

STRANGE CAPTIVITY

By F.E.Campbell

Note: All the characters and events are fictitious. No resemblance to real persons is intended or should be inferred.

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Gail often wondered how much of Ma Billings sadism was deliberate. Sending her to the barn for the cord, and then making her carry it, could be unconscious laziness, or it could be sly and effective humiliation. Either way it was shaming. Gail shrugged resignedly. The name of the game was shame! The alliterative slogan fit. She toyed with an alternative, using the word pain instead of shame. They were equally applicable.

It could have been pleasant in the woods had the errand been other than it was. Ma Billings did not belong. Her passage had an air of complaint, of being put upon. Her heavy breathing was loathed and feared. It held a forbidding strength. She sweated easily, and her sweat was sour.

"Think you'll ever learn, honey?" Ma Billings voice was affable without warmth.

"It doesn't matter, maam," Gail said listlessly. She hated the 'maam', but it was obligatory. Ma Billings didn't rate a title.

"You're a damn sensible gal," Ma conceded. "Surprising you don't bellyache more. You ain't got no bed o' roses."

"Would it do me any good, maam!" The girl's voice was only faintly bitter.

"Yup! A wise little trick. I told Billings last time he was down, I said: That little ass o' her'n 'ull take a lot o' whup-ping." She looked sideways with a bright eye. "Think you'll last it out, kid?"

Gail allowed herself a wry smile. "I have to, don't I! If I don't make it, the fault will be more yours than mine, maam."

"Ain't aiming to be sassy, are you?"

"No, maam. But I want to last it out. I want to terribly."

Ma Billings coarse laugh was pleased. "I'll help you, Hon'. Ain't killing no goose with golden eggs. Take her just so far, I says to

Billings, I ain't aiming to kill the gal. Billings, he don't want no corpses hanging around come election time."

"How . . . how am I doing, maam?" The question was shy, diffident and absurd, but the girl with the cord had to ask it.

"Ain't never had a gal o' your class. Silly bitches most of 'em; not that I didn't enjoy giving 'em a bad time. But you're different. You and me got a long way to go, Honey." The older woman stopped and looked around. "This ought to do. Been here before, ain't you?"

Gail had been there before! She stood now in the same hesitancy that still afflicted her at such times, the pathetic last minute hope of reprieve or easement.

"Well, shuck it! Don't just stand."

Her hesitancy abruptly dealt with, Gail slipped out of the single sheath. Beneath it she was naked. She no longer cared about Ma's devouring eyes. Stripped, she knew what she must do. The sapling had been used before. She pressed her back against it and crossed her wrists behind the slender trunk.

Ma Billings tied her. The wheezing breaths again heaved their protest against effort. But the shrewd fingers were strong and deft. The crossed wrists of the passive girl were criss-crossed by the cord and tightly joined. There was no final knot. The wrists secure, the remaining cord was passed twice round the trunk and knotted where no searching finger could find it. "Don't want you sitting down, honey, or going 'round and 'round." Ma Billings laughed as though at a witticism.

The older woman backed away and surveyed the girl she had made helpless. She nodded in satisfaction as at a job well done. "I'm going in to town. If I ain't back, one of the kids'll be along to let you loose in time for you to make supper. Use the rest o' that ham and them greens I readied."

"Yes, maam."

Ma Billings chuckled. "Think you can get loose, kid?"

Gail made the futile struggle required of her. "No, maam, I'm quite sure I can't get loose."

The heavy woman made a slow circle of the sapling and the naked girl it held. She tested the tight cords with probing fingers. "Guess you'll do," she acknowledged. "Have a real fun day, honey." Chuckling at her own satire, she ambled back to the ranch house. Gail's single garment draped over one arm. She disappeared among the trees. Her naked captive was left alone.

Always it was a bad moment. A girl, naked, tied to a tree in a wood alive with potential harm. She had once protested. But Ma Billings had laughed to scorn the hazards of insects, rodents and other wild things of the trees. They were a hazard of punishment. That was why she was there. It was unlikely that any of them would ever bother her. But still . . . ! The mosquitos were the sure and certain element. Not many in the day. But by evening . . . ! The other hazard was the improbable passing of a stray human. The naked girl wanted that least of all.

Gail twisted against the strictures that held her captive to the tree. She had no hope of finding them sympathetic. Ma Billings used cord upon the slender wrists with great competence and a little cruelty. But it was worth a try. She did it every time before settling into apathetic acceptance. There had been past occasions when she had fought the cords frantically for as long as they were upon her, then been taken back to the ranch with cut wrists from which blood had flowed. But that was past.

It was infuriatingly frustrating to have to stand against the tree all day, held only by her wrists. An observer from the front might have wondered why she made no move. No bond was visible. This was one more instance of not being sure whether humanity or a cruel wish to frustrate dictated the lack of further bindings. Her feet were free, her body was free. But the tree held her as surely as if she was swathed in rope.

Gail settled herself against the trunk and surrendered to her thoughts. That she should spend the day tied to a tree no longer disturbed her equanimity, naked or not. Ma Billings had a wide repertoire of discomforts and a fertile ingenuity for their infliction on any female unfortunate enough to be delivered into her hands. Standing thus was, for the captive girl, a relatively pleasant day. She could think of worse. It would get tiring after awhile since Ma had foiled her hope of being able to sit. But this was part of the game. A girl was never quite sure . . . .

To a captive, time passes slowly. It seemed long before she heard the sound that quickened her pulse. Her nudity tensed. Footsteps could be good or very, very bad! She watched, anxious, every sense alert. When Neil came into view she relaxed and exhaled a sigh of relief.

He was a shy boy. Perhaps seventeen to her twenty-two. His first discovery of her long ago had been a quaint embarrassment of tragi-comedy, until their acceptance of each other had led them to the informality of their present acquaintance. But he was still shy, apt to be diffident in his approaches, faintly shamed by the prohibitions upon them both.

"Hi, Gail." He tried not to see her nakedness, thus was doubly conscious.

"I'm glad you came." She hoped she did not sound too eager. A day alone with her tree could seem forever.

He sat on the old stump and looked only at her face, his own flushed. She was secretly amused that he was so much a gentleman. "Neil! Look at me. If s not our fault I'm naked. I'd sooner you looked at me properly than somewhere up above my head." Since she had come to realize he would never help her escape, she got what amusement she could from teasing him.

He obeyed. The intense avidity of his gaze made her blush. She watched him with an almost maternal affection. "I'm the first woman you've seen naked, aren't I?" she challenged.

Neil nodded, engrossed. "You're very beautiful. I'd never have known."

"What about the gatefolds?" Gail asked curiously.

He grinned awkwardly. "A fellow doesn't really believe in 'em. We gawk and think: Oh sure, some guy with a lot of dough will get her. But we never will."

"You've got me."

"Not really," he disclaimed. "I can just look."

"You can touch. Why don't you?" She always pushed him.

His blush deepened. "Because I'd want to untie you," he admitted frankly.

"Untie me then! Please, Neil. Help me. Get me out of the State!" At a risk of losing him, she always tried.

He shook his head vehemently. "Nobody messes with Everett Billings. You know that. We'd both be hurt. Besides, there's my folks." He looked at her appealingly, and added, "You said it was for just a year, and two months have gone?"

"How'd you like to be tied to a tree for ten months!" Gail demanded brightly. She would not be bitter with this boy.

He grinned sheepishly. "You're not tied to a tree all the time."

"Half the time it's worse! These are the good days. Honest, Neil, I'm scared. They say a year. But it's just their word. I don't see what's to stop them keeping me here forever. Ma Billings would like that, and if this husband of hers has all this influence, all this political pull, then Neil, I haven't a hope!"

She had touched him. She could tell. When he spoke, it was an affirmation. "If they cheat you like that I will help," he said fervently. "But they won't. The Old Girl likes a change."

"Does everyone know about them? And about me?"

"Pretty well," he conceded grudgingly. "Calling you the hired girl makes it O.K."

Gail considered. "So here we have a frustrated middle-aged woman whose husband stays away most of the time and she's taken up sadism as a hobby. He provides her with pretty girl subjects on whom she works out her animosities. It's a case for a psychiatrist."

"Better not tell her that."

"Think I'm crazy! She'd half kill me. She's stayed away from the whip for a week. Haven't you noticed, no fresh marks! I'm careful what I say. And I'm damn careful to butter her up with plenty of 'maam's'. Gosh, I hate having to do that."

"She's a bit pathetic," he ventured. "Most people feel a bit sorry for her."

"Am I supposed to?"

"Well hardly." He eyed her shrewdly. "But you do have her figured out."

"Doesn't make anything hurt less." Gail's voice was bitter.

"Are you hurting now?" He was suddenly anxious.

"Oh sure!" she admitted resignedly. "But it's no more than I can bear, and there's nothing you can do about it." She grinned at him cheerfully. "Unless you want to untie me. Wouldn't you like to?"

"Of course I would. Don't tempt me."

"I'd let you tie me again when you go. I'm very well behaved."

They shared laughter. Most of their times together had come to be spent in a wry repartee about her condition. "Ma Billings would know. No one could get the knots back just the way she does 'em. I bet the Old Girl checks. What would you tell her?"

"Oh allright, I'll suffer," she said good humourdly. "But let's try it next time just to see if she can tell. You don't have to worry. It's me who'll get whipped if she catches on."

Neil looked at her with youthful adoration. "You're wonderful! I don't think I could handle what you're having to take. You aren't scared . . . ."

"I'm angry. I'm angry at myself for letting it happen, and I'm a damned sight angrier that it's even possible to happen. If it hadn't happened to me I wouldn't believe it."

He nodded understandingly. "I suppose it's the same with me. I'm awfully glad I came by that day and found you. I come now whenever I can, hoping you'll be here. Do you mind? I mean, does it help?"

"Oh please! I need you. You're all I've got. Everything else is

insane."

"Are there other places she ties you? Places I could come?"

"I'm forever tied one way or another. She loves to tie me. But this is the only spot, so far, that you could come to. She puts me out here because I'm scared of animals and beetles . . . and maybe the wrong kind of man. I was scared out of my wits the first time. That amused her."

When it came time for him to go, she was more bereft than usual. "Neil . . ."

He tensed, tremendously aware of her.

"Put your hands on me. Now! I want you to."

He obeyed her, dazed with wonder. Her nipples hardened beneath his fingertips. She moaned. "Kiss me, Neil!"

He kissed her, his hands cupped upon her breasts.

"Now go." She panted. "Go quickly. If you don't you'll be seduced into freeing me. I don't want you to free me for that reason. Go."

When he reached the trees he turned, hoping she would call him back. "Thank you for coming," she said fervently. "Oh, thank you – always come."

He made a diffident motion with his hand and quickly plunged out of sight. He was still a boy.

It was very lonely with him gone. There was now nothing to look forward to. Just the hours and the hurt of the cords upon her wrists. Gail tugged, making them hurt even more. It served her right! It served her right! She desisted and stood submissive in her bonds. The tree possessed her.

It was Curtis. Gail hated Curtis. He carried her slip of a dress, so she knew Ma Billings had sent him to release her. He would release her, but not immediately. With Curtis it was never immediate! For twelve years old he was a very wise little lecher. "Hello, tit girl," he greeted amiably.

"Hello Curtis." Her role must be forever humble.

Ostentatiously he cut a switch and trimmed it. "Just in case you want to be uppity," he informed her cheerfully, cutting the air to make her wince.

"Your mother will be angry if you mark me."

"Yeah, but that'll be afterwards," he leered. "Open your legs. I want to see your slit."

Awkwardly, Gail obeyed: one leg on each side of the tree to which she was bound. She faced him, hating, but obedient. She had long since abandoned heroics. He manhandled her sex until she was gasping. Then bit her nipples until she pleaded. She knew he wanted her to plead, so she did it as quickly and humiliatingly as she could contrive. Curtis was satisfied. He did not switch her. Gail was grateful. The boy often threatened to whip her, but had never done so. Perhaps. his mother had warned him off her own preserves. But Curtis was an opportunist. He began to pluck her pubic hair. One at a time. Slowly and painfully.

"Please, Curtis, don't do that. It hurts."

"You don't care about the hurtin'. You're just scared o' havin' a bald cunt," he jibed.

Gail kept silent while he amused himself. It was surprisingly painful. He extracted each hair very slowly so as to cause her the maximum pain and shame. He was his mother's son! She always wondered why the little horror did not rape her. She supposed his mother must have warned him there too. Ma Billings would not enjoy a pregnant prisoner.

But Curtis was on a mission. Gail got a scant satisfaction from the fact that Ma Billings progeny were almost as much afraid of their mother as herself. Reluctantly, he abandoned his pubic sport and untied her hands. As always, it felt impossibly good and wonderful to be free. Even to massage her wealed wrists was a privilege, a privilege of short duration since Curtis grabbed her right hand and slipped a fresh loop about the wrist.

"You don't have to do that," Gail protested.

" 'Course I don't. But you ain't goin' to stop me." He was very certain of what he could get away with.

Gail shrugged. It was not worth a fight, possibly a few cuts with the switch and an argument with Ma. It was easier to allow the urchin to lead her back to the ranch house on a tether like a dog. It amused him, and her own capacity for shame was sadly depleted. It did not matter. Nothing mattered anymore.

She was half way through the preparations for the evening meal, when Ma Billings returned and chained her ankles. Gail made her obvious protest. "You don't need chain me, ma'am. You know I won't run away. I've agreed to my sentence."

"Mebbe' that's so," Ma conceded doubtfully. "But the less chance you got to run, the less you'll be thinking on it. And anyway, you know damn well I like to see a gal chained. I'd have 'em all well ironed if I had my way."

"What about you when you were my age?" Gail asked archly. She had discovered that Ma Billings, when in the right mood, was not adverse to repartee.

"Got tied in the barn mostly," Ma admitted. "Never got tied without a licking neither. Won't say it never done me good. Little Heller I was in them days," she added with pride. "That's afore Billings showed up."

"Would you say being . . . well, punished like that got you started into finding enjoyment in . . . in, that sort of thing?" Gail poured potatoes into a pan.

Ma Billings chuckled sardonically. "Doing a bit o' that screwball analyzing, ain't you! Never had no truck with it. Don't matter a damn what starts nothing. If I get a charge out o' whipping your ass or tying you to the corral rail what the Hell . . . ! That's what matters. I like it so I do it!"

"But you couldn't if you weren't . . . well, sort of privileged."

"Sure does help, honey. I ain't denying that. Billings being what he is does sorta' put me in the catbird seat with you gals. Quite a few of you he's put my way." She paused reminiscently. "He don't want to shove it into me no more, figgers I get my jollies outa' you. 'Spose he's

right enough. Wouldn't want to trade back. I got the best of it."

"Are all the girls sentenced to one year, maam?"

Ma Billings laughed sourly. "You sure do hate to have to call me maam, don't you, honey! Yup! Most of 'em gets a year."

"Don't some of them choose to stand trial and take their chances? Don't some think prison might be better than the things . . . the things you enjoy?" Gail shook a frying pan vigorously.

"That what you're thinking?" Ma's voice was sharp.

"No, maam, just curious." The chains on Gail's ankles clinked pleasantly as she walked to a cupboard, her steps short and hobbled.

"Like we told you in the first place, that there Prison Farm ain't no bed o' roses. Gal gets in there she don't always get out on time," Ma informed darkly. "But you get set on finding out, we can always arrange it. Want I should tell Billings, honey?"

"No! Please . . . I'm just curious. I'm sorry, maam."

"You better be. And forget them silly notions 'bout being innocent. No one gives a damn. Billings or me says you're guilty, gal, then you're guilty as Hell. Better believe it."

"Oh, I do!" Gail could say this with fervent truth.

"Hate me bad, kid?"

It was a question Gail had asked herself and found no answer. Ma Billing's brand of sadism hardly ranked with Torquemada's. It was actually an amiable cruelty in search of a strange eroticism. The honesty with which she discussed her aberrant recreations disarmed. Yet she was quite ruthless. She was unpredictable.

"No maam." Gail almost winced as she used the demeaning token of respect. "When I first met you I chose what I am doing rather than go to prison. I don't think I could have done that if I had hated you."

Ma Billings brightened. In some ways she was very human. "Smart gal! Said it from the start. You're special.

Damn funny," she mused humorously. "I like you. But I get more kick out o' slicing into your ass than I ever done whaling them others. How you figure that one?"

The girl in chains did not figure it. But she knew a polite interest was expected in a subject dear to her mistress's heart. "I think innocence always provokes us," she offered slowly. "It's probably the contrast. It's sort of routine and half expected to thrash some girl who's been a perfect bitch, so there isn't all that much novelty in it. But if you whip a perfect innocent her outrage alone, her bewilderment, the moral hurt that almost equals the hurt to her skin, it's a fresh and rare emotion."

Ma Billings was gratified. It was as though she had been accorded recognition for a scientific breakthrough. "Damn good, honey. Next time I take a switch to you, we'll discuss it stroke by stroke. You got a head on your shoulders." She laughed ribaldly, "As well as the cutest little butt I ever laid a cane across."

Gail took out the roast. It was time for supper. She wished her feet were not chained. It is hard to serve nimbly with linked ankles.

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For the captive girl the ranch evenings were dull. Had it not been for fatigue they might have been tedious. But by the time she had finished the tasks imposed, Gail was ready enough for sleep. The last chore was rarely finished before nine. Sometimes she was allowed to watch television for an hour. But this privilege was uncertain. She was taken to her room when Ma Billings felt like it.

It was a simple ritual, hatefully shaming. Ma Billings motioned with her thumb and followed her domestic treasure up the stairs. Gail's room was surprisingly ordinary. It was neither penal nor plush. Reaching it, Gail immediately discarded her single covering. Naked, she then performed the next mandatory act. Thrusting out her right foot she watched Ma lock the heavy shackle on the slender ankle. It was a snug fit. It had been made for her in the ranch blacksmith shop. From it an equally heavy chain ran to a massive ring sunk in the floor. Once a girl's ankle was thus secured she could forget escape. The tether allowed the captive to use the bed and walk to the dresser and a clothes closet. But it denied her the door or the window.

Though safely prisoned for the night there still remained an

unknown. Gail masked her apprehensions as she waited. Ma Billings chuckled with enjoyment of the suspense. It was a game she played nightly with her captive. With deliberate slowness she opened a dresser drawer and extracted a pair of handcuffs. She toyed with the chrome admiringly. "Mighty handy things, these," she said as though speaking of a household convenience, which indeed, for her, they were! "Billings brought me several of 'em last time he was to home." She chuckled, "Compliments of the State Police I expect. He don't pay for nothing he don't have to."

The naked girl eyed the shining metal. It was hard to control her features from mirroring her loathing. But she had been bitterly taught to accept what she must with good grace. There were far worse things than handcuffs! This regular evening play that gave pleasure to the older woman held an element of considerable uncertainty. Gail might not be cuffed at all; or she might be made to wear them normally so that her wrists were simply joined. Her hands could be fastened behind her back. Or, if Ma was in a playful or vindictive mood, the metal bands could be made to hold their victim in a myriad of uncomfortable or shaming ways. One wrist locked to one ankle would not preclude sleep, but it was a punishment. There had long since ceased to be pretence that the girl's security was at stake. The handcuffs were placed upon her solely for Ma Billing's erotic enjoyment. It did something for her. It did a lot.

"Turn around, honey." Ma was maintaining her benign mood.

Equally determined to give no offence, Gail almost eagerly obeyed, placing her hands submissively behind her back. A small inhalation of breath was her only acknowledgement as the cuffs bit at her wrists and were clicked tight. "Thank you, maam." She kept her voice even, almost grateful. This, too, was mandatory.

It was done. The captive girl was ready for bed. Ma Billings waddled happily away. She did not bother to lock the door.

Pensively the chained girl moved to stand before the mirror. What might have been the considerable clanking of her ankle chain was muted by a frayed rug thoughtfully provided for that purpose. Gail's passage about her room might otherwise have been noisily obtrusive. The heavy links accompanied her like a shadow.

She would have liked to brush her hair. The mirror accused her of untidiness. She tugged fretfully at the handcuffs in a reflex motion

utterly futile. She could do nothing. Why, oh why, could Ma not have cuffed her hands in front! It would still be shaming. But there were so many things a girl could do. She shrugged resignedly and grimaced at herself in the glass. She would take what comfort she could from the knowledge that her condition could be worse. It was no fun trying to sleep with her hands chained to the rail above her head. Beside such ingenuities, her present lot was mild.

Gail had come to understand the pathetic consolations of captivity. They were small, but so eagerly sought, so avidly enjoyed. That the bands upon her wrists be one notch tighter or more loose was a major victory or defeat. That she be chained or free while she washed the dishes was a thing of much concern. The life of the slave girl she had become was measured, not by hopes of happiness, but only by varying degrees of discomfort or restraint. To be allowed to sleep without her hands in limbo was a gala occasion. She lived by comparisons.

Dejectedly, Gail sat upon her bed and reflected bitterly on what might have been. If she had not done this or not done that! If only she had not stopped her car at the Sunshine Motel. Or if she had driven on to the next town. Or if she had not taken the key and gone away to supper before opening the fatal door. Such small decisions. Yet they had changed her life. Almost they had robbed her of life.

The shock of finding the dead man had been traumatic. There he lay across the bed that should have been hers. The manner of his dying all too obvious. But she remembered most of all the creeping horror of realization that she was suspect. Remembered how she had cringed and flinched that first time they handcuffed her. Remembered the claustrophobic terror of the little cell and the larger bare room with the angry sweating faces and harsh demands. There had been the phone call, the eyes coldly assessing her, the cryptic exchange of words and leers. She had been almost grateful when, after hours of bleak fear, her cell door had opened to admit the huge figure of the bluff hearty man with his facile bonhomie and his incredible offer: Be a slave girl to his wife at their ranch, be a servant, a housemaid, a cook. Accept restraints and punishments without complaint. Just for a year. For only one year . . . .

Billings had shrewdly watched her incredulity, her instinctive revulsion, her flinching from the word punishment and his quite frank description of what those punishments would be. "She'll whip your ass, honey, and tie you up every way from Sunday," he had

assured her genially. Then, when she was about to utter a heated rejection, he had described her alternative. He had described it with cold clinical detail. Described what would be done to her and how old she would probably become before she returned to the world of sanity. All the Billings would ask of her was twelve months. It wasn't all that much . . . was it . . . !

The next day she had voluntarily chosen the journey to the Bar-B-Ranch.

Gail idly kicked her foot and watched the chain respond. She pulled at her prisoned wrists. She reflected bitterly that she would never know the wisdom of her choice. She had no means of gauging her salvation at Billings' hands. Or, conversely, how cannily he may have inveigled her into a needless slavery. She had no knowledge of prisons. But she thought it unlikely that any of them would be as physically cruel as Ma Billings or would work her as hard. On the other hand she had read stories of this State and this County and their penal inhumanities. At least at the Bar-B there were human contacts, not all hostile. Ma Billings herself could be strangely sympathetic between her cruelties and her demands. Almost she was to be preferred to a uniformed jailer and the cold impersonality of a penitentiary. And there was always the record. At the Bar-B she was not a criminal.

It was a strange captivity. She was chained and she was bound. Sometimes she was locked into this compartment or that device. Yet, often enough, there were opportunities to run. It was casually accepted that Ma's inflictions were for Ma's pleasure. If the captive was foolish enough to run away during those odd periods when she was not restrained she was welcome to do so. It was understood that the police would catch her, and that retribution would be swift and awful. Among the more terrible penalties mentioned was that her sentence might then cease to be only a year.

She examined the threat. It dissolved her courage. Only the knowledge that it would one day end had enabled her to act the perfect prisoner thus far. She clung to a belief that the Billings would keep their word on her indenture. But she could never free herself of a nagging certainty that should they resolve to keep her chained forever, there was nothing to stop them doing so. In such a case there was only Neil. Would the nice boy have the courage . . . !

Speculations were fruitless. Gail lay back and struggled and twisted

herself beneath the covers. Handcuffs had long since ceased to impede her slumber.

Morning brought Dulcie, half asleep, resentful. In an almost somnambulant state, she unlocked the shackle from the captive ankle and joined Gail's feet with the chain hobble. She removed the handcuffs and returned them to the drawer. Mutely, the Billings' teen-age daughter, having performed her six A.M. duty, bemusedly made her way back to bed for whatever sleep she could manage before the breakfast call. Gail never failed to be amused by the perfunctory manner of her daily release to go about her eternal chores.

It was one of the few good moments. Her feet were prisoners, but the rest of her was free. She stretched and luxuriated in flinging wide her arms. She stole what time she dared before the mirror and in the bathroom. She donned her scanty dress and clinked her short-stepped journey to the kitchen to get the family breakfast.

Ma Billings was practical in the matter of extracurricular business. It was not until all work was done that she produced the banana skin. Seeing it, Gail's heart sank.

"Found it down between the fridge and the wall, honey."

The bond maid quailed. The offending object would have been placed by one of the children, or even by Ma herself to justify a punishment. It had not been there before breakfast. Gail had become alert in watching for such traps. They were frequent. It was useless to protest them fraudulent. Such protests were listened to with sly smiles and earned only additional impositions of whatever it was she was about to suffer as punishment. She had once wondered why they bothered. But she understood now that placing her delinquent added savour to the punishment she would bear. It also gave scope for the ever mandatory humility with which she must accept a guilt that was not hers.

"I'm very sorry, maam. Shall I fetch the cane?"

"Was thinking about the whip, honey," Ma Billings said mildly.

To be whipped for a banana skin! But it was nothing new. Gail smiled brightly and said demurely, "Thank you, maam. Where would you like to whip me?"

"On the ass, of course!" Ma seized the obvious, and roared with laughter at her feeble wit.

"In the barn, maam. Or out in the yard?" The Bar-B held many suitable places where a naked girl could be tied for punishment.

"What say the barn, kid." Ma's voice had become eager.

"Thank you, maam."

They walked together across the yard. Two females bent upon the business of the ranch. Gail never ceased to wonder at the incongruities of her condition. Only her chained feet marked her as different from the woman who matched her steps. On the way they passed the whipping post. It was frankly and unashamedly that. It stood, stark and menacing, in the center of the big space. A girl was fastened to it when an audience must be impressed. Tied to it, a hundred eyes could watch her shame. Gail knew it well.

The barn was large, but little used. The Bar-B was less a ranch than a country home. It provided a useful facility whereby Ma could enjoy her quaint proclivities, and was an ideal rearing ground for Congressman Billings' considerable issue.

"Guess you'd like a bit of a change, honey?" Ma Billings looked 'round the huge structure with a speculative eye.

Gail had learned that 'a bit of a change' was rarely for the better. But her "yes, please" sounded grateful. Ma Billings nodded thoughtfully. Her eyes brightened. "Get them leather wristlets, honey, and stand in the aisle."

Standing in the spot where she would receive her stripes, Gail stepped out of her scanty sheath and held out her hands. The wristlets were a concession to the frailty of female flesh. When they were strapped tight, neither suspension nor struggles would cut the skin as would rope or cord. They were most practical. Each held a metal ring incorporated in its construction. Gail watched them strapped upon her passive wrists. This was the true beginning of her day.

The barn held two rows of stalls. Between them the aisle was wide. The girl about to be punished reflected bitterly that there would be

plenty of room to wield the whip. The older woman, intent upon her task, was tying separate ropes to each ring. Then, with much tossing and looping and tugging, she achieved the effect envisioned. The naked girl stood, dead centre, her captive hands strung high and far apart by long lengths of rope that held her to stand remote and alone and frighteningly vulnerable.

"Can you move much, honey?" Ma sounded as though it mattered.

Gail's feet were still chained. The shackles did not interfere with what was to be done. Obedient to her mistress's inquiry, Gail essayed a step forward and back. They were a matter of only a couple of inches either way. The ropes were tight, but their very length gave the prisoner latitude for a small swaying motion which she obligingly demonstrated to Ma Billings' satisfaction. Actually, she was utterly helpless.

"Give you a chance to wiggle a bit," said Ma the beneficent.

Gail preferred not to have a chance to wiggle. She would do it. But it was demeaning. "Thank you, maam," she said without hope.

The whip sliced her shoulders and bit a breast. The shock was severe. She had allowed Ma Billings' bit of humour to mislead her into the supposition that it was her bottom which would receive the inflictions. She passionately did not want to scream, but she could not suppress a vivid moan of wild surprise. The whip was a cruel and awful thing above the waist.

The woman with the whip was panting, not from effort but with a savage excitation. The scarlet weal that was forming across the white shoulders was a thing of beauty on which her eyes focused in rapt ecstasy. She waited for the maximum effect then struck again.

Once more the naked recipient of the stroke managed not to scream. Gail vented her agony in a frantic plunge forward against the ropes away from the thong that, this time, had duplicated its cruelty beneath her other outstretched arm. Her lips uttered an involuntary cry of desolation that she could not contain. But she did not scream.

She could not know it at that moment, but she was exquisitely beautiful. The woman who owned her stood back and watched the writhings of the ivory loveliness so totally held and exposed. Across the strained back another crimson emblem was forming its tribute to

the lash. The ropes vibrated and swayed against their naked victim's struggle.

"Cat got your tongue, kid?" Ma Billings was a firm believer in screams. A good scream showed a girl's appreciation. She made the whip sing its song once more.

Gail screamed. Even though it was required of her she would have screamed anyway. There is always a point somewhere when the screams begin. The whip demands them. It is a foolish girl who doubly suffers because of pride. To take six across her bottom in silence may be a small victory for the sufferer. But with a naked girl tied fast the whip will always win. Gail's panting cries continued while the red stain spread across her skin.

Five strokes! A mild enough punishment as such things go. At the end of them Gail's "thank you" was quite sincere. She knew that by Ma Billings' caprice her punishment could just as easily have been ten. There were no schedules, no established precedents. She stood still, breasts heaving, back on fire, the ropes pulling inexorably at her arms.

Ma Billings herself was loath to move. The formation and progression of the weals across the whiteness of the girl's back held, for her, an irresistible fascination. The sound of the hurt panting breaths was pure magic. The tossing of the helpless head was a mute affirmation of her possession of this girl who stood helplessly awaiting her pleasure. She could whip the little trick to death, she mused comfortably.

Cut and cut until the female thing hung limp and lifeless, bloody and seared and mute. But what waste! Ma knew a good thing when she had it. She was not about to ruin it. She sighed with an ineffable happiness.

"Might as well leave you like that for the day," she mused cheerfully. "Ain't likely to think up nothing better."

The captive stood as naturally as her bonds would allow. She looked pitifully at the woman who had whipped her, but she managed a wan smile as Ma Billings thoughtfully dried the wet cheeks, then patted them maternally.

"Kids can get their own lunch," Ma said. "I got a few things to do.

But I'll be back in time to loosen you or I'll phone young Dulcie."

It was the usual: her captive day. Gail did not wish to stand as she was, but knew there would be no help for it. She managed a bright-eyed smile. It was always best to keep Ma Billings pleased with her. The strangeness of smiling after she had been whipped was an anomaly she had deliberately accustomed herself to. So many things were mandatory with Ma.

"You're a damn fine gal, kid." Ma Billings took a final look of approval at her masterpiece, her daily work of art and of love, before she reluctantly turned and waddled from the barn.

For Gail it was an accolade.

The tree had been better. It was something to lean on. Today would be tiring, her arms would ache, her shoulders were strained, her wrists would hurt. She would just stand there naked without ability to ease any of her hurts. The pain of the whip would gradually decrease leaving only tenderness, so that in the end the pose she must sustain all day would be the worst punishment of all. The work she must perform mutely was tiring enough. Sessions such as she would now endure made her trebly weary. But she was a bond maid. She was by no means the first to suffer in such ways.

But it was a wretched way through which to spend the long hours. She reflected wryly that quite probably she did look beautiful in this enforced worship of the sun. But she could not see herself and there were no other eyes. Neil would not come to the barn. The Billings children lacked aesthetic appreciation. She would just stand, knowing that Ma Billings would be remembering her with satisfaction that she be thus beautifully bound by her own hand. It was a sad reflection that she was sacrifice to a middle-aged woman's loneliness and frustration. Yet her pain was not fruitless. It gave Ma happiness. What strange twists life could take!

She thought of Kevin. How badly had he been hurt by the letter she had been forced to send! She thought of herself and men. For the year of her sentence there would be a vacuum. Her punishments did not consider the intangible yet most vital loss of all: a year of life. A year taken from that time when a girl is most ardently alive. Gail knew that because of this deprivation she had come to sublimate Neil and his boy's earnestness, his obvious adoration. That he was so much younger than herself was becoming of less and less moment. He was

male! She reflected with wry humour that, held captive long enough, she might even find the attentions of the objectionable Curtis tolerable . . . if only he was not all prodding fingers and curiosity.

Dulcie came at noon. She looked a lot better than she had done at six A.M. Gail knew that under normal circumstances she would have found the teenager attractive and likeable. But nothing was normal at the Bar-B. Dulcie closed and bolted the barn door from the inside. That meant she had a mission. She said a perfunctory "Hi" and stood admiring her mother's work of art. "Really got you fixed, hasn't she? She whip you too?"

Not the least of the Bar-B's phenomena was the awareness and acceptance of Ma Billings' favourite sport by her brood. Gail often wondered how their personalities would develop under exposure to a daily diet of naked girls tied and whipped and chained. Girls who, sometimes under stress, would plead for help and for release. Already, Dulcie and Curtis had graduated from acceptance into a sly participation.

Dulcie nonchalantly circled the pinioned nakedness, stopping to admire the five weals across the white back. She traced them with her finger and laughed as their owner winced. "Why she stop at five, Gail?"

"I don't know. I never know," Gail retorted testily.

"You tired . . . standing like that?"

"Yes, terribly."

Dulcie studied the naked captive hungrily. She was obviously carrying a heavy weight of decision. She rid herself of it in a single sentence, "If I let you down for an hour will you lick me?"

Gail had seen it coming. Dulcie was a highly sexed and precocious moppet. At times such as this she had total control of a woman's body. The demand was not surprising. But its answer was not easy. Gail was not naive, a prude, or without experience. An hour of release would be glorious! But she was not a pushover. And, once started, where would such a liaison end? And what would Ma Billings do to them if she found out? But there was an insidious appeal in the idea of an ally, someone tied to her by a bond stronger than pity. She temporized, "Your mother would murder us."

"Ma won't know," Dulcie said equably. Then, as a helpful afterthought, "I'll whip you if you refuse."

"You wouldn't dare. Your Ma would see the marks on me."

Dulcie smiled quietly. She found rope. While one end of it was being cinched around her waist Gail had the feeling her resistance pleased the youngster. When the other end snared an ankle and tugged it off the ground she had an inkling of what was in store. "Your mother will be mad at you." The threat might be an empty one. But it was her only weapon. When the small task was done the naked girl stood on one foot. The other was joined to her waist and bent up as far as the ankle chain would allow, far enough for Dulcie's purpose.

"Ma ain't going to look on the sole of your foot," the youngster said smugly.

Gail watched unhappily while Dulcie went to the tack room for a crop. She was utterly at the youngster's mercy. The sole of her captive foot screamed a mute protest at what was about to happen. She twisted and tugged, but was more impotent than ever.

"Alright, I'll do it," she capitulated. At least the child would know she had not been willing! By such slender threads does a female cling to integrity.

"You put me to a lot of trouble. Don't see why I shouldn't give you a few licks," Dulcie grudgingly suggested.

"Oh, please, Dulcie! It will hurt terribly."

Dulcie's arm flashed. The pinioned foot seemed sundered by the blow. The pain was so great and of such a new and unexpected intensity that Gail screamed and screamed again. Surely such agony was not possible . . . !

The child who had delivered the blow stood enthralled by its effect. Her victim was utterly demoralized. The naked girl moaned and writhed in the most satisfying ways. When her louder noises subsided, she moaned and sobbed in complete surrender: "Oh Dulcie! Not again . . . please! I'll do whatever you want. I will, I will! Oh, please . . . ."

"You'll do it nicely? You won't be sulky?"

"I won't be sulky. I promise."

"As much as I want?"

"All you want, Dulcie. Everything. And I'll let you tie me again after." Gail was defeated.

Dulcie snickered. "Ain't no need of that. I thought of something."

The 'something" was effective and took no chances. One at a time the long ropes to Gail's wrists were loosened and re-tied at a height of four feet. She was made to kneel, the ropes tugged tight. She was as helpless as she had ever been. Kneeling, her arms horizontal, tautly stretched to either side, she knew herself well positioned for what she must do. "You promised to free me," she complained.

"No need. This will do fine."

"But I'm tired. You offered me a rest."

"I offered you a chance to lick my clit. You aiming to be difficult?"

Gail was close to tears. It was all so unfair. But she was frightened. This moppet, in ignorant exuberance, might do her more injury than would Ma Billings. "No. I'll be good. I'll be nice to you. It's just that I really truly am tired."

Dulcie was faintly touched. "I thought kneeling would give you a rest?"

"I suppose it does, a bit. But I can't even kneel properly with one foot tied up to my tummy."

"I want it like that so's I can whip it if you don't behave," Dulcie pointed out reasonably.

"Please take the rope off it. Honest, I will please you. I will! You can whip me terribly if I don't. You've got me fixed, Dulcie. I can't do anything except what you want me to." Gail was becoming desperate. Another blow across the sole of her foot was unthinkable.

"Oh alright then," Dulcie agreed doubtfully. "Ill let your foot down. But I'll leave the rope round your middle. You start acting up and I can have you back the way you are in no time, and I'll give it to you good."

The captive sighed with relief as her foot fell to the floor. Kneeling was better than standing. She would console herself with a prisoner'a philosophy that half a loaf was better than no bread. She watched Dulcie strip naked. It was done with surprising ease. The girl wore no more than Gail herself was allowed. There was a pert femaleness about her nudity that was tremendously appealing. The kneeling girl watched the advance of the dark hairy triangle and smiled brightly to show herself willing. Her lips parted. She moistened them with a wet tongue.

For Dulcie, her noon hour was excitingly wonderful.

Power and lust are heady stuff for a teenager. Amidst her testacies her mind was busy with future plans. A treasure like Gail was not to be wasted. For Gail herself, the sixty minutes brought no relief from weariness. Her tongue was now added to the list of what was tired. Again and again she longed for the use of her hands. She pleaded for their freedom, pointing out how greatly they could enhance joy. But Dulcie was adamant: perhaps another time. Not now. Gail dare not persist.

Rightly or wrongly there was a bond. Gail did not know whether to be glad or ashamed. The two girls had shared an essentially female happiness. It could not be forgotten. Gail sensed the thoughts in the youngster's mind. It would happen again and again. Perhaps a weapon was being forged. She stood passive and willing to be re-bound as Ma had left her. Standing taut and helpless, her eyes sought those of the girl she had pleasured. Knowledge and understanding flashed between them. With a sound akin to a sob or a moan, the girl who was free fell to her knees before she who was tied. Strong young hands felt and clutched, eager lips sped to their task. Gail gasped in wonderland.

Dulcie was more than kind.

Alone again, tautly held, Gail was preparing herself to reflect through the hours of the afternoon when Curtis appeared. "You're supposed to be in school," she accused, her heart sinking.

"No class for an hour," he exulted.

With Curtis it was always a battle of wits. She dared not be as curt and as brusk with him as she wished. She was too vulnerable. He had access to her for an hour. It would take all her wit to counter his lechery. She kept a cautious silence.

"You and Dulcie been up to something." His eyes were wise.

"She came and talked to me."

"I bet she did!" He walked 'round her nakedness. "She give you them licks with a whip?"

"That was your mother."

He grinned, complete master of the situation. "I seen what you and Dulcie done. There's knot-holes and the windows. You sure did make her squirm."

"So run along and tell Mummy."

"You done it for Dulcie, you can do it for me."

Gail was about to point out that girls and little boys are different, when she realized that, for what Curtis had in mind, the difference would not matter. She fell back on the comforting obvious. "I can't do anything for anybody tied up like this."

He snickered. "I can soon fix that."

The naked girl knew a sudden terrible yearning to be free. To be herself and not naked and tied so that her body was a plaything for children. Even for an hour or two . . . ! She gave the avid urchin her best smile and dropped her bait, "If you untie me I can give you a lot more than I gave Dulcie." For extra measure she added archly, "And you'll be giving me something too."

She saw him tense, saw the excitement take possession. "Aw shucks!" He said disgustedly, "I untie you, you'll run like Hell."

"I can't. My feet are chained." She raised one foot and rattled the links.

She caught his attention. Curtis was confronted with The Great Adventure'. His eyes lingered on her pubic hair. "You asking me to fuck you?" He was glimpsing Paradise.

"Of course! I want it as much as you do." Gail felt certain that even at the age of twelve the male ego was susceptible to flattery.

"You ain't going to tell Ma 'bout this?"

"Good Heavens no! She'd whip me."

"Me too," said Curtis the realist. "How 'bout if you have a baby?" The idea obviously pleased him.

The hazard of pregnancy was not included in what Gail had in mind. "I'll have to take my chances," she told him heroically.

Curtis was hooked, but was still covering angles. "Ma will throw a fit if she comes home and you ain't fixed the way she left you?"

"She'd whip me terribly," Gail craftily agreed. "That's why I'll want you to tie me like this again. We just have to do that." She gazed at him in earnest complicity.

The youthful satyr nodded thoughtfully. He could see no impediment to his excursion into lust. He had covered all the loopholes. With determined eagerness he shed his clothes and went to work on the ropes that held his partner in lubricity.

Gail was excited, not with passion, but by the stakes for which she played. Assessing the active naked youth with his rigid sex she realized he would be no easy mark. If only her feet were not chained! But they were chained! She would have to take her gamble. Failure must not be thought of. She must be stronger than he was! She had to be.

When the last ropes fell away and she stood free, they eyed each other awkwardly as though they were indeed adolescents embarking for an unknown sea. Divergent as their intents might be, the approach of each was similar. Smiling at her companion all the while, Gail massaged and flexed her stiff and aching arms. She would need them. Gauging the expression on her ravisher's face she lay on her back on the floor and held out her arms.

Gail had to choke back a giggle. It was too absurd! The youthful

Curtis came at her like a strutting cockerel. His gaze, mesmerized, never leaving the dark triangle between her legs. He knelt and fell forward to impale his conquest.

It was her moment. Twisting, she snared his legs in her ankle chain. While he was still shocked by her sudden motion she had him face down. Twisting his right arm up so that he yelped, she reached for rope, her knees with all her weight upon his back.

Without surprise and the boy's preoccupation with his lechery, she might not have succeeded. He was strong and ruthless. Her chained feet were a frightening handicap. But she did succeed. After an ebb and flow battle made vivid by Curtis's threats and outraged curses, she had him securely tied. He lay, crimson faced and glowering as she rose to her feet, his maleness still comically erect. "You'll get the whipping of your life," he assured her sourly.

"So will you," his erstwhile victim retorted complacently.

Curtis's mind worked craftily. "Untie me and I'll just go to school and you can do what you damn well please."

Gail wished she could trust him, but knew she could not. Had her feet not been chained she would have taken the chance. But the first tussle had told her plainly that she might not win the second. The rampant Curtis could stay where he was. Thoughtfully, she tied his already bound feet to a stanchion, then made her way to the door, followed by a stream of abuse and threats, some of which she feared might actually be made good.

It was a strange feeling, her closest approach to freedom since coming to the Bar-B. For a moment there was exaltation, an intoxicating awareness of possibilities. But deflation was instant. What hope of escape was there for a naked girl with chained feet! Miserably, she looked down at the heavy metal bands about her ankles and their equally heavy joining links. Only Ma Billings had the key that would get them off.

But she would not too easily accept defeat. If, by some effort or ingenuity she could rid herself of the irons, the actuality of escape might become real. If she could reach a highway and hitchhike out of the State she would be beyond the malign influence of Billings and his cohorts. At the mere thought, her heart soared.

She tried the blacksmith shop. But the tools were valuable. The door was firmly locked. She hastened to the house and to her room. Scrambling into a dress and shoes, she stumbled her hobbled way to Ma's own bedchamber. The search was long. Everything must be left as though undisturbed. Failing to escape, it would be wise to minimize the punishments she supposed inevitable. With little optimism she began her search of the big house.

A hall closet yielded a glass jar containing half a dozen assorted keys. None of them fit her shackles, but following a faint hope she took them to the blacksmith shop. One of them gained her entry. She stood perplexed by the anvil, the forge and the array of tools. She wasted a good deal of time in fruitless efforts to pick the locks with assorted bits of metal strewn upon the bench before she noticed the hacksaw. When she essayed its use, she almost wept in frustration. Because her feet were joined she could place neither of them in a convenient position. At best she could use the blade awkwardly and with little power. Her first disappointment came with the discovery that the tool would make no headway on the shackle itself. The band was too big and too curved. She could cut herself but not the metal.

Gail considered. With perseverance she might be able to sever the chain from the anklets. Successful in that, she would then go out into the world with heavy metal bands locked upon her ankles. They would be no impediment to motion, but would proclaim her condition. Yet fashions today were strange. Perhaps with a twisted scarf or some textile trifle she could achieve a semblance of normalcy! Freedom had beckoned too brightly to desist now. She fitted the serrated blade against one shackle ring and made her first effective thrust with the saw.

"Aiming to do a bit of traveling, honey?" Ma Billings voice queried sardonically.

Shocked dismay sent the saw clattering to the floor. Gail's heart made a similar descent. Turning from her awkward crouch she found the doorway filled by Ma Billings hefty bulk. That lady's eyes were viewing the escapee's consternation with pleased amusement. "Cat's away, the mice can play, eh, kid!"

Gail buried her face in her hands and wept. Fate was too cruel. The day had turned into disaster.

Ma Billings watched her captive cry. She enjoyed tears. What greater tribute could the defeated girl pay her. When they turned into dry sobs she picked up the hacksaw and minutely examined the shackles. "Looks like I come home 'bout the right time," she observed cheerfully. "Saved you spoiling a good pair o' leg irons and making an asshole outa' yourself, honey."

Gail kept within the sanctuary of her hands. She had nothing to say. No girl could have been caught in more flagrant guilt. She could think of no words to offer in mitigation. She had lost her freedom because of a few bits of metal on her ankles. It was too, too cruel!

"Them irons saved the day, kid," Ma observed reflectively. "Damn good thing I had 'em on you. If I hadn't you'd be high tailing it up the highway and getting yourself into all sorts of trouble . . . real bad trouble. Maybe I'd better get a heavier set on you just as a reminder."

"Yes maam," the tearful prisoner sniffed.

"Yes maam my arse!" Ma Billings exclaimed. "How the Hell you get loose?"

Gail told her.

Ma Billings listened unperturbed. She admired enterprise, especially that of her own progeny. "You mean you got young Curtis hog tied in the barn?" she chortled.

"What else could I do, maam!"

"Could have given the lad his first bit o' tail." She roared with laughter at the sally. "Imagine you got a bit to spare." She wiped her eyes and handed the cambric to Gail. "Here, honey, dry them tears and lets go have a look at the young buck."

The helpless Curtis had no eyes for Gail. They were focused in apprehension on his mother's approaching bulk. "She done it to me, Ma." He made it sound like a charge of high treason.

"What you aim to do to her, son?" Ma was enjoying herself.

"I wouldn't have hurt her, Ma. Honest!"

"Didn't figure she was no virgin, eh!"

The subtlety of the remark was lost upon the crimson faced youth. "She asked me to let her down for a rest," he offered hopefully.

"That why you took your clothes off?" Chuckling with an immense amusement, Ma Billings took Gail's arm and led her towards the door.

"Hey, Ma! I'm all tied up," Curtis proclaimed the obvious.

"You sure are, son. And you can damn well stay that way. Teach you a lesson. I got things to talk about with this fool girl." Ma jerked her captive's arm and headed for the house.

It was typical of Ma Billings that she insisted on coffee. Making it, Gail had no illusions about the respite. They would sit sipping it while she was sentenced to some horrible penalty. Ma Billings liked her cruelties to be good natured. The hated chains clinked and clinked in triumphant reminder of their victory.

"I won't make any excuses, maam," Gail said despondently over her cup.

"I'd listen if you had any, hon'," Ma said big heartedly.

Gail tried, her voice uncertain. "When I came here, maam, it was understood that I should treat you with respect and that I must accept the things . . . the things you would want to do to me −"

"Like whipping your ass," Ma Billings broke in helpfully.

"Well . . . yes. And all the rest . . . !" Gail eyed the older woman doubtfully. "I suppose I was sort of sentenced. Or maybe we could call it some sort of verbal contract. But − and please don't be offended at this − I don't think it included the things your children want to do to me. You see," her eyes made a genuine appeal, "when you leave me tied for the day, they can do anything they like. I'm completely at their mercy."

"What they been doing to you, honey?"

Gail hesitantly described the juvenile interest in her femininity. "You see, maam, I've been scared to tell you. I'm scared now. If you reprimand them, they can get revenge by giving me a really bad time."

"The little so and so's," Ma reflected thoughtfully. Feeling in her bag she brought forth a small plastic object Gail recognized all too well. "Here, you'll get one of these a day. I can't stand guard over that cute little slit of yours."

It was a declaration from which Gail could garner no comfort. But she swallowed the little red pill. One more hazard of her captivity had reared its head. "What are you going to do to me?" she asked dolefully.

Ma Billings poured them both more coffee. "What you think I should do, honey?"

"I suppose I have to be punished." It was an acceptance rather than a question.

"Damn right you do! How'd you like to be whipped?"

From anyone but Ma Billings the question would have been rhetorical or absurd. Somehow she clothed it in normalcy. With pounding heart the delinquent girl strove for the same tone. "I expect I should be whipped, maam."

The older woman nodded, pleased. "That looks after stealing my keys and your little act with the hacksaw, honey. But you ain't no business tying up my kid. What about that?"

"But the little monst −"

"The little monster what, honey?" Ma's voice was sweet as syrup.

"He was trying to rape me."

"Who talked him into taking them ropes off you?"

Gail flushed. "He . . . he had to . . . to get at me. I was frightened. They had tied my foot up so they could whip the sole. You wouldn't see the marks."

"They?"

"Dulcie started it." Gail felt a tattle tale. She cringed at thought of the children's wrath.

"I'll be damned!" Ma slapped her knee in hearty approval.

"Had yourself quite a day." She considered briefly, "Makes a couple more rumps I'll have to tan." Momentarily she pursued a quiet thought. That hurt much? I mean on the sole of your foot?"

"It's so awful I can't describe it."

"Good! I'll try it on you sometime." Ma sounded pleased as with a new recipe. "But right now you got a score to settle for Curtis and for young Dulcie, bless her heart. Got any ideas?"

"I was helpless, maam. They could do what they liked with me." Gail felt a great weight of injustice descending on her shoulders.

"You was helpless when I left. But when I come home I find you damn near off and running," Ma said darkly. "Can't tell me you didn't have no hand in that."

Punishments! Forever punishments! Because there had been guilt these would be doubly awful. Instinctively the chained girl looked appealingly at the woman who held her in thrall. "Please, maam, don't hurt me too much. I know I've earned a whipping. But . . . but, I'm so tired . . . ."

Perhaps Ma Billings was touched. It was hard to tell. "You run along and get the supper, kid. We'll leave your little rewards until tomorrow. You ain't a bad girl. Just need a bit o' breaking in. One of these days I'll get you real gentle."

"Oh, thank you, maam." Gail was genuinely grateful. At that moment her courage was not equal to being whipped. She rose, her eyes meeting those of the other woman. "I'm . . . I'm frightened," she whispered brokenly.

"And so you should be, kid! So you should be!" Ma Billings approved warmly.

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It was quaintly formal and reminiscent of another age. The whipping post became a thing of another century. The barnyard became a Barrack Square. The six Billings children stood in line, the

four youngest mightily intrigued, the two eldest crestfallen and sullen. To one side stood Gail, clothed but desolate. To the other the masterful bulk of the mistress of proceedings, Ma Billings herself. The post dominated them all.

Ma clapped her hands twice. With military precision Curtis and Dulcie marched forward to the place of execution. The boy slipped out of his clothes, positioned his hands and stood abject while his sister fastened them. Dulcie accepted from her mother a handful of willow switches, trimmed and peeled, and with vigor and enthusiasm she proceeded to lash the exposed youth from waist to knees. The victim protested vigorously and howled lustily, but with a noticeable absence of threats. His sister wore out her stock of willows one by one. Her chagrin when the last one shattered was comical. She gave the impression that she had only gotten nicely started on an enjoyable task.

Once more the hands of authority gave the signal. With noticeably less panache, Dulcie released her brother, divested herself of all covering and took his place at the post. Curtis, his features now transformed with a vicious joy, fastened her brutally. The watching Gail realized an absence of affection between brother and sister beyond anything she had suspected. The girl's cheeks were already wet with tears of anticipation at her brother's revenge.

But Ma Billings had her own ideas about sibling relationships. She motioned Curtis to dress and to retire to the ranks and, herself, descended on the palpitating bit of femininity tied to the post. Dulcie watched approaching doom with manifest dolor.

Of the two, it was Dulcie who put up by far the best performance. Gail felt certain Curtis had been favoured. She was sure the withes now used were longer and more numerous. They split and shed in all directions under the force of Ma's lusty attack on her daughter's squirming nudity. But Dulcie had courage, or pride, or perhaps her refusal to scream or plead was her own way of besting the boy who had made so vocal an outcry under her own hand. When the last switch was discarded, the teen-age nakedness was vividly striated and concerned only with her pain and her sobbing. Released, Dulcie quickly dressed and rejoined the ranks of her grinning brothers and sisters. Family justice was complete.

Gail stood, shamed and uncertain. She had not been briefed. But a couple of nods from the woman in charge told her what to do.

Listlessly, she shed her clothes and placed her hands, one on each side of the post, and watched Ma Billings tie them very tightly indeed. She was now ready to be whipped, but a quick glance told her that her flogging was to be different. No willow switches for her. Ma held a whip, a tapered snake-like horror that was frightening to see, let alone feel. But it was when Ma beckoned Curtis that Gail fought her bonds.

"You tie my boy up, he gets to whip your ass," Ma Billings explained pleasantly.

"He'll kill me," Gail protested wildly.

"Don't be silly, kid. Just warm you up a bit. Hurt a damn sight worse if I do the job."

Gail was by no means sure. There was a ruthless viciousness about Curtis that she feared. She turned pleading eyes to the older woman. "He won't do it properly. He'll hit me in the wrong places." She blurted out her fear.

"It won't hurt your little twat to get a lick or two, honey. Don't take on so. The boy's got to learn sometime. Ain't right he should practice on his sister," Ma said consolingly.

It was outrageous! Impossible! But it was going to happen. She was to be whipped naked by a vindictive boy. She burned with shame. The childish eyes in the ranks would be glowing in enjoyment of a gala day. To them she was a woman. It is not often in a child's play they see a woman stripped and flogged. Gail felt certain Dulcie's eyes would sparkle most of all.

"Can I wale her all out, Ma?" Curtis asked excitedly.

"Sure you can, son. But no funny stuff. Watch it!" Ma Billings admonished ambiguously.

"Please . . . !" Gail put all the pleading she could muster into the single word. But its poignancy was lost in a wave of agony. Curtis had brought the supple length down squarely across her naked shoulders so that it curled beneath a raised arm and snapped across her breast. She screamed in a mixture of shock, pain and outrage.

"Stay off her tit, son." Ma's voice was stern. "You flick her tit again and you go back there yourself."

The tied girl beneath the whip had cause to wonder if indeed Ma Billings would have hurt her more. Curtis was not adult, but he was vigorous and male. His arm was swift and strong and sure. The whip bit at her flesh with a professional skill. Denied her breasts, he sent the thong curling into every other female secret she possessed. Every third stroke shamed her in its searching of her sex. The rest were competent strokes that marked her from knee to neck with weals that Ma herself might have viewed with pride.

"Slower! Oh please! Give me a chance." Gail was frantic under the swift succession of cuts.

"Take it easy, son. The gal wants to make it last," Ma advised equably.

The blows slowed so that their recipient could catch her breath between them. Gail wondered, in her haze of pain, if this would be better or worse. But it was what she had asked for. She could not complain. She had quickly abandoned hope of emulating Dulcie's silent acceptance of pain. Dulcie had not felt this whip. There could be no comparison. She screamed and moaned each time her skin was slashed. There was something personal about each blow, as though the boy was remembering his hours tied upon the floor of the barn. After an eternity of pain there came a pause.

"How you feel 'bout the idea of escaping, honey?" Ma asked kindly.

For a moment the rhetorical query did not penetrate the whipped girl's consciousness. At that moment escape seemed as distant as Betelgeuse. It was only when she realized the blows had stopped that she knew she had best answer. "I'm sorry I tried, maam. I won't try again."

Ma Billings laughed and ran her hands up and down the wounded flesh of the girl shrinking at the whipping post. "You'll try, honey. You'll try. Escape's a disease little girls have. It's incurable. But a little touch up with a whip sort of keeps it under control. It does help, doesn't it, honey?"

Humiliation! Gail accepted it full measure. "Yes maam, it helps tremendously."

Ma was in full stride. She was feasting. "I sorta' think it would be nice, honey, if you was to tell the kids the way you feel 'bout how silly you been. And mebbee toss in a bit of thanks for the trouble we're taking with you."

It was a royal command. There was no doubt of that. But even in her pain Gail shrank from it. The children already regarded her as their rightful perquisite. She had no wish to demean herself further. And anyway, what could she say that would not sound childish and inept.

"Liven her up a bit, Curtis," his mother suggested.

The livening-up blow around her hips would have endowed an elephant with eloquence. Gail took a deep breath and stripped her pride as naked as her body. "I have been a silly girl," she started out hesitantly. "I deserve to be punished because I tried to escape. I won't try again. I deserve to be punished because of my ingratitude. The pain of being whipped is terrible. I can't tell you how terrible it is. But I am glad to suffer it to teach me a lesson. Thank you, Curtis, for whipping me so well. You are very clever at whipping a girl. Far more clever than I thought you were. I am very sorry for what I did to you yesterday. Thank you for punishing me for being so wrong."

Gail paused hopefully. Surely she had dragged herself in the mud enough! Such childish twaddle! Yet, after all, they were children. Ma herself would relish any humiliation of a girl's flesh or spirit. Once more she accepted shame. "But most of all I have to thank you, maam." She managed a quivering smile for the woman with the whip. "You are so kind to me to have me whipped like this. I'm sorry to be such a trouble to you. You are teaching me such a wonderful lesson. I'm tremendously grateful."

"You sure are welcome, honey," Ma said as though it was an exchange of compliments. She handed the whip back to her son. "Carry on, boy. You doing her a world of good."

The girl tied to the post was aghast. She had cherished a hope that her shaming recital would earn release. What more could she have said! She screamed again as the lash recommenced its exploration of her skin, she screamed and screamed and fought her bonds in a frenzy of despair while the cunning thong licked and cut and screamed its own savage song of joy.

When it stopped again, and while she stood limp and panting, Ma Billings paid tribute. "You sure do put on a damn good show, kid. Never seen better. The way you brace them feet of yours against that pole and tug like Hell is something to see. And the way you howl! I ain't heard nothing like it no place." She patted the sweating shoulder of her captive. "Be mighty pleasant to whip you all day. But I ain't gonna' be hard on you. The boy's doing better than I thought."

Hard on her! Despairingly, Gail looked over her bound arm at the smiling face of the woman to whom what was taking place was a normal day at the Bar-B. The woman whose bliss was commensurate with her captive's agony. Blinking at her tears Gail sobbed, "Please don't have me whipped any more. I don't think I can stand it."

"You're a good girl," Ma approved. "You just ain't got no idea how much o' this you can stand. You're doing fine."

The blows returned. Curtis gained in vigor and cunning as her own strength waned. He was now frankly, and presumably with his mother's approval, aiming for her loins.

Every stroke sent the end of the lash snapping to wound her within her thighs or across her pubic hair. Gail began to weaken and sag against her tied wrists.

"Maybe that will do for right now," Ma Billings judged. She turned to her brood. "Run along to school now, kids. Show's over. You done real good, boy. I'm proud of you."

Proud! The word of praise hurt Gail as another blow. By such standards the children were trained to torture. What hope for her was there left, naked, and at their mercy daily!

Ma read her thoughts. "Don't you forget, honey. A pair o' them got a licking too. I ain't going to have you abused." She chuckled sardonically, " 'Cept by me, of course. Them kids ain't going to hurt you 'less I tell 'em to."

Gail nodded. It was a faint comfort.

"Good gosh girl, you have learned a lesson, haven't you!" Ma Billings was studying her shrewdly. The captive girl's face was eloquent of hopelessness. "You wouldn't run away now if I told you to."

"No. I wouldn't!" Gail stated it as an implicit fact. She was still gasping and panting in the aftermath of her agony. She looked at Ma's earnest face and tried to smile. It was not a success.

Ma Billings fell back on her universal specific. "You stand still, honey," she suggested unnecessarily. "I'm going to get us a cup of coffee."

Agony and farce. One countering the other. Stand still! What else could she do! Yet Gail was glad of the respite. She had been terribly whipped. She knew herself demoralized. She wanted to stop sobbing before Ma returned, but the dry spasms shook her again and again. What she could see of her body was cruelly striped. She shuddered to think of her back. She was a palpitating tenderness. Looking up she saw that her wrists had blood on them.

Why had she been so cruelly punished? It was far worse a whipping than she had been given previously. There could be little doubt that she had committed the unpardonable sin. To attempt to escape was evidently Ma's idea of the ultimate transgression. Gail looked bleakly at her future. For the rest of her sentence she must expunge escape from her mind. But with it went all hope. She was amazed at how vast a vacuum was left in her small world of pain and shame when that hope was gone. When all she would do henceforth was accept. She would offer her wrists and ankles to be bound, her body to be chained. She would concoct the humiliating litanies required of her and recite them with spurious fervor. She had become a slave.

"Nothing like a good cup o' coffee," Ma said as she held the cup to the grateful lips.

She dragged up a couple of boxes, placed the refreshment on one and sat on the other. "May as well leave you like that for the day, honey. Good as any."

The captive had expected to be left bound to the post as she was. It was an obvious thought. If she stopped tugging at her cut wrists it would be bearable. She had not expected to be freed. There was no disappointment. "Is my punishment over, maam?"

Ma Billings regarded her benignly over a steaming cup. "You ain't going to get whipped no more, kid," she stated non-committally.

The naked girl was afraid to ask what else might be done to her. Perhaps it was best she did not know. She sipped more coffee from a proffered cup and gulped at a doughnut. How strange this woman was! Gail sensed her loneliness.

"D'you miss not getting fucked, honey?" Ma asked affably.

The irrelevant query was like a blow. Not in cruelty, but in its shrewd observation. Gail missed Kevin with all her being. A girl who denied all men is but half alive. Yet she blushed. She supposed, angrily, society demanded that blush, but her involuntary response left her annoyed with herself. But Ma must be answered. She managed a demure, "Yes maam."

"It's a bitch, ain't it?" Ma agreed. "Don't get much myself no more. But at your age if they'd took it away from me I'd have gone right up the wall." She masticated quietly for moments, then continued as from a deep conviction. "Us gals need our arse kicked when we're still young. When I think o' all the tail I give away free it breaks my heart. We get this damn fool love notion out of a pair of hot pants, and while it lasts, we can't do enough for the guy. When I think of all the things I done for Billings and the rest o' 'em . . . ." She sighed, leaving in the air a vision of feminine frailty brutally betrayed. "Screws them little whores up in the State Capitol now he does . . . ." She pondered a moment. "You want he should screw you, honey?"

Ma was disconcerting. Gail got out a "No thanks, maam," as quickly as she could.

"Billings ain't bad, kid," Ma reproved as though wishful that her offer be recognized at its proper worth.

The captive managed another blush.

"I got a deal with the rotten bastard," Ma explained placidly. "He don't touch my girls and I don't beef 'bout his. But I took a liking to you. I'd make an exception in your case if your cunt was getting too hot to handle."

"You're sweet, maam," Gail responded feeling ridiculous. "But I'll wait."

"What you got to wait for, kid? You only nicely got started on that

year of yours. Your slit's going to be crying out loud before them ten months is gone."

Ma Billings was coarse. She made nice things seem ugly. But the girl tied to the post grudgingly recognized a shaming truth. If we deny our bodies, they wreak their own revenge. Her two months in chains had told her this with vehemence. She was young, she was healthy, she was beautiful! Shifting awkwardly in her bonds she agreed. "I'm sure you're right, maam."

"Don't be so prissy, kid. You want a cock shoved in that bush o' yours, say so."

"I want to like the person who . . . who does it." It was hard to get down to Ma's level.

"Horsecock, honey!" Ma pronounced vehemently. "This love bit is pure balls! Believe me. I know. So's this nobility kick you gals get 'bout your age. Give all for love! Give is right: that's all you do. You give! The bastards take. A gal's better off with a good vibrator. Want I should lend you one?"

As usual it was pure nonsense. Half an hour ago she was being whipped within an inch of unconsciousness. Now she was being served coffee and doughnuts and her glandular urgencies were being catered to with affection. But she must show gratitude. She must! "Thank you. That would be nice, maam."

"Got a good big head on it," Ma explained proudly. "I've had a lot o' good outa' that plastic dink. Want I should stick it up you now?"

The victim of benevolence groaned inwardly. To stand tied to a whipping post with a mechanical contraption inducing orgasms one after the other was a dream for Salvador Dali. Gail was still debating a tactful rejection when Ma Billings came up with inspiration.

"I got a better idea, kid. Let's you and me go in the house. Young Dulcie tells me you got a real sporty tongue."

So it had come! The naked girl had sensed it hovering throughout the past two months of her captivity. She had been surprised that Ma had not thought of it before. Gail looked desolately at her corded wrists and down at her chained ankles. How did a girl fastened like this say no to anything? Hell might have no fury like a Ma Billings told

her person repelled. The whipping would start afresh. But Dulcie was one thing, Ma was something else again. The captive was still struggling with indecision when Ma Billings read her thoughts.

"You close your eyes, kid, and there ain't no difference between Dulcie and me. Same as with men when you get right down to it. Some's bigger and some's smaller."

"Yes maam," Gail said inadequately and noncommitally.
noncommittally
"Think I don't wash it?" Ma asked belligerently.

"It's something I've never been used to doing, maam. I had to do it with Dulcie because she was whipping my foot," Gail protested unhappily.

"If having your foot whipped makes it easier I can certainly oblige, honey." Ma's voice was getting grim.

"Oh please! I didn't mean that. I'll do whatever you want." Gail was desperate. She wanted no more whipping.

With her typical inconsistency Ma seemed touched by her captive's abject helplessness. Without further words she came behind the slender naked figure tied to the post and circled it with her arms. One large palm found a breast. A wise and knowing finger sought its way through the pubic hair and into the warm wetness, wherein nestled the bud that could be made to flower. Cunningly she went to work.

Gail tensed at the unexpectedness of what was being done to her. She pulled at her pinioned wrists and threw back her head in surprise. She was cheek to cheek with the older woman intent upon her task. She bit back an outraged protest. She had best watch her words. This was delicate ground.

"Relax, honey. This one's on the house." Ma's voice was a whisper in her ear.

Relax! What else could she do? Tied as she was she was delivered into any caprice Ma chose. Almost instantly Gail knew herself in the hands of a past mistress of an art. Unprepossessing as the older woman might be, she was nonetheless more skilled in eroticism than any teenager. Under the lascivious finger, the victim had a sudden vision of the girl Ma must once have been: ardent, alive, desired. She

felt a fresh pity for this woman who seemed determined to bring her to orgasm, as she stood tethered to the post.

How strange a rape! How sad a love! Neither term was right. What was happening was a possession, the using of the body of a slave. But Gail was young. She was vividly healthy. Strive as she would, she could not achieve detachment. The sly finger had its way with her, so that she was soon writhing and moaning to Ma's infinite delight.

"You're hotter'n a firecracker, honey," Ma Billings approved. "You're too good to waste. I ain't going to let you pop." With hasty determination she freed the hurt wrists, took one of them in a firm grip and led its owner towards the house.

To be captive is to endure. To endure is to adjust. Often it is helpful to be mute. Gail had learned these precepts in her captivity. She used them now. She gave and she received that which was demanded by her thralldom. She drew what comfort she could from the reflection that it was better than being whipped. Added to this was an irritatingly guilty memory that at times it had been much, much better!

Ma kicked away the shackle and tossed the pillows from the bed. "Lay on your back, kid," she ordered.

Gail draped her single garment across a chair, revealing her cruelly striped nudity. There was that in Ma's voice which brooked no demur. Gracefully, but with inward tremors, she disposed herself as directed. Ma took the girl's right wrist and, pulling it up against the head rail, handcuffed it to the top corner of the bed. She then served the left hand in the same way. Gail lay with her arms stretched wide upon the sheet above the level of her head. If her ankles were similarly secured she would be spreadeagled. But this was not done.

"May not be the most pleasant night you ever had," Ma admitted. "But you earned yourself more than the whip. You can tell me in the morning how you make out." She gave a broad and inexplicable wink and left.

It was not comfortable. The metal on her wrists was tight. Its mate had been clipped safely below the mattress out of sight. She could move her arms and shoulders very little. By inching back she discovered she could raise her head against the backboard, but not very far. Any pull against the handcuffs hurt. There was no

advantage. She slipped back to her original position and considered how well she might sleep. The first realization was that she was very, very, bare. Ma had forgotten to throw a blanket over her nakedness. The second told her she would know an increasing ache from her wracked shoulders. If she did not struggle, the handcuffs would not hurt, but in sleep she would snub them constantly. Gail knew herself in for a depressing night.

Dulcie and Curtis arrived together. They closed the door behind them with an air of purpose, then stood beside the bed gazing down at the naked female body spread and fastened for their delectation. "She can't do nothin' but kick," Curtis exulted.

"We can easy stop her doin' that," Dulcie contributed.

It was another of the awful moments, unforeseen and uncontrollable. Gail looked up askance at the intent young faces and knew herself delivered into hands that would show little mercy. "Does your mother know you're here?" she asked without hope.

"Ma sent us," Dulcie explained succinctly.

"I'm going to fuck you good!" Curtis was male bombast epitomized.

"Don't mind him," Dulcie giggled. "I won't let him hurt you, at least not too much. I'm going to have a go at you too."

Her brother eyed her belligerently. "I'll fuck you too, Sis, if you're goin' to be a smartass."

"Dreamer!" Dulcie mocked. "Go on. Get on with the job. I want to watch." She retired to a chair and sat down, obviously prepared to enjoy herself.

Their naked and helpless victim was aghast. So this was Ma Billings' idea of a punishment! It was exactly the sort of thing that would appeal to her bawdy humour. She would shrewdly know, too, how it would humiliate and shame. Gail thought bitterly, yet thankfully of the pill. To be impregnated by this lustful child! It was too bizarre. "Don't you dare touch me!" It was an instinctive exclamation. Even to herself the words sounded impotent.

"Don't be silly," Dulcie advised. "We're going to touch you plenty."

Curtis had slipped out of his clothes. His striped and scarlet buttocks were an additional incongruity. He appeared to have a permanent erection. With gaze riveted on the sacrificial sex he clambered upon the bed. Gail's flashing kick caught him in the centre of his chest and sent him sprawling to the floor. She had instinctively taken the defensive act without thought of consequence. Now she quailed.

He was on his feet in an instant, furious, yet glad of an excuse for his next assault. Withdrawing the belt from his discarded pants he began to slash savagely at the helpless nudity that had repelled him. "I'm gonna' cut you to bits," he hissed delightedly.

"Stay off her tits, Curtis!" Dulcie warned. "You know what Ma said." She turned to Gail: "Ma says we can make you squeal if you want to play the 'Miss High and Mighty' bit. I'll lace into you same as Curtis if you're not a good girl when I want you to be."

Dulcie's admonition was heard through the rain of blows that Curtis was delivering with vicious satisfaction. Gail was frantically using her flailing legs to foil as much of his accuracy as possible. But she was learning the bitter lesson that a girl tied as she was tied can only defend one portion of her person at the expense of another. At last in utter defeat and knowing herself inevitably lost she sobbed, "Oh stop it! Stop it! I'll be good. I'll keep still. I'm sorry!"

Curtis desisted, the limp belt dangling from a ready hand. "That's better. Now you're going to get five good ones square across your cunt just to teach you to behave. After that I'll fuck you."

"I'll behave, Curtis. I'm sorry. You don't have to hit me anymore."

"I don't have to." He sarcastically emphasized the word 'have.' "But I'm going to. What's more, you're goin' to ask me nicely. Come on. Get talkin'."

More shame! But Gail was frightened. She did her best. "Please, Curtis, will you use your belt to hit me hard across my cunt five times?" Gail longed to weep.

"You done that real nice," Dulcie admired.

"Arch your back up so I can get in some good licks," Curtis

demanded.

Gail did her best, but without spectacular result until Dulcie thoughtfully pushed the discarded pillows beneath the raised hips. "Now if you make her spread her legs you ought to do alright," she advised her brother from the depths of her feminine knowledge.

Without waiting for the shame of being told, Gail followed the teenager's advice. Her hairy sex was revealed in all its glory and pitiless vulnerability. Curtis was enthralled. "Good thing you come, Sis," he breathed in grudging tribute to the inferior female. "I ain't never seen one that good before."

"You ain't seen much o' anything," his sister sniffed, cutting him down to size. "Go ahead. You got your cunt. Slap it good."

"Maybe we ought to tie her legs apart like that." Curtis was savouring the eroticism of female flesh.

"Nah! She's too scared to kick again," Dulcie declared complacently. Let her have it good. You'll see."

"Honest! I'll behave," Gail agreed abjectly. She could not face more wounding of her skin beyond what she must now accept.

Curtis cut the sex of the naked girl with precise and salacious accuracy. It taxed his victim's control to the limit to remain spread and quiescent while her triangle of pubic hair was flogged. Had it been a crueller weapon than the boy's belt she could not have done so. He moved back and forth to extract the utmost advantage from the shaming posture of the girl chained to the bed for his amusement. When the last of the five blows had fallen, he stepped back to feast his eyes on what he had done and on the feminine vulva so wantonly displayed.

"Say, I've got to have a go at that," Dulcie declared firmly. 'This is too good to miss." She turned to the quivering girl commiseratingly. "Sorry kid. I ain't never whipped a cunt. Wait 'till I tell 'em at school . . . ." She took the belt from her brother's unprotesting hand. "Only five, Gail. Just five. I promise."

Just five! Gail moaned and closed her eyes. She did not wish to see the eager faces or the flailing strap as it sliced the air to cut into her defenceless flesh. The blows fell again and again. The teenager's arm

was as strong as her brother's. Through the searing sting of the inflictions, Gail came face to face with the shaming knowledge that she would obey this prurient pair. What they would do to her would be a punishment in itself. But she wanted no more of straps or whips or canes. She was exhausted with pain. She had had enough.

"Should I leave them pillows under her ass while I fuck her?" Curtis's respect for his sister's judgement had been enhanced.

Dulcie giggled. "Sure you should. Gets you an extra inch. But let's see how wet she is."

Gail kept her eyes closed as the girl's hand explored her lubricity. The whole area of her loins was aflame with the aftermath of the belt. She passionately wished it could be left alone to heal, but knew her wish futile.

"She's dry as a bone," Dulcie confirmed. " 'Bout all you could expect, I 'spose. Tell you what, Curtis. Go get Ma's vibrator and the vaseline. We can have a bit o' fun loosening her up."

Curtis, whose respect for his sister's knowledge of feminine mysteries was increasing momentarily, donned his shorts and sped on his errand. Dulcie continued her massaging of the lips so openly offered for her enjoyment. "If you're going to get fucked, Gail, you might as well enjoy it," she said with the wisdom of one woman to another. 'I'll try and get you started. That thing of Ma's is quite a size."

It was indeed! The girl who was to receive it within her inmost recess watched forlornly as the plastic was daubed with lubricant. She was thankful for Dulcie. Left to his own devices, Curtis's mating onslaught would have been pure pain. Looking at the object about to be thrust within her, Gail was by no means sure that pain was going to be absent now. Yet, in a strange acknowledgement of sisterhood, Dulcie was kind. It was with gentleness that the impalement was completed. Curtis stood by and watched in rapt attention, almost in awe. Dulcie pushed the switch.

The children stood and watched. After thirty seconds of fighting nature Gail gave up her battle for immobility and silence. Both were impossible. Uncaring of shame, the tortured girl allowed her reactions to find full vent. Curtis and his sister were vastly entertained. "Wait 'till she's had a come," Dulcie whispered excitedly.

"She'll go plumb crazy."

So that was it! Gail miserably knew she should have guessed. They were going to leave the buzzing prong within her until the surfeit of sensation drove her wild. Far beyond pleasure into something akin to pain. She tugged at the handcuffs. But what was the use! It was a token gesture. It would gratify the children far more than it would relieve her.

"Now, just to make it really wild." Dulcie giggled, "We'll get one on each side of her and suck her tits. It'll blow her mind." She threw off her scanty garb and dived upon the bed.

Gail moaned and wept and pleaded. She flailed and threshed her legs striving to dislodge the torture between them. She heaved and tugged at the handcuffs. She bounced her hips. In none of it was there surcease. The avid lips drank steadily at her nipples, sometimes biting, sometimes caressing with the tongue, but always keeping her on the outer limit of sensation. Orgasm after orgasm drove her into paroxysms of writhings and pleas that the busily vibrating monster be taken from her. Finally the batteries died, leaving it as exhausted as herself. When it was withdrawn from her warm wet sheath she longed only to sleep. But she knew this was but the beginning.

"She's wet enough now," Dulcie judged. "Go to it, boy."

Curtis went to it with gusto. Utterly depleted, Gail felt neither his weight nor his friction. Overstimulation gave him but moments of fulfilment before he gasped and spent his vigor. "Oh damn, damn, damn!" he muttered disgustedly.

"Never mind, boy," his sister consoled. "You can have another bang later. You won't have a limp dink long. Now it's my turn."

With a professional skill that left the chained girl wondering, Dulcie took a pillow from beneath her hips and used it to raise her head. She then positioned herself so that her young bush was almost in the captive's mouth. "You better do it good, honey," She said with complacent satisfaction.

Gail did it good.

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It was the first time she had not looked forward to Neil's coming. Gail stood naked against her tree, immersed in a new and frightening shame. The Bar-B and its family had an endless repertoire of shocks designed to rob a girl of courage and respect. The flow of them were as constant as the clutch of chains and the bite of cords.

She was handcuffed quite simply. She had been made to face the relatively slender trunk and embrace it. The handcuffs had been clicked upon her wrists so that she must maintain the embrace as though the tree was a living thing she loved. To prevent her falling to her knees or in some way contriving to recline, a metal collar was locked about her throat. Its chain rose above the lowest bough. There it circled the trunk and was padlocked. It kept her no more prisoner than did the handcuffs, but it compelled her to stand. Gail reflected bitterly that its intent was probably more to humiliate than to secure. The collar round her neck made her seem tethered like an animal.

It would be a day like the others. A captivity accentuated by bonds. There was something wickedly final about handcuffs. Idly she raised them close to examine them and their grip upon her wrists. They were shining attractive bracelets closely joined. They had been tightened to the point where the metal circlets faintly indented the skin. She was more comfortable than when bound. But she was even more implacably captive. She leaned her cheek against the trunk and thought of Neil. Her only link with normalcy might come sauntering through the trees at any moment, and she was afraid. Shamed into fear. Fear of what he must inevitably discover and the inferences he would draw from the discovery. He might well turn from her in disgust and walk away. She considered ruefully that if at this moment she could walk away from herself she would wish to do so.

Ma Billings had done the awful thing to her with typical goodwill. There had been no warning. The command to "Bend over, honey," had been her first inkling of something untoward. The careful and skilful insertion of the plug in her rectum had been so outrageous, yet so clinical; she had failed to protest until after the bizarre impalement had become a fait accompli. Even then she cherished the illusion of some medically normal reason for what had been done to her. That the woman who had done it failed to respond to question or complaint was no more than normal for the Bar-B. There had even been the possibility of vulgar humour. But all hopes of rationality had died when Ma Billings produced the harness.

The whipping had been too recent, her wounds from it still too sore, for Gail to have the courage to resist. She accepted Ma's cheerful, "Don't worry none, honey, you'll live," and stood passive while the straps were buckled about her loins. One 'round her waist, another from back to front between her legs. The latter, passing through a slot in the base of the thing within her, held the plug inexorably pressed home, divided her sex and made walking painful. Ma tightened buckles thoughtfully until Gail flinched within the cutting embrace of the leather bands. The thing was neat and cruel.

"But why . . .?" Gail was genuinely puzzled.

"Well, this ain't supposed to be no summer vacation," Ma reminded.

"But, is it a punishment? Or have I got something wrong . . .?"

Ma Billings guffawed. "I ain't never seen a gal' got less wrong than you, honey. Let's say I don't want you to feel lonely. With little Peter up your ass you'll always have a friend."

"There's nothing little about what I'm feeling."

"Come night you won't know he's in there, kid." Ma found amusement in referring to the intrusion as a personality.

"It all hurts. Is it supposed to?"

"Sure is, honey. Now we take a little walk. A get acquainted stroll you might say." Ma Billings chortled happily.

The little stroll had ended at the usual tree and with the familiar handcuffs. Now Gail stood, hurting, shamed and apprehensive. Now she would wait. But the waiting would bring no reward. It was but one more period in punishment.

Neil was amused that she seemed to peep at him 'round the bole of the sapling. "They think of the damndest ways to fix you," he exclaimed cheerfully. Taking his familiar seat, his eye caught sight of change. "How come there's heavier chains on your ankles?"

"I tried to escape."

Suddenly he became aware of the myriad whip marks with which

the naked girl was emblazoned. His boy's brow furrowed; his eyes narrowed in disbelief. Rising, he came close, circled the tree and stood so that they were eye to eye. "They did that to you . . .? Ma Billings . . .?" His voice was incredulous.

"I was a bad girl. I tried to get away." She would not tell him of the other things.

With reverence, the boy took her chained hands and kissed them. It was a discovery of her he had never previously made. He kissed them again and again as though suddenly aware of hunger. Leaning forward against her tree Gail watched his tribute to her pain. She responded vividly to his touch. That someone should be kind to her! It seemed almost impossible . . . She longed to embrace this youthful male who was her only friend. How good it would be to throw her arms around his neck instead of having them chained 'round the trunk of a tree! She realized, with a pang, how much these brief encounters had come to mean to her.

With a new sense of purpose Neil knelt and examined the metal bonds upon the slender ankles. "But these are awful things!" he exclaimed. "There's no way of getting them off."

Gail was painfully aware of the brutality of her new hobbles. Their excessive weight had dragged at every step she had made as she accompanied Ma Billings along the path through the trees. Their drag upon her every movement said clearly that escape should be forgotten. No girl could escape anything with so great a weight of metal made an integral part of her. As though to emphasize the start of a new and different day, she had been taken to the blacksmith shop immediately upon rising. A lewd and jocose Ma Billings had made frequent reference to the previous night as she busied herself with tools. Gail disconsolately sat upon a box and, in obedience to a laughing order, placed her shackled feet across the anvil. She watched her familiar fetters unlocked and thrown upon the bench and replaced with the massive metal bands and links better suited to a mammoth than a girl.

"Just so I don't forget the key, honey. Or them damn kids o' mine don't pull no tricks, these little trinkets won't come off nohow," Ma had told her as she inserted rivets and smashed them flat with frightening blows of the heavy hammer. Three rivets in each anklet! There was something frighteningly final about the tight clasp of the metal that had no lock or key.

"But they won't come off at night?" It was Gail's first thought.

"Right, honey. But you'll still be chained to the ring like always. Real permanent they are. Only way you get 'em off is in this here shop. Even then it'll take a bit o' pounding. Them rivets ain't small."

The first steps had convinced Gail that her new chains were impractical. She had looked at Ma Billings and shaken her head hopelessly as she had made limping hops with her weighted feet. But a girl can adjust. She had managed. She would continue to manage. But she would never escape. She supposed if she did not try to run the hateful things would not hurt her too much. They were tight enough they should not chafe.

"I think Ma wants to make it plain to me that I have to forget escape," Gail explained unhappily. "After yesterday I am going to try and put it out of my mind. Unless you can think of something," she added wistfully.

Neil looked at her earnestly. The touch of his lips had created something new between them. "I almost have to think of something . . . ." The words emerged from a mind busy with thought. "You can't go on like this. A girl as beautiful as you."

"You can't help me now. Not with my feet chained like this."

He waved the objection aside. "Oh it's possible alright! There's tools for everything. The problem's the same as always. How to get you out of the State. You mustn't be caught . . . not by the police."

Her eyes were tender, watching his concern. The whip had seemed to drive escape from her mind. But the decency of this troubled boy revived it. Perhaps no punishment ever entirely kills the captive dream. If Neil had resources and set his mind to the task escape could become reality. She yearned.

"Could you . . . could you get hurt?" she asked uncertainly.

He waved that objection aside as he had waved the other. "Oh, I suppose so! But it's my people really." He made a sheepish grin. "Dad's a friend of Billings. They have business interests . . . and I suppose you could say we were neighbors. You know how it is."

Gail knew. It was unfair to the boy. A venture weighed with too many hazards. Perhaps tomorrow she would have more courage. Today she hurt too much for optimism. "Don't do anything," she counselled. "But see what you can plan. And anyway, I may not be hurt so bad again if I behave."

"Behave!" He was angry. "Having to try and walk with your feet chained like that . . ." He looked at her in distress.

Gail saw the puzzlement enter his eyes as he specifically noted her harness for the first time. Circumventing question and answer she told him in simple words exactly what it was. Shamed, she watched the blush take possession of his face.

"I thought it was some . . . some sort of dress. I'd no idea!"

"Why should you have!" Gail's voice was bitter. "Don't worry about it. As Ma said! I expect I'll live."

"But it isn't locked. Is it?"

Gail thrust her handcuffed wrists into view. "It doesn't need to be. I can't touch it."

"But I can!" Neil was vehement.

"Don't!" Gail knew her own cheeks suffused with red.

"Please! Leave it . . . ." Seeing his surprise, she explained awkwardly: "Don't you see. If you . . . well, remove it, you'll have to put it back. Ma would half kill me if you didn't." She grinned at him ruefully. "I don't think you'd enjoy doing that, and I wouldn't enjoy it either . . . ."

For moments they looked at each other in shy embarrassment. Then, spontaneously, they laughed. The Bar-B sometimes overreached itself and lapsed into the ludicrous.

Memory of their laughter sustained the naked girl through her afternoon after the boy had gone.

On the following morning subterfuge was shattered. "This one's bigger," Gail said with certainty.

" 'Fraid that's so, honey," Ma admitted, buckling the strap so it hurt.

"Why, maam?" Gail felt certain she knew why.

"They get bigger all the time," Ma said conversationally.

"It's . . . it's to make me available for men, isn't it?"

"I never said so," Ma declined defensively.

"Is it . . . is it for Curtis?" Gail felt her cheeks flame.

Ma Billings guffawed delightedly. "Damme, if that ain't an idea! Want to try it out?"

"No, maam, I don't. I don't even want what . . . what I've got!"

"Well, you got it, kid. You oughta' be grateful. Getting fixed up with a new facility, you might say."

The captive girl was suddenly assailed by frightful visions. "Am I going to be made into a whore?" Fright sloughed off niceties of terms and titles.

"Hell no kid! We ain't short of dough."

"But men are going to use me?"

"That's one way o' putting it," Ma conceded, then brightened. "Might say there's two ways o' putting it." She laughed uproariously at her own wit. "Which way you prefer?"

Gail suddenly realized it was a question she might have to take seriously. Loathing violation in the front did not indicate a preference for the back. Both were repulsive.

"You ain't going to get no big belly out o' a cock up your arse," Ma offered comfortingly.

Gail looked at the laughing woman pleadingly. "Must this happen to me, maam? I don't want it. I don't want it at all."

"Ain't you forgetting yourself, kid?"

"I agreed to be punished, not raped."

"You sooner have Curtis fuck you?" Ma asked slyly.

"Yes!" Gail was angry and vehement. "If I've got to be . . . to have the filthy business, yes I'd sooner have Curtis."

"Calm down! Hold it, kid," Ma Billings soothed. "Bit of a shock I'll agree. Ain't too pleased 'bout it myself. But I figgered if we can keep your front just for you and me, we ain't either of us going to miss the back. See what I mean, honey?"

Incredibly Gail saw what she meant. She saw it all too well. What insanity that gratitude was expected of her that she be sodomized! Yet, in a choice, it could be the lesser of two evils.

"It's your husband, isn't it, maam?"

"The son of a bitch!" Ma agreed with deep feeling.

"When will he do it to me?"

"Ain't in no hurry, are you," Ma rejoined sarcastically. "Best forget Billings for awhile. You got a few plugs to work your way through before our favourite Congressman comes looking for votes." She tightened the final buckle. Looking up, she patted the captive's cheek. "I'm sorry, honey. Dammit, I'm sorry as Hell. It ain't my idea."

Gail believed her. With purely instinctive generosity she leaned forward and kissed the forehead of this strange coarse woman whose thrall she had become. "It's time to fix me up for the day," she said brightly.

There is a euphemism for everything.

It was miserable inside the crate. But of course it was meant to be! Gail constantly had to remind herself that suffering was implicit to her condition. Complaint came so easily to the lips of a girl who had once been free. Complaints bothered Ma, probably a guilty conscience Gail thought amusedly. But in response to them she was often cruel. Prudence was best. The crate was one probably once used to contain a traveling boar so that he might bestow his favours on amorous sows. It had protruding arms on each side so that it could

be carried as a Sedan chair. It had been cleaned so that it no longer smelt of its one time occupants, but the ignominy remained.

Crouched within her small prison, Gail reflected that the boar had probably found it better adapted to his dimensions than did she. Obeying Ma's instructions she had sat on the floor at the end of the open crate and edged herself backwards within until she was able to bring her knees under her chin, and Ma could lower the end-gate and lock it with the inevitable padlock. Since the crate was of heavy open lattice construction, she had a good enough view of her immediate vicinity. Since the crate was in the barn, that view was not extensive. Ma had feasted on the sight of her naked crouched captive, made her usual caustic comments and gone her way. To the girl in her tiny prison the day stretched long.

It was all that did stretch. She herself could not. The wooden cage exactly contained her and that was all. She could not even hold her head upright, but rested her chin on her knees in a pensive pose lovely to behold but tiring to maintain. Gail had learned to distrust the first hour of these punishments. It was often deceptively bearable. But soon the aches and the cramps and the weariness would have their way until she longed to scream or fight the frustrations of immobility. Ma Billings parting remark on the present occasion had been: "Be a nice change for you, honey." It was not until the barn door had closed that Gail understood how sardonic the comment had been.

There was always the little something extra. The cord, the strap, the chain or whatever it might be that, seemingly innocent, finally invoked its own specific pain or ache. Gail wondered if they were accidental or whether Ma Billings craftily devised them for her discomfort. It was not a question she dared ask. The crate was no exception. To sit for a number of hours might seem no more than a bore. But it did not take an hour for Gail to plumb the possibilities. The first was her shaming harness. Sitting, as she was, on the peak of her bottom it cut her with double venom. But, still worse, was the ugly thing thrust within her that the strap held. It, too, proclaimed its dissatisfaction with her pose. She longed to ease her position with her hands. By so doing she could help herself. But this had been denied. To have her wrists handcuffed before her was a rare privilege. It had sparked optimism. But the crate had imposed a disposition of her captive hands. She had no choice but to hold them so that she hugged her bent knees with her prisoned arms. No matter how she tried, there was nothing else she could do with them. Thus they were

lost to her. To ease her seat or find relief by lifting her weight was a joy denied as was the need to stretch her legs. The only benefit she could derive from her chained hands was to strive to dry the cheeks that finally became wet with tears.

"I got let our early," Dulcie said. She eyed the naked girl within the crate with avid curiosity. "You hurting in there?"

"Yes. Want to let me out?"

Dulcie giggled. "Come off it. Nobody gets outa' anything Ma puts 'em in." Bright eyed, she reviewed possibilities. "If I got a sharp stick I could really make you squeal."

Always pain! The Billings family was obsessed with pain. The naked captive groaned inwardly. Outwardly she took a small gamble.

"Why do you like hurting me, Dulcie?"

The teenager treated the question as begging the obvious. To her the answer was clear. "Well, why wouldn't I?" she asked suspiciously.

"I've never hurt you."

"You ain't never had the chance. Bet you'd whip the ass off me if you could. You would, wouldn't you?"

"No."

Dulcie treated this tampering with the truth with the contempt it deserved. "I sure got a bang outa' belting into your cunt when you was fastened to the bed," she confessed almost with pride.

"If you get me out of this crate you can whip me now," Gail baited. "I'm handcuffed. I can't fight."

Dulcie wavered, enticed. "Ma leave the key on a nail somewhere?" she asked.

"Not that I could see," the captive admitted.

"Wouldn't be safe anyway," Dulcie judged. "Ma don't want us kids whipping you 'less she says so."

"Dulcie, you got well whipped with those willow switches. Did you enjoy it?"

Gail had asked the question rhetorically. But the teenager gave it her full attention. "You know how it is with us girls being whipped," she said slowly and defensively.

"I only know it hurts more than I can stand," Gail countered hotly.

"You sure do make a lot of noise," Dulcie agreed as though puzzled by unseemly behavior. "But your slit gets wet, don't it?"

"Good Heavens no! You found that out last night. Remember?"

"Figured that might be just because we was whipping your cunt. If your ass gets striped, don't your quiff get damp?" Dulcie seemed puzzled by confrontation with a physical infirmity.

Gail blushed. Yesterday had been too much. But on other occasions when Ma Billings had used the whip less harshly . . . there had been times . . . . "So what!" she demanded. More irritated with her own feminine frailty than with Dulcie's question.

"Ain't no fun while Ma's laying it on," Dulcie admitted. "But when she got through with me at that there post yesterday I was horny as Hell."

Fifteen! The girl was more knowledgeable than most whores! Gail was both repelled and intrigued. "If that's the way being whipped works with a girl, then I should whip you and you should whip me and we'd both be sexually excited?" she probed.

"Why of course." To Dulcie it was a statement of the obvious.

"And what would we do then?" Gail was amused.

"Don't be silly. You know damn well what we'd do. Dive into a sixty-nine or get young Curtis to fuck us."

"Can he manage two girls at a time?"

"Pretty well," Dulcie said reminiscently. "Curtis gets a second hard on right quick. 'Specially if you play with his balls."

Gail was aghast, but fascinated. "You mean . . . you and Curtis –"

"Oh sure. Ma watches me pretty close and Curtis, he's handy. He's pretty good really. He's best the second time. He's always so damn excited he pops off too quick the first."

The voice of experience!

"Tell you what," said Dulcie in a friendlier voice than she commonly employed with the prisoner. "Sometime when Ma's away you and me we'll have ourselves a time. But it will have to be when she's fixed you right or else left the key handy. How 'bout that?"

"I'd love it." Gail lied. She needed an ally and would get one anyway she could. There was an engaging naiveté about Dulcie that made it hard to be angry with the girl.

"I could set you free, y'know, if I really wanted to." Dulcie left the words hanging in the air when she went away. The girl chained in the crate was uncertain if they were a statement of a fact or nothing more than a child's boast.

"I often been real mean to you, honey," Ma Billings told Gail in the cheerful tone of a woman admitting benevolence. "I'm going to give you a nice easy day."

They had walked to the barn. The size of her new and larger anal companion made Gail thankful it was no further. She had not seen the object that penetrated her, but was sure it must be monstrous. Each day brought her fresh wonder at the accommodative quality of feminine faculties. She took the plugs for granted now. They had become a part of her ways at the Bar-B, just as had the heavier chains that weighed upon her feet. Dragging at the metal, she asked wistfully. "On my birthday, maam, could I have my feet unchained so I could run twice round the yard. I've forgotten what it's like to even walk properly. It would feel so good?"

"That's a deal, honey," Ma Billings agreed heartily. "I can imagine that for a youngster like you it's rough not being able to stretch them pretty legs." She chuckled. "Mind you, kid. They're doing you good. Leastways, they're keeping fool notions about escaping outa' your head. They are, aren't they?" she demanded with sudden concern.

"Yes maam. Thank you. I'd have to be crazy . . . ."

"Good!" Ma Billings approved such sincerity as she detected in her captive's voice. Them chains is a bit of a nuisance, and I'd actually like it better if I didn't have to have 'em on you. But I can't think of nothing quite as safe."

"Couldn't you keep me handcuffed?" Gail asked wistfully.

"Hell, girl, you could still run."

"Behind my back then, maam. I can't do much like that," Gail pleaded.

"You don't like them things on your feet, do you!" Ma chuckled.

"They make me walk like an old, old woman with arthritis," Gail admitted. "I suppose I'm feminine enough to hate that. Besides, they're wearing out the blankets on my bed," she added plaintively.

"Honey, you're kinda' sweet. Damn funny how it works . . . ." Ma added ruminatively, "The sweeter I find you the more I want to beat your bottom or hang you up by the thumbs. You figure that out?"

Gail was of the opinion that nothing about the Bar-B could be figured out by anyone. But she did not like to say so. "If I gave you sexual relief every day, would it help?" she asked hesitantly, feeling she was offering her all.

"You mean lick my clit?" Ma asked suspiciously.

"Yes."

"I can make you do that anytime anyway," Ma pointed out pragmatically. "And I can tell you right now it wouldn't do you no good. After a good come there ain't nothing like whipping a gal's ass to put me in the mood again. You might end up a damn sight sorer than you are now."

It was all quite hopeless. Gail looked brightly 'round the barn.

"Pretty simple, honey," Ma explained. "You lie on your back in that there stall."

There was straw. Gail lay on it.

"Get your feet as high as you can up the partition. You'll have to edge your ass up against the base."

Gail managed a jack-knife. Flat on her back, she gazed up at her slender legs and feet at right angles. Ma had helped her lift her heavy ankle chain. "One o' the times I wish you didn't have these damn things," the older woman puffed.

The naked girl watched Ma Billings separate the chained feet as far as they could go, then fastened their linking chain to the top rail of the partition with a separate chain wound 'round and 'round and locked with a padlock.

"Don't trust them kids," Ma said darkly as she pocketed the key. She examined her recumbent captive with satisfaction. "Just one more thing, honey." She produced the handcuffs. "Let's have your hands, girl."

Thankfully, Gail extended her wrists. If this was all, she did indeed have reason to be grateful. She watched the metal bands click snug upon her slenderness.

"If I wanted to be mean I could put 'em behind your back," Ma pointed out modestly.

"Thank you for being kind to me, maam." Absurd! But her gratitude was real. Behind her back the handcuffs would be misery.

"Quaint position, ain't it, honey? Sorta' cute." It was indeed! "Has it any significance, maam?" The holder of the quaint position quavered.

"Hell no! What can you do like that?" Ma guffawed at a sudden vision. "Like to see young Curtis get his dink in you now! And don't matter how you try you ain't gonna' be able to reach them feet o' yours. Not that it would do you any good." Ma sobered for a moment. "Just occurs to me, honey. You could unbuckle that harness and get the plug out. Aim to do it?"

Gail shook her head. "No maam. I'd be scared. I could never get it back."

"Maybe the kids would help you. Little buggers!"

"I wouldn't want them to," Gail affirmed with distaste. "Honest, I'll be good. Isn't there some way to lock it on me so nobody will be tempted?" She looked appealingly. "I couldn't stop the children if they decided to take it off . . . ." Gail stumbled over the implications. "I know it sounds false, but I'd much sooner it was locked on me. You'd be terribly angry if you came back and found it draped over a manger."

"Damn right I would, honey. But I'm gonna' leave it like it is. I'm sorta' curious." Ma Billings looked down at the naked girl she owned. She stooped and picked up the handcuffed hands and imprinted on them kiss after kiss. Letting them fall she turned towards the door. "Have a good day, honey," she said with what may have been a false jauntiness.

"You too, maam." Gail's voice, also, was uncertain.

Everything at the Bar-B was pathetic.

"Damn her, she's gone and chained your feet," Dulcie exclaimed petulantly.

"She took the key with her," Gail said with inward satisfaction.

Dulcie laughed joyously. "But it doesn't matter," she said, sharing her discovery. "Poor Curtis couldn't get into you. But I can. And, what's more, you can get into me. Oh honey, Ma's slipped a cog."

Gail held up her handcuffed wrists. "What about these?"

"Oh pouf! They don't matter. Hold 'em over your head. Or maybe if you get 'em around my legs you can get some use outa' them. Oh honey! A perfect sixty-nine!"

The perfect sixty-nine went busily to work. Gail had given up concerning herself with guilt or what she should or should not do. She was a vessel that others used. Her will was set aside in some dim and distant storage reserved for the abandoned principles of slave girls. She found the teenager unexpectedly sweet, and wondered at the infinite miracle of being female . . . .

"You two having fun?" Curtis asked with menace.

"Go away," said his sister.

Curtis found a bit of strap and swung it viciously across Dulcie's rump. Dulcie howled. Gail wished herself elsewhere.

"You little bastard!" Dulcie raged. She took a swing at his grinning face. It missed.

"I ain't hard to get along with," Curtis assured the two girls jauntily. "First! fuck Dulcie, then honey here gives me a real good blow job. After that I run along. You can stick your tongues in each other's cunts all afternoon for all I care."

Dulcie looked down at her helpless partner in lust. "Oh damn, honey. Let's please the little shit and get rid of him." She turned to her omnipotent sibling. "Alright. Stick it into me and get it over with." She lay down beside Gail and spread her legs. Don Juan shed his clothes and took possession. Gail lay still, speechless and impotent. The Bar-B defeated her every time.

But for the naked captive the worst was yet to come. She had found an unsuspected joy in the girl, but the boy was something else again. Curtis grunted and gasped his short journey into orgasm. He was allowed but a short recuperative respite before Dulcie irritably pushed him to his feet. Despite herself, Gail's eyes focused on the wet and slimy flaccidity she must now accept within her lips. Seeing her distaste and realizing his own power over the chained girl, Curtis's male organ began a quick recovery. On her back, naked and without defense, Gail opened her mouth to pay a slave girl's tribute to the male. She would have loved to bite, to grind her teeth until they met within the turgid flesh. Instead she busily sucked Dulcie's secretions and sent her tongue upon its age old task.

"He's not a bad kid. But he's always horny," Dulcie said of her brother after he had gone. "He'd fuck me six times a day if I'd let him." Her eyes sparkled their curiosity. "Tell me, honey. Could you taste me on his prick? I mean, was it different?"

The chained girl had found a friend. She was not about to lose her. "You tasted gorgeous, darling." It was not until after she had said it she realized it was true. She and Dulcie had found something! For diversion she raised her handcuffed wrists and studied them. Diffidently and with hesitation she asked, "Do I taste sweet?"

Her answer was instant. A wild and naked girl inserted her legs

within the embrace of the chained hands. Two full and sensuous lips buried themselves within her pubic hair. A wise and questing tongue found that which a male can seldom find. Gail writhed in ecstacy and lapped savagely at the sex upon her mouth.

"You and young Dulcie been up to tricks?" Ma demanded suspiciously.

Gail's mind worked swiftly. There was nothing to betray! She dissembled craftily. She had no wish to be punished or to be the cause of punishment. The plug had not been removed. Only a strap, and it had been buckled back in the identical hole. "Curtis and Dulcie came at noon," she admitted wearily and with spurious indignation. "They sucked and bit my nipples until I howled." She looked up pitiously at the older woman's intent gaze. "Why does everyone want to suck a girl's nipples, maam?"

"Damned if I know, honey. Often thought I'd get mine bit off," Ma admitted. She looked down at Gail's breasts. "Yours are damn lovely, kid. If it wasn't that I have to kneel in the straw I'd have a go at 'em myself." She sighed reminiscently. "Tits and twats. That's what the world is made of, far as I can see." She sighed again with a touching dolor, "Spose it's time for you to get supper." She searched within her clothing for a key.

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"Dammit, I can't get you out of that fix!" Dulcie was annoyed.

"No one can get me out of this fix," Gail agreed miserably. "Your ma seemed to think it's cute."

"I been in there myself," Dulcie admitted. "It ain't no fun."

"Who thought it up?"

Dulcie giggled. "I think it was Pa. I remember once when I was quite small he had Ma in there. Gosh she was mad."

Gail was unhappy. Who wouldn't be, she reflected miserably. Ma Billings had lifted a shutter in the barn wall. The opening revealed slots designed for female neck and female wrists. The shutter was turned. It, too, had slots. Slipped into place and locked it became a set of old-fashioned stocks incorporated in a barn wall. Its victim

looked out upon the yard. Her head was there. Her hands were there. But the rest of her was inside and out of sight. The effect was bizarre, both for the prisoned girl and any who beheld her shame.

Dulcie pushed and pulled. She went inside and pushed and pulled. When she returned to the captive's view she motioned dejectedly. "No way, honey." Finding a box, she sat and grinned ruefully at the prisoned head and hands. "Ma won't be late today. So we won't have lost all that much. 'Spose it's bound to happen sometimes."

Gail wriggled to demonstrate her helplessness. "It's a damn funny sensation. I keep thinking about all of me that's back there inside and all the things that might happen . . . . Snakes and mice and −"

"You need to think of Curtis," Dulcie advised sagely. "Time I got fixed like that the little bastard clipped clothes pins on my tits and put a sucking calf in the same stall. It damn near chewed me to death."

Gail was curious. "Does your Ma do much of . . . of this sort of thing to you?"

Dulcie laughed cynically. "She did before you showed up." She giggled. "I was damn glad to see you. Took the heat off me. There's been other girls like you, of course. Leastways they ain't a bit like you, but they got here for the same reasons. Ma worked on 'em good, but they was a miserable lot. Most of 'em didn't have good tits and they cried more than you do."

"Does your mother sometimes whip you just for amusement? Or does she always have a reason?"

"Reason!" The teenager laughed gaily. "It ain't hard to find reasons for skinning a fifteen-year-old girl." She sobered suddenly. "You want to escape, honey?"

The eternal question. Gail was afraid, but knew she could never turn her back on it. "How, Dulcie?"

"I know where I can get a tool. It's called a bolt cutter. It will cut the links of your chain."

"What then?"

"There's a man . . . ." The girl was suddenly eager. "I don't like him,

but he'd drive us through where they couldn't touch us. He'd want paying. But not money. You and me both got what he wants."

"When?" Gail asked hesitantly.

"I'll talk to him," Dulcie said matter-of-factly. She giggled gleefully. "Right now I just thought of something." She disappeared inside the barn.

If Gail had not known it was coming the shock would have been devastating. The wise small hand came from behind up between her legs and cupped the soft damp mound. Fingers found a nipple and began to play. She squirmed. Soon she was squirming with delight. She closed her eyes and surrendered. The hands strayed and searched. Soon soft lips replaced the cupping palm. A wet and probing tongue went busily to work. Gail drifted into the glowing world in which the Bar-B did not exist. She travelled far and long . . . .

Gail did not see Ma Billings. The approaching woman observed and guessed. Softly, she entered the barn and emerged a moment later with a wriggling and protesting Dulcie who she led by a firm grip on one ear. "Seems like I can't trust neither of you," she said grimly.

"Oh Ma!" Dulcie exclaimed. "It weren't that bad . . . ."

Gail kept discreetly silent. Her heart went out to the scarlet-faced girl.

"A twitching twat," Ma said vehemently. "Go and get old Baldy." She freed the pinched ear and gave her daughter a push. Dulcie departed, weeping.

Gail had no choice but to watch. She did so with a cringing curiosity. Old Baldy was an aged and amiable horse kept for the amusement of the children. By the time the still weeping girl led him to the barn Ma Billings had produced a saddle. The prisoner eyed it with puzzled interest. Its seat had been divided laterally to allow the incorporation of a narrow one-inch board that reared its sharp-cornered edge several inches above the leather. It had been neatly and competently done, so that any rider foolish enough to sit astride the tampered seat would find themselves in danger of being cut in two. The girl in the stocks realized why Dulcie wept.

Old Baldy slept peacefully while Ma Billings cinched the saddle.

The tearful Dulcie returned from a mission within the barn with cord and rope.

"If you got pants on, take 'em off." Ma was not to be trifled with.

"Oh please Ma! Let me keep my pants."

Ma Billings grabbed her daughter's ear and shook it so that Dulcie howled. The pants came off in one swift motion. Mother and daughter gazed at each other without sympathy. "Must I get up there, Ma? I ain't been that bad." Dulcie was young enough to still believe in hope. Her tears continued as her crossed wrists were tied behind her back, and while ropes were looped to dangle from her ankles.

A girl with her hands tied behind her back cannot mount a horse. Ma tossed her daughter into the saddle with ease and quickly joined the ankle ropes to cinch them as tightly as she had cinched the saddle itself. Dulcie was firmly held astride. Ma Billings tugged at the girl's clothing to ensure that none of it would provide easement for the girl whose naked bottom was squarely upon the board's unyielding edge. "Might say that's getting to the bottom of your problem," she observed jocosely. "I ain't standing around to listen to your beefs. I got things to do. Have yourself a time, kid. Just you remember: Cunts ain't always fun." She strode towards the house.

Gail was appalled by the agony on Dulcie's face. Yet when she considered what was hidden by the girl's brief dress she knew that agony to be real. "I can't stand it! Oh Gail . . . help me. I can't . . . I can't!" Dulcie's moaning wail was close to hysteria.

Old Baldy was unperturbed by his burden. He snoozed happily. Dulcie did nothing to waken him. Motion would double the awfulness of what she was suffering. She looked down at the anxious and impotent face in the stocks and sobbed, "I don't deserve it . . . . Oh, not this, not this . . . ."She flung her head wildly from side to side. "Oh Gail, it's cutting me in two. I can't stand it. Nobody could stand it. If this horse moves I'll die."

Ma Billings was soon back. She paid scant attention to her moaning child. Her eye was fixed on Gail. She carried a small box. "Wouldn't want to say it was all young Dulcie's fault, would you, honey?" Her voice held intent.

Gail squirmed. She was resentful that Ma Billings should so terribly punish an act she herself performed with zest. No doubt the older woman's anger arose from a sort of jealousy or possessiveness that must find a vent. But it would not be safe to reason or to try and analyze. To cross the angry woman would be to ask for pain. "I expect I was partly to blame, maam." She paid the lip service Ma demanded.

Ma Billings looked up irritably at her moaning daughter. Without warning, she gave Old Baldy a hearty slap on the rump that woke his daydream and sent him ambling off across the yard. Dulcie screamed and screamed again. Baldy's trot was a bone-shaker.

"It won't kill her, if that's what you're worried about," she told Gail shortly. "The kid's cunt crazy. This'll really teach her she's got one. Next thing I gotta' do is teach you yours don't belong to her, too. Been using it pretty regular I suspect." Ma disappeared inside the barn.

Gail twisted against the wood that held her. Back out of sight her body was delivered naked into hands that would hurt it. She knew a tearful and frightening helplessness. If Ma would hurt her own daughter as she was doing, what might she not do to her! Exclamations of anger filtered through the wall. Ma had found the loosened strap of Gail's harness that Dulcie had been given no chance to buckle. The girl in the stocks gasped as the hated plug was withdrawn from her rectum. Punishment was close. Fastened as she was, almost anything could be done to her.

When it came she longed to protest, to cry out her shame and indignation, voice her pain. But how can these things be made manifest to someone who is not there! Ma Billings was busy tugging at straps on the body of a girl sundered by the stocks. She was also replacing one plug with another. Gail knew now what was in the box. She thought she knew, also, that this fresh horror was beyond her body's capacity to accept. But Ma Billings was expert. The unseen enemy was gently pressed and turned so that, fraction by fraction, it entered the warm passage in which it was not welcome. From time to time Ma stopped as though to give the maiden flesh a chance to stretch and to absorb. Gail shrewdly guessed that what was being inserted within her now was the last and final one of a succession that Ma had cut short. This one, as she was, would be a punishment. No doubt it would achieve the desired result as well as if it had come a month later. It would simply shame and hurt her more. The

persistent but unseen manipulation continued until the strap could be passed through the ring and the buckle made fast. The captive girl was impaled more brutally than she had ever been. This one hurt.

When Ma Billings once more stood face to face with her captive the two women stared at each other without need of words. What had been done was understood and accepted. A girl had disobeyed. A girl was being punished. Gail could think of protests. But what was the use! She was helpless as it was possible for a girl to be. Probably Ma Billings would have returned to the house and left her in quiet contemplation of her misery had not a sound intruded upon their silence.

It was a strange and poignant sound. A sound infinitely disturbing in that it belonged nowhere in normalcy. It was a cry of desolation. The keening wail of a girl lost in pain. Gail's eyes sought its source in the distant picture of old Baldy and his tortured burden. The horse was quietly ambling here and there seeking tufts of grass. Dulcie's face was turned to the sky, her head thrown back in agony. From her mouth had come the incoherent sounds of suffering desuetude. Gail could not bear the sound.

"Please don't punish Dulcie any more, maam." How feeble it sounded!

"She'll get her busy little ass cut for a couple of hours," Ma said with grim decision.

It was asking for trouble. But the girl in the stocks could not help herself. "Please, maam. I beg you. She meant no harm. I feel so guilty . . . ."

"Do you now!" Ma sounded interested. "Maybe you'd like to change places with the little so and so?"

It was typical Billings. Gail twisted uneasily within her bonds. This one of those questions for which there was no right answer. "Yes maam. I'll take her place. She's so young . . . ."

"I'll be damned!" Ma Billings exclaimed admiringly. "You gals would drive a poor old woman like me to drink. You're heavier than her. It's going to hurt more. Your little quiff ain't going to like it."

"No maam. I understand. I expect I'll make as much noise as

Dulcie. I'm not very brave."

"Any female what sits up in that saddle of her own accord has to be either brave or damn stupid. You stupid, kid?"

"Oh please maam! Take her down. I expect I am stupid. But stop those awful screams. I can't bear them!."

The older woman assessed her captive with shrewd amused eyes. The situation piqued her interest. Obtaining a battered bowl from the barn, she beat it as a drum. Old Baldy cocked his ears and ambled back to base. He was rewarded with oats. Dulcie's pain wracked features implored her mother hopefully.

"This damfool gal says she'll take your place, kid. You want her to?"

Gail had never seen such glory on a female face. Dulcie returned to life. But the glory died. The hurt girl shook her head in negative of more than the question. "No! Oh no! It ain't right. No one oughta' have this done to 'em. Oh ma! Let me down . . . !"

"You got a coupla of hours up there."

Dulcie's moan seemed endless. It went on and on. Suddenly it ceased. Indignant eyes flashed down upon her mother. "Gail can't take my place. You know she can't! Not with her feet chained the way they are. Ohhhh . . . you're cruel!"

How absurd! Nobility for nothing! She felt foolish. She, of all of them, should have remembered the obvious. But the weight on her ankles had become a part of her. Ma Billings slapped her leg and roared with laughter at their oversight. When her merriment had run its course she looked at Gail appraisingly. 'Tell you what, honey. You want little hot pants off that horse, you ask me real nice to whip your ass."

"Please whip my bottom, maam." The words were not hers but Gail spoke them automatically.

"I never said nothing 'bout bottoms." Ma was being difficult.

It was a time for screams or acid retorts. But such luxuries are not for thralls. "Please whip my ass, maam." Gail loathed her abject

compliance.

"That's better, honey. You can do it when you try. 'Bout how many licks would you say?"

"As many as you wish, maam." Surely that could give no offense!

"That ain't what I asked, honey. But I'll make you a proposition. The kid's got herself a couple of hours. I'll knock off thirty minutes for each ten you ask for on that neat little can o' yours. The limit's thirty. Little sweetheart's got to have a half hour regardless."

"Don't do it!" The weeping Dulcie was suddenly vehement. "If I got to stay here at all, ain't no sense in you taking a whipping."

"Chip off the old block," said Ma Billings proudly.

"Please cane my ass thirty times, maam," said Gail with no pride at all.

Old Baldy quietly munched his oats while two girls shared agony with their eyes. The awfulness that was happening to Gail was invisible to both. It evidenced itself by swishing fleshly sounds within the barn and by the pain wracked features of the girl whose behind was being flayed with a whippy riding crop. In the end, Gail's lips moaned out the most vivid admissions of all while her bottom was being cut and cut again with ruthless skill. The girls in their separate agonies tried bravely to smile at each other from time to time. The swishing sounds went on and on.

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There were three of them. Gail named them by their physical attributes: 'Big Nose', 'Gutsy', and Congressman Billings who was simply Congressman Billings, or 'Everett' to his friends. They had wasted no time in using her and her physical facility that Ma had so capably enlarged to accommodate their massive masculinity. Their approbation was both shaming and disturbing.

"That's what I call a real piece o' ass!" Guffawed Big Nose.

"Don't you never part with this little ass-hole, Everett boy," counselled Gutsy with deep feeling.

"Ma done a damn good job on you, girl," affirmed Congressman Billings with pride. "Nicest little arse I ever stuck my pecker into."

Gail supposed it was a party. Three bluff hearty men, with Ma making an appearance when invited. They had business to discuss, but she and her enlarged anal passage had been provided as recreation for the warriors. She stood, naked, in the centre of the big room for their approval. What was shame! A thing she had heard of long ago.

"I always liked good firm tits," said Gutsy.

"Fine crop o' cunt hair," from the representative of Government.

"D'you have to keep them bloody great chains on her feet, Everett?" from Big Nose.

Billings patted the slave girl's back with paternal pride. "You know what would be real nice, honey. You shuffle them chains off to Ma and bring us back some nice cool drinks on a tray, real proper and serve 'em real professional. Don't hurry, kid. Don't want you tripping." Another warm hearted pat before the punch line, "And have Ma give you that there long riding crop she uses . . . ."

Gail tried not to show the cringe. But it was there, deep inside. The riding crop! Used on her naked skin by men like these! They could slice her to shreds. It might be no more than a threat to ensure her perfect obedience. Or just a pleasantry. But nothing at the Bar-B had ever been less than real. She clattered her chains upon her errand.

When she had been told of The Visitors' and what was expected of her, Gail had made up her mind to be 'a good girl'. She had long since resigned herself to the use of her body by others. Now it would be best that she neither sulk or protest. She had become a slave girl. By being a good slave girl she might avoid stripes. Perhaps there might even be some humour or goodwill . . . ! For a serving girl the heavy fetters were a disabling handicap. But she did her best.

First she had to place the tray upon a table. Then she dutifully kissed the wickedly limber riding crop and, with knee bent, proffered it to the Master of the House. Congressman Billings accepted the thing with which he would correct her misdeeds, with a beaming smile and some perspiration. He was impressed. His visitors watched in rapt delight.

Gail cursed her chains. Their linkage was too close to allow her to kneel while holding a tray of drinks. But she managed a curtsy and a smile. Each man admired her breasts while they reached for their glass. 'Tell you what, gal' said the owner of the Bar-B in a fine hearty burst of bonhomie, "you trot along and get yourself a good stiff drink and join us. Dammit, you're alright."

She could not trot. But she got the drink. She then had to stand and sip so that they could enjoy her nakedness. The atmosphere was convivial. "Someone cane your ass, gal'?" Big Nose inquired. "Yes, Sir. I was disobedient."

"You mean you actually have to do something to get your ass whipped?"

"Yes, Sir. But I do get whipped quite often." She hoped his anxiety would be relieved.

"You wearing all that hardware on your ankles on purpose, honey? Or for some good reason?" Gutsy obviously disliked her chains. She could imagine why.

"I tried to escape, Sir. These chains are my punishment and to prevent me trying again. They are riveted on my ankles. They can't be removed except with tools."

"Everett get a yen for your Cat, honey, and they'll come off damn fast!"

There was a general guffaw. Gail permitted herself an appreciative smile. A Congressman's erection might be a pathway to freedom. She sipped her drink gratefully. She hoped she would be allowed another. She did not explain that intercourse was possible even for a girl with chained feet.

"You keep them there irons on that little girl, Everett," Big Nose advised with sincerity. "You got yourself a treasure in this cute little kitten. You'll be a damn fool if you ever let her go."

Gail's heart fluttered. It was the ever recurring fear that, for her, there would never, never be release.

"How long you with us for, honey?" Billings asked as though he

had actually forgotten.

"There are about another nine months of my sentence, Sir."

"Hell's Bells, Everett boy, that there nonsense don't mean a thing," Gutsy adjured earnestly. "Keep the little trick permanent. There's fifteen years o' good clean fun in that little ass o' hers. If I had her I'd make damn sure she never got away."

"How's Ma keep a'hold of you, kid?" Big Nose asked seriously.

"I am chained to a ring in the floor of my room every night, Sir."

"Yeah, but what about the days?"

She did not want to tell them. They had enough ideas without Ma's. But it was useless to dissemble. Billings knew the truth. "I am here to be punished, Sir. After my work is done Mrs. Billings ties me in some way so that I'll behave."

Big Nose slapped his thigh. "Dammit, Everett, you got yourself a set-up for sure!" He grinned in sudden inspiration. "It's a ranch, ain't it! The Bar-B. Why don't you slap your brand on the little filly?"

The silence proclaimed the interest. To brand a naked girl! Delectable! Drinks were gulped. The captive herself took a long swallow. She wished Big Nose had kept his inspiration to himself.

"We got the irons," Billings admitted. "Ain't used 'em in a long time." He turned his benevolent attention on the quaking captive. "How you like to wear my brand, honey?"

A good old Bar-B query. Gail reflected bitterly. She had a terrible intuition that her flesh would bear the hated name. She did not wish to wear Congressman Billings brand burned in her skin. But how to say so! "I am frightened of the pain, Sir."

"Could give her a knock out drop." Gutsy was interested.

"Piss on that!" Big Nose disposed of humanity with contempt. "Best to have her watch the makings, and then hear her howl." He turned to Gail. "You wouldn't mind, would you, kid?"

"No Sir." No one hearing the two words could doubt their

insincerity.

"Give you ten-thousand for her, Everett?" Gutsy's voice was hoarse.

"That'ud 'bout cover a couple o' fingers," Billings rejoined meditatively.

"Alright! Twenty."

These men wanted to buy her! A female slave, purchased for cash. If one of them did it would be the end! She would never again know freedom. Certainly not within the span of her youth! Gail was frozen in terror.

"There ain't enough dough in the State to buy that little filly," the Host stated fervently.

"Fifty-thousand," interjected Big Nose as though disposing of the matter once and for all. His eyes sought Billings. What he saw there caused him to say, "O.K. Billings. One-hundred-thousand dollars for the girl." His voice was cold and hard.

Gail was aghast. So great a sum that he might whip her and use her rear entrance! She almost felt flattered.

The silence was electric. Gutsy watched the two principals with curiosity. He said nothing. His bid was dwarfed.

"Holy cow, Harry! You almost make me take you seriously," Billings grudgingly admitted.

"Take me seriously, Everett."

Billings obviously did take the offer seriously. His captive girl quailed as she watched his face reflect his thoughts. She saw herself as good as sold into a lifetime slavery, and wondered if a male would whip her less than would a woman. Certainly her body would be used more than it had ever been. Her present owner temporized.

"Look, Harry, we come out here to relax. I ain't runnin' no slave market. Give me time. I ain't saying no and I ain't saying yes. 'Sides, Ma's concerned. You know that." He turned to Gail: "More drinks, honey. And one for you too. Bet you're needing it after what you've

been listening to." He slapped her bottom playfully.

Gail could not know what had been said in her absence. The subject of the sale of her body had been dropped. Goodwill reigned. She made her round with the tray. Her breasts and pubic hair were scrutinized, her nipples pinched by questing fingers. She resumed the position where her nudity showed to best advantage. She sipped her drink and waited for something to be done to her. Of one thing she was sure something would be done. The fraternal atmosphere was expansive. "Let's whip her ass," Gutsy suggested thoughtfully. "Nothing to stop us slapping on that brand," contributed Big Nose.

"How's about another 'round from the rear?" Billings offered as though anxious to minimize wear and tear on a valuable asset.

The Congressman's thought found favour. The tenor of the talk had stimulated tired libidos. The slave girl herself was a delicacy sufficient to whet any jaded appetite.

"Guess you better bend over, honey." The Congressman's order was only faintly apologetic.

Gail retrieved the glasses and, with her own, placed them aside. In the most exposed part of the floor she spread her legs to the limit of her chain and touched her toes.

"Be a damn sight better if the kid didn't have all that stuff on her feet," Gutsy complained. "Can't really spread herself. And she does try . . . ."

"Didn't have to ask for help getting in there, did you?" Billings chaffed. "Spread her any more and we'd lose you."

They flipped coins to determine the order in which they would use her. Gail paid little attention to their small boy chatter. What did it matter! She thought fleetingly of the incredible glory of freedom. Then braced herself as the first impalement thrust her forward. She was actually thankful for Ma Billings plugs. Once more she knew that all things are comparative. She tried hard not to moan.

As the rounds of drinks followed each other in slow succession the whip became inevitable. Reference had surfaced here and there throughout the conversation. The listening girl found herself genuinely puzzled by the fascination the weal of a whip upon a naked

girl had on all men. If there were exceptions she had not met them. She had sensed that even Neil had been sexually excited by her striations. And it wasn't just men! There was Ma, and there was Dulcie. How many placid females walking any Main Street cherished a secret wish to whip one of their own! A slave girl's cry under the lash must always have been mankind's most potent aphrodisiac. Gail glimpsed the possibility that perhaps one-hundred-thousand dollars was not a penny too much!

"Got anything else besides that riding crop?" Big Nose asked casually. "I sorta' got a hankering for something that curls around."

"This curls round her arse real good," Billings assured him.

"Ain't aiming to stay on the girl's arse. That's kid's stuff."

"We don't want her cut up," Billings warned.

"Wasn't thinking of a blacksnake," Big Nose assured placatingly.

"How 'bout them special ones for her tits and twat. Never got around to trying that?" Gutsy said with interest.

Congressman Billings smiled at the naked girl who was beginning to be thankful for her drinks. "Bloodthirsty pair, ain't they, honey! Ma got anything you think would tickle you up about right?"

"Yes Sir."

"Go get 'em, sweetheart. And fill the glasses."

Gail was frightened. These huge men spoke of whipping her as though she was a grateful participant. The idea of the brand was still hovering. She sought counsel from Ma Billings.

"Ain't nothing I san do, honey," Ma admitted, "Your best bet is to go along with their damnfool ideas as though you think they're bloody clever for thinking 'em up. You know, the dewey-eyed bit. If you can work a bit of charm off on 'em it might save your hide a mite." Ma sniffed disparagingly. "But then they'll take it out on your asshole. Sorry, kid, there just ain't no way this can be your day."

"But those huge men? With whips . . . ! They'll kill me."

"Not with Billings there, honey. And anyway, men are mostly blowhards. Where in Hell did they get the notion 'bout going after your tits?"

"I think it was because they didn't want to cut up my back."

"Well, that's something anyway." Ma looked puzzled. "Where you sooner get it, honey? Front or back?"

"I don't want it at all." Gail was close to tears.

A sudden and strangely maternal Ma Billings took the chained and naked girl into her capacious arms. A large rough hand patted a smooth white back. "I treat you rough enough, kid, but these arseholes of men are somethin' else again! A gal' just can't keep up with 'em, and that's a fact. Not even me . . . !" There were a few moments of silent thought. Then, "Look, Sweetheart, I don't want them nice breasts of yours messed up. Don't suppose you do either. Tell the boys I ain't got no special whip for tits but that I'm sending one that will make you yelp without putting you in the hospital. You can take back that one I used on you last week. You know, the one with the white handle."

Gail knew! Even the white-handled one was barely humane. She would scream. But she would probably survive. Ma went for it while she busied herself with Southern Comfort.

The return journey was an agony beyond the drag of her chained feet. Her hands carried the tray. The whip that would give the men pleasure hung from one wrist. She reflected bitterly she was a neat package equipped for man's ultimate joy. Upon or within her body they would find their heart's desire. It took a steely determination to smile. But she respected Ma's wisdom. If charm could save her she would charm . . . .

"I think you will find this satisfactory to whip me with, Sir." Gail tendered the hated thing with a smile and bended knee. She kissed it gently as though with love.

Congressman Billings' beaming smile was s the one usually reserved for blocks of over a hundred votes. He took the whip without seeing it. His eyes were on the naked girl. "Ever play poker, honey?" he asked with seeming irrelevance.

"Yes Sir."

"Gonna' give you a chance to make a couple of bucks," said Gutsy.

"The boys didn't feel they wanted to lace right into you with this here whip, honey," Billings explained big heartedly. "So we're having us a poker game for exactly one hour. You win you get the cash. You lose you get marked up a bit. Stakes is a dollar a stroke."

"Oh, what fun, Sir." Gail hoped her eyes sparkled.

"You ain't got a hope, kid," Big Nose warned dourly. "We're good."

"But it's sweet of you to let me try, Sir." Gail rewarded him with a smile that would put up her price by thousands.

"This gal' keep on the way she's going, I'll start bidding again." Gutsy shook his head in incredulity. He looked keenly at Gail. "You stay this polite while your rump gets roasted?"

"I'm afraid I scream, Sir. I'm only a girl." She batted eyes of innocence, admiring his maleness.

"Stud. Jacks or better. Five dollar limit," Billings announced. "Mustn't let the little lady get in beyond her strength," he guffawed heartily.

Gail had played poker for tokens twice at parties. As she accepted the proffered chair she knew herself delivered to the whip. She had no hope of winning. But the potency of Southern Comfort was an ally. The men were happy and underrated her. After an initial loss of fifteen strokes, she was soon ahead fifty dollars. She moved her feet frequently to make her chains clink. The sound enraptured her companions. She frequently toyed with her hair so that her lifted arms displayed her breasts. She wanted, passionately, to win.

She supposed the game honest. She judged that Billings was on her side and allowed her to win when he could comfortably do so. But Gutsy and Big Nose were out for her hide, an appropriate expression, and bantered back and forth with gusto. Gail's mind was computing constantly, not for what she might gain, but with her possibility of loss. The loss of a hundred dollars, for someone who had it, was not tragic. But to lose a hundred strokes . . . ! It was frightening. To lose

two-hundred or more was a real possibility in such a game. She wondered if these men had knowledge of the frailty of female flesh. Anything over twenty strokes was a frightful punishment. They were probably envisioning her insouciantly wiggling her bottom at them under an infliction of hundreds!

In the end the game thrust at her a typical Bar-B decision. It was the last pot. It found her the breathlessly thankful possessor of enough dollars to show herself willing. Unless an obvious winner, she would toss in her hand. Money was useless to a slave girl. She would not risk the lash upon her back. But Fate was cruel. It gave her a pair of aces up and showing. Forbidding eyes compelled her bids. When all cards were dealt, hers was the highest hand against Gutsy with a pair of fives and Big Nose with a possible straight. Billings had thrown in his hand.

Gail longed to pass the bid, but knew herself trapped by her two aces. Her cash was gone. The brisk bidding had debited her with twenty strokes, the limit she believed she could bear from these muscular arms. She bid two more. Gutsy raised it ten. She stayed. Big Nose raised it twenty. Gail could have wept in frustration. She hated the two aces that made her continued participation mandatory. She felt fairly certain she was being bluffed. If she met the twenty it would end the game. She would be a quite considerable winner with unmarked skin, or a loser who must bear fifty-two whip strokes somewhere on her person. She bid the twenty.

Gutsy turned up a third five.

There was no hurry. Gail was sent for more drinks, including a large one for herself. As she served she knew the men were savoring her fate. Fifty-two strokes upon the skin of a naked girl. She dared not think. But she kept smiling. If only she could make them feel pity . . . !

"Where's the best place to tie you, honey?" Billings asked genially.

"The whipping post in the yard is much the best, Sir. It exposes me completely and gives you space to swing the whip so as to hurt me as much as you wish." She made her smile show a pleased interest in what was about to happen. "Of course, Sir," she added thoughtfully, "it is a bit public. I don't know if you wish the family to witness my . . ." She dragged the sentence out deliberately whilst looking with bright expectancy at her three companions, ". . . my . . . punishment."

"I'll be a son of a gun!" Gutsy breathed huskily.

"I don't believe it! That gal' ain't possible!" Big Nose affirmed.

"If you would prefer to whip me in private, Sir, I would suggest the barn. It also offers more varied positions."

"Positions!" ejaculated Gutsy. "Holy horny toads . . . !"

"This I got to see!" said Big Nose fervently.

They chose the barn.

It was a quaint procession. She was made to carry the whip and to lead the way. The three men sauntered slowly behind her fettered progress. Gail hated her chains. They robbed her of poise and dignity. She hated, also, the remarks of her admirers.

"Look at that little butt go from side to side," from Gutsy.

"It'll go every which way if you curl it 'round her hip to snap at her cunt," Big Nose advised.

"Leave the kid's nips alone," Billings adjured. "There's lots o' the rest of her."

The naked slave girl forcing her chained feet to lead her to the whip had never felt more lonely.

"Would you like to tie my wrists to an upright, Sir? Or do you prefer to suspend me?" Gail was going all out to please. She fetched them rope and cords.

They hung her by her wrists.

"She'll kick real pretty at the end o' that rope," Gutsy approved.

"Sooner have her legs apart," Big Nose observed thoughtfully.

After much debate they lowered her the several inches it took to place her toes on the floor. Then they tugged her feet as wide apart as her chain would allow and tied them. She felt trebly nude.

"That damn chain sure does screw up anything you want to do to a gal," Big Nose complained.

"Spoils the effect," Gutsy agreed.

"I'll agree, boys, we could stretch her little twat twice as wide," Congressman Billings confirmed regretfully.

"Dammit, Everett! Let's take the blasted things off her. Ain't that big a job." He laughed sardonically. "The poor gal ain't going to run far with us around."

"Hell, why not! Ma can put 'em back on after we've gone. If she wants to, that is." Billings chuckled lewdly. "Maybe the old lady will see how much better the kid can be if she can stretch her legs. Back or front, it helps."

Legs, waist, shoulders, the three men shared her weight. Triumphantly, as with a great prize, they carried her in procession to the blacksmith shop. Spirits ran high. It was a festive occasion. Gail passionately longed to be rid of her chains. Her ebullience would have matched theirs had it not been for her knowledge of that which awaited the freedom of her feet. But even with that knowledge her heart sang. A voice within her cried, "Free! free! free!" True, the men would tie her to be whipped, but before and after there would be moments when her person would be untrammelled by restraints. How small a thing it was; yet to a slave girl it was a victory.

For a little while she was a Queen, the box her throne, the anvil her footstool. She watched the preparations to free her ankles with joy and some trepidation. The men whose thrall she was had imbibed enough alcohol to impair their competence with drill and punch and hammer. But skill is instinctive. One by one the rivets that had prisoned her fell before the onslaught of the pounding metal. When the heavy anklets fell to the floor, it was as though Gail had been given wings.

"Wanna' run round the yard, honey?" the Congressman asked, grinning.

"Oh, could I? Oh please!" She was a child, pleading for ecstasy.

They watched benignly, sensing their power and possession of the nude loveliness that leaped and threw wide her legs in an abandon of

physical release. Gail had been constantly aware of the brutal prisonment of her ankles. But not until this moment of wild unfettered motion had she realized the full enormity of the loss Ma Billings shackles had imposed. She longed to flee, to fly, to never be bound again. But she savored the privilege granted, savored it to the full. Then, with racing pulse but heavy heart, she returned obediently to the men who would whip her. "Thank you! Oh thank you!" Her words were a glowing sincerity. Her sparkling eyes surveyed them all.

"You're a damn lovely girl." Gutsy's words almost held emotion.

There came an awkward silence as though none wished to shatter a mood. Gutsy's tribute was from the three of them. Gail wished her painless freedom might last forever. Mute, in a memory of something ethereal, the three men and the captive girl walked toward the barn.

"She looks prettier if you stretch her arms same way as her legs. Make an 'X' out of her," Big Nose suggested thoughtfully.

It was done. Few words were exchanged. They went about the task of binding her with an intent purpose that held reverence for a naked girl who had become very much flesh and blood and very female in a way they had not glimpsed before. Through their haze of drinks they understood the privilege of whipping this palpitating femininity. For a little while they were gods.

Fear had returned to Gail. Cold cringing fear! She looked up the taut columns of her stretched arms to where the rope circled her hurt wrists and held them high and wide. She looked down across her concave tummy and to each side where her thighs and legs were strained apart by ropes that pulled her ankles so widely separate, that her pubic hair proclaimed itself wantonly as if demanding scrutiny. Gail knew herself delivered utterly to the whip. She looked from one to the other of the three who watched, their faces rapt, their breathing heavy. "Please don't hurt me too much . . . ." The words slipped from her as the innocent plea of a child.

It would be wrong to say that the men who were about to whip her were untouched by her appeal. But, with a strange perception, Everett Billings told the truth. "Honey, ain't none of us wouldn't want to kiss you and let you go. Trouble is you're just too damn beautiful. Loving a gal' like you ain't enough. It don't say it all. You rate more than getting a man's dink shoved in you here or there. We almost got to whip you. Ain't no other way of saying what we feel."

For the naked girl there was small comfort in the quaint encomium.

"Do we wale her all out?" Big nose ventured conversationally.

"Hell no! You'd cut the gal' in two." Billings wanted no damage to such a valuable property.

"Want to do a bit more than tickle her up though," Gutsy contended. "We gotta' make her yelp."

"Ain't going to be no trouble doing that, the way we got her fixed," Billings assured him earnestly. "With them little legs spread the way they are you got some damn interesting targets." He turned his attention to Gail. "Can you move, honey?"

Obediently, Gail demonstrated her helplessness by the struggle she knew they desired. She fought the ropes, but managed to flutter only her shoulders. Her feet were firmly staked to the floor. She could scarcely move at all. "No, sir. I can't move." She looked at them piteously. "I'm frightened."

Congressman Billings was well used to dealing with those who were anxious and disturbed. In a fine paternal fashion he patted the naked girl's bottom and tweaked one nipple. "Don't you worry none, honey. You're in good hands with me and the boys. Tell you what sweetheart, you got fifty-two licks coming, we'll make it an even fifty." He made the concession as though ceding title to the island of Manhattan.

Even with the first stroke Gail screamed. Big Nose wrapped the lash across her back so that it curled 'round and bit at her ribs. Stretched as she was her skin was taut and doubly receptive to pain. Absorbing her agony, the captive's mind reiterated again and again, fifty, fifty . . . fifty!

But Gail had an ally. Whether his motives were humanitarian or financial it might be hard to know. But Everett Billings wanted no maiden prostrate from a flogging. "You know what I think, boys," he suggested. "We've all of us whipped an arse or two. But we got something special here. What say we use her twat for a target! We ain't using it for nothing else," he guffawed heartily. "Takes a bit more skill to get up there between her legs. It's for sure we'll never get a

little filly in no better shape for it."

The idea appealed. Gutsy aimed but missed. The thong instead wrapped 'round a tractioned thigh. It evoked a gasp of pain from Gail, and good-natured jibes from his companions.

"Skill's what counts, fellers," Billings boasted, and sent the seeking leather in a neat snap upwards from the juncture of the wide-spread legs. Gail moaned exquisitely as his reward. She tugged and twisted so that for reverent minutes her audience was content to watch her tortured nudity.

"You got something there, Billings," Big Nose acknowledged. "I'll have a go at her little ass in a minute. But let's see what I can do with a quivering quim." He laughed at his alliterative wit, and managed an upward slash that evoked from the tied girl a response that held him spellbound in lust. 'This little gal go on acting this-a-way and I'm going to have to go 'round her back with something else besides a whip," he admitted, almost with regret.

Once again Gail knew incongruity. To feel gratitude that her sex be whipped! Yet, excruciating as it was, it was better than a brutal flogging. She writhed and moaned in payment for their attentions. If she could contort lustfully enough it would divert their minds from more damaging pursuits.

But not from lust! As the fifty strokes bit and gouged at her tenderness, her eroticism so stimulated those who did the whipping that each in his own time expended himself within the facility Ma Billings had so assiduously prepared. Bound as their subject was she was nonetheless vulnerable. She could be used. For her, pleasure was not implicit in the act.

Gail could not doubt that Billings had contrived a compromise in her whipping. She would survive the fifty strokes. But, even so, she would suffer bitterly in shame and pain. The lash deliberately seeking the lips of her vulva was a terrible thing for any girl. Yet, mostly, no more than six inches of the thong made contact with her flesh. It sought her secrets and punished them shamefully, but it was less devastating than the full length of the leather curling 'round her slender nakedness. The Congressman shrewdly sold the advantage of prolonging the whipping so that every stroke could be aimed and wagers made on accuracy. After all, they had a target for which he coarsely coined the term of 'Heifer's Eye.'

When they freed her, Gail was bathed not only in the sweat of pain and fear but in a great thankfulness that it was over. She knew not what else these men might do to her. But the whipping was done. It might not recur. She even welcomed Billings' hand upon her arm as they walked back to the house and he promised jovially the biggest damn drink she'd ever seen!

When the whipped girl was sent for the inevitable drinks, Ma Billings' reaction was a quaint contrast of concerns. Consternation over the bruised skin of the loins vied with disapproval of ankles on which there were no chains. "The dirty bastards!" she mused angrily. "The sons of bitches! Beat hell out of your cunt, then let you run. You going to try high-tailing it up the road, honey?"

It was a question Gail had been asking herself. The absence of the chains upon her feet changed all her attitudes. Something impossible had become possible. It was a rebirth. An excited hope had sprung to life. She temporized with the obvious. "Oh maam! After being whipped like this! I wouldn't dare. They'd kill me."

"They aim to put them chains back on your feet?"

"They said when they were through with me."

"Humph! I suppose that'll have to do. Them damn men and their stiffs! Don't you run, honey. You'll wish you hadn't . . . !"

The drinks were large and well received. "We're going to have a nice quiet time, honey," Billings assured her. "We want you to stand out front where we can all get a good look. Sip your drink and sort of revolve. Real slow, keeping still in between. So's we can admire that lovely hide o' your'n. You're really something, honey! You surely are."

Gail supposed she could not complain. It was not a demanding task. Shame no longer counted. Let the silly fools feast on her nakedness and the marks they had etched upon it. She was hurting, but only from what was past. She sipped her drink. From time to time she made a half turn. She made no effort to shield herself. She was theirs. She would not try to cheat. Billings in his own strange way had tried to be kind. She was tired. But she stood erect for their enjoyment. She sipped and dreamed of freedom.

It was when her back was turned to her audience that she heard the snore. Tensed and curious she turned. The Southern Comfort and the labours of whipping a girl had exacted their toll. Three large satiated men lay back in their chairs asleep, mouths open, heads lolling in unconsciousness. Her heart pounded in a sudden terrible knowledge that here again was a moment 'of decision she would remember all her life.

She was free!

The possibilities flashed. Free! But naked, her skin wickedly marked. She was in the house. Ma and the children were around. Could she reach the road and run? Run, run, run . . . . It was a fifty-fifty chance that she could do so unseen. But suppose . . . ! She thrust the doubts aside. She must think positively or else go now to Ma and ask humbly to be chained that she be not tempted. If Ma handcuffed her decision would cease to be a burden. Gail realized the measure of her slavery in that the abject idea held appeal. The beautiful simplicity of being chained! No decisions, no regrets. She rebuked herself. Here was a chance such as she would never have again. When Ma replaced the chains upon her ankles she was doomed. Doomed to the other nine months or perhaps even to life. Forever there would be the whip . . . .

It was not until she had tip-toed from the room out into the yard that she saw the cars. The Bar-B held no hazards of theft. The keys were in the locks. With an excitation such as she had never known she slipped behind the wheel and started the motor. With a car there was hope. The gas tank was nearly full. It might take her from the state. Surely her striated skin would gain her a sympathetic hearing somewhere! She shifted into drive and gently stepped on the gas. No one had appeared to question the movement of the car. She headed for the highway.

Gail had never known such exhilaration, such a sense of soaring in space, such a knowledge of victory. She felt the surging power of the motor. It spelt freedom. Behind her was the whip and the chains. There could be no turning back now. The road beckoned. In a few miles there would be a freeway.

She was bothered by her nudity. It was a strike against her. A swift glance failed to show a rug. Perhaps there would be something in the trunk with which she could cover her nakedness from a disapproving world. But she would not stop now. Faster and faster. Her foot was

heavy on the gas. The miles sped by.

She had no money. She could not buy fuel. It would be a race between the miles that separated her from the state-line and the contents of her gas tank. She debated the practicability of bartering her body to some astonished service station owner in return for gasoline. She had little doubt that she could find a buyer for what she had to sell. But it would take time, and would he stay off the phone after she had gone? The gallons and the miles slipped by. She prayed.

The road block was suddenly in view beyond a bend. No car could back or turn. It was cleverly placed. She skidded to a stop yards from the police car. The ditches offered no hope. They were too steep. The uniformed giants bedecked with their accoutrements were figures of doom as they sauntered to accost her.

The moment had its element of farce. They ordered her from the car and to put her hands on its top and spread her legs wide before they realized the impossibility of a naked girl hiding arms.

"It's her all right," one of them said with finality. "I'll drive the car back and take her along."

"Arrest me," Gail pleaded. "I've been kidnapped. I want a lawyer."

They looked at her with a faint compassion, but with a far greater interest in her body and the whip marks. Her words were lost. They grasped her arms and handcuffed her wrists behind her back. Desolation enveloped her. "Please . . . I've been tortured. Can't you see? Don't take me back."

"Looks like the Congressman takes his fun where he finds it," one said to the other. They laughed.

Gail was propelled back into the stolen car. Her hands cuffed behind her back felt so cruelly familiar. She was being taken back into slavery. "Don't take me back," she pleaded. "They'll whip me, and worse. Oh please . . . ! Be human. Look at me . . . ."

They looked, and enjoyed what they saw. But they made no answer to her plea. She was not for them. She was no longer of the world. She belonged to the Bar-B and to the man who had the power . . . .

"Better use these on her feet. The poor kid's desperate." The second officer held out his handcuffs.

Gail sat miserably in despair as the metal bands were clipped on her ankles. She was now totally helpless. Escape had, once again, become an impossible dream. Ahead of her lay a retribution so awful she dared not think of it.

"You are taking me back to hell," she said simply to the man at the wheel. "Please, please let me go."

The car was in motion. Backing and turning. The driver spared her a glance. It roved from her strained face down to her breasts. He was young. He felt her femaleness. He was also honest. "Sorry, kid. If it was anyone but who it is, I'd proposition you. We drive in the trees and I let you go. I know the score. But not with Billings. For sure not with Billings! Lady, you ain't got a hope."

Gail wept. She sobbed in an abandon of grief. To have come so close! And now . . . ! She dared not think of now. In silence the officer let her cry.

She was delivered back into bondage in an atmosphere so tense it could be felt. The officer unlocked his handcuffs from her wrists and from her ankles, made a brief salute and left with his companion. Gail stood naked before her inquisitors. For the moment her body was free of bonds, but she sensed a deeper prisonment than she had ever known. Billings and his wife studied her in a pregnant silence. She stood, listless and bereft of hope.

"What the hell else could you expect?" Ma demanded accusingly.

"That was a damn fool thing to do, honey," Billings offered morosely.

"Get them chains back on her feet," Ma demanded.

Gail said nothing. There was nothing to say.

"Don't fret 'bout them irons, Ma," the Congressman placated. "We'll get 'em back on the little filly in good time."

Ma obviously had her own ideas. But Billings was boss in his own house. He took the escapee by the arm. "You come along, honey.

The boys and me got a little talking to do 'bout you." He led his captive away from a glowering Ma.

"Whip her ass," said Gutsy as though the act was obvious.

"She's had a pretty good going over already," Billings defended.

Big Nose laughed. "You two ain't got no imagination," he jeered. "The little trick ran away. This is cattle country. What you do with strays?" He looked around for effect to his proclamation. "You brand 'em. That's what you do."

The silence bespoke approval. Each man was seeing the naked girl strapped down and hearing her scream as the red iron entered her smoking flesh. Gail stood before them, numb with misery.

"Would you do that, Everett?" Gutsy almost pleaded.

"Hell, why not?!" Billings was displeased with her escape.

"Got a sort of logic to it," Big Nose clinched.

Gail knew for sure. She would be branded. Even to her the logic was obvious. They had talked of it before. Now it would be certain. Perhaps she should feel lucky if that was all they did to her! "Please," she pleaded desperately. "Not today! Not today!. . ."

"Kid's sorta' played out," Billings acknowledged. "Well all enjoy it more tomorrow. Give her time to think on it . . . ."

Gail was spread-eagled on her bed and tied fast. Never again would there be freedom or hope of freedom for her. She would always be suspect. She would always be bound! When they had tied the last knot and left her there helpless and alone, she wept bitterly and fought in frantic futility against the cords.

Before nightfall, after she had tended the tied girl's needs, Ma Billings sat beside the tautly stretched nudity on the bed. Looking down at her frightened captive Ma emitted her usual heavy sigh. "Honey, you ain't got no sense. What you do it for?"

Gail sensed compassion. "At my age, wouldn't you have run?" She looked up in desperate appeal.

"You're right, honey. I'd have run. But that don't change nothing. You're in for a bad time."

"Please, couldn't I be chained instead of tied like this? I'll never manage to sleep. I'm so tight."

"You'll sleep. Being tied this-a-way is the beginning. You ain't going to be very comfortable for quite some time, kid."

"Will they really put a brand on me?"

Ma Billings nodded sombrely. "They'll brand you." She grinned in wry amusement. "You practically asked for it, y'know. They might never have done it if you hadn't headed for the border." She smiled down at the helpless girl. "Try not to think about it. It's bad, but I expect there's worse things. You'll live."

They surveyed each other in a silent feminine communion. "Please, maam, don't put those chains back on my ankles." It was a plea Gail had to make. The heavy fetters had come to symbolize a lifetime slavery. Even with all its disasters the day had been good for the few hours she had spent without bonds.

"Hell girl! How am I to keep you if I don't? You'd head for the hills every day."

Gail understood. The problem was real enough for both of them. Miserably she offered, "How about parole? If I give you my word . . . ?"

Ma Billings grunted with small humour. "I thought o' that one myself, sweetheart. But I wouldn't wish it on a dog. You'd try and keep your word. I know you would. But every day you'd go through hell, again and again. The thought o' them little feet o' yours twinkling down the road would wear you down."

Gail glimpsed truth. But still! "I'd sooner have that, maam, than those chains. They make me feel so . . . so hopeless!" She smiled winsomely at the older woman who possessed her. I'll be very obedient. I will . . . honest!"

Ma bent and kissed her and went away. Once more Gail wept. In the night she slept.

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"On her ass, for sure," Gutsy enthused.

"Seems like a natural," Billings agreed. "But there's a thing or two against it. The kid won't be able to sit down for a month. And a gal's ass is made to be whipped. We can't go whipping a fresh brand." He grinned expansively, " 'Sides, the kid wants to be able to admire it herself. She don't want to have to back up to a mirror."

"Above her right tit," Big Nose said with certainty.

Gail cringed. Free of restraints, she stood with the three men in the barn as they discussed their Devil's work. Before her was the heavy wooden bench to which she would be tied. To one side was the perforated bucket with its glowing embers in which were buried the two irons that would burn through her skin so that she would wear their emblems all her life. She kept silent. It was too late for pleading. It was too late for anything . . . . She listened breathlessly to learn where upon her body the crimson metal would sear.

"Naw! That'd spoil a good thing," Gutsy countered. "Could she take one o' the irons each side of her cunt?"

"Spread your legs, honey," Billings commanded.

Gail obeyed, but suspected the notion impractical. After prolonged fingering the men agreed. "Want to do a good job for the kid," Big Nose conceded magnanimously.

"Ain't but one place that's good all round," Billings judged weightily. "We'll put it on her thigh. Something to work on there, and it ain't going to be in the way o' nothing," he guffawed happily. "Any feller aiming to get a piece o' tail is going to know who she belongs to."

Decision was unanimous.

"Climb aboard, honey," Congressman Billings invited.

In a maze of quivering apprehension, Gail stretched her nakedness upon the bench. It was hard and unyielding. She wondered if it had been made for such a purpose. The men tied her down with much care and forethought. She must not move. As the cords were

shrewdly tightened, Gail knew she would not move. The timbers on which she lay were spaced with narrow apertures between so that the cords could circle and hold any part of her anywhere. When her ankles were made fast and her small waist cinched down, they took her hands and stretched them back behind her head. Tied thus they were lost to her. Obedient to their need she struggled, but scarcely moved.

"Now a good one just above her knee," Billings decided.

It was beastly. There was no doubting the purpose of this final stricture. Her thigh must not move when the glowing metal entered her skin and smoked its message for all to see. No matter how she surged in agony this cord must hold her still. They looped it twice and cinched it down far, far too tight so that she cried out in pain.

"Won't be for long, sweetheart," Big Nose assured her jovially. "Have it off in no time." He patted her cheek paternally.

He had diverted her. She had not seen. The iron found her flesh and burned its way slowly through her skin.

Gail screamed many, many times.

The three men watched and listened. This was their harvest. Their time of fruition. In the exquisiteness of a naked girl's agony they found their own Nirvana. The white limbs fought and bulged against the cords. But the girl did not move save for her head. She flung it madly from side to side. Her gaze passed over them without lingering, for in them was neither hope nor mercy. In her martyrdom to the brand Gail was utterly alone.

Neatly and with care they pressed home the second iron.

When they had looked and listened to their heart's content, they loosened the cord that bound her knee. Then, quietly without a word, they went away. Perhaps it was some rough decency, or perhaps they had reached a surfeit of ecstasy that prompted them to leave the branded girl to her moans and to herself. For several minutes she did not even know they had gone.

When her thoughts again became coherent Gail found herself strangely glad to still be bound. She could not see her brand. She could not touch it. Thus it was not there. The agony in her thigh

might go away. In such sad ways do naked slave girls find solace. They have much need of it. She was glad, too, to be alone. She wanted no leering faces moist with lust. Since the men had come she had been branded a hundred times by avid eyes. The male trio's preoccupation with her nudity had taught her much of the eternal hunger of Man. That she had been used to assuage it briefly was no comfort at all. Soon they would hunger again with an appetite that could not die. Beneath her hate there was sorrow. They were so driven!

She hurt. A sickening searing hurt. But it was no worse than she had dreamed. Perhaps there is an ultimate pain beyond which we cannot go. Gail tried to arrange her thoughts. She was branded. So what now! Was she to be punished more for her escape! From things said it seemed quite possible. She miserably considered the whip. A girl can be whipped endlessly if her scourgings are sufficiently spaced. The burning iron had not erased her memory of the thong. Perhaps even today it would seek her flesh.

Gail tested her bonds. They too hurt. She was tightly tied. She could not move. She had not expected to, but it was the ritualistic try. A girl always tried. She would lie upon the bench until they chose to come for her. She had no hope they would come without intent. In fearful obedience she would accept whatever it was in passive complacence. A brief vision of freedom crossed her mind. She quashed it.

But they came without intent. All they wanted was a serving maid. "Ain't no one does it as good as you, honey," Billings assured her as the last cord fell away and he helped her to her feet. For a minute she stood, dazed and without restraint. Her eyes sought those of her masters. But they were focused elsewhere than on her face. Fearful of what she was to see she looked down at herself, beholding the scarlet indentions of the cords wherever they had held her. Then, in unquenchable fascination, seeking her brand.

It was clear and precise and properly spaced. A perfect "B". She might one day escape from the Ranch, but never from its symbol. She would belong to the Bar-B forever. Her heart pounded, her breath caught in a gasp of emotion as she looked at the burnt black fringe at the edge of her wounds. It was her skin. It had been burned crisp as toast is burned within a toaster. But deep within her flesh was the real wound that looked as wounds do. It was not pretty. It would not be pretty for weeks or for months. But no one could doubt the proclamation of ownership. The emblem was not small. Gail was

owned.

"Prettiest thing I ever see," Billings breathed huskily.

"Damn remarkable girl we got here," Big Nose said thoughtfully.

"Gives me a hard on just to look," Gutsy contributed with reverence.

Ma Billings viewed her captive's brand with lively interest. She was miffed at being excluded from the male rite. Angrily, she dispensed Southern Comfort in the glasses on Gail's tray. "It's a damn nice job, honey," she conceded. "There'll come a day when you'll be proud of it." She made another intent examination. "I'd better put a bandage on there for you, kid, but them fool men will want to feast their eyes. That there mark on your hide will keep 'em happy all afternoon. Your little asshole will probably get a bit o' wear and tear. Bound to affect 'em that-a-way." She straightened up and gripped her prisoner's arm, her eyes were unblinking. "Listen, gal'. Them bastards go to sleep again and you run, there'll be Hell to pay. I don't like you being free the way you are." She shook the captive arm. "Honey, you willing to promise me you'll behave?"

A week before, such a promise would have been hard to make. But not today. The naked girl patted the hand that held her. "I promise, maam." Then added with a rueful smile, "It's not so much that I'll be a good girl. But I'm just too damn tired and I hurt too much."

The two women found trust in each other's eyes. Gail picked up her tray.

By Bar-B standards, for the captive girl, the afternoon was good. The men used her as the mood took them. But, mainly, they were content to sip the drinks she served and to feast their eyes on her nakedness and their work thereon. She posed for them and sipped the drinks they insisted she enjoy. They were immensely pleased with her as one is pleased with engaging pets. Gail stood and dreamed, or ran her errands. Even in her pain the freedom of her feet was a minor miracle. Sometimes the men's conversation slipped by her ears. But when they spoke of her she listened.

"We was going to brand her anyway," said Gutsy.

"You aim to let her get away with that running off caper?" from

Big Nose.

Billings laughed knowingly at their concern. "You boys would wear the poor gal' to a frazzle," he reproved.

"It's a lesson I'd teach her," Gutsy affirmed. "If she's going to run every time you take the ball and chain off, she'd plumb wear me out."

"We'll put Ma's chains back on her tomorrow before we leave," Billings announced. "Poor kid ain't going to run in them things."

"I can't even walk!" The protest burst out of Gail spontaneously.

They were amused. They enjoyed her sudden anger.

"You sure do hate that clutter of hardware on your feet, don't you, honey?" Billings commented shrewdly.

"Yes." Her answer was uncompromisingly emphatic.

They laughed. She was fun. "But how they going to keep you down on the farm?" Gutsy chortled.

"I'd give my word!" Gail raised her chin proudly. "And if I wasn't treated too cruelly I wouldn't break it either."

"You got an 'if in there, kid," Billings admonished.

"There's no need to be too cruel to me." Gail was sulkily defensive. "Everybody can have pleasure from me without that."

"How 'bout a bit o' punishment for that escape act?" Billings probed.

Gail wondered if she had struck a chord of sympathy. She would be reasonable. "Yes. If you think I deserve it, Sir."

Three indrawn breaths paid her tribute.

"That there girl's a treasure." Gutsy's praise was from the heart.

"You got a decent cane, Everett boy, well lay it across her little butt," said Big Nose, enraptured.

Billings grinned good humouredly. His gaze rested on the branded girl almost with affection. "We ain't going to do nothing drastic," he proclaimed. "She don't get branded every day. But this running off thing she's so hot on needs a cure. No running and jumping, that's the remedy. Our little lover girl's going to spend the night tied to that post out in the yard. Tied tight!" He turned to Gail, "You won't like that, will you, honey?"

"No Sir." True, she would not like it. But it was better than she had feared. If only it would be Billings who would boss her for the nine months she might survive! She let him see gratitude in her eyes.

"I'm thirsty as blazes," Big Nose hinted.

Gail picked up her tray.

They went to sleep. It was perhaps inevitable that they do so. They were replete with their alcohol and with her flesh. They were comic in their somnolence. But their captive dared not wake them. Nor did she dare the escape of the previous day. She believed she knew what was best to do. She went to Ma.

"They're asleep again," she informed flatly.

"And you come back to me instead of taking off?" Ma was pleased.

"Yes maam. But I'll have to go back there and stand the way they want me." She paused and looked at her companion with a faint and rueful smile. "Please help."

"What you want me to do, honey?"

"Handcuff me. Behind my back."

For a moment Ma Billings was nonplussed. Then, in approving sympathy, she laughed in genuine amusement. "Dammit, sweetheart, I think you got the right idea." She looked shrewdly at the naked girl who had made the strange request. "You don't want to stand there and be tempted, do you?"

"No maam. With my wrists handcuffed behind my back there's no use me thinking of escape."

Ma slapped her thigh in enjoyment of the situation. "I ought to

refuse," she affirmed. "Ought to test you. See how good your word is. But Hell . . . ! This is too good to miss. See those silly bastard's faces when they wake up and find you like that. It's the easiest slap in the face I can give 'em!"

Gail turned and placed her hands behind her back. There was always something frighteningly final about the clasp and snap of the metal bands upon her wrists; this time was no exception. But she was pleased. She had pleased Ma, she had removed herself from temptation. It would be fun to see the faces of the men . . . . She tugged. "One notch tighter please," she pleaded.

Chuckling with pure enjoyment, Ma made the handcuffs very tight indeed.

Gail's pose was tiring. But it had become fun. She realized how great was her relief that the branding was done. It might hurt for days or weeks. But the awfulness was over. Added to this was thankfulness for the night to come. That a girl might be grateful to be tied naked to a post in a ranch yard throughout the hours of the night was a thing so bizarre that few would believe. Yet it was so. Gail had expected to be mercilessly whipped. Despite the pain of her brand her heart was lighter than it had been for two days. Such was the Bar-B.

The handcuffs stayed. Once awake, the men had sheepishly changed the shining things from back to front so that their serving girl could continue her duties for their comfort.

"Dammed if they don't suit her," Gutsy applauded.

"Gal ought to wear 'em all the time," Big Nose approved.

"I'm a' going to tell Ma that's the way to handle the filly," Billings said emphatically. "Gal ain't going to cut no capers with handcuffs on her little flippers. Damn sight better than that hundred-weight of scrap iron she was toting around."

Gail was a guest at supper. Her hands were linked. But it was comparative freedom. They even let her bathe without a guard. She had long known that whilst handcuffs prohibited much, they also allowed a great deal more than might be supposed by a girl who had never worn them. She tidied herself and even used cosmetics. Perhaps it was silly for a girl who would spend her evening and night

tied to a post, but she was female. She felt better. Not happy, but better.

Gail pressed her naked back against the wood and passed her hands as far behind the post as she could get them. Her head was high. Her eyes roved reflectively from one to the other of the men who held the cords with which she was about to be bound. She was passive, but proud. It was only evening. Still light. Bound now, she would stand against her post for many, many hours before morning brought release. Perhaps this punishment she was about to suffer would demand and extract more from her than she had thought. But the die was cast. Cords circled her waist and were pulled very tight indeed until she was one with the timber that would companion her through the darkness. She relaxed. Her wrists were being competently dealt with by Big Nose. She felt sure Gutsy was tying her ankles tighter than he need.

She would have no need to consider the hazard of escape.

Each kissed her before returning to the house. Strange kisses from strange men. The kisses of an uncle, a grandfather, a cousin. No fleshy act, no thing of lust, but an accolade, a tribute. Perhaps the fumbling bussing was a thank-you for raptures given. There was no fingering or pinching or slapping. They ambled away and left her solitary, tied to her post in the waning light.

Gail did not cry. At moments like this tears came easily. But she shed them not. She was still buoyed with the same relief that had sustained her through the afternoon. She did not relish the approaching night. But it was a hurdle to cross. Tomorrow the men would leave. Her life would revert to housework and being tied to a tree. She wondered if Ma could be converted to the idea of handcuffs instead of the weight of irons upon her ankles.

It was a melancholy time. No matter how she tried, Gail could not sustain her optimism against the gathering dusk. She was lonely and she hurt and she was tired. Tied as she was she could hope for no more than cat-naps through the night. She was neatly tied. No more rope than would keep her totally secure. Ankles, wrists and waist. Her hands were bound in such a way as to hold her tight against the post. But her chest and shoulders suffered no cord. "You breathing against a rope all night, honey, it'll have you cut in two by morning," Billings had told her genially to explain a seeming humanity. Again, Gail knew gratitude, but it might have been easier to sleep with her shoulders

held. Slumber is hard for those who stand.

Total darkness brought fear. One by one the lights within the house went out. By midnight the naked girl was stranded alone in a sea of black. She felt adrift. Delivered to a Stygian and unfamiliar world. Objects seemed to move. The yard was peopled with eyes she could not see and creatures she could not name. But she could not move. She surrendered her nakedness to them and stood bound to her stake as thousands of others had stood in centuries past. She fell asleep.

The hand upon her mouth wakened her. It was firm and strong. It muffled her startled cry. Big Nose stared back at her in amusement at her wide-eyed alarm. "Quiet now girl. Take it easy," he said gently.

They took stock of each other. The man's demeanour eased her fear. It was replaced by puzzlement. Had he come to have sport with her body quietly on his own! "You want to get to Hell out of here, honey?" It was part statement, part question.

Gail nodded. Her panting "Yes" seemed superfluous.

"You want to go with me? Right now?"

He meant business. But what business! Suspicion flared.

He laughed quietly. "Don't trust me, do you, kid! Can't say I blame you. But look! We're not loaded with time. Here's what I'm offering —"

The doubt and hesitation on her face stopped him in mid-sentence. He said tersely, "I want you. I'm going to take you. Now! You can come willingly with a deal. Or you can come fighting without one. But you'll come."

Gazing at the intensity of his expression, Gail knew herself within the grip of a new force. "What do you want?" she asked without optimism.

His voice was urgent. He was a thief in the night, with no time for niceties. "You've got nine more months to put in here. I'll cut it in half. You'll be free by Thanksgiving. With me you won't be branded, you won't scrub floors. What do you say?"

Gail writhed inwardly as well as against the cords that held her. Her mind raced. Big Nose had shown her no mercy. He had wanted to put a brand upon her breast. Everything was wrong! She wanted to turn to Ma Billings for the only female sustenance slavery offered. "Go away. Please leave me alone. You'll get us both in trouble." Her voice was a cry of anguish.

"You're going to fight?" The question held regret.

"Oh, don't be silly!" she wailed. "Do I look like fighting! I can't move. If you want to kidnap me, go ahead. I can't stop you and I won't fight you. I'm tired of the whole silly business."

She sensed his disappointment. He had wanted justifications. Absurdly, Gail felt sympathy for his frustration. He had envisioned a grateful slave or a fighting female. "I wish you'd forget the whole thing," she said wearily. "But if it's something you have to do, then get on with it. I'm just going to stand still."

His movements were decisive, planned. A noose 'round her neck, tethering her loosely to the pole. Then the swift cutting away of all her bonds. Gail stood free save for the tether. But she knew that, had she wished to fight, it would have defeated her. A naked girl cannot win against a powerful man when her neck is captive. Hard hands turned her and brought her arms behind her back in a compulsion she knew all too well. Her wrists were tightly tied, palm to palm. She gasped in pain and unvoiced protest as the cords found her elbows and bit savagely into soft flesh until her forearms were joined as one. He loosened the rope from the pole and used it as a leash to lead her to the car.

It was nothing Gail had hoped for in her thoughts of escape. No glow of victory, no thankful turning of the back. She found Big Nose difficult to assess. She might be exchanging one slavery for another infinitely worse. She sat passively in the front seat while he tied her neck rope to a handrail behind. Whatever this man might be, he had her. She was his captive. The cruel bite of the thongs about her elbows told her of the futility of struggle. She would go where he wished to take her.

Big Nose eased into the car beside her, started the engine and drove as noiselessly as possible from the Bar-B. When they were on the road that would take them to the highway, Gail twisted to sit sideways facing her abductor. It was more comfortable. With elbows

tied she could not lean back against a seat, now she used her shoulder. Her branded thigh was held away from harm. It stared at them accusingly. The driver took a long approving look at his new captive.

"Name's Harry Rattery," he said pleasantly.

"What do I call you?" his slave girl asked without interest. "Master? Or do you prefer Sir? Or just plain Harry?"

"Feeling your oats, ain't you, kid! You wouldn't have talked like that to Everett Billings."

"Does it matter! I end up branded or whipped or something awful no matter how I act." Gail was in a mood to push her luck. She pushed it further. "I suppose you'll whip me?"

"Yes I will." He was quite forthright about it. "I'll whip you for discipline, and I'll whip you because I like to see you squirm. Both good reasons."

"For you they are. But I'm sick to death of being whipped. It's beastly. You men don't know how it hurts. You think it stings a girl a bit and she howls because she's a girl."

"I can see we are going to have some interesting talks, honey." The Big Nose who was now Harry Rattery seemed more human. He gave her a swift keen glance. "Just in case it bothers you I'll tell you now that I left our Congressman my check for a hundred-thousand. You may have been kidnapped, but you haven't been stolen."

Gail wanted to respond. But she couldn't. It was too bizarre. The huge sum made her slavery frighteningly real. Harry Rattery was willing to pay because she had been neatly extracted from the stream of life and placed within a captivity that belonged a millennium ago. He could make her utterly his own in a way impossible with other girls. She had been kidnapped. But who cared! Perhaps not even the Billings! The cords bit at her, the brand burned, the rope chafed her neck. Tentatively, she angled.

"All that money to possess me for a few months?"

Rattery chuckled sardonically. "I offered you a deal. You turned it down. Now it's for life."

He could do it! A cold hand clutched. Never again to be free! It was the thing Gail feared most. She tried to sound careless. "Couldn't I change my mind?"

"No," he spoke seriously. "You'd have to try and change too much. I want totality. Utter obedience. An involvement beyond saying 'yes'."

"I'm not likely to please you then?"

"You will. I'm talking about an ideal, a dream. Not getting it doesn't spoil the other. You know – 'half a loaf . . ."

Gail was puzzled. "Where's your hill-billy speech?"

Harry Rattery chuckled. "Just three boys having fun on Everett's ranch. Like putting on an old shirt and pants."

"And whipping a helpless girl!" Gail was still bitter.

"Don't play that tune too long, honey. It makes one damn good reason for striping your hide."

"You'll never be short of reasons, Harry," Gail ventured recklessly. "You can make me do or be anything you want with the whip. You don't even have to use it. I'll say yes before you start."

"You want to make it 'Harry'?" His tone was thoughtful.

"Sure. Why not! Incidentally, Harry, how about taking this lousy cord off my elbows? It hurts like fury, and I'd be just as helpless with only my wrists tied."

He laughed delightedly. "You're deliberately being too big for your breeches. Why?"

"It just feels so damn good," Gail admitted. "I've been saying 'maam' and 'sir' and 'yes' for so long. Sure! I know! You'll beat me into being abject. But give me the time it takes to get me to your prison." She eyed him slyly. "I suppose there'll be dungeons and chains and things?"

"How else can I keep you from running?"

"That's right. Make it sound like my fault!"

"I hadn't planned on lacing into you first thing. But you're going to make me."

"I'll take that for granted. Now! How about easing up on my elbows?" Gail made a pixie grimace and added the one word: "Master?"

"Your elbows stay. So can the 'Master.' I like it."

"Yes Master." She was provokingly demure.

"And cut the sarcasm. It'll cost you."

"Thank you, Master." She was honey and cream.

"I like it," Harry Rattery admitted. "But I'll still take it out on your rump. If I give you an inch you'll twist me."

The darkness sped by. Gail knew herself invisible to all save the man at the wheel. Doubtless they would reach their destination before daylight disclosed a bound and naked girl in his car. Rattery was safe. Kidnapping a girl was the simplest of acts.

"If you don't untie my elbows I'll cry."

"Go ahead. They're your tears."

Gail had fully intended to make good her threat. But the salt drops refused her summons. "Alright! I won't then!" she said angrily making a virtue of necessity. "But if you're so damn unkind, how do you expect me to love you? That's what you want, isn't it?"

He turned again, surveying his prize with more than approval. "Where did you pick up that bit of wisdom?" he asked soberly.

"It's true, isn't it! All you ridiculous males long for girls to throw their arms round you in worship. But you never do anything to earn it."

Harry Rattery made a sound of disgust. "It's a bitch! A man never grows out of it. What would I have to do to make you love me?"

"Untie my elbows."

They shared a chuckle. "If I believed you, I'd do it." He sounded seriously sincere.

"Well, all fooling apart, I would feel a little warmth if you did untie me," Gail assured him defensively.

"You'll stay tied," he told her slowly as though considering the decision. "Actually, I'd enjoy being a nice guy and loosening your elbows. But it's a wrong way to start. You need a halter. That's why I tied you like that. The pain keeps you knowing who and what you are. It works too, or you wouldn't keep harping on it."

Was he right! Grudgingly, she supposed he was. If a slave girl was kept in pain she would constantly know herself slave. It was a thing easy to forget. She was still tingling with a residue of euphoria from her release from Ma Billings chains. She mused quietly for a minute before the agonies and stresses of the day took their toll. She fell asleep. Seeing what had happened, the man at the wheel smiled gently as though well satisfied.

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There is an exhaustion of the mind, the spirit and the flesh which can produce slumber drugged by weariness. So it was with Gail. She was aware of motion, of sounds, and of being lifted and carried. But she clung to her dark warm unconsciousness as does a child whose parent moves them in the night. There was a sense of comfort she made no effort to analyze as she drifted back into the deep safe darkness that held neither whips nor chains. From a great need she slept on hour after hour.

Her awakening was gradual. It had come from satiety. Nothing had disturbed her. She was laying on a flat hard surface. She felt the rough wool of a blanket. Lifting a hand to sweep the hair from her face, the other followed. She was handcuffed. Kicking her feet she found them free. She was still naked. She sat up.

She was in a shining metal cage that occupied the centre of a vaulted stone chamber. Windows high in the walls provided ample light, but gave no view. The air was warm. This was all: the cage, herself within it, and a blanket. She looked at the handcuffs snug upon her wrists. She shrugged. At least they were not behind her

back. That was always something for which to be most thankful. She examined the Bar-B brand upon her thigh. It was red and angry. She wished it was bandaged. Slowly she got to her feet and stretched. She felt rested and replete.

The cage in which she was captive was beautifully constructed. Its door barely distinguishable from the rest. Gail shook the bars. It did not move. She examined the lock and knew she would never open the door by her own efforts. She walked the small circumference of her new prison. It was small. She judged its diameter as no more than eight feet. It was circular, a simulation of the conventional bird cage, its peaked top well above her head, but not reaching the ceiling. The bars of the cage were substantial, their metal of steel, chrome, alloy . . . she could not tell. It had about it the quality of chaste femininity. It was a girl-cage.

Gail tried all the bars. They were firm. As do most prisoners, she ended her tour by holding one with her joined hands and gazing wistfully at the freedom beyond. She supposed a cage might be better than a dungeon. But it would be more frustrating. Surveying the floor, her heart leaped at the ring and the outline of a trap. It responded easily to her tug. She blushed at what she found. It was a flush toilet within a small concrete well that would accept her feet but no more. With a mixture of thankfulness and apprehension she used it, her eyes anxiously upon the closed door of her stone prison. The act, within a cage, was strangely shaming for a girl. Suppose the door had opened! But it did not open. It was a monolithic forbidding door, made to be closed and locked. Perhaps it would never open! As Gail closed the trap and let the ring fall back into its channel flush with the floor, the significance of the facility she had just used struck her with frightening logic. She need never be taken from the cage! She could be kept in it for life if someone so desired. All her other needs could be dealt with through the bars. For life! Gail shuddered. So easy, so plausible! Was that what Rattery wanted! She remembered the lines of an old song: "A bird in a gilded cage . . ."

Why the handcuffs! She could never escape the cage, so why chain her hands! But that was part of it; the same as the cords 'round her elbows that still left their pink indentations in her skin. The handcuffs would be the constant reminder. With her hands linked by the shining metal she would suffer awareness of slavery always. She would not forget.

Would the door suddenly open and Harry Rattery come and look

at her through the bars of her cage! She shrank from the thought. She felt many times more naked than standing face to face or within the confines of a room. It would be the incongruity of being free to move but unable to shield herself from public view. The airy openness of this confinement seemed to make her more vulnerable than bonds.

It was lonely. Having exhausted exploration, Gail reclined on the blanket. She was aware of hunger and a wish that someone would come. For three months she had been a prisoner at the Bar-B, but nothing there had conditioned her for this cage and its implications. She knew that, if left alone long enough, it would be easy to panic. To shout to make someone come, if only to beat her. But would they come! Would anyone even hear! She could see herself frantically tugging at the bars . . . .

It was a woman: in her thirties, charm and poise and a wide-lipped mouth and calm amused eyes. She carried a tray. Her voice was unhurried, casual, educated.

"You may call me Grace. It is my name. No, I will not remove your handcuffs. No, I will not let you out of your cage. Yes, I will whip you, but not now. You may eat and talk to me naturally. We are two girls together. You may ask questions. I will answer those I wish. You will notice the small horizontal aperture close to the floor. I will pass this tray through it. There is food, and there are dressings and medication for your brand."

Hunger vied with curiosity, and for a short time won the battle. But Gail was female. "Where's Harry Rattery?" she asked, munching busily.

"Sudden business. Don't know when he'll be back. You're mine."

"Are you Mrs. Rattery?"

"As close as anyone ever comes." There was an undefinable emotion in the voice.

"What are you going to do with me, Grace?" How strange to use a name!

"Train you. In obedience."

"Does that mean I get whipped twice a day?"

"Three times if you deserve it." Grace's voice was amused, but very firm. "I might even stretch it to four."

"You'll take me out of this cage then?"

"Not necessarily. This cage can be your whip." Grace smiled enigmatically. "You look delightful in there."

"You know about the Bar-B?"

"Harry told me, and about your brand, and about your enhanced facility at the rear."

Gail flushed. "He didn't need to tell you that."

Grace laughed. "You mean because I won't be using it! Don't worry. I won't bandy it around."

"Is that all he wants me for? To use . . . to use that?"

"Good gracious no! This cage has been here for ages. Waiting for you."

"Waiting for me?"

"Harry had a dream. You're it. He always knew he'd find you."

Gail pondered, puzzled. "You mean you don't mind! You'll let him keep me around?"

"Why not! I'll share you; that's a small dividend." Once again there was the small emotion in the voice. "Besides, I can't stop him. And I'm damn sure you can't."

"How'd you like to be locked in a cage?" Gail asked slyly.

Grace laughed cheerfully. "You don't suppose I haven't been, do you! I once spent a month in there without the door ever being opened. Handcuffs and all . . . ."

"What on earth did you do! To earn it, I mean?"

"Slapped his face."

"That's all!"

"With Harry Rattery that's too much. Watch it, kid! But the training will help. I'll whip you into the desired pattern. Quite literally!"

"Grace," the captive girl searched for the right words. "Why won't you let me go? You could set me free. So easily . . . ."

"There are a lot of 'why's' about your imprisonment. You can answer them as well as I can."

"It's for life, isn't it? He'll never let me go?"

"I can't begin to answer that one. You'll have to ask Harry."

"Please let me go! Please . . . ! While he's not here. You could! Oh, can't you understand! It's my life I'm pleading for. I don't want to spend it locked in a cage."

"No, I won't let you go. And from now on, every time you ask you'll be punished. Forget it. I'd think you'd be thankful for the cage. Must be easier to take than the Bar-B."

"I'm sorry. You're right. But it's claustrophobic. Perhaps I'll get used to it." Gail was anxious to placate.

Laughing, Grace retrieved the tray. "Get used to it, honey. I've got the key. But if I use it you'll smart. Your training includes looking sweet behind the bars. Practice. You're a natural."

The girl in the cage looked doubtfully at the closing door. It thudded shut with an eloquent finality. On the basis of first things first she went to work with the dressings on her brand. The handcuffs imposed a challenge when it came time to wind the bandage. But, using both hands and teeth, she achieved a result of which she was proud. The neat white band upon her thigh seemed a feminine badge of distinction. A further search beneath the trap in the floor disclosed a small hand bowl and a faucet. She could wash and she could drink. There were even towels. She longed to knot one about her loins. But did not dare.

But when all was done, she remained a naked girl in a cage. She made herself as comfortable as she could upon her blanket and considered her plight. Except for the ache of the brand, she did not hurt. That was something! Apart from the bandaging, the handcuffs did not matter. She could wear them as bracelets. That they were joined mattered not within the cage. Outside the bars they would deter resistance. Handcuffs, for Gail, were an understandable facility of her slavery. She would wear them without protest. For the rest, she could see only that she had exchanged Ma Billings for Grace, and Harry Rattery for the Congressman. The cage was better than the Bar-B barn inasmuch as, in the barn, she was tied or punished, in the cage she was relatively free. But she reserved judgement on the cage. It had a quality all its own. It had a power over her that she sensed but could not define.

Its power grew. She found herself walking from side to side, grasping the bars and pressing her face between them as though there was something to see. But there was nothing. Stone walls, and windows that showed only the sky. A door that might stay implacably closed. She was a caged thing, quite alone. She thought of all the living things that were kept in cages all their lives. She was ready to weep for them and for herself. Surely they could not feel the oppression of their small latticed prison as she was feeling hers! But supposing they did . . . !

Walk and sit; walk and sit! Press against the bars or ignore them. Dream . . . let her thoughts wander! But to what end! She wanted only freedom. The steel upon her wrists and the steel of her cage made a mockery of freedom. It was like wishing you had a million dollars. She examined hope. For naked girls in cages, in dungeons or in chains, hope is the cruelest thing of all. Hope is those few dry crusts that prolong starvation. It denies you but will not die. It beckons tantalizingly as a mirage in the desert of captivity. For Gail, hope had been sustained by Neil, and Dulcie, and an occasional kindly glint in Ma. Billings eye. Now Grace would nourish it with a pleasant smile and a cultivated voice.

There was no hope!

It was a long, long afternoon. When the light slowly waned, the captive girl was forced to face a thing she feared. She passionately wanted Grace to come. But Grace would not. She was getting hungry. But there would be no food. She did not want to be alone through the dark hours. But she would be alone. She would huddle

upon the blanket within her cage, and when the new day dawned she would still be there, the cuffs upon her wrists, gazing with fading hope at a door that did not open. Slowly the potency of the cage seeped into her being. Grace had said it doubled for the whip. Gail understood. Miserably, she knew that if she was now offered a choice she would buy her freedom from the cage with stripes. But there was no choice. The cage possessed her.

Time had become nebulous. The hours were lost to her. She would never know the time. The hours of darkness or of light would be her only divisions of the day. She was captive within a vacuum. Gail told herself it did not matter. Even if she could number each hour, none would have significance. The time at which she be fed was of another's choosing and might never be the same. But to be so adrift was frightening. Time was one more anchor she had lost.

She slept when darkness came. Fitfully, strangely conscious of the cage. In the moments when she woke she tried not to look beyond the bars. There were ghosts in the black shadows. The bars would hold her secure, but would not hold the demons of the dark at bay. She buried her face in her naked arms seeking sanctuary. How small a weapon of defense was sleep!

Daylight brought both hunger and fear. The previous day had provided only the one meal. Evidently hunger was a part of being in the cage. To keep her hungry was a deliberate act. She supposed it was to keep her humble and anxious to please. The fear grew with the daylight. Each hour the door remained shut made it seem less likely that it would ever open. She knew, cringingly, that it did not have to open. Grace could feed her every second day, or every third day, or not at all. Grace could leave her in the cage alone with her thoughts, her fears and her hunger. Gail glimpsed herself becoming amenable to anything. Her need to get out of the confined yet airy space was becoming compulsive.

"Sad feeling, isn't it, honey!" Grace's amused voice came from a door opened silently while the prisoner's eyes had been elsewhere.

Gail was ashamed of her eager thankfulness. Life had returned. Grace brought hope as well as food. Her instinct was to voice her thankfulness. But prudence intervened. Best not be too abject too soon. But she ate with zest. Hunger brought no shame.

"Want to get out of the cage, honey?" Grace asked casually.

Gail sensed the question did not herald release. But she played the game. "Yes!" She made the one word as emphatic as she could.

"You know you're not going to, don't you?"

"I know." Her admission was grudging. Grace was having fun. Over the coffee cup her eyes sought the woman who held the key. "Why are you keeping me in here? If you let me out I'll be obedient. I'll do whatever you tell me."

Grace leaned against the bars, looking in as a prisoner looks out. "There are subtleties about being a slave girl that I'm sure you've glimpsed," she said cheerfully. "You've just offered your all. But it has no market value. It's not really yours to give. You are a piece of valuable merchandise being polished and improved. You won't enjoy the polishing, but you're not supposed to."

"If you leave me in here long enough I'll start getting queer in the head."

"We tell ourselves that. But it doesn't happen. Remember, I know."

Gail looked up at the soft quiet eyes. "Were you left alone like this? All day?"

Grace laughed ruefully in retrospect. "Harry was an absolute bastard. I never knew. He'd leave me a day, or even several days. I thought I'd go crazy once, it was so long. When he showed up I did everything, pleaded and begged and got on my knees. But he just smiled at me as though I was an interesting specimen. Another day he'd be in here half the time talking. But he always kept me hungry. Being hungry does something to a girl. Makes us realize our dependence on the holy male, I suppose."

"Do you have to keep me hungry?" Gail looked up pleadingly over the last morsel of her food.

"Of course! It's part of the cage. It has its effect. Can't you tell?"

Gail could tell. "Please let me out for five minutes," she asked spontaneously.

"Doesn't seem much to ask, I know, honey," Grace mused. "I used

to ask Harry all the time. But it breaks the chain. Undoes the work already accomplished." She laughed reflectively. "I even asked to be taken out and whipped, or hurt in some other way. Anything at all so long as I could stretch my legs and not see things through bars."

"Take me out and whip me please!" It was a cry of agony.

Grace tensed. She studied her prisoner intently. Gail's plea had touched her. Perhaps she remembered . . . .

"Alright," she said without emphasis. "If it means that much to you. Are you sure it does?"

Gail was suddenly not sure at all. Why add pain, probably quite terrible pain, to the isolation of the cage! But she had asked, and her wish had been granted . . . .

"Thank you, Grace." Her words were humble and sincere. She would show neither weakness or ingratitude. That she was prepared to pay a most terrible price for a few minutes beyond the bars was irrelevant.

"I'll hurt you, you know. I won't play at it?"

"Of course! Why not! That's always the deal, isn't it."

"You're handcuffed. But you can still act up. Are you going to?"

"No. Honest! It would be silly. I couldn't win."

"I'll cane your bottom."

Gail shrugged. "Whatever you wish, Grace."

"You're a cool one, honey." The older girl's voice held interest. "If it was not for all those marks on you I'd suppose you didn't know what you were letting yourself in for."

Gail returned a wry grin. "You'll tie me, won't you please? I'm not very good at standing still while . . . while it happens."

Once more, quite suddenly, they were two girls together laughing at incongruity. There was a warm complicity in the opening of the door.

Stepping through the aperture was unreal. Gail could scarcely believe it was happening. "If it wasn't for my handcuffs I'd hug you, Grace." The declaration was real, without affectation.

Suddenly the captive hands were raised and a sleek head inserted itself between the prisoned arms. "I can hug you, sweetheart," Grace assured her captive ardently. She proceeded to do so. Lips met lips in an unsuspected hunger, assuaging a loneliness deep within each female heart. Their kisses went on and on. Gail's chained hands fought to clutch and hold in frantic joy.

"You are still going to be whipped, honeypot," Grace's lips whispered into the pink ear they were nibbling.

"I know. It doesn't matter. I'm . . . I'm glad." At that moment the naked girl wanted only the woman in her grasp, and whatever things that woman might do to her. Over a soft shoulder she beheld the empty cage. It looked defeated.

"You know why I'm going to do it, don't you, darling?" The whisper held mischief.

"Of course. It's because you want to. Why not!" Gail asked happily.

"I'll love whipping you. I'm ashamed." Grace was not ashamed at all.

"Don't be," Gail giggled. "Everybody else has. You might as well. Besides, it's s small thing to pay for getting out of that damn cage. Will you let me out regularly?"

Grace's arms tightened about the slender nakedness. "When I'm through with you today you won't ask that."

Gail closed her mind. She wanted to think of nothing beyond that moment. Her need of human communion was so great that cages and whips seemed as nothing compared to the reality of being held and feeling the warmth of lips against her own.

"Harry's thought of everything." There was half an apology in Grace's deprecating laugh. "You put those cute little ankles in the circles."

From the vantage point of her cage Gail had been aware of objects as fixtures of the larger stone chamber. The purpose of most was obvious enough. They were implicit to her condition as was the cage itself. She accepted them as no more than to be expected. She viewed, now, the neat metal facility bolted to the floor. Its leather strap was obviously awaiting her. Its purpose left her more curious than afraid. Obeying Grace's injunction she placed her ankles as directed and watched as they were tightly strapped and buckled by deft strong fingers.

It was beautifully simple. The small frame held her feet six inches apart so that she stood. And that was all she would do: stand. She was, in actuality, rooted to the floor. "I'm not going anywhere, am I," she conceded ruefully. "It's a neat idea."

"Nice for our first time," Grace agreed. "I could fasten you in all sorts of ways. Some of 'em so you couldn't even wiggle. But standing there with just the ankle clamps and handcuffs you can hold on to as much dignity as you feel you want to. Comfy?"

"I suppose I am," Gail admitted wonderingly. "Do you want me to just stand like this to have my bottom caned? Or do I bend over?"

"We'll do both. We may as well make a fun thing of it, even if it does hurt you shockingly."

"And afterwards, do I have to go back in the cage?"

"Of course! Remember my warning, darling. Don't plead."

"I won't. I promise." Gail forgot her claustrophobia in this fresh glory of someone to talk to. That that someone was about to give her exquisite pain seemed curiously unimportant.

From a cupboard, Grace produced the implement she would use to punish the naked helplessness that stood so straight and unconcerned. With an impish grin she handed it to the waiting girl. "It's going to kiss your bottom, sweetheart. The least you can do is return the compliment."

Gail took the slender springy length in her chained hands. Her eyes glinting mischief at the watching woman. She raised it to her lips and kissed it lingeringly. Awkwardly with her joined hands she made it cut the air and whine. With a moue of distaste she returned it to the

waiting hand that would use it to stripe her flesh. The two girls smiled at each other in an infinite wisdom. They were female.

In darkness we seek the light. In agony the dark is kind. We seek it that others shall not see our pain, and because, within its shroud, we will not watch the thing we fear. Gail buried her face in her hands as the cane she had kissed whirred its knifing of the air to find her flesh.

She took the first two strokes without a sound. She bent and twisted under the impacts, but managed not to cry aloud. Handcuffed, she could shield nothing. But she was grateful for her hands. It was a new sensation that they be relatively free while she was whipped. But her feet were lost to her. She could not move from where she stood. That, too, was strange. Her fettering was ingenious and imaginative. The cane bit at her cruelly. She knew she would not long be stoic.

"You're quite delightful, you lovely honeypot." Grace lowered her cane and examined its work. "You mark beautifully, Gail. I wish you could see your stripes. They're coming up wonderfully."

Gail came out from behind her hands. She was pale and her breathing was uncertain. She was close to tears. But, as something to be shared, she twisted and turned to see as much of her punished bottom as is ever possible for its owner to behold without the aid of a mirror. What she could see, coupled with what she could feel, assured her the total effect must indeed be something to exclaim over.

"Now, how about touching your toes for a few, darling?"

"That's an order, isn't it?" the captive asked sadly. "You do know, don't you? It hurts twice as much bent over."

"It does indeed, sweetheart. I know!" Grace agreed brightly. "Now, over you go. I want a nice round tight bottom. I also want you to take the first one without a quiver or a sound. Let's test your character. After that you can howl and twist all you want. You can even straighten up. Just so long as you bend right down again."

Gail supposed it could be worse. But not much. Grace was hitting her expertly and hard. To remain without response for even one stroke was a Herculean task. She clenched her teeth and bent forward to greet her fettered feet with her fastened hands. Almost instantly her world shattered into a myriad sensations. All awful. All

unbearable. For moments she was consumed and destroyed. But she did not move. She made no sound save for the breaths indrawn and exhaled through flaring nostrils. She waited impatiently for the next that she might scream.

"You're quite wonderful, darling. And, incidentally, you may stand up." Grace was breathing fast. She was excited.

Gail had lost count. It was not until Grace's words impinged her consciousness that she understood the cessation of the scalding inflictions on her bottom. Gratefully, she straightened. Then, pathetically and in futility tried to touch her wounds. Failing in this instinctive motion she apologetically met Grace's quizzical gaze.

"I'm sorry . . . ! About the noise . . . I always do it. I can't help it. Maybe you should gag me." She smiled winsomely as though a gag was a welcome trifle.

Grace kissed her with a deep sensual enjoyment. "You are quite something, honeypot. I shouldn't have started this. I don't want to stop. How much can you stand?"

"I don't know." Gail managed a pale giggle. "Do you have to hit me so hard? I mean, is there some sort of standard you have to live up to? Gee, it hurts!"

"Harry and I talked about that," Grace told her. "He says that if you don't do it right why do it at all." She shrugged resignedly. "I didn't have much to say about it since I was on the receiving end. But yes, I suppose it's a policy of the house. Sorry, Sweetheart." She looked shrewdly at her captive. "Think you'll want to get out of your cage tomorrow?"

Gail found the question easy to answer. "Right now the answer is no," she admitted. "But I'm scared in that cage. Tomorrow I'll want out. I'm almost sure of it." She looked at her Mistress pathetically. "Couldn't you come and see me sometimes? Must I be left all alone and hungry?"

"House rules again, honey. I'm not an unfaithful servant. I do what I'm told. I'm brainwashed, I suppose . . . ."

"What will he . . . I mean, Harry Battery, do with me when he comes back?"

"What will men ever do with a girl! We both can think of two things. Probably I shouldn't mark your skin too much after this. You belong to him. But he has a thing about that cage. He may not whip you at all. He may just stand and feast his eyes. You look damn sweet in there. I can sort of understand how he feels."

"It's true, isn't it! I could be in there for always?" Gail's handcuffed hands flew to her lips as though stifling a cry of desolation.

There was a touch of cynicism in Grace's chuckle. "I wouldn't worry too much. If Harry looks at you naked in that cage long enough he'll take you out and do things to you that may make you wish you were back in there. All joking apart, Honey, if it wasn't for boredom that cage would be a good place to be. I sometimes wish I was back in there myself. And now, darling, are you going to watch me hit you, or are you going to politely look the other way?"

Gail politely looked the other way.

It hurt just as much.

It was an awkward moment for both when the strap was loosened from the slim ankles. Gail kicked in experimental relief and again tried to reach her flaming bottom. But between them was the cage. Gail knew she should resolutely march into it without waiting for the order. But it was the last thing she wished to do. Grace held the reins of authority. The captive treasured every moment she could squeeze from her jailer's tolerance. They looked at each other and grinned.

"O.K. Honeypot." Unmistakably it was the dread command.

Gail could not end it easily. Her handcuffs impeding an attempted embrace, she did manage to kiss the woman who had whipped her in kindness. How strange to be grateful for a thrashing! But a slave girl's life is all anomaly. She was deeply grateful for what she had found and been given in this time beyond the bars. Grace hugged her soundly and with fervour. "Get back in there, honeypot, before I do something I'll be sorry for." She gave her charge a gentle push.

The act of stepping through the door was one Gail would always remember. It was as though the daylight was quenched, as though all hope had been left behind, as though she would never again feel the touch of lips and tender hands. She told herself manfully that she was

being fanciful. But within the bright chamber and within the bright and shining cage the light had dimmed. The captive stood disconsolately and watched Grace close and lock the door. She looked at her chained wrists and at the surrounding bars. She watched the woman who was now her only friend go to the door and close it behind her with a soft thud. Gail sat upon her blanket and wept. Wept with a bitterness beyond the power of the whip. She belonged to the Cage. It possessed her. She would never, never escape!

Why tell of the hours and the days! They passed as all things pass. Gail could never believe they would. But they did. Naked in her cage, with the handcuffs firmly clamped upon her wrists, she fought her battles with loneliness, with hunger and with fear. Through it all she came to love the woman who kept her there. So strange a love! So inverse an emotion! But such is slavery! Gail was a slave girl. Throughout her days within the silver cage, she came to know it as she could know it in no other way. Perhaps, within the omnipotence of those who owned her, the Cage made sense. It held and moulded her.

Between the captive girl and the woman called Grace there grew a rapport. Both were lonely. Both in separate ways were owned. Despite desperate pleas that grew in intensity day by day, Grace refused to again whip or cane the girl in the cage. The door was not again opened. Grace feared herself and the temptations of her captive's scented flesh. Or perhaps it was her Master's anger that she feared. But whatever it was the door remained closed, and the naked girl within the bars had to be content with the press of lips between the bars, the touch of a questing hand, or the feel of breast against breast as the cage separated them. The Cage won every battle and every round.

But the awareness that grew between them told Gail of the final day. Not necessarily that she would leave her cage, but that Harry Rattery would return to claim that for which he had paid so high a price. Gail wondered, bitterly, if her rectum had shrunk back to normal from lack of use. She would soon know. If it had, she would probably be whipped. All disappointments are a slave's fault. There are no extenuations.

Grace saw no reason to keep her captive uninformed. Before the day itself she told Gail of their Master's return. On the morrow it might be he who carried in the tray. Gail reflected he would more

likely carry a whip. But she did not care. If only he did not sit and look! She did not want to be a lovebird in a cage.

The naked handcuffed girl cherished her own laughter at the absurdity of her excitement. By no stretch of her imagination could Battery's return bring aught else but stripes upon her skin or shame upon her psyche. Yet she welcomed him. She supposed that this, too, was the function of her silver cage. It made the little bird within its bars so very grateful, grateful for anything. She was hungry for food and for change. She watched the door. She watched the door as though its opening meant freedom instead of a deeper slavery.

Dulcie was naked. Dulcie was bewildered. Dulcie was far from home. Dulcie was handcuffed, hands behind her back. Whoever had propelled her within the chamber pulled tight the door behind the shrinking teenager's back. Dulcie looked about her with an infinite astonishment. An amazement more than shared by the girl inside the cage. When their eyes met and locked, the newcomer uttered a cry of joy and of relief that gladdened the captive's heart.

"Gail! How come? Why!"

Gail told her.

The teenager clutched the bars as though as anxious to enter within them as was the caged girl to get out. "I knew you'd gone, but I didn't know how," she panted. "Oh Gail! You look darling in there!"

"I don't feel darling. How on Earth did you get here?"

Dulcie grinned imperturbably. '1 told you I'd get away. It worked out sorta' funny." She giggled. "I propositioned Harry. He went and told Pa. Know what Pa said?"

Gail shook her head.

"Pa said for him to take me and whale the daylights out of me until I grow up." She giggled again. "That's what he's been doing."

Gail saw, now, that which she had not noticed. The teenager's skin was plentifully coloured by the marks of cane and whip. It might have been supposed such striations would have dampened her ardour for escape from the Bar-B Ranch. But her sparkling eyes and excitement belied the premise.

"But where have you been? Are you a prisoner?" Gail was nonplussed.

Dulcie turned her back and wiggled her chained hands. "I suppose I'm some sort of prisoner," she conceded carelessly. She turned back to the cage, eyes glowing. "That Harry Rattery! He does the damndest things with these handcuffs. He's had me fixed more ways than Friday. But mostly he shows me a bang-up time."

Gail's question must have shown in her eyes. Dulcie produced more giggles. "Oh sure, he screws me! That's what you want to know, I can tell. Super-dooper, ain't he!"

Gail was about to make an icy retort, but thought better of it. Curiosity, however, triumphed. "Where . . . how —" She broke off in confusion.

But the teenage captive was impervious to shock or shame. She laughed delightedly. "He calls me his cunt kid. He tried in back, but Ma never fixed me the way she done you, so it didn't work too good. Harry's awful anxious to get at you. He likes you. He thinks you're something special." Again the giggle. "I'm pretty sure he's going to give you a real bad time." Dulcie took a quick glance at the cage. "I say, can't you get out of that thing?"

"You don't think I'd be in here if I could," Gail said bitterly.

The youthful visitor walked the circumference of the silver prison, eyeing all she saw with obvious approval. "You really look cute in there, Gail. I think it's sweet. Why are you handcuffed?"

"Why are you!" Gail exclaimed cynically. "We are handcuffed to keep us in a proper frame of mind."

Both girls turned, startled. Harry Rattery entered. He wore a wide smile and carried a tray. With incredulous amusement he watched Gail attack her daily meal. "You always that hungry?" he inquired.

"Why wouldn't I be! You left orders to starve me. Please let me out of this cage."

"Well, that's a fine welcome! Ain't you glad to see me?"

"I would be if you let me out and fed me regularly."

"How about I whip your ass?"

Gail shrugged, unconcerned. "If you have to. Just so long as I get out of this canary cage."

"You ain't going to get out, honey. Not talking that-a-way." Big Nose was back.

"Please, dear Master, let your little slave girl out of her cage so she can adore you." Gail's sarcasm was nullified by a mouthful of food.

"That's only a little better," Rattery conceded. He turned to the adoring Dulcie. "You ever aim to treat me offhand like that?"

"Take my handcuffs off, Harry, and I'll treat you real good," Dulcie promised without shame.

"See what I mean?" Rattery demanded of Gail.

"She's got enough whip marks to say yes to anything." The eating girl was unimpressed.

"Maybe you need a few, honey?"

"I'm sure I'll get them. Part of the curriculum, I understand." Gail speared a potato. "Forgive me for starving. That's been part of the curriculum, too."

"There's a lot of that there curriculum you ain't even seen, honey," Harry Rattery assured her darkly. He opened the cage door and motioned to the wide-eyed Dulcie. "In you get, kid."

Obviously intrigued as though given a privilege, the teenager stepped daintily through the aperture. Stopping beside her owner, she asked, archly, "Aren't you going to take off these lousy handcuffs, lover boy?"

Rattery slapped her bottom. "No, I'm not. Get in there. Some short rations would do you no harm."

Dulcie stepped beside the eating incumbent. She turned saucily and stuck out her tongue at the grinning Harry. "There! I don't care!

I like handcuffs. And anyway, it's her you've come to whip, not me."

Harry good humouredly ignored the pert youngster who was so obviously unafraid of him. He beckoned to Gail. "This way, honey."

"You wanted to get out of that cage." He made to shut the door.

"Oh alright!" Gail abandoned the last of her food and dived for the narrow space. After her the door slammed and the lock clicked. Dulcie was caged. Gail managed a reasonably genuine smile for the man whose bidding she must now do. Without being told, she walked to the clamps and placed her ankles within their circles. "I expect this is it, isn't it?" she asked diffidently.

Rattery was pleased. "Guess you were just hungry," he conceded. "Doing much better now. Not that one, honey, those there."

Gail followed his gesture. Close by there was not one, but two, of the restraints. These were made for individual feet. Without a word she changed places, placing her ankles where they would be fastened. Blushingly, she realized she was widely straddled. Trust a man! Shamed, she watched the straps clutch and tighten until she could not move from the obscene posture. Rattery must have enjoyed her whipping in the barn. Her silky triangle was now again similarly exposed. It would be beastly to suffer while Dulcie watched. Docile, she extended her cuffed wrists for whatever he wished to do with them.

"They're O.K. honey. Leave 'em be." He was grinning with a vast enjoyment at her confusion.

Suddenly Gail understood. Her cheeks that had been pink now flamed scarlet. "Oh no! Please, no. Not in front of −"

"Nothing the kid hasn't seen before, honeybunch," Big Nose consoled. "Fact is she's sorta' interested."

"You've promised her . . . !" Gail accused. It was taking all her will power to refrain from covering her sex with her joined hands. "But, please! What about me? It's horrible."

"Well then, what d'you say to the cage for a month with meals twice a week, sweetheart? Would you like that better?"

The helpless naked girl looked at the male who held the power. He owned her. He could do what he liked. He was watching, with undisguised amusement, the emotions flit across her face. She glared in fury and shame, but said no word. She bent forward and touched her toes. It was only when she had shut her eyes that she heard the metallic zing of a zipper thrust down all the way. She clenched her teeth. She knew her posture perfect. All she had to do was think of something else and to pretend that Dulcie was not there.

When the act had been done, and then done again, Gail lethargically straightened up from the obscenity of the bend into the equal obscenity of the stretch. She covered her burning face with her linked hands and waited for the whip. But it did not come. Her feet were freed. She was put back in the cage. A replete Harry Rattery took the tray and left his female playthings to watch his departure through the bars. It was suddenly very quiet. The huge chamber seemed empty.

There was little to be said. Dulcie saw the misery on her companion's face, and refrained from comment. Soon the clutch of the cage imposed its cold hand upon the youngster's equanimity. Rising to her feet she made the small round of their prison. With her hands cuffed behind her back she could not clutch the bars. Instead, she pressed her body and her face against them as though to test their substance. Then, satisfied that she was caged, she sank once more to share the blanket with the girl who had watched her exploration with a wry amusement. They grinned companionably, unwilling to voice fear.

"He handcuffs one of my wrists to his bed every night," Dulcie volunteered brightly as though to fill an awkward conversational gap. "Sometimes it's to the rail so I can be in bed with him. Sometimes it's to one of the legs so I have to sleep on the floor. When he does that I'm never sure whether he'll give me a blanket or not. I'm not allowed to ask. I mustn't ask for things that really matter."

"If you do, he whips you?" Gail asked.

"Oh sure! I suppose that's the deal, isn't it? I've got to behave."

"But your parents! They're willing to let him own you?" Gail was horrified.

The youngster managed a chuckle. "Well, they ain't all that

concerned. You know that. But Harry and me ain't about to tell 'em he shoves it into me. They probably figure he does anyway. I'm sure if I beefed I'd get whaled from all directions."

"Were they angry about him abducting me?" Gail was genuinely curious.

"Yeah, 'specially Ma. But Pa got that there cheque, and Rattery can do him a bit of good in business. You know how it is."

"They aren't likely to come and rescue us?"

"Hell, no! Harry's got himself a couple of what he calls 'little fillies,' and that's the end of it."

"But for how long? When do you go back to the Ranch?"

Dulcie shrugged without concern. "Dunno'. Maybe never. Harry's got dough. He can look after me."

"Like a pet kitten, you mean?" Gail was aghast.

"That's what you are," the youngster pointed out demurely. "I wouldn't bet either of us would ever get free. You thought about that?"

"All the time. It scares me. We're so damn helpless. Look at us now, locked in this cage. Both of us handcuffed. We don't have a chance."

Dulcie digested the thought. "It's been sorta' strange with me," she confided slowly. "Harry's been hauling me around the country while he does his business. Mostly he keeps me handcuffed and naked. But sometimes he lets me dress. Two different times he takes off my handcuffs, gives me clothes and gives me money and, sweet as pie, tells me I can go home or anywhere else I please. No strings. Free as a bird. It was quite a lot of money, too. Not just a couple of hundred." She wrinkled her brows in retrospect and made an apologetic grimace. "I didn't go anywhere. I can't tell you why. But I didn't . . . ."

Again the silence. Gail could understand the teen-age child clinging to the stability of the man, the male with money. "Have you regretted not running?" she asked.

"Have I ever! But I don't mean all the time!" Dulcie hastily

amended. "When he's whipping me or hurting me some other way. He tied me up and hung me by my wrists once, that sort of thing. But when it's over I know I wouldn't run even if I got another chance." She mused silently, then continued hesitantly. "It's funny about the whip. Afterwards, you don't seem to mind. It makes me horny as blazes."

"Think he'll offer me the chance?" Gail asked bleakly.

Dulcie's look of compassion was sufficient answer. "Could be we're both in the same boat," she confessed slowly. "But I'm pretty sure Harry's going to hang on to you. He likes you, and you're valuable. I heard some talk. If he ever got tired of you he could sell you for one hell of a lot of money, probably more than he paid." She paused and grinned wryly at sight of something Gail had glimpsed long since, "Seems like us girls is awful expensive. You know, luxury goods."

"I wish I was a man," Gail sighed wistfully.

"I don't!" Dulcie proclaimed emphatically. "Think of having to make all that money! Us girls got it good." She looked around speculatively, "I bet this cage we're in cost a fortune." She sobered suddenly. "Think we'll ever get out of it?"

"Does it frighten you?" Gail was curious.

The younger girl considered. "Yes," she said slowly. "It's worse than a room or a cupboard or something. Maybe because it's so small." She groped for expression. "I'm already believing I'll never get out. It would be easy to figure that Harry would never have spent all this dough for just a coupla' days. Birds never get out of cages."

They would have touched if they had possessed their hands.

"I wasn't all that nice to you back at the Ranch," Dulcie offered tentatively.

"Nobody was. You were as nice as any of them."

"What with Ma the way she is it all come sorta' natural." Dulcie was apologetic. "You never got nothing worse than I did, 'cept for the men. Pa was the only one ever whaled me."

"You mean your Ma actually tied you in the barn and out in the

trees the way she did me?"

"Sure! Ma got a kick outa' it. Not much I could do. After I got used to it I didn't really mind." Dulcie grinned at a memory. "That boy, Neil ever find you?"

Gail blushed. "Yes. What's his story? Why wouldn't he help me?"

" 'Spose I'm the story," Dulcie confessed ruefully. "He's nice. I'll never forget how shocked he was that first time. He had me untied before I could stop him. He never did get me tied back the same way. Ma raised the roof. She tied me in the barn for the night and wore out four switches on my bum." She paused, thinking back. "It's awful, ain't it, not to be able to move, and hurting, and knowing nobody ain't going to come."

"Your mother, did that to you?"

"Well, you know Ma." Dulcie produced her giggle. "She may even have thought it done me good. Anyways, a couple of days later she took me back out to the tree. This time she was going to fox whoever it was that had let me loose. She used the handcuffs. You know, you put your arms 'round the trunk like you loved the damn thing, and she handcuffs your hands the other side. You stand there having a love affair with a tree. I was naked. Trust Ma for that. Poor Neil! I thought he'd flip. Gosh! I wish I got that big a charge outa' seeing a guy without his clothes. I had three things he wasn't suppose to see. So he kept looking at 'em, even though he tried not to.

"He'd been coming every day, hoping I'd be there. Boys like to play the big hero bit. But when he saw the handcuffs it was a bit of a let down: No key, no hero! But he come up with something I was nutty enough to fall for. We was to put an end to Ma's fun and games once and for all. He goes dashing off to get some tools." The erstwhile damsel in distress grinned reminiscently, "I wish we had them tools right now. Wasn't no time before them handcuffs were twisted and cut up and Neil and me was on our way to his home. It wasn't far.

"His folks' name was Horton. His Ma was nice. She managed the shock of seeing me in Neil's sweater and nothing else, but was concerned as all get out when she gets the whole story. Wouldn't hear of nothing but that little Dulcie trot right back home to Ma. When I got it figured, I could see there wasn't no way the Hortons were going to get in dutch with Congressman Billings. Right about then I'd have

given all I had to be back rubbing my little twat against that tree. I even felt mad at Neil for wanting to be a hero. All he'd get was an argument, but I couldn't bear to think what would happen to me.

"Ma gimmie what she called the three-day treatment, a day hanging up by my wrists, a day in that lousy hog crate, and a day spread out on my bed so I couldn't even twitch. Before and after and in between she wore out enough switches on me I thought I'd never get my skin back," Dulcie chuckled ruefully. "Ma even went over to the Hortons' and made 'em pay her for the handcuffs Neil had buggered up getting me loose."

They exchanged rueful glances of commiseration. Two girls naked in a cage, sharing a common pain. Owned. Each knew the other would have clasped them in a feminine embrace. But the wearing of handcuffs is not conducive to such intimacies. Gail kissed the youngster who suddenly seemed warm and appealing and lost. Surely this exuberant child would not be compelled to share the same lifetime of servitude in which she was held! Yet they were together in the cage! The cage would take the child as it had the girl.

When Grace came, she carried no tray, nor did she smile. Seeing her, the captives instantly knew something was wrong. An electric tension followed her as an aura. She carried an unmistakable air of purpose. Without a word, she unlocked the cage door. The wondering girls emerged and stood, waiting and obedient to instruction. There was none. Instead, the older woman freed their wrists of the handcuffs and eyed them enigmatically. Her voice was sombre.

"I haven't minded you," she spoke to Gail. "But this poor damn kid is one too many." She turned to the wide-eyed Dulcie, "You're too young, child. Sure, I know Harry's jollied you along. You've been having a ball. But it wouldn't last. I'm bailing you out."

"I don't want to be bailed out," Dulcie protested sullenly. She showed no gratitude for her freed wrists which she was massaging tenderly.

Gail was tense with a wild hope, an incredible surmise. Seeking Grace's eyes, she found in them a confirmation of her most ardent dream. "I'm setting you free," Grace told her quietly, but there was no joy in her voice.

The silence was brief, but heavily charged. The mind of each of the trio was vivid with the implications of this act which would change their lives. Yet only Gail knew exaltation. A brilliant sunshine of hope and gratitude irradiated her world. Freedom . . . !

"Harry pushes too hard," Grace offered in explanation. "Probably I'll regret what I'm doing, so let's get it over with. I want you both gone. He won't be back for a few hours. I'll give you clothes, money and a car. This way . . . ."

It was like a dream, urgent, passionate, every moment vital. The three females used few words. There was no need. Dulcie's plaints were stilled by the manner and purpose of her older companions. For both the stakes were high. She sensed that, for them, this was a game she had best not disrupt.

It did not take long. When the car keys were placed in Gail's trembling hand she felt a surge of compassion for the woman who placed them there. Each could plainly read in the features of the other the compelling emotions that made the moment possible. Gail took her savior's hand and gripped it. Then, in a moment of deep and compulsive sympathy, flung her arms around Grace's neck and whispered in a choked voice, "Thank you. Oh, thank you!" Both women were close to tears. Even Dulcie was subdued.

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Fate was kind. It took them to the state line without incident. It even took them a couple of miles beyond before the flat tire brought them to a halt. But it was no tragedy. Gail's heart still sang with the glory of release as she and her less enthused companion sought the spare and the jack. Her spirit's song was a reiteration: Free, free, free!

"What the devil am I going to do?" Dulcie wondered aloud as she, willingly and competently worked at nuts and bolts.

It had been the essence of their conversation during the drive. The last refuge the youngster wished to seek was the Bar-B Ranch. "You'd better stay with me," Gail told her with decision. I can easily look after you until you decide what's best to do." She heaved the spare out onto the pavement.

They worked at the dusty disagreeable job in silence. Passing cars, noting their competence, did not stop. Gail hurried, not so much

from urgency, but still under the momentum of escape. Until she got back to the home she had left three months previously, she would be a fugitive. Excitedly she kept thinking of the state line and the wonderful moment of crossing it. Prison doors are not always of metal or of wood! So intent were they upon their task that they did not notice the car that drifted silently beside them until it stopped. When she looked up from the costive wheel, Gail's heart was clutched by the icy hand of fear. The car was black and white.

It had happened before. Such confrontations possess an inevitable sameness. The two officers were polite and firm, and very curious. They were principally concerned with Gail, and treated the indignant but quaking Dulcie with tolerant humour. The girls submitted to the humiliating search, hands on car roof, feet wide. But when the handcuffs came into view, Gail protested. "You're out of your jurisdiction. This is not your state."

"That's right, lady. Hands in back, please." The bored voice plainly said he could not have cared less.

"But you don't have to do that! We're not criminals."

The spokesman laughed. "Ain't the way we heard it, maam. Got you down for a two-forty and a one-eighty-nine. And there's always driving without a license."

In sudden panic Gail knew that once the shining metal was on her wrists all hope was gone. No escape, freedom lost, the glory cast into the dust. Defensively, she backed away.

"Don't need the cuffs on Miss Billings, do we?" the second officer asked casually.

"Cuff her. She's got a record for running," the spokesman said gruffly. His eyes were still warily on Gail. She sensed herself as the real quarry. Dulcie was eyeing her own captor with undisguised interest.

"Don't let him, Dulcie. I refuse to be handcuffed," Gail affirmed with a finality that sounded naive even to herself.

The officer eyed her with amused tolerance. "Lady, you want I should say please?"

Gail was close to tears. These stalwart males with their harness and

accoutrements could subdue a girl with one hand. If she ran, they could catch her. If she fought, they would hurt her and tear the clothes it had been so good to wear in the hours past. The whole tenor of her life was frustrated helplessness. For her, the word freedom represented a tenet unavailingly denied. The pink circlets upon the flesh of her wrists told of the handcuffs' long possession of her hands. Hers was no maiden shrinking from a humiliation previously unknown. It stemmed from a purely instinctive conviction that as long as her limbs were free there was hope, a hope relinquished and forever dead once the metal circlets were locked upon her wrists. A flashing mental picture of Battery's silver cage told her that these amused young men were unwittingly returning her to an imprisonment for life. Yet, how to tell them! They would never believe. She tried scorn.

"Are you afraid of us? What harm can we possibly do you!"

"Lady, there's going to be one of us and one of you in each car. You decide to get uppity when we're going down the highway and we'll end up in the ditch or a smash-up. It's just plain common sense to put the cuffs on you."

"But not behind our back!" It was a cry of agony.

The policeman was touched by her vehemence. He was, after all, but little older than she. Her female allure had an aura to which he was not impervious. Dubiously, he considered her plea and conceded. "Maam, you want 'em in front, O.K. But you'll have to wear the chain belt to keep 'em there." His voice was patient, but only just.

Gail cringed. A chain belt! She remembered pictures in the press of prisoners in transit. Even for murderesses it had seemed a degrading exhibition. She had always felt sorrow for their shame. Her whole being revolted. A chain round her middle confining her cuffed hands might be something from Ma Billings. But from these smart uniformed men! She could not bear the thought. Yet, and she understood the absurdity of it, in their shoes she would think as they did. Their point was valid. A prisoner free of all restraint was a hazard and a threat. With a weary hopelessness she turned and put her hands behind her back.

Dismally she watched as Dulcie, too, was handcuffed. It was only too evident the teenager relished the compulsion of the male hands.

She looked happier than at any time since she was put in the cage. Her eyes sparkled. For her, this was adventure.

"You take Miss Billings back with the stolen car," the spokesman directed his companion. He turned his eyes to Gail. "You'll come with me in the black and white." She could have sworn she detected pity in his voice.

When they were in motion, Gail arranged herself for comfort as she had done once before with Harry Rattery when her arms had been captive behind her back. "Where do I go now?" she asked listlessly. "Is it jail this time?"

"Not exactly." He sounded embarrassed.

If it was not jail, then it had to be the Billings and the Bar-B. "Have you any idea what you are taking be back to?" she asked without hope.

"I'm not taking you back to anything, lady." His voice was firm on that point.

Gail was puzzled. There was something in his voice that boded ill. But she was still more concerned with liberty than destinations. She offered woman's oldest bribe: "You don't have to take me. You could let me go free if you wanted to. Drive up a side road and do whatever you want to with me. I'll be nice to you." Even as she said the words she felt soiled by her only weapon.

He shook his head and gave her a quick sideways glance of compassion. His voice became officially formal. "That's an offer we get from at least half the women we pick up, maam." Then, as though sharing her disappointment, he added, "Wouldn't really work that way anyhow, I could do anything I wanted to you without even taking the cuffs off. You couldn't complain. No one would listen. It's such an old ploy. You'd have paid for something you didn't get."

Gail supposed she should feel gratitude for honesty. But she would sooner have been free. "Is Congressman Billings really all this powerful?" she asked dully.

"Pretty well," the officer conceded. "We live with it. It's nothing new y'know."

"You'll let me be whipped every day for the rest of my life because he's a little tin god?" Gail asked bitterly, hoping to shock.

The man beside her shifted uneasily. "I just don't believe it's that bad," he said defensively.

"Take my clothes off, then! I'm covered in whip marks."

"Another bribe, lady?" he sneered.

Gail was about to make a tart rejoinder when she realized they were travelling in directions unfamiliar. "This isn't the way to the Bar-B!" she questioned suspiciously.

"You're not being kidnapped," he said shortly. "Don't be scared."

"But where are you taking me?"

He refused to answer. When she became demanding, he told her abruptly to desist. He drove steadily and fast into the country as though anxious to be rid of a distasteful task. When, at length, they turned into the driveway, a discreet but clearly legible sign told the captive all she needed to know: "State Prison Farm For Women." It was terse and to the point and very frightening.

Gail was formally delivered as one live female body. She was accepted by a large fat man behind a desk. He and the officer were on familiar ground. A paper was signed. "Give you any trouble, Len?" The fat man eyed his new prisoner with interest.

"She sure does argue," Len admitted. "That's all." He grinned in a shared understanding. "Nice girl. Don't treat her too rough."

"Hell boy! You know what she's here for, doncha'!"

The policeman grimaced. "That! No, no one told me. But then, why would they!" He looked at his former captive commiseratingly.

Their female prisoner quailed. There was that in their voices which made her feel expendable.

"I've never been sentenced," she affirmed stoutly.

"Dammit, she talks!" The fat man affected surprise and gave her his

full attention. "Honey, on this here farm, little girls like you don't talk 'less they're spoken to. If they do their ass gets to hurting."

Gail knew herself lost. She had heard of such places. But the heady stuff of freedom had not yet dissipated itself. She was in despair. "I have been illegally arrested in another state. I have not been tried or sentenced. I cannot be legally consigned to this place. I demand to be set free."

The fat man was vastly entertained. "You hear that, Len! Beats all, don't it."

"And take these handcuffs off me. They're not serving any useful purpose now!" She might as well die for a sheep as a lamb.

The fat man opened a drawer, rummaged and produced handcuffs which he tossed to Len. "Fair exchange, boy. Little Flossie here liable to slap my face if we let her loose."

"You've no right! Take these handcuffs off." Gail was recklessly burning bridges.

"I'll leave you to it, Andy," the officer proclaimed hastily as though anxious to disassociate himself from an awkward situation. He looked at Gail as though wishing to say something encouraging, but was forced to be content with a lame, "Good-bye, Miss. And good luck." It was obvious he had little hope for her continued well-being. He exchanged compliments with the fat man and was gone. Gail stood before the desk. She was still handcuffed. She was now desperately afraid.

"Seems like you been a real bad girl," Andy said conversationally.

"I haven't, and you know it. I haven't been convicted of anything."

The fat man sighed pleasantly. Gail could envision his enjoyment of all the women and girls who had stood as she stood now. To them he was a deity. "You ever have your ass whipped real good?" he inquired as though anxious to keep a record straight.

"Yes. You know where I've been kept prisoner."

"Honey!" he reproved. "You weren't no prisoner. You was a guest."

It was typical of her condition. She would never be allowed an identity. She was a female body. "I suppose I'm a guest here?" Her voice was desolate.

"Honey, you got the right idea."

"And, as a guest, I can expect to get my ass whipped?"

"You're doing just fine, kid."

It was all so hopeless! Gail longed to scream. A piercing keening exclamation of protest against a male world in which she was two breasts, two nipples and a vagina with some pubic hair thrown in for good measure. "Why must I be forever handcuffed?" she asked as though her curiosity was genuine.

"You know damn well why," Andy said tolerantly. "Keeps you from wondering which way to run. Saves us from having to do a Karate chop on you three times a day."

He could rationalize anything, of course. But Gail tried again. "What happens to me now? What are you going to do to me? I got the impression I'm here to be punished?"

"That you are!" the fat man agreed heartily. "We aim to give you a real bad time. We got our orders."

"Haven't you any mercy or sympathy or kindness?"

" 'Course we have, honey! Every so often one of us will give you a couple of orgasms instead o' the whip." He laughed genially. "What more can a gal' ask!"

"Is everyone here . . . I mean the girls. Are they all like me?"

Andy considered. "Damn good question," he agreed. "I'd say 'bout half of 'em. Silly little bitches didn't know which side their bread was buttered on."

"Is there anything we can do or say?"

"You mean so you can get outa' here? Not really. The guy you've been mean to sets a time for your . . . well, let's call it your education.

We do our best to help you see the light."

"You torture us?"

The fat man was unperturbed. "Them's your words, honey, and I won't deny 'em. It ain't no picnic here for a little trick like you," he guffawed coarsely. "You shoulda' said yes."

Gail had no more repartee. It was all banalities. She was here to learn a lesson. A lesson about the wish and the futility of escape. She would be brutally hurt. Perhaps she would learn the lesson. At the end of her unspecified incarceration she would be a girl without will, anxious only to obey. How much better it would have been to have resigned herself to the Bar-B, or the silver cage. In the eyes of the fat man behind the desk she beheld that which she dared not face.

He had picked up the phone and was chuckling into the receiver. "Hey Thelma, come on over. Len just delivered us the Billings dame. You know, I told you the deal. She's all yours." Still chuckling at some private knowledge he eyed his prisoner sternly. 'Thelma don't take no nonsense, honey. So take my advice and don't give her none. You're in deep enough shit without getting her mad at you. Four things to remember here: You call the Wardress, that's Thelma, Maam. You call me Sir. You do what you're told. And you don't make no complaints. If you get a sore ass I don't want to hear about it. That understood?"

"Yes sir." Gail wished herself dead. In this place she sensed a bondage beyond any previous experience.

"A pretty piece," Thelma approved. "But then what the hell else! For sure, Billings ain't picking no dogs." She gave her new possession a shrewd scrutiny. "You ready to get your little butt tanned, sugar?"

Thelma was well designed for her post. She would handle the average girl with the same ease that the policeman would have done. A short whip hung at her side, suspended from a leather belt that also supported handcuffs. The Wardress contrived a more official appearance than did her superior at the desk. Once again, the captive girl understood the logic of the handcuffs locked upon her wrists. At that moment the compulsion to resist, to make a last minute dash for freedom, to slap a leering face, was strong enough that she might have done any one of those things to her sorrow. But, handcuffed, she was safe and they were safe. How strange a set of

values a prisoner lived by!

Thelma's grip upon Gail's arm was authoritative as she led her new prisoner across the yard. "Ain't goin' to give you no heart to heart talk, gal'. You know what the deal is. I know what the deal is. We both know it ain't fair, there ain't no justice, and you don't deserve it. But that don't make no difference. You're here for a bad time, and I'm goin' to give it to you. O.K.?"

"Yes maam." The captive could think of nothing else to say.

"I ain't goin' to shoot you no line of crap, kid. Beating your butt when you ain't done nothin' to deserve it don't bother me none at all. I'll enjoy every moment. I'm a real bitch. Good natured, mind you, but still a bitch. And we got a lot of little dillies here you won't like either. I'll enjoy givin' you them, too."

"I'd like to behave, maam," Gail ventured cautiously. "I don't want to be punished."

"Come off it, kid," Thelma guffawed as at a shared joke. "Sure you behave. You'd better! But it don't help you none. 'Cept you get things twice as rough if you don't."

It was an unattractive structure, long and low. A dormitory. Rows of single cots lined each wall, an aisle down the centre.

"Bit early for the rest of the girls," Thelma said as she unlocked Gail's handcuffs. "But a bit o' extra bed won't do you no harm. Off with them clothes."

The command was inevitable. A girl to be punished was first stripped. The captive expected no less. But she parted with her clothes with the same reluctance as that first time long, long ago. They were a symbol of a freedom she no longer possessed. Whilst removing them her eyes sought the bed in curiosity. Along with the rest it held an anomaly. The beds were longer than normal. At the side of each, up towards the head, there rose a grooved metal stanchion bolting the whole solidly to the floor. Its top was perhaps eighteen inches above the level of the thin mattress. One on each side of the cot, they conveyed a sinister message to the now naked girl.

"Figured this little notion out myself," Thelma announced with pride. "Don't use it regular. Ain't none o' the girls said they liked it."

Reaching under the cot she pulled into view two shaped planks, the holes in which told their own story. She slipped one of them into the metal grooves and thrust it down hard against the mattress. "There you are, sugar. You're sleeping on your tummy tonight. You can see where to put your neck and wrists."

Gail could see all too well. She longed to protest, but was mindful of Andy's warning. It would be a bad start. She wondered if what was about to happen to her might not be as dreadful as it looked. Unhappily, she lowered her slenderness upon the bed and obediently fitted her neck in the larger circlet, pulled her hair forward beside her face, and put her already chafed wrists into the smaller apertures. Instantly the top half of the stocks was grooved and fell into place, the whole was heavily thrust down by Thelma's brawny arm; there were a couple of ominous clicks that told the naked girl she would not move from the position she was now in. She was prisoner of a simple set of neck and wrist stocks attached to a cot. Neat and effective! She wondered unhappily if it would be possible to sleep.

"Mostly you gals don't have to sleep this-a-way," Thelma explained placidly. "But the gadget's useful for special occasions and special gals'. You're a special gal."

"I can only move my feet," Gail complained politely.

"You'd be surprised, sugar," Thelma said helpfully. "That little ass o' your's will romp around real cute when I start lacing into it."

Gail's breathing stopped, her heart pounded. She had been more vulnerable. But she had never felt more vulnerable. It was a frightening sensation to look down at the mattress a few inches away, yet be unable to see what might be done to her. With neck and wrists snugly and cruelly held as they now were, she could make no effective motion. Now, to be whipped! Why, oh why! "Must I be whipped, maam?" She fought to keep feeling from her voice.

Thelma considered. "Well, I suppose you must, sugar, since you put it that way. I got my orders to keep your little rump well marked. But apart from that, it's the custom here to give a new girl ten good ones just to get her in a proper frame of mind. Sort of an introduction. Works out real good . . . ."

The naked girl flat on the cot, head and hands held immovably in

the wooden gyves, knew panic. She was beautifully positioned for the whip. She could be cut to pieces, and who would care! This wardress woman owned her now more surely than Ma Billings had ever done. There had been stories about the State Prison Farm For Women. Stories in the press of awful things done to recalcitrant girls. They had seemed unlikely at the time. But now!

Gail knew a panicky need to plead, to try and make this insensitive woman understand the awfulness of what she was doing, to see it as an act wrong in all senses of the word. Perhaps to touch some spark of pity. She felt so small and juvenile and naked beneath the cynical eyes and the arm corded with sinew.

The thongs cut her squarely. Her hips bounced beneath the impact. She surged her shoulders against the stocks, but her only movement was the flailing of her legs and an obscene writhing of that portion of her being whipped. Agony was implicit in all.

"You done that real nice, sugar," Thelma sounded gratified. It was evident the whipping was to be a long drawn out affair. She would enjoy every stroke and every sound.

The punished girl moaned and cried her way through two more wicked slashes. She was striving desperately not to scream. She hated to hear herself scream. It was the most degrading thing of all. She could not control her instinctive movements save that when a new stroke seemed near she would try to close her legs. Even on her stomach there were secrets revealed should she spread wide her legs.

Gail jerked and gasped as a searching hand thrust itself into her soft flesh and cupped her sex. "Nice and wet," Thelma approved. "I do like a girl to get a damp cat after a few with the whip. Shows she's alive."

The naked girl had never understood why her sex should so betray her beneath the whip or the cane. She was far from joy. But it happened. She did not care. If this woman was pleased what did it matter! If her contortions had achieved sexual arousal it had come without intent or knowledge.

"I'll give you one right straight up lengthways, dear," the wardress told her victim pleasantly as though wishing them both to share everything to the full.

The lengthy stripe cut the supine girl from her shoulders to the crease of her buttocks as though seeking intimacy with every vertebra of her spine. She screamed and screamed again. Pain mingled with desolation in the hopelessness of her cries. Her legs beat a furious tattoo upon the cot.

"Lovely . . . lovely!" Thelma breathed. Her appreciation of what she heard and saw might have been likened to an adjudicator at a festival. She was a connoisseur. "How about another like that, sugar?" she asked encouragingly.

It was a terrible thing for the whipped girl to know that a right word or a wrong word could double or halve her pain. She emitted, heartbrokenly, the few words that came most easily, "Oh please! I'm sorry for anything I've done! I'm only a girl . . . only a girl," she sobbed brokenly in her anguish.

It is possible the wardress felt pity. We will never know. At least she made a change. "Tell you what, sugar, press down hard with your tits and bring your knees up under your tummy, arch your back and stick your butt up high."

For a few dazed moments Gail failed to comprehend that she was being told to do something actually possible. But the whip lash idly trailing down her backbone encouraged her to try. At the end of much shuffling and panting she was obscenely crouched as directed. Her bottom was invitingly protruded, its skin stretched so tight the pain of each cut must inevitably be doubled. Her posture was cruelly strained against the unyielding stocks.

"You make a damn pretty picture, honey. Too bad you can't take a peek." Thelma sounded genuinely pleased with her creation. She playfully tugged at a tuft of her victim's pubic hair that had strayed backwards."

"Nother thing I like 'bout you is that black fleece. I do admire a gal' who grows enough hair to hide her slit. Now, you ready to get tickled up a bit?"

"Yes maam," Gail lied.

"This way's one Hell of a lot better. Gets you off the mattress. I can give you a real wrap-around. I'm damn sorry you can't see how good you're fixed."

It was impossible to tell if the comments were well intentioned or designed to heighten suspense. The pinioned girl felt herself cringing in the wait for what was about to be done to her. The knowledge that she was not yet half way through the introductory flogging was bitter and alarming. Gail was almost choked by the outpouring of her own voice as the blows cut her taut flesh. She screamed, she pleaded, she moaned. The strokes did indeed wrap around. They marked her from hip to hip. Now she had lost the relief of threshing legs. So tightly was she tucked into a ball that she had become simply a quivering receptacle for the seeking lash. She sought unconsciousness, but it would not come.

"Don't know when I ever enjoyed a gal' more, sugar." Thelma's tribute was warm. "You and me's goin' to see lot of each other. You got a way with you, a damn pretty wiggle."

The wardress sat upon the bed beside her victim. Gail could not see her, she was held too tightly, her vision too restricted. "You stay the way you are, honeychile," Thelma ordered pleasantly. "Don't flatten out until I give the word. You're really somethin' the way you are." Firm fingers made the naked girl gasp as they followed the path of the whip upon the quivering flesh. Instinctively, with a knowledge born of the past months, Gail knew where the questing hand would end its journey. When it was thrust between her legs to find the lips that awaited it, she tensed stoically for the inevitable. "You got a beautiful wet quiff, honey. Want I should pleasure it?" Thelma asked casually.

"No thank you, maam."

"I'll do it anyway, sugar. Expect you're a bit shy." Thelma chuckled unashamedly." 'Sides I like it. That's what counts. Get just the right spot and a girl critter will gasp as good as slicin' her bum with a whip."

Gail kept silent. She endured. The fingers were highly skilled. They extracted from the helpless girl the full responses desired. She moaned and gasped most satisfyingly. She was still grappling with the aftermath of pain and pleasure when her companion left the shed.

It was some time before Gail realized she was alone. Cautiously, she relieved herself of the crouch. It felt good to lie flat again and to know that cruel eyes were not feasting on her nudity. But there was little comfort in her plight. The yoke upon her neck and wrists was

unyielding in its imposition. It was strange and frustrating to turn her prisoned head from side to side and see the small hands held neatly as though severed from the rest of her. Indeed, that was the whole effect! Behind her was a nudity with all the sensitivities and vulnerabilities of its femininity. But it was divorced from her by the stocks. Divorced from all save pain shame.

She could not tell how long she lay helpless and wondering before the big room filled with the chatter and motion of those it would house for the night. It was infuriating to lay motionless and unable to see or raises her eyes in greeting. Her ears were alert.

"Hey! We got a new one!"

"Who cares! Silly bitch shoulda' stayed at home."

"Say! Look at her tail! Thelma really went to town."

"Got a sore ass, kid?" The question was followed by a hearty slap and laughter at her wince.

A girl came into Gail's limited range of vision. A girl attired in no more than a gunny sack in which holes had been cut for arms and head. Her hair was damp from a shower. She grinned matter-of-factly as though Gail's situation was normal. "I'm the next bed. Name's Nancy. Don't feel bad about the spot you're in. We all got it. We all keep on getting it too. It's one of Thelma's favorites." Suddenly a pillow was thrust under the captive cheek. "Here, this will be better. It's lousy without a pillow."

Gail could have shed tears of gratitude. The pillow helped, as did the human voice of a fellow captive. Her thank you was heartfelt. A new exclamation reached her.

"I bet she's Congressman Billings girl. Whatsa' matter, honey? You don't want to bend over?" There, was laughter.

Gail told her story to a changing panorama of peering faces. None were shocked or surprised. The comments were revealing.

"Ain't nothing as bad as this place, kid."

"You should have let him ream your ass. Thelma will probably bung a cucumber up it."

"Wish I could sit in a cage all day. Helluva' lot easier than hoeing spuds."

"You think you got whipped! Take a look at us!" The speaker lifted her sack to reveal a bottom vividly striped. Others joined the demonstration to position themselves where the recumbent girl could see a succession of lifted sacks and welted flesh until she felt herself drowning in a sea of punished girls.

"We're all about the same age?" she queried.

There was laughter. "What you mean is we're just the right age, kid," a voice mocked cynically. "Just the right age for being screwed; and there's lots of ways a girl can get screwed, believe me! Most of us are here because we didn't do it at the right time with the right guy."

"We are all being taught to lie down and spread our legs on command," Nancy interpreted soberly. She laughed a bitter laugh. "I'd do it right now if it would get me out of here."

"But . . . but −" Gail felt herself blushing −"aren't any of the girls, I mean, aren't they −"

"You mean criminals!" Nancy laughed, coming to the rescue. "Oh sure! There's a few. They're the lucky ones. The rest of us get it really rough."

"How long do we have to stay?" To Gail this question was paramount.

Nancy shrugged resignedly. "Ain't no general rule," she admitted regretfully. "Most of us would be good little girls at the end of the first week. But it don't do no good. We are here because some bimbo is mad at us and wants us broken. Depends on the bastard that sent us here. Could be a month or a year. Probably depends on how big a hard-on he gets when he remembers us . . . if he ever does!"

A new voice interpolated. "Let's have our bit of fun with her before Thelma shows up."

"Sorry kid," Nancy explained regretfully. "It's a sort of initiation. The girls don't get much fun. They give a Rookie a bad time while she's helpless. They used to whip her, but now we don't have anything

to do it with. So they'll try and drive you wild with their fingers. You're lucky you're face down."

Gail was still digesting the information when the first fingers found her. They were not content with the most obvious centre of her vulnerability but inserted themselves beneath her breasts to tease the nipples she could not shield. Soon she was enveloped in sensation, a helpless quivering nakedness. She heard her voice moan with pleasure and plead with satiety. But the erotic play went on and on until she was limp and palpitating and distraught. She could never claim that her first evening at the State Prison Farm for Women was a bore.

They were regimented. They formed lines. They marched here and there. Ablutions, breakfast, work. All in silence. Always under the eyes of wardresses who, if they were not Thelma's twin, could have passed for it. Each wore a whip and a holstered gun. The girls treated them with immense respect. Fear was alive within the ranks.

There was a small sad feminine coterie that was forever a rearguard watched over by a single woman. Their gait was slow and hobbled because their feet were chained. These were the ones who had transgressed. Nancy explained in a hissed whisper that the shackles were the least of their discomforts.

Gail had joined the gunny sack parade. It had been tossed to her without comment. She wore it without gratitude. No one pretended that the jute garment was other than part of their punishment. It was also very easily discarded, a facility particularly appropriate to the activities of the Farm for Women.

They hoed potatoes. To a girl unused to such exercise it was extremely hard work. To any girl, it was demeaning and hard on the hands. Gail was soon sweating and feeling a kink in her back. The tempo was far from casual. No one seemed to set it. But if a girl lagged she was checked by a watchful wardress. Gail noticed that the curt reprimand instantly spurred the laggard into renewed vigor. She soon discovered why.

Inexperience coupled with a natural curiosity caused her own unwilling efforts to falter. A cheerful authoritative voice instantly made a horrendous suggestion, "How's about you shuck that there gunny sack, honeypie?"

The simple words delivered in the pseudo friendly voice were more frightening than a bellow. Here was vicious intent: the savoring of a girl's anguish. Gail turned and instinctively pleaded. "I'm sorry. I'm new. It's all so strange . . . ."

"Do tell!" The voice was still that of a next door neighbor. "Well, honey, we promise you gal's a trade, so here's your first lesson. Off with the Christian Dior."

"Are you going to whip me?" Gail quavered. She felt that surely there must be some way of halting this frightening charade.

"Why, honey, how'd you guess!" The voice held admiration for such perspicacity.

"Please! I've said I'm sorry. I will try harder."

Again the broad pleased grin as of good news shared.

"That's a big comfort to me, girlie, to hear you say them words." The commendation was warm. "Makes us old hands feel appreciated. Least we can do is help where we can. Like a bit of encouragement f"rinstance. You wouldn't want me to have to ask you to strip again, would you, child?"

What was the use! This was now her life. Far best to test what tolerance she could purchase with humility before she tried revolt. She said her humble and futile, "Thank you, maam." Then drew the hated jute over her head. Letting the shaming garment fall to the ground she stood naked for all to see. No one stopped hoeing.

The wardress unhooked from her belt, not a whip but a slender riding crop. "Thelma give your ass a good welcome yesterday, didn't she, honey?"

"Yes, maam."

"Your little butt real tender?"

"Yes, maam."

"Be sorta' a shame to whale it again now, eh?"

"Yes, maam. Thank you." Gail knew she was being played with.

"I'm a sucker for a well mannered gal'," the wardress admitted expansively. "I took a likin' to you. So I'll let your little seat have a rest. How'll it be if you hold out one of them nice little hands?"

Gail was aghast. Always a shock. Never the rational or the expected. "You are going to whip my hands?" she asked, wide eyed.

"That's right, sugar. Never mind the thanks. I know you're grateful."

"But . . . but, I have to use my hands for the hoe!"

"That's the whole idea, sugarpie. When you're hoeing them potatoes you'll appreciate a little reminder all the time 'bout keeping up the speed. See what I mean?"

"Yes . . . thank you, maam. But why have I taken off my, my sack?"

"So you can ask sassy questions, gal'. So's you can bend over and touch your toes and get a little something extra for bein' nosey."

It was no use! She could never win. Fearful of further sarcastic humor, Gail bent down and received a vicious cut that bedded itself upon Thelma's already purple work. She managed not to scream.

"That sorta' answer your questions, honey?"

"Yes. Thank you, maam." Gail straightened up apprehensively.

"And now the little hand. Palm up nice and flat." The woman made it sound like a special treat.

The scalding cut across the palm was unbelievably painful. It reduced the naked girl to a paroxysm of writhing agony that was watched by avid sparkling eyes.

"My, my! Sure is nice to see a girl what appreciates a good lick across her hand." The tribute sounded truly gratified. Unhurriedly it was followed by the inevitable request, "Now the other one, girlie. You sure do hold out a pretty little palm."

It was in Gail's mind to deny her ability to accept another such blow. But she mustered enough courage to hope that one on each

hand must surely be enough for a first time. Bravely she thrust out her arm and received another cut of agony to match the first.

"Think that'll help your speed, child?"

The punished girl straightened up out of her world of pain. "Oh yes! Oh, thank you." Her thanks were not for the strokes but their cessation. She dived to pick up the hoe with numbed hands.

"Don't forget that there dress, honey. Wouldn't want a couple more for indecency, would you!"

Blushing, the hurt girl donned the sack that hid her femaleness. She plied the hoe. But now she worked in pain.

The farm day did not run an even course. Whilst no one dared stop work when one of their fellows ran afoul of authority, there was no one of the prisoners who failed to see the succession of punishments that were doled out for delinquencies, real or imagined. The wardresses displayed a cruel and varying ingenuity. Gail cringed hollowly throughout the correction of her nearest neighbor, a slender dark haired girl accused of injuring the roots of the plants she worked upon. Gail wondered if she herself had seemed as pitiful.

The girl was beautiful. Obedient to the fatal command she stood naked in wide-eyed tragic fear before her inquisitor. "Please don't whip me, maam." She spoke the sad words as though they were a threadbare prayer. She had probably said them many times. Gail could see the whip marks with which the girl was plentifully decorated.

"Why shouldn't I whip you, sugar?" Always the polite and kindly words!

"I. . . I, didn't mean to. I'm sorry. Honest, maam, I won't do it again." It sounded lame. The girl knew it sounded lame.

"Where you like to have it, sugar?"

The girl twisted, obviously in an agony of fear. "Please maam! Oh please don't whip me again. I've been whipped so much." It was a cry of desolation.

"You ain't suggesting you never deserved it . . .?"

"Oh no, maam! I wouldn't do that. But please! Could I be let off this once?" The plea was pitiful.

"What you here for, honey?" The tone might have been solicitous.

The naked girl shuffled her toes in the loose dirt. Her reply seemed ejected by force of will. "I'm here to be punished, maam."

"Well then, child, we're on the right track, ain't we?"

"Yes maam." She was close to tears.

"What you do to earn the punishment, kid?"

The tormented nudity obviously writhed. "I . . . I made someone angry, maam."

"Can't very well let you off then, can I?"

"No maam. I'm sorry for bothering you. Please whip my back. My bottom got it twice yesterday."

What happened then almost brought Gail's labours to a standstill. The slender girl stood erect and naked. She clasped her hands behind her neck and waited for the lash. She took her five terrible strokes in moaning desolation, but did not break pose. When they were done, she gave her thanks and resumed her garment and her work.

There were rest periods. The prisoners sat. Water was passed around. Almost without fail, and presumably as a sort of floor show, a girl was punished at these times. By now Gail had come to realize that few, if any, of the punishments were justified. They were dealt out in this manner to maintain discipline and because the method gave scope to their guard's sadistic enjoyment of their work. If a girl got this for nothing, what might she expect if she truly erred!

This one was a nubile blonde with sulky lips and well marked skin. She removed her sack without waiting to be told. "I didn't do nothing," she said resentfully.

"There we are then!" her wardress exclaimed jubilantly. "You ain't done no work, you get licked!"

"You know that's not what I meant." The blonde had either courage or privilege.

"Where you want to get tickled, sweetheart?"

The victim shot her guard a glance of pure venom. "I don't want to get whipped, not anywhere. I'm already covered. Why don't you go easy! Carstairs don't want me killed. He'd blow the lid off this place if he saw me marked up like this."

"Visiting day next week. We could arrange for him to have a good look, honey. You like that?"

The girl about to be whipped seemed willing to burn her bridges. "O.K. Show me to him. Naked!"

"Will do, honeychile. Now, where you want 'em?"

"I don't want them. There's no space left on me."

"Come on, now! I can see spaces." The voice held a terrible portent.

The blonde girl visibly cringed and in an involuntary gesture, instantly corrected, glanced down at her own nakedness. All present understood.

"Nice pair of tits," the wardress commented conversationally.

The naked girl fought to keep her hands at her sides. "Cute little cunt inside that bush. I could make it twitch a bit."

The blonde began to show chinks in her armour. Suddenly, as though for the first time realizing what awaited her, she fell to her knees and begged. "Please, please, maam, don't whip me. I can't stand any more."

Watching the vivid tableau, Gail was ashamed of the wetness within her loins. Why! Why! Why! The agony of a naked girl was so beautifully erotic that it aroused lust. In this knowledge she could ask what hope there was for girlhood! If to whip a girl gave such ecstasy, what hope was there for any girl anywhere! The girl herself might consider her own suffering well justified if it gave joy to so many! Her mind switched back to the pleading prisoner.

"I ain't hard to get along with, girl. Where will you have it? Tits or twat?"

The blond captive was slow to reply. It was obvious she had given up hope of reprieve, and was concentrating on the cruel choice. "Between my legs," she said brokenly, and stood up.

"Stretch 'em wide then, honey."

Manfully, the blonde girl obeyed. Automatically, from previous beatings, she clasped her hands behind her neck and thrust out her breasts as though it was the twin mounds that were to greet the thong.

"That's real nice, kid," the wardress approved warmly. She turned to survey the mass of intent faces. 'Take a look girls. That's the way to stand when you get your cunt whipped." Determinedly she swept back her arm.

It was terrible to watch. It was intended to be terrible. Even the first upward cut upon the exposed loins brought the girl to her knees, contorting and moaning in the dirt. But the most evident act was her swift return to her original pose. Her acceptance of her agony was total and complete. Her pleas had failed. She accepted what she must. Each stroke dissolved her into clutching and writhing. But always she remembered in time and again took her stance. Gail's heart went out to her.

It was but one of a number. A wardress decided to whip a girl's breasts. She had chosen her subject well. The weeping girl was heavily endowed. Her twin treasures were quite beautiful. No doubt that was the reason for the attention they received. It was also the reason for their owner's desolation at what was to be done to them.

"Not my breasts! Oh, not my breasts! Oh please!" She was quite young. Perhaps she still believed in mercy. It seemed evident that her breasts had not been whipped before, though it was quite evident the rest of her had.

"And why not, sweetheart?" Always the honeyed words of false hope.

"Oh maam, please! My breasts! Not a girl's breasts! Not to be

whipped!"

"Would you sooner I just cut off your tits?" Cool and casual.

The child burst into an emotion of sobbing.

"I can tie you if you prefer, child. I can play with your tits until they get hard and stick well out, and then I can hold a lighted match under them . . . ."

The captive girl cried in agony. "A match soon burns down, sweetheart. It wouldn't be that bad, would it."

The naked girl wept. She was beyond words.

"Well, honey. Which you want? Can't stand here all day."

Perhaps it had happened before. This awful moment would come to all who were captive within this place. The weeping girl faced reality. Her face contorted by grief, she stood erect, clasped her hands behind her neck, and thrust out her breasts to their utmost limit. She threw back her head and waited for the whip.

"You'll remember 'bout standing still, eh?"

"Yes, maam. I'll remember. I won't move." It seemed an impossible assurance.

"One at a time, honey. Does a better job . . . ."

The whip sang and danced across its twin targets. Gail watched spellbound. The child whose breasts were being punished was incredible. It was as though, in her pleading, she had exhausted her will to resist, had passed over into a world beyond agony. She stood erect and lovely as the whistling thong bounced her softest flesh and changed its color. She moved little other than to sway and flinch under each blow. Her eyes were closed to look sightlessly at the sky and see a vision of her own that others did not share. Terrible sounds emerged from her lips, but she did not scream. When it was done she remained standing in the same pose as though unable to believe her pain was over. Her breasts were a latticework of erotic tracings.

"Snap out of it, girl. Or d'you want me to start again?" The guard cut the air with her whip menacingly.

The girl snapped out of her trance. "Thank you for whipping my breasts, maam." She said it as though she meant it.

The work resumed. There was no end to it. Gail's hands hurt, both from the chafing of the hoe and from the whip. Her back hurt. She ached with weariness from muscles rarely used. She longed to be anywhere but where she was. The inevitable happened.

"This ain't no resort hotel, honey." The sarcasm was heavy.

Gail tried truth as defense. "I'm sorry, maam. I'm not used to the work. I'm terribly tired."

"Like to lie down, honey?" There was a lewd chuckle. "Take your sack off. Give you somethin' to lie on."

Hopelessly, Gail obeyed words and motions. Watchfully and tentatively she lowered herself and lay upon her back.

"Legs up and back, sugar, until you can hold your ankles."

She might have known it would be vile. Having grasped her ankles she found herself upon her back with legs so widely spread and strained back that all of her inmost secrets were laid bare and open. For a fleeting moment she thought that only a man could want her thus.

"Ever have your cunt whipped, sweetheart?"

"Yes, maam, I have." It was as though she had scored a point.

The wardress was unperturbed. "Bet you wasn't in this position though?"

"No maam."

"Ain't it a dandy? I can slice right in there."

"Yes maam."

It happened suddenly without volition. There is always a last straw. Something snapped. Gail returned to the primitive. She leaped to her feet and ran.

Revolt on the Prison Farm must have been rare. Neither guards nor prisoners moved to stop the naked girl as she fled across the field. She was free of the group before shouts and thudding feet announced dismay and anger. Gail's feet thrust at the soft earth towards a destination unknown. It was less an attempt to escape than a revolt against pain and obscenity.

As an escape it had never had the remotest chance of success. Reaching the inevitable high wire fence Gail leaped upon it with clutching fingers and toes. But she was flung backwards by the force of the current with which it was charged. Sobbing, she ran beside the wire. Surely there must be a gate, a tree, a culvert . . . anything! She was in the grip of panic.

Three of the Wardresses had deployed. They converged. The chase ended with a game of hide and seek around the buildings of the prison yard. Abandoning flight, the fugitive sought to hide. They caught her easily when she could run no more.

"Thought you was tired, sugar?" Always the sarcasm!

They wasted no words, but marched her to the blacksmith shop and riveted chains upon her feet. Gail sat in mute misery and watched the metal fitted and welded round her ankles. They were ugly things with nothing to commend them save that they would hold her captive. She thought of Ma Billings, and could have wept. Once a girl's feet were chained together she had lost all hope.

Her guards must have believed this too. They returned to the field, telling her to follow as fast as she could. She stared at them in disbelief that the chains could be her only punishment. Surely she would be terribly whipped! They interpreted her amazement and assured her blithely. "Don't worry none, kid. You ain't goin' to be cheated outa' nothin'. You gets it tomorrow. The full treatment." They walked away, laughing.

Gail hobbled after them, weeping and wondering. Her chains clanking dismally in the dust.

The chained girls were a sisterhood. They were segregated. For them no dormitory. Only a bare shed with a concrete floor in which were set the metal rings to which they would be chained for sleep. The chains varied. Out of the five girls shackled, three were secured

by a metal collar, the chain to which was but a bare three feet long so that they could not stand. Another girl was fastened by the collar and a band about one wrist. Gail, because her transgression was fresh and she must learn a lesson, was chained at neck, both wrists, and a band about her middle. The tethers were short. She could do no more than grovel on the floor. They were heavy and brutal things that a girl must hate, their function to punish rather than hold. Each girl slept upon the concrete naked, their sacks taken from them.

Her companions were kind. They consoled. Gail learned that she would wear the chains upon her ankles for as long as she stayed at the farm. She was an "Escaper". The chains would ensure she did not run again. She learned, too, that the heavy shackles she now bore would lessen as the days went by until the night when she would be fastened only by her neck. But it was the other thing she learned that was most devastating.

"We've all had it," one of the girls told her reflectively. "It goes along with getting our ankles chained. They make a real big thing of it so as to deter the rest. You know, they make an 'Example' of us. That 'Full Treatment' Emma promised you is a Ceremony that takes place before the staff and all the girls. Sometimes the bastard who sent us here shows up to gloat. Tomorrow they'll tie you to a post out in the yard and give you fifty with a special whip. The idea is that the whip and whoever uses it stops just barely short of killing you."

The four chained maidens looked at her in sorrow. Each had suffered what she must suffer. Gail looked at them piteously in a great need of communion. She held out a hand, heavy with links. Her closest neighbor tried to reach it, but could not. "That's part of the beastliness," she said morosely. "Us chained girls can't touch. They chain us purposely to make sure . . . ."

It was almost military. The inmates were lined up with precision. The staff was smart in uniform. They formed three sides of a square about the posts in the centre of the huge yard. Gail was the last to arrive. She was led grimly to the place of execution by the firm grip of Thelma's large hand. It was not until she had completed half the journey that she realized there was not one post, but two. Fastened by her wrists to one of them was the naked figure of Harry Rattery's mistress, Grace.

The State Prison Farm for Women was indeed a place of vengeance!

Gail drew the gunny sack over her head, tidied her hair as best she could, and stood naked awaiting instructions. Then, under Thelma's guidance, she raised her hands so that one of them could be strapped firmly on each side of the grim hulk of timber that would thwart her struggles to escape the whip. When she was helpless, she turned to Grace who stood no more than ten feet distant. In the tied nudity Gail saw a mirror of her own condition. They smiled at each other once, then looked away.

The fat man, Andy, read a proclamation. It was beautifully official, and cringingly frightening. With verbiage trimmed, it said simply that a girl named Gail Sommers was to receive fifty strokes in punishment for an attempt to escape, and that another girl named Grace Willows would be given fifty strokes for delinquent behavior.

At that point, possibly as a sporting diversion, Emma and Thelma took the stage. They tossed a coin. The winner whipped her victim first. Emma won.

When only the first lash had curled round the lovely nakedness of the girl bound as she was bound, Gail knew for sure that the tossed coin affected far more than the two wardresses. To have to watch the whipping of another girl in the knowledge that she herself would suffer the same agonies within the space of a little time was a punishment in itself. In this sense it was Gail who had lost in the flipping of a coin. Her agony of both the spirit and the flesh was limitless as she beheld what was being done to the girl who had been kind to her: the same torture for which she waited helplessly.

There was blood. But only small flecks where the tip of the lash had bitten beyond intent. It became evident that Emma's purpose was to strike the white skin as hard as possible without cutting it. She was undeniably competent. But it was evident, too, that the girl's breasts would not be immune. If the end of the lash found them, so be it! She whipped slowly with careful pauses so that the watching eyes could learn their lesson or enjoy the erotic delight of a naked girl beneath the lash.

It was incredibly erotic! Gail sensed the atmosphere. Beyond her own suspenseful fear she, too, could not be unaware of the elemental quality of what was taking place. It was pure beauty and pure horror. But the point at which they merged was indefinable. They stood in a great openness; yet, spotlights might have been playing upon the

nakedness of the girl tied to the post whose body was now plentifully striated with weals. Grace was the star. Grace was the cynosure of every eye. Grace, without knowing it, was at the moment the most beautiful thing in all the world. Grace radiated an eroticism that all could feel in every pore of their being.

Poor Grace! She knew not, nor cared, for any feelings but her own. If she was beautiful, or if she was erotic, she could not have cared less. But, unconsciously she gave of herself in an incredible giving. Gail, watching, wondered if she, when it came her turn, would writhe and twist and moan with such abandon. She watched every part of the whipped girl strain and tug against her wrists in a fruitless attempt to evade the curling lash. In a frenzy of despair Grace planted a foot against the post to lever against the straps upon her wrists: those two simple bands of leather that compelled her to stand naked to accept the whip. Gail looked at her own wrists, similarly fastened, and shuddered.

When the fiftieth stroke had wealed the soft flesh, Grace hung limp, perhaps grateful now for the straps about her wrists from which she could droop in agony and fatigue. She continued to sob and to whimper. Every part of her was marked by vivid stripes. Her punishment had been that of a felon in centuries past. Brutal!

In the knowledge that it was now her own turn to feel the whip, Gail's heart thudded with a sound she feared others might hear. She knew she would scream. She cherished no hope that she would emerge from her punishment with any emotion intact. Already she was driven and reduced by fear, fear of agonies no naked girl should have to bear. She looked appealingly at Thelma, but received only a broad appreciative grin of pure enjoyment. Thelma had been given the whip. She was curling it lovingly back and forth between her fingers. She held it up for the trembling girl to see. "You'll love it, honey. You'll love every stroke," she whispered with a warmth that bespoke an insane sincerity. "I'm going to make this sweet leather snap right into you. Honey, you tell your tits and twat that here I come." She raised her arm and swept it back.

The flogging of Gail Sommers had begun.

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They shared a cell. The Prison Farm had everything. It was a plain bare cell of concrete and a barred front. A narrow cot was against

each wall. But the sharing had been diabolically designed. Only a sadist, or perhaps Harry Rattery would have thought of it. Gail and Grace were naked, their only clothing the livid lines of the whip upon their skin. Each sat upon her cot. Each wore a leather gag helmet padlocked at the back of her neck. The wrists of each were handcuffed behind their back. A metal collar locked upon each slender neck tethered them to the wall. They had freedom to lie upon their cot. That was all. They gazed at each other in utter desolation. They could not speak.

It was too cruel! They had so much to say, but could make no sound. They longed to touch, but they were tightly chained. Never had two beings been so close without communion. "You'll be able to have a nice long talk," the wardress had chuckled after she had slammed and locked the barred door. They had looked at her with hate and hopelessness. Gail noticed that Grace's ankles had been chained as had her own. They spent the most frustrating hours of their lives before they wept, and then weeping they fell asleep.

The Prison Farm for Women did not easily forgive. When Gail and Grace were delivered to the chain gang the following morning, they were made to hold out their hands to have handcuffs locked upon their wrists. They still had not been given no chance to talk. Gail longed to comfort and to warn the bewildered Grace of the hazards of their workday. With linked hands it would be doubly difficult to use the hoe. The threat of the whip would never be far distant. It seemed impossible that they would be whipped again after their flogging of the previous day, but Gail feared it all too probable.

With chained feet and chained hands the work was doubly miserable. No matter how she tried, Gail knew her wrists would be sadly chafed by night. Before the morning was ended the inevitable happened. Grace dropped her hoe.

"Fingers need limbering up a bit, honey," Emma's suave and helpful voice suggested.

Grace swiftly retrieved her hoe and looked uncertainly at the woman who had flogged her the day before. "I'm sorry," she quavered humbly.

"Ain't I got no name or title, girl?" Emma was out for blood.

"I'm sorry maam." Grace's voice betrayed her knowledge she was

lost.

"Maybe if you hold your hand out I can loosen up them fingers for you." A stranger might have sworn the words held kindly intent.

Grace raised her cuffed hands. She looked questioningly from them to her tormentor.

"Them cuffs won't bother us none, honey," Emma advised heartily. "Just you stick them pretty hands well out front. Pull back on one, palm up on the other."

Gail watched in fascination. Emma was right. Being handcuffed in no way impeded the whipping of a girl's hands. Hesitantly, the girl to be punished raised her arms. It became easily possible to offer a single stretched palm for the cut of the crop. Grace stood, statuesque in misery. The crop whirred and bit. Its victim fell to the ground, twisting in agony in the dirt.

"No one said nothin' 'bout sitting down, honey." The inexorable sarcasm prodded.

Grace looked up fiercely. "You rotten bitch!" The words were ejected from between tight lips as though each was a bullet. "I can't take that! I can't. You don't have to treat us like this. I'll blow your rotten prison sky high when I get out of here."

Emma beamed. "When you figure to get out, honey?"

The quiet query was like a blow. No girl there could be certain she was not at the Prison Farm for life. Grace raised her joined hands. "You have to give us a break. You just have to! No girl can work like this."

"You can and you will, sweetheart. Up! And out with that flipper."

It was heartbreaking to watch. Grace looked hopelessly at the handcuffs upon her wrists and at the heavy chain linking her ankles. She could not fight. She could not run. She could do nothing but obey. Disgustedly, she got to her feet, held out her hands once more and received a scalding slash that, again, sent her to her knees.

Gail was suddenly stricken in horror. A crop rapped against her knee. "You retired from business, sugar?" Thelma inquired. In her

absorption with her companion's ordeal Gail had stopped work to watch the cruelty.

"Let's make things a bit easier for you," the wardress said expansively. "Hold out your hands, honey."

Gail watched dubiously as her handcuffs were unlocked. She had no hope for what was about to happen.

"Off with the sack, little darling."

Naked, Gail allowed herself once more to be handcuffed.

"Little hands still sore, sweetheart?"

"Yes, maam."

"Then let's have a little change. You keep working, honey, till I get back." Thelma made for the buildings.

Grace, too, was allowed to resume her task. With bruised fingers and hands and the chains upon her wrists hoeing was well nigh impossible. But she tried. Gail felt sure neither of them had yet plumbed the depths.

Thelma returned with a largish zipper bag and a broad smile. She winked at Emma and suggested, "Yours first, eh?"

Continuing the motions of hoeing, Gail frankly watched Emma grasped Grace's hair and pulled forward and down. "Bend well over, honey," she invited.

The unfortunate girl had no choice but to obey. A moment later her head was between Emma's ample thighs, her neck held as in a vice. Her bottom was reared, her legs were rudely kicked as wide apart as their chain would allow. Gail began to guess what was in store.

But she had underestimated the resources of the Prison Farm. From the bag, a gleefully grinning Thelma produced a huge tuft of what appeared to be ostrich feathers spouting from a sizeable rubber prong. She also produced vaseline.

Grace struggled and protested. But to no avail. She was held. The

operation that would degrade and render her ludicrous before her fellow prisoners went competently forward. Admittedly, it was done with reasonable care. The ugly protrusion entered its warm sheath under skilful guidance and practiced hands. But to a girl who had never been spread it would be agony. Its frontal knob would ensure the sphincter muscle's firm retaining grip upon the mockery of a bird's plumed tail. But it would be bitterly painful to the girl within whose rectum it found refuge. The beastly work was concluded when Grace's handcuffs were removed so that the sack could be discarded to leave her nude, and then locked back on her wrists with an extra tight grip. Scarlet faced, she stood in her plumed nakedness, uncertain what to do.

"Reach round and pull it out if you don't like it, sugar," Thelma suggested cheerfully.

For a moment Grace stood, undecided, off balance, not knowing. Then, following a natural instinct, she did the wrong thing. She reached back to tug the intruding alien thing from her body.

The laughter was not limited to the merriment of the wardresses. Most of the captive girls found it hard to keep a straight face. Even the agonized Gail could appreciate the comic absurdity of what she beheld. No matter how she tried, Grace could not reach the thing she sought. The handcuffs tight upon her wrists defeated her. She could touch a fingertip to a feather. But could grip nothing with sufficient force to achieve her purpose. With or without permission, she would have no choice but to wear her badge of shame. Blushing vividly she picked up her hoe. Tears of chagrin bedewed her eyes.

"Record says you can take the big end o' a baseball bat, sugar," Thelma informed her next culprit. "Billings had you spread, eh?"

"Yes, maam." Why deny!

"They come in all sizes. Got you a real goodie."

Gail surveyed the 'real goodie' with dismay. Without previous experience she might have insisted on the impossibility of its entrance within her. But Ma Billings plugs had left her astounded by a girl's infinite capacity. "You don't have to hold me," she said dejectedly. "I'll be a good girl and behave." Spreading her ankle chain taut, she leant forward and grasped the anklets themselves while the greased horror was inserted slowly inside her body. When she, too, stood with

averted gaze, shamed eyes and scarlet face, she made no move to reach the plumed tail that rose pertly from her behind. She would wear it and be damned to them! Why make herself more of a clown than need be!

What is a breaking point? A last straw? A final insult? There is no single answer. Perhaps for the two girls from whose bottoms reared the upstanding tails of feathered plumes, it was the snickers, the sly glances, the ribald remarks of their guards. Their shame was much enjoyed. Their pain was internal and could not be seen. But their blushes were on view for all to see. That they were compelled to continue their hoeing made their shame and their pain doubly potent. Motion hurt. It also sent their tails into weaving to and fro or a rise or a dip that enraptured those who had put them there.

It came about suddenly. Their work had brought them close. Grace turned and seized Gail's appendage and dragged it from its anchorage. She turned about and offered her own. Instantly Gail seized it and pulled. The plumed tails lay discarded in the dirt. Two furiously angry girls confronted their guards. The hoes had suddenly become a weapon. They were raised in menace by chained hands.

Anything might have happened. But the prison farm was used to crisis. Thelma chuckled gleefully. "You two gals sure do love trouble." She gave tribute. "What you want to do? Have a fight?"

The absurdity of fighting was borne upon the militant pair by their own intelligence. They might hurt a guard or two. But, chained as they were, they had no chance. Whatever their success might be it would but add to their later punishment. They slumped, but kept a wary eye upon those who threatened them.

"Tell you what, gals," Thelma advanced reasonably. "Any way you play it you two are going to end up in front of Andy's desk. What you get sentenced to depends on how much damage you done. You ain't done much yet. I can clean up them asshole tails real good so you can wear 'em again. But what counts is Andy. You wanna' go and talk to him?"

Always the unexpected! At that moment Gail could have believed that Thelma felt sorry for them. Perhaps she did! The naked girl found her fury off balance in the face of sweet reason. Speak to Andy? Why not? Could their lot be worse? Perhaps somehow they could get through to the fat man. Perhaps get word out beyond the

prison fence. She sought Grace's eyes and found consent. She lowered her hoe.

Thelma laughed, pleased by her diplomacy. "You don't need no guard, kids," she assured the delinquents cheerfully. "All that expensive metal on your hands and feet, you ain't goin' no place outside the happiest farm in the county. You amble off now and tell Andy your story. Better make it true. I'll check. You tell a lie and I'll have the skin off your ass. When he's told you your sentence, you can come back and work out the day. Ain't never no hurry 'bout puttin' a gal in solitary. One day's as bad as another."

Sweet reason on a prison farm! Behind it, horror! Gail and Grace dropped their hoes and began their hobbled walk to the superintendent's desk.

"It was because you freed us, wasn't it?" Gail asked guiltily.

Grace shrugged. "Yes. But what does it matter? Harry would have goaded me by one way or another eventually. It happened with you. That's it! Don't feel bad."

Gail was puzzled. "But he's fond of you. He must be. How long would he have you kept in this beastly place? How long will he keep me here?"

Again the resigned shrug. "I don't know," Grace admitted. "If I have to guess I'd say a month." She laughed cynically. "Not because he wants to limit our punishment, but because he'll want to use us again. Remember, what you have isn't all that common."

"But is he willing to have us brutalized like this? In a month we could be half-dead." Gail was puzzled. "He paid all that money . . . ."

"I honestly don't think he knows about this place. Probably Billings doesn't either. They're thinking we are being whipped and humiliated. But not like the way it is. They expect to get back a chastened little girl, not a physical wreck."

Andy was unperturbed, both by their factual admission of their guilt and by their pleas for contact with the outside world. He nodded enjoyably through all they had to say. "Well gals," he adjudicated genially. "Don't feel too bad. You ain't the first. You won't be the last. You're in for a bad time. But you'll live. I ain't goin'

to be too hard on a couple of sweet things like you. We'll call it a week in the black hole on bread and water and full chains, and then at the end of it, and just to get you back into the swing of things, fifty apiece at the whipping posts out in the yard. Full dress parade in your honour. Now you say your thank you's real pretty and trot back and tell Thelma what the deal is. She'll think I'm going soft. But to hell with it! I like you both."

It was all a phantasmagoria. The two naked girls left the office, dazed. The mind of each obsessed by visions of the horror they would now endure, the pain their flesh would have to bear. It was all so casual. It was all impossible! Thelma would laugh. Tomorrow they would be shackled together in the dark. A darkness that would go on and on. After it the whip. They would think of the whip throughout the seven days. The prison farm gave its girls much to consider.

The car was unobtrusively parked beside a shed, its ominous black and white and all its appurtenances logical in a prison yard. Gail recognized its number. It was the car the policeman named Len had used to drive her here. No one was in it. No one was in sight. Its driver must have passed them unseen behind a building. She stopped dead. She had glimpsed hope. Limping to the window she extracted the keys from the ignition and opened the trunk. It was empty. Replacing the keys where she had found them, she exclaimed urgently, "Come on! Both of us in the trunk. It's perfect. If we can get to a police chief maybe he'll listen. The chap who drives this car is a decent guy." Awkwardly, she inserted her chained person into the open space. Grace doubtfully followed. The two of them filled the trunk with naked girl and clinking chain. But there was room. Two pairs of handcuffed hands slammed down the lid.

For chained and naked girls, a ride in a car trunk is far from joy. There were moments during their journey when Gail regretted her inspiration. She regretted it doubly when, finally, the car stopped; they hammered their handcuffs against the metal, and the lid was lifted to disclose a startled male face she had never seen before.

They were lifted from the trunk by an officer who doubted what his eyes beheld. "Where's Len?" Gail asked timidly.

"Len's on vacation." The officer laughed. "Bet he wouldn't have gone if he'd known."

"We'd like to see the Chief of Police."

"So would we, lady. He's on vacation too." The officer's eyes flitted back and forth between two pairs of conical breasts.

They were in a small enclosed yard. They were alone and unseen. "Think we could go inside and get rid of these things fastened on us?" Grace asked reasonably. She held up her cuffed hands.

There was something wrong. Gail knew it instinctively. The officer was surveying them with a knowing scrutiny. "From the prison farm, aren't you?" he said without emotion.

"Please contact Congressman Billings," Gail pleaded. "He'll tell you what to do with us."

"I bet he would," the officer said without enthusiasm. "C'mon, let's go talk to Jake."

"But . . . but, we're naked," Gail quavered.

"I sorta' noticed that," the officer acknowledged drily. "C'mon, this way."

They followed him, chains clinking, features crestfallen. There was something wrong.

"Bung 'em in a cell!" Jake exclaimed enthusiastically. "Ain't every day we get manna from heaven."

The driver of the car answered to the appellation of Tosh. "Won't nobody ever know," he agreed. "Them folks at the farm will bust a gut."

"Guess you girls been screwed before?" Jake conjectured pleasantly.

Jake nodded musingly, his mind hard at work. "O.K. But we'll call him when we're ready. Not before. Right now you girls just don't exist," he guffawed. "So far as poor old Jake and the girls go, you're somewhere out in the wild blue yonder. He won't think of us."

The naked girls understood. They were indeed manna from the skies for an isolated detachment. These men could own them utterly.

"At least take these blasted things off our ankles," Grace demanded irritably. "We sound like a tank corps walking around. If you insist on using us, we'll all enjoy it more with our feet free."

Tosh examined their fetters. "I'll be damned! Those bastards out at the farm riveted 'em on."

"That takes tools and time. To hell with it!" Jake said grimly. "We can screw 'em all we want the way they are."

Gail's heart sank. She supposed copulation was better than being flogged. But there was something ugly about these men. They were out of a frying pan into a fire. She lifted her locked hands. "At least take these off . . . please!"

"Why should we? They keep you in line."

"But we're not going to fight."

"Damn right you ain't! Not the way you're fixed."

"Look at the marks on us," Gail pleaded. "Can't you feel a bit of sympathy?"

"All I can feel is a hard-on," Jake admitted. "The way you are you're the two sexiest dames I ever seen. I'm going up town and buy me a whip. This is too good to miss."

Gail was desperate. "Fine then! Whip us! We won't say a word. But phone Billings."

The officers laughed and escorted them to a cell.

"The dirty bastards!" Grace ground the words between her teeth in fury. "They fuck us both and now look! We're worse off than ever."

It was much later. The naked girls could not know the time. Each stood on tip-toe, hands cuffed to the bars above their heads, their breasts protruding outside through the bars of their cell.

"They didn't need to do this to us," Gail mourned. "We did what they wanted. You're right, they're bastards." She strained her naked slenderness upwards to relieve the cut of the metal on her wrists.

"As pretty a pair as I've ever seen!" It was a new voice, a new uniform. "Name's Sam, ladies. Pleased to meet you."

"Are you fucking us too?" Grace asked bitterly.

"I aim to, miss. But right now I want to use this little item." Sam held up a quivering length of the Tackmaker's Art.

Gail's heart hammered. A whip! Always a whip! Did men think of nothing else when they thought of a naked girl? "Well, I suppose we're nicely fixed for it," she invited sourly.

"Help yourself."

It hurt as nothing else had hurt. The pain was less, but the shame was more. Two naked girls were being whipped within the sacred confines of law and order. The metal bands upon their wrists held them, strained and nude, for the officer's convenience. He whipped them at leisure. He whipped them with a tremendous zest and enjoyment.

"Something I've always wanted to do," he confided engagingly.

"Will you let us down when you're through?" Grace asked without hope. "It hurts like hell standing like this." She moaned in agony as the withe bit squarely across her rump.

"I'll consider it," Sam assured them in a voice that plainly said he would do nothing of the sort.

"We'll do anything you want," Gail promised abjectly. "But please let us down. It's awful."

"How 'bout this?" Sam asked. He brought the limber horror squarely down across her strained shoulders. Gail screamed.

"There must be something . . . something you want more than anything else? We'll do it for you. But stop whipping us . . . . Oh please! Please let us down. We'll be nice to you." Grace had abandoned all feminine reticence.

"Hell, lady. You're doing all you can for me right now," Sam assured her affectionately. "Don't know when I ever felt so good with

my clothes on." He whipped her shrewdly across her thighs with a cut that evoked from her a most satisfying scream.

"But you can't whip us forever," Gail pleaded without conviction. "Please stop. There's other things."

"Nothing near as good as this," Sam exulted. With great accuracy he lashed her so that the tip wrapped 'round her thigh."

He whipped the two naked handcuffed girls joyfully. It went on and on, until Gail began to believe it might go on forever.

"Better hold it, Sam." It was Jake's voice. "Billings don't want no dead meat. For that matter, neither do the rest of us," he added thoughtfully. "Girls as cute as these got a lot o' uses."

The handcuffs were unlocked. The two girls allowed themselves to slump to the floor. They wanted only rest and a chance to massage their hurt wrists. The two officers surveyed their captives with satisfaction. "Better let the night boys in on this. Give Roddy and Mick a call. They can have a turn before we hoist 'em again," Jake ordered casually.

"But why 'hoist us?'" Grace wailed when Sam had gone on his errand. "We do everything you want. Maybe we can do a lot more if you keep those damn handcuffs in your pocket. Why have we got to stand on our toes?"

Jake laughed. "You just said it, lady. Keeps you on your toes. Nothing makes a gal mind like a session on the bars. We know. We got experience."

"I just bet you have!" Grace retorted acidly as she rubbed the indentations on her wrists. "But you've hung us up once. It hurt plenty. Why do it again?"

"Because we're just plain bastards, lady," Jake admitted with pride. "A gal looks damn pretty when she's fixed like that, and her little ass is handy for any of the boys to tickle it up."

"That wasn't tickling. We were flogged."

"Well, Sam might have gone a mite overboard. I'll tell the boys to go at you a bit easy."

"Thanks a lot!" Gail retorted drily. "When are you going to phone Billings?"

Jake considered. "Like I said, we're a bunch of bastards. We'll have fun with you 'till the day before the chief is due back. Then you're home free; matter of about a week."

"A week on our toes and getting whipped. You're supposed to be policemen!" Grace was infinitely bitter.

"Could take you back to the farm?" Jake suggested thoughtfully. "Don't hesitate to ask."

There was the thud of heavy boots. "See, what did I tell you?" Sam exulted at his two burly companions. "Two nice as little tricks as we've ever had."

"I suppose we lie on our backs now?" Grace asked coldly.

"Tell the truth, lady, we'd like to try the other way 'round." Mick had the healthy exuberance of a big puppy.

Gail sensed her companion's fear. "If that's what you want," she said bravely, "you can do it to me. I've been . . . well, I've been fixed."

Four pairs of avid eyes examined her delightedly. "The Congressman shoved a bung up her," Jake supplied indelicately.

"You'll enjoy me there, I promise." Gail was determined to take the heat off an apprehensive Grace. She rose, smiled sweetly, and bent well over. "If you'd take these damn chains off our ankles it would be a lot better for you." She hoped they would take the hint.

We can rationalize anything. Everything can become commonplace. Gail regarded what was done to her then as one of the lesser violations. She could bear their thrusts without pain. She heard their grunts with contempt. From such a coupling the girl emerges victor. For her, the tumescent male within her rectum is without significance. She invited their attentions again and again. Never failing to tell of the greater delights she could have given had her feet been without their hampering chains. The absurd and gleeful males spent themselves within her, enraptured by something new, an erotic experience beyond their wildest dreams. Grace watched in

wonder and loathing.

"Well, ladies. We got work to do. Up you go again," Jake ordered brightly when the last vestige of concupiscence had been assuaged.

Gail shrank from the unfeeling command. She turned on him indignantly. "Look! I tried to be nice to you. I was nice. You all enjoyed me. Can't you be a bit kind too and give us a break?"

"Don't push, kid." The voice had lost some of its bonhomie.

"Well, if you must chain us to the bars, can't you do it at waist level so we can stand properly?" she bargained desperately.

"Up, the both of you! No more yapping."

There was no choice, no chance to fight, nothing but obedience. Dejectedly the two naked girls stood and offered their already chafed wrists. Gail watched the steel band circle the slenderness below her hand and click tight. Passive, she rose on her toes and lifted her arms. Looking up she saw the empty cuff passed round a bar above the crosspiece that would keep it there. Hating the act, she pressed her other wrist within the open jaws and saw the shining metal close in a firm tight grip. A few moments later the girls were alone, their nakedness stretched and strained against the bars as though seeking an escape that wasn't there. The sound of heavy footsteps died away. Ankle chains clinked as the captives sought a comfort the handcuffs denied.

"The dirty rotten bastards!" Grace muttered vehemently.

"We've got to get out of this," Gail said tearfully. "There has to be some way!"

A door opened and closed. There were sounds. The chained girls tensed, their self pity set aside they listened, alert.

She was a nondescript girl of perhaps eighteen. She carried a broom, a mop and a pail. She was not surprised, "The boys told me," she explained in answer to their wide-eyed stare. "There's usually some poor damn girl around somewhere." She gave them a comradely grin. "Helps me out a lot. When they ain't got one they screw my ass off."

"Do they always keep them the way they've got us now?" Gail demanded incredulously.

"Mostly. Pretty good way, really. Can't do much, can you?" the girl asked reasonably. She obviously saw nothing to criticise.

"Would you get a message out for us. I'd get you money?"

Grace asked.

"Stuff it, sister. I listen to that talk, I'd be standing the way you are. I got a good thing going here. I ain't about to spoil it."

"What's so good about mopping floors?"

"My name's Hetty, and I'll show you what's good 'bout my job. It's this." Without haste, the girl laid down her burdens, then in one swift motion clamped Grace's nipples between thumbs and fingers.

Grace yelped in surprise and pain. But she was helpless. Her breasts had protruded through the bars. They were freely available to anyone in the passage. "Please, don't do that!" she pleaded. "Not you too . . . ?"

"And why not!" Hetty sounded offended. "The boys don't begrudge me a bit of fun. Here, I'll pinch 'em harder. Maybe you'll enjoy it."

Gail watched in frustrated fury. "Stop it you little bitch!" She could no longer keep silent. "She's never done you any harm. You don't have to treat her like that."

Hetty raised smoldering eyes. "Bit big for your britches, ain't you, lady?" She released Grace's nipples and turned her attention on Gail.

To plead or not to plead! To struggle and hurt her wrists or to stand still and accept! Miserably, Gail stood and watched approaching punishment. Her eyes on Hetty's eyes and on Hetty's hands. Both were merciless. Before she was touched she could have moaned. When her defenseless nipples were clamped and pinched, she did moan in hopeless misery. Her ankle fetters clinked musically as she made the only motion she could that did not hurt. "After awhile I'll tickle your clits," Hetty assured her prey. Her voice left doubt if it was threat or promise. Her torture of the two nipples she held captive

increased. Gail screamed.

Hetty was pleasantly social as though visiting old friends. She was cruel as children are cruel before they understand cruelty. "I got me a real good idea for you two," she announced suddenly. "Be back in a jiffy."

The 'good idea' was instantly obvious. Four spring clip clothes pins! Simple! Cruel! Demeaning! "Look, please! Don't put those on us," Gail begged. "Isn't there something we can do or say that will please you without torture?"

"You lost your marbles, kid?" Hetty asked pleasantly. "You ain't got nothing I want more than I'm getting off you right now."

"You put those things on me and I'll scream my head off," Gail threatened.

"Go ahead, lady. Scream," Hetty advised indifferently.

Gail screamed. Grace joined in with cries for help. After much clamor a door opened and a male voice inquired, "Want any help, Hetty?"

It was useless. No one cared. This girl would use them as others had done! Hetty had stood, smiling quietly at their abortive seeking of aid where no aid was. Her fingers toyed idly with the small domestic instruments of torture they would soon wear. "I don't mind if you wiggle," she said amiably. "There just ain't no way you can stop me putting these on your tits."

Hetty's statement was so obviously true that neither girl had the will to fight. Gail looked down cringingly as her right nipple was bitten and clamped, then watched again as the small open jaws approached her other breast and took possession of their passive prey. The small objects hurt bitterly. They stuck out pertly and aggressively in a way that shamed. They made the breasts seem wanton, demanding attention. Neither girl had the faintest possibility of removing them. They exchanged glances of despair. Hetty went about her work, leaving them alone with their pain.

Mick, passing on an errand, stopped to admire. "Please take these things off our breasts," Gail asked him humbly. "Hetty put them on us. She's no right . . . ."

He laughed and flicked one of her pins with a heavy finger so that she winced. "Poor kid's got to have her bit of fun," he admonished cheerfully. "Likes her clothes pins, Hetty does." He went blithely about his affairs.

It was some considerable time before Hetty returned. "Guess you'd like to get them pins off your nips?" she suggested brightly. She listened to their fervid affirmatives before she said, "You'll wear 'em awhile yet. But I am going to take 'em off." She grinned at their puzzlement. "I take 'em off but put 'em right back on in a different position. It hurts much more that way. See, I'll show you."

She showed them. They stood abjectly while their nipples were introduced to a fresh torture. Without experiencing it, they would have found it hard to believe that what this girl was doing to them could produce so much pain. But as each of the seeking jaws found its new bite upon their flesh they gasped in shock at the intensity of sensation.

"Bet the boys didn't screw your cunts," Hetty affirmed, no doubt from some personal knowledge of her own. "With these on your tits your little clits ought to really be ripe. Let's see how good you are." She inserted a knowing finger within Gail's waiting vulva and plied it cunningly with female skill.

Like so many of their punishments it went on and on. The hoyden went from one to the other, snickering with a lewd joy at the responses they could not quench. It was a very feminine torture. Between their nipples and their damp sex the captives were kept in constant agony. They tried hard not to moan. But a girl is a girl is a girl . . . !

It passed in the way that punishments do. They were fed. They were allowed to sleep. They slept handcuffed, but without pain. Morning brought breakfast, Sam, and disaster. When he cleared the dishes he crudely grasped Gail's left nipple and squeezed. Instinctively, she swung her cuffed hands, the metal on her wrists striking the male Adam's apple with enough force to send him gagging and clutching to the wall. She quailed at the sudden savagery in his eyes. There was a terrible silence while he got back his voice. With frightening venom he ejaculated: "You bitch! You absolute bitch!" He gathered the dishes and was gone. Both girls were trembling. Sam would soon be back.

"Sure, I know. She hit you, Sam. But we can't cut the girl to pieces," Jake argued persuadingly. "Just forget the idea of stringing her up and going to work with that whip."

"I'm going to hurt her," Sam insisted doggedly.

"O.K.! O.K.! But let's spread it out a bit. How's about making her a five-way girl."

Gail cringed. Sam brightened. "O.K. But I've got to be in Court."

"I'll get Hetty in to warm her up. You can take over later."

"Let's fix her now. I got time." Sam was avid.

They 'fixed her'. It was really very simple. Gail's hands were cuffed behind her back. Cursing the trouble, they got tools and removed the chains from her feet, immediately replacing them with loops of rope about her ankles; these led to rings high in the wall. Both officers pulled until Gail's legs were widely and obscenely spread and her hips were raised off the floor. Most of her weight rested on her shoulders and upper arms. She could make no effective motion. "A damn pretty picture!" Sam approved. Jake merely smiled. They went away. But before they left they thoughtfully passed Grace's hands behind her through the bars and cuffed them there so that she must stand and watch. "Be a real education for you, honey," Jake assured her affably. Their laughter drifted back to the captive girls.

Hetty arrived in short order. She was glowing. Her eyes sparkled at the sight of Gail's gaping secrets. "Curious 'bout the five ways?" She laughed. "Look! I'll show you." She held up a small short single thonged whip, a miniature, but still a thing of menace. The bound girl felt her flesh crawl. She cringed. She knew!

As always, the unexpected! Hetty's wrist flicked the wicked little thong across the exposed sole of her victim's anchored foot. Gail cried out in pain and shock. "Number one," said Hetty. "Let's try for number two." She hit Gail's other sole and elicited another yelp of pain. Delightedly, the excited teenager struck the shockingly exposed centre of her victim's sex. How's that for number three?" she inquired with interest. "Guess where the next two go." She took up a new position. Gail looked up at her beseechingly in the knowledge that her naked breasts pleaded for the thong. Hetty carefully rewarded

them with number four and number five. "There! You're a five-way girl!" Hetty announced jubilantly.

The naked girl lay helpless and watched herself whipped. The girl who wielded the thong went slowly from number one to number five with methodical precision. No single stroke of the short lash injured, none was impossible to bear, no stroke mattered. But in their unceasing cumulative effect they were diabolical. Gail wept in the desolation of her misery. Sometimes she moaned or cried out in protest. Hetty smiled and whipped steadily. They had all day . . . .

Jake's entry was a small explosion. "O.K. Hetty, girl. You can run. Chiefs coming back." He was joined by a sweating Sam. The two men lost no time in freeing their torture victim and the girl cuffed to the bars. In a matter of moments the two naked girls, their wrists handcuffed behind their backs, stood beside the patrol car while the lid of the trunk was raised. "Sorry 'bout this, girls," Jake said with evident sincerity as he lifted the helpless Grace within the empty space.

Gail was frantic. "Please don't take us back to the Prison Farm," she begged tearfully. "Keep us here and hurt us and . . . and . . . the rest! But don't take us back there. They'll half kill us."

Her plea met only laughter. She was lifted and deposited beside the equally distraught Grace. The lid slammed shut.

It seemed a long, long time. But in the motion filled darkness the naked girls could measure nothing. They strove to comfort each other. But their old familiar enemy, the handcuffs, denied them. Always the handcuffs! Gail reflected bitterly as she tugged at the metal bands. The handcuff and the whip! They had become the symbols of her life. She kissed Grace's foot against which she lay. A captive girl is grateful for the smallest joy.

The ancient hulk of machinery rusted peacefully beneath a tree. The naked girls, each with a single wrist handcuffed to a sturdy angle iron, blended naturally within the sylvan scene. They waited where a chuckling policeman had chained them. "Don't you run away with that there harvester," Jake had admonished as he clicked shut the cuff that kept them captive. They watched him drive away. They examined their captive wrists and shrugged hopelessly, grinned at each other in rueful resignation, and waited for something to happen.

It was over an hour before Ma Billings came into view. She was smiling happily. She carried cord. She kissed Gail warmly, and patted Grace's cheek. "Talk about casting your bread upon the waters and getting it back . . . ." She greeted them cheerfully. Looking at the perplexed Grace, she said with deep satisfaction: "I'm going to keep you as a bonus, honey. I surely am." She winked broadly. "Some cop I never heard of phoned and said I'd find you here. I owe that guy . . . . Turn around, sweetheart. I ain't taking no chances."

How strange is slavery! Gail knew only happiness as she passively allowed her elbows to be painfully tied with cord. Ma had already unlocked her from the old machine and joined her wrists behind her back. Even the tether 'round her neck felt good. It was held by someone who would not hurt her more than she could bear. The captive girl watched as Grace was similarly enslaved. She smiled to show that all was well.

"Y'know, honey, I was thinking only yesterday. You just got eight more months to go. Ain't hardly nothing." Ma sounded wistful. Pulling on their tethers she led her slave girls back to the Bar-B, Ranch.

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In this bizarre enslavement which Gail accepts under a compulsion she cannot counter, she finds herself **subject to the whims and eccentricities of an entire family. In bondage and in punishment they work their will upon her with strange penalties and even stranger human relationships.** The Billings on their rustic Ranch enjoy, with an almost bovine innocence, **the use of Gail's loveliness to work out the individual fantasies of each.**

Gail is one of this Author's most endearing 'Damsels in Distress'. The reader shares with her the wry mixture of horror and amusement with which **she bears the subtle cruelties of a prison farm and the lusts and inflictions of as wierd a family as fiction has portrayed.**

Barbara C. Behr
THE HOUSE OF MILAN CORP.