Dances with Werewolves

Niki Flynn

Published by Virgin Books

Please note that this extract contains scenes of an adult nature

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PLAYING ON THE EDGE

There will be censorship.

I say this from experience, both as a writer and as a reviewer. Show me a new medium and I'll guarantee it will attract censorship as soon as it becomes popular (or, in some instances, once it attracts public notice). In my lifetime alone this has befallen comic books, videos and the Internet, not to mention old favourites such as films and books. Indeed, not so long ago this very book would have been unpublishable in English outside Paris. In the 50s, horror comics aimed at adults apparently had to be stopped, and so they were in Britain by the Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Bill, encouraged by a newspaper outcry under headlines such as 'Now Ban This Filth That Poisons Our Children' and 'Make Bonfires of Them' (the comics, not the children), along with a persistent media claim that a gunman called Alan Poole had been influenced by his collection of hundreds of horror comics, although in fact he owned just a solitary comic, a Western one eventually described in Parliament as 'not very alarming'.

A media campaign that uses an unexamined scare story or a single unrepresentative crime to whip up hysteria until the government feels forced to bring in extra censorship – it's a recurring set of events. In the early 80s it was the turn of the nasty: while the term was coined by a publicist to sell horror fiction, it was hijacked to describe videos the public was supposed to find objectionable. The *Daily Mail* urged 'Ban the Sadist

Videos' and clearly had the ear of Bernard Braine, who referred in the House of Lords to 'a grave and growing social evil which no civilised or caring society would tolerate . . . a filthy and pernicious trade' (which is to say, making and distributing horror films he didn't like).

All this (along with earlier media tirades that blamed the Industrial Revolution, the music hall, the bicycle and – 'a grave danger to the community, responsible for the downfall of many young people' – silent cinema for the collapse of society) may be history, but some of us lived elements of it. In 1969 my parents' house was raided when I advertised a copy of de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* for sale, while in the 90s Her Majesty's Customs confiscated one of the *Men Behind the Sun* videos (a series of fictional reconstructions of Japanese atrocities in Manchuria) and sent me a small nastily duplicated scrap of paper warning of the legal dangers of importing 'obscene' material. I suspect that the sender may have been the kind of petty bureaucrat into whose unyielding grip identity cards and a blind faith in computer information will deliver us. The film would certainly be released uncut here now, as most of the nasties have been (three of them rated as suitable for anybody over fourteen to watch), and you can buy the exact same unexpurgated translation of de Sade in any major British bookshop. The other recurring truth about censorship (sometimes exerted by the marketplace, the reason why David McGillivray's excellent anti-censorship magazine *Scapegoat* lasted for just a single issue) is that it tends to go away. Since the turn of this century the British board has taken the view that films rated suitable for adults should be cut only for exceptional reasons, which will be specified on the BBFC's website. One kind of film that has continued to bother the board is a central issue of the present book.

It did even after the R18 certificate allowed hardcore sex films to be legally released. In 2000 the board refused to pass *A Caning for Miss Granger* (a video in which the eponymous office worker is also spanked and strapped, if relatively mildly), citing as unacceptable 'the portrayal of any sexual activity, whether real or simulated, which involves lack of consent'. The press release went on to say that 'The Board's Guidelines prohibit the infliction of pain or physical harm, real or (in a sexual context) simulated . . . The Board concluded that the work both promotes the idea that pleasure may be taken from inflicting pain upon another person

and clearly shows, with some relish, actual pain and physical harm. In doing so it goes some way beyond what might be regarded as "mild consensual activity". The Board does not feel that the problems can be usefully addressed by cutting since the difficulty with this work lies not only in the great number of specific visual images, but with the overall theme of sexual pleasure being derived from imposing pain on a coerced victim. The work is therefore not suitable for classification.'

On the whole the Board is lenient towards spankings embedded in mainstream movies, including the episode in *The Fearless Vampire Killers* where the director watches through a keyhole as his then wife is spanked by Alfie Bass, surely one of the most extraordinary confessional moments in all cinema. As far as hardcore goes, though, has anything changed? Let me save the answer for the end. Meanwhile, it would be naïve of me to suggest that a time will ever come when such material won't be attacked or, if you prefer, misunderstood. Some years ago I wrote a survey of several dozen British videos in the genre, and felt bound to allow for reservations. Aren't the films catering to male fantasies? (Of course they are, but not exclusively by any means.) Don't they, and indeed porn in general, degrade women? (Quite apart from all the male gay porn this recurring objection excludes from the argument, would it be perverse to suggest that the idea itself degrades the models by reducing them to mere representatives of their gender, denying them individuality and choice?) Can the participants really be consenting to their treatment? As you'll see as you read on, even Niki Flynn used to wonder (although it's typical of her that she set out to discover the truth by experience). She reassures us – certainly me – in her admirably honest reminiscences, which offer more insight into this kind of play than I've ever read elsewhere.

Ms Flynn begins with reminiscences of the solitary spanko's (or, as the spellchecker insists I should have written, the solitary spinach's) guilty youth – the sense of exclusion, the contradictory desires to pass for ordinary and to yield to the secret self. I ought to say that, like the Nexus novelist Fiona Locke, she has a good deal of wry fun with this, not least because it's so sharply observed – especially the many paradoxes inherent in it – and the same is the case with some of her accounts of filming. You'll learn of the ideal dress for such occasions (and how it isn't always respected). You'll read where Rosaleen Young (an auteur in this

field if there ever was one) has been known to direct her films from (if I may be permitted a parenthesis so as not to finish with a preposition). You'll observe Niki's search for the best description of her activities: stuntgirl seems to ring true, but I'd suggest performance artist as well. You may be comforted by some of the anecdotes from behind the scenes (confirmed by extras on the DVDs), and you'll learn how fearsome the Strap of Joy proved to be, and how hard it is to dismember a bear. However, this is by no means just a book of informative fun. Her psychological scrutiny illuminates places some readers (even though any buyer of this book will presumably have kinks in common with the author) may find very dark.

Let's confront the central truth. Niki Flynn doesn't play for the audience, however much of one there is: she does it to explore her own fantasies. I believe she will take it as a compliment that I find some of her films genuinely unnerving, and on occasion very hard to watch. Her accounts herein of her more extreme experiences are simultaneously harrowing and reassuring, and there's a remarkable moment among the extras on the DVD of *Stalin 2* that more than bears them out. She's interviewed before and after a particularly severe scene, and in the latter section of the interview she has plainly attained an extraordinary psychological state. Since she uses the word herself in the course of the book, I'll presume to suggest that she achieved a form of transcendence.

I referred in passing to her audience. Some readers may feel this needs to be taken more into account if not regarded with suspicion. I don't believe the response of an audience can be easily controlled or predicted. I've found this not just with my own fiction but in other instances, perhaps most strikingly when a fellow judge of a literary prize objected to a scene in one of the competing novels (an episode in which a nun who has just left the convent is embarrassed by her underwear while shopping in a boutique) as a male fantasy, demeaning to women, until I revealed that I'd identified the anonymous co-authors, one of whom was an ex-nun drawing on her own experience. We may also assume that Marilyn French intended the spanking reminiscence in *The Women's Room* to outrage her feminist audiences, but a significant number of readers take it quite another way. As for censoring material on the chance that it may provoke non-consensual imitation, I offer the alternative possibility that consuming it may be the only outlet the viewer needs, and that suppression may

leave viewers no outlet for their fantasies except real life. But shouldn't material that's perceived as potentially dangerous be outlawed just in case it causes crime? What if the material prevents crime by allowing the viewer to be content with fantasy?

While Niki Flynn's English and American films are as much fun for the participants as for the audience (I was amused and delighted to find books of mine figuring as props in two of them), her European work is closer to the edge yet edges closer to relatively mainstream genres. The *Stalin* films are so intense in their recreation of the nightmare of totalitarianism that they're seldom even erotic, though disturbing when they veer that way. In their sense of panic they're closer to the horror film, where terror is often inextricable from an erotic element. (The Lupus film *The Orphan* – not one of Niki's – recalls Hans Andersen in its icy cruelty, but no angels are flown in to save the day.) It isn't surprising that Niki Flynn admires the films of David Lynch, in some of which – *Blue Velvet*, *Lost Highway* – eroticism and terror are inseparable and inescapable. As a horror writer I often have to assure interviewers that, rather than striving to be scary, my fiction tries to convey how the themes and observations make me feel, and it's clear from her starker work that Niki Flynn believes in undergoing the situations she depicts, not just in acting them. She brings to them, or discovers in them, a sense of real dread. Her *Stalin* films are also related to the Women In Prison genre, a form originated by John Cromwell's 1950 movie *Caged* and sometimes redeemed from disreputability (if one feels it needs redemption) by a political subtext, for instance in the Japanese *Female Convict Scorpion* series. On the other hand, politics are precisely the problem (if there is one) with her film *The Spy*, condemned by some as an unacceptable fantasy. You might expect kinky folk to be more tolerant of other people's kinks, but it doesn't always work like that: try calling a spanko a masochist, or confusing CP with BDSM, and you're likely to provoke the kind of reaction you'd meet if you mistook a science fiction fan for a fantasy reader. In *The Spy* the contentious element is the setting of an interrogation fantasy in a fascist regime some find uncomfortably similar to Nazism (even though the insignia on the armbands resemble symbols in a futuristic film about dictatorship far more than swastikas). Why is this objectionable? In *The Night Porter*, after all, Nazism is explicitly the basis of an erotic, not to say perverse, relationship. It may be argued that *The Night Porter*,

unlike the films that were stimulated by it, is about eroticism rather than erotic in itself, but the present book proves this not to be the case. The truth is surely that it's impossible to predict the effect of any text, written or visual, on every member of its audience. Look at the Bible. Look at the Koran.

I ended my rant about censorship with the refusal of an R18, but we've moved on. Last year *An American Brat in London*, starring none other than Niki Flynn, gained the certificate, if in a version somewhat re-edited before submission by the director. As I write, her latest British film *Trial by Ordeal* appears to have been passed uncut with the certificate, confirming the precedent that greater severity can be allowed at R18 (and indeed can be the only reason for the rating). This seems to establish that such material will be safe from any proposed new censorship, however intensively that may be campaigned for. I hope none of her work will be threatened. Even if she's had to don a *nom de fessée*, Niki Flynn has certainly earned her fame. Here's to more.

Ramsey Campbell
Wallasey, Merseyside
17 May 2007

My fear is my substance
and probably the best part of me.

Franz Kafka

1. PROFESSIONAL VICTIM

'Give me pain, Niki!'

I screw my face into an expression of agony as the camera clicks and I pretend that the hand pressing into my bottom is smacking me. I'm already sore and tender from the real spanking Heather gave me a few minutes ago. The stills are done afterwards, recreating the video we've just shot. And yes, they're usually faked.

Viewers sometimes complain that a girl's bottom is already red in the stills that allegedly show the beginning of the punishment. There's really no way around it. You can't shoot the stills and the video at the same time. Otherwise you hear the camera and see the flash during the scene.

They also assume that this is a regular day job, that we turn up at the studio every day to shoot one clip and then go home. In reality I shoot about a dozen clips in a day, so it's not surprising that my bottom is bruised by the end. Viewers don't realise that a ten-minute clip can take three times that long to film. Or that it takes an hour or two just to set up the lighting and props. Or that the 'new' update on the website was probably shot several months ago. Companies produce huge amounts of content in one go and then dole it out piecemeal.

'Raise your hand, Heather,' Mike directs, snapping away. 'That's good, now lift her skirt.'

I feign shock and outrage as she lifts my pleated school skirt and positions her hand across my white cotton knickers. This is the usual sequence. Over the skirt, over the knickers, then on the bare. In a video it provides a warm-up, gradually getting my bottom used to being smacked. Many people like the slow progression and it can help disguise the fact that I'm already marked. I don't like it myself; it's inauthentic. And I'm all about authenticity.

Posed stills are nowhere near as much fun as movies. I want the real thing; I want the ritual, the scolding, the anticipation. It's an elaborate dance with precise choreography. Anxiety, exposure, vulnerability, surrender, pain, endurance, bliss . . . Like ballet, it looks effortless. But, like ballet, the cornerstone is pain.

I love being paired with a skilled top who knows how to intimidate me and has an answer for all my backchat. No matter how much I resist, the object of the game is to lose. That's what the viewers are paying to see and it's what I want too. I crave the moment of surrender, the moment when I finally give in and have to submit to the sting of a firm hand or a cane across my bare bottom. It's what I live for.

I don't really like the term 'spanking model'. But 'actress' is too pretentious. And while I get a kick out of calling myself a porn star, I don't actually have sex on camera. I don't have sex for money at all, though I respect those who do. However, what I do is undeniably 'intended to arouse', so I suppose technically I'm a sex worker.

Whatever you call me, I get paid to be spanked, paddled, caned and whipped on camera. And I love what I do. Is there anything better than getting paid for doing what you love? Kind of like a nymphomaniac getting paid for sex. It hardly seems fair to call it a job. I don't do it for the money, but there's an added thrill in being paid for it. So you can call me a whore too. Really. I like it.

'More reaction, Niki!'

I arch on Heather's lap, my eyes wide as I crane round, reacting with exaggerated horror as she raises her hand high above my backside. When she pulls my knickers down I reach back as if to stop her. She pins my wrist against my back and I grit my teeth when I feel her hand on my bottom. We vary our positions and the camera records our efforts. It's more work than you'd imagine.

The headmistress's office is actually a corner of Mike's garage. A bad *trompe-l'oeil* bookshelf covers the wall behind us, and I'm

surrounded by light-stands, soft boxes and slave flashes that blind me every time they go off. The place is a deathtrap of electrical cords and tripods and the room still stinks of burned plastic where one of the makeshift reflectors melted against a light bulb.

Welcome to my world.

'Right, that's enough OTK.'

Over the knee is everyone's favourite spanking position. It's just so intimate and humbling, especially for a grown woman dressed as a schoolgirl. The vulnerability turns me on like nothing else.

Mike lowers the camera. 'What did you use next, Heather?'

'The leather paddle and then the cane.'

'No, it was just the cane,' I remind her. 'The leather paddle was in the French maid scene.'

Heather laughs. 'Oh, right.'

Sometimes it's hard to remember what you've just done. Especially when you're on the eighth vignette of the day. It took ten minutes just to get the white balance right for the stills and that's quite long enough to lose track. Clips like this are all improvisation, so there's no script to refer to. Not that you can cram much plot into a five-minute clip anyway; they're 90 per cent action.

We reposition ourselves. The headmistress looms over me, flexing the cane menacingly while I chew my lip and look worried. It's hard to resist the urge to ham it up with campy, melodramatic expressions. It's like filming a silent movie.

Another shot and our eyes lock. Heather looks so earnest it's hard to keep a straight face. Mike waits too long to push the button and we break into giggles and spoil the shot. He grumbles.

Trying again, I unfocus my eyes and look just above her eyebrows to avoid making her laugh again. Heather and I can never make eye contact without cracking up.

Click. Click. Click.

I stretch out over the desk and we re-enact the caning. I cringe in anticipation. I arch my back as she presses the cane against my cheeks. I kick. A fan told me once that I have the best kick in the business. I open my mouth wide as though howling in pain. I grit my teeth. This is where it gets tedious. There are only so many faces you can pull.

'Hang on,' Heather says. 'Weren't your knickers on the desk for this part?'

I have no idea.

We look over at Mike, who shrugs. 'No one'll notice,' he says dismissively.

He'd be surprised. You wouldn't believe some of the things guys pick up on. There are some serious pedants and fantasists out there who spot every continuity glitch. They're impossible to satisfy, but they're some of my favourite correspondents. I find their discernment extremely erotic.

'OK, Niki, you ready for some impact shots?'

I groan. I hate impact shots. Most models do. They're so unflattering.

Heather positions the cane and Mike counts to three.

'One, two, three—'

WHACK!

These are actual strokes. And when the timing is right the shots are dramatic. They make you realise just how powerful an implement the cane really is. Even a hand causes the cheeks to flatten out like a rubber ball squashed against a window, but the cane creates a wave that ripples away from the line of impact. We also call them 'pancake shots'. It's the least attractive image you'll ever see of a girl's bottom. But the guys seem to like them. There's certainly no way to fake those shots. After four or five of these, I'm starting to hurt again.

I have a high pain threshold and I can take a lot of punishment – especially with the cane, my favourite implement. But it's not the caning itself I get off on; it's the aftermath. I don't actually like *being* caned; I like having *been* caned.

The other side of the pain is where I want to be; that's where I find euphoria. Pain is the process I have to endure to get there. And when all the elements are right, I can fly.

WHACK!

'Oww!'

'You all right, Niki?' Heather asks.

'Yeah, I'm fine.'

'Use your safeword if you need to.'

The safeword is my code for 'stop!' It's the signal to halt a scene that's getting too intense. 'No', 'please' and 'stop' won't work; protest is a key element of the punishment fantasy. In my world 'no' often *does* mean 'yes', so the safeword has to be something I'd never ordinarily say, like 'red' or 'kingfisher' or even simply 'safeword'.

One girl I know uses 'ouch'. If she's OK she says 'oww,' but 'ouch' means it's getting too much. The bottom is always in

control, you see. I like 'cut!' myself, though I can usually survive until there's a natural break in the action.

But for now it's back to reality. I have to pace myself for the rest of the shoot. I'm eager to finish the stills so we can get to the next video. I have a bratty comeback I'm dying to spring on Heather.

I'm notorious for putting my darkest fantasies on film and I'm known for unglamorous roles and edgy movies. I embrace intense scenarios many people won't go near. Military interrogations and prison abuse. And yet the school kink is a vital part of my sexuality, of who I am.

For me there's nothing like an authentic English school caning. Six of the best. Skirt up, knickers down. I've been caned by more headmasters and headmistresses than I can count. I can knot a school tie blindfolded. And I've had 'sir' and 'miss' drilled into me so thoroughly that it slips out occasionally in vanilla company. It's a tiny taste of the school life I never had in America.

'Well done,' Mike says, satisfied at last. 'Now, for the next scene . . . Heather, let's have you in your nurse's uniform. Niki, did you say you had a straitjacket?'

WARNING!

This is an adult site dealing with consensual corporal punishment of adults. **Access by minors is strictly forbidden.** If you are a minor or if this subject offends you then please click here to exit.

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2. STRANGE LITTLE GIRL

All my life I've been drawn to the dark side. I was a weird kid. (Weren't we all?) Painfully shy and introverted, I hid inside my own little shell, trying not to be noticed. I was obsessed with horror movies. The nightmares they inspired only fuelled my dark imagination more. When the other girls played house, I wanted to be the ghost. Every house had one, I insisted. Their expressions said it all: *You are not like us. You are not normal.* So I learned to keep my bizarre ideas to myself.

In school I was a typical Ophelia wannabe, dressed all in black and romanticising death. Morbid fantasies consumed me. Lost in my own world, I imagined elaborate scenarios where I was kidnapped, punished, tied up, tortured, brainwashed, raped. Sometimes even killed.

Happy endings bored me. I needed to suffer in order to feel.

Throughout high school I had a recurring fantasy involving all the boys who had ever humiliated me. I wasn't 'cool' enough to enter their sphere. I was just a freaky girl in black who, while no different from a hundred thousand other freaky girls in black, was worthy only of their scorn. So I took the shame and made it my own.

In my fantasy I was wandering alone in the woods when they ambushed me. I ran, but they gave chase and caught me. They stripped me, tied my hands behind my back and whipped me.

After that they took turns violating me in every way I could imagine. When they'd had their fun, they killed me and dumped my body in the river.

It was an oddly sterile scene. There was never any dialogue. And I experienced the murder from a safe distance, as a ghost. I was a martyr and they were the wicked villains who had used and abused me. My conscience was clear.

Fear was my drug of choice. I thrived on scary movies, ghost stories and rollercoasters. I dreamed of playing the last girl left alive in a slasher film – the one who screams herself hoarse as she discovers her friends' bodies one by one. Naturally, she's the first one killed in the sequel.

There was just something about fear, helplessness and even violence that pushed certain buttons for me. Even as a child. I had no way of knowing they were budding sexual feelings; I just knew they made me feel strange in a way that wasn't entirely bad.

Like when I played the lead in an eighth-grade school play about a girl shipwrecked on an alien planet. In one scene the aliens captured me and tied me to a tree. 'Tighter,' I remember whispering to my co-stars. 'Make it look real.' No, it had nothing to do with Method acting, but that was my dirty little secret.

Fetishes are deeply personal. They're not something you choose. Nor can you 'cure' yourself of them. The road to sexual awareness is a rocky one, especially if what turns you on is different from what's considered 'normal'. Rejection and ridicule are powerful deterrents. It's no wonder some people live their whole lives in the closet, never sharing their fantasies with anyone.

Spanking in particular has always gotten a bad rap. Think of all the kinky spanking scenes you've seen in movies. How many portray it as a healthy, intimate act between sane and consenting adults? Sometimes it's characterised as a neurotic fixation on reliving childhood abuse, but more often it's comic relief. People laugh at the middle-aged civil servant in short trousers, getting his bottom smacked by a woman he's paid for the privilege. They love to mock such people when they get lampooned by the *News of the World*. Why? If they've never had an intimate confession to make to a partner, then I truly envy them.

As a child I was confused and conflicted by my reactions to certain scenes in movies and books. I remember an animated fairy tale that I saw once in school. My friends appreciated the damsel-in-distress scenario – but only the part where the princess

was rescued by the handsome prince. That was where I lost interest. I didn't want her to be rescued. I felt cheated out of details of the kidnapping, the imprisonment and the unseen torments inflicted on her by the villain. He was much more appealing than the boring one-dimensional prince. My imagination ran wild, but I knew by then to keep my mouth shut.

Though I was a weird kid, I was a well-behaved one. Cruel classmates teased me and called me 'Goody Two Shoes'. The paddle was still in use when I was in school, but I never did anything bad enough to earn it. I was tempted, though. The gym teachers were zealous practitioners of corporal punishment and it would have been easy enough to get on the wrong side of them. I'd occasionally hear the loud CRACK! echoing through the halls as some unfortunate kid felt the board. I don't need to tell you the effect it had on me.

Eventually I found the signposts that led the way to others like me. The first was the movie *Videodrome*. I saw it around the time I entered puberty, when I was at my most conflicted. In one scene Nicki Brand is looking for some porn to get her in the mood. She finds a tape labelled 'Videodrome' and asks what it is. Max Renn nonchalantly replies, 'Torture. Murder.' She smiles. 'Sounds great.' 'Ain't exactly sex,' he warns her. But there's a gleam in Nicki's eye. 'Says who?'

Says who indeed. Nicki Brand was the first masochistic character I had ever encountered. And while she was only a character in a movie, she validated my preoccupation with being victimised. I related to her even more when she said she was 'made for that show' and went off to discover where it was filmed. Her self-assurance gave me courage. I wanted to be like that – confident in my unconventional desires. Embracing the lure of pain and not caring whether or not anyone else understood. I needed to know that such people could exist.

The next signpost was a roleplay experience like no other. Every Halloween the local fire department hosted a haunted house for the kids. When they asked for volunteers from my high school I knew I had found my dream job. I was sixteen. The high point was when the boy I was madly in love with played Freddy Krueger from *Nightmare on Elm Street*. I got to be his victim.

I wore a torn nightgown splattered with fake blood. Freddy attacked me and I screamed, dying again and again, night after night. I told him to be rough with me and gave him my standard

line: 'Make it look real.' He did, oblivious to how much it was turning me on. I never wanted it to end. I'd go home every night with bruises and scratches from our struggles. Then I'd lie in bed, too keyed up to sleep but too self-conscious to relieve my frustration. I just couldn't bring myself to masturbate to fantasies about Freddy Krueger!

(Now, Hannibal Lecter on the other hand . . .)

As I distilled and refined my fetish, I realised that it wasn't death or even violence that turned me on. Ultimately it was power. There is nothing more erotic to me than power. And that most special privilege of the empowered: *discipline*.

Spankos speculate endlessly on what made us the way we are. Some blame it on corporal punishment at home and school. But there are just as many who can't trace it to any defining moment. I was spanked while growing up, but my adult fantasies couldn't be further from my childhood reality. Frankly, I think my obsession with fear and horror informed my sexuality more than any actual spanking did.

I read *Story of O* and other BDSM novels, but the traditional Master/slave relationship didn't resonate with me. I wasn't submissive. I wasn't aroused by pleasure. But I wasn't a true masochist like Nicki Brand either; I didn't actually like pain. So why was I so obsessed by the power dynamic, with pain such a crucial element? I felt just as lost as when I'd started my quest.

At last I found my Rosetta Stone. *Frank and I*. It's a classic Victorian novel about a girl – 'Frances' – who disguises herself as a boy – 'Frank'. She's adopted by a wealthy gentleman who wants to help the lad and see that he gets a proper education. He's also a strict disciplinarian and he discovers the secret when he orders Frank to drop his trousers for a birching. A confessed 'lover of the rod', he keeps the knowledge to himself, continuing to treat his young ward as a boy and administering punishment at every opportunity.

In one scene Frank's guardian decides not to birch the girl, as he thinks it will be more exciting to put her over his knee and spank her. Yes, yes, yes! Submitting to someone with the authority to punish me – *that* was what I wanted! I didn't have to be submissive; I just had to submit. And I didn't have to enjoy it; I just had to take it.

I was ecstatic at the discovery. Punishment had always fascinated me, but I had never realised anyone else found it sexually

arousing. Now I knew where to channel my energies. And I thought I knew how to ask for what I wanted. I underlined every hot disciplinary passage and gave the book to my college boyfriend Roger. I assumed that it would hit the same bullseye for him.

'You find this sexy?' he asked, as though I'd given him a book on waste-disposal management.

'Well, not exactly sexy, but . . .' I should have known better.

Roger was a Christian who tolerated my atheism with pursed lips and the creepy warning that one day all the Christians would be taken off the earth, leaving me to face the lake of fire alone. One day he found my copy of the *Necronomicon*, having 'sensed its evil presence' while snooping around in my bedroom. After a discussion with his father, a self-styled demon hunter (I kid you not), Roger destroyed the book. Well, Lovecraft might have been flattered, but I was pretty pissed off. The relationship didn't last long.

In another clumsy attempt to reach out I wrote a cringeworthy essay called 'Mary Shelley, Sadomasochist'. Playing amateur psychoanalyst, I theorised that Shelley enjoyed making her virtuous female characters suffer in *Frankenstein*, symbolically destroying the image of the passive and subservient female she refused to be herself. I leaped at the chance to compare her Justine character to de Sade's tortured protagonist of the same name, suggesting that Shelley must have been a fan. (I wrote a lot of papers like that.) My pretentious effort earned me the devastating comment 'Imaginative but not exactly relevant'. Another failure.

I had no outlet for my fantasies and no one I could share them with. So I wrote stories, scribbling down my secret thoughts and squirreling them away under my mattress. I read them again and again, lying on my stomach with my panties pulled down to my knees as I got myself off. I had no interest in sex. My fantasies were only about spanking. I couldn't get aroused without thinking about it.

It was important for me that my disciplinarian got no sexual charge out of the act. I would cast my favourite actor as the businesslike authority figure who wouldn't be swayed by any tearful pleas. He wasn't sadistic; he was simply doing his job, for my own good. The emotional detachment was essential. As was my own genuine fear and dislike of the punishment. It was really just a variation on the rape fantasy. No guilt. No responsibility. Someone else was in control and there was no danger of rejection.

What I was doing with my hands had nothing to do with the scene I was playing out in my head. The sensations were wonderful, but they weren't happening to the girl in the fantasy. Kind of like having a massage while watching a movie. And picturing myself over a strict man's knee, having my bare bottom smacked, it wouldn't take me long to reach a shattering climax. Profound embarrassment followed the afterglow, but it never made me stop.

Some months later I panicked when I thought the pages under my mattress had been disturbed. Had my parents been snooping? Had they read my dirty stories? In a panic I burned them all and tried to convince myself that I wasn't a pervert. I could forget this sick fetish. I could be like other people.

I could be normal.