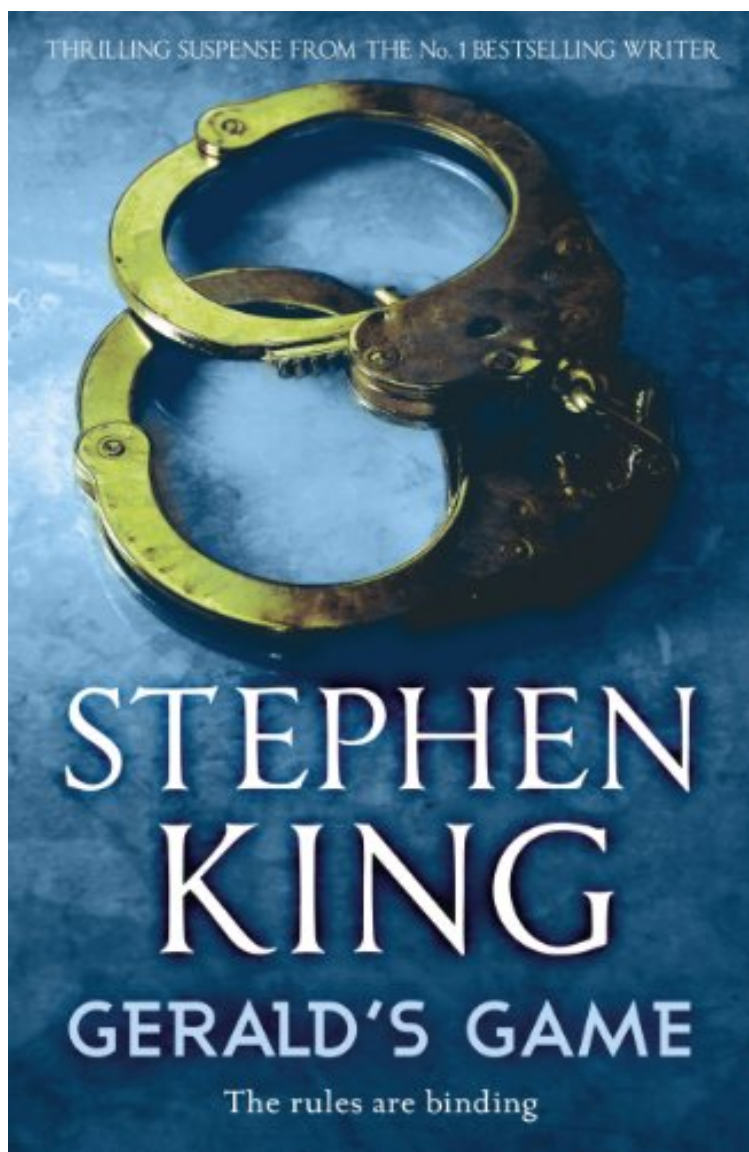


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Gerald's Game (English Edition)



Par Stephen King
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Description : Description du produitStephen King cranks up the suspense in a different kind of bedtime story. A game of seduction between a husband and wife goes horribly awry when the husband suddenly dies. But the wife's nightmare has just begun.

Prsentation de l'diteurNow a Netflix movie directed by Mike Flanagan (Oculus, Hush) and starring Carla Gugino and Bruce Greenwood.A game. A husband and wife game. Gerald's Game.But this time Jesse didn't want to play. Lying there, spreadeagled and handcuffed to the bedstead while he'd loomed and drooled over her, she felt angry and humiliated. So she'd kicked out hard. Aimed to hit him where it hurt.He wasn't meant to die, leaving Jesse alone and helpless in a lakeside holiday cabin. Miles from anywhere. No-one to hear her screams. Alone. Except for the voices in her head that had begun to chatter and argue and sneer . .

.ExtraitGerald's Game 1 Jessie could hear the back door banging lightly, randomly, in the October breeze blowing around the house. The jamb always swelled in the fall and you really had to give the door a yank to shut it. This time they had forgotten. She thought of telling Gerald to go back and shut the door before they got too involved or that banging would drive her nuts. Then she thought how ridiculous that would be, given the current circumstances. It would ruin the whole mood. What mood? A good question, that. And as Gerald turned the hollow barrel of the key in the second lock, as she heard the minute click from above her left ear, she realized that, for her at least, the mood wasn't worth preserving. That was why she had noted the unlatched door in the first place, of course. For her, the sexual turn-on of the bondage games hadn't lasted long. The same could not be said of Gerald, however. He was wearing only a pair of Jockey shorts now, and she didn't have to look as high as his face to see that his interest continued unabated. This is stupid, she thought, but stupid wasn't the whole story, either. It was also a little scary. She didn't like to admit it, but there it was. Gerald, why don't we just forget this? He hesitated for a moment, frowning a little, then went on across the room to the dresser which stood to the left of the bathroom door. His face cleared as he went. She watched him from where she lay on the bed, her arms raised and splayed out, making her look a little like Fay Wray chained up and waiting for the great ape in King Kong. Her wrists had been secured to the mahogany bedposts with two sets of handcuffs. The chains gave each hand about six inches worth of movement. Not much. He put the keys on top of the dresser two minute clicks, her ears seemed in exceptionally fine working order for a Wednesday afternoon and then turned back to her. Over his head, sunripples from the lake danced and wavered on the bedroom's high white ceiling. What do you say? This has lost a lot of its charm for me. And it never had that much to begin with, she did not add. He grinned. He had a heavy, pink-skinned face below a narrow widow's peak of hair as black as a crow's wing, and that grin of his had always done something to her that she didn't much care for. She couldn't quite put her finger on what that something was, but Oh, sure you can. It makes him look stupid. You can practically see his IQ going down ten points for every inch that grin spreads. At its maximum width, your killer corporate lawyer of a husband looks like a janitor on work-release from the local mental institution. That was cruel, but not entirely inaccurate. But how did you tell your husband of almost twenty years that every time he grinned he looked as if he were suffering from light mental retardation? The answer was simple, of course: you didn't. His smile was a different matter entirely. He had a lovely smile she guessed it was that smile, so warm and good-humored, which had persuaded her to go out with him in the first place. It had reminded her of her father's smile when he told his family amusing things about his day as he sipped a before-dinner gin and tonic. This wasn't the smile, though. This was the grin a version of it he seemed to save just for these sessions. She had an idea that to Gerald, who was on the inside of it, the grin felt wolfish. Piratical, maybe. From her angle, however, lying here with her arms raised above her head and nothing on but a pair of bikini panties, it only looked stupid. No... retarded. He was, after all, no devil-may-care adventurer like the ones in the men's magazines over which he had spent the furious ejaculations of his lonely, overweight puberty; he was an attorney with a pink, too-large face spreading below a widow's peak which was narrowing relentlessly toward total baldness. Just an attorney with a hard-on poking the front of his undershorts out of shape. And only moderately out of shape, at that. The size of his erection wasn't the important thing, though. The important thing was the grin. It hadn't changed a bit, and that meant Gerald hadn't taken her seriously. She was supposed to protest; after all, that was the game. Gerald? I mean it. The grin widened. A few more of his small, inoffensive attorney's teeth came into view; his IQ tumbled another twenty or thirty points. And he still wasn't hearing her. Are you sure of that? She was. She couldn't read him like a book she supposed it took a lot more than seventeen years of marriage to get to that point but she thought she usually had a pretty good idea of what was going through his head. She thought something would be seriously out of whack if she didn't. If that's the truth, toots, how come he can't read you? How come he can't see this isn't just a new scene in the same old sex-farce? Now it was her turn to frown slightly. She had always heard voices inside her head she guessed everyone did, although people usually didn't talk about them, any more than they talked about their bowel functions and most of them were old friends, as comfortable as bedroom slippers. This one, however, was new... and there was nothing comfortable about it. It was a strong voice, one that sounded young and vigorous. It also sounded impatient. Now it spoke again, answering its own question. It isn't that he can't read you; it's just that sometimes, toots, he doesn't want to. Gerald, really I don't feel like it. Bring the keys back and unlock me. We'll do something else. I'll get on top, if you want. Or you can just lie there with your hands behind your head and I'll do you, you know, the other way. Are you sure you want to do that? the new voice asked. Are you really sure you want to have any sex with this man? Jessie closed her eyes, as if

she could make the voice shut up by doing that. When she opened them again, Gerald was standing at the foot of the bed, the front of his shorts jutting like the prow of a ship. Well... some kids toy boat, maybe. His grin had widened further, exposing the last few teeth—the ones with the gold fillings on both sides. She didn't just dislike that dumb grin, she realized; she despised it. I will let you up... if you're very, very good. Can you be very, very good, Jessie? Corny, the new no-bullshit voice commented. Trs corny. He hooked his thumbs into the waistband of his underpants like some absurd gunslinger. The Jockeys went down pretty fast once they got past his not inconsiderable love handles. And there it was, exposed. Not the formidable engine of love she had first encountered as a teenager in the pages of Fanny Hill but something meek and pink and circumcised; five inches of completely unremarkable erection. Two or three years ago, on one of her infrequent trips to Boston, she had seen a movie called *The Belly of an Architect*. She thought, Right. And now I'm looking at *The Penis of an Attorney*. She had to bite the insides of her cheeks to keep from laughing. Laughing at this point would be impolitic. An idea came to her then, and it killed any urge she had to laugh. It was this: he didn't know she was serious because for him, Jessie Mahout Burlingame, wife of Gerald, sister of Maddy and Will, daughter of Tom and Sally, mother of no one, was really not here at all. She had ceased to be here when the keys made their small, steely clicks in the locks of the handcuffs. The men's adventure magazines of Gerald's teenage years had been replaced by a pile of skin magazines in the bottom drawer of his desk, magazines in which women wearing pearls and nothing else knelt on bearskin rugs while men with sexual equipment that made Gerald look strictly HO-scale by comparison took them from behind. In the backs of these magazines, between the talk-dirty-to-me phone ads with their 900 numbers, were ads for inflatable women which were supposed to be anatomically correct—a bizarre concept if Jessie had ever encountered one. She thought of those air-filled dollies now, their pink skins, lineless cartoon bodies, and featureless faces, with a kind of revelatory amazement. It wasn't horror—not quite—but an intense light flashed on inside her, and the landscape it disclosed was certainly more frightening than this stupid game, or the fact that this time they were playing it in the summer house by the lake long after summer had run away for another year. But none of it had affected her hearing in the slightest. Now it was a chainsaw she heard, snarling away in the woods at some considerable distance—as much as five miles, maybe. Closer by, out on the main body of Kashwakamak Lake, a loon tardy in starting its annual run south lifted its crazed cry into the blue October air. Closer still, somewhere here on the north shore, a dog barked. It was an ugly, ratcheting sound, but Jessie found it oddly comforting. It meant that someone else was up here, midweek in October or no. Otherwise there was just the sound of the door, loose as an old tooth in a rotted gum, slapping at the swollen jamb. She felt that if she had to listen to that for long, it would drive her crazy. Gerald, now naked save for his spectacles, knelt on the bed and began crawling up toward her. His eyes were still gleaming. She had an idea it was that gleam which had kept her playing the game long after her initial curiosity had been satisfied. It had been years since she'd seen that much heat in Gerald's gaze when he looked at her. She wasn't bad-looking—she'd managed to keep the weight off, and still had most of her figure—but Gerald's interest in her had waned just the same. She had an idea that the booze was partly to blame for that—he'd drunk a hell of a lot more now than when they'd first been married—but she knew the booze wasn't all of it. What was the old saw about familiarity breeding contempt? That wasn't supposed to hold true for men and women in love, at least according to the Romantic poets she'd read in English Lit 101, but in the years since college she had discovered there were certain facts of life about which John Keats and Percy Shelley had never written. But of course, they had both died a lot younger than she and Gerald were now. And all of that didn't matter much right here and right now. What maybe did was that she had gone on with the game longer than she had really wanted to because she had liked that hot little gleam in Gerald's eyes. It made her feel young and pretty and desirable. But... .. but if you really thought it was you he was seeing when he got that look in his eye, you were misled, toots. Or maybe you misled yourself. And maybe now you have to decide—really, really decide if you intend to continue putting up with this humiliation. Because isn't that pretty much how you feel? Humiliated? She sighed. Yes. It pretty much was. Gerald, I do mean it. She spoke louder now, and for the first time the gleam in his eyes flickered a little. Good. He could hear her after all, it seemed. So maybe things were still okay. Not great, it had been a long time since things had been what you could call great, but okay. Then the gleam reappeared, and a moment later the idiot grin followed. Ill teach you, me proud beauty, he said. He actually said that, pronouncing beauty the way the landlord in a bad Victorian melodrama might say it. Let him do it, then. Just let him do it and it will be done. This was a voice she was much more familiar with, and she intended to follow its advice. She didn't know if Gloria Steinem would approve and didn't care; the advice had the attractiveness of the completely practical. Let him do it and it would be done.

Q.E.D. Then his handhis soft, short-fingered hand, its flesh as pink as that which capped his penisreached out and grasped her breast, and something inside her suddenly popped like an overstrained tendon. She bucked her hips and back sharply upward, flinging his hand off. Quit it, Gerald. Unlock these stupid handcuffs and let me up. This stopped being fun around last March, while there was still snow on the ground. I dont feel sexy; I feel ridiculous. This time he heard her all the way down. She could see it in the way the gleam in his eyes went out all at once, like candleflames in a strong gust of wind. She guessed that the two words which had finally gotten through to him were stupid and ridiculous. He had been a fat kid with thick glasses, a kid who hadnt had a date until he was eightenthe year after he went on a strict diet and began to work out in an effort to strangle the engirdling flab before it could strangle him. By the time he was a sophomore in college, Gerald's life was what he described as more or less under control (as if lifehis life, anywaywere a bucking bronco he had been ordered to tame), but she knew his high school years had been a horror show that had left him with a deep legacy of contempt for himself and suspicion of others. His success as a corporate lawyer (and marriage to her; she believed that had also played a part, perhaps even the crucial one) had further restored his confidence and self-respect, but she supposed that some nightmares never completely ended. In a deep part of his mind, the bullies were still giving Gerald wedgies in study-hall, still laughing at Gerald's inability to do anything but girlie-pushups in phys ed, and there were wordsstupid and ridiculous, for instancethat brought all that back as if high school had been yesterday... or so she suspected. Psychologists could be incredibly stupid about many things, almost willfully stupid, it often seemed to her, but about the horrible persistence of some memories she thought they were bang-on. Some memories batted onto a persons mind like evil leeches, and certain wordsstupid and ridiculous, for examplecould bring them instantly back to squirming, feverish life. She waited to feel a pang of shame at hitting below the belt like this and was pleasedor maybe it was relief she feltwhen no pang came. I guess maybe Im just tired of pretending, she thought, and this idea led to another: she might have her own sexual agenda, and if she did, this business with the handcuffs was definitely not on it. They made her feel demeaned. The whole idea made her feel demeaned. Oh, a certain uneasy excitement had accompanied the first few experimentsthe ones with the scarvesand on a couple of occasions shed had multiple orgasms, and that was a rarity for her. All the same, there had been side-effects she didnt care for, and that feeling of being somehow demeaned was only one of them. Shed had her own nightmares following each of those early versions of Gerald's game. She awoke from them sweaty and gasping, her hands thrust deeply into the fork of her crotch and rolled into tight little balls. She only remembered one of these dreams, and that memory was distant, blurred: she had been playing croquet without any clothes on, and all at once the sun had gone out.

Never mind all that, Jessie; those are things you can consider another day. Right now the only important thing is getting him to let you loose. Yes. Because this wasnt their game; this game was all his. She had gone on playing it simply because Gerald wanted her to. And that was no longer good enough. The loon voiced its lonely cry out on the lake again. Gerald's dopey grin of anticipation had been replaced by a look of sulky displeasure. You broke my toy, you bitch, that look said. Jessie found herself remembering the last time shed gotten a good look at that expression. In August Gerald had come to her with a glossy brochure, had pointed out what he wanted, and she had said yes, of course he could buy a Porsche if he wanted a Porsche, they could certainly afford a Porsche, but she thought he might do better to buy a membership in the Forest Avenue Health Club, as he had been threatening to do for the past two years. You dont have a Porsche body just now, she had said, knowing she wasnt being very diplomatic but feeling that this really wasnt the time for diplomacy. Also, he had exasperated her to the point where she hadnt cared a whole hell of a lot for his feelings. This had been happening more and more frequently to her lately, and it dismayed her, but she didnt know what to do about it. Just what is that supposed to mean? he had asked stiffly. She didnt bother to answer; she had learned that when Gerald asked such questions, they were almost always rhetorical. The important message lay in the simple subtext: Youre upsetting me, Jessie. Youre not playing the game. But on that occasionperhaps in an unknowing tune-up for this oneshe had elected to ignore the subtext and answer the question. It means that youre still going to be forty-six this winter whether you own a Porsche or not, Gerald... and youre still going to be thirty pounds overweight. Cruel, yes, but she could have been downright gratuitous; could have passed on the image which had flashed before her eyes when she had looked at the photograph of the sports car on the front of the glossy brochure Gerald had handed her. In that blink of an instant she had seen a chubby little kid with a pink face and a widows peak stuck in the innertube hed brought to the old swimming hole. Gerald had snatched the brochure out of her hand and had stalked away without another word. The subject of the Porsche had not been raised since... but she had often seen it in his

resentful We Are Not Amused stare. She was seeing an even hotter version of that stare right now. You said it sounded like fun. Those were your exact words: It sounds like fun. Had she said that? She supposed she had. But it had been a mistake. A little goof, that was all, a little slip on the old banana peel. Sure. But how did you tell your husband that when he had his lower lip pooched out like Baby Huey getting ready to do a tantrum? She didnt know, so she dropped her gaze... and saw something she didnt like at all. Gerald's version of Mr. Happy hadnt wilted a bit. Apparently Mr. Happy hadnt heard about the change of plans. Gerald, I just dont feel like it? Well, thats a hell of a note, isnt it? I took the whole day off work. And if we spend the night, that means tomorrow morning off, as well. He brooded over this for a moment, and then repeated: You said it sounded like fun. She began to fan out her excuses like a tired old poker-hand (Yes, but now I have a headache; Yes, but Im having these really shitty pre-menstrual cramps; Yes, but Im a woman and therefore entitled to change my mind; Yes, but now that were actually out here in the Big Lonely you frighten me, you bad beautiful brute of a man, you), the lies that fed either his misconceptions or his ego (the two were frequently interchangeable), but before she could pick a card, any card, the new voice spoke up. It was the first time it had spoken out loud, and Jessie was fascinated to find that it sounded the same in the air as it did inside her head: strong, dry, decisive, in control. It also sounded curiously familiar. Youre rightI guess I did say that, but what really sounded like fun was breaking away with you the way we used to before you got your name up on the door with the rest of the type-As. I thought maybe we could bounce the bedsprings a little, then sit on the deck and dig the quiet. Maybe play some Scrabble after the sun went down. Is that an actionable offense, Gerald? What do you think? Tell me, because I really want to know. But you said For the last five minutes she had been telling him in various ways that she wanted out of these goddam handcuffs, and he still hadnt let her out of them. Her impatience boiled over into fury. My God, Gerald, this stopped being fun for me almost as soon as we started, and if you werent as thick as a brick, you would have realized it! Your mouth. Your smart, sarcastic mouth. Sometimes I get so tired of Gerald, when you get your head really set on something, sweet and low doesnt come close to reaching you. And whose fault is that? I dont like you when youre like this, Jessie. When youre like this I dont like you a bit. This was going from bad to worse to horrible, and the scariest part was how fast it was happening. Suddenly she felt very tired, and a line from an old Paul Simon song occurred to her: I dont want no part of this crazy love. Right on, Paul. You may be short, but you aint dumb. I know you dont. And its okay that you dont, because right now the subject is these handcuffs, not how much you do or dont like me when I tell you Ive changed my mind about something. I want out of these cuffs. Are you hearing me? No, she realized with dawning dismay. He really wasnt. Gerald was still one turn back. You are just so goddamned inconsistent, so goddamned sarcastic. I love you, Jess, but I hate the goddam lip on you. I always have. He wiped the palm of his left hand across his pouting rosebud of a mouth and then looked sadly at her poor, put-upon Gerald, saddled with a woman who had gotten him out here in the forest primeval and then reneged on her sexual obligations. Poor, put-upon Gerald, who showed no sign whatever of getting the handcuff keys off the bureau by the bathroom door. Her unease had changed into something else while her back was turned, as it were. It had become a mixture of anger and fear she could remember feeling only once before. When she was twelve or so, her brother Will had goosed her at a birthday party. All her friends had seen, and they had all laughed. Har-har, preety fonny, senhorra, I theenk. It hadnt been funny to her, though. Will had been laughing hardest of all, so hard he was actually doubled over with one hand planted above each knee, his hair hanging in his face. This had been a year or so after the advent of the Beatles and the Stones and the Searchers and all the rest, and Will had had a lot of hair to hang. It had apparently blocked his view of Jessie, because he had no idea of how angry she was... and he was, under ordinary circumstances, very much aware of her turns of mood and temper. Hed gone on laughing until that froth of emotion so filled her that she understood she would have to do something with it or simply explode. So she had doubled up one small fist and had punched her well-loved brother in the mouth when he finally raised his head to look at her. The blow had knocked him over like a bowling pin and he had cried really hard. Later she had tried to tell herself that he had cried more out of surprise than pain, but she had known, even at twelve, that that wasnt so. She had hurt him, hurt him plenty. His lower lip had split in one place, his upper lip in two, and she had hurt him plenty. And why? Because he had done something stupid? But hed only been nine himself nine that day and at that age all kids were stupid. No; it hadnt been his stupidity. It had been her fear fear that if she didnt do something with that ugly green froth of anger and embarrassment, it would (put out the sun) cause her to explode. The truth, first encountered on that day, was this: there was a well inside her, the water in that well was poisoned, and when he goosed her, William had sent a bucket down there, one which had come up filled

with scum and squirming gluck. She had hated him for that, and she supposed it was really her hate which had caused her to strike out. That deep stuff had scared her. Now, all these years later, she was discovering it still did... but it still infuriated her, as well. You wont put out the sun, she thought, without the slightest idea of what this meant. Be damned if you will. I dont want to argue the fine points, Gerald. Just get the keys to these fucking things and unlock me! And then he said something which so astounded her that at first she couldnt grasp it: What if I wont? What registered first was the change in his tone. He usually spoke in a bluff, gruff, hearty sort of voiceIm in charge here, and its a pretty lucky thing for all of us, isnt it? that tone proclaimedbut this was a low, purring voice with which she was not familiar. The gleam had returned to his eyes that hot little gleam which had turned her on like a bank of floodlights once upon a time. She couldnt see it very wellhis eyes were squinted down to puffy slits behind his gold-rimmed spectaclesbut it was there. Yes indeed. Then there was the strange case of Mr. Happy. Mr. Happy hadnt wilted a bit. Seemed, in fact, to be standing taller than at any time she could remember... although that was probably just her imagination.

Do you think so, toots? I dont. She processed all this information before finally returning to the last thing hed said that amazing question. What if I wont? This time she got past the tone to the sense of the words, and as she came to fully understand them, she felt her rage and fear crank up a notch. Somewhere inside, that bucket was going down its shaft again for another slimy dipa scumload of water filled with microbes almost as poisonous as swamp copperheads. The kitchen door banged against its jamb and the dog began to bark in the woods again, sounding closer than ever now. It was a splintery, desperate sound. Listening to something like that for too long would undoubtedly give you a migraine. Listen, Gerald, she heard her strong new voice saying. She was aware that this voice could have picked a better time to break its silenceshe was, after all, out here on the deserted north shore of Kashwakamak Lake, handcuffed to the bedposts, and wearing only a skimpy pair of nylon pantiesbut she still found herself admiring it. Almost against her will she found herself admiring it. Are you listening yet? I know you dont do much of that these days when its me doing the talking, but this time its really important that you hear me. So... are you finally listening? He was kneeling on the bed, looking at her as if she were some previously undiscovered species of bug. His cheeks, in which complex networks of tiny scarlet threads squirmed (she thought of them as Gerald's liquor-brands), were flushed almost purple. A similar swath crossed his forehead. Its color was so dark, its shape so definite, that it looked like a birthmark. Yes, he said, and in his new purring voice the word came out yeh-uss. Im listening, Jessie. I most certainly am. Good. Then youll walk over to the bureau and get those keys. Youll unlock this oneshe rattled her right wrist against the headboardand then youll unlock this one. She rattled the left wrist in similar fashion. If you do this right away, we can have a little normal, painless, mutual-orgasm sex before returning to our normal, painless lives in Portland. Pointless, she thought. You left that one out.

Normal, painless, pointless lives in Portland. Perhaps that was so, or perhaps it was just a little overdramatization (being handcuffed to the bed brought that out in a person, she was discovering), but it was probably just as well shed left that one out, in any case. It suggested that the new, no-bullshit voice wasnt so indiscreet, after all. Then, as if to contradict this idea, she heard that voice which was, after all, her voicebegin to rise in the unmistakable beats and pulses of rage. But if you continue screwing around and teasing me, Ill go straight to my sisters from here, find out who did her divorce, and call her. Im not joking. I do not want to play this game! Now something really incredible was happening, something she never would have suspected in a million years: his grin was resurfacing. It was coming up like a sub which has finally reached friendly waters after a long and dangerous voyage. That wasnt the really incredible thing, though. The really incredible thing was that the grin no longer made Gerald look harmlessly retarded. It now made him look like a dangerous lunatic. His hand stole out again, caressed her left breast, then squeezed it painfully. He finished this unpleasant bit of business by pinching her nipple, a thing he had never done before. Ow, Gerald! That hurts! He gave a solemn, appreciative nod that went very strangely with his horrible grin. Thats good, Jessie. The whole thing, I mean. You could be an actress. Or a call-girl. One of the really high-priced ones. He hesitated, then added: Thats supposed to be a compliment. What in Gods name are you talking about? Except she was pretty sure she knew. She was really afraid now. Something bad was loose in the bedroom; it was spinning around and around like a black top. But she was also still angryas angry as she had been on the day Will had goosed her. Gerald actually laughed. What am I talking about? For a minute there, you had me believing it. Thats what Im talking about. He dropped a hand onto her right thigh. When he spoke again, his voice was brisk and weirdly businesslike. Nowdo you want to spread them for me, or do I have to do it? Is that part of the game, too? Let me up! Yes... eventually. His other hand shot out. This time it was her right breast he pinched, and this time the pinch was so hard it fired off nerves in

little white sparkles all the way down her side to her hip. For now, spread those lovely legs, me proud beauty! She took a closer look at him and saw a terrible thing: he knew. He knew she wasn't kidding about not wanting to go on with it. He knew, but he had chosen not to know he knew. Could a person do that? You bet, the no-bullshit voice said. If you're a hotshot shyster in the biggest corporate law-firm north of Boston and south of Montreal, I guess you can know whatever you want to know and not know whatever you don't want to. I think you're in big trouble here, honey. The kind of trouble that ends marriages. Better grit your teeth and squint your eyes, because I think one bitch of a vaccination shot is on the way. That grin. That ugly, mean-spirited grin. Pretending ignorance. And doing it so hard that later on he would be able to pass a lie-detector test on the subject. I thought it was part of the game, he would say all hurt and wide-eyed. I really did. And if she persisted, driving at him with her anger, he would eventually fall back to the oldest defense of them all... and then slip into it, like a lizard into a crack in a rock: You liked it. You know you did. Why don't you admit it? Pretending into ignorance. Knowing but planning to go ahead anyway. He handcuffed her to the bedposts, had done it with her own cooperation, and now, oh shit, let's not gild the lily, now he meant to rape her, actually rape her while the door banged and the dog barked and the chainsaw snarled and the loon yodeled out there on the lake. He really meant to do it. Yessir, boys, hyuck, hyuck, hyuck, you ain't really had pussy until you've had pussy that's jumpin' around underneath you like a hen on a hot griddle. And if she did go to Maddys when this exercise in humiliation was over, he would continue to insist that rape had been the furthest thing from his mind. He placed his pink hands against her thighs and began spreading her legs. She did not resist much; for the moment, at least, she was too horrified and amazed by what was going on here to resist much. And that's exactly the right attitude, the more familiar voice inside her spoke up. Just lie there quietly and let him shoot his squirt. After all, what's the big deal? He's done it at least a thousand times before and you never once turned green. In case you forgot, it's been quite a few years since you were a blushing virgin. And what would happen if she didn't listen and obey the counsel of that voice? What was the alternative? As if in answer, a horrid picture rose in her mind. It was herself she saw, testifying in divorce court. She didn't know if there still were such things as divorce courts in Maine, but that in no way dimmed the vividness of the vision. She saw herself dressed in her conservative pink Donna Karan suit, with her peach silk blouse beneath it. Her knees and ankles were primly together. Her small clutch bag, the white one, was in her lap. She saw herself telling a judge who looked like the late Harry Reasoner that yes, it was true she had accompanied Gerald to the summer house of her own free will, yes, she had allowed him to tether her to the bedposts with two sets of Kreig handcuffs, also of her own free will, and yes, as a matter of fact they had played such games before, although never at the place on the lake. Yes, Judge. Yes. Yes, yes, yes. As Gerald continued to spread her legs, Jessie heard herself telling the judge who looked like Harry Reasoner about how they had started with silk scarves, and how she had allowed the game to go on, progressing from scarves to ropes to handcuffs, even though she had quickly tired of the whole thing. Had become disgusted by it. So disgusted, in fact, that she had allowed Gerald to drive her the eighty-three miles from Portland to Kashwakamak Lake on a weekday in October; so revolted she had once again allowed him to chain her up like a dog; so bored with the whole thing that she had been wearing nothing but a pair of nylon panties so wispy you could have read The New York Times classified section through them. The judge would believe it all and sympathize with her most deeply. Of course he would.

Who wouldn't? She could see herself sitting there on the witness stand and saying, So there I was, handcuffed to the bedpost and wearing nothing but some underwear from Victoria's Secret and a smile, but I changed my mind at the last minute, and Gerald knew it, and that makes it rape. Yes sir, that would do her, all right. Bet your boots. She came out of this appalling fantasy to find Gerald yanking at her panties. He was kneeling between her legs, his face so studious that you might have been tempted to believe it was the Bar Exam he was planning to take instead of his unwilling wife. There was a runner of white spittle coursing down his chin from the center of his plump lower lip. Let him do it, Jessie. Let him shoot his squirt. It's that stuff in his balls that's making him crazy, and you know it. It makes them all crazy. When he gets rid of it, you'll be able to talk to him again. You'll be able to deal with him. So don't make a fuss; just lie there and wait until he's got it out of his system. Good advice, and she supposed she would have followed it if not for the new presence inside her. This unnamed newcomer clearly thought that Jessie's usual source of advice—the voice she had over the years come to think of as Goodwife Burlingame—was a wimp of the highest order. Jessie still might have let things run their course, but two things happened simultaneously. The first was her realization that, although her wrists were cuffed to the bedposts, her feet and legs were free. At the same moment she realized this, the runner of drool fell off Gerald's chin. It dangled for a moment, elongating, and

then fell on her midriff, just above the navel. Something about this sensation was familiar, and she was swept by a horribly intense sensation of *dj vu*. The room seemed to darken around her, as if the windows and the skylight had been replaced with panes of smoked glass. It's his spunk, she thought, although she knew perfectly well it wasn't. It's his goddam spunk. Her response was not so much directed at Gerald as at that hateful feeling that came flooding up from the bottom of her mind. In a very real sense she acted with no thought at all, but only lashed out with the instinctive, panicky revulsion of a woman who realizes the trapped thing fluttering in her hair is a bat. She drew back her legs, her rising right knee barely missing the promontory of his chin, and then drove her bare feet out again like pistons. The sole and instep of her right drove deep into the bowl of his belly. The heel of her left smashed into the stiff root of his penis and the testicles hanging below it like pale, ripe fruit. He rocked backward, his butt coming down on his plump, hairless calves. He tilted his head up toward the skylight and the white ceiling with its reflected patterns of sunripples and voiced a high, wheezy scream. The loon on the lake cried out again just then, in hellish counterpoint; to Jessie it sounded like one male commiserating with another. Gerald's eyes weren't slitted now; they weren't gleaming, either. They were wide open, they were as blue as today's flawless sky (the thought of seeing that sky over the autumn-empty lake had been the deciding factor when Gerald had called from the office and said he'd had a postponement and would she like to go up to the summer place at least for the day and maybe overnight), and the expression in them was an agonized glare she could hardly look at.

Cords of tendon stood out on the sides of his neck. Jessie thought: I haven't seen those since the rainy summer when he pretty much gave up gardening and made J. W. Dant his hobby instead. His scream began to fade. It was as if someone with a special Remote Gerald Control were turning down his volume. That wasn't it, of course; he had been screaming for an extraordinarily long time, perhaps as long as thirty seconds, and he was just running out of breath. I must have hurt him badly, she thought. The red spots on his cheeks and the swath across his forehead were now turning purple. You did! the Goodwife's dismayed voice cried. You really really did! Yep; damned good shot, wasn't it? the new voice mused. You kicked your husband in the balls! the Goodwife screamed. What in God's name gives you the right to do something like that? What gives you the right to even joke about it? She knew the answer to that one, or thought she did: she'd done it because her husband had intended to commit rape and pass it off later as a missed signal between two essentially harmonious marriage partners who had been playing a harmless sex-game. It was the game's fault, he would have said, shrugging. The game's, not mine. We don't have to play it again, Jess, if you don't want to. Knowing, of course, that nothing he could offer would ever cause her to hold her wrists up for the handcuffs again. No, this had been a case of last time pays for all. Gerald had known it, and had intended to make the most of it. That black thing she had sensed in the room had spun out of control, just as she had feared it might. Gerald still appeared to be screaming, although no sound at all (at least none she could hear) was now coming from his pursed, agonized mouth. His face had become so congested with blood that it actually appeared to be black in places. She could see his jugular vein or maybe it was his carotid artery, if that mattered at a time like this pulsing furiously beneath the carefully shaved skin of his throat. Whichever one it was, it looked ready to explode, and a nasty jolt of terror stabbed Jessie. Gerald? Her voice sounded thin and uncertain, the voice of a girl who has broken something valuable at a friend's birthday party. Gerald, are you all right? It was a stupid question, of course, incredibly stupid, but it was a lot easier to ask than the ones which were really on her mind: Gerald, how badly are you hurt? Gerald, do you think you might die? Of course he's not going to die, the Goodwife said nervously. You've hurt him, indeed you have, and you ought to be sorry, but he's not going to die. Nobody is going to die around here. Gerald's pursed, puckered mouth continued to quiver soundlessly, but he didn't answer her question. One of his hands had gone to his belly; the other had cupped his wounded testes. Now they both rose slowly and settled just above his left nipple. They settled like a pair of pudgy pink birds too tired to fly farther. Jessie could see the shape of a bare foot rising on her husband's round stomach. It was a bright, accusatory red against his pink flesh. He was exhaling, or trying to, sending out a dour fog that smelled like rotting onions. That's tidal breath, she thought. The bottom ten per cent of our lungs is reserved for tidal breath, isn't that what they taught us in high school biology? Yes, I think so. Tidal breath, the fabled last gasp of drowners and chokers. Once you expel that, you either faint or... Gerald! she cried in a sharp, scolding voice. Gerald, breathe! His eyes bulged from their sockets like blue marbles stuck in a clod of Play-Doh, and he did manage to drag in a single small sip of air. He used it to speak a final word to her, this man who had sometimes seemed made of words. ... heart... That was all. Gerald! Now she sounded shocked as well as scolding, an old-maid schoolteacher who has caught the second-grade flirt pulling up her skirt to show the

boys the bunnies on her underpants. Gerald, stop fooling around and breathe, goddammit! Gerald didnt. Instead, his eyes rolled back in their sockets, disclosing yellowish whites. His tongue blew out of his mouth and made a farting sound. A stream of cloudy, orange-tinted urine arced out of his deflated penis and her knees and thighs were doused with feverishly hot droplets. Jessie voiced a long, piercing shriek. This time she was unaware of yanking against the handcuffs, of using them to draw herself as far back from him as possible, awkwardly curling her legs beneath her as she did so. Stop it, Gerald! Just stop it before you fall off the b Too late. Even if he were still hearing her, which her rational mind doubted, it was too late. His

bowled back arched the top half of his body beyond the edge of the bed and gravity took over. Gerald Burlingame, with whom Jessie had once eaten Creamsicles in bed, fell over backward with his knees up and his head down, like a clumsy kid trying to impress his friends during Free Swim at the YMCA pool. The sound of his skull meeting the hardwood floor made her shriek again. It sounded like some enormous egg being cracked against the lip of a stone bowl. She would have given anything not to have heard that. Then there was silence, broken only by the distant roar of the chainsaw. A large gray rose was opening in the air before Jessies wide eyes. The petals spread and spread, and when they closed around her again like the dusty wings of huge colorless moths, blocking out everything for awhile, the only clear feeling she had was one of gratitude. From Publishers Weekly While this is one of the best-written stories King has ever published, it will offend many through sheer bad taste. Jessie and Gerald Burlingame have been married for 20 years.

Kinky sex is Gerald's game; lately he has taken to handcuffing his wife to the bedposts. During one such session, via a series of bizarre circumstances, Jessie accidentally kills her husband, and for the next 28 hours she is trapped. King effectively uses this tragicomic conceit to take us deep into the mind of "Goodwife Burlingame." sic For the first third of the book he is at the top of his form, creating in Jessie one of his most intense character studies. Then, Jessie's ruminations lead her to remember a long-repressed episode of incest that is startling not because it becomes a central element of the plot, but because the details of the sexual relationship between father and daughter are salaciously--and lengthily--described. The gory stuff--how

Jessie escapes her handcuffs, for example--is prime King, but this is subsumed in the book's general tastelessness. A lame wrap-up to what might have been a thrilling short story only further compromises the enjoyment readers might have found in this surprisingly exploitative work. 1.5 million first printing;

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