Summary

Gail just needed a place to lay low until the heat was off. What she didn't know is that she was jumping out of the frying pan and into a fucking volcano.

Tags will be updated as the story progresses, archive warnings are just to be safe. There's no straight-up noncon.

Dubcon, no straight-up rape.

This is not a romance.
Inspired by WitchoftheWestCountry and FancyLadySnackCakes and their colorful, meaty fics about that handsome, bloodthirsty lunatic in Resident Evil: Biohazard.
“Shut the fuck up, Jerel,” Gail hissed through clenched teeth. Her hands were clamped around the wheel hard enough that her knuckles went pale.

She had to focus on steering the car, which was currently barreling through the overgrown dirt road, smacking hanging vines and blazing by low, shrubby branches. Police sirens wailed in the distance behind them, but it was Jerel's whimpering that set her teeth on edge. He was slumped and panting in the passenger seat, one bloodied hand gripping the door frame by the window. The other clamped over the bullet wound in his gut, dark and wet.

“I don’t think I’m gunna make it, Gail,” he slurred.

“Jerel, shutthefuckup.”

Were they following them off the main road? Humid night air whipped in through the broken driver’s side window. She eased off the gas and slowed. Nothing in the rearview. She was ready to fight. Her single-barrel shotgun was within reach jutting out of the driver-side door compartment. Her heart was pounding, but her head was clear.

She pulled to a stop, her eyes glued to the mirror. She disregarded Jerel’s moaning and killed the lights. He was going to die if he didn’t get medical attention, but not getting caught was a higher priority.

The car idled. Far behind them, a single siren became louder and then faded. Another passed, and a third, each dropping a half step in pitch as they receded into the distance.

She waited a couple more breaths, but all she heard was the swampy wilds on either side of them, a cacophonous chorus of insects and frogs and fuck knows what else. A mosquito buzzed by her ear and she swatted it away. A sudden stinging itch on her shoulder and she flattened another one.

There was no way they could get back on the highway without being found. She hadn’t planned on killing someone, let alone a former fucking cop, but he shouldn’t have been a hero. Strip mall security didn’t pay enough for it. Thanks to him, the simple ATM bust had turned into a murder. It complicated things.

She started the ignition and flicked the lights.

They cut a tunnel of brightness into the dark woods ahead. A faded and worn track was all that marked where the road was, but at least there was a road. Drive a few feet off in the wrong direction, you could lose half a car to the sinking mud and hidden marshes.

Gail pressed on. Rocks and branches crunched under the tires and trees passed by the windows. Now that they were out of immediate danger, she needed to figure out how to deal with Jerel.

“Jerel,” she said, glancing to the side. He looked pale in the blue glow of the dashboard. She shook his arm and he stirred and mumbled something. She didn’t know how much blood a man could lose before he died, but she’d seen it happen once or twice and it wasn’t looking good for Jerel.

The road continued for a couple of miles before it terminated in a dead end. She remembered that
there’d been another dirt road a way back. She made about a twelve-point turn and went back the other way. This time, she took the right fork.

It was a long driveway. A little bit of the way down, the tracks widened. It was still overgrown, but she could see further ahead on the winding trail.

Her companion’s breathing was shallow. She gritted her teeth and followed the tire ruts around a curve.

The headlights slid across an iron gate. Beyond it lay a truly massive old style plantation home. She didn’t like the looks of it. It was huge, and with its windows dark, the dilapidated place looked ghostly in the light of the headlamps. Her keen eyes caught sight of the trail off to the side, though.

Gail knew these kinds of places, her gran’d had one like it, before she died. There was almost always was a guest house set apart from the main one. Likely the guest house would be harder to get to, perhaps enough to deter other seedy elements like herself.

She didn’t wait. She turned off the car and got out, tucked the shotgun under her arm and stuffed the shells into her pockets. Only then did she go around to get Jerel out.

He was heavy, but he wasn’t unconscious, so he was able to support some of his own weight. Couldn’t talk, though, which was just fine with her. He talked way too much, usually.

“You owe me, man,” she grunted shuffling toward the path one step at a time, knowing he couldn’t answer.

She didn’t know how far she walked. Mud squelched under her feet, choruses of nocturnal swamp life chattered ceaselessly, or buzzed in front of her face, and more than once she heard some animal crashing through the thick brush through the trees.

She lost her footing, slipped down a steep embankment, and then almost stumbled on top of another, smaller house. The relief she felt when her suspicion was confirmed was dulled by how much worse this place looked.

The building was falling apart, far more than the main house. It had been partially reclaimed by the bayou around it, vines and weeds filled up every bit of open ground. Places like this were all over the Louisiana wilds. Abandoned, forgotten. This one was a real beauty. As far off the main road as it was, it was possible that it hadn’t been totally looted it yet. There might be medicine left in a bathroom cabinet, bandages, or even a working phone line, though she wouldn’t hold out hope for that last one. Her cell was all but useless out here in the dead center of nowhere.

In the light of her cellphone’s flashlight, she caught sight of garbage piled everywhere in the front, random weird shit like shoes and hub caps and refrigerator crisper drawers. Smelled weird, too. Like mud, rotten wood, and the eggy stink that always seemed to hang around coastal backwater towns like Dulvey.

She wasn’t going to be picky.

The front door was open, but as soon as she stepped through, a wall of stink hit her in the face like something solid. She almost dropped Jerel when her stomach heaved. It smelled like the previous occupants had died in there.

She was having second thoughts. She looked behind her. Indirect moonlight painted everything in shades of blue and black, like a monochrome photo. The humidity was oppressive. Somewhere back up the trail, the car sat waiting, but she didn’t much want to have to go back on that trail in
the dark. And what was she going to do? She couldn’t leave, and she wasn’t going to stay in the middle of a swamp in a car with broken windows. She already probably had some mosquito-borne disease. There was nowhere else to go. This place might’ve stunk to high hell, but it was well-hidden, and she might have some relief from the bloodsuckers for a little while.

She’d call her cousin in Lafayette tomorrow in the light of day, and see if he’d let her crash at his place.

Jerel whimpered and sagged against her a little. Supporting his heavier frame as best she could, they shuffled inside together.

----

Gail made him hold the cell phone’s flashlight ahead of them as she dragged him down the hall and around the corner into a fairly large kitchen. The stink was atrocious, and even Jerel in his half-aware state gagged a bit. She didn’t need his encouragement to get through it as quickly as possible.

As soon as they exited the far side, Jerel tripped on a battered plastic paint bucket, sending it skittering, and almost took her down with him.

“I feel sick,” he moaned, slumping on the bottom step of a staircase. Gail did, too, but at least she had all her blood.

“All right, look. We just need to find somewhere to hole up for a while. It ain’t the Hilton, but it ain’t a morgue or jail cell either. Just hold off on dyin til I can find you some Meds or something.”

He steeled himself, sucking his breath through his teeth and she helped him stand again, casting a wary eye up the dirty wooden stairs behind him leading to the second floor.

“What a shithole,” he rasped.

“No worse than that dumpster you shoot up in,” she said. He was too distracted with his pain and the effort of walking to respond.

A small room to the right down the hall seemed fairly dry. It was a good place to drop him off, after she checked the corners for any tiny, deadly pests.

The house was giving her a sick feeling. There was something wrong with the air. It felt oily and she could taste the decay on her tongue and in the back of her throat. She shoved it down as best she could.

Gail started opening drawers in the hall, trying to touch the surfaces as little as possible, wishing she’d thought to bring her gloves with her. To her surprise, a dusty bottle of Meds seemed to be just waiting for her in a moldy wooden lamp stand. It was expired, but Jerel didn’t get to be picky. If it still worked, it’d save his life just fine.

He looked paler than usual. His sunburned white complexion was waxy, lips colorless. She had him hold up his shirt while she doused the bloody mess that was his stomach in the green liquid.

He gasped in mingled pain and relief as the Meds worked their magic.

“Why the fuck did that old asshole have a gun anyway. He was a fucking security guard,” he whimpered.
“If you hadn’t forgot the second fuckin camera, he wouldn’t’ve seen us,” she iced.

The bullet had passed through his side and, from what she could tell, hadn’t pierced anything vital, an assumption based on the face that he was still breathing. She made him maintain pressure over the entry wound while the Meds absorbed. It would seal and sterilize it, maybe keep him alive for a few more hours, but he still needed a doctor.

She checked her screen. Only 1:44 am. It had been a very long night.

“We got the money, though,” he said.

He was grinning. Blood was webbed between his crooked, stained teeth. He looked every bit the shit-kicking redneck, but Gail knew he was a coward deep down. He’d almost crapped himself when he saw the guard’s gun.

“I got it.” She stressed the ‘I’ in case he forgot who’d actually done all the work.

She turned off the phone’s flashlight to save its charge and helped him settle into the corner. By the sounds of his breathing, he’d almost immediately fallen asleep.

Had it been any other circumstances, she would’ve left Jerel back at the strip mall parking lot, let him take the fall for the dead guard. Unfortunately, she needed him to make it out of this, otherwise it would’ve been all for nothing.

She tried to make herself comfortable on the floor next to him with her face toward the cracked door, of the room, but it was impossible. It was hot, and the smell of decay was thick. She kept thinking about that guard and the look on his face when he caught her shotgun blast from two yards away, and the way the blood had sort of exploded out of him. It was kind of spectacular, really. She'd never blasted anyone with a 12-gauge from so close before. Of course, at the time she thought he’d killed Jerel with that shitty nightstand handgun of his, but that didn’t turn out to be the case.

She’d had to hide worse places. Once, cut off from every other escape route, she’d hidden in an open grave for three hours before the local bacon gave up the search. Jobs went wrong every so often, but Gail was lucky, and smart, and had gotten herself out of more than a few tight situations.

But fuck… this house was creepy. It was constantly settling, creaking, with those god-awful cicadas chittering outside, and one trapped inside by the sound of it. They sounded like those cheap hand-crank noisemakers. They’d go on for a spell, only to cut off abruptly with a space of brief silence before continuing again.

She shuddered. She felt sticky from the sweat and moisture that was collecting underneath her limp tee shirt. She wiped her forehead with her forearm, but it only made her feel grimier. She would have loved a shower, especially after spending an hour in this place. It would all be sorted out tomorrow, and she could leave this place behind and forget it even existed.

Every once in a while, she caught the movement of skittering cockroaches out of the corner of her eye, but apart from what moonlight filtered through the boarded-up windows at the end of the hall, it was dark enough that she could ignore them. She could still hear them, though, and imagined that there were probably many more of them. It made her skin crawl.

She envied Jerel for his ability to just pass out like that. The longer she sat there, the more awake she felt, but it was a strained, tense wakefulness.

A creak of floor board, closer than the other noises had been, made her grip her shotgun closer.
Jerel slept on, breathing loudly through his nose.

It wouldn’t be unreasonable to consider that someone else might already be in the house. And that god damn smell… was it getting stronger?

It smelled like black mold, a familiar scent. You just didn’t live in the south without knowing that smell, but everything in this shithole of a state was somehow so much worse.

She fucking hated the bayou.

There it was again, that fucking sound outside the doorway, the settling of old, dilapidated wood, warped from the humidity. It sounded like the entire structure of the house was creaking and groaning under its own weight.

The cicadas cut off. In that brief interval, she heard soft noises, like something small being dragged.

The cicadas started up again. Gail got a grip. It was probably just a possum. This region was rife with the little fuckers, and there was probably more than one nest of them in the walls.

Even so, Gail slid herself a bit further from a hole in the wall and checked that her shotgun was loaded. Her eyes were on the wall across the hall from her. In the dark, her vision played tricks on her, and the peeling wallpaper seemed to be moving. She wasn’t a coward. She’d been raised by a mean drunk of a mother who taught her both how to hide white wine in Mountain Dew bottles, and how to fight.

“Fuck this,” she whispered to herself. Jerel was still out cold. He wouldn’t notice if she went out, took a look around the place, maybe tried to find something worth stealing. The bayou was a breeding ground for skags and crackheads, so he also wouldn’t mind if she took the shotgun. He’d be safe in here for a little bit. She just needed to do something.

All the same, stepping into the rest of the house did not alleviate her nerves or make her feel more in control of the situation.

Something just wasn’t right.

She caught her hand hovering over a doorknob leading into a room beside the one that held Jerel, listening to the eerie ambiance of the house for a solid five minutes without moving to actually open it and realized immediately that she had no interest in going into any of the closed rooms.

She decided to come back later and went back to the kitchen.

She avoided the pots and pans on the table. She was sure that whatever she’d been smelling was coming from there. The ski mask she tugged over her nose and mouth did nothing to filter out the stench of decomposing meat, but it kept the flies away, at least. There were just as many bugs inside as outside.

She found a few more things in drawers. Mostly trash, but on the floor by the door on the other side of the kitchen, she found what was unmistakably a lock pick. Seemed like someone else had been there at some point. The door to the outside stood open, still, and briefly she thought she should shut it, as if somehow it wasn’t safe to leave it open to the night like that. She chided herself on her nerves.

She went back through to the other side and down the back hallway. A door at the end was cracked open. A bathroom, somehow filthier than the rest of the house, was empty of anything of interest.
The bathtub had a suspicious brown ring around the interior.

She checked her phone. It was only 2:33am.

A rhythmic series of creaks sounded above her head. She froze, and listened.

There was no mistake, someone was walking around up there. The house wasn’t empty after all.

Gail decided she needed backup, or at least another pair of eyes. Fuck his gunshot wound, she wasn’t going to let Jerel sleep through this night if she couldn’t.

She headed back through the door into the other hallway. And into the empty storage room.

Jerel’s corner was empty. Which meant that the noises she’d heard had been him.

Gail uttered a series of cusses. She checked that the gun was loaded again, and wiped her sweating palms on the thighs of her jeans. It felt like the gesture hadn’t helped relieve the feeling of filth that coated her.

A door slammed somewhere on the other side of the house. Someone moving around, or just more weird house stuff?

“Jerel,” she hissed into the emptiness up the stairs. Her only answer was a flying cockroach in her face.

Gail dropped her phone and swatted it away. Her shotgun arm was shaking, now, but she aimed it ahead of her as she groped on the floor to grab the phone. With the light in hand once more, she swept it around upstairs without leaving to bottom step.

Ice cold fear gripped her when she saw the people, missing limbs and standing totally still just at the top of the steps. But then she saw that they didn't have faces either.

What she'd first taken to be human figures were mannequins. Inexplicable, solid black mannequins, just gathering dust like everything else here. She appreciated that she didn't have an itchy trigger finger. It would've been humiliating to lose her nerve and blast some mannequins. But still… what kind of creepy motherfuckers just had shit like that laying around?

“This shit ain't worth it,” she snarled. She didn’t care if Jerel was her connection with Beaumont, the gun dealer to whom she owed money. He could go fuck himself for disappearing like that.

She went back across the kitchen and to the front door, but the entryway was dark. The door she’d heard was the front door shutting. The lock didn’t budge, and no amount of prodding with the lock pick could open it.

Maybe the wind had shut it -she could hear it now moaning through the cracks in the walls and windows. Or, maybe Jerel was feeling better and had left without her. Maybe he’d waited until she wasn’t looking and just fucking left her alone in this dump with no car, and no money. Rage filled her chest, sudden and hot as she thought about him doing that after all she’d done to help him.

She thought of the car sitting in wait in the driveway, with enough money in the trunk to pay off her debts and get a new name in another city. She dreaded to think what she'd have to do to get that back.

More immediately, she was having difficulty just finding another route out of the house.
With increasing desperation, she checked and found every window to be boarded up and reinforced with rusted chicken wire mesh. There was even barbed wire in some places. What was with this place anyway?

“Jerel, you piece of shit,” she yelled into the empty foyer, unable to contain her anger any longer. “Where the fuck are you?”

A sound of static popped in the empty room.

“Jerel’s not in right now, caaaaaan I take a message?”

Gail jumped out of her skin and nearly fired her shotgun at a painting on the wall before she realized that it wasn't a real person. The voice had been in the upper register, and undeniably male, but she couldn’t tell where it had come from.

She heard low chuckles, crackling as if from interference.

“A little jumpy, aren’t we?”

The voice was coming through speakers. She swept the light over the seam between walls and sagging ceiling. She spotted one by the stairs, and another one to her left by the kitchen door. There must have been a microphone somewhere, too. And a camera.

So this house wasn’t as abandoned as it looked. Her immediate thought was drug den. If she'd stumbled on a hideout, they might be in more trouble than she’d originally estimated.

“Let's play a game,” the voice crackled. It had a definite bayou tilt to it. He sounded like real backwoods white trash. “I'll call it… 'find your buddy while he still has all his body parts.’”

Was this a fucking joke? Who the fuck was this guy? Was Jerel somehow in on it? It didn't make sense, and she fucking hated being caught off guard.

“No feeling chatty? That's okay. Jerel talks enough for the both of you… Gail.”

“Son of a bitch,” she growled under her breath.

Leave it to him to get himself kidnapped by some inbred Hills-Have-Eyes-talking motherfucker, and then tell the man her name. She had to assume that he’d already spilled everything else too. Gail’s pulse was in her throat as she figured out what to do.

She didn't want to deal with this. She didn't want to put her neck out for a guy she didn't even like.

She could take the money and leave. Screw Jerel, screw Beaumont and his crew, and screw whomever was fucking with her now. She just needed a way out. She went back through the hallway to the back of the house. The only other door led to stairs that disappeared in the inky blackness below, and she sure as fuck didn't want to go down there.

“We’re havin a party here, Gail,” the voice crackled to life. Had he installed speakers all over the fucking house? “I think Jerel’s feelin a little green around the gills. That right, buddy?”

Gail heard the faint sound of a man sobbing in the background. She’d never heard Jerel make that kind of sound. The twinge of sympathy was short-lived. He was still a monumental fuckup, and after his stupidity earlier in the evening, whatever he’d gotten himself into was his own problem.

“I don’t give a fuck,” she said, speaking back for the first time, though she didn’t know where to
look. She settled on slowly turning to address the room. “You can do whatever fucked-up Deliverance shit you want to him. I’ll leave you to it.”

“It ain’t that easy, Gail.” She was starting to hate the way this fucker said her name. There was a sadistic rawness to his voice, something that warned her to be careful. That kind of malicious joy came from criminals who enjoyed the bloodier parts of their jobs just a little too much. “Your friend here… well he’s a real pussy. Nice of him to find that bear trap, though. I been lookin for that thing fer weeks. Thing is he don’t got much tolerance for pain an’ that just ain’t gonna cut it. No sirree.”

She didn’t know what he was talking about, but she believed him about Jerel.

“Look, man, today’s been bad enough without all this extra crazy on top of it. I ain’t in no god damn mood for it, and I’ve got a shotgun, ya hear?”

She cringed to hear herself mention the gun. It sounded like false bravado. If he could see her he already knew what she was carrying. She started to head back to the door at the end of the hallway.

“Let’s see how good y’are at findin’ things,” the voice sang.

“Go in the tv room! There’s a tunnel down there-“ Jerel gibbered in the background through the speakers, frantic, before his voice was cut off. She paused and listened as a scuffle was broadcast through the speakers in the house. The faceless speaker uttered a litany of curses and then started giggling, high-pitched and manic. In the background, there was more screaming, this sounded mindless and in the spirit of total agony.

The mic on the other end thumped and crackled, and then… breathing, deep and raspy.

“Gaaaail,” he said, sing-song and taunting. It sounded like he was a lot closer to the mic now. She could hear him swallow, which bled into another series of low chuckles. “I hate spoilers. Your friend broke the rules, and now he’s got one less tongue to waggle.”

Well, looked like Jerel wouldn’t be saying anything to Beaumont, now.

“Look, dude, I don’t think you get it. I don’t give a fuck about that worm.” She needed something to bargain with. And, as much as it pained her, she knew of one thing. “How about money? You want some money? I know where there’s a whole ton of it. I can give it to you.”

Silence. She cleared her throat and walked back down the hallway toward the stairs. This time she paused at the door she hadn’t opened before. She twisted the knob, wiped her palm off on her jeans, and pushed it open. In the back, the dark glass of an old CRT television screen reflected her cellphone’s light back at her. The TV room.

“Ten grand, my man,” she continued, deciding on a figure that might seem like a lot to a hick. “All yours. You just gotta let me go so I can get it for ya.”

Of course, there was way more than that in the ATM case, hell they’d picked that machine because she knew it had a higher capacity than most, but he didn’t need to know. She had no real intention of giving it to him, she just hoped he was the kind of crazy that made him gullible.

“You mean this money?” the voice oozed, suddenly low and menacing. She stopped, puzzled, and listened, but there was only silence that broke a moment later in laughter. “What am I sayin’? Ya can’t see a got-damn thing through them speakers. Well let me just say that Jerel here really is a talkative little fella. A real chatty Cathy, lemme tell ya.”
Now Gail felt the rage build red hot inside of her chest. Jerel had spilled about the money. They’d been in the damn guest house for almost two hours, now, plenty of time for someone to break into the car and take the case.

“Fuck!” she said, kicking over a chair in her rage.

Shrill laughter cut out to silence. For all her bravado, Gail was scared. She knew how not to show it, but the nausea inspired by that god awful stench had settled in and made itself comfortable, and now it mingled with the trembling already present in her gut.

She wiped the sweat from her brow -but seeing that mold on the door made her feel like it was all over her- and pulled the flask of Wild Turkey out of her bra. She took a swig of the warm liquor and gasped as it burned its way down. The trembling let up a little.

She was still scared, but that didn’t matter. She was gonna get that sum’bitch who had her money, and as soon as Jerel backed up what had happened tonight -who else would believe her otherwise?- she was gonna kill him, too. Unfortunately, it meant that she had to go deeper into this fucked up place.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Your pageviews/kudos/comments give me life.
Teamwork

Chapter Notes

aka an adventure in triple contractions.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She knew after about five minutes of creeping around that she’d made a mistake. If that fucking ladder hadn’t broken -looked like it wasn’t the first time, either- she would have taken one look at the murky, brown water and turned back. As it was, she had to deal with it. But Gail wasn’t a soft southern lady.

She’d been subjected to her own share of awful, disgusting shit, sometimes in the line of her work, sometimes as a consequence of being wrapped up in it. She would never tell anyone as long as she lived that she’d hidden in the tank of a porta-potty just so she could smoke a dude who’d been dealing goods on Beaumont’s turf. She’d worn a biohazard suit, and that fat fuck never knew what hit him, so ultimately it had been worth it for the look of surprise plastered on his face. But that day, Gail had found the line between what she was and was not willing to do for money. It had taken her a week before the ghost smell of blue chemical and human waste left her nostrils, even despite the suit.

She didn’t have a biohazard suit now, but the standing water here didn’t smell like sewage. Still, as she peeled off her sweaty clothes and stripped down to her sneakers, she wished she’d at least thought to grab a plastic bag from somewhere. She took another swig from her flask before wrapping it in the bundle.

She held the bundle of clothing, shells, and the shotgun over her head as well as she could to keep it from getting wet, and slopped through the muddy, filthy water in total darkness. It nearly came up to her chest in places thanks to how she had to crouch to get under the wooden beams.

The mud beneath the water was deep and soft and she quickly realized that the suction formed by her weight pressing into it was strong enough to suck off her shoes. One of her sneakers was pulled loose, but with her hands over her head, she couldn’t reach down to grab it. Her foot slipped out of it and suddenly she only had one shoe.

A stream of curses poured from her as she tried to regain her balance without dropping the shotgun or her phone, and the next step she took, her bare foot sank up to the ankle in mud. There was something hard beneath the surface of it, something that felt very much like a bony spine, and she had to choke down panic.

She stepped as carefully as she could, leading with the foot that still had a shoe to protect it from unseen hazards, but even then, she could feel sharp objects embedded in the muck. Something sliced her heel. With a hiss, she lurched forward, tried to move faster.

She could see the other side now, illuminated by unseen lights, and she followed it like a beacon. She forced herself to focus through the stinging pain. She’d seen enough horror movies to know that if she lost her cool, she’d lose everything.

That giggling fucker hadn’t spoken since before she’d crawled through the open wall panel. It
seemed that he didn’t have the entire house wired after all. Either that or he was watching her go through this in silence and was laughing about it. She couldn’t stand the thought of being one-upped, but after hearing her name spoken in that creep’s voice, she felt slimy in a way that filthy water and mildew couldn’t touch.

When she emerged from the water, she leaned against one of the less disgusting concrete walls to dress herself, and then grabbed her foot to check the cut. It was about an inch long, and on the inner corner of where the heel touched the ground. She’d need a tetanus shot when she got out of this, and maybe some antibiotics, but it wasn’t as bad as it could have been.

She was in a foul mood. Despite everything, and despite what she’d already put up with in the name of the score, she really didn’t like dirt or grime, and here she’d had to submerge herself, completely naked, in it. Had exposed a cut to it.

And why? Quarter of a mil, that’s why. That hillbilly motherfucker probably wouldn’t know what to do with that much money. He’d probably never seen so much in his life, and she’d take particular relish in getting it back.

Gail continued through the bowels of the house, limping on her bare, cut foot, with her cellphone lighting the way from her shirt pocket, only at 36% now. She stepped carefully over the debris and detritus that was everywhere. Broken glass, shards of metal, broken tools, and all kinds of plastic containers.

She couldn’t figure out why was there so much fucking bleach. The place didn’t look like it’d seen cleaning chemicals in years. She stroked the shotgun in a self-soothing manner as she walked, and imagined all the things she’d do to the man that belonged to the voice.

She thought it would be particularly fitting if she smashed his face in with the cash box; that thing was heavy. It actually put a smile on her face, imagining how he’d look when she lodged the metal container into his forehead. She didn’t know what he looked like, but by his voice, she could picture some mutated wretch covered in boils, pop-eyed and sallow. It temporarily helped distract her from the dark, disgusting surroundings.

There was a whole other world beneath the guest house, apparently. Gail left the basement passage with the dirt floor and passed through a workshop. She didn’t look too close at the trash bags full of something brownish red and wet-looking (and the fucking smell… it was worse here than upstairs). She only gave one cursory glance into the closed, empty cell, complete with rusted, iron-barred door. This was starting to look less like Deliverance and more like the one with the guy who kept women in a pit so he could skin them later.

It could be worse. She didn’t need it spelled out for her, she recognized that this situation was fucked-up beyond a shadow of a doubt. But at least it was undeniable and overtly so. The real problem, what set her hackles up day to day, were the psychos that knew how to blend in. The kind that looked totally normal, talked calmly and cheerfully about Huey Lewis and the News right up until they lodged an axe in your skull.

Whoever had built this torture dungeon, or whatever it was, there was no way they lived in the normal world with normal people. The level of crazy needed to live like this, and take glee in it, could only belong to a shut-in of epic proportions.

Gail felt like she had it all figured out, and that made her feel good. Made her feel powerful. But even she gave pause when she reached the room at the end of the filthy basement. A wall panel was set aside, revealing the only apparent way out of this place: a pitch-black dirt tunnel that stretched farther than the light reached.
Bizarre noises traveled down the passage. It sounded like the groans of the house, but wheezier. Air pressure from the outside, she had no doubt, thinking of the desolate wind whistling through the cracks upstairs. Despite her rationalizations, she made no move toward it.

She was starting to wish she hadn’t used her phone so much. It was down to 28% (the fucking flashlight drained so much power), and without a way to charge it, she’d be stuck in the dark.

Thinking of the near labyrinthine layout of the basement, and all the hazards scattered underfoot, spurred Gail’s half-shoed feet into action. Without further thought, she charged into the moist, breathy darkness, eyes on the floor to avoid more hazards.

The floor of the tunnel was uneven, and despite her care, about ten yards in, she misstepped. She stumbled and caught herself, shotgun still gripped tight, but the cellphone had spilled out of her shirt pocket and went skittering a bit ahead.

She grumbled to herself as she reached for the phone. Its field of influence cast light up at an angle to the left and shone on the damp walls of the rough tunnel.

It wasn’t until her hand was nearly hovering over it that she saw the slimy black growth, caught in the light, bulging out of the ground. She almost choked on the earthy smell of fungus and mildew, and beneath it all was a hint of meaty rot.

It glistened wetly, actively oozing, almost… pulsing. Taking the phone, she swept the light up to see how big the protrusion was. And it just kept going.

She’d never seen black mold that looked like this… tar-like goop dripped in ropy strings and it looked like whatever it was growing on, maybe a fence post or a stretch of tree root, went all the way to the ceiling.

That wheezy groaning noise she’d heard at the mouth of the tunnel filled the tight space.

“What the fu…” the words died before she could finish saying them.

The mold was moving. Not only that, but it was getting bigger, growing out of the wall before her very eyes, like a nasty cake rising in the oven. When it swelled, it sounded like rubber being stretched taut.

Her stomach lurched and acid bit the back of her throat.

Suddenly, two chunks stretched and ripped, dangling free from the main mass and then it had arms.

And a fucking mouth.

The noise Gail made was a combination of horrified scream and a groan of disgust, but it was cut short. One of the massive, dripping arms clobbered her square in the middle of her chest.

The impact crushed the air from her lungs, and stars prickled the corners of her vision. Seconds later, her body hit the compact dirt floor, hard.

Her brain caught up before the rest of her.

She couldn’t make her limbs cooperate, even as she could see that the Thing was coming right the fuck for her. The cellphone, now laying on the floor between them, was pointed up in just a way that the thing’s shadow swallowed up everything behind it, filled the narrow tunnel, made it look even bigger.
Its teeth… massive, pointed, and gnashing, extended upward, stretching against the black, stringy slime that it was made of, like a rotting elastic sheath.

She aimed, and she fired.

The blast was deafening in the tight space, stunning her anew as the ringing in her ears eclipsed everything else. The bright flash of light left glowing green imprints on her eyeballs.

When the ringing subsided, she heard another wheeze. Gail raced to reload, but with a heavy, sopping wet plop, the moldy creature collapsed and stopped moving.

It was a few minutes before she found that she could move again. Over and over she repeated the same words, unable to stop the flood of verbal spew. ‘what the fuck? What the fuck? What the fuckwhatthefuckwhatthefuck-’

A toxic-looking puddle of thick, greenish pus, streaked with red, began to ooze out of the place where its head had been, and maybe it was that that tipped her over the edge.

Gail crab-walked backwards, twisted to the side. And then she heaved up the whiskey in her stomach, and whatever was left of her Waffle House dinner from before, until she’d emptied herself out.

She pushed herself against the tunnel wall, panting.

“Get fucking grip, Gail. You killed it,” she said to herself. “It’s dead. You blew its fucking head off, and now it’s dead.”

A thousand questions poured into her head at once, what is it? Where’d it come from? How is something like that possible?

She pushed them down.

It didn’t matter what it was, or… how it was. What mattered is that she’d blown its brains out. Now it was dead, and she was still alive.

She dug around for her flask, unscrewed the lid with a shaky hand (shotgun loaded and tucked under her arm in case the thing decided to get up again), and took a nice, long swig. She swished it around in her mouth. The whiskey covered the taste of bile and partly digested hash browns. Then she took another, for good measure. She wasn’t an alcoholic like her Ma, but situations like this could drive anyone to the bottle.

She had to gather her courage before she could move again, but the whiskey helped. She grabbed her phone and wiped the outside of it off as best she could (that black goo had gotten everywhere, including on her) and made herself get back up.

She was more careful going forward, and extra wary of any brackish, seeping water or moldy-looking growths, especially careful not to step in it with her bare foot.

The tunnel winded and twisted for quite a way, and though she had an average sense of direction, she suspected that we was headed right for that large plantation home.

She had trouble believing that Jerel had gotten this far on his own. She hadn’t left him unattended for that long. Meds or not, the man had lost a lot of blood. He could barely walk with her help, let alone swim through sludge and maneuver around all the shit that was strewn around.
Gail started to get a sinking feeling, something about Jerel, but it didn’t get much further than that, and she pushed it down.

She took another swig from her flask, which was now less than half full.

Around another bend, she heard that wheezing sound. Gail grinded her teeth together until her jaw ached to keep from screaming this time. The black slime webbed from the floor to the ceiling, and the bulbous mass within it was swelling and growing. Her bladder trembled and she clench tight.

As soon as she could see what looked like a head, she fired. The thing hadn’t even been able to emerge fully, but now it sank down, headless, in a soggy noxious heap while that disgusting internal fluid, almost human-looking, gushed out like a busted pipe.

*That’s right, girl, show those things you ain’t to be fucked with,* she thought, swallowing down the nausea. Still, she wasn’t feeling quite cocky enough to speak out loud.

It was another blessedly uneventful five minutes or so, winding though the bending (and thankfully unbranching) tunnel, before she felt a change in the air. She’d been walking up a slight incline for some time when she caught sight of a metal paneled trap door in the ceiling ahead and above.

Her phone was down to 6% now, so she turned off the screen, tucked it into her back pocket, and pushed up against the heavy metal hatch with one arm. The shotgun was primed to fire at any surprises ahead.

She did not expect to see what was on the other side.

It was a room. A clean room, illuminated by strings of flashing green Christmas lights, taped around the border near the ceiling. She peered around the cracked seam. A battered, plastic-topped card table stood in the center of the room with a single metal folding chair pushed up to the near side.

A TV, currently off, sat atop the table, facing the chair. Its cord stretched behind it where it disappeared beneath the wall behind.

She pushed open the hatch a little further, choosing caution over haste. This looked too set-up to be a coincidence. It looked like a trap. She considered turning back.

A gasp of air, and squelching in the tunnel behind her was enough to propel her in. She rolled away from the opening, but not quite fast enough. Her one remaining shoe snagged on something. Uttering an involuntary noise, she jerked her foot free. The shoe disappeared into the opening and the hatch slammed shut with enough force to break her ankle, had she been a second slower.

A sickening slide of metal against metal informed Gail what she might have guessed, had she been given a little more time to work it out. She was right where she was meant to be, and she was trapped.

For a moment, she just lay there, feeling tired and more disgusting than she ever thought she could. She still had one soggy sock on, stained and dirty. She peeled it off the rest of the way with the thought of using it to wrap her cut, but it was so filthy it would have been pointless.

The room smelled like formaldehyde, with subtle undertones of ozone. Gail preferred it to the rotting meat and mold.

Noises sounded on the other side of the hatch, a squishing, thumping sound as the creature, or creatures, tried to get in, and she sat up so quickly her head spun.
“Hey girly…” The voice cut through her distraction. That fucking voice. “How’d you like my little ‘tunnel of love?’ Make any friends?”

She searched the walls with her eyes for the speakers. Two, on opposite walls. And there, on the other side of the TV, installed in the corner between the wall and ceiling, a small red light blinked a sluggish rhythm. There was no visible exit from the room, just rusted metal panels, featureless and strangely sterile.

After taking out those swamp things in the tunnel, she felt brave. And after having nothing to drink for the last couple of hours but cheap whiskey, she was feeling a little reckless, too. She knew it, but she couldn’t give less of a shit about it.

“You must be a real ugly asshole if you gotta hide like this,” she said, staring right into the blinking red light.

She was rewarded with a breathy, delighted giggle. Her smirk was involuntary, and she dropped it as soon as she realized it was there. Knowing she was being watched, she considered shooting the camera and taking away at least one of the lunatic’s toys, but something made her stop. Knowing he was watching her didn’t make her feel powerless, maybe as intended. Instead, it made her feel more in control.

“I gotta say, I didn’t think you’d make it through. You got balls, missy.” She couldn’t tell if the praise was genuine. Everything out of this guy’s mouth seemed duplicitous. “I like that about you. Means you’re a fighter. Wooo-wee, this is gon’ be fuuun!”

Apprehension filled her, but the whiskey kept it in check. She pushed herself to her feet, flexing her toes against the cold metal floor.

“Why don’t you just come face me like a real man?” she demanded of the blinking red light, drawing her hand over the shotgun barrel with a menacing grin. She didn’t know if her crazy eye translated through the camera, though. In person, it could make lesser men piss themselves.

“Naaah, can’t do that, Gail. It’ll ruin the game. Ya see, I made this room just fer you! It ain’t as pretty as I woulda liked, but didn’t have a whole lotta time to plan. I hope you like it, Gaaail.”

She looked around a little more carefully. Something about the fact that all of the surfaces, including the floor, were made of metal made her uncomfortable. When she caught sight of the thick, black electrical cables laying strewn about, their copper wires exposed, she knew why. It was pretty obvious at that point where this might go, as the only surface in the room that wasn’t conductive was the plastic top of the card table. And of course, she was barefoot.

As much as she hated doing exactly what was expected of her, she didn’t need him to tell her to take a seat.

“Thass right… get comfy, make yerself at home. I think we’re gonna have a real good time, you an’ me. Oh! And… let’s not forget Jerel.”

At that moment, the TV flared to life. A screen full of white static was replaced by a black and white video feed. Jerel alone sat on the other side, looking all the worse for wear. His entire lower face was smeared in crusty dark blood, and she could see that it had seeped down his neck and stained his shirt, which was already bloody from his gunshot wound. He looked sweaty and pale, his eyes were wide and twitchy.

“Jerel,” she uttered, unable to hide her shock. He opened his mouth, as if to say something, but all
she could see behind his dark smeared teeth was a glistening blackness. He made an awful vocal gulping sound, and his adam’s apple bobbed. He choked a sob and his eyes pinched and rolled back in despair.

“I happen to be fluent in tongue-less, so I’ll translate for you. Jerel says ‘Hi Gail, how nice to see you! I can’t wait to play this game with you.’”

Sick fuck. Maybe it was the whiskey, maybe it was everything else she’d been through, but part of Gail was experiencing a morbid, vindictive sense of satisfaction seeing Jerel suffer. She didn’t care how he felt, at the moment, she only wanted to know one thing.

“Jerel, what were you doing in the TV room?” she said, staring at his image on the TV screen with narrowed eyes. “Why’d you go in there when I wasn’t looking?”

Jerel’s mouth opened, but all he managed to do was utter a pained groan. His face looked like he was pleading.

“Oh, I can answer that one for ya. You see, Mr. Dumbass here thought he could get out that way. He was plannin’ on taking all that money and leavin’ you here. Isn’t that right, pal?”

Jerel’s eyes looked somewhere off screen and he shrank down in his seat. Gail could now see that his wrists were zip-tied to the arms of his chair. She hoped they were tight.

“You piece of shit,” she seethed through her teeth

Despite pretenses that he wanted to come along and provide backup, Gail knew the only reason Jerel had been with her for the ATM bust in the first place was to keep an eye on her, make sure she got the money, and make sure it got to Beaumont. That was fine, pretty normal when you owed the Big Dog some backpay. But then he’d fucked it all up for the both of them. Now she wondered if it hadn’t been his plan all along to just take the cash for himself and let the blame fall on her. Of course, his brilliant scheme didn’t account for the fact that he was utterly incompetent.

Jerel warbled something wet and incoherent to whatever, or whomever, he was looking at behind his camera.

“You were gonna come back for her? Well ain’t that sweet as my momma’s peach pie. You hear that, Gail? Jerel’s a real nice guy. How ‘bout that?”

Jerel started to say something else, but just then, a torso in a dusty sweatshirt, medium grey in the colorless TV, walked on screen behind him. The figure looked skinny. A long-fingered, white-skinned hand gripped the back of Jerel’s neck and jerked it back. Jerel’s expression was now one of mindless terror.

“It’s a good thing y’all are such nice people, ‘cuz we’re gonna play a niiiice little game together, just us friends.” The man’s cheerful, menacing voice was now coming through the TV.

Another hand came into view, this one wielding a short X-Acto knife. Jerel’s eyes bulged in terror when the empty hand gripped his wrist, but all it did was slice the blade through the zip ties holding him to the chair. Jerel rubbed his wrist, looking thoroughly miserable, but he made no move to get up or fight back. Perhaps because of the bear trap the man had mentioned before.

She was reminded that Jerel, for all his two-faced idiocy, had been through a lot worse than she already.

“What game?” she asked, suddenly aware that her bare feet were touching the same metal floor as
the stripped electrical cables. She slowly pulled her feet up and crossed her legs in the seat of her chair, even though it wouldn’t do her any good, with the shotgun rested across her lap. The chair didn’t have any rubber feet, and the seat and back were made of the same material as the rest of it, but she still felt better with her bare feet off the floor.

The torso disappeared from view. A second later, a sharp face, peering from within a hoodie, filled the screen. Her bladder gently reminded her at that moment that alcohol was a diuretic and she clenched tight.

“We gonna call this one… ‘Teamwork,’” the man said with a wide-eyed, shit-eating grin before he bobbed back out of sight again. Gail’s initial reaction with his sudden presence on screen changed from shock to wonder within short order. He wasn’t ugly as she had imagined. He wasn’t what she’d call pretty, either, but her presumption that the psycho on the speakers was probably too freakish-looking to pass in regular society went out the window as soon as she saw him.

“I betch’all jus can’t wait to get started…” one of the lean hands reappeared from the side, holding a Rubik’s cube. The hand slid it in front of Jerel, who regarded it as though it were a coiled snake, and then withdrew off screen. “Now, Jerel,” he said in an exaggerated, saccharine drawl, “all you gotta do is solve this little puzzle. I even made it easy for ya. Just a few moves and you got it! Easy peasy, right?”

Jerel looked as baffled as Gail felt. He gurgled something that even Gail understood as, ‘that’s all?’ She had a sneaking suspicion that there was more to it, but she stayed silent, her face hard.

“Waeehhl, there’s a little more to it. Can’t make it too easy.” The voice was coming through the speakers again.

Suddenly, the TV screen flashed dark before it came back on again. The way the light reflected in Jerel’s wide eyes, and the small glow radius that only touched his front told Gail that she was seeing Jerel through a night vision filter. Whatever subtle shade differences the squares on the cube’s face had in normal light were even harder to differentiate now. Jerel looked around himself frantically. He was totally blind.

He glorbled something incoherent and alarmed, and shrill laughter poured in through the speakers.

“Get it now?” the voice had dropped in pitch to something low and dangerous that sent a tremor low in Gail’s gut that was half-fear, half… something else. “Jerel’s not gonna be able to do this one on his own, Gail. He needs yer help. Oh boy, does he need it.”

“What if I don’t wanna play your stupid fucking game?” she shouted to the room.

The laughter that filtered in now was slow and vicious.

“Oh it’s too good. Hoooooo boy. Well, if either of you don’t play nice… both of y’all’ll get a bit of a shock.”

How predictable, she thought with bitter anger as her eyes flickered to the cables on the floor.

“This puzzle can be solved in 7 moves. You gotta be careful. If you tell Jerel the wrong move, you’re gonna feel it. And Jerel, my buddy, if you don’t turn it the way miss Gail tells you… well… I hope you’re done shittin’ yerself because I seen what electricity does to a man and it ain’t pretty.”

“I can’t even see the fucking colors, you pasty-ass piece of swamp garbage,” she snarled to the red flashing light near the ceiling. He didn’t laugh this time.
“Well that’s just somethin’ yer just gonna have to figure out, Gail. Remember, 7 moves. Any more 'r less and that means you lose.”

She thought again about shooting out the camera, even going so far as to run her fingertip over the trigger. She took another swig of her whiskey instead, not caring that she might regret it later.

Jerel was gibbering, and fidgeting, and it looked like his tongue was bleeding again by the thin, dark liquid drooling from the corner of his mouth.

“Jerel,” Gail said through her teeth. He didn’t seem to hear her. She slammed her fist on the top of the table hard enough that her TV jumped and a wobbly line of interference passed over it. Jerel grew silent and still, and swallowed hard. “You fucked up everything, you goddamn junkie. You know that?”

His chin dropped sheepishly and his mouth closed into a deep, pitiful frown. In the night vision, his thin blond hair looked white and wispy, and his stubble looked like sandpaper.

“If you hadn’t gotten stupid, none o’ this woulda happened in the firs’ got-damn place. But still, I shot that guard before he could blow a hole in your thick skull. I got your wounded ass away from them cops. I even found you some Meds. That means I saved your worthless fucking hide three times tonight, ya dumb shit. If you care about getting outta here at all, you’ll stop tryin to fuck me over and listen to me. An’ when we get back to town, you’re gonna tell Beaumont that we’re square.”

Jerel’s lower lip trembled and his throat bobbed. He looked like he was going to cry. She continued.

“Thing is, we ain’t even gonna get that far unless you do exactly what I tell you,” she said, forcing the edge out of her voice. “Nod if you understand me.”

Jerel nodded. Gail took a deep breath and looked up at the hoodie man’s digital eye. He’d heard everything she had just said, but had not decided to chip in. Gail had spoken of getting out, mostly in an attempt to calm Jerel, but whether or not he actually had any intention of letting them go, she couldn’t say. At the moment, there wasn’t much choice but to play along, at least until she had a better option.

“Alright, asshole. Let’s play.”

-----

From the very first attempt, Gail could tell that this wasn’t so much a game as it was a malicious, drawn-out method of torture. Jerel, already scared out of his mind, was shaking so hard that he was having difficulty turning the sections of cube.

The first shock was his.

Gail saw light from a spark somewhere below the camera’s line of sight, and Jerel’s entire body jumped. The camera, probably on an insulated surface like her TV was, was unaffected, and she was treated to the full sight of what would happen to her if she fucked up. Jerel was left gasping and whining wordlessly once the shock was over.

As soon as it happened, they were both subjected to their tormentor’s child-like giggles dripping through the speakers.

She had to make him hold the puzzle cube up to the camera lens and rotate it so she could see all
sides. Lucky for him, even with her trying to tell the difference between shades of grey, she’d had one of these as a kid. In fact, she used to be pretty good at it.

All the same, the situation was a bit more tense than it had been at home, and she told him the wrong move. She saw the spark out of the corner of her eye and a split second later, every muscle in her body went tense and a flash of pain in her skull blinded her.

“Ohh BABY that’s some good shit!” the man exulted.

When it passed, She could see the shotgun had fallen to the floor, though she didn’t remember dropping it. Her cellphone, now at 3%, was somehow unharmed.

When she managed to catch her breath, she turned it off and set it atop the table. Her bladder felt worse, as did her head.

But what she fixated on, more than anything, was the rage that was building steadily in her chest. Gingerly, she bent down and picked up the shotgun, and lay it atop the table, curious why their captor didn’t mind that she had a weapon.

She was more careful after that, making him rotate the cube in front of the camera a few more times before she gave him an instruction.

Her skull was starting to throb in time with her heartbeats, but to Jerel’s credit, he did exactly what she said. Except once, when he got confused (for some goddamn reason) which ‘left’ she meant (always his left, as she’d plainly stated from the start).

That shock was longer, and somehow worse, and when he came out of it, he was clearly dazed. A string of dark-clotted drool seeped out of his mouth, and Gail considered that he might not be coming out of this without at least a little bit of brain damage.

Without her phone on to tell the hour, Gail had no idea how much time was passing. It felt like days. As she tried to figure out the next move, she thought about the man orchestrating this fucked-up situation.

The Rubik’s cube, from what she could see, was not wired in any way. It was just a basic puzzle cube. So, she had to wonder, how did the psycho know who to shock? It occurred to her, with no small amount of trepidation, that perhaps he was simply watching, and keeping track. If that was true, then their captor was not only cruel, but extremely intelligent. That made him far more dangerous.

As the cube progressed toward completion, their captor remained silent, except for the occasional burst of laughter when Jerel (only him, after her single shock) made a mistake, and was zapped.

With a massive upwelling of triumph, Gail gave Jerel the final instruction. The cube’s sides were complete, solid shades of grey, and she breathed for the first time in what felt like hours.

“Alright. We finished it. Now let us go,” Gail ground out, tired and thirsty dealing with the extremely urgent need to take a piss. She’d die before she faced the humiliation of pissing herself.

There was a thump through the speakers.

“Man... you are one smart cookie, ain’cha.” He sounded equal measures disappointed and impressed. Gail didn’t break her stare into the camera. “I gotta hand it to ya. I thought this would be boring. But you sure know how to keep a man int'rested. That was some edge-of-yer-seat suspense, I tell you whut!”
Her triumph started to sink down like a cold lead weight.

“In fact… I’m jus’ havin too much fun to stop now. Why don’t we call that… Round One.”

Gail knew, suddenly, that he wasn’t going to let them go. That nagging suspicion in the back of her head came to the forefront.

“You said-“

“An’ what exackly did I say?” he interrupted, his voice so close to the mic that he sounded big enough to swallow her whole.

Gail’s mouth worked soundlessly, and at the moment, she realized he’d never outright said that he’d let them go if they won. She felt stupid, and half the rage inside of her was directed inward. On the TV, Jerel whimpered and fidgeted. The man started to chuckle, low and threatening.

“Now, now… let’s not get caught up in the particulars. Let’s jus’ try to enjoy each other’s company. I gotta say, I ain’t never met a gal like you. Yer somethin’ special, yes ma’am… How ‘bout that, Jerel? Did you know she was a bonafide-fuckin’-genius? Maybe you should tell her how much you ‘preciate ‘er, on account o’ she just saved yer ass.”

Baffled, Gail watched on the TV as the hooded figure flashed into the light briefly before standing behind Jerel, partly in shadow.

Jerel, still blind, seemed to sense him standing there, and his fearful vocalizations grew in volume. Long, white fingers slid around Jerel’s neck, and tapped it lightly. He sat up stock straight, shaking hard enough to rattle the table.

“TELL HER,” the voice bellowed with sudden, monstrous volume. “TELL HER YOU APPRECIATE WHUHT SHE’S DONE FER YOU.”

Jerel started sobbing something, thick and throaty. Gail felt her face go cold. But somehow, that bloodless sensation didn’t extend to the rest of her… their captor’s fierce voice had set something off inside of her, a spark.

She was looking at those hands, wrapped loosely around Jerel’s neck, and she had the sudden desire to see them squeeze. Not only that, but she had a desire to know what they felt like on her own skin.

Her breath caught in her throat as the realization of what she’d been thinking hit her like a shockwave.

“Jerel says, ‘Thank you, Miss Gail, fer bein’ sooo smart. An’ thank you fer savin’ muh ass.’” His mockery of Jerel’s voice, with a deep and dopey vocal inflection, almost forced a laugh from her, but she held it back, knowing it would be entirely inappropriate. She knew that Jerel hadn’t actually said those things, probably something more along the lines of ‘please don’t kill me please let me go,’ or some such shit, but she felt the same satisfaction as if he’d actually thanked her himself.

“Y’all ready fer Round Two?!?” he said with unrestrained glee, and Gail was suddenly reminded just who was in control of the situation. She glanced up at the camera when the hooded figure walked offscreen.

Something flew toward Jerel and struck him in the face.
“Ah, muh apologies, Jeereeel.” His voice now oozed with cruel mockery, like a gradeschool bully. “I fergot you can’t see shit in there.”

Jerel scrabbled for whatever it was that had been thrown at him. It rattled like plastic. On her end, Gail could see exactly what it was. Jerel’s fingers ran over the face of it, slow and stupid. It was a square, maybe ten inches by ten, covered in little plastic tiles. One corner lacked a tile, and on its face was a scrambled picture. Searching it with her eyes, Gail could almost make out an image that was somehow familiar to her, something from a children’s book.

“Are you fucking kidding me?”

“Aaaand Gail’s got it! Got-damn, girl. I tell you what, if things were diff’rent…” he trailed off, intimate somehow through the speakers, and breathy in a way that made Gail feel like she was having trouble breathing. “Well… Nevermind. Do I need to explain this one, or you think you got it?”

Jerel gibbered something that sounded thoroughly confused, looking around him as if he might see a clue in the dark before looking straight ahead at his camera.

"You got seven moves."

Gail wasn’t ready to go through all that again. She fucking couldn’t.

Inwardly, her mind worked.

She had to get the fuck out of there. There was no doubt about it.

She looked around, but there wasn’t much. She could try shooting her way out, but upon closer inspection, it appeared that some of the metal wall panels had already been peppered with some kind of gunshot. Just how many people had he subjected to this torture?

And fuck if she had to wait one more minute, she would burst. It seemed like a small matter, but at the moment it was blocking out every other discomfort.

She glanced at the cables on the floor. And then she looked back at the camera.

A calmness seemed to settle on her like a blanket, and sank into her bones. It was the calm that came with the certainty of the very real possibility of death. But she was at the point now where she’d face it, if it meant she had a chance.

“Hey,” she said with honey and sweetness, trying to sound as if she was really enjoying this as much as him. She knew how to talk to dangerous guys. It wouldn’t be the first time. “What’s your name?”

The mic was on, but for a moment, all she heard was breathing. And then he audibly swallowed.

“Lucas,” he answered. His voice this time bore none of the mockery or cruelty. In fact, he’d sounded almost hesitant. Clearly, his desire to tell her what she wanted to know had outweighed his criminal objectivity.

Her heart fluttered and she smiled.

“Alright, Lucas, I’m ready,” she said. “Jerel, you listenin’?”

Jerel nodded, eager for instruction and showing only the slightest bit of apprehension. Clearly he
“Hold it so the empty square’s at the top left.” Jerel complied. “Now, move the tile underneath it up.”

Lucas’s chuckles indicated that she’d made a wrong move.

Gail knew this.

Before Jerel could move the tile, Gail pushed herself up on the chair and clambered onto the plastic tabletop, sending the chair scattering behind her.

“Hey! What’re you doin’?!”

The card table wobbled and swayed under her weight. A second later, she caught sight of the electricity arcing from the exposed wires to the metal floor, harmless where she was currently perched.

“YOU AIN’T S’POSED TO DO THAT,” Lucas roared over the speakers.

Jerel, alarmed and entirely bewildered, looked around himself. His hands were shaking so hard that the plastic tiles rattled against one another.

“Sorry, Jerel,” she whispered, though she didn’t feel as much regret as she should.

“SHOULDA TIED YOU DOWN LIKE I DID HIM,” Lucas continued, his voice taking on that raw, guttural edge that she’d heard hints of before. The electricity on her end didn’t cut off. In fact, it seemed to increase. The Strings of Christmas lights began to glow brighter.

The cables began to spark and bounce around like jumping beans on a hot pan and Gail knew that if she were to touch the floor, or anything metal, she’d probably die in less than a minute.

Her heart raced as she lay herself out on top of the table, knees bent, bare feet up in the air. Gripping the edges of the plastic surface, she began to throw her weight forward in fits and starts until the table’s flimsy legs, moved by her motion, began to stutter forward inch by inch.

A cacophony erupted over the speakers. It sounded like Lucas had knocked the mic over.

Gail caught a glimpse of Jerel, his face twisted and stretched in an expression of abject terror, leaning away from a pair of grasping hands before the TV cord pulled taut. The entire unit tumbled onto the floor and exploded in a burst of sparks, and partially caught fire. She smelled burning plastic and rubber.

Gail thought she would throw up, but she kept at it, inching that table forward bit by bit, toward the flopping, fizzling cables, praying that the legs didn’t give.

The speakers crackled to life, and she thought she heard screaming in the background. She wondered what Lucas had done to Jerel, but only for a brief second. It wasn’t her problem anymore.

“Gaaaaaaaiiiiil,” Lucas crooned in a tremulous singsong over the speakers. It sounded like his lips were touching the mic, caressing it. She dismissed the tight heat blooming between her legs for her clenched bladder, which was near to bursting. “Gaaaaaaaiiiilll.... What are you doin’, Gail? You tryin’ to take the easy way out? I tell you, girl, yer makin’ a big mistake. Yer gonna miss out on all sortsa fun.”
Almost there. The Christmas lights were bright to the point of blinding. A couple of bulbs popped, and then a few more, until it was like listening to popcorn, and bit by bit, the room started to go dark.

Carefully, Gail climbed to her feet atop the shaky table. And then she turned to face the blinking red light, unaffected by the current travelling through the walls and floor.

Without breaking her gaze from Lucas’s camera, Gail began to open her belt. And then her pants.

She peeled them down, savoring the way Lucas’s breath began to come a little rougher.

“Gail… are you puttin’ on a little show fer me before you go? That’s real sweet o’ you, Gail… but ya don’t hafta do that.”

Gail smiled. Naked from the waist down, she piled her pants neatly on the table next to her. Then she turned to the cables. Her feet inched apart.

Using her fingers to spread her pussy lips, Gail aimed, and prayed.

And then, released her bladder.

It was the most exquisite pleasure, taking a piss that she’d been holding for so long it hurt, and she groaned in unrestrained enjoyment.

The liquid stream broke up before it hit the floor. The moment it did, the floor where it landed popped and sparked and sizzled, and then the cable burst into flame.

Somewhere behind the walls, there came the sound of a muffled explosion.

Gail jerked from surprise, cutting off her stream. All at once, the table collapsed, and all the remaining lights burst on their wire. She was plunged into total darkness the same moment she tumbled off her island onto the metal floor behind it.

For a moment, she didn’t move.

The hissing sound of superheated metal and rubber filled the air, and an acrid stench bit into her nostrils.

Slowly, she became aware that she was still alive. The cables were no longer sparking.

All she could hear was the sound of her own ragged breathing. The speakers were silent, and when she looked, she could no longer see the blinking red light.

She began to laugh. It just poured right out of her in an uncontrollable torrent of elation. She wished Lucas could hear it.

Lucas. *Fuck*, she thought. He was probably pissed, and that was never a good thing when it came to people like him, people who were already a hair’s breadth away from flying off the handle.

But it wasn’t Lucas she needed to worry about. Through the floor behind her, something wet and solid impacted the trap door hard enough to make the metal panel jump.

Gail realized, with some dismay, that when she’d blown the power, she must have deactivated the hatch’s power lock as well.

*Fuckfuckfuck.*
She scrambled for the gun in the dark, her eyes wide, and her joy waning out with the warmth in her extremities.

It sounded like there were a lot of them, now. The hatch door jumped again, harder this time, and wheezing, groaning noises leaked into the room before it slammed shut.

She scuttled over to the wall where the camera had been, dragging her pants, still laden with spare shotgun cartridges, with her, no longer concerned with her state of dress. With her bare ass pressed into the cold metal floor, and her back against the wall, she hastened to ready a spare shell.

The Hatch jumped again, but this time it slammed open with a deafening, concussive bang. She knew, without seeing them, that the black, moldy horrors were pouring out of the hole in the floor into the room with her.

If she hadn’t already pissed, she would have done it all over herself just then.

She aimed at that general direction and fired. The gun jumped, and in that millisecond of illumination, she could see a black mass of limbs and gnashing teeth boiling through the opening. Her ears ringing, half-blinded by the flash of light, she didn’t wait. She took the spare cartridge and loaded it in the dark. The monsters were groaning, a whole chorus of ravenous, inhuman voices.

She fired again, caught a flash image of an exploding tar-goo head, and immediately started loading it again. She was too slow, though, and there were so many more.

Pain exploded on her ankle. She shrieked, tried to kick it off, and then fired down, just above her foot. The monster that had bitten her burst. She felt the sickly warm liquid spatter her face and struggled to reload.

Everything below her calf was a throbbing, stabbing pain. She aimed again.

Before she could finish, the wall behind her fell open and she spilled backwards into darkness.

Gail felt something solid, but almost pliant, behind her and fired straight up. In the brief flash of light, she saw Lucas’s face, eyes huge with surprise.

An agonized cry was all she heard. She’d missed his head.

She fumbled to reload, but then a pair of hands slid beneath her armpits and began dragging her backwards. The cartridge she’d been trying to insert in the shotgun slipped out of her hands and rolled away.

Her pants, caught on her other foot, were getting dragged with her. She passed it up from her leg to her grasping hand. More spare cartridges scattered in the process, but she managed to grab one, insert it into the gun.

Her mind blanked as she reacted almost instinctively to defend herself, raised her gun.

A sudden burst of light blinded her. A door slammed, and the hands slipped out from under her pits.

Gail lay there panting. Her eyes darted around, dazed and nearly delirious with the agony in her foot.

The ceiling was unusually clean, she thought.
“Fuuuhhhck,” a male voice groaned from somewhere over her.

Gail’s heart was beating so hard, she was sure it would burst out of her chest.

With painstaking slowness, she turned her face up, and then back, to look over herself. She was greeted with the upside-down vision of a hooded figure, sitting on a computer chair and tenderly examining the meaty, gory mess where his shoulder should have been.

“Lucas,” she breathed. He looked up. In the lighting, his face was almost completely lost to darkness. All except his eyes, which seemed to glow a bright, pale blue.

He stopped tending to his shoulder and rested his hands on his splayed knees.

“Gaaail,” he said, smooth and low, and just a little out of breath.

Gail lost consciousness.

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for the confusing action sequences. I got a little over excited. Tags will apply in the next chapter.
Also, apologies for any inaccuracies with the method of torture. I don't know how electricity works (but you're free to correct me :) )
Before Gail was aware of anything else, she was aware of the pain.

She felt like she’d been skull-fucked by a Mack truck. Like her brain had swollen up and gotten too big for her head.

_Oh God, my foot._

Did she have a foot anymore? She didn’t even know. Her left leg, from mid-calf down, was nothing but pain. Reflexively, she tried to reach for it.

She jerked forward only to gag on an immobile constricting force around her neck, cutting into her esophagus.

Her throat muscles strained against whatever was cinched tight, before she erupted in a series of choking coughs. Each once sent a knife of pain to her temples, then it was her head again.

A vile stench wafted to Gail’s nose, and she hurtled the rest of the way to full consciousness.

Her eyes, streaming, snapped open.

She was growing uncomfortably accustomed to the smell of putrefaction.

Her eyes adjusted to the dim light, but she still didn’t totally know what she was seeing. Her dazed mind couldn’t make sense of it.

Directly over her head, motionless white shapes hung, pendulous, from a sea of solid shadow. They were suspended from somewhere high. She wished she could return to unconsciousness.

Human bodies, wrapped in white plastic and bound with rope, dangled overhead like packaged ham hocks.

Flies whizzed by her ears, crawled on her bare legs, tickled her nostrils. She almost gagged again, but the tightness around her neck was immovable and prevented her throat muscles from working properly.

Gail twisted to get some relief from everything that she felt at that moment.

But then she choked. She couldn’t breathe. Her arms jerked against restraints that felt and sounded like chains, and in a moment of mindless desperation, she started to thrash.

“Whooooah there,” a voice scolded from somewhere off to her left. Footsteps clanking on metal approached. Immobile and unable to defend herself, the panic only grew hot and wild in her chest until she thought it would burst from the pressure.

_Get it together, you dumb bitch._

She pushed it down, compressed it into a tight little ball until she could feel it wane.

Lucas’s hooded figure came into view.
“Rise an’ shine, sleepyhead,” he taunted. He sounded different in person. Looked different, too.

The indirect lighting hit his face from one side, enhanced the hollowness beneath his eye and the prominence of his cheekbone, while bathing the other side of his face in shadow. He grinned, showing straight, white teeth as he leaned over her, looked right into her face.

Gail took a breath, and then another. Without breaking eye contact with him, she tried moving her arms again, but the sound of metal on metal and the bite of solid links into her wrists confirmed that she was tied down.

“Lucas,” she said, forcing calm. Her voice sounded hoarse to her own ears. “Why’m I tied down?”

His grin stretched wider. It looked like he was showing too many teeth. He looked manic.

“Well, since you ain’t housebroken, I figured I should take some… precautions.” She strained to see what her wrists were tied to. It was a low railing, like the kind on the sides of hospital beds or gurneys.

She tried moving each limb, felt shaky and sick when her injured leg met resistance. A fly wandered around her upper thigh, and she tried to shake it off. Ankles, wrists, and neck, all fastened down tight. Everything in between was open and… almost completely bare. A thin layer of fabric, her cheap cotton briefs, kept her ass from sticking to the grimy metal surface of the bed, and she knew that was all that clothed her from her waist down.

“Where’re my pants, Lucas?” she asked in a shaky voice. She didn’t know where the instinct came from, to use his name often. Maybe she thought it would endear herself to him, or garner some mercy. It took a lot of concentration to stay cool while the dead bodies dangled overhead.

He snorted and bit his lower lip. His eyes darted to her lower half before going back to her face.

“I tried to put ‘em back on ya, but your fuckin’ foot near fell off. I guess I’m gonna hafta do somethin’ ‘bout that bite…” he narrowed his eyes discerningly and leaned in close, enough that Gail could smell his breath. It smelled like… Funyuns. “Unless you wanna be one o’ them.”

Gail thought of the monsters. And she thought about her foot. She clenched her eyes against another wave of pain. Not being able to see it somehow made it so much worse.

“I’d rather you didn’t turn. Kinda wanted ta keep you aroun’ a little longer, Gail. Hoo BOY was I right about you! Yer a fighter. Blowin’ the fuse with yer own piss? Even I didn’t see that comin’.” He laughed. “I gotta tell ya, that was some quick thinkin’ in there. You nasty, girl… an’ Jerel.” He grinned with overt malice. “Poor, poor Jerel.”

“Jerel’s a grown-ass man. He can take care of himself.”

Lucas leaned back and cackled, high-pitched and mean.

“That’s real cold.” And then he drew in real close. Gail’s head, captive, could only look at him right back. He was cleaner than everything else. Except that hoodie, the same dark gray it had appeared through the TV screen. The right shoulder was shredded and sopping wet with dark blood. A bare shoulder, pale skin, could be seen where she’d blasted him.

Wait a fucking minute.

“I shot you!” she accused, now searching for any sign of a wound through the hole. His right arm had been barely attached, when he was sitting in that chair. She was sure she’d seen bone. Though
how he managed to drag her with an injury like that, she had no idea.

“Now don’t you worry nothin’ about that right now, Gail. We got business ta tend to.”

He disappeared and she listened to him pick something up off a metal tray somewhere behind him. She caught a flash of light on metal out of the corner of her eye, but then it disappeared when Lucas’s shape moved to the other end of the gurney.

Fingertips touched her thigh, and she jolted. Then a hand slid across the curve of her leg, palm flush, and squeezed lightly where it was softest, toward the inside. Gail bit the inside of her cheek until she tasted blood.

She couldn’t do anything. Not unless it was what Lucas wanted.

That thought felt like a splash of cold water through the chaos inside of her. It was clear, and almost detached.

So, that’s where this was going. Gail would have to weather it. She hoped that all he meant to do was fuck her, and nothing worse.

“This hoodie was my favorite,” he said to her. The hand felt cold on her warm skin as he drew it down over her knee. Away from her groin. “Now I’m gonna have to throw it away. Ain’t no patch job gonna fix this mess.”

Something hard, and sharp, scraped down her leg just ahead of his hand. The flat edge of a blade. A big one. Maybe a machete.

“I’m sorry,” she said before she could stop herself. “I didn’t mean to.”

“Now, now, S’alrigh,” he said, stroking her lower leg. This close to where the wound was, his bony touch was near agony. He squeezed the meat of her calf muscle and she groaned. “I forgive ya. Juss hold still. Thassa good girl.”

“Nonono-“

BANG. Metal slammed against metal. Gail’s leg exploded in fiery agony and she bellowed.

“Whoopsy! Just one more…” BANG. She roared through her teeth, her eyes rolling up in her head. It felt like her leg was being held under boiling water, but she couldn’t pull it out.

“Come on, now, it ain’t that bad. Juss a little… amputation.”

Her fucking foot. That psycho had cut off her goddamn foot. Her world shrunk down to that agony, and her own gasping breaths. Gotta get out. Gotta get the fuck out!

She heard liquid sloshing around in a bottle, and he set something on the metal top of the table. Seconds later, he dumped some fluid on her, and the blinding pain softened slightly to a dull throb. The herbal scent of Meds cut through the rotting meat smell of the room they were in.

“There we go, all better!”

Except now she only had one fucking foot. If she got out of here, she’d be crippled for the rest of her life. She’d have to use a prosthetic.

“You piece of white trash garbage,” she snarled. “I’ll stick that knife up your fuckin’ ass until you taste shit.”
He howled with laughter and suddenly he was in her face again, his eyes pinched in a look of childish mischief.

“Oh boy, do you got a mouth on you! God-damn you are a breath o’ fresh air. I hope you’re ready to take that fire to the next level, Gail. Yer gonna need it for what I’m gonna put you through. Yes ma’am.”

“My fucking foot, you asshole,” was all she managed to ground out. Lucas tittered.

“Don’ worry, it’ll be fine. Eveline’s gift’ll fix you right up... You must be famished after all you been through.”

His words didn’t make any sense. All she could think about was how this was like a scene in a movie. The next thing he’d do is cook her foot and try to feed it to her, paired with a fine wine. Though he seemed more like a beer guy. Or whiskey. Now that the mindless pain was somewhat subdued, Gail’s mind worked a little better.

“I could use a drink,” she said, swallowing the dryness in her throat. Her fucking head felt like it was splitting open. She caught his eyes with hers. “I got a flask in my bra, Lucas. It’d be mighty sweet of you to give me some of that before… well. Anything else.”

The man’s eyes flickered to her chest, and the tip of his tongue touched his lower lip. The bloodthirsty maniac who’d cut off her foot, and then laughed at her pain wasn’t something she could control. But this was more… comprehensible.

There were things she was willing to give up before she gave up another extremity.

“Alrigh’,” he said. His voice was a little husky.

Her eyes rolled down. She kept her breaths steady as Lucas slipped one long-fingered, spidery white hand through the collar of her shirt and touched her upper chest underneath. Gail’s shivers were outside of her control. She clenched her eyes as questing fingers found one nipple, tightened on the soft swell of her breast, and then found the other.

In a mindless, spontaneous gesture, Gail’s ribs, free from restraint, swelled under the skin contact. As if her body craved more of it. Maybe his touch was too unexpectedly soft, maybe she was out of her mind from pain. What she knew, for sure, was this man was cruel. And somehow, there was still something separate from that. Something naïve.

She hadn’t told him where the flask was, but after a moment of oddly careful groping, he found it tucked into the outside of the left cup.

“You’ve done this before, haven’t you?” she teased with a shaky smile. He grinned and slipped the flask out of her bra. He unscrewed the tethered metal cap. “I bet you’ve got a whole gaggle of girlfriends.”

“Flattery’ll get you everywhere,” he answered, tilting the flask toward her mouth. She wasn’t quite ready for a drink and the first bit went down the wrong pipe. She coughed, her wiles forgotten for the moment as her irritated lungs tried to expel the inhaled liquid. Lucas pulled the flask back, and biting his lower lip, reached somewhere behind her. She heard the sound of a spring compressing (somehow, she knew it was a double-ended trigger clip) and she felt her neck, still constricted in something, come loose from the bed.

She took the moment of freedom and cracked the joints in her neck and stretch her jaw. This was an improvement. He tried again, and this time, she swallowed as much whiskey as she could.
Whatever happened, she would need the courage, and the way it softened things a bit. After a good couple of swallows, Lucas sniffed the flask. And then he took a long drink himself.

Whiskey man, she thought with satisfaction. With a gasp, he smiled and closed the cap.

He fixed her with a shit-eating grin this time when he slid the flask back into her bra. This time, he got a good couple of handfuls of tit. She sighed.

“I got some plans fer you, Gail,” he said. His eyes glinted feverishly in the dim light. “But firs’, we gotta see to that foot now, don’t we!”

“I ain’t hungry,” she said without thinking. Lucas erupted in harsh, helpless laughter.

“Girl I ain’t gonna feed it to ya. I’m gonna help you get it back.”

He was insane. Gail’s mind raced as she tried to think of the best way to respond. He seemed to like her at the moment, and she couldn’t let that go. It was the one thing she had right now.

“How? People don’t re-grow cut off limbs, Lucas. I don’t know about you, but I know I can’t.”

It seemed to be the right thing to say.

“Things’re different here.” He looked away, off to the side. When Gail followed his eyes, she could see nothing but darkness and the rusted metal interior structure of the barn or warehouse they were in. “Eveline’s gift’ll help you, and you’ll be right as rain. Just gotta give it to you somehow. Don’t got none o’ momma’s cookin right here at the moment.”

“What is ‘Eveline’s gift’?” The words together formed a sentence, but it wasn’t one Gail fully understood. She had to play along. Maybe he’d open the chains, let her free. Then what?

“Ah, well. You gotta eat somethin’, swallow it an’ let it become part of you. Before you know it, you’ll be tap dancin’ just as good as new!”

Her heart throbbed, hard and steady, behind her ribcage. She could feel it in her eyeballs.

“Lucas, are you sayin you got this ‘gift’?”

His eyebrows waggled. He looked like he hadn’t ever gotten a good night’s sleep in a few years.

“You wanna see?” he asked. And then he was grabbing the machete. Gail became terror-stricken, thinking he meant to cut something else off her. Maybe a hand this time. Instead, he held up his pinky. “Watch this shit.”

Without a further word, he pressed his pinky against the edge of the blood-criusted machete, and bore down on it. To her horror, the edge of the sharp blade cut into his digit. He grunted, and with a jerk of his arm, the blade bit through bone and to the other side.

The severed pinky dropped to her side, and blood began to seep freely from the open wound. He held it up like a sign. Gail couldn’t stay calm. She cried out, hyperventilating. He was off his motherfucking rocker. She was fucked. But also morbidly curious.

“Doesn’t that hurt?!?” she asked, thinking of her foot.

“Watch,” he hissed, holding his hand closer to her face. Blood from his stump dripped fatly on her chin.
Nothing had really felt real since before all the weird shit had started happening. The moment she’d stepped into that guest house, Gail had felt like she was walking through a nightmare. A cliché horror movie trope. And then Jerel had disappeared. The moment Lucas’s voice had spoken for the first time over the speakers, Gail had left the real world behind.

Maybe she was disassociating. Maybe Lucas’s madness was contagious. But when she saw the throbbing, pulsing flesh, stringy and wet, bulge from the red meat of the base of his small finger, she thought of the black mold in the dark tunnel, and how it had grown.

Before her very fucking eyes, another pinky finger, complete with a fingernail, emerged from nothing.

She felt sick. But... more than that, she was fascinated.

“How...”

Her question was lost, however, to the man hovering over her. He looked off to the side again and gestured.

“Eveline, I’m just showin’ her. Don’t you want another friend? She’s real smart, Eveline, I promise, you’ll like ‘er.” Gail couldn’t stop staring at his pinky finger. She’d seen him cut it off. There was no doubt, otherwise she’d have to question everything her eyes were seeing. She needed to hold on to that anchor, even when it meant that something... supernatural was at work here.

“How...”

Her question was lost, however, to the man hovering over her. He looked off to the side again and gestured.

“Lucas,” she said, trying to pull him back to her, focus on her instead of whatever he was talking to. “Are you tellin me I can do that too? If I accept this... ‘gift.’”

Lucas grinned like a madmad, then. His eyes lit up in unmitigated delight. Something about them looked almost corpselike to her.

“Yer got-damn right. You want some?”

Her mind went in two separate directions.

On one hand, either she had entered some other world, like the dark kind the black magic preachers talked about on the streets of New Orleans as they rattled their chicken bones, and she was dealing with some serious underworld shit.

On the other hand, she was completely at the mercy of this man who, by all accounts, was blasted out of his fucking mind. Even despite that, she’d seen how he’d enjoyed touching her.

Somehow, while she was out, he’d managed to carefully slide her cotton panties over her legs so she wasn’t completely naked. She tightened the muscles between her legs, but didn’t feel that sense of rawness that came with being fucked without foreplay.

“Yeah,” she said in a smooth, throaty tone. “I want some.”

She saw the moment Lucas grabbed the bait she’d lain out. He bit his lower lip again, and then licked it. Gail unconsciously licked her own lips. Both of them, she realized, were a little tipsy, her more so than him.

She looked down to the edge of the table where he stood. He followed her eyes and then a crooked grin split his gaunt face.

“Alrigh’,” he said, breathy. “If you say so. This’ll probably work... nah, nah, it’ll work for shure.”
*Fucking pervert,* she thought with breathless anticipation as Lucas lifted up the bottom of his grey hoodie. She was watching his hands, but she could see out of the corner of her eye that he kept looking at her face, as if waiting for her to reveal her bluff.

The thing was, she didn’t know if she was bluffing anymore.

He opened the front of his jeans and pulled out a fleshy length of white cock. He was already hard. What a scamp.

Gail prepared herself, met his eyes as he guided himself toward her face. She strained to the side, swallowing down her thick saliva. Her pulse throbbed in her throat and between her legs.

Lucas’s expression changed to one of near wonder as she followed through, reaching for the flushed red tip of his dick with her lips.

He smelled faintly musky in a way that hit the back of her nose. In a way that made her mouth water more. It wasn’t strong, but somehow it blanked out the scent of the rotting corpses suspended, observing without seeing, overhead.

She flicked her tongue against the underside and tried not to pay attention to the way her heart jolted when Lucas’s whole body jerked.

“Got-damn girl,” he groaned. “You make a man wanna slap his own mamma.”

She ignored his words, except for the heady rasp of guttural groan that had come with them, and strained forward, restricted by the chains on her wrists, to take him in. His dick was girthy and long, more so than she was used to, and when he pushed forward into her face, she almost choked. He didn’t seem to notice.

She made her mouth a soft orifice, then, and let him start to move in on his own.

One thing was clear, Lucas was inexperienced, and seemed unaware of how big his goddamn dick was. Gail’s gag reflex tensed against the thing around her neck (a collar, she knew on some level) and she forced herself to look up and focus on something else than the hot, hard flesh fucking her mouth and into her throat.

Lucas was looking down at her. The mischievous glint she’d seen before was gone, and now all she could see in his eyes was a carnal, violent need as he sucked ragged gasps through his open mouth. Something deep inside of her answered that, and she knew without touching that she was getting wet.

Taut pubic flesh slammed against her mouth, made her teeth cut into her upper lip, and she only opened her jaw wider and forced her tongue into a point. She made sure he felt it along the entirety of the underside of his cock, and by the noises he was making (no clever quips now or teasing insults), he appreciated it.

It was surreal. Tied to a fucking hospital gurney, missing a fucking foot, Gail found herself getting into it. Almost, if she was honest, enjoying it.

A hand lighted on the back of her head and a jolt of panic almost made her bite down before she stopped herself. As it was, the light scrape of her teeth on the soft, sliding skin of his cock seemed to tip him over the edge.

Lucas, with a guttural groan, and a face tense with mindless ecstasy, release jets of hot, salty come. So much of it, too. It filled her mouth and Gail swallowed it down without thinking, without even
being able to breathe, until the spurts waned.

With his hand still on her head, he pulled himself out, and she gasped, swallowed again, licked her teeth. A pube was stuck between the front ones.

Lucas was panting, and so was she. His hand moved around to the front of her face and gripped her chin, hard, but he didn’t say anything. Wordlessly, they looked into each other’s eyes.

Gail’s thought, even as she tried to lick away the last bitter tastes of jizz, was that she wanted him to fuck her like he’d just fucked her face. Her thighs squirmed together.

“Alright,” he said between pants. “Let’s see if that did it.”

She didn’t miss how he sounded less sure now than he had before, when he was ‘shure’ it’d work.

But soon, she wasn’t thinking about that. Lucas was moving now, keys in in hand, to unlock the padlocks around her legs. Testing it, she moved her legs, and the heavy chains fell away, clattered loudly to the table.

The sight of an entire section of her left leg being just gone, from mid-calf down, was dizzying. The reality of the situation slammed into her like a fucking truck, and a sob began to rise in her throat. Lucas’s hand, spider-like, slid down to her neck. His forefinger hooked lightly into the collar as he stared at the stump, his over large eyes wide with childlike curiosity.

She felt an itching. It grew to maddening proportions, and her hand jerked against its chain to grasp her stump.

Before her eyes, she saw her own raw flesh start to bubble. The stump seethed, writhed. And then something began to grow.

She felt sick in her stomach, sicker than she’d ever been before. There was something wrong with his jizz. Had to be. She’d never felt such roiling, gut-clenching nausea. She wanted to die, or pass out. Her strength started to slip, and her eyes rolled back. Her leg lowered.

Sensing this, Lucas reached out and gripped her leg, held it immobile. He was so strong, and she couldn’t fight him. She could only watch as new flesh started to emerge from the place where Lucas had hacked her foot off with the machete.

“Fuckin’-right!” he exulted. “What’d I tell you? Miracle dick. Re-grow your fuckin’ shit. I shoul’ charge ya for that!”

He was laughing, but Gail barely noticed. What nightmare had she landed herself in?

“Well, I guess since yer feelin’ better, we might as well get on with it,” he said, dropping her leg inattentively back onto the table, sending a knife of pain up to her hip. He tucked himself back into his jeans and closed the fly.

Get on with it? What was he talking about? Something clicked beneath the table, wheels unlocking, and then, with Lucas poised over her head, she felt the gurney begin to move. Rusted wheel joints squeaked, and the scenery began to move and fall behind. He was taking her somewhere.

“Lucas,” she stuttered, fear rising in her throat with her stomach acid. “Where’re you takin me?”

He started to hum. They passed beneath a doorway into a dark hall.
Gail could hear the moist sound of the mold in the walls, pulsing and moving. Her hands found, and gripped, the gurney’s metal rails, needing something solid to hold onto.

“Didn’t you like that?” she asked, desperate now. “You don’t wanna hurt me, do ya? After I did that.”

He glanced down to her, his face twisted in malevolent glee.

“Well ain’t you just an eager lil beaver.” Without pausing in his stride, he bent down low, bared his teeth. “I ain’t stupid, Gail. I know you only did them things so you could try to get away.”

His voice was a near growl, and it send icy fingers straight into her gut.

“Nah, Lucas,” she said. She couldn’t stop the tremor from slipping into her voice. “I wanted to do it. Honest.”

That part wasn’t entirely wrong, but he seemed unfazed by her plea. They went into another part. How big was this goddamn house? How much time did she have to convince him she wasn’t going to try to escape?

“Look, I played your games. I gave you a nice farewell… can’t you just give me my money? I’ll split it with you, fifty-fifty.” She was babbling now, and she knew it, but she couldn’t stop it.

“There’s more in that case than I mighta told you. A hundred thousand bones.”

Lucas still hummed, something familiar. Something she’d only heard when she was visiting her Gran. An old bayou tune. Nonsense words.

“I mean… a quarter mil. I’ll give it all to you. Just let me get outta here.”

God, but her fucking stomach. She tried to grind her leg stump against the surface of the table, desperate to alleviate the itching. She jerked her hands against the restraints, twisted her head to the side.

A black writhing mass passed them by, teeth massive and glistening in the warm light of the hallway’s bare bulbs. Lucas was unconcerned. The swamp things, she thought. They didn’t attack him.

She didn’t have a chance to think about it.

The gurney came to a stop and she strained up to look ahead.

A solid steel door, with a small square hatch near the top of it.

Lucas, still humming to himself, put a key in the door and turned it. With a metallic clank, the lock mechanism released. The door groaned open.

“Lucas, please,” she begged, hating how weak she sounded. “Just take the money, let me go.”

Lucas looked her in the face as he unlocked her arms. The smile that grew on his face was vicious.

“What money?”

It felt like the ground had been pulled out from under her, like she was freefalling.

He’d never had the money in the first place.
He watched as the realization dawned on her face. He wasn’t holding her. Almost daring her to fight back now. Gail couldn’t.

He released her arms from the chains, and unceremoniously shoved her forward. Clumsily, she tried to at least control her one-footed balance as he forced her off the gurney and through the door.

Before she knew it, the door slammed shut behind her, locking her into the cell.

She caught a glimpse of Lucas’s face in the small metal window before it grated shut, and she slammed her fist into it. The movement made her lose her balance, and she fell against the wall, slid down it.

For a long moment, she clutched her sore knuckles, lost. She focused on taking one breath at a time. She’d fucked up. He never had the money. He only said so he could draw her in and trap her, and as smart as she wanted to think she was, she’d fallen right for it.

Now she was fucked.

“Gail,” a voice groaned. She froze in place, and her heart forgot to beat for a few seconds. She knew that voice. But it was so messed up and distorted… With almost dreamlike lethargy, Gail turned toward it.

“Jerel,” she choked out.

The thing that she’d called Jerel was slumped in the opposite corner of the six-by-six cell. His head lay limp on one shoulder. His face, though, was half-consuming in a tangle of black stringy fibers. Like roots. The entire left half of his head was a bulbous mass of black, and the corruption seemed to be spilling down his neck. It completely consumed his left arm to the point where it was almost unrecognizable.

“Gail,” he moaned again. “I don’t feel so good.”

She slid back, away from him, until she hit the corner by the door.

Overhead, the sound of metal scraping metal made her look up just in time to see a bundle poke through and drop to the floor.

Her jeans. The hatch slid shut again. She reached for her pants, and something heavy, wrapped in the center, fell out. She picked it up and saw that it was a small switchblade. It wasn’t one of hers.

She thought she heard some muffled laughter before it disappeared out of hearing range.

In the back-right corner of the room, a camera looked on impassively.
Because the canon is kinda vague, I've decided to accept that the RE7 universe is one where there is some kind of cure-all medicine which Gail refers to as Meds. I'm just taking this tongue-in-cheek approach based on the past games (combine some herbs with some other shit and it doesn't matter if you got stabbed, you'll be just fine). Of course, it doesn't re-grow limbs. Only the gift can do that.

feel free to check out my spotify playlist for this fic. I'm adding to it along and along. open.spotify.com/user/1230836959/playlist/2EQhyf8HxSyl6AhTrNLsDn

Lemme know what you think in the comment section. Thanks for reading!
After the little sliding hatch had closed, Gail thought she heard noises on the other side of the door, as if Lucas were still there doing something, or listening. But then it was gone.

First thing she did was unbuckle that leather dog collar, jerk her jeans back on, and grab the knife off the floor. It was only a couple inches long, and serrated near the handle, but it felt good to hold it. It seemed Lucas hadn’t bothered to empty her pockets because there were a couple of things still in them, like a single 12-gauge cartridge.

Now that her hands were free, Gail clawed at the burning itch in her throbbing stump. Her stomach lurched when she felt the spongy growing flesh there, but she couldn’t stop. The only thing that could distract Gail from that was what was sitting right in front of her.

She barely blinked. While she scratched at herself, she couldn’t stop staring at Jerel.

She could hardly even call it Jerel anymore. The half of his face that was recognizably human was weirdly blank and saggy, as if the man she knew wasn’t there.

The other half had disappeared under the same black shit that grew out of the tunnel walls. The light in the cell came from a single bulb on a chain. It was brighter, but sharper, and she saw more detail than she ever would’ve wanted.

The black substance looked almost caustic. She caught glimpses of pink flesh underneath, between the webby gaps, maybe even exposed muscle. It also was constantly moving, like simmering liquid, or a solid mass of ants.

It was ravenous, and it was eating Jerel alive.

“Gail,” he said during one of his brief flickers of awareness. “Something’s wrong with me.”

She wished the cell weren’t so small. All she wanted was to get away from him. She wanted him to shut the fuck up. Apparently, the moldy growth could replace body parts, it was the only explanation for how he was able to talk, and maybe why he sounded so fucking strange. He was speaking with the voice it gave him.

“I think ‘e did somethin to me.”

She didn’t want to talk to him. She really wanted her gun right about now, but she needed to think of something else to distract her from Jerel’s dry breaths and occasional muted whimpers.

Considering how sly and malicious her captor was, this whole thing was just entertainment. He didn’t bother hiding his intentions. She didn’t see any speakers this time, just the red light and the impassive black lens. He wanted a show, no matter what happened to them. Any idea that he liked her, or that him liking her would benefit her somehow, was completely out the window.

_I can’t fucking believe I did that_, she thought to herself. She could still feel his demon jizz coiling around inside of her. After seeing his fucking finger grow back, she had no doubt that some supernatural bullshit was occurring. Her lower leg, after all, should’ve been gushing blood, even with the medicine. Instead, she could see a fleshy, mottled lump bulging from the stump.
It wasn’t a foot, not even close, but something was happening to her. She didn’t believe that shit he was saying about the “gift”, not really even when she saw his goddamn finger grow back. So… why had she led him to put his dick in her mouth?

It wasn’t really her fault, right? She was a captive, held against her will, subjected to electric shock and then forcibly mutilated. Of course, when she tried to think of it that way, the fact that she’d sucked his dick after he cut off her foot, instead of before, didn’t make a whole lotta sense. Of course, it didn’t hurt so much after he put the Meds on it, she thought. It was a weak argument.

Whatever she might have done, and whether she might have even enjoyed it on some fucked-up level, was beside the point. Lucas had the power, and he wanted something very specific, something besides sex.

He’d made sure to give her a single, short switchblade. The fact she was given anything at all meant she was probably intended to use it. Either on herself, or on Jerel, who was looking worse by the second.

She didn’t think she could fight one of those things without a gun, especially when it was wearing Jerel’s face.

“What happened to you?” Gail asked, her voice hoarse, as she pulled her feet closer to her body. There was barely a yard between them. A drain, set into the floor between them, was stained forever with dried brownish rivulets. “You’re covered in that… shit.”

“I ate something bad,” Jerel groaned. Gail didn’t know how to respond, but she also didn’t want to know what he meant. Still, Jerel seemed lucid enough for the moment, and continued anyway.

“He put something sharp in my mouth, made me swallow it. Feels like it’s cuttin’ me up inside.”

Gail swallowed the lump in her throat. Her eyes flickered briefly to the camera. What the fuck was the game now?

“What was it, Jerel? What did he give you?”

Jerel fell quiet, and his head lolled further forward. She took a quick look at the dingy metal door behind her. There was no handle, just a rusty deadbolt lock and the closed metal sliding panel.

Gail tried to make herself smaller. Her face was terse, her teeth clenched so hard she thought she might crack them.

Jerel’s breaths were coming faster. They sounded wheezy and strained, and every single gasp added to the weighty sense of dread building inside of her. She thought about the deadbolt lock.

“What did he make you swallow, Jerel?” This time, her question was drenched in cold, steady apprehension.

“He tol’ me…” he moaned in his warbly, wet voice. “It was the way out.”

“Was it a key?” she asked, hearing herself as if from far away, and knowing that the question was not necessary. “Jerel, did you swallow the key?”

Jerel didn’t answer. His head rolled to the other side so his one eye was fixed on her. The pupil was narrowed to a point, and the white part was bloodshot red, like a hound dog.

She’d seen the mainstream torture porn horror movies, where people had to do horrible and painful
things to escape confinement, to themselves or someone else. She wasn’t a big fan, she preferred classics, shit that came out before the 90s. But, if she had to guess, Lucas didn’t share her feelings on those films. In fact, he seemed to be taking a cue from them.

“Jerel,” she snapped, unnerved by the way he hadn’t blinked for almost a solid minute now. “Did you swallow the fucking key to this door?”

The answer came in a monstrous rattle. That eye sagged, the lower lid drooping so that the pink skin showed.

“Keeey,” he growled from deep in his chest.

_Fuck nope. Nopenopenope_, her thoughts machine-gunned against the inside of her pounding skull. _Not gonna fucking happen._

“Just shut up and stay over there,” she hissed through her teeth. “If you say one more goddamn thing, Jerel, I’m unna cut yer fuckin balls off, ya hear?!”

She cast her hate-filled glare into the camera, willing her wrath to reach the _piece of shit_ on the other side.

“Gaaaaail,” Jerel groaned… but there wasn’t any hint of Jerel in that voice, not anymore.

He stood up, rising until he swallowed the entire opposite corner. He moved more like a puppet on strings than a human being.

The single bulb cast a massive shadow behind him, multiplying his size threefold. The black shit was creeping down his leg now, and faster. She could actually see the individual tendrils snaking, pulsing, growing.

A series of wounds set wetly into blotchy dark bruises around his mid-calf matched what a bear trap might do to a man, and he stood there with that ankle rolled to the side as if broken. He didn’t seem to notice. The tar-like filaments sought out the broken skin and snaked into him.

Desperate, Gail’s shaking hand held the small blade out in front of her while her other hand dug frantically in her pockets. Could she somehow set off the shotgun shell without a gun? No, no, she’d need a hammer and even then it might just blow her own hands off, she’d seen it happen before. She searched for anything else. A crumpled-up piece of paper with the ATM’s address on it. Her cellphone, probably completely dead. And…

Her heart nearly seized when her hand closed around the handle of a tool.

The lock pick she’d found in the kitchen.

She almost laughed with joy, but it died before it reached her mouth.

Jerel was watching her, swaying in place. The mold had consumed half his body by now. It was covering the remnants of his tee shirt and pants, spreading on him like aggressive, time-lapse kudzu.

She wished she’d thought to check her pockets earlier. She didn’t want to turn her back, even for the minute it would take to force the lock open.

The thing surged upward, a moldy monster that was wearing Jerel like a suit (she could see dark veins beneath his human skin), and the bulbous top of its infected head grew and split down the
middle.

Gail slid to the side and groped the door behind her with the hand holding the lock pick.

She pushed herself to her one foot. She could hear herself gasping, uttering a low steady noise, but she couldn’t stop it.

“Jerel,” she said in a tremulous voice. The hand holding the blade was shaking. Her mind raced, adrenaline seeped into every extremity until she felt like every nerve was on edge. “Stay right there-"

The pick found the lock behind her back, but then the creature heaved forward.

The massive, mutated hand, sporting clawed digits instead of fingers nearly encased her head. She was treated to a face full of black slime and dropped the lock pick.

Her knife stabbed forward into the still-human part of its neck and sank in.

The claw let go. The creature stumbled back.

Gail, lacking the balance to stand on her own, planted her other hand in the middle of its chest and pushed.

The blade was still embedded in its neck, with human-looking blood pouring out around it, gushing over her hand. Jerel’s human mouth was open in a voiceless scream, his eye wide and vacant with agony. The other mouth, the one that was still forming teeth, let loose a keening, burbling cry.

The thing slammed against the back wall. Gail, roaring, stuck the blade in the same place over and over. Encroaching black tendrils that burned her skin wherever they touched started to snake over the hand planted on its chest like it was going to devour her too.

But still, she kept stabbing. Blood, now mixed with that black ichor, spattered her front, got in her eye, flecked her lip.

She kept stabbing until the thing started thrashing, sliding down.

She bore down on it, her arm slamming the blade repeatedly into the same spot until the fist gripping the knife handle began to sink in.

Tendon snapped, muscle severed. Her knuckles crunched against esophagus, and the blade met bone. It was weirdly soft, though, like boiled chicken bones.

With a wet crunch, the spine snapped either because of the blade, or because of the force with which she was smashing into it.

The head tipped to the side, one bloodshot eyeball bulging, but the limbs were still moving. That monster mouth gargled.

Gail pinned the massive clawed arm with a knee, grabbed the head in her hands, and wrenched it to the side.

It wasn’t as hard as she expected. The black mold was soft, the flesh underneath mushy, and the head was flung away from the body from the force of her torsion.

Gail scrambled back, taking sharp, forceful breaths.
Felt like she hadn’t breathed once the entire time. She wiped her face on the back of her bloody arm, and only managed to smear it around worse.

She didn’t care.

She still couldn’t tear her eyes off of the thing, which was falling apart right in front of her.

The black shit began to run and flake off in chunks. As she watched, the headless torso sank further to the side. The mold started to melt and peel like sunburned skin.

It oozed off him, showing what looked like half of a skinless torso underneath. Ribs poked through muscle, weirdly bloodless. And then that half of the body began to dissolve, sinking into the floor in a black and red mess. The head, too. The part that was still mostly human remained whole, bisected.

It stank like moist earth and decay.

More importantly, though, it was dead, and she wasn’t.

She felt like a goddamn beast. She felt fucking invincible.

Her eyes flew up to the camera because she knew it wasn’t over yet.

Lucas wanted her to dig around in Jerel’s guts. He wanted her to go after the key that he’d likely put in there, just to see her wallow around in human entrails. In fact, she couldn’t be totally sure there even was a key. It seemed right on character for him to make her believe that so she’d debase herself in desperation.

Gail wasn’t going to do that. The more the black shit melted away and seeped down the drain, the more normal-looking blood began to replace it. It flowed sluggishly into the grate. It looked like a slaughterhouse floor.

With one wary glance at the remains, Gail turned her back. Lock pick in hand, she started to work the tumbler mechanisms inside the deadbolt.

She knew she was in a state of shock. Her fingers were clumsy and bloodless, and she felt cold and clammy all over. It had been awhile since she’d had to pick a lock, too, let alone a secure deadbolt.

All she could do was think about the look on Lucas’s face. What must he be thinking? Was this how he expected it to turn out? Or had he hoped she’d die? She suspected he would’ve been happy, either way.

Once she got out, she’d have to deal with finding her fucking way out of this hell. She couldn’t imagine how something this size could be hidden away, unknown, in the Louisiana coastal wilds. She didn’t even know how long she’d been there. Ever since the weird shit started happening, she’d lost all grip on the passage of time.

Did the outside world even exist anymore? Or would she just be here in the darkness forever?

Gail had no idea where these thoughts were coming from. It wasn’t like her to get so fucking introspective. But she couldn’t be sure of anything anymore.

She felt the easy click as the last pin moved in place. She was free.

She put her hand on the door to push it.
A sharp feeling in her gut stopped her.

She was so intensely aware of the camera pointed at her back that she could almost feel it boring into her skin.

*Just stop for a god damn minute,* she silently berated herself. *Slow the fuck down. Think.*

She drew in a slow, deep breath, and pulled her hand away from the door.

Flexed her stiff, cold hands, cracked her neck. She stopped touching the door and started pacing, hobbling on her foot stump. Back and forth in front of the door, from one side of the small cell to the other.

*Hold on hold on… think, think, think.*

The urge for caution grew.

She couldn’t charge forward mindlessly hoping to escape. She was too smart for that. What had she learned from all this?

She’d learned that Lucas was a twisted little shit, sure. But more than that, he was underhanded and deceitful. He liked making traps, cornering his prey, and then… giving them illusion of choice.

She had assumed that he’d simply given her pants back without looking through them. It was a sloppy mistake, unlike him from everything she’d seen.

No, it was far more likely that this was another fucking trap. It was possible she was reading too much into this, overthinking it. But the more she considered her ‘host’, the more secure she felt in her paranoia, and the more sure she was that she was right, as much as it tore her apart.

If she went through that door, she’d probably be walking right into more swamp monsters. Or a bear trap. Or something else. Lucas had wanted to heal her (even if it was going way more slow that it had for him). He had wanted to keep her from becoming one of those things, she knew. He’d gleefully hacked off her foot, sure, but why?

He wanted to keep her from becoming something like Jerel because he wanted to play with her.

He didn’t have to let her suck his dick to get the magic voodoo shit into her (something about mamma’s cooking?) but that just made him a fucking asshole who’d taken advantage of her ham-fisted attempt to seduce him.

But the fact was, he could have just let her turn into a monster, and the jizz juju *was* working on her.

In a sick way… maybe the psychopath *did* like her.

She used to know a kid, a little boy, that bullied her every day in fourth grade. Turned out that he liked her, just didn’t know how to express it. It stopped after she punched him, though.

She wanted to punch Lucas.

Gail would be lying if she said she wasn’t, in a fucked-up way, at least a little flattered, though. And disgusted. Mostly because she was still covered in the result of that attention. Jerel’s blood, and a little bit of that black mold, was smeared over her face and arms to the elbows, staining the front of her dingy white shirt, slick on her feet and soaking the bottom of her jeans. After
everything Jerel had pulled, or tried to pull on her, she had been half-serious about killing him herself after it was over.

After all, as long as she showed up to Beaumont with the hundred grand she owed him, he likely wouldn’t give a shit what happened to the inbred tweaker. Of course, she ultimately pictured shooting Jerel. Not cutting his fucking head off.

So… to this point, she’d probably done everything Lucas had wanted her to, right down to picking that fucking lock.

Gail leaned back against the wall beside the door, and stared into the camera, hating it.

Lucas was on the other side of that thing, watching her from somewhere safe and probably clean. Waiting for her to just make a run for it. Otherwise, he would’ve come and stopped her by now. She was sure of it.

She wasn’t going to play into his game. She was going to change the fucking rules.

In the electrified room, she remembered how she felt with the camera on her. She’d felt powerful, somehow, with a faceless audience (even a sadistic one) watching her every move.

And his voice… it had done something to her, she couldn’t deny it. Especially when he’d forced Jerel to ‘thank’ her.

Gail’s eyes peered into the blinking red light.

In full view of it, she started to take her clothes off.

She pulled the shirt over her head (it was disgusting anyway), drained the rest of the flask, and then lay it on the floor beside the door. Balancing carefully on her one good foot, she unhooked her bra, ruined, and lay it there, too. Without breaking her gaze, she pulled her stained jeans down her legs, leaning on the still-forming heel of her severed foot.

Bare-chested and in her dirty cotton underwear, she tried to imagine Lucas watching her right now, transfixed by what he was seeing on the screen. It was a conceit, sure, but it helped. If she thought about herself like the heroine of a horror movie, she felt braver. She’d always like to think she’d be the ‘final girl’ if she were in a situation like that. Things were different when you were living it, though.

She thought of Lucas and she began to touch herself sensually, performing, like in a New Orleans burlesque. It was stupid, and there was no music, but if she just pretended for a second that things weren’t fucked… almost on their own, her hips started to move. A little bit, at first.

She closed her eyes, and she swayed. She wasn’t that good at dancing, but there was a sort of instinctual female dance that was hip-strong and slinky, that she employed (often with positive results) when she was dancing at the bar or in a club.

Part of her recognized that maybe no one was on the other end of the camera. Maybe she was dancing to an empty room, and no one was watching her. She honestly didn’t know which would be worse at the moment.

Hungover and slightly intoxicated, buzzed from mental and emotional exhaustion, trapped in a fucking dungeon with the remains of the man she’d killed all over her, Gail was fucking done with the psycho mindgame bullshit.
And, maybe, she’d been driven more than a little bit insane by what she’d been subjected to.

She bit her lip and tossed her hair, closed her eyes and tried to think of one song. All she came up with was Sir Mix-A-Lot.

...You get sprung, want to pull up tough 'cause you notice that butt was stuffed -deep in the jeans she's wearing. I'm hooked and I can't stop staring

She was probably gonna die. Sir Mix might be honored that the last thing she did was shake her ass to his song, though.

Or… that shithead, drawn by her absurd display, wouldn't be able to resist her and… then what? She'd decapitated Jerel. Maybe she could do the same to him.

I've seen her dancing, to hell with romancin', she's sweat, wet, got it goin' like a turbo 'Vette

She thought about Lucas, and she felt the twinge of deep muscle tighten between her legs. It was unjustifiable, her arousal. But she guessed she’d always been a bit fucked in the head. Normal people didn't kill other folks, probably, and that was something about her Lucas couldn’t claim credit for. She guessed they both had that in common.

With her back to the camera, she wiggled her ass and worked the cotton panties down her legs.

Somewhere outside the cell, far away, she heard a heavy door slam.

He was coming.

Gail nearly panicked. It was exactly what she’d hoped, but her exultation in finally getting a response came with the uncertainty of what might happen to her now.

She stopped dancing, and with a sudden internal appeal to common sense, she grabbed the bloody knife off the floor.

He didn’t come in right away. First, she heard him moving around on the other side of the door. Wires scraped the solid metal, and she heard a faint click.

She backed away one awkward step at a time. Her bare feet mashed into Jerel’s remains and she shoved them away with her foot.

He didn’t need to unlock the door, she already had. So what was he doing?

When Lucas pulled it open, he was standing, with wires and the components of a mechanism gathered in his hands, and what looked like a fucking IED. She had no doubt it had been meant just for her, had she gone out that goddamn door.

A hard, feral-eyed look was on his waxy pale face. The shadows in his eye sockets looked like bruises.

He was looking right at her. He threw aside the things he was holding (the explosive clattered to the floor in the hall without exploding, but she was still startled with his cavalier attitude).

“You been a bad girl, Gail.”

Gail smiled, but he wasn’t laughing now.

He charged forward, and Gail’s back hit the wall.
Lucas was right there, his hand flat on the wall beside her, caging her in. His other hand was clamped on her lower jaw so hard it hurt.

“This what you want?” he said, jerking her head to the side. “You got my attention, now what? You want me to fuck you? You goddamn slut. You’re fake just like the rest of ‘em.”

Gail breathed through her teeth. She didn’t look away from him, though. If he was trying to intimidate her, it wasn’t going to fucking work. Lucas had given her another false choice, the lie of freedom, but she’d thwarted him again.

When she didn’t answer, Lucas grabbed her shoulders in his bruising grip, shook her, and then forced her to flip around so that she faced the wall. One hand pinned the back of her neck, jammed her cheek against the grimy concrete.

The hand that wasn’t pinning her went straight to her ass, but he wasn’t enjoying the scenery. His fingers wedged her cheeks apart, and then the bony, bloodless digits probed her. She knew what he would find, and it was both humiliating and thrilling. What would he do when he saw proof of how totally, inexplicably turned on she was?

She could now feel proof of the slickness coating her inner upper thighs. It caught every air current and felt chilled on her overly warm skin.

Artlessly, his fingers jabbed between her pussy lips, gave a couple half-hearted strokes when he found the nub (as if he didn’t really get what it was) and then plunged into her. Two fingers, without ceremony, slid into her up to the knuckle joint, and Gail gasped and clenched around him, the knife in her hand forgotten.

“You fucking like that?” He hissed with ragged breaths. Gail answered by bowing her lower back, pushing down onto his fingers more. Lucas drew them out before ramming them back in, and she uttered an embarrassing grunt. They were so long. She felt his every bony finger joint as they ribbed by that sensitive first inch of cunt muscle and then hit the back wall, and like a stupid horny teenager she let him finger fuck her. It was humiliating.

But yeah, she fucking liked it. The hand pinning the back of her neck squeezed and he stepped closer until his clothed front touched her naked back.

She took the chance and pressed her ass back into him.

Lucas, close enough that his breath brushed by her ear, swallowed a groan. It seemed that Lucas liked it too.

The hand on her neck slid to her hair and grasped it from the roots. He jerked her head back and she uttered a noise that was half-surprise, half delight.

“You’re a sick bitch,” he said as his fingers worked inside of her. The wet sounds it made made her face burn and her pulse race. She wanted more.

She made a petulant noise, and Lucas growled. It sent shudders up her spine.

He pulled his fingers out and she clenched on the sudden emptiness.

“I’m unna make ya regret fuckin with me.” He was doing something with his jeans. Gail bit her lower lip. “Ya shoulda just gone through the door, Gail. Or let ‘im bite yer fuckin head off. It woulda been quicker than what I’m gonna do.”
Gail wasn't scared. She wanted him to get on with it. He spread her cheeks again with one hand, still gripping her by her hair. He breathed almost vocally now, as his dick probed blindly for her slippery hole.

And then he slipped the head in.

Gail’s noise of appreciation was wholly involuntary, and she didn't know if the high pitched whimper Lucas uttered was in response to her noise or the way her pussy felt right now. As if remembering that he was supposed to be punishing her, he shoved the entirety of his cock forward, eliciting an ‘oof’ from her.

Of course, once he was inside of her, he seemed to sort of forget again. Wobbly waves went straight to her knees and Gail thought she'd crumple (most of her weight was resting on her good foot). But then he released her hair and gripped the meat of her hips with both hands, somehow holding her up.

He drove himself forward and Gail knew she hadn't felt his whole length before because he smashed into the deep wall of her cunt. Tight balls jolted her clit and she nearly buckled again but he didn't let her.

“Fuuuuhhhck,” he moaned in her ear. The hoarse timbre of his voice did things to her belly. It made her feel like she had half a dozen snakes writhing around inside of her.

“Lucas,” she whimpered, not able to give even the slightest fuck about her dignity. “Don't you goddamn stop.”

He grunted in agreement. Holding her like a vise, with her feet barely skimming the floor, Lucas pulled back and plunged forward again. He uttered an animal noise when he went all the way, and she gave him one of her own.

She dropped the knife.

Her hands, flat against the dirty wall (didn't even think to fight him) curled into claws when he did it again. And again, jarring her whole body, so deep and so hard she thought she might swallow her own tongue.

Lucas seemed to lose himself. She tried to see his face out of the corner of her eye. His head was thrown back, long neck arched in a graceful bow that made his adam’s apple stick out as it bobbed. Sharp hipbones met the soft flesh of her ass, right in that sweet spot of being almost painful. Without any fat to pad the base of his dick, she got the entirety of it. Or, at least what would physically fit in her. She’d had his dick in her mouth, but somehow it was so much larger than she remembered.

If she hadn't been so goddamn wet, the feeling of her tender pussy stretching around it might have been excruciating. As it was, the sharp ache only made the desperate need for so much worse.

He was saying nonsense shit now, just a stream of bullshit like ‘ohmygod’ and ‘fuckingbitch,’ but there wasn’t any real malice behind it based on the way he was stroking her insides with his ridiculously huge organ, kneading her hips with his sharp, bruising grip, like he’d found the holy fucking grail. Gail’s noises were in sync with her breaths. She felt her pounding pulse in her cunt. Felt like her pussy lips were swollen and throbbing.

Without thinking, her hand snaked down to stroke the fire between her legs. At that moment, Lucas decided that he wanted to see her face.
He tugged himself out of her and flipped her around, interrupting her.

She didn't expect the effect seeing his wild-eyed and flushed face would have on her. Boldly, she wrapped her arms around his neck (only then seeing, and remembering what she'd done to Jerel with her bare hands before immediately dismissing it again as currently unimportant). Lucas's cold hands hooked around where her ass met her upper thigh and his hard fingertips sank into the soft skin at the crease.

Her knees were shaking, but she felt him support her weight (way too easily) so she picked her feet off the floor and locked her legs around his narrow, sinewy waist.

His pale eyes narrowed on hers and with a frightening focus, he guided his dick into her again, leaning into her with a groan as she enveloped him.

His hips rolled into her, pinning her to the wall. Every jolt made her feel hot and shaky, and she didn't care that she couldn't reach her clit. At the moment she was helpless, like a rag doll as he fucked her, and she was okay with that. He seemed very okay with the fact that she was still covered in the evidence of her gory altercation with the thing Jerel had become. Maybe it even got him off, the sick fuck.

Lucas's breath came hot and fast on the base of her neck, and while his cock pounded her brain into mush, the sharp press of his teeth sank into the meat of her shoulder. The noises coming out of her were obscene, vulgar, and she didn't care.

Something about all this, getting fucked by her violent captor right beside her former partner’s remains, was depraved to the point of surreal. She felt her back sliding down the rough wall, and could only hold onto him as he sank with her to the ground.

He fucked her right into the floor. Mindless, lured along by the tightening in her cunt and the pressure building in her hips and lower back, Gail let him. She let him smash into her until she felt her body grind down into the cool wetness smeared on the floor.

On some level she knew what she was sliding in. But all that mattered was Lucas’s face, teeth bared in animalistic fervor, red-rimmed eyes wild and dangerous, as he maintained that punishing pace that seemed to hit every delicious spot inside of her while simultaneously feeling like he was going to rip her in two.

This time, when she reached down to touch her clit with her grimy hand, he let her.

It didn't take much. From the very first stroke, Gail’s body responded with a quivering jolt of heat right to her pussy. She cinched around him and Lucas’s eyes rolled up under his eyelids. Her own head tilted back, wallowing in the mess on the floor. Dampness soaked her hair to her scalp (would be a pain in the ass to wash out later) but she just furiously worked her clit. She savored the immense build-up of white hot anticipation that eclipsed nearly everything else. It was bigger than she’d felt in a while.

Lucas uttered a throaty moan, grabbed her jaw in hand (wet and tacky with red) and forced her to look at him as he pounded her. His stubbly face stretched into a vicious grin.

And then she came.

She let loose a savage moan and he made a half noise of triumph before it was choked off when her pussy clamped tight. Wave after wave of warmth rocked her and she felt the convulsions in her cunt, gripping his shaft in spasms.
His face got really red and tense. He uttered a guttural *hnnng* and he couldn't hold back anymore. He slammed in to the hilt, jarring her backwards a few inches, and wet heat jetted into her.

She felt his dick throb with each spurt, each one seemed to drain him and make him sag a little lower. And then he sank down on top of her. His thin chest shuddered. He lay there, panting against her cheek. She could feel his heart through his chest. Somehow, he felt at once brittle and made of iron and sinew. She’d felt his strength.

Now that the lust fog was receding, Gail couldn't believe what had just happened.

Her arms, shaky and sore, slid down his back, felt his upper spine and shoulder blades through his hoodie, then dropped to the floor.

They landed in something soft and wet that she could no longer really ignore. Everything smelled like blood.

She was covered in it, and now Lucas was too. He raised himself and hovered over her, supported by his arms. The expression on his face was one of intense, boyish delight. She could still see his white cock, soft but somehow still sizable, dangling from his open fly like a fleshy worm.

He bit his lip, pushed himself back on his haunches, and tucked his still wet dick back through his fly.

“Guess that settles it.”

“What?” she croaked, trying to debate if she would be able to get up again. She just knew once she sat up, the air would hit the disgusting bloody mess she'd been pounded on top of. She could feel Lucas’s jizz leaking out of her and considered maybe some of the gore had gotten in there, too. She wondered if it would have the same effect as when she'd swallowed it.

Lucas giggled and rested his hands on his knees.

“I’m movin’ you up in the ranks. Next, I’m pittin’ you against one of the fatties. See how you deal wit’ that *acid attack*.”

Gail sat back, rage overtaking her post-fucking languor, and swung at him.

Lucas caught her fist in his hand. She threw a punch with her other hand but he caught that too. He burst out in harsh, helpless laughter, howling, eyes huge and crazy.

“Ya dumb *bitch*, I’m just fuckin’ with you.” His hands slid around to her wrists, and he grabbed them tight. In one fluid movement, he tugged her to her feet with him, and then jerked her in close so that her naked front was crushed against his hoodie. He growled deep in his chest, squeezed her a little too tight. “Guess yer my girlfriend, now. Someday, might even introduce ya to muh momma and the old man.”

“Your girl…” Gail sputtered, unable to complete the sentence. His momma?! Did this redneck garbage fire even have parents? Gail thought it was more fitting that he’d just grown one day out of that same swampy shit that ate half of Jerel.

“You’re a goddamn psycho,” she snarled, but his self-satisfied grin only stretched bigger.

She threw her weight back. Unexpectedly, his arms opened.
Gail lost her balance and tipped backwards. Her momentum carried her to the floor, where her bare ass landed on Jerel’s squishy half-torso with a sickening squelch.

Nausea rippled up her throat. Her mouth watered, and then she pitched forward, retching and sobbing for breath. Lucas only chuckled. He lowered to a crouch again and his eyes swept down her, and his brows rose in exaggerated bemusement.

“Ooooh wee. Yer fuckin’ gross right now, though,” he said, clicking his teeth in a false rebuke. “What a goddamn mess you made.”

All the shit she went through before she lost her goddamn mind came right back to her and Gail lunged forward to snatch the knife from where it lay in a puddle of blood and fleshy chunks. Lucas didn’t even move to stop her. The piece of shit found all this hilarious.

“You know you ain’t as clever as ya think?” Gail growled.

“Is that so?” he asked lightly. She couldn’t tell if he was mocking her or not. He looked at least a little curious. It didn’t matter.

“Yes,” she nodded, giving him a crazy eye of her own. Her blade hand wasn’t shaking this time around. “All y’all men think you got it figured out. You think yer sooo fuckin’ smart. You fuck women, you fuck with them, and then you fuck them over because ya think it’s yer god-damn right.”

Gail’s voice rose. Lucas listened with a growing expression of delirious rapture.

“I tell you whut, motherfuck. You better kill me now, ‘cause I ain’t. Puttin’ up. With it. First chance I get, I’m gunna gut you in yer sleep, shit in your mouth, and burn yer house down.”

Gail leaned forward, her focus narrow, and her mind blessedly clear. She wore her blood-soaked nudity like holy armor, and didn’t care that she was still dripping with a mess of her own between her thighs.

“If you think I’m playin’ wit’choo, boy, fucking try me. No More Games.”

Lucas nodded in acknowledgement. But why was there such a fuckboy smirk on that sharp, bony face of his?

He didn’t say anything, but his eyes lowered. Gail realized he was looking at her foot. She didn’t dare look away from him. She tried wiggling her toes. Something responded, but it still felt weird.

She followed his eyes, real quick (knife stayed right where it was), then fixed her stare back on him.

She did a doubletake.

Her foot… her foot, the one he’d cut off, was there. It was covered in gore, and the toes were small and webbed, but it was a foot. Now she had two of them again.

Her knife arm lowered, and when she looked back at Lucas, he was standing up.

“Guess we better getcha hosed off,” he said, stretching with a lazy grunt. The bottom of his bloody and shot-gunned hoodie lifted and her eyes went immediately to the hard curve of his lower abdomen. She cursed herself and looked back at his face.
“I mean it,” she said, her brows tight. Without intending to, she wiggled her toes again, savored her renewed balance.

_Jizz juju_, she thought with some private reverence and wonder.

“Good,” he said with surprising sincerity and smug delight.

Lucas bent forward, braced on his forward knee, and offered his hand.

A shower sounded _real_ good right about then.

Maybe she could worry about the other shit later (the escape, getting the money, all that), Lord knew she’d been through enough. But, she swore to baby-_titty-fucking_-Jesus, if he was just leading her to another trap, she would slit her own throat and deny him the satisfaction.

She took his hand with her empty one and he yanked her up. Lucas made sure to sweep down and grab her shit, first. He shoved it into her arms, and set off at a brisk pace without further ado.

As Gail scrambled to keep up with his lanky stride, her gaze trailed briefly behind them. She had a fleeting thought to maybe say a couple words for Jerel… but they weren’t exactly church words. She decided not to.

“Where’re you dragging me?” she asked Lucas, feeling indignant for how she had to jog just to keep pace. Here she was, just going along with him, even after what he’d done to her. It was the most fool-headed thing she’d ever done. She never would’ve put up with it from some yokel in the real world. But she was looking at the world in a whole new way. She’d never be able to see things the same as before, even when she got out of this situation.

Lucas pulled her up a set of wooden stairs and paused in front of the door at the top. It was wooden, and she counted no less than five different locks on the inside. He wasn’t the least bit concerned about the knife she was holding (maybe because that arm was also occupied with holding onto her dirty clothes).

“You gotta be quiet,” he said with a conspiratorial giggle. His firm hand tightened around hers before he dropped it.

He started digging around in his pockets, leaving Gail to stand there dumbly. As if suddenly remembering she was naked, she clumsily tried to dress without dropping anything. She looked back down the steps with a wary eye as she tugged her jeans back on. It smelled different up here. Still musty and damp, but somehow… cleaner. She took a few deep breaths of it to clear the smell of sex and death out of her lungs (pointless when she had to wear the same clothes).

She tried to swallow down the horrific taste of vomit and whiskey clinging to her teeth, but her mouth was too dry.

With a rattle of keys, Lucas started unlocking the three keyed padlocks one at a time, muttering to himself something about ‘_meant to upgrade this shit… hafta do that next…_’ before moving onto the combination padlocks.

And then he pushed it open. He took her hand again and peered around outside. Evening noises filtered in. The regular kind. All those bugs she’d hated from earlier, sounded more like a cheerful symphony of normality now. So it seemed that the rest of the world still existed, after all.

“Alrigh’,” he said, turning back at her. “Don’t say a goddamn word, and do what I do. If momma or Eveline, or anyone else sees you, you just let me do the talkin’, ya hear?”
“Who’s Eveline?” she asked, too curious about the name he’d mentioned before to stop herself. Lucas growled, impatient, and pulled the door a little more shut. His wide eyes darted around them, as if to check for eavesdroppers.

“No one you wanna fuck with,” he said with sudden gravity. The lightness in his face was gone. “Now shut up and do what I tell you if you don’t wanna end up in mamma’s gumbo.”

What else could she do but nod? He barely waited before pulling her through.

To the outside.

Chapter End Notes

I always wanted to write a filthy sex scene in which two people fuck on a corpse. I’m not sorry I did it, I’m only sorry I didn’t do it sooner.

Please comment if you read this far and want more <3
The shed she stepped out of was standing in the middle of a damp, overgrown yard. Her bare feet sank into the weed-choked mud, and water welled up between her toes.

It was drizzling, and there were no stars showing in the solid black above. It smelled like rotting vegetation and sulfur. A drop of water gathered and rolled down her nose to drop on her lip, and without meaning to, she licked it away. It tasted like blood.

Lucas’s hooded head turned as he looked, and listened around them. He’d let go of her hand. At that moment, a near blinding jolt of urgency almost overtook her to run.

But then Lucas was moving along, without even looking at her. She stumbled after him toward the rear entrance of the plantation mansion that loomed across the yard.

Despite what she’d seen from the front, the main house was not abandoned. A porch light, choked with moths and marsh flies, winked at them dimly up ahead.

It looked like the entire estate was sinking slowly into the swamp.

Somewhere, on the other side of that house, her car was parked, waiting for her, probably sodden and full of tiny spider webs by now. If Lucas’s disinterest in it was any indicator, the money could very well still be in the trunk.

There was so much between her and that car, though. Physically and otherwise. For one, she wasn’t so stupid as to run barefoot through the bayou at night. Besides the normal array of poisonous and predatory wildlife, she couldn’t be sure there wasn’t something else out there, too. Something… supernatural.

She tried not to think about it.

She could hear waters moving somewhere out there in the darkness, the creaking of branches, and then she was thinking of the creatures again. Of Jerel.

She followed a couple strides behind him, stepping carefully in the dark, holding the knife close at her side.

It would be all but useless against Lucas. The fact that he’d let her keep it showed that he knew that, too. But, pig-headedly, Gail didn’t fold it or put it away. By god, if she was gonna die, she’d rather die with a fucking weapon in her hand.

He stepped onto the deck and unlocked the faded white door.

The door stuck, likely swollen in its frame by the humidity, and a deep, resounding groan echoed inside. He took her wrist, and pulled her in after him when she hesitated. He didn’t have to use much force. She knew that, at the moment, she was safest right next to him.

She didn’t miss how he kept her close, nor how his hooded head darted around. His caution, and his silence, set her on edge.
The interior looked close to normal, if a little neglected. It had once been a grand home. A pair of staircases framed the entryway, sweeping up to a second-floor walkway and balcony. The light she’d seen was coming from a couple of dusty, wall-mounted lamps. A clock ticked somewhere, though Gail couldn’t see it. It was so oddly quiet, apart from the noises of the house itself, creaking like a ship bobbing on the waves. She thought again about how it looked like it was sinking beneath the marshes from the outside.

Her guide didn’t let her linger. He started up the stairs, each step heralded by the squeak of wooden boards. If he was trying to be stealthy, he was failing miserably. Each passing moment, she felt more and more ridiculous for holding her knife, yet also more justified.

By the time she reached the top of the landing, she was starting to feel lightheaded and shaky. She was tired, dehydrated, and the headache she was dealing with was only worsening. Gail’s legs were nearly ready to fold beneath her.

Lucas brought her to a door, decorated with the bones of what could have been a raccoon, or a possum. *Morbid swamp freak*, she thought with automatic disgust. But as per his warning, she kept her mouth shut.

He popped open a plastic panel on the side, revealing a powered electronic lock with a digital screen and speaker. It was the most modern piece of technology she’d seen since arriving on the property, and it was so out of place. Why not put a lock like this on a door to the outside?

He shielded the buttons with his body and jabbed in the first digit.

She almost didn’t hear the door opening on the other side of the second-floor balcony. She glanced behind them audibly sucked in a breath when she saw an approaching figure carrying a lantern. Lucas froze and turned, pushing an unresisting Gail behind him.

It was a woman.

Gail came very close to shoving Lucas over the balcony railing. She even went as far as to open her mouth, a plea for help hovering just on the tip of her tongue.

“*Lucas,*” the woman chided in a hollow, motherly voice. “Now, I told you, *no girls in your room.* I know your daddy an’ me raised you better’n that.”

Gail shut her mouth.

Something was off about the woman. So much so that Gail found she couldn’t stop staring despite the horror creeping in. Maybe it was the greyish cast to her skin, or the filthy, unkempt state of her clothes and straw-colored hair. Maybe it was Lucas’s sudden tension.

“I’m a grown man, Momma,” he said, his voice strangely flat, in jarring contrast to his usual animated inflection. He jerked his head toward a bewildered Gail and smiled. “And besides, *Eveline* don’t seem to mind.”

“Eveline’s alright with it?”

The woman’s dull eyes moved to Gail, and her mouth split into a queasy smile. Instead of pink gums and lips, what Gail could see in her rotten-looking maw was as pale grey as a corpse’s. She looked like she’d died a few days ago and just didn’t realize it yet. She didn’t seem to care about the fact that they were both clotted and spattered with blood.
“Well then. You take care and treat my boy right. I don’t want any dirty fucking whores in my home, ya hear?” She had spoken it as easily as a comment on the weather, but the language was startling. Gail thought she saw something moving in there, behind her teeth. Something squirming, with legs.

The fear crept further up her body until she was primed with it. Cramped fingers gripped the switchblade’s handle.

“You have a lovely home,” she said with great care.

Lucas snorted, reached behind his back, and took Gail’s forearm in one hand. His cool grip was both comforting and nerve-wracking.

“Y’all should come down to supper,” she answered, switching tack without hesitation, like her brain wasn’t firing right. “Got a roast cookin’ in the oven.”

“We already ate,” he said without looking at her. Standing between Gail and the woman he called ‘mamma,’ Lucas poked the number panel.

The lock beeped, and a mechanism inside the door moved. He pushed it inward, and ushered Gail through ahead of him. The woman stared after them with that stapled-on smile on her face until he pulled the door shut behind them.

“Are y’all zombies?” Gail asked, point blank. “Or vampires, or somethin like that?

“You stupid? Ain’t no such thing as zombies,” he said before his face cracked into a shitty smile. He laughed at her as he walked off, down the dark, narrow hallway, lit by one barely-glowing wall-mounted bulb. Gail glared after him. She’d felt it was a fair question.

About halfway down on the left, a door stood cracked and a dim stripe of light cut across the shadow. He walked past that. Gail thought of the woman, who might still be standing there on the other side of the door, and decided she didn’t want to stand there by herself anymore. She followed behind him.

Peeling wallpaper bared the wooden paneling underneath. The carpet felt spongy beneath her bare feet with what felt like years of accumulated grime.

“Was that really your mother?” Gail asked, unable to quiet the question. She passed another door on the right. It was closed with a padlock.

“Yeah. I think she likes you.”

Gail didn’t feel comforted to hear this. He stopped before a door at the end of the hallway.

“Lucas… what’s with all the Eveline shit? I haven’t seen no one called Eveline but y’all sure talk about her a lot.”

He paused with his hand on the doorknob.

“You’ll know, soon enough. May as well enjoy it until then.”

She didn't get to ask him what the fuck that meant and demand an explanation for the cryptic shit, because just then, he opened the door and flicked a switch, and the room behind him lit up.

He moved aside to let her pass and then just stood there in the doorway, looking shady as fuck with
his hood still up.

The bathroom was a bit dirty. But in a male way, not in a warehouse strung with dead bodies sort of way.

There was a cracked porcelain sink to the left of the door. A curled tube of toothpaste sat on the back of the sink, next to it, a frayed toothbrush.

She looked back at the man currently blocking the doorway with an overt leer on his face and found it hard to believe that he brushed his teeth like a normal human being.

“The fuck you standin’ there for? Get the fuck out.”

“Now what is the point o’ that? I already seen it all, and then sum.” He licked and bit his lip, running his eyes up her like he wanted to do the same to her. “That was fucked-up. Even for me.”

“You don’t got a season pass, motherfucker… and I seriously doubt that.” He seemed like he might be into some weird shit like pissing. Or snuff. Maybe she’d given him more of a show than she’d realized.

His wicked look only sharpened.

“Women,” he scoffed, without losing his smile. “Don’t take too long, Gail. This ain’t a safe place to be alone. And we need to have a… conversation, you an’ me.”

He spun and his hooded back retreated into the dark.

Gail pushed the door shut behind him. Of course, there was no inside lock, on the one door that really felt justified to have one.

First thing she did was check for cameras. It brought little comfort that she didn’t see any. Cameras could come pretty small. Either Lucas hadn’t caught on, or, more likely, he got off when his victims knew they were being watched.

It was possible she wasn’t the first guest. But looking around didn’t yield any evidence of a woman. In fact, apart from a stack of empty toilet paper tubes by the toilet (lid up… but by far not the dirtiest she’d seen), and the cracked bar of soap on the rim of the bathtub, it barely looked lived in at all. She immediately went to the sink to wash her hands and get a drink, but the faucet knobs turned freely and nothing came out. She noted that the sink basin was clean.

She went to the bathtub this time. The fact that it was also clean was somehow… unsettling. There were only a couple of drill holes in the wall where an overhead shower might have once been, but the lower faucet was functioning. She turned on the cold water first, let it run for a few seconds, and then immediately washed her hands and face, shivering with pleasure from both the shock of cold in the stuffy warmth, and the feeling of getting clean. As soon as the water splashed over her face ran clear, Gail drank.

Bent awkwardly over the edge of the tub, she drank from cupped hands until she couldn’t drink any more, until it sloshed around in her belly. With one more wary glance to the door, she plugged the drain, turned on the hot water, and stripped off her shirt and bra. Both were forever stained with Jerel’s blood, as were her jeans, and no amount of washing would get it out. She started emptying her pockets.

Both the lock pick, and the cellphone were gone. Of course, it had been Lucas who’d picked up and handed her all of her things. Either he had neglected to grab those things, or he’d deliberately
deprived her of them. She knew which one she’d bet on.

The hot water ran out only halfway to filling the bathtub, but she didn’t care. When Gail stepped into the semi-warm water, she might have made a sound usually reserved for sex. She folded herself beneath the surface until the water came up to her shoulders and went from clear to pink to a watery red.

Without a second thought, she grabbed Lucas’s soap and started scrubbing her nails and skin with it. She took particular relish in swiping the bar between her legs in an attempt to wash away what was left from that very… thorough fucking. Something told her that she’d never really feel clean after that.

The thought didn’t bother her as much as it probably should’ve, but it didn’t matter. It wouldn’t happen again.

She really hated to do it, but Gail had to wash the blood (and other stuff) out of her hair, which was matted down with it in the back. She had bigger things to worry about than the frizzy mess it would be when it dried. Like what the hell she was gonna do next.

As she did her best to rinse her hair, her eyes kept straying to the closed door on the other wall as if he might burst through at any moment.

Whether Lucas had cameras planted in the bathroom didn’t really matter. He had already gotten into her head and inspired a paranoia that felt like background noise in her brain. She’d seen him cut off his own finger, then watched it grow back. Where could she stab him that could do enough damage to end him?

Or, better, what could she cut off that might not grow back? She snorted to herself. She could think of something she’d like to try that on. Her hair, as clean as it was gonna get, wasn’t as tangled as it could’ve been. She set to work scrunching it to help it dry a little faster. Any trace of the straightening she’d done before the ATM incident was gone, and now her hair was going to be a kinky black cloud.

Creaking sounded in the ceiling over her head.

Her heart skipped a beat, and she froze where she sat.

Water dripped from the end of the tarnished steel faucet into the bathtub, and she could hear a distant whistle of wind.

A wall creaked, and she let out her breath. Just normal house sounds. Normal being relative, that is.

More sounds from above made her shiver in her bloody water and sink down. She remembered what Lucas had said, that this wasn’t a safe place to be alone. Of course, it was all intimidation, she had no doubt. But after what she’d seen, she couldn’t assume it was a total lie.

She suddenly felt very cold, and very small, and she didn’t like it.

She pulled the plug and stepped out, eyeing the pile of soiled clothes with distaste as pink drops rolled down her skin and joined the puddle collecting beneath her.

She didn’t even have a towel. Who the fuck didn’t own any towels? She imagined that skinny bastard walking around ass-naked having to drip dry. She thought about it a little more as she padded, damp-footed, to the sink. She remembered that flash of belly skin she caught when he stretched earlier and wondered what the rest of his body looked like. And then she forced those
thoughts from her head.

She took a dab of his toothpaste on her fingertip and sort of brushed her teeth with it, swished the minty foam around a bit, and then spat it out. She only then remembered that the sink faucet didn’t work.

Looking behind her at the rest of the bathroom, she could see that she’d definitely made a mess. The interior of the bathtub was tinted red, and she’d left streaks of red on the rim. In addition to the pink puddle on the floor where she’d gotten out, droplets of various concentration were scattered around the outside of the tub. She wondered if Lucas would care, and then decided she didn’t give a fuck.

She caught a shadow out of the corner of her eye. When she looked, nothing was there.

Liquid dripped from somewhere inside of the walls.

A change in the air inspired the hairs to rise on her bare arms and legs.

Out of nowhere, a shudder rippled up her spine.

She thought again of Lucas in the other room and at the moment she couldn’t tell which would be worse, the man’s company (and his ‘conversation’) or being alone where her overactive mind conjured horrors worse than what she’d already seen.

But no… she hadn’t imagined it. There was definitely something in the corner of the bathroom opposite the door. But it only seemed to exist in the very outermost edge of her field of view. It faded out of sight completely if she looked at it straight on.

That meant, quite plainly to her, that it was there whether she could see it or not.

She found herself stepping back toward the door.

Her eyes darted to movement. A cockroach, that skittered from behind the toilet and up the wall before it squirmed into the holes where the overhead shower would be attached.

A soft errant eddy in the air brushed by the nape of her neck. It carried with it the sound of a wordless whisper.

It felt like an excited child telling a secret.

Her back hit the door and she groped for the door knob. The bathroom’s single fluorescent light buzzed louder and flickered out once, twice.

She tugged the door open only as much as she needed to squeeze through, and then spilled into the hallway. She shut the door behind herself a little more loudly than she meant to.

Of course, she’d left the knife and all of her things.

She came very close to going back in, at least for the switchblade, but her hand faltered over the knob and dropped.

She didn’t used to believe in all that paranormal crap, but a lot had changed. If tar mold monsters could come out of walls, and Lucas could cut off a piece of himself and regrow it, then who was Gail to say that ghosts weren’t real?

The problem was, now she was both unarmed and naked. She stepped back, at a complete loss for
what to do.

Fuck Lucas, she’d make him give her something to wear. Or she’d stay naked. Either way, she sure as fuck wasn’t going back into the haunted bathroom by herself

She started toward the door he had disappeared into and almost tripped over a small bundle sitting on the floor.

It was clothes. A large pair of brightly colored, but faded swim trunks in neon green and orange, and a blue tee shirt that looked at least twenty years old by the shape it was in. Emblazoned in faded, cracked print on the front was a sketchy illustration of a mountain overlooking two lakes. The words “Twin Lakes Summer Camp” were scrawled across the chest.

In the context of the situation, the fact that he’d left her something clean to wear was weirdly… touching. She couldn’t help but remember that he’d put her underwear on while she was unconscious so she wouldn’t be completely half-naked as she lay on the gurney. She couldn’t be sure he didn’t take some liberties while she was out, but the gesture had meant something to her.

It was a confusing feeling, seeing the faintest hint of some sort of moral compass in the guy. He had a fucked-up idea of chivalry, but she’d take it.

The clothes, fitting for a teenage boy, were almost the right size for her. She missed having her bra, but… she considered that a casualty of self-defense.

She crossed her arms over her chest and went to the door on her right. The other one still had a padlock on it (that fucking lock pick would’ve been nice), so unless he’d left her alone in this wing, that was the only place she could go.

She wrung her hands together.

She reached out, but the door swung open before she could touch it.

Lucas, craning around it to see from his seat, had a big smile on his face as his eyes looked her over before settling on her hair with mild, but genuine surprise. For some reason, Gail felt her cheeks burn. She ran her fingers through it self-consciously, feeling like a fucking idiot.

“'The fuck you standin’ there for?” he asked, mocking her words from earlier. “Get the fuck in here.”

Gail did as he asked, rubbing one arm. He shut the door behind her without getting up from the desk where he was sitting. Three large monitors glowed in the dim room, which was otherwise illuminated by a table lamp sitting crooked on the floor in the back corner. From a quick glance, she’d seen that the rest of the room was drab and cluttered, but she didn’t want to take her eyes off Lucas.

“Can I getcha anything? Beer? Food? A good clitty lickin’?” Despite everything, Gail sputtered, unable to conjure the words for a retort. He sniggered. “Just fuckin’ with ya, Gail… how ‘bout you just have a seat right over there.”

He nodded behind her. She glanced back. There was a couch against the back wall, its brown plaid upholstery worn and holey. A couple of bed pillows were strewn on it, as well as a sheet. It looked well slept-on.

“That’s a good girl,” he said in a mock soothing tone as she went to it. “Right there.”
She lowered herself on it. The cushion was springy and she sank into it. It was surprisingly comfortable. She gripped the armrest with a tight hand as her eyes darted around the room without fully letting him out of her sight.

Her eyes fell on his desk. It was littered with crap, all kinds of random shit, but the bright colors of a Funyuns bag caught her eye first. She swallowed the saliva gathering in her mouth.

“You hungry, Gail? I was serious about that.”

She glanced back at the junk food wrappers on his desk and her stomach gurgled weakly.

“I just want answers, man.”

“You might find yerself wishin’ you didn’t.”

“I’ll risk it.”

Lucas smiled and leaned forward in his chair. On two of the screens behind him Gail could make out lines of red text or computer code against black. The third looked like a web page, like a forum. She realized that he had internet, which meant access to the outside world. She tamped down the thrill of urgent excitement.

“Well… there ain’t no pretty way to say this, but… whether you meant to or not, the second you set your pretty little foot in that guest house, you was a dead woman.” He shrugged, but he didn’t look that remorseful. “I thought I could get some fun out of ya first, o’ course. Never thought it’d turn out this way.”

“How many times you done this?” she asked. “How many people’ve fallen for your traps?”

He waved his hand dismissively with a smug smirk on his face.

“Who’s keepin’ track? Point is, you were just too damn clever for yer own good. And you got them… womanly ways about you. So here you are. An’ the truth is… I just don’t know what’s gonna happen next.”

“The hell do you mean ‘you don’t know?’” Gail asked, her apprehension making her angry, giving an edge to her question.

Lucas leaned back in his chair and sat with his legs splayed comfortably. She noticed that he’d changed his jeans, and his hoodie. He now wore one with gold foil lettering on the left side of his chest. Did he always wear a fucking hood up?

“You’re probably gunna start experiencing some confusin’… changes.”

“Like Jerel?” she asked immediately. She pulled her feet up onto the couch and hugged them close. A meager shield.

“Nah. I gave Jerel somethin’ a little different than I gave you.” He leered.

“Give it a rest already,” she snapped, unable to stop herself. “We got it. I sucked your dick. We screwed. Can you get past it?”

“I'm sorry if I'm a little sentimental, but despite what you might think, I ain't exactly popular with the ladies. Or the guys. Or… anyone, now that I think about it…”

“I can't imagine why.”
He continued on, a half smile on his sharp face.

“What I'm sayin is, that meant something to me. Whut can I say? I'm a romantic at heart. So it really… chokes me up when I think about how it ain’t gonna last.”

Though hardly anything left his mouth without layers of irony slapped on top, she really did believe that he was sad. She didn’t care.

“What do you mean?” It sounded to Gail like he was going to kill her. She’d be a disappointed and pissed-off ghost if he’d put her through all that just to commit plain ol’ murder.

Lucas giggled and his eyes widened.

“Eveline, Gail… if you ain’t seen ‘er yet… you will.”

His ominous tone sent an involuntary shiver through her and she pulled her legs in closer, fidgeted with her toes. She thought about that shadow in the bathroom. The whisper.

She decided to keep it to herself. But the more she tried to push off what she’d seen and heard as paranoia and nerves, the harder it became.

“So, if I start seein’ her… then what…?”

“Then you just ain't gonna be yerself. You'll be hers. You'll do whatever she wants you to. All sortsa shit. Worst part is, you'll like it. You won't wanna stop. You won't wanna do anything else, either. I seen it. I lived it. You may as well enjoy yer freedom while it lasts, Gail.”

He’d been talking to someone before, when she was on the gurney.

“You see her? Is that why you're such a crazy asshole?”

“Nah, that's all me, baby! I see her, but Evie don’t got a grip on me like everyone else…” He looked around the room, conspiratorially. Almost comically. “Eeeehh… maybe you best keep that to yerself.”

Gail didn’t know what was real and what was the ravings of a lunatic anymore. It was all fair game now. She’d scramble for a foothold in some kind of relatable reality, only to find it false and her balance thrown all over again. If nothing else, she didn’t get the feel from him right now that he meant to kill her.

She rubbed her eyes, racked with doubt and anger and helplessness, and then more anger. God, but she was so tired.

“Ah know… it’s a lot ta take in. You’ve had a long day, Gail… why don’t you just lay down right there and get a little shut eye?”

She scoffed, fighting a yawn.

“Boy, I ain’t takin’ my eyes off you for a god-damn second, you hear?”

“Gail,” he started in a low, throaty tone, leaning forward in his chair. “if I wanted to do somethin to you, you really think you could stop me?”

Fuck, she thought as heat flashed through her. It was not the response she wanted her body to have. She wanted anything but that. Fear, anger, a healthy dose of spite… anything. She fell silent, though. His words, as shitty and creepy as they were, rang with the truth behind them. When she
looked at him again, he had a wicked grin on his face.

Ah, anger, there it was.

“Fuck you.”

He shrugged.

“I’m just sayin’… you ain’t goin’ nowhere. May as well enjoy it. Hell… might even be nice. All that really depends on you, though.”

She was too tired for this. She knew because his constant barrage of suggestion was starting to get to her. Even so, she didn’t miss the subtle threat at the end.

Her eyes fell back on the desk behind him. Namely the food wrappers. Her stomach gurgled. If she was gonna stay up all night watching him, she needed food.

“You got anythin’ to eat...?” she asked, tentative.

Lucas’s eyes widened in delight.

“You hungry?”

“Yeah.” And then, she quickly amended, “normal food. Like… for humans.”

“A’right,” he said, looking far too pleased. He unfolded his body from his desk chair. Gail reflexively shrank back into the couch. But he wasn’t going for her. He went to a door to the side that she’d taken as a closet, and opened it. It led into another room, completely dark. He disappeared around the corner. She heard hinges squeak. Sounded like a freezer door.

When he came back out, he was holding a box of ham and cheese hot pockets.

Gail didn’t know what she’d been expecting. She felt like she’d stepped into a parallel universe.

A card table set up on the other side of the couch was littered with crumpled papers and scattered tools. Buried beneath stacks of blank VCR tapes (who the fuck used those anymore?), was a microwave that looked like it had seen better days.

Lucas tore open the Hot Pocket box, ripped off the plastic wrapping, and carefully (to the point of near surreality) put the frozen food in the sleeve. He threw it in the microwave (she caught sight of old cooked-on food mess) and twisted the dial. With a buzz, the light came on and the hot pocket started rotating slowly on the dirty tray. Drained, she stared at it and felt her attention slip.

She watched that hot pocket spin slowly through the dirty glass window, and thought about the outside world. By now, Beaumont must have heard about the shooting. He probably assumed she’d skipped town with the cash. Maybe enough to have people looking for her…?

She dismissed that faint hope as soon as she had it.

She somehow forgot Lucas, until she realized he was still standing right there, staring down at her.

“I like yer hair like that,” he said.

The microwave dinged, saving her from having to respond to that. She could smell the hot bready meat pastry now.
He pulled it open and a puff of scent-laden steam escaped into the room.

Lucas picked it up and hissed, tossing it from hand to hand and blowing on it. Gail felt herself smirk at the universally recognizable gesture, before she wiped it away. Lucas threw it to her. Gail, not expecting it, scrambled to catch it, getting a bit of the molten cheese filling on her hand in the process.

She didn’t wait for it to cool down. Ravenous, Gail shoved a whole corner of it into her mouth and began to devour it. She didn’t pay Lucas any attention as he sat back down and clicked his mouse.

“Dinner and a movie?” he asked.

Gail, gulping down the too-hot food mouthfuls at a time, ignored him.

“… locals in Morgan City were shocked by an apparent ATM robbery gone wrong. The crime left one security guard dead, and more than $250,000 in cash missing.”

Gail stopped eating mid-chew, her eyes on Lucas’s monitor where a navy-suited male anchor addressed the screen.

“Police investigations are underway as the entire crime was caught on camera.

Gail didn’t even realize she’d stood up until she was halfway to the desk.

“The following footage contains graphic depictions of violence and may be upsetting to some viewers. Viewer discretion is advised.”

The camera switched from the news studio to grainy black-and-white footage from above depicting a store front and an ATM.

“The two suspects were caught breaking into the ATM located in Inglewood Shopping Center. Will Devereux, the security guard on duty, tried to stop the robbery in progress.”

Gail gripped the corner of the desk, the hot pocket forgotten in her hand. Two masked figures came into view on the footage. It was eerie, watching herself like this. Jerel was keeping a lookout while she worked the front of the machine with her back to the camera.

“Devereux, a former police officer and a beloved member of his community, was armed with a licensed personal firearm.”

Gail was pulling the ATM cash box out just as the Jerel onscreen jumped and gestured frantically. The footage wasn’t clear enough to make out much detail, but that was the point where he took a bullet in the gut. The greyscale Jerel hit the wall next to her.

“He fired upon one of the thieves, but was tragically shot himself in the process.”

The Gail on the footage reacted like she was spring-loaded. With Jerel sliding down the wall next to the ATM, Gail whipped out her shotgun. The guard’s legs ran into view in the top right corner. And then, with a jerk of Gail’s body, she fired. The disembodied legs fell back.

Her heart was racing as she remembered what it had looked like from her own vantage. Far more exciting than it looked there. The way he’d fallen, stiff as a log, had been almost cartoonish. Except for all the blood.

“Devereux died of his injuries before paramedics could reach the scene. The suspects fled the
scene with the stolen money.”

The screen changed back to the anchor, who had an appropriately grave look on his face. In the top left corner of the screen, a window popped up, showing what looked like the security guard at a cookout, wearing an apron and holding a grill-forked-hotdog aloft.

Gail wanted to see the security footage again.

“The killers are still at large, but Morgan City police are on the lookout for two suspects.”

She recognized the man in the mug shot.

“Based on footage, police were able to identify one of the suspects as convicted drug felon Jerel Ajay Clements. Clements is believed to have sustained a stomach injury when he was fired upon.”

And then, the picture changed. All they had of her was a still image from the security camera, of the top half of her face as she half-dragged Jerel, the shotgun, and the ATM off camera. They didn’t show it, but immediately after she realized there was a second camera, she’d shot it. More out of spite than practicality.

She took a bite out of her hot pocket and chewed it slowly.

“Clements’ accomplice is unknown, but Morgan City police are on the lookout for a female of mixed descent between the ages of 25 and 35. She appears to be around 5’5” and of medium build.”

The desk chair squeaked behind her and she was suddenly reminded that she wasn’t alone.

“Baby girl,” Lucas cooed. Gail crammed the rest of the hot pocket in her mouth and looked back at him. He was sitting behind her with his knees opened, positioned with his crotch to her back, and he was looking at her ass. “Mmmm. You’re bad girl, Gail.”

Her heart still pounded from the memory of shooting that guard. The news story wasn’t over, but it had changed to interviews with concerned citizens. She didn’t care what they had to say.

“Play it again,” she told Lucas.

“You like watchin yerself, huh?” he said with a lewd look. Gail, impatient, ignored him. Instead, bent forward, she grabbed the mouse and tried to take the video back.

“… was armed with a licensed personal firearm…”

Gail watched Jerel take the bullet and hit the wall. She studied every grainy pixel as her on screen twin reacted. It had all happened so fast. Why was she breathing so hard all of a sudden?


When she felt the large hands touch her thighs and slide up to the gathered elastic waist band of the swim trunks, she tolerated them.

She played it back, watched the moment the guard took the blast. That fucking idiot shouldn’t’ve tried to intervene. He’d gotten what he’d deserved. The cookout photo did nothing to engender her sympathies. She noted that the news story had been aired at 6pm.

“They have no idea who I am,” she said, feeling fucking proud of herself. Unlike Jerel, she’d managed to keep her mask on.
The fingers hooked around the cinched elastic waistband, teased at it and tugged lightly. He was making a sort of rumbling noise in his throat.

“Them cops... they don’t know shit,” he said. His hands slid down to touch her ass through the shorts. He squeezed and rumbled again.

Gail’s breath hitched and warmth flooded between her legs. Her eyes were glued on the screen, but now her focus was shifted to the man behind her and his wandering hands.

“You ever… shot someone?” she asked, swallowing.

Lucas laughed voicelessly.

“Waaeeell… I don’t like to get my… hands dirty,” he said palming her ass cheeks as his thumbs slid down toward the center. “So ta speak.”

“So you just watch while your victims kill each other… or themselves.” The way she’d spoken it, there was no hint of accusation. Just… curiosity.

His fingertips gripped her flesh through the material of her shorts. She remained stock still, trapped between the urge to run and the urge to push herself harder against him. He was breathing real loud now, as he pushed her cheeks apart. Gail didn’t mind. She liked the way it sounded.

“There’s somethin’ real satisfyin’ about watching idiots fuck themselves over. But good, old-fashioned violence has its perks, too… tell me, Gail… how many people’ve you killed?”

His voice was soft and easy, but there was an undercurrent of trembling eagerness. Gail’s throat worked, her eyes still on that screen.

“More’n anyone’ll ever know,” she said. Lucas made a throaty noise of appreciation.

When his fingers wrapped around the front of her hips, and pulled her back against him, she didn’t fight it. But she couldn’t look at him, either.

Even as she felt the hardness in his groin, and even as the answering slickness grew in hers.

Something’s wrong with me, she thought, as his arms snaked around her front. Her eyes were now locked on the screen, as if none of this was really happening as long as she didn’t look.

One hand went between her legs and the other went beneath the shirt and grabbed a handful of unprotected tit.

He shifted his position beneath her, pushing his crotch into her ass in the process.

“Ya liked it, too. Killin’ them people,” he breathed into the side of her neck.

“I ain’t like you,” she said. She sounded petulant. Defensive. False. Lucas sniggered against her skin and pinched her nipple between his finger joints.

Gail’s entire body jolted and she choked off a moan. He wasn’t even holding her that hard, but she felt like she couldn’t move.

“Nah,” he said, breathy and harsh, as he toyed with her breast, sending errant jolts of sensation shooting through her every time he grabbed her nipple. “You’re somethin’ else entirely.”

His other hand slipped under the waist band of the shorts.
When he found the first hint of wetness (it was admittedly... excessive), he groaned and pressed his groin against her ass again, pinning her between his hand and the hard cock she could feel through his jeans.

She gasped, gripping his wrists to stop them from going further. A battle erupted between the logic centers of her brain and the entire rest of her body.

He was vulnerable. He was distracted. And mother of God she wanted to fuck him.

She pulled the hands out of her shorts and shirt, and repositioned them on her hips. Gail leaned forward, grinding her butt onto him like a dancer at a cheap strip club. He didn’t seem to find it that distasteful.

As he enjoyed the lap dance (and fuck if she didn’t like it just a little bit too), Gail’s eyes went to his desk.

A screwdriver was just sitting there over his keyboard. Gail’s heart skipped a beat.

She shot forward, grabbed it, and turned on him in one motion.

Lucas only had a chance to make a noise of surprise before she sank it to the handle between his shoulder and neck. His hood fell back, showing his high hairline and short, dark hair.

Lucas’s eyes bulged and his mouth stretched into an ‘o.’ He pushed against her with stiff arms, but she fought to stay right on him. She pulled all eight inches of screwdriver out, and drove it back in. Something broke inside of him and his voice was lost to a wet gargle. His hands flew to his neck. Blood began to run from the corner of his mouth.

He threw her off of him with enough force that she smashed into the desk. A cascade of junk food wrappers, empty VHS tape boxes, and various electronic parts fell upon her when she collapsed. She was just dazed.

Lucas snarled, oozing blood from both his mouth and the stabwound. He stood up so fast the desk chair fell back.

Gail scrabbled, threw a piece of computer hardware at him, and then another, hitting him in the face. She grabbed the doorknob.

She wrenched the door open and scurried into the hall on her hands and knees. The door banged open behind her. She lurched to her feet and stumbled for the bathroom.

The knife was in there. She was going to jam it into his eyeballs.

She knew this, saw it in her mind when everything else was lost to mindless panic.

“Gail,” Lucas rattled. How could he still talk? She reached for the doorknob.

A finger arced up her spine, sent icy shivers down to her toes.

A puff of air hit the shell of her ear.

Gail, gasping, froze.

There was something there in the dingy hallway.

Standing between her and the bathroom door was a shadow with indistinct edges.
This time, it didn’t disappear, even as she looked right at it.

Hands gripped her ankles, dragged her backwards on her belly.

Screaming, Gail forgot the shadow. She kicked against him, but Lucas was unfazed. He was breathing loudly through his bloody teeth, smiling, manic. The screw driver still jutted, absurd, from his shoulder.

“Why do you gotta hurt me so,” Lucas asked, his voice hitting that frenzied pitch. He spat out a clot of blood. “Not a great way to end our first date, Gail.”

Her hands clawed the carpet, useless.

She thrashed, but he dragged her back through the open door, into his room.

She upset a stack of old VCRs on the other side of the doorway, landed a heel in his groin.

He flipped her and tugged her underneath him. His knees fought her legs, and pinned her thighs. His feet hooked around hers. He trapped her wrists. It all happened with such speed and efficiency, she thought he must have had some training.

She fought against his immovable strength as he grinned down at her. His mouth was full of blood. A wet clot drooled onto her lips and she spat it back at him. It flecked his cheek.

It only seemed to delight him further. Lucas started laughing with helpless abandon. It only made her more agitated. She wasn’t thinking rationally anymore.

She was sure she was about to die. But he didn’t make a move. He just watched her, grinning, as her struggles gave way, gradually, to inevitable fatigue.

“Now, now… that’s a good girl. Just calm down a minute,” he cooed, still out of breath. The screw driver bobbed as he talked. “I know you had a long day ’n all, so I ain’t even gonna hold that against you. I admit, things got a lil’… hot n’ heavy there for a minute. Maybe things’re movin’ just a little too fast fer a proper lady like yerself. We gotta step it back a little… build up that trust between us. It’s the foundation of any healthy relationship, after all!”

He pushed her hands together over her head and held them one-handed. The other hand grabbed the handle of the screwdriver. He jerked it out, and a spurt of blood followed behind it, sprayed her face, and then stopped. He threw the bloody screwdriver to the carpet and rubbed the entry wound.

“There, see, ain’t nothin. Already closin’ up.”

“I’ll try harder next time,” she said, defiant to the point of stupidity. She didn’t think she had another escape attempt left in her, but her pride wouldn’t let her admit it.

“I don’t hafta keep ya here, you know… I can always jus’ let ya stay in the bathroom ‘til you cool off,” he said, leaning down until she could smell the blood on his breath. His eyes were feverish. “I’d tie you up in the tub, fill it to yer chin with cold water… turn off the light…”

The mental image of such a torment was so vivid, Gail was overcome with desperation.

She shook her head, her pride forgotten. The conflict she’d felt earlier, whether it would be better to stay with him, or by herself, was gone. She’d seen something in the hallway. She didn’t know what it was, but it had been there.
“Smart lady,” he said.

-----

Gail fought the urgent fear she felt as he tied her hands together behind her back with rope that he seemed to pull out of nowhere, but she didn’t resist. He looped rope around her ankles, attached her wrists to a loop around her waist, and then, in an absurd imitation of a bridal carry, he lifted her up (so goddamn easily) and dumped her face down onto the couch.

Maybe she could’ve wiggled her way off the couch. She could’ve done any number of things. But the thought of being dumped into the bathtub and left alone in the dark, forced to stay awake for fear of drowning… it was exhausting. As was the constant dread, the endless struggle. Any energy imparted by adrenaline was long gone.

Lucas, apparently satisfied that she didn’t represent any real threat, locked his computer, and left the room.

She heard the bathroom door open and close down the hall.

She was alone in his room. She wasn’t completely immobilized, but she made no move to escape or get free.

Instead, she just lay there and let her cheek sink into the plaid upholstery. It smelled like dust and old beer.

She might have cried a little bit. She didn’t cry often, but when she did, it was out of frustration and anger, like now.

Everything was so jumbled in her head right now… and it was no wonder. She hadn’t slept for nearly two days by this point.

Even tied up like she was, the couch felt pretty comfortable, considering the alternative.

In the quiet, face down on the sofa cushion, Gail couldn’t help it when she finally succumbed to exhaustion.

Chapter End Notes

Oh dear.
Gail woke to muffled noises. It beat steady, with intermittent breaks. It took her a moment to understand what it was. Hammering.

She’d heard it in her sleep, and somehow it had been incorporated into her dream. In it, she’d been in her car, barreling through swamp so fast she couldn’t make out the individual trees. Half of Jerel sat in the passenger seat, a human body cross section, silent and, somehow, alive. She could see inside of him, as his glistening heart pumped and his one lung expanded and contracted.

In the dream, Gail wasn’t concerned about Jerel, she was concerned about the banging over her head. It was coming from the roof. Something was up there, trying to get in.

She woke before it could, her heart pounding.

She didn’t know where the dream had been headed, or what, if anything, it meant, but she started to forget the details anyway. What the fuck was that hammering?

She had no idea how long she’d been out, completely unaware of her surroundings and vulnerable. From what she could tell she was still fully-clothed, and more or less in the same position she’d been in when she’d been dropped on the couch. Her neck was stiff and her shoulders ached. The bare skin on her wrists and ankles was starting to burn from rope friction.

She was thirsty, hungry, and she really had to pee. All things that would be difficult to address with her ankles bound, and her wrists tied at her back. She adjusted her position to alleviate the ache in her shoulder, but the rope around her middle pulled tight.

She groaned, frustrated.

And then the door cracked open. The silhouette of a tall figure leaned in to grab something from the desk without even looking in her direction.

“Lucas,” she croaked. The figure stopped.

“Ah, gooood, good. I was wondering when you’d wake up. I need yer… help with somethin’.”

He crossed over and, blocking her view of the door, flicked on the lamp behind the arm of the couch. The warm, soft light bathed him from beneath. His hood was down, and Gail got a glimpse of a long, elegant neck. She didn’t see any sign of the screw driver’s entry wound.

“How long was I out?”

“How long was I out?”

“Long time. Thought you was dead this one time … so ah… if ya happened to wake up an’ hear me breathin’ over you all funny, I was just… checkin’ on you.”

Without preamble, he grabbed her upper arm and tugged on it, clearly trying to get her to sit up. She caught sight of his hands. They were smudged with black, and his short nails were caked with dirt. She was stiff all over, though and moved slow.

“I have to pee,” she said, feeling anxious. Both about her bladder and the ‘help’ he said he needed.
“Hold on, this won’t take but a minute,” he said. He yanked her to her feet without care, and started to shuffle-drag her backwards out of the room by her armpits. Gail struggled to keep her feet underneath her. “I been real busy, Gail. I almost woke you up, I was so excited, but you looked sweet droolin’ onto my couch.”

“Were you watching me sleep?” she demanded as soon as his words registered.

“I been workin’ on this for days,” he said, ignoring her question. “With a brief… interruption. But I think it’s ready.”

They crossed the hall and Gail glanced to the bathroom door at the end with both longing and automatic dread, but there was no shadow this time.

“Lucas!” she snapped, urgency rising in her chest. “I. Need. To. Pee. Let me, or I’ll go right here in the middle of your fucking floor. I think… hope… neither of us wants that.”

He groaned, impatient.


Gail didn’t have a response for him, but all the same he was changing the direction, now dragging her back toward the bathroom. Her bare feet caught on tiny, sharp bits of detritus lodged in the worn carpet. She saw the formerly padlocked door sitting open. Bright light flooded through the crack and into the dim hall.

Without letting go of her, he kicked open the bathroom door and stood her, swaying, on the floor. There was a brief, terrifying moment with her back facing the darkness beyond the doorway, but then he turned the light on.

He squatted down, whipped a pocket knife out of his pocket, and started to saw through the rope binding her ankles together.

She watched the top of his head as he did so, feeling an odd sort of fascination with the smooth, bristly dome of his skull. Two things occurred to her at once in looking at it. One, she wondered how much damage she’d have to do to him before he stopped getting back up again (she imagined bludgeoning might work). Two, she struggled with the sudden desire to run her fingers over it and feel the hairs brush her palm. Maybe in the act of shoving him between her legs. Her heart skipped ahead when it occurred to her, as if he might somehow hear her thoughts, and she quashed it down, deep down.

Then her ankles were free. She adjusted her balance with some relief and rubbed the raw skin on the outside of her ankle against her calf to soothe the sting. She looked at him expectantly as he stood, folding the pocket knife.

“What? Get on with it,” he said, waving the closed knife toward the toilet.

“What about my arms…?”

His shiny eyes rolled up to hers and his brows popped up with a look of intense irony. The bags in his eye sockets looked darker today. In fact, he looked altogether worse. He had a waxy, translucent cast to his skin, like he hadn’t slept or seen the sun in a week or three.

“Come on, now. I respect yer intelligence too much to give ya that much freedom. Some part o’ you’s gonna be tied until I ain’t worried about you. Really, it’s a compliment, if you think about
“How’m I supposed to wipe?” she hissed, all the angrier for having to say it out loud. “I can’t just ‘shake it off’.”

Lucas grinned.

“I just know you’ll figure somethin’ out.” He clapped her on her arm, jolting her. “Yer good at this kinda thing.”

She bit back a remark. She couldn’t deny that there was a small part of her that was always ready to run, something he’d clearly caught onto by now. To be fair, she’d already looked around for the switchblade, but he must have taken it out (rest of her mess was still there). But her common sense, and immediate needs, took precedent.

Lucas stepped back to the door and leaned against the frame, facing down the hall. Unconcerned with her by all appearances, he started picking his nails with the pocket knife. Her jailor. He wasn’t going to leave her alone.

Gail inspected what she had to work with. He had a toilet paper holder in the wall. An empty cardboard tube was actually on it, and a half roll of toilet paper set on top. It was so fucking typical of a guy living alone that she almost laughed, but at least he had some. She was having trouble imagining Lucas walking down the aisle of a grocery store with a cart full of toilet paper.

With her hands tied and fixed in place at the base of her spine, she was able to flick down the toilet seat with a bang. She grabbed the roll behind her sat down, watching the man in the doorway carefully for any sign of… excessive interest. He looked, by all accounts, thoroughly bored. Thank god for that.

So, she went. Grabbing a massive wad of paper in her hands, she dropped her shoulders and bent her spine back as far as it would go until she could reach underneath from behind.

Honestly, She’d expected it to be more difficult and potentially messy. She was kind of proud of herself.

She stood up, shut the lid with a spiteful thud, and then flushed the jiggly metal lever.

Last, still watching Lucas to make sure he wasn’t looking, she wiggled and maneuvered, spreading her legs so the elastic waistband crept up her thighs to the curve of her ass. She knew she probably looked fucking ridiculous and was glad she didn’t have an audience. Arching back so she could reach with her hands, she tugged them back into place.

When she went back to him, with some reluctance, she was a little out of breath. The medicine cabinet over the broken sink caught her eye when light reflected off one of the few remaining shards of mirror left in the frame.

She made a mental note of that, for later. Something like that would do well to saw through rope. Or flesh.

Lucas made some asshole comment about her being ‘housetrained after all,’ but she was too busy thinking about murder to bother responding. He might have been disappointed in the lack of reaction, but she didn’t care. If nothing else, the sleep he’d allowed her had given her more energy. More energy to put up with whatever shit he had planned.

As he ushered her toward the open padlocked door, her mind went in every direction. He’d agreed
to no more games… hadn’t he? But now that Gail thought of it, she couldn’t remember if he’d actually said that.

_Fuckin’ slippery-ass snake,_ she thought, pissed at herself for letting that happen. It wasn’t the first time he’d managed to sneak around explicitly promising something. She had to be better.

“Lucas, no more games, right?” she asked. His only answer was a close-mouthed giggle. She swallowed the lump rising in her throat. She felt a bit shaky, and a bit queasy.

Inside the door, an island of bright light cut into the surrounding darkness. It shone on a table made of rusted solid steel at its center. A pair of strange mechanical-looking devices sat on top. Cords and wires snaked from the side of them and disappeared underneath.

She tried to resist him, but he only steered her right toward it. Around the edges of the light’s radius, odd pieces of equipment and mechanical junk glinted. The room smelled like burnt rubber and old sweat.

She was thrust rudely into a heavy metal chair, seated right before the devices. Her eyes were glued to them, puzzling over their purpose and dreading it. They were mirror images of each other, and clearly meant to fit hands. Five short channels corresponded to each finger and thumb. She started shaking her head, barely aware that she was doing it.

“What the fuck is this? I ain’t puttin’ my hand in that, if that’s what you think, ya crazy asshole.”

He leaned in and growled into her ear.

“Yeah, ya are.”

“Remember that shit you said about trust?” she asked, shivering from a combination of his breath so close to her face, and trepidation.

“Yeah,” he said, licking his lips audibly. Hands cupped her shoulders, slid down her arms, and then with the sound of the pocket knife sliding open, he started tugging on the ropes binding her wrists together. “You’re gonna have to trust me.”

Gail uttered a sharp, humorless laugh.

“You kidding me?! Why the _fuck_ would I ever trust you?” her voice was getting a little shrill, but she couldn’t stop it. “That shit goes both ways, Lucas.”

Metal sawed through rope, and then, her wrists were free. But his hands went back to her upper arms and squeezed. It felt like a threat.

“Trust that if you fucking run, I’ll catch you and break every one o’ your limbs so you can’t do nothin’ but lay there.” The way he said it, smooth as honey and a little shaky set her on a razor’s edge. “The thing is, Gail, that ‘gift’ I gave you? It can also be a curse, if you catch my drift.”

She brought her hands forward to her lap and rubbed the stinging skin, still staring at the devices. They were for torture, she had no doubt. There was nothing else they could possibly be.

“Lucas—” she started, calculating how fast she could shoved him over and run.

“Shhh,” he whispered, touching the back of her neck.

Gail didn’t fight him. Maybe on some insane level, she believed that he wasn’t going to hurt her,
even though she had no real reason to give him that much credit.

She wish she’d never sucked his dick. She would’ve preferred being one-footed for the rest of her life than the horrors he was implying.

As he took her cold, shaking hands and put them, one-by-one, into the devices, fingers splayed, the only image in Gail’s mind was of herself laying broken, legs and arms bent in too many places, bones knitted permanently together that way. A torso with useless limbs, unable to fight or flee.

She wasn’t hungry anymore.

He fixed metal straps in place over her wrists, from the web of her thumb to the outer edge of her hand, and over each individual finger. The devices, she could feel, were attached firmly to the top of the table, and it would have taken far more strength than what she had to break free.

Both of her hands were locked into place, palms down, in front of her. She was, effectively, shackled to the table. Her fingertips felt as bloodless as his, and she wished she could clench her fist to warm them.

She was glad she’d emptied her bladder ahead of time.

Lucas, who’d pulled his hood up at some point, dipped beneath the table, humming.

“What does it do?” She hated herself for how weak she sounded, but at the moment, her ability to control her voice was gone.

The cords jerked and wiggled. He was doing something with them. With a grunt, and a pop, she heard an electrical buzz.

The metal finger slots each jumped a mere millimeter upward (jointed at her knuckles, clearly hinged to bend the wrong way) and Gail uttered a short, involuntary scream.

It hadn’t hurt, but it became suddenly, painfully clear to her what its function was.

“Lucas—” she wailed. “Lucas come on, man. Is this necessary?”

“Hold on,” he grunted, unconcerned. She felt his hands circle one of her calves, and her entire body jerked reactively. Before she could do anything, coarse rope bit into the bend of her knee, pulled taut, and fastened her leg over the sharp corner of the seat. Another went around her ankle, binding it to the blocky, hard leg of the metal chair. It was either so heavy that her motions didn’t move it, or it was bolted to the floor.

When he went for the other knee, she kicked it out, made contact with a shoulder. She threw her entire body into it, not caring that her hands were fixed to the table. With a growl, his fingertips sank into bare muscle, gripping her fast.

She wasn’t capable of speaking, and settled instead for making tremulous, panicked noises as he tied her other leg to the leg of the chair. Her middle, the only part she could move freely, slid forward on the seat, desperate to wiggle free, until she realized that it only forced her thighs open wider.

“Mmmm,” Lucas rumbled beneath the table, doubtless noticing this as well. She was hyperventilating as one of his hands snaked over her knee and up to her thighs. His fingertips slipped under the hem of the trunks she was wearing, and she was helpless to stop him.
That was as far as he went, though.

“Alright, Gail, listen up,” he said, speaking from somewhere near her knees. “This is just a prototype, so keep that in mind when ya give feedback.”

Red flashed in her skull.

“You hillbilly motherfucker, I’m gonna smash your fuckin’ face in the minute I get out of this, I swear to fucking god, I will END YOU,” Gail screamed. She started thrashing anew, though it did little outside of making the ropes and the hard angles of the chair dig into her legs.

Lucas let out a high-pitched, keening giggle, and then his head popped out from under the left side of the table. His eyes were wide, blinking like some creature emerging from its burrow into bright daylight. Gail turned to him and snarled, tugging against the bindings on her hands and the chair, wishing more than anything she could reach him.

He brought an arm up and rested it on the edge of the tabletop, watching her with a dreamy smirk like she was some kind of wondrous thing.

“Now hold on, let me explain,” he said, raising a hand. Gail’s enraged barrage didn’t let up.

“-gonna gouge out your fucking eyes and shove ‘em down yer throat till you see yer ass-“

Her face started to feel hot and tight, and bright spots prickled at the edges of her vision.

“Come on now, don’t be like that…”

“-choke you with your own shit-stained sphincter-“

“Gail, don’t make me gag you,” he said, leaning forward with a dangerous glint in his over-large eyes. He looked very much like he would have enjoyed doing it, and that was what shut her up.

Gail seethed until spittle collected on her lips. She felt hot and prickly. But the cussing died in her throat. Denied an outlet for her anger, her fear and resignation assumed dominance.

“You ready to listen?” he said, sounding as though he were chiding an unruly child.

Gail didn’t answer, and only leaned her head on the chair back, staring at the ceiling, panting. Her fingers, and everything else fastened and immobile, hurt from her efforts.

“I haven’t even told you what it does.”

“Breaks fingers,” she grunted, hating everything. He clapped once.

“Yes ma’am! You can think of ‘em like points in a game… or penalties. Right now it ain’t hooked up to anythin’ but a trigger, but when it’s ready, I’ll use it to keep score. In a card game or somethin’… haven’t got that far yet.”

Only some of what he said registered. Her head lolled toward him.

“Trigger?”

His lips were pressed into a smirk as he nodded, as if he were barely containing his glee. He was practically spilling over with it.

“The rules o’ this game’ll be a little… diff’rent. Seein’ as how I don’t got it set up that way yet.”
Gail thought of that shard in the mirror. She thought of sunshine and daylight, and getting a drive-through burger. She thought of the screwdriver in his room, and driving it into his ear cavity. She thought of wind in her hair and sweet ice tea under a porch fan.

“I put together a little… surprise for ya.”

He stood up and went around the circle of light to the other side of the table and bent over something.

With a faint electrical pop, a TV she hadn’t seen before came on, showing blue. A disc in his hand flashed in the light, and then she heard a disc tray slide closed.

“I prefer video tapes, there’s jus’ somethin’… pure about that medium. But this’ll have to do.”

He stepped aside and turned to look at her over his shoulder.

“I had to throw this together real quick, so I hope you like it.”

“Lucas, what’s the fucking point of this?”

“Let’s jus’ call it… ‘couples bonding,’” he said with a wide, nasty grin and bright, delirious eyes. “Wish it could be under diff’rent circumstances, Gail, but ya can’t really blame me fer playin’ it safe after that little ah… hiccup.”

“I think you mean ‘screwdriver,’” she quipped, too anxious to be any more clever.

He shrugged. Though he was still smiling, it was unnerving that he didn’t laugh like he usually did. It meant he was focused, and that terrified her.

“Point is… it was plain as day you were all… hot n’ bothered, watchin’ yerself on that screen. Now, I know I’m no expert in the ways o’ women, but ya can’t fake that. You can use it to yer own advantage, but ya can’t fake it.”

He leaned forward until the light above him cut jagged lines into his face like a sinister Rorschach image. And then more until the hood blocked out the light. Even though the table separated them, Gail felt herself shrink back reflexively. His whole face was drenched in shadow and the indirect light that bounced up off the table’s surface.

“Fine, you got me,” she blurted under the intensity of his scrutiny, not sure what he wanted from her, but willing to admit it. She cleared her throat and took a deep breath. Then she gave him a smile. She hoped it was convincing. “Truth is, that was more ‘cuz of you than anythin’. You got some nice hands, Lucas. You’re real good with them. A natural.”

It was true enough, from the brief interaction she’d had with them, and he must have sensed that. His grin widened, and the hands on the table tightened into a tense fist for a second. He made a throaty noise like he’d just smelled something delicious cooking in the oven.

“That’s real nice o’ you to say… but that ain’t exactly what I’m getting’ at. Well… you’ll see.” He moved back until he was nearly out of the light entirely. “It’s time for another movie.”

Gail had a feeling she knew what the movie was. And with the press of a button, her suspicions were confirmed.

She was looking at herself from a high angle in a small room. She seated next to a metal door. The cell.
This footage, however, was in color, and the angle was wide enough that she could see the top of Jerel’s head. The playback speed was at least doubled.

“I made some edits… couldn’t wait to get to the good stuff,” he said, walking around behind her. After everything else, she was less concerned with him than with the finger breaker devices.

“Why’d you have to put my hands in these things just to show me this?” she asked. She felt strangely calm, as if her fear and anxiety had crossed a line into disbelief. Almost like this wasn’t happening to her, like it was happening to some other dumb bitch who picked the wrong house to hide in.

“Ah, well… I wanna make sure we’re bein’ honest with one another. I want the truth from you, Gail, ‘cuz after the last time… when you used that sweet ass o’ yours against me, I feel like we need a reset.”

Lucas’s hands slid over the back of her frayed curls, down to her neck, and then to her shoulders, so gently and somehow so much more menacing for it. On the screen, she could see that the point when Jerel turned was approaching. She didn’t realize until she saw the time signature in the corner that she’d been in there for more than an hour before that happened. Remembered fear started to rise in the back of her throat.

“If I ask ya somethin’, and you try to trick me, or if I think you ain’t bein’ totally honest, I’m gonna have to… correct you. We gotta have boundaries, Gail.”

“How the fuck are you going to know when I’m tellin’ the truth?!?” she demanded, horrified at the implication, trying not to look at the screen. It was hard, though, it just kept catching her eye. In the footage, she was pressing herself into the corner as far as she could, and the back of Jerel’s head was rising on the right side of the screen as he stood. “You’re just gonna break my goddamn finger if you don’t like what I say?!”

Lucas’s hands disappeared from her shoulders.

“I’ll know,” he said, ominous and low.

She caught a flash of him ducking under the table again out of the corner of her eye. Her heart hammered in her throat. Gail on the screen was scrabbling with the lockpick. Jerel attacked and Gail swallowed the spit gathering under her tongue.

“I gotta say, when I was rewatchin’ this, I had to appreciate the way you just fuckin’ went for it,” Lucas said somewhere beneath her. She thought she felt his breath on her inner thigh, but she couldn’t be sure. “No hesitatin’, no panic like a brainless animal… you just fuckin’… drove it home.”

Gail onscreen struggled against the black ropy claw, and then she started stabbing Jerel. He blocked out some of the image with his body, but Gail remembered just fine. She wondered how many times Lucas had watched this.

“Why are you showing me this?” she asked, feeling short of breath. Her feet felt cold, and she realized she was pushing against the rope.

“How hard was it, ta kill ‘im?” he asked, ignoring her question. And then, his hand touched her knee. Gail bucked in her seat and made a startled noise while the images on screen took an increasingly violent turn. “Did you feel any kinda… remorse, or guilt?”

Gail forgot to blink. Onscreen Jerel was crashing into a side wall as onscreen Gail continued her
onslaught. In full color, she could see just how much blood there’d been. But she didn’t feel horror at the sight, as she knew she should have. She felt… exhilarated.

Below, something tugged on her trunks. After the sound of a pocket knife opening, came the sound of tearing fabric. A thin sliver of cool metal touched her skin as she imagined he scissored the blade up the side of the shorts. He was cutting them off of her.

“Lucas, what the fuck-“ she stuttered. She felt like she couldn’t get a breath.

“Nuh uh,” he cut in. “Answer my question.”

Gail just remembered the contraptions her hands were strapped to. She could see what looked like a very strong spring-loaded mechanism underneath and tried to flex her fingers. They were already strained open, and as flat, as they could go.

“I don’t know,” she spat out. “I don’t know what you want from me.”

“I think you know a lot more than you give yerself credit for,” he said. His voice was on the verge of shaking with excitement. “I’ll call that yer first warning. You ain’t getting’ any more.”

She looked down to see his white hands peeking out from underneath the table. He held the waistband with one, and sawed through the elastic with the knife. That small glimpse was all she got. To her horror, he tugged on the shorts, pulling them off that leg. She tried to fight against the disrobing, to no avail. Soon, the shorts were tugged down the other leg as far as they could go and she was all but naked from the waist down.

On the screen, Gail’s image, done with Jerel, was scrambling with the lock. She recalled her triumph and elation, and how close it had come to ending her. She imagined Lucas watching this exact thing, seeing her almost try to flee, and then change her mind. She hoped it had pissed him off.

“I don’t know, I was just defendin’ myself,” she answered, swallowing the saliva in her mouth. She heard faint sounds of open-mouthed breathing under the table.

“That ain’t the face of a woman who was jus’ defendin’ herself,” he said with perfect timing. On screen, the striptease had begun. Heat flashed on her neck and rose into her face. “You enjoyed it. You fuckin’ liked it. Tell me the truth.”

Gail’s mind raced, thought back to that moment desperately, despite the very present threat. She tried to remember how she’d felt.

Like she was on top of the world. It was the same way she’d felt after shooting the guard. After killing the fat asshole in the porta-john.

And after all the others.

“I felt… like I wasn’t human,” she said, struggling with her words. The ruined remains of the shorts were tugged, and cut away, and then it was just her bare ass and the back of her thighs on the seat of the steel chair, exposed under the table. The panic began to rise again, threatened to overtake her logic, but she pushed it down. “Like I was… better than them.”

She only realized after she’d spoken that she wasn’t really only talking about Jerel anymore. She didn’t know why she felt the flash of heat in her chest. It didn’t feel like shame. It felt more like… relief.
His hands lighted on her knees, and squeezed. She jumped, thinking of the knife he had down there, and then her mind switched to finger traps. With so much going on, she was having trouble focusing on any one thing. It was difficult to think. She needed to think of a way out of this, but she was coming up blank, and then she knew that all that was deliberate. Lucas wanted something, and he was breaking down her defenses to get it.

“Mmmm… yeah. Like what?” he said. She could hear him breathing louder now. His nails dug into her skin a little.

“Like… like a…” she searched for the words. Onscreen, she was backing away from the door, completely naked and streaked with red. She looked like a fucking monster, kicking away Jerel’s disgusting remains like they were nothing. “Like a… god.”

The words sounded like they had come from someone else. She wasn’t delusional. She wasn’t crazy. But something was happening to her. Her torso sank down in the seat. Her fingers twitched, only mildly uncomfortable. A sort of warmth was creeping up her legs.

Cool hands slid up her thighs and cut a sharp contrast. Painful, pointed thumbs dug into her inner thighs and she jerked, squirmed in her seat. The warmth spread and joined the heat in her face, neck, and chest. At that moment, the cell door on the recording pulled open. Lucas barged in. Even from above, on a tiny screen, he was terrifying.

“Tell me, Gail… do you usually like a good fuck after killing someone?”

Involuntarily, the muscles in her pussy tensed and her thighs tried to close to protect it.

Onscreen Lucas had Gail trapped against the wall. She could see his shoulder moving, and though none of it was in view, she knew that he was working his fingers inside of her.

“Sometimes,” she admitted, breathless. She couldn’t think. She wiggled her trapped fingers, strained against the ropes.

She adjusted her position on the seat and air caught the dewy moisture on her pussy lips. She swallowed her spit, and her head rolled against the back of the chair. Thinking about it all was turning her on.

It was humiliating and baffling, and she really didn’t want to know what that said about her, with the threat of horrific pain so imminent, and the threat of god-damn Lucas.

Below her, the light caught Lucas’s hand as it slid up the bend of her hip, fingers clawed on her skin, trailing across her abdomen beneath her navel. Gail shuddered against it, and her body slid down a little more, spreading her thighs wider, bringing her ass closer to the edge of the seat.

“Does murder push your buttons, Gail?” he tittered. “Is that what does it for ya?”

She felt both of his hands slip up the inside of her thighs.

Gentle, maddening touches lighted on her pussy lips. Gail swallowed a groan and her eyes rolled back. She could feel the blood in her body converging down there, and it was hot, and throbbed with her pulse.

Onscreen, Lucas was fucking her against the wall. From behind, she had a clear angle, could see the way his body moved, bucking almost violently into her. She saw the moment he threw his head back and everything deep inside of her clenched around nothing.
She felt his thumbs spread her pussy open beneath the table.


The cool air hit it for only a second before his hot breath took its place. Scooted forward like she was, she couldn’t see, but she could feel it when his tongue touched her. Her entire body jerked as if electrified.

Muffled by the table, and her thighs, Lucas uttered a low, throaty groan as he pressed the entirety of his mouth against her. The vibrations from his voice traveled straight to her core. Her lower spine flexed and tensed, trying despite her bindings to get closer to him.

“Oh god…” she whimpered, losing her already feeble grip on her composure. His tongue lapped at her like a thirsty dog, artless, relentless, and driven by selfish desire. He was doing this for him, it was clear, but fuck it felt good.

Onscreen, Lucas had already flipped her around. Gail saw her own face, pinched in mindless enjoyment as he railed her with his dick. It was disgusting, vile, deplorable. She was incensed, regarding it bleary-eyed like she couldn’t tear her eyes away.

She tugged on her captive hands, but this time it wasn’t out of fear of the finger trap. She wanted to grab the back of his head and grind into him, feel his short, bristly hairs in her palm and his skull beneath his scalp. Instead, she was forced to remain where she was seated, straining against the ropes on her lower legs past the point of pain, as Lucas did what he wanted.

He made his tongue into a wet point and assaulted her clit, then like a child with focus problems, dragged it down to her hole. He made it fat, and jack-hammered it into her. His upper lip grazed her throbbing nub, bristle from his mustache scratched. She cried out, writhing in her seat, wanting more and less at the same time until her brain casing felt like it was starting to crack.

He was breathing vocally now. On screen, she was getting fucked into Jerel’s human half, open-side up. She saw his organs glisten as it jiggled with each thrust and thought of her dream, forgotten until now.

She barely registered the sound of his zipper opening, but then the sound of skin slapping skin told her, quite clearly, that Lucas was masturbating while his mouth sucked and pulled on the soft, slick folds. How could someone capable of such brutality be so fucking careful?

The heat and pressure condensed tighter and tighter in her lower back. Obscene slurping noises came from below, intermingled with Lucas’s bestial grunts.

She gave in to his hungry, hot mouth, and started pushing her hips into it.

One hand lighted on her thigh, gripping it so tight it hurt, pinching into the soft flesh on the inner side.

She didn’t remember the fucking lasting so long in the cell. Lucas must’ve edited the footage so that it looped, the cheeky fuck. It was effective.

Something instinctual kicked in, and as she watched the two bodies grinding together into the bloody mess, her entire body wanted to be pressed against his.

“Lucas, fuck. Just fuck me,” she grated, watching the TV. She wanted what they were having.

“Nuh uh,” he breathed into her pussy. His tongue was whipping left and right against that engorged
bundle of nerves, beating a steady and persistent rhythm, until she couldn’t talk.

She felt the threat of an orgasm looming. She couldn’t feel her feet anymore, but she didn’t care. All that mattered was the wet, liquid fire spreading from her groin to the rest of her, and that his mouth didn’t stop.

Every muscle tensed at once.

When Gail came, she screamed, plaintive and almost pleading. A white hot shockwave coursed through her, leaving her muscles and limbs like liquid jelly in its wake.

Lucas had stopped licking, and was now just moaning against her cunt, the slapping skin sounds rapid and frenzied.

Panting, dazed, and still shuddering with aftershocks, she listened to him utter a helpless growl, and the hand on her thigh clawed into the skin.

“Lucas,” she gasped, her brain fogged and delirious and wracked with an animal need. Her mouth watered. “Give it to me.”

“What?” he panted under the table, clearly not firing on all cylinders himself.

“Give it to me,” she grated, chewing on her lip as her heart beat a percussive tattoo inside of her ribcage. “Don’t waste it, let me have it.”

There was the sound of scrambling and banging, and then Lucas popped out from under the table. His face was glistening wet with her pussy juice. His hand, fingers tense, was strung with his jizz.

Gail ground her drenched pussy against the hard metal chair, feeling like she could come again if she could only get her hands free. She licked her lips, her eyes on his hand.

He didn’t waste any time. With a look akin to manic wonder, he grabbed her jaw, and he dangled his hand over her open, upturned mouth so the viscous white liquid started to drip down.

She didn’t give a fuck about dignity anymore. She strained her neck up, and she took all four of his fingers into her mouth.

She sucked the salty, bitter come off his hand like a starving animal and gulped it down like the sweet elixir it was. Wishing it was his cock, she took his hand in as far as she could, ran her tongue between his fingers.

When he drew his hand out, she chased it wantonly. Some of the jizz on his palm smeared onto her chin, and she swiped her tongue under her bottom lip, swallowed it as easy as breathing.

Lucas’s breathing was ragged as he watched her tongue. Without warning, he grabbed the back of the chair and his mouth crushed against hers, held it captive.

His greedy tongue probed, as if he were still eating her out. She tasted herself in his mouth, was suddenly overcome with the urge to devour him. It seemed to be mutual. His teeth scraped her lips, her teeth, and his nose smashed into her cheek.

He broke only for breath, licking and chewing his lips as if he still couldn’t get enough. Behind him on the screen, Gail was sawing through Jerel’s neck.

Lucas’s heated look split into a manic grin, shiny with pussy juice and spit, and probably a bit of come at this point.
“Wasn’t sure that’d work,” he said between breaths. “I think I might love you.”

“You fucking idiot,” she sighed without heat, ignoring him. “You didn’t have to do all that shit just to get some pussy.”

“Nah… this wasn’t just about that…” his hand, quaking, dragged down the front of her throat. “Truth is, I think you been wasted yer whole life with that petty crime shit. Robbin’ ATMs or whatever bullshit you been doin’.”

“I do what I have to,” she said, fixing him with a pointed stare. “I get shit done. An’ I ain’t a fucking petty criminal. I only needed that money to pay off my debts, get outta this fucking shithole of a state.”

“All that, playin’ by their rules… it’s beneath ya, Gail.”

Gail jerked her head away from his hand, tried to alleviate the soreness in her calves. Now that the heat was waning, the moisture in her groin and the hard seat of the chair digging into her ass was starting to feel uncomfortable.

“And playing your twisted idea of a game isn’t? Where the fuck do you get off, threatening to break my fingers?”

Lucas sniggered. Gale’s irritation came back and she glared, not that it seemed to have any effect on him.

“I feel like we made some real strides, here. I wasn’t actually gonna do that. I mean… unless ya didn’t calm down.” He looked up, pondering. “Though I did almost bump the trigger when I took my dick out…”

Gail took a deep breath, trying not to think too hard about what he’d just said.

“If you want my feedback,” she started. Lucas, thoroughly interested now, leaned forward on the table and rested on his elbows. Gail looked at her own fingers. She couldn’t believe she was going to say this. “Breakin’ fingers is too painful. An’ the pain don’t let up, neither, with a broken bone. Cutting them off’d be more effective. And… psychologically speaking… more upsettin’.”

Lucas’s eyes lit up.

“That’s whut I’m talkin’ about,” he growled, banging his fist on the table top. “That’s good shit.”

“Can you let me go now?” she asked.

“I donno… I like havin’ you all accessible like this.”

She didn’t let herself show the flash of anger at hearing his teasing words. She waited. And Lucas, again disappointed in being denied a reaction sighed and crouched down beside her.

“Learn ta laugh a little… could do you sum good,” he grumbled.

She felt the ropes loosen, and she let loose a sigh of relief.

Despite the fact that she got pleasure from imagining all the ways she’d like to try killing him, Lucas was… a fucking great lay. And he had something about him, with his tweaker eyes, and his complete lack of moral decency. It was almost magnetic. Even after what he just did, she wanted to ride him like a rodeo bull. For now, she was subject to his whims. Who could fault her for finding
some kind of enjoyment in an otherwise helpless situation?

He flipped a mechanism underneath the table and the tension holding the finger and hand straps in place released.

She snatched her hands out and rubbed the digits tenderly. No harm done, except maybe to her eternal soul. She’d never been a good Christian girl anyway. Lucas went over to the TV, where Lucas had her trapped against the wall. He turned it off.

She was thinking about all the times she’d justified the rush, the surge of almost euphoric pleasure after wasting a target. She wasn’t a hit man, technically, but she didn’t have any problem doing it. Thugs like Beaumont didn’t question the why, they only wanted the ‘yessir.’ Playing by their rules was the only way to survive in the outside world. Lucas didn’t seem to realize that, though.

She looked up at him, who was messing with something outside the circle of light.

“You got your own little kingdom here, don’tcha?” she asked. He shrugged without looking at her.

“I ain’t the boss, though,” he said with the barest hint of bitterness. “Gotta do what Eveline wants. Gotta bring ‘er a steady supply of outsiders. Gotta keep her happy, else… game over. Fer me an’ my family.”

Gail was a little taken aback. She detected almost… tenderness when he mentioned his family. But thinking of his ‘mamma,’ she suspected he got something out of it too. A lot.

“She got ‘em stuck here?” she asked, not totally understanding, but trying her best to unravel this fucked-up home situation.

“Yeah… she got her fingers in ‘em real deep. Don’t even think they’d be able to step off the property, they been under it for so long. So… we gotta stay together, an’ we gotta do what she wants… I have my fun, though, ain’t gonna lie,” he said with a sly grin over his shoulder.

He came back to the table and dumped a handful of metal bits and pieces on top, including some razor blades.

It was clear that he’d taken her advice to heart. She wasn’t sure how she felt about that, being the cause of some poor shmuck’s pain. It didn’t exactly feel like guilt, though. Absently, she bent down and rubbed the place where the rope had bitten into her calf. Just thinking of it made her stomach feel like it was flopping inside of her. The way he’d made her sit there while he did what he wanted. She shook out a sudden shiver.

“You know…” Gail started, her voice breaking. She cleared her throat. “If you had to tie me up again… maybe jus’ do it a little looser. Or with something softer. Like nylon. Or jute.”

Lucas looked like he was at a bit of a loss for the first time. Gail’s face burned, which was absurd seeing as how she was still naked from the waist down and had a belly full of his come. She rubbed the back of her neck.

Lucas came in fast, sliding around the edge of the table, before seizing her head in his hands. He stood there for a long minute, with her craning to look up at his face under the hood.

“Ah think I oughtta… introduce ya to the family. Make it… official.”

It wasn’t what she expected to hear. But somehow, his little… ‘couples bonding’ game had been somewhat effective. She trusted him.
She still kind of wanted to cut his head off, but that could wait.

Chapter End Notes

I should've clarified, not that anyone probably cares but me, but for the sake of my need for accuracy, I made up this part of the house. I imagine it's at the top of the stairs next to the master bedroom, if you were to look at the map.

Feel free to tip the writer! I accept payment in a comment or kudos if you like what you're reading <3 thanks for reading
Family

Chapter Summary

Gail gets a firsthand look at just how fucked-up the Baker family's reality has become.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As he knelt of the floor before the couch to tie her wrists with a soft nylon rope, Lucas hummed something that was either tuneless or rendered so by his tonedeafness.

Gail just sat there like an idiot, wearing his boxer shorts, and she let him do it.

There was no point in fighting after what had happened. For now, she was beaten (but why did it feel like a collusion?). The worst part was that she’d enjoyed it. She was still thinking about it, even as his fast fingers secured her wrists together, in the front this time.

She wanted more.

How the fuck did he know how to do all that shit with his mouth? It didn’t seem right, that an asshole like him would be a first-class pussy eater. She still felt a little tingly between her thighs. Now, being tied up by him carried a different layer of significance. He didn’t seem to be thinking of it in the same way, though.

Every fingertip jab or errant brush of his hands felt more intense. He wasn’t taking any extra care, but Gail was overly aware of everything he did.

He breathed loudly through his nose as he wrapped her wrists and knotted them together. It should have been irritating, but it only made her think about the sounds he’d made under the table.

It was maddening. It felt like she was on something, or drunk, except her head was clear.

Gail was on the verge of saying something, but when she looked up, she forgot her words.

There was a child in the hall, standing just outside the open door. A low hiss of static was rising in her head.

Lucas stood up and stretched.

“Better have somethin’ to eat now. Unless… hey, you ain’t findin’ the idea of cannibalism more appealing, are ya?”

Gail didn’t even hear what he’d said. The girl’s pale face was mean, pinched, as she looked right at Gail. It was intensely unsettling. She didn’t mind kids usually, but there was something all kinds of wrong about this one.

“The fuck is your problem?” he asked brusquely.

“Lucas,” Gail said, staring at the girl without blinking. “Who is that?”
Instead of following where she was looking, he fixed his eyes on her with heavier scrutiny, and narrowed them.

“Little girl?” he asked. “Bout eleven?”

Gail blinked, and then the girl was gone. There was no trace of her, except for a fading buzz in Gail’s head.

“She’s gone,” Gail uttered, now frantically leaning forward, standing up. Lucas pushed her back onto the couch, but it barely even registered. “She was there. I saw her.”

“She say anythin’ to ya?” he asked with an uncharacteristically detached look of curiosity, still watching her close.

Gail shook her head, still staring at the empty space where the girl had been.

“The shadow I saw in front of the bathroom...” Gail muttered to herself. “It was her.”

She didn’t know how she knew, but she was sure of it. If it was a hallucination, it was an intense one. She’d felt her before, gotten a glimpse. But this was something else.

Lucas smirked. “I wondered why you was so easy to catch.”

“That’s her, isn’t it?” Gail said, shrinking back. “That’s Eveline.”

“Bingo!”

Lucas snapped his fingers and went to retrieve something from the freezer in the back room. He came back in with some microwave burritos.

“What the fuck is she?”

Without even looking at her, he banged the microwave so it popped open, and threw the thing inside. Humming, he slammed it shut hard enough to shake the little table it sat on.

“Don’t know,” he said, twisting the timer dial. ‘But she ain’t goin’ nowhere, so you better get used to seein’ her. And hearin’ her. And fuckin’... talkin to her. You’re gonna love it, too.” The last part was said with a hint of resentment.

“Am I seeing shit or was she actually there?”

Lucas shrugged.

“She’s there... kinda. Only you can see ‘er, when she looks like that. Means she’s startin’ to get a hold on ya. Soon yer gonna be real... suggestible.”

She didn’t understand what he was saying. She hated it, how down to her core scared she was of what was happening to her. The microwave dinged but he made no move to open it yet.

“So... what you’re telling me is that this is just gonna get worse. It’s like... brainwashing.” She eyed him. “That why you spread that shit to me? So I’d be your sex slave?”

The thought made her sick. It also didn’t feel entirely right.

“Nah, Gail... I wasn’t really uhhh... thinkin’ with the right head when I gave you the gift. Believe it or not, I really like you. You’re too smart for your own good, near as crazy as me, and you like
some real, fucked-up kinky shit. My perfect girl, if I’m honest,” he leered at her and wiggled his eyebrows. “But when you ain’t you no more, that’s it for us. So how ‘bout we just enjoy it while it lasts, huh? I can cut down one of them bodies in the basement and set it up real nice for ya. Make it real nasty, if that’s what ya like.”

“No -just… shut the fuck up,” she blurted, disgusted and annoyed. “You said you were going to introduce me to your parents. Why the fuck would I want that?”

“Whether you want it don’t matter worth a shit, Gail,” he said, clearly impatient with her desire for him to stay on topic with what actually mattered. “It’s about what Eveline wants. You wanna stay alive? You gotta make her happy. If yer seein’ her, she probably already knows you’re here.”

Gail looked down to her tied wrists as Lucas retrieved the burrito. He served it to her on the only thing even remotely resembling flatware in his room, an empty VHS tape box. She would have laughed if the whole situation weren’t fucked.

“What do I gotta do, then?” she asked, even though she didn’t want to. Lucas smiled.

Gail was Lucas’s girlfriend.

That was what she had to tell herself over and over to keep the panic from setting in. He said, that as long as she acted like his girlfriend in front of these people, no harm would come to her. Probably.

As he led her to the dining room with a warning hand tight on her upper arm, wrists still tied, Gail had to believe him. She didn’t have any other choice.

Still, when they came into the room, her eye went immediately to the woman in the kitchen, watching her through the serving window as she busied herself.

“We’re comin’ to dinner, mamma,” Lucas called to her with a shitty smirk.

“Just take a seat in there, now. And don’t y’all start eatin’ yet,” she answered coarsely from the next room. “Evie’ll be down any minute.”

What might have been a normal thing to say in the real world was nothing but nightmare fuel now.

The table in front of her was laden with the rotting remnants of some kind of animal, maybe a pig or cow. Greying, decomposing organs glistened under the light. There were flies, but not as many as she would have expected for a scene like this. It was like even they knew something was wrong with it.

The moment she had set foot in this part of the house, her brain had instinctively switched to mouth-breathing in self-preservation, but it didn’t really help when she thought about how instead of smelling it, she was now tasting it.

“I ain’t eatin’ this,” she hissed at Lucas through her teeth. He’d warned her that it would be disgusting, had acted as if it were a mere embarrassment like a messy house. She’d seen the conditions Jerel lived in, the man had been a bonafide hoarder. But there was no way she could have been prepared for the rotting organs. And the maggots that wriggled and squirmed in the more decomposed flesh.
“Yer on yer own there,” he muttered back. “Just don’t get caught, otherwise I ain’t bailin you out.”

He snorted. “An’ who knows, the taste might grow on ya.”

She tried to fool herself that it was just grandma Rosie’s chitterlings and collards, but it was impossible. She would have eaten steaming buckets of the family recipe now, and thanked Rosie for the privilege. Lucas dragged a chair close to him and planted her in it, then sat in the one next to her. In the kitchen, the woman was humming. An oven door slammed and Gail jumped in her seat.

“Don’t fucking blow it,” Lucas muttered out the side of his mouth, gripping her thigh under the table.

The boxer shorts he’d given her were hardly a proper wardrobe, but they were better than nothing.

“I told you, if you play yer cards right, we’ll get through this. Then you can go back to killin’ me, or fuckin’, or whatever it is you wanna do.”

Gail almost said something biting, but just then that woman came around through the doorway carrying a serving dish of what might have been lungs. One of them was veined with black mold.

Gail’s stomach lurched, but she kept it all in check, focused on the water-stained ceiling.

The woman put the dish on the table, nudging aside a tangled mass of large mammal intestines. Gail knew that the woman was staring at her.

“So what’s yer name, hun?” she asked. Gail’s eyes were watering.

“Gail,” she choked. “This looks great Miss uhm… uhh…”

“Baker,” Lucas whispered out the side of his mouth.

“Mrs. Baker, thanks for havin’ me.”

Gail accidentally breathed in her nose and nearly lost the thin thread of self-control that was keeping her from gagging.

“Well ain’t that a pretty way to talk. You can jus’ call me Marguerite.”

“Marguerite,” Gail repeated, unable to manage anything else.

Lucas stroked her thigh with his thumb. Her eyes flickered to him where she saw a devilish look on his face, inappropriate for this, and probably every, context.

“JACK!” Marguerite screamed suddenly, so loud Gail nearly jumped out of her chair. “DINNER’S WAITIN’.”

Gail gripped the front edge of her seat between her knees until she couldn’t feel her fingertips.

Across the table, Gail finally got a better look at Marguerite, who was leaning on the table and smiling back at her. A cockroach scurried down her arm and onto the chair before disappearing again.

“Y’all kids gonna see a movie?”

Gail realized that a majority of the bugs flying around seemed to be centered around the woman.
She was moving weird in her seat, like she couldn't sit still. Fidgety, like a crackhead. A marsh fly lighted on her nostril and crawled inside, but she didn't seem to notice.

“Sure Ma,” Lucas answered with thinly veiled sarcasm. “They're showin’ a double feature at the Cineplex.”

Marguerite missed the falseness of his words and just responded with an approving nod. She looked like she was rolling something around on her tongue. Seconds later, Gail watched as rows of black legs popped out from behind her pallid lips before disappearing again.

Gail’s mouth fell open before she thought of the bugs and snapped it shut, teeth clenched together tight.

Heavy footsteps and the squeaking of unoiled wheels heralded the approach of more people. When Lucas took his hand away, Gail knew things were about to get serious.

It left her feeling stranded somehow.

A great bear of a man pushed a woman in a wheelchair through the cracked double doors. He wheeled her into the empty space at the table on the other side of Gail. Now her attention was torn between the two newcomers and the horrifying Marguerite.

Ultimately, the man seemed like the biggest potential threat. Wispy pale hair and a scruffy white beard sprouted from his sallow skin. Torn and dirty clothes hung on a frame that seemed built for contact sports.

He looked up at her through rectangular frames before looking away, and picked up a folded newspaper from his seat at the table. It was at least a year out of date. He shook it open.

He wasn't massive, but he didn’t need to be to feel like a threat. Even though he wasn't looking at her, she felt like a rabbit in a wolf den. There was no running from this.

Marguerite twitched and scratched her neck.

“How’s them two city boys comin’ along, Jack?” she asked, grabbing the serving fork from the table and spearing something jiggly from the serving dish. She shook it off onto Jack’s plate. “They were so lost ‘til we found ‘em, poor things.”

Gail didn’t want to know anything more about the context of the conversation. She simply sat there and tried not to draw attention to herself.

“Ah, you know, can't rush it, Marguerite. These things take time,” he answered back in a deep baritone that came straight from his chest. He lay the paper aside and looked down at the table. “Where's my beer?”

“Slipped my mind, lover,” Marguerite said, shoving her chair back with a smile.

She shuffled into the kitchen. Her posture was weird and slumped, but Gail didn’t miss how Jack craned in his chair to watch her go. When he sat forward again, he had a sleazy look on his face.

“Get me one too, momma,” Lucas called, as if this were normal. His hand snaked over to Gail’s thigh again. “You want one?”

Gail wasn't listening to Lucas though, she was currently more concerned with the older man at the table. The skeevy expression was still on his face, but it was now fixed on Gail. His eyes dropped
to her shirt collar, and then below that. Her skin crawled.

“Ain't you just sweet enough to eat,” he said as his tongue darted out to his lower lip.

Gail blanched and forced a small smile. Lucas’s hand tightened, and Jack looked over at his son, too-white teeth peeking out from behind a scruffy beard and overgrown mustache.

“My boy musta paid top dollar to get you to even look at ‘im.”

Jack’s smile widened when Lucas growled and leaned forward, sunken eyes narrowed. Jack’s look was just as hollow as Marguerite’s.

“Whaddyou know about anythin’?” Lucas demanded, his tone rising. “You ain't left this place in two fuckin’ years, old man.”

Jack leaned forward now, a knife in his heavy fist suddenly. The air was charged with tension. Lucas had a manic look on his face, and she wondered if this was about to erupt in violence.

“Allright, you boys settle down, we’ve got company,” Marguerite said with an admonishing tone and a vacant smile, slipping a bottle from a six pack into Jack’s hand. “And stop terrorizin’ the poor girl, Jack.”

She gave one to Lucas, too, who snatched it and leaned back.

Jack reached behind Marguerite, she jumped and tittered. He’d pinched her.

“You know I only have eyes for you, baby girl,” he said, taking a swig and leering at the bug-infested woman. It would've been sweet in a normal family. Here, it was all wrong. They were like corpses propped up and posed like living people… a puppet show. The tension was gone in an instant, but the interaction had left Gail feeling slimy and unsafe.

“Well, tuck in,” Marguerite nodded at Gail, stabbing a section of the vile-smelling fleshy intestinal tubes and dragging them onto the filthy plate in front of herself.

Jack set aside the paper and pierced a chunk of grey, unidentifiable flesh with his knife. He started eating it off the knife while Marguerite just went for it with her bare hands.

Gail’s burrito from earlier was starting to come up again.

A wet chunk of something plopped onto her plate. Then another. She tore her eyes from the gruesome meal to look at the fleshy bits, and then to Lucas, who was wiping his hands on the dirty table cloth. He leaned forward, his elbow on the table, smiling as he slid his bottle of beer toward her.

“You better drink this,” he said with strange sincerity. She accepted with shaky hands. It was room temperature, but she took a long swig anyway. Thinking about this all as a play, or a puppet show, made her eyes move to her other side, to the occupant of the room she'd all but forgotten about until now, who was in the perfect position to see all of it. The sole audience member.

The old woman was better dressed than the rest of them, and somehow looked less corpse-like. Her head leaned weakly against the back of the wheelchair. Two milky white eyes looked right at Gail.

Gail took a long drink of the tepid beer without looking away.

“Gail,” Lucas said in a low, careful voice. “Meet Eveline.”
“I believe we already met,” she said in a flat voice. She downed the rest of the bottle in one long, unbroken series of gulps, and then stifled a belch. The old woman’s mouth stretched into a wet, puckered smile.

“She likes you,” Lucas said, reaching into the six pack for another beer, his eyes flickering to his parents, as if the next part was for their benefit as well. “I think she’ll fit in jus’ fine.”

The old woman didn't respond, just kept those cloudy orbs, practically floating in her translucent, wrinkled face, turned on Gail.

“Ain't you hungry, girl?” Marguerite asked, her voice sharp, around a greasy mouthful of soft tissue. Gail realized both the Baker parents were looking at her.

Time to act.

Gail nodded with a smile and pinched one of the pieces of organ meat that Lucas had thrown at her between her fingers. She forced down the nausea when the decomposing flesh gave under the slightest pressure, like a fragile custard. She brought it to her mouth with her conjoined hands, forcing down the bile for how close she held it. Then, Gail employed a bit of sleight of hand. Considering the view from every angle, she dropped it down the joined back seam of her forearms. She mimed chewing, and Marguerite beamed.

Hidden between her elbows, Gail lowered the rotten thing harmlessly to her lap and then out of sight.

Lucas slid her another beer from the six pack, eyeballing her with strange focus.

“Lucas, I broke our good hacksaw tryin’ to break up that body I found in the basement,” Jack said around a mouthful. He, too, was working on his second beer. “It was the damnedest thing, almost like someone had wandered into the property and you didn't tell anyone.”

Gail started to chug down the warm beer. She knew what Jack was talking about and didn’t want to think about it. She didn't take a breath until the brown glass bottle was empty.

“Tried that rapid mold method on ‘im,” Lucas said without missing a beat. Gail watched him stir the crap on his plate. She hadn't seen him eat it yet. “Didn't say nothin’ in case it didn't work. Which it didn't.”

“No matter,” Jack said with a magnanimous smile. It looked predatory. “I made do. But you're gonna have to go to town soon n’ get me another saw. And next time you keep somethin’ from me, I'll take it outta your hide, you hear me, boy?”

Lucas muttered something under his breath. For some reason, Jack was looking at her. As if he could see right through her façade. Or, as if he might eat her. He took an aggressive bite of whatever was in front of him, and she decided it was the latter.

“How you like it?” Marguerite asked, reaching for a rope of intestines and dragging its unraveling length to her plate. She picked up the end and began to work it between her yellow teeth. Maggots, unseated from their meal, dropped away to writhe on the plat below. “I tried a little extra spice this time. Ain't every day my boy brings home a girl. Ain't that right, Jack?”

“Thought he was a god damn queer his whole life,” Jack said to Gail, eyeing Lucas with a fierce, toothy smile. Gail recognized the look on his face, of lazy brutality. Like a male lion, or a gorilla, all bunched-up muscle and aggression waiting for the slightest trigger, or excuse, for violence.
Gail glanced at Lucas. His expression was dark. His anger was no act. Without levity to lift it, his face looked even more severe and sunken. As much as he’d told her that they were just gonna act like a normal, happy family, Lucas was the one that seemed to have trouble maintaining it. His entire behavior was on edge and simmering with barely restrained loathing.

He was going to fucking blow it. She had no doubt that Jack’s brick-like fists could snap a neck without much issue.

It occurred to her that without Lucas, she would be alone with these people.

“Ain’t that movie showin’ soon?” she asked in a voice bolstered by the small amount of alcohol she’d consumed.

The dark heat dropped away from Lucas’s face. His hand curled around her bare thigh, almost startling her with its coolness, and tightened. It felt more like he was looking for reassurance rather than a cheap grope.

“I’m just yankin’ your chain, boy. Come on, now, we’re gonna sit here and eat like a family,” Jack chided, his tone almost completely changed from before. “Ain’t that right, Evie?”

The old woman didn’t answer, but Gail was sure she felt something brush against her ear. When she looked, Eveline was still watching her with an empty expression of serenity on her aged face.

Marguerite stood to grab something on the far side of the pile of organs. Gail thought she saw something… heavy and pendulous under her dress, between her legs. It bumped the edge of the table when she leaned. She took piece of liver, looked like. Brownish juice leaked from it when she picked it up.

The gorge was rising again and Gail flipped her gaze toward the ceiling, started counting the spots of dark mold peeking through amidst the water marks.

“Eat more,” Lucas hissed through his teeth. Gail gulped. Jack was still watching her like a vulture with carrion, tearing sinew and crunching gristle with his teeth. Gail did the same as she did before, hating that she had to touch it at all. It made its way to her lap, and then joined the first piece on the floor. She smiled and worked her teeth.

“Mmm,” she said, unable to feign much enthusiasm. “Just like my mamma’s.”

Any other time, it would have been a funny remark, for reasons no one but her could have appreciated, but Lucas snorted anyway.

Somehow it was comforting.

Jack leaned forward on one elbow.

“What do you do then, girl?”

Gail was unnerved by the way he called her ‘girl’. Somehow when he said it, it felt like he was laying some kind of stake.

“Gail here’s an actress,” Lucas interjected before Gail could say anything. He sniggered, and she came very close to throwing her plate at him.

“You went to school?” Jack asked, either uncaring or oblivious to what Lucas had said. “I hear state’s goin’ all the way this year.”
That phrase, *state’s goin’ all the way this year*. It sounded like a recording. Like an empty facsimile of a sentiment.

“No, sir,” Gail forced. “I did not go to college.”

“Hm,” he said sitting back and rubbing his belly a bit. He started picking his teeth with his pinky nail. “Probably for the best. Womenfolk’re only good for one thing, ain’t that right Marguerite?”

He acted like he’d made a funny joke, and Marguerite fixed him with a barbed grimace and giggled girlishly.

“Jack, come on now, behave yerself.”

Lucas groaned and massaged his forehead with one hand. He looked so fucking tired suddenly.

“You’ve outdone yourself, baby girl,” Jack continue, to Marguerite. A fleck of something was stuck in his beard, and as Gail watched, a too-long, snakelike tongue, riddled with black veins at the back, swept around and grabbed it.

Her forehead broke out in a cold sweat.

She didn’t think she could stop it this time. She was about to vomit.

*Just a little longer*, she told herself. *Just hold out a little bit longer.*

“There’s a lot more of this where it came from,” Marguerite said, prodding some of the grey organs in the middle of the table. “Nice to have fresh meat. Even if it was only half a carcass.”

Gail’s vision was starting to swim. A buzzing was rising in her ears, and a flat brown beetle of some kind landed on her nose. It was a small cockroach. Another one fluttered in front of the candle in a spam can.

*Half a carcass*, her numb brain repeated silently as she swatted it away. She had a mental image just then, of a living and breathing Jerel cross-section. It was so vivid it felt like a memory, but it was jumbled with the Jerel in Lucas’s camera footage. She couldn’t tear her eyes from the lungs on the table. She imagined them glistening as they filled with air, and deflated. Heart, pumping away.

*Half a carcass.*

Gail couldn’t look away from the organs. She felt like she’d been here before. Maybe it was just everything hitting her all at once.

Everything had become a blur of blood and mold and sex.

It had all culminated in a feeling of being disconnected. Objectively what she saw was horrifying. Both the situation she was in, and the reality of Jerel’s death and her part in it.

She’d known him for years indirectly. But in the last days, she’d become more familiar with Jerel’s innards than she’d ever been with the outside of him.

Her hands gripped the front of her chair again. A cold sweat broke out on her face and her vision narrowed.

Her throat yawned.

And then she vomited.
Lucas’s hasty excuse was nerves (‘she jus’ couldn’t wait ta meet y’all, ain’t that righ’, Gail?” he’d asked with a jab in her arm), and that she couldn’t hold her beer. Gail was too sick to be offended. She needed to get out of there, and Lucas seemed to agree.

Jack was suspicious, but Marguerite didn’t care when Lucas said Gail had already eaten some of her cooking for lunch.

Before he could retreat with a woozy Gail in tow, Marguerite shoved a plate of offal into his empty hand.

“For your sister,” she whispered, casting a conspiratorial look toward Jack, who was looking at the same outdated newspaper again, working on his fourth beer.

Lucas accepted the plate, but as soon as they were around the corner, he dumped its contents into a hole in the wall and dropped the plate to the floor.

Her brain wasn’t really working well enough for her to question it. He helped her up the stairs, into his private wing, and into the bathroom. He kicked off his boots before stepping into the room with her.

Wordlessly, he started filling up the tub with hot water. The reddish stain was mostly dried-on by now, but Gail didn’t even care.

Lucas peeled her boxers down her legs with detached efficiency. And then, without asking, he untied her hands and tugged the summer camp shirt, stained with vomit, over her head. He left her hands free.

With some help, she stepped into the tub and she sank beneath the steaming hot water up to her shoulders. She rinsed out her mouth with the water running from the faucet until she felt a little less disgusting.

She didn’t want to close her eyes. Every time she blinked, maggots writhed in the dark behind her eyelids.

“You did real good in there, up until the end I mean. Couldn’ta done it better myself,” Lucas said, sidling around to the side of the tub. He rested his chin on his forearms. For once, Lucas didn’t leer at her or say anything crude. His eyes were bright and distant, fixed on the wall behind her. “This might jus’ work.

“You think they bought it?” she said with some dubiousness.

Lucas shrugged. “Good enough.”

“Y’all got some serious issues,” she said. She felt like a layer of grime was coating her. The pinkish tint to the bath water didn’t help. She craned around to find the bar of soap.

“Not all of that’s because of Eveline,” he admitted, picking it up from the rim of the tub behind her and handing it to her. “Things weren’t always good before she came. Now, at least, it’s easier.”

Easier. The word sat on her heart like a brick.

“When am I supposed to become like… that?” she asked, looking at the fingers he skimmed just
beneath the surface of the water.

She thought about Jerel’s innards slopped in the middle of the table, and she tried to feel something about it. But now that the initial shock was starting to wear off, she felt nothing but concern for her own skin.

“Honestly, I was surprised you didn’t have an appetite for mamma’s cookin’ tonight. It’s been more’n 24 hours since I gave you that ah… token of my affection,” he said with a cheesy grin. “It’s kinda… weird that you don’t, actually.”

“What’s that mean?”

Lucas shrugged. “I got no idea. This is all brand-fuckin’-new to me. First time I uh… been with someone and contaminated ‘em… like how I did.”

Gail stared at him. Her thoughts bounced around the word ‘contaminated’ a few times before settling on everything else he’d said.

“She’s that mean?”

Lucas shrugged. “I got no idea. This is all brand-fuckin’-new to me. First time I uh… been with someone and contaminated ‘em… like how I did.”

Gail stared at him. Her thoughts bounced around the word ‘contaminated’ a few times before settling on everything else he’d said.

“Lucas. Don’t tell me that was your first…” her words trailed off. Lucas gave her a mischievous smirk. He wiggled his brows.

“Told ya it meant somethin’ to me.”

This was fucked. Gail groaned and leaned back in the tub. She pinched the bridge of her nose.

“How the fuck...” she started before she could stop herself. She was thinking about how good he’d been with his tongue. How confident he’d been with everything else. It was almost more embarrassing for her, knowing that she’d succumbed to the charms, and skills, of a sociopathic virgin rather than one who’d at least got his dick wet a few times already.

Somehow, of everything, that was the thing that bothered her. Lucas seemed to sense where her thoughts were going.

“You can learn anythin’ on the internet,” he said in an offhand way. “Not just from pornos, neither. There’s some good shit on there. Ain’t nothin’ like the real thing, though...”

She shook her head, disbelieving. The problem was, the little shit had tied her up and eaten her out like he’d been doing it his whole fucking life. She pictured him browsing one of those sites ‘by women, for women’ and almost cracked a smile.

He flicked the surface of the water and got droplets on her cheek.

“I thought I might get one good fuck outta you before you lost interest. This shit... it kinda kills the libido.”

“Obviously libido ain’t your problem,” she muttered, eyeing the holes in the wall over her head in case some bug decided it wanted to join the party. Lucas chuckled.

“I actually think it might be worse now than it was before,” he said in a way that told her he was checking her out. “But maybe that’s jus’ you.”

She was actually a little flattered. When she glanced at him over her shoulder, though, his eyes were closed and he was resting his head on his palm with one hand. The other lazily strummed the surface of the water by the side of the tub. He looked like he might nod off.
She couldn’t help but be curious about the other effects of the contamination.

“Do you uh… sleep much?”

He certainly didn’t look like it. His eyes cracked open and he regarded her with a rising eyebrow and a sharp smile.

“Gaaaail,” he chided. “Don’t wanna make it too easy for ya. I’d hate for you to get bored.”

Gail gave him a sour look. It seemed that he'd taken her vow to gut him in his sleep seriously, and she didn’t know if she should be annoyed or pleased.

“I didn’t mean it like that,” she said, even though it sounded false to her own ears. For once she hadn't been looking for a weakness to exploit. She had a lot of questions, including basic human functions like sleeping, most of which she’d kept to herself. Chief among them was the endgame. Would she end up like Marguerite? Or something else? And what would happen to her if… when she ever got out of this place?

“S’alright. I know you wanna kill me. I also know you wanna fuck me, so I’m willin’ to take that risk.” He gave her a lazy, sultry smile, and she forced herself to look away before it did something to her. She started to wash herself with the soap beneath the water.

She’d be lying if she called him a liar.

He was deeply disturbed and gleefully remorseless. He didn’t participate in his family’s cannibalism, but he didn’t seem to really care about it either. She’d stabbed him with a screwdriver, and the very next day he’d gone down on her.

He’d also made her realize some troubling things about herself, under duress. And he, of all people, had welcomed those things with pleasure.

“I must be crazy, or maybe it’s that shit you put in me… but you ain’t wrong,” she muttered, stealing a glance at the severe lines of his stubbly face, the cold eyes, and the asshole smile.

“Guess I got a thing for crazy,” he said, leaning forward, making a show of checking out her tits.

Gail was feeling a little vindictive and off-kilter.

Maybe she was experiencing giddy relief after the harrowing dinner experience. Maybe Lucas’s behavior was starting to rub off on her.

She saw an opportunity.

She grabbed the front of his hoodie with both hands and yanked him forward. Unbalanced, his upper body toppled into the water.

Bath water sloshed over the sides and down his legs, and he braced against the sides of the tub, sputtering. Gail hooked an arm around his neck and pushed him back down submerging his head right around her middle.

“How’s that for crazy, you sonofabitch,” she grunted, almost laughing.

Lucas’s flailing hand grabbed her face and shoved her under, too. Her feet slid out the other side. Cascades of pinkish water sheeted to the floor.

Now Lucas was cackling over her, from what she could hear when her head was above the water.
He was almost entirely in the tub on top of her, fully clothed except for his shoes, with a knee jammed against her groin.

She punched him in the jaw, as much by accident as by design, and he let up.

He let her shove him away and she sat up, coughing and gasping, and still half-laughing too much to take a decent breath. Water had gotten up her nose and now it burned, and it dripped from the rim into the growing puddle beneath.

“God dammit,” he growled, crouched on the floor beside the tub in the middle of the spilled water. He pulled the clinging, sopping wet hoodie away from himself. She saw a sliver of skin at the top where the zipper had come undone. “I swear to god, woman, if you keep ruining my clothes like this…” his threat faded into an irritated growl.

Gail leaned over the rim of the tub, watching him. Inside of her, the impulse for mischief was turning into something else.

“Just take it off,” she said with a tight, chaotic feeling in her belly. Lucas looked up at her with the briefest look of confusion. Something rough in her voice must’ve tipped him off. Without breaking eye contact, he stood up so that he was taller than her again.

“Fine,” he said with a touch of defiance. Or defensiveness.

He started to unzip his hoodie. She saw his throat bob. He was nervous, Gail realized, but doing his best not to act like it. With eyes stuck open and nearly unblinking, Gail flipped between the expression of forced indifference on his narrow face and all the extra skin he was uncovering below.

Without ceremony he peeled the drenched hoodie off his shoulders and balled it up in the sink.

Gail realized, looking at his lanky, sinewy body, that she hadn't yet seen him without clothes. His skin was near translucent in places. A pair of long, dark veins framed his lower abdomen where they disappeared beneath his belted waist. His ribs stood out, but the angles of bone met taut stretches of muscle. Her throat worked dryly.

“What the fuck’re you lookin’ at?” he demanded sharply.

“You look like a wet rat,” she said without real malice. He scowled, and she smiled back. “Now, how about them pants, too.”

She pushed herself up and climbed out of the tub. Confronted with her nudity, the tight look on his face dropped away for a second.

She was the one standing there already naked as the day she was born, damp curly hair a fucking mess of dripping ringlets, yet it was Lucas who looked uncomfortable. He watched her as he unbuckled.

She got a concentrated dose of heady power, as he did what she told him. And what she was seeing of him was delectable.

Lucas wasn't one of the massive fuck-off brutes she usually went for, with muscles probably sculpted by acts of violence, but he didn't have anything to complain about.

His jeans joined the hoodie in the sink, but her eyes were drawn to the growing hard-on he was sporting.
There was a beat where they both just stood there naked, looking at each other. He was still wearing his damp socks, and the absurdity of it was almost enough to make her laugh.

Instead, Gail threw herself at him.

He grabbed her arms, half-pushing, half-pulling like he didn’t know if he was going to fight her off or fuck her.

She pushed through his grip and sank her teeth into his shoulder. Their bodies folded together and his back hit the wall by the door.

“Ahh,” he moaned his surprise, now digging his fingers into the soft skin of her ass and grinding his dick into her belly. “God damn crazy-fuckin-“

Gail released her teeth and licked the place where they’d dented his skin, and whatever Lucas had been about to say was lost to a reedy growl.

“Couch,” she said, uninterested in screwing in the puddles on the floor of the bathroom.

Like hormonal teenagers, they stumbled a drunken path down the hallway and through the door of his room, scrabbling hands grabbing breasts and clawing backs. He threw her down on the couch and then pinned her with his naked body.

He thrust a crude hand between her legs and made some inelegant attempts to stroke her. Impatient, she slapped his overeager fingers away and spit on her hand. She lubed herself up, and with him breathing hard in her face, she took his cock and slid it in.

His huge eyes rolled back when her walls enveloped him.

Lucas braced his feet against the arm of the sofa and gripped her hips like a vise. Recovered from that momentary lapse in cognitive function, he slammed his dick into her, compressing the couch springs noisily.

Gail let him do it, unable to stop the awful, squeaky noises she was making as the weight of his entire body seemed to squeeze the air out of her lungs from the inside with each thrust.

Artlessly, he kept hitting that sweet spot between pain and delicious pleasure, piercing her and sliding out of her like a skewer into a piece of meat. Her mouth watered and she clenched her jaw.

It wasn’t logical, or rational, the feeling this gave her. Like a hyena, she wanted to laugh at him and tear him to shreds with her teeth. She settled on biting his neck. Internet-educated virginal Lucas, Lucas with the predilection to enjoy the pain of others, Lucas the asshole with a big-dick.

“Ya nasty bitch,” he hissed, “you like the way I fuck you?”

“You’re lucky I let you come anywhere near me,” she grunted, wrapping her legs around him to keep him inside her. “You talk too fuckin’ much.”

Lucas, grinning manically, threw her legs off, wedged himself between her and the couch and shoved her onto the floor.

Indignant, she had a second to register the carpet grit digging into her cheek before she felt him crawl onto her, hand planted on her shoulder. He pried apart her cheeks with the other hand and sank into her pussy with a satisfied groan.
Even as her pelvic floor muscles gripped onto him like it was life or death, she twisted to throw him off, clawed hands scrabbling for his bare skin, awkwardly reaching behind her.

He swatted away her thrashing hands, and finally with a punishing thrust of his hips, jerked them both behind her. He pinned them in place over the small of her back and gave another jarring push. In this position, he felt so much deeper. Gail writhed, finding a guilty satisfaction in her helplessness.

Even holding her arms one-handed he was stronger than her, and his other hand was free to do what it wanted. He slapped her ass cheek, uttering a boorish hoot as she twisted beneath him.

Her face was feeling hot, and she arched beneath him.

His weight bore down on her arms, and then his chest pressed into her shoulder blades.

Arched over her body, he hooked his feet, still clad in damp socks halfway to falling off, around her knees for better leverage.

He rode her hard enough that the friction of the carpet sliding against her breasts was starting to hurt, but even that seemed to fold into everything else she was feeling.

It became one chaotic jumble of sensation, and she started making noises almost against her will.

But without warning, Lucas froze in place. Gail gave an embarrassing noise of frustration and squirmed, and he clamped his hand over her mouth.

“Shut the fuck up,” he hissed. She looked at his face out the corner of her eye, but he was looking toward the cracked open door.

Gail’s eyes became saucers when she saw the figure shuffle by toward the bathroom.

Lucas’s chest swelled against her back and contracted with his ragged breaths.

“Shit,” he whispered. “It’s mamma. I musta left the hall door open.”

Panic gripped her, but he was still holding her wrists and pinning her with his body.

She heard the sound of the bathroom door squeaking open down the hall. It sounded like she was talking to herself, but Gail couldn’t make out the words.

In her fear, she felt her body tense around the dick still inside of her, poised mid-thrust. Lucas stifled a grunt and then chuckled low.

“If she catches us, she’ll prob’ly kill ya,” he said into her ear. “Corruptin’ her only son an’ all…”

Gail started to protest, it was ridiculous to think that anyone could corrupt him, but the hand over her mouth tightened, squeezing her jaw.

“Be a good girl, now,” he said in a shaky whisper.

And then his hips jerked into her. Gail choked back a sound of mingled horror and pleasure.

Marguerite was doing something in the bathroom. Gail heard running water.

‘Lucas, what the fuck,’ she tried to say, but it came out in a muffled series of plaintive noises. A tongue darted out and licked her ear.
“Shhhh,” he said again, rolling his pelvis forward into her, long and slow. Gail did her best to hold still, but with the entirety of his length being drawn out and then pushed back in, his steady pace was beginning to do things to her. She bit the inside of her cheek to fight against the warmth starting to build inside her. Her eyes remained planted firmly on the door.

With each sharp breath he took, he worked himself into her harder. She could feel his body moving like an oiled mechanism, smooth and repetitive behind her, bones sliding beneath skin, muscle flexing and loosening. She started to sync her breaths with his and clenched her eyes.

Behind the black of her lids, there was nothing but the feel of his cock grinding into her. She was slick as a seal now, she couldn’t help it. Everything there felt tight. She could feel her pulse in her pussy lips, and feel his heartbeat in his dick as she gripped him.

The fact that they were both trying to be as quiet as possible only meant that the wet sounds of him slapping into her, and their forceful breaths were all the louder.

Marguerite was going to hear. She could come back down the hall at any moment, see them. Her heart pounded wildly and she pushed herself back even harder. He was using her wrists as an anchor, jerking them back with every thrust.

Gail could tell he was close. When his hand dropped off of her mouth, and pinched her hip. She stayed quiet, even as the fire started to build in her, biting her lips until the skin split.

Lucas rammed her a few more times before making a strained, voiceless sound in her ear. She felt his cock throb, and seconds later, something wet spilled out of her and caught the air.

His body pulled off of her.

Disappointed, Gail deflated. But then she felt his hands gripping both her hips. Hit wet mouth trailed down her spine. Sharp teeth bit her ass cheek and she almost made a noise. The running water in the bathroom cut off.

Lifting her hips so her spine curved sharply, Lucas snuffled around back there. She craned her neck to see what the fuck he was doing.

Pale, fever-bright eyes peered back at her from behind the curve of her ass, and then she felt his mouth clamp onto her dripping pussy.

The shock of it, and the knee-jerk revulsion that he was licking her after coming inside of her disappeared when his tongue lapped against her swollen clit and inner pussy lips. She felt his breath cold against her asshole, his giant nose butting against it without a fucking care as his hungry mouth sucked and licked.

He jammed his tongue into her cunt, teeth lightly scraping her sensitive skin as he made the most obscene slurping noises.

Now Gail clamped her own hand over her mouth to stop from uttering a sound. Her hips started to bob of their own accord in an irregular rhythm of need, grinding back into his hot, wet mouth.

She wasn’t aware that he’d let go of one of her hips until she felt his long fingers plunge into her where his tongue had been. His mouth moved between her ass cheeks and fluttered against her asshole.

His fingers hooked inside of her.
Everything inside of her battled against the iron control she kept over her own noises.

Straining, she came crashing ass-first into her orgasm. She clenched his fingers in waves, clawing the rug.

Like a good boy, he kept them inside of her until the paroxysms passed. And then he drew them out, wiped them against the back of her thigh. It left a smear of wetness on her hot skin.

A shadow passed by the door, and she could hear the hall door shut. Silence.

Marguerite was gone.

When Gail finally made a noise, it was a sigh.

A hand popped her on her ass, and with a grunt he stood. Lucas’s feet came into view, long and bony. He’d lost his socks at some point, she noted.

He shook her shoulder.

“You dead?” he asked, still panting.

When Gail twisted to look up at him, he was bent over her, braced on a knee, and wiping his face off with a forearm. He grinned like a madman.

“Yeah,” she said, sinking back down with her cheek on the floor. She might as well have been.

Lucas snorted and his feet padded out the door past her.

She heard a low curse out in the hall from the direction of the bathroom.

Languid, and curious, she crawled to her feet. She was a fucking mess between her legs and could use a wipe-down anyway.

When she saw what he was cursing about, she was baffled.

The bathroom was, if not spotless, much cleaner than it had been before. Lucas was standing over the sink, his half-hard dick jutting from between his legs. His clothes were gone. So were hers. The puddle on the floor had been dried up, and the bathtub ring was gone.

“Did she… clean your fucking bathroom?” Gail asked, dumbfounded.

“Tossed my goddamn clothes,” he muttered. “Fuckin’ hate it when she does that. She don’t know how to do laundry anymore. Always gets bugs in the wash.”

Gail didn’t know how to feel about the fact that his mother still tried to clean up after him. And then one thing shot to the forefront of her mind.

She’d gotten in because he’d left the hallway door open. Looking behind her, she could see what she already knew, that it was closed again.

She’d lost a chance at freedom because she was so wrapped up in the heat of the moment.

She wiped herself up with toilet paper as Lucas started to brush his teeth dry, feeling strangely cathartic about it all.

She’d try again later.
Lucas washed his toothbrush in the bathtub faucet and spat into the drain.

A single bee, or yellow jacket, was buzzing and clinking against the fluorescent light overhead, trapped but unable to stop itself.

Gail felt like she could relate.

---

Chapter End Notes

Let me know if there's anything unclear in the way the scenes are laid out. Sometimes I get lost in writing and forget what all the limbs are doing.
Feel free to tip the writer if you liked it. I accept payment in the form of Kudoses and comments <3
The night after dinner, Gail slept on the couch alone as she had the last couple of nights while Lucas did whatever it was he did on the computer or in his workshop.

So, when she woke in the near dark to the glow of Lucas’s three monitors still on their login screens, and the feeling of a body wedged between her and the back cushions, her instinct took over.

She cracked the back of her head against the intruder’s forehead and rolled herself onto the floor to get away. It was Lucas, of course, but her half-asleep brain wasn’t as quick as her muscle memory. By the time she knew where she was, Lucas was awake and cursing in shock.

“God-fucking-dammit,” he yelped. Gail lay on her back on the floor feeling stupid and dizzy while her higher functioning caught up. She had to hand it to her fighting instinct, she’d gotten him (and herself) good. The bright screens trailed behind the movement of her eyes and the room felt like it was tilting. “Jesus, Gail, some way to wake a fella.”

She tried to blink away the wooziness.

“So, you do sleep,” was all she said. The back of her skull was throbbing, but it wasn’t as severe as it should have been. She’d had to headbutt someone once before, and it had almost knocked her out at the same time. Skulls, ultimately, didn’t make good bludgeons unless you were willing to risk a concussion. Lucas grumbled something and pushed himself into a sitting position. He was holding a hand to his forehead and in the light of the monitors his face was pinched in a grimace of pain.

“Shit, well I was. The fuck’s wrong with you?” Gail laughed, she couldn’t not. A socked foot nudged her hip. “How’d you like it if I did that to you? It ain’t that funny.”

She tried to blink away the wooziness.

“So, you do sleep,” was all she said. The back of her skull was throbbing, but it wasn’t as severe as it should have been. She’d had to headbutt someone once before, and it had almost knocked her out at the same time. Skulls, ultimately, didn’t make good bludgeons unless you were willing to risk a concussion. Lucas grumbled something and pushed himself into a sitting position. He was holding a hand to his forehead and in the light of the monitors his face was pinched in a grimace of pain.

“Shit, well I was. The fuck’s wrong with you?” Gail laughed, she couldn’t not. A socked foot nudged her hip. “How’d you like it if I did that to you? It ain’t that funny.”

She laughed harder at the sullen tone in his voice, but stopped when it made her headache worse.

“What’s wrong with me? You can’t be serious.”

He massaged his forehead with the heel of his hand and looked down at her with the glow of the monitors reflected in his eyes.

“You got a fair point there,” he said. He shook it off and then slapped the couch next to him. “C’mon, I ain’t mad. Well… ‘less you do it again.”

Gail pushed herself up but remained on the floor. The light from the monitors illuminated the books on the mounted shelves over the couch, most of which were probably on the FBI’s watch list. Lucas leaned back on the couch and yawned.
“You don’t sleep much, do you?” she asked, her eyes moving onto the microwave table at the other end of the couch. There was an old Cool-Whip tub sitting underneath it that she hadn’t noticed before. Something was in it, like small electronics.

“Ehhh. Maybe once er twice a week… don’t need much more than that.”

It sounded about right. She hadn’t seen him sleep once since she got here… and come to think of it, Gail wasn’t entirely sure how long ago that was. She rubbed her eyes, still groggy and sat forward to get a better look at the plastic container without being too obvious. At least he’d left her arms untied.

Somehow, despite that, he’d thought it was a good idea to sleep with her on the couch without warning. It was almost like the motherfucker wanted to get stabbed.

“Don’t you wanna turn your brain off sometimes? Just for awhile?” she asked. She could see an assortment of batteries in the container. And… cell phones. The tub was full of cell phones. Her heart vaulted into her esophagus.

“Nah,” he said, reclining on the couch and shaping the single bed pillow under his head. “Wish I never had to sleep. Waste o’ time. Unless you got someone to snuggle up with.”

She almost missed the flirt in his voice, thinking about those cellphones.

“Damn, boy, that all you think about?” Gail demanded. He was looking at her with one arm tucked under his pillow and something about his boyish grin and scruffy, gaunt face in the blue glow of the screens made her stomach tilt like the room had.

It felt good, and she didn’t like it.

“I ain’t gonna try nothin. What, you wanna sleep on the floor like a dog?”

He patted the couch again, and this time, she crawled up onto it. Lucas bit his lip and lifted his arm, inviting her in. Despite his assertion, he already had half a boner. She ignored it and tried to get comfortable.

“Thass right,” he murmured into the back of her hair, holding her tight to him with the arm curled over her side. It felt so fucking good to just lay with someone, Gail allowed herself a deep, relaxed sigh. It’d been too long since she'd just let someone hold her, even if she didn’t have a lot of choice in the someone.

“Don't you got a bed? This is just sad,” she said, stretching with applied nonchalance against his front just to feel that hard outline against her butt.

“Yeah,” he said, with just a hair of breathlessness. “But this’s better. It came from the old house. Ah fuckin’ love this couch.”

Gail had to admit that it was very comfortable. Not too soft, not too firm, wide enough for two bodies to lay like they were. Lucas draped his lower leg over hers, slipping between them at the ankles. He took a deep breath and let it out in a warm spot on the back of her head.

Her thoughts drifted and her eyes closed. Somewhere outside, distant thunder rumbled.

She fell asleep with his breath in her ear and his bulge against the cleft of her ass.
Gail woke an unknown time later to fading dream memories of black mold. It had tasted like dirt as it grew, pushing its way down her throat. But in her dream logic, she’d found herself opening up to it, letting it in, savoring the way it filled her. Wanting it.

It had been almost… sensual.

Lucas was awake, too. He was kissing her neck and fidgeting on the couch behind her, a reflection of her own restlessness. She rubbed the sleep out of her eyes, already forgetting the details. A pleasant fog seemed to have settled over her brain and she didn’t trouble herself with the dream as he nuzzled her affectionately and rumbled in his chest.

He was even harder now. It seemed they both had the same thing in mind. She sighed and arched into him, stretching with a smile as she felt herself respond to the shivers his kisses sent down her spine. Maybe the same thing that happened to Lucas was happening to her, the libido thing, because she was already getting hot and bothered by his attentions. Or, maybe it was just him.

He started grinding the strained crotch of his jeans into her, growling lightly in her ear. She bit her lip to soothe the ache in them. They felt tender, swollen, and so did other parts of her.

She felt pleasantly warm. Maybe a little too much. She wanted to touch bare skin, and the clothes were constricting.

His hand wound up from her side under the bottom of the tee shirt. She felt behind her for the bulging crotch of his jeans and squeezed it through the denim. She was trying her damnedest to not breathe so loud and be so obvious, but she couldn’t help it as Lucas squeezed the plump flesh of her breast and made those little noises in her ear.

“None of this makes sense,” she said as his mouth sought her neck beneath her curls. Teeth glided over skin and pinched so he could tongue it. She started fumbling for his zipper. Why was she so into it? “You’re drivin’ me half out of my mind, boy.”

He squeezed her nipple so hard she yelped, but it turned into a soft moan. Gail could feel the tickle of moisture between her legs, and he was being so fucking sweet, it wasn’t helping.

“Ah don’t fuckin’ know,” he said with his lips against her skin. “Maybe it’s my winnin’ personality?”

Unable to get the zipper fly to cooperate, she kneaded his bulge through the denim and elicited a delicious shudder from him.

“Maybe.”

She blamed it on the contamination. There was no other explanation for why this white trash swamp zombie was driving her so fucking crazy, and in more ways than one.

He yanked his hand out of her shirt and started fumbling with his belt.

“Have any uhh... weird dreams?” he gasped. “Cuz I shure as fuck did.” She could hear that he was smiling. He jerked down his zipper with ease, and tugged out his cock. Its moist tip smeared across her lower back.

A remembered taste of mold and blood hit the back of her soft palate and she swallowed down her thick spit.

“Is it uh... normal?” she whispered in the semi darkness, tugging down the elastic waist band of
the loaned boxers over the swell of her ass. She felt like she couldn’t get clear of them fast enough.

Lucas sniggered breathily and rolled his hips forward, grinding his shaft against the cleft between her cheeks. His fingertips bore into her buttocks and he squeezed the soft skin. Thunder cracked outside, closer this time, rattling the door on its hinges. Stormy weather.

“Nothin’s *normal* anymore, baby,” he breathed. “But fuck normal, right?”

He lipped her neck and scraped the skin with his teeth, pressing his hard shaft against her tailbone. A sound through the cracked door made her freeze. Someone was humming in the hallway.

“Shh,” she hissed. Lucas swallowed loudly and held still. “Didn’t you shut the hall door?”

“Yeah, goddammit, ‘course I did… oh shit it’s Evie.”

He started furiously tugging the bed sheet that was currently twisted underneath them. Not knowing what else to do, she helped him throw it over them.

The dim line of light grew wider with the creak of old hinges.

“Lucas and Gail, sittin’ in a tree,” the singsong trill of a little girl’s voice came from the hall, though she couldn’t see anything. “K-I-S-S-I-N-G.”

“Aw Evie, *c’mon*,” Lucas groaned, and she knew that she wasn’t the only one hearing it this time. She was just puzzling over that when, before Gail’s eyes, a shadow blinked into existence in the doorway. It was the size of a young child.

“Ew, what are you guys *doing* in here?” she demanded with clear childlike disgust.

“I tol’ you not to come in here!” Lucas said, his voice breaking in the middle of a word. Gail was surprised to hear the reserve in his tone. He sounded more petulant than angry. He mumbled something about ‘… *a man can’t get a moment alone in this fuckin’ place*… ’ before stretching himself over the arm of the couch to turn on the lamp. It seemed like the hallucinations weren’t only hers anymore.

“You said only if the door’s shut. It isn’t shut.” Evie was wearing the same outfit she’d seen her in before, the black socks and overdress, and the black shirt underneath. Her dark hair hung around and half in front of her pale, sharp face, and framed an olive-green eye. Gail tugged the waistband of her shorts up, mortified suddenly about her current state, before she remembered this wasn’t any normal little girl.

Lucas quickly started to buckle his jeans, roughly jabbing his sharp knuckles into Gail in the process. His heart was pounding in his chest, she could feel it through her back.

He climbed over her and crossed toward the door where Eveline was standing. She had a sour look on her sheet white face, and her arms were crossed over her chest.

Gail sat up slowly.

“What do you want, Eveline? I’m kinda busy right now. Gail uh was havin’ a bad dream.”

Eveline’s pinched look dropped away. Her shaded eyes glittered and turned to Gail, who was just now sitting up.
“No, it was a good dream,” she said with a sharkish grin. And then, before Gail could respond, “what’s your favorite color?”

“Uh… green,” she said because it was the first thing to come to mind. She hadn’t smoked in awhile, but she really could have used a joint right about then, the way her heart was racing.

“Purple’s better.” Eveline retorted, swinging her arms idly.

“Can’t argue with that,” Gail said with a knowing smile.

“Eveline, Gail’n I got shi- er. Things t’do,” Lucas said, standing partly behind the door with his hand rested on it over his head. Gail knew that he was trying to hide his boner. He looked thoroughly embarrassed, something she never would have expected to see.

“Like what?” she shot back, now looking up at him.

“Uh we gotta uhhhh…” It was clear at that moment that most of Lucas’s circulation hadn’t yet returned to his brain.

“We gotta buy a saw,” Gail interjected. “For Mr. Baker.”

Lucas stared at her with disbelief in his bugging eyes. She shrugged. What did he want from her?

“I gotta buy a saw. In town.” It sounded far stupider when he said it.

“It’s gross and rainy outside. I want to play Barbies. You said you were gonna play with me, Lucas. You said you’d be Ken.”

“Aw come on, can’t you ask Zoe? She likes all that girly shi- stuff. I think.”

Thunder boomed and the lights flickered. Suddenly the girl was standing right next to her. Her expression was wide-eyed but weirdly blank.

“Zoe is a jerk. She won’t play with me. Maybe Gail will.”

A faint buzzing sound started to rise in the outer ranges of her hearing. It felt like it was coming from inside her skull. Out of the direct light of the lamp, Eveline’s face was jagged and predatory.

“Do you like me, Gail?”

Gail gaped and lightly twisted the edge of the sheet in her hands. Lucas was watching, an unreadable expression on his face.

“Uhh… I don’t really know you that well yet, Eveline… I just met you and all.” She swallowed, feeling a lot like she was dangling her feet inches away from a venomous cottonmouth.

The girl’s eyes narrowed and she cocked her head to the side. The buzzing grew louder, and the unnerving squirming behind her eyeballs was back and getting worse. Gail felt rooted in place as a darkness started to encroach the borders of her peripheral vision.

“If you like me, you’ll bite off your tongue,” she said calmly, but with the barest hint of malice.

Gail’s teeth itched, and her tongue tensed in her mouth. As if they weren’t her own, she felt her incisors start to pinch down on the muscle.

Then she balked. Her hand flew to her mouth, horrified that she’d almost complied. The heavy,
invisble fog that had settled on her limbs was starting to dissipate. She pulled her tongue to relative safety behind her teeth and clenched them shut, terrified of what they were capable of doing.

“No. I will not do that, Eveline. What kinda lil girl says a thing like that? It ain’t nice.” Gail kept her words measured but firm. Her instinct screamed danger, but she thought of Marguerite and Jack. No matter what Lucas said, she couldn’t let herself be like that.

“Bite it off. NOW!” Eveline screamed with blazing eyes, moving forward as if she was going to attack.

Gail flinched backwards. Her scalp writhed and the moldy blood smell in her sinuses was sharp and pungent enough that she could taste it. She shook away the dizziness.

She was starting to get pissed off.

“Now listen here, little girl,” Gail growled, leaning forward and fixing the demon child with the pop-eyed death stare she usually reserved for men three times her size. “You can’t talk to me like that, you hear? That ain’t how you talk to people, especially grownups. You talk to your mamma with that mouth? If you were my kid I’d smack you on your butt.”

Eveline’s monstrous rage dropped away as easily as a mask. She was standing as before, hands behind her back. The shift from a wrathful expression to a neutral one was jarring.

“Mommy’s not feelin’ well,” she said with a slow-growing smile. “She doesn’t always do what I want either, so I make her hurt. I could make you hurt too.”

Gail’s stomach tightened. She had no fucking idea what she was doing. Lucas was pointedly quiet.

“You don’t hurt your friends,” Gail said, swallowing the retch that was tightening her throat muscles. Her fingertips were cold and tingly, and she realized she had the edge of the sheet wrapped so tightly in them it was cutting off the circulation. “You wanna be friends, don’t you? You want a family? You don’t hurt the people you love. You got it? Go on, now, Lucas an’ me got grownup things to do.”

Gail was starting to feel faint, and she realized it was because she had barely breathed. Eveline’s cold reptile eyes scanned Gail’s face without blinking.

“You’re no fun,” she said, finally, as if nothing had happened. Then, she turned her head to peer back at Lucas. “I want root beer barrels when you go to town, Lucas.”

Her voice was sickly sweet, and it made the hairs on the back of Gail’s neck stand on end.

“Alright, Eveline,” Lucas said in a strangely stilted voice. “But it’s gonna be our little secret from Mia, okay? You know you ain’t supposed to have too much sugar.”

Instead of answering, Eveline gave Gail one last lingering stare before blinking out of existence.

“First comes love, then comes marriage...” her voice faded and then it was gone. So was the buzzing.

Lucas shut the door with a soft click. When he looked at her next, his brows were raised, carving tense lines into his forehead. Gail pried her fingers out of the knotted sheet and flexed them a few times to get the blood flowing again.
“What?” she demanded of him, tired of the scrutiny and feeling jumpy and irritable.

“Nobody talks to her like that. Nobody,” he said, shoving his hands into the pockets of his hoodie. “You shoulda done what she said, Gail. It woulda grown back.”

“Are you kidding me? Fuck that. Would you have done it?”

Lucas ran a hand over his scalp. Gail realized he was sweating.

“I did worse to myself in the beginning. I couldn't fight it. She made me.” Gail was starting to feel unnerved by the way he was looking at her. He'd had that glint in his eye once before, analytical and searching. “She got bored, though, when I got her some more uhhhh… playmates.”

Based on what Evie considered ‘playing,’ Gail didn't want any more details. After that morning’s heavy petting was interrupted, and after the altercation that had followed, she felt antsy, on edge.

Lucas’s weird look finally left his face, maybe a little too easily. She thought about how he was when he was talking to his mother, or his father, and how he’d spoken to Eveline just now. Playing a part, to the point where she wasn’t totally sure what the real him was. It was one of the warning signs of sociopathic disorders.

He went over to his desk.

“You got any kids?” he asked, rooting around in the debris scattered around the base of the monitors.

“I ain't exactly the nurturin’ type,” she answered.

“You sure sounded like you knew what you was doin. I thought she was gonna kill you.”

“For a minute there, so did I… I don’t got a lotta patience. Maybe why I don’t feel much like putting up with guff from little miss ‘Damien’ back there.”

She started to adjust her shirt and hair. Her hands were cold and quaking.

“Who?” Lucas said, stopping what he was doing to stare.

“You know, from the Omen?” she offered, cracking her stiff neck. “Creepy kid, son of the devil… how do you not know about that movie? They got movie theaters out here in the middle of pigfuck don’t they?” She was starting to feel more relaxed. The banality and relative normality of their conversation was doing something to ease her tension.

“Ain’t been to an actual movie in… I don’t know how long. It’s borin’ just sittin there.”

Lucas picked up a loose stack of bank cards and started shuffling through them. Something told Gail that they had once belonged to different owners. It didn’t bother her as much as it probably should have.

“I woulda pegged you for a horror fan,” she said, feeling a little disappointed.

He shrugged.

“Never much cared fer ‘em.” He looked up with a brief grin. “The real thing’s so much better.”

“Sick fuck,” she muttered without any real heat. This point, she was getting farther away from a place she could judge. She’d always been into scary movies, especially slashers. She was surprised
they didn’t appeal to Lucas, but then again his life seemed to be one big fucking horror movie, and here she was right in the middle of it. What was truly scary was how normal it was already starting to feel. Funny how quick people adjusted.

“How uh… how many people you killed?” she asked, letting her eyes stray around his room again, avoiding the pile of cellphones in the Cool-Whip container as though they were the stare of Medusa.

“I told you, I don’t-“

“Don’t mince words, boy,” she cut in with a sardonic brow. “You some kinda lawyer or somethin’? You know damn well you killed them people, just like you killed Jerel. Puttin’ people in impossible situations they have to die or kill to get out of? That’s murder. Can’t believe you never seen the Saw movies the way you carry on with them… games and shit.”

He gave her a coy smile with his teeth sinking into his bottom lip before looking back to the stack of cards. He didn’t really seem to be paying them much attention at this point.

“How many would it take to get them sweet lips to suck me off again?” Gail scoffed and rolled her eyes, but she didn’t hide her smirk.

“Way to avoid answering.”

Lucas, snorted.

“Y’know, they’s plenty o’ girls out there that go for that kinda thing. Whole gagglers of ‘em on the internet. I could have a fuckin’ fan club if I wanted. Dumb sluts creamin’ their fuckin’ panties to get at me just ‘cuz I got some people to off themselves.”

“Oh yeah?” she asked, lounging back against the back of the couch, arms crossed beneath her breasts, hands tucked into her armpits to warm them up again. She was amused at the prospect of him having a fan club. “How come you never took advantage of that if you’re so sure you’d be swimmin’ in pussy?”

He seemed to have found the card he was looking for and tucked it into his front pocket.

“Too easy,” he said without looking at her.

“Maybe a little bit o’ easy woulda done you some good,” she said half under her breath.

“Heh… I doubt it. Ain’t no fixin’ what I got. It don’t matter. Wouldn’t trade all that for you anyhow.”

Involuntary warmth started to climb into her cheeks.

He clapped his hands and rubbed them together, breaking the spell. “Alright, well I’m goin’ to town. You think you can behave yerself for a few hours?”

Gail wanted to say no. It was on the tip of her tongue. She didn’t want him to leave her alone in this fucking house, not knowing when and if that little girl was going to pop up again and say more creepy shit.

But then, a familiar turn in her guts told her she was getting a little over her head here. It wasn’t only the fear of Eveline. She was actually starting to enjoy talking to him.
It had to be the contamination.

A darkly gratifying image popped into her head, of her going to town with Lucas while he did… whatever the fuck he was doing. Kidnapping people, buying implements of torture, and her at his side gunned up and ready in case shit hit the fan.

Here was a person who wouldn’t shit himself if it did. Someone who accepted her for who she was. The realization came with the feeling of being unbalanced, like she was about to miss the bottom step.

“I think I can manage,” she finally answered him, fighting the conflicting thoughts down. Lucas’s eyes narrowed a hair, as if he wasn’t entirely sure he could trust her. She held up her empty hands in a gesture of innocence. “I can’t go nowhere. What’m I gonna do, wreck the place?”

She regretted the words as soon as she’d said them.

With unbridled glee and no warning, Lucas came at her. Whatever primal instinct had driven her to smash her skull into his earlier had decided to fuck off right then, because she wasn’t ready. She managed a few half-hearted cusses and a good fist to his nose before he had her pinned. He was laughing like a maniac as he flung nose blood all over her face. Now more disgusted than afraid, she did her best to avoid getting it in her mouth, but it seemed like he was trying to do it on purpose.

He had her wrists tied behind her back, attached to a loop around her waist in a matter of minutes, and this time he didn't bother putting her on the couch.

“You want anythin’ while I’m out?” he asked with a shitty smirk on his blood-crusted mouth as he tried to straighten his appearance. He was failing.

“A fuckin’ toothbrush would be nice,” she snapped without missing a beat. A finger dabbed with toothpaste just wasn't cutting it anymore. “And some goddamn lotion. I'm starting to look like a fucking gator washing in your nasty-ass swamp water.”

“No need to get personal,” he cut in with a scowl.

“I want some fucking conditioner too. Your pasty ass might be fine with a bar of soap but I can't keep washing the blood outta my hair that way,” she said without relenting, pushing herself off her stomach so she was laying on her side.

“Anythin’ else, yer highness?” he grated.

“Yeah. Tampons,” she said with malicious relish. She didn't need them, but imagining Lucas patrolling the feminine hygiene shelves at Winn-Dixie trying to navigate the abundance of menstrual products gave her a particularly sharp spike of pleasure.

“Fuck, wish I'd never asked. Fuckin’… high maintenance… bitch.” The last part was said as a mumble. He still had some nose blood on his face, and a few drops on his hoodie, but she wasn’t going to tell him.

“Well you wanted a girlfriend? Might as well know it ain't all sunshine and blowjobs. If I'm stuck here you gotta get over your delicate-ass sensibilities.”

“I ain’t promisin’ nothin’,” he grunted from the doorway. He pulled up his hood and tipped his imaginary hat. And then, with overt sarcasm, “see ya.”
He shut the door behind him, and the second she heard the hall door close on the other side, she started to squirm and wriggle, working the waist loop down to her hips. She’d thought of this before, but with Lucas there she hadn’t dared try.

She didn’t think Lucas’s room shared a wall with the outside, but she could still hear and feel the vibrations from the thunderstorm raging somewhere outside. She usually loved thunderstorms, but the way the lights would flicker occasionally with the sound, or preceding it, made her nervous, and lent a bit of urgency to her efforts. She heard water dripping somewhere over her head, unsurprised that the house had a leaky roof.

J jerking down with her tied hands, and arching her back like an overfed snake, she worked it down inch by painful inch. The rope was smooth, but it was tight enough that her skin was starting to feel raw.

She stopped every few minutes to catch her breath, hating how gritty the carpet felt under her bare skin, but with one final jerk of her aching wrists, she got it past the widest part of her ass. She lay there for a minute, chest heaving as she got her bearings. And then she slid the now slack loop down her thighs, knees, and feet.

Next, she went through a similar process, albeit less challenging, to get her tied wrists down past her feet and in front. Some part of her knew that she wouldn’t be able to re-do the knots, which meant he’d know as soon as he got home that, left to her own devices, she was too clever for rope.

She’d worry about that later. Now, she went straight for the cellphones. With a quick glance to the door, she started digging through the plastic container with her wrists still locked together.

She didn’t find one phone that was whole. Plenty of cases and partial cell phones were jumbled together with components and batteries. She counted parts of at least eight. One, missing its guts, was a pink gold color with a cartoon kitten charm still attached. Another lacked its screen but was inside of a utility case with a belt clip, something an older business man might have. A couple were pay-as-you-go burners, similar to hers. Gail wondered just how many of their owners were now dead, or worse. Her phone, however, was nowhere to be seen.

Just when she was considering digging through the rest of his things to find hers, the lights went out. Seconds later, the walls and floor shook with a rumbling peal of thunder.

Gail waited, without taking a breath, for them to come back on.

Instead, she heard a faint tone ring out suddenly in the near silence, coming from somewhere outside the closed office door.

She knew, without really knowing, what it was, even if she didn’t understand why, or how. The security panel in the hallway. She didn’t know what kind of janky-ass system he’d rigged together, but she knew enough about home security systems to recognize the sound of a malfunction.

Gail tried to remember where everything was before the lights went off, and felt around on the floor. The flathead screwdriver she’d stabbed Lucas with was still there, though it had been kicked out of the way a bit.

In her head, she thought of anything other than the dark earthen tunnel beneath the guest house, where some of those black swamp creatures had dwelled, and she started to saw away at the ropes with the wedged flathead of the screwdriver. It was sharp enough to sever the nylon rope fibers (partly why it had made such an effective stabbing weapon), though progress was painstaking.
The darkness felt close, and in her imagination, it was a physical presence hovering just around her without touching. But she couldn’t think like that, because it made the panic start to flutter at her ribs insistently, made it hard to take a deep breath.

Another few fibers broke, and she twisted and wriggled her wrists, working it loose.

Something brushed by her neck and she gasped in the silence. Was it Evie? Or just a draft? She didn’t hear the child’s voice, but that small sensation sent a scatter of goosebumps down her arms. She didn’t like being blind, not here. Not anywhere.

One hand slipped through the bindings, and she quickly freed the other one. Without hesitation, she scrambled through the suffocating darkness to the door, screwdriver still in hand. She didn’t plan on letting it go.

She didn’t know what she would find when she went blindly into the hallway. But when she saw the sliver of light ahead, the frantic pounding in her chest only worsened. Childlike giggles, somehow too deep and distorted to belong to a real child, came from behind her.

She fought down the unsettling feeling that she was being herded.

It wasn’t her imagination. The electronically-secured door was open. Perhaps as some side effect for the power going out. Her tendency to pause and reason raged against her fear that this might be her only chance. Lucas would be coming back at some point.

She pulled the door open.

The rest of the house was silent. Heavy rainfall pattered against glass windows, and on the roof. Rumbles from the heavens shook the panes of glass in their frames. Everything was dark, and eerie partial rectangles of light stretched through the gaps in the wooden boards over the windows with every flash of lightning. The upper floor walkway was dark enough that she couldn’t make out the other side.

She could feel eyes on her, coming, it seemed, from every shadow.

Barefoot, no longer caring that she might have to run around outside with shoes, Gail took to the steps two at a time, gripping the screwdriver like a lifeline. She’d rather face to water moccasins and other swamp vermin than attend another family dinner.

She hoped the car still worked. She hoped that the money was still in it, that they hadn’t done anything to it.

Her feet slapped wood flooring, nearly skidded on loose newspapers made brittle with age and water damage as she raced for the front door. She tried to imagine what it would feel like to have the rain on her skin, the sky over her head.

How long had she been here? She couldn’t be sure.

But when she reached the front door, on the opposite side of the foyer from the way he’d brought her in, the door was locked. Gail growled in frustration and banged her fists against it.

And then she went to the other side, to the back door. She was willing to run through the swamp barefoot, and swim through gator infested waters, now, if she had to. But that door was locked as well.

She should have expected it. She should have known it wouldn’t be that easy.
She rested her forehead against the Cerberus motif for a moment, already considering how best to get back to Lucas’s room, and maybe avoid the worst retaliation. She even felt a small pang of guilt for wanting to get away so badly. Thoughts chased each other around in her brain, a desire for freedom, and to put her life back on track where it was before all this. And a desire for something she didn’t even know existed until Lucas had wormed his way into her life.

A loud creaking floorboard behind her made her spin to face the rest of the shadowy foyer. Rain drummed, thunder crackled.

Lightning flashed, and her lungs filled like a spasm. A figure, tall and broad, was standing by a door beneath the stairs on the left, but then it was gone to darkness.

“Scared of the dark?” a deep voice teased, just as she was willing to dismiss the vision. It was real, and Jack Baker was standing there.

Gail’s lips worked for a second before she could make her voice cooperate, but the words weren’t coming to her as quick as she wanted them to.

“Uhm, I was just… I wanted to see the storm,” she finished lamely. She started to edge back toward the steps. “I love thunderstorms and Lucas doesn’t have any windows.”

Jack looked up and around them as if just noticing the rain.

“He’s gonna have to fix this. Where is that boy, anyway?”

Everything out of his mouth felt like a veiled threat. The way he stood, the way he smiled when he asked where Lucas was.

“Lucas went to town,” she said, as if this information would somehow protect her. She realized after she said it, that perhaps she had made the wrong choice, revealing that she was now alone in the house. Strobe flashes of lightning illuminated the broad-shouldered man, reflected off of the lenses of his glasses like flat glowing eyes.

“He shoulda put you somewhere safe… you know it ain’t good to wander ‘round here in the dark.” He came closer, a few strides away now, his fists balled. She didn’t see until another flicker of lightning that he was smiling. Gail’s stomach flipped.

“I’ll just go back to his room, he’ll be back any minute I’m sure,” she said with a smile, trying to swallow her heart back down to where it was supposed to be. Her hand tightened on the screwdriver. “I appreciate y’all lettin’ me stay here, it’s mighty decent of you…”

She didn’t know how to act without Lucas around. Out of sight, she adjusted her grip on the screwdriver to better stab a taller opponent. But she knew it wouldn’t stop him. She doubted it would even slow him down.

Instead of responding to her thin lie, he paused, as if listening. Gail could hear faint whispers in the dark beneath the sounds of the rain, though she couldn’t see the source or make out the words. A distinct sinking feeling in her stomach told her she knew damn well who it was.

“Well now, that’s very interestin’,” Jack said after a long moment, his benevolent smile flashing in the brief light of the storm. “My little girl says you ain’t much in the mood to play! That just isn’t gonna do. Eveline, well… she gets what she wants.”

Jack went for her at the same time that she bolted for the steps, started clambering up them on her hands and feet, scattering junk and papers that were collected in the edges. She got about a quarter
of the way up the staircase before a hand closed on her ankle and jerked her backwards.

She cracked her forehead on a step and blanked out in a spray of stars.

-------------------------

Disjointed imagery passed beneath her, of dingy concrete steps, and rusty metal grating. The back of Jack Baker’s legs and feet moved in and out of view. By the time the ringing in her ears subsided, she could hear, and feel, the vibrations coming from Jack’s chest as he hummed something.

The next moment she was laying flat on her back.

Gail’s body didn’t do what she told it to. She could only lay there, trapped in her own pounding head, vision shifty and doubled and queasy while flashes of an out-of-focus Jack Baker, grinning with satisfaction, dipped in and out of view.

He was saying something, but all she could hear was the throbbing rhythm of her heart.

Maybe she should have died, as hard as her head hit that step. Maybe she still would, she didn’t know the extent of her condition. All she remembered was that you weren’t supposed to go to sleep if you had a concussion. Unfortunately that wasn’t an issue.

She was wide awake when her vision started to right itself, and when all her other senses started to come back to her.

Jack was talking to himself. She heard the clatter of something heavy on a metal table somewhere else in the room.

She didn’t recognize the concrete ceiling. But it smelled like rotten mold and decomposing meat. Her brain was almost starting to get used to that stench to the point where it wasn’t even making her gag anymore.

Jack was singing something she didn’t recognize, slightly off key.

“…You’re standin’ too close to the flame. Once I mess with your mind, Your little heart won’t beat the same…”

He was out of view. She tried to move her arms, but she wasn’t surprised when she couldn’t.

She was strapped down tight to a table. She didn’t know what Jack was going to do with, or to, her. What Eveline wanted him to do, she supposed.

“… well I’m a ramblin’ man, don’t fool around with a ramblin’ man...”

Footsteps approached.

“Comin’ round, I see” Jack said, leaning over her. The look on his face was kindly. But his eyes were dead and empty behind his frames. “Good, good. We want you to feel everythin’.”

Gail’s breaths started to come shallow and fast. A hand slid over her belly and she squirmed. Thick fingers gripped her soft fat through her shirt and squeezed until it hurt. He made a low growl of appreciation before dipping back out of view. Stupid, animal panic gripped her.

She tested the straps holding her to the table. They were across her chest, hips, ankles. Her hands were cuffed, and so was her forehead, limiting what she could see to how far her eyes could move.
“I didn’t mean to upset her,” Gail croaked, not above begging. She was going to stay calm. Maybe she could reason her way out of this. And then, to the rest of the room, “you want to play, Eveline? I like Barbies.”

She heard a child’s giggles but she couldn’t tell where they were coming from, and Jack’s chuckle.

“You know you ain’t part of the family ‘til Eveline says so. An she don’t much like folks who take her gift without giving somethin’ back,” he said, walking back over. He had a pair of gritty forceps and a scalpel in his hands. “A strong-hearted little girl, my Eveline. She sure is somethin’, ain’t she? Best day o’ my life’s the day I found her…”

Panic rose, hot and acidic in Gail’s chest. She fought it down, even as Jack pulled her shirt up a little, and the waistband of her boxers down, exposing the widening part of her waist and the top of her hip.

She felt him pinch a piece of her skin on that side, face tight with concentration.

And then he started cutting.

The skin around the scalpel blade erupted in pain as it sliced through. The forceps pulled and tore. Gail made a strained noise behind her clenched teeth, vision swimming as her eyes watered. The only thing keeping her from losing it was the knowledge that it could be so much worse. At the moment it wasn’t very comforting.

Her right side was on fire. Somewhere in the room, she heard Eveline.

“I bet she tastes good, Papa Jack. Really fresh.”

Something pulled on the raw edges of the wound, and then was ripped away. Gail hissed and jerked on the straps, panting for the effort it took not to scream. She wasn’t a mindless animal. She wasn’t going to act like a fucking coward. She wasn’t going to shit herself. She kept up a steady stream of things she wasn’t going to do. It was the only thing she could do to keep other thoughts from edging in.

Out of the corner of her eye, Jack held a piece of her flesh, skin clinging to a thick layer of yellow fat, in front of his face. It was about three inches square and a couple deep, and jiggled when he shook it. Red droplets flung loose.

He bit his lower lip in a very Lucas-like expression of subdued excitement, and then he slid it into his mouth, dripping blood down his chin and into his white, scruffy beard.

“Mmmm MMM!” he grunted, his eyes rolling back with unreserved pleasure. Her side throbbed like a bee sting. She could feel her own blood pooling underneath her. Her arms were starting to hurt from straining against the straps, but she couldn’t stop.

“What is wrong with you?” Gail grated, forcing the words through her clenched teeth. Jack, who either ignored her or didn’t hear, swallowed thickly and let out an obscene, tremulous groan.

He chuckled, licking his lips with that bloody, too-long tongue.

“Boy, but do you taste good, just like she said. I just gotta have me some more of that…”

His fingers started poking and feeling around her again. Grabbed her hip, her thigh, felt around her ribs beneath her breasts, anywhere with some fat on it, making coarse, throaty noises as he did. She didn’t hear or sense Eveline anymore. It felt like no one else in the world existed outside of this
room, and no one would be able to stop this.

Her side where he’d cut him was prickling and itchy now more than it was throbbing. She struggled against the straps, but there was no relief for it. It felt much like her foot had when it started to grow back.

She thought, then, about what Lucas had said, about how the gift could also be a curse. Given the context, she saw new meaning in it. Her throat started working, an involuntary tremor when Jack found a piece he liked, on her soft inner thigh. It was too close, too intimate, and despite Gail’s determination, and all her bullheaded attitude, she started to weep.

“I just knew,” Jack said in his rumbling voice, “when I saw you at dinner… I just had to get me a taste. That boy might be an idiot, but he sure knows how to pick ‘em.”

He touched her skin with the edge of the scalpel.

“He ain't an idiot.”

Jack stopped cutting and Gail took advantage of the brief reprieve to breathe.

“What did you say?” He adjusted his glasses, hovering over her upper body. Gail forced herself to breathe through her teeth. Her spit bubbled at the corners of her mouth and she sniffled the snot that was trying to spill down her face.

“Young boy Lucas. I said he ain't a fuckin’ idiot,” she repeated, savoring the way her voice was starting to regain some semblance of strength, partly, she knew, because of how much this angered her. “What the hell kind of father are you that you can't see that?”

Jack’s toothy smile faded a bit and disappeared beneath his overgrown mustache.

She thought she saw a shadow of sadness pass over his features. But like a cloud in a swift wind, it was gone in an instant.

“Well ain't that sweet. He musta given that sweet cunt o’ yours a good workin’ over. He’s got you as loyal as a bred bitch.” He winked as if what he’d just said had been a sly sideways reference instead of the horrifying crudity it was. Gail wondered if a side effect of the ‘gift’ was a lack of tact.

“You nasty old fuck,” she hissed.

Undeterred, he started cutting again and she clamped her teeth down to keep her pathetic whimpers in her throat. She found room to be grateful he wasn’t trying to cut at her genitals, but as soon as she thought it, she knew she couldn’t assume he wouldn’t.

Frantically, she looked around herself from what she could see. She didn’t even know where she was. She remembered stairs… and the concrete ceiling over her head was different from the rest of the house that she’d seen.

Pain knifed through her leg as Jack peeled away more skin, her pelvic floor muscles tight as a fist against the nearness of the sensation, and her thoughts blanked out for a second before racing ahead faster.

Had he brought her back to the underground place she’d first gone to? She sniffled again and got a whiff of dirt and rot again. The mold. There, at the corner of her eye to the right, she could see that nasty liquid black webbing, bubbled and corrupted. Panic was a coppery tang at the back of her
throat at the thought of the swampy black creatures with gaping maws. She focused on that, rather
than the agony, now dulling to a throb that matched time with her racing heart.

Jack was holding up a long strip of her inner thigh skin now, examining it from every angle. She
tried to ignore the disgusting noises he made as he tongued it and slurped it into his mouth. She
could already feel the agonizing itch as the skin tried to heal itself, and for a brief second her mind
went into an irrational tangent, imagery where she was strapped to a table for days, months, years,
harvested for parts only to have them regrow.

_No no no_, she thought to herself, scolding and severe. _You ain’t gonna stay here. You’re gonna get out. Lucas…_

She started crying again, but now she was thinking of Lucas. He was going to come back. He’d
know as soon as he got in that she tried to escape again when the power failed. He might be angry.
Enough to let his dad devour her alive.

Jack’s attentions were straying above her waist now. The brief relief she felt for the fact that he
wasn’t going for the flesh between her legs was shot when he started walking his fingers
underneath her shirt. Gail started hyperventilating, thinking he meant to go for her breasts next. He
started singing again.

“ _Left a girl in West Virginia, up there where that green grass grows…”_

His hand went between her breasts and lay there, with his middle finger lightly probing the dip
between her collar bones.

“Maybe some of them… sweetbreads next…” he murmured to himself, licking his lips.

Gail wasn’t a chef, but she knew from her love of horror movies that Hannibal Lecter liked the
sweetbreads, and that they were some kind of organ. Jack pulled his hand out from under her shirt
and he left her range of sight, humming that same song. She could hear him rummaging through
tools.

Gail started jerking against her restraints. They held tight, but the table she was strapped to
wobbled. Lacking any other plan, she kept going, until she felt the table start to sway and rattle.
Maybe, if she could knock it over, she might get enough slack to… but Jack was coming back, and
held a stabilizing hand on the table, holding it still. He was smiling as if this were a joke.

He had a bone saw in his other hand.

“Now hold still, this won’t take but a minute…”

Gail started to scream and thrash against the straps, but Jack was already starting to cut through the
shirt with a pair of surgical scissors.

“Gail?” someone hollered from far away. Not someone, but Lucas.

“Lucas!” she wailed louder. “Lucas you better get your daddy off me or I SWEAR TO FUCK I’M
GONNA-“ her useless threat was lost to sobbing.

A door on the left side of the room flew open with a deafening bang.

“Daddy- _what the FUCK are you doin’ with my girlfriend?!_” Lucas roared. Gail had never heard
him sound like that before. Jack stopped cutting and held his hands up in a placating gesture.
“Now son, don’t fret, I’m happy to share-“

Gail kept crying, now with relief, as a sopping wet Lucas, hood down, flew at his father. Jack dropped the saw with a clatter, laughing as he tried to fend off Lucas.

“That’s right, boy, you ready to be a man?” Jack taunted, pushing back against Lucas.

“You old fuck, I’m gonna kill yew!” Lucas snarled, landing a good hit on Jack that sent him staggering against something. Heavy metal things scattered to the floor with a crash, but Gail couldn’t see. Instead, she started rocking the table again.

Sounds of the fight devolved into animalistic growls and snarls and half-formed cursing. Gail wasn’t sure Lucas would win this. Jack was a much bigger man, and she wouldn’t have been surprised if he’d played football in his youth.

She got the momentum going until the table swayed back and forth, and with a final jerk, tipped past the point of return.

The table landed hard on its side and Gail sagged against the straps. The surgical scissors were within her reach. Her fingers strained to grab it.

“Eveline told me, she said Gail might taste good,” Jack hooted. “And she does, boy you got a good eye!” Jack managed to guffaw before it was cut short with a crack and a grunt as, Gail imagined, Lucas’s fist landed on his jaw.

More crashes and sounds of chaos, and dull thuds of bone hitting flesh.

Gail got the surgical scissors in hand and awkwardly started to hack away at the leather strap around her wrist, whimpering involuntarily in her mindless urgency. It was worn and soft enough that it cut easily enough, and soon her hand was free. She started at the other wrist, cutting faster now.

There was a meaty snap and Lucas’s howl of pain shot straight to her core before it terminated abruptly.

The fighting sounds stopped. One ragged breath was all she heard.

A figure, limping, approached from the foot of the downed table and Gail’s eyes flickered to it, terrified of what she might see.

Her fears were fully realized as Jack Baker, bloodied and bruised, and missing part of his cheek exposing an entire row of his back teeth, stood there panting. From the look of triumph on his face, she knew Lucas was dead.

“Where d’you think you’re goin’? We were just gettin’ started!” he panted, jeering.

Gail cut her chest strap free as he reached for the bottom corners of the table. With more ease than should have been natural, he jerked it, and her on it, back upright, whipping her neck painfully. Her chest was free, and she sliced through the strap on her forehead in time to heave her upper body into a more defensible position, but her eyes landed on the sight behind him.

Lucas’s body was crumpled in the corner beneath what looked like body lockers for a morgue. His head was flung back on a neck that was twisted at an unnatural angle. Clouded eyes saw nothing as they peered out from his bloodied and bruised face.
He wasn’t going to save her now. He wasn’t going to be doing anything anymore.

Despair battled fear when Jack picked the bone saw up off the floor.

“Maybe I’ll get Marguerite to fry up your liver for family dinner night…”

Gail wielded the surgical scissors, trying to calculate the best place to stick them because she figured she might only get once chance.

Movement in the corner tore her attention away from Jack.

Lucas’s body was twitching. At that moment, Jack grabbed her wrist and wrenched it backwards. She felt the snap of her bone straight to her spine and uttered a scream as the scissors clattered to the floor.

Through bleary eyes, she saw Lucas’s crumpled figure start to move more. His head, loose on his neck, lolled forward.

His eyes cleared and focused. And then, grabbing onto the wall, he started to rise.

Gail was in too much pain to think. She just wanted it to stop.

As Jack started to push her back on the table, far stronger than she could ever hope to resist, Lucas came up behind him. He had a baseball bat in his hand, though where he’d gotten it, she wasn’t sure. He pulled it back, and with an expression of manic rage, he smashed it into the back of Jack’s head.

Chunks of bone and brain splattered Gail’s face and front, Jack’s body folded, and he collapsed to the floor. He was missing half his skull. Lucas gave his limp body a good poke before dropping the bloodied bat to the floor next to him.

“He won’t be getting’ up fer awhile,” he rasped in a broken voice, like a smoker with a tracheotomy, popping his neck joints with a satisfied grunt.

Gail lost it.

“You were dead,” she shrieked, starting to hit him with her unbroken hand, and then, “where the fuck were you? Why the fuck did you leave me alone?! Your fucking FATHER was trying to EAT ME ALIVE YOU FUCKING FUCK-“

She was angry and confused and horrified, and unable to process all of that while her entire left arm was a throbbing mass of agony. Lucas held his hands out in a gesture of peace, and took her weak blows with an expression of amused pity on his battered face.

Lucas, eyes wide and brows up, inched toward her, moving like he was facing down a rabid animal, and slowly reached for her shoulders. She hit him one more time, but the second he touched her, she deflated.

She buried her face against his chest, crying ugly and messy as he pulled her against him with his cold, damp arms. The strength she felt under the waterlogged fabric of his hoodie anchored her and she closed her eyes and tried to forget everything else but the swampy wet dog smell on him.

“It’s alright,” he said, still sounding like his throat wasn’t fully healed, stroking her back. Through pain-dimmed eyes, she saw him pull out a pocket knife with the other hand and saw through the leather straps over her hips and feet. “That old bear ain’t getting’ up fer a good spell at least, I got
Gail clung to him, holding her wrist away to keep from jarring it, as he slid his arm beneath her crooked knees and lifted her. She never wanted to leave that feeling of weightlessness behind, like all the worries of the world were somewhere miles below on the ground.

“Luuucaas,” a child’s sing-song voice chided. She felt him tense underneath her, and she stifled her silent weeping into the folds of his lowered hood. No more, she couldn’t fucking handle it.

“Where are you going with my toy?”

She didn’t know how she knew, but Lucas was angry. The rage was almost palpable, coming off him like a dense cloud. He took a deep breath, and when he spoke, none of that anger bled into his words. He sounded calm. Almost teasing.

“She’s only family if I want her to be,” Eveline answered with a dangerous cut to her words. She sounded nearer. Gail couldn’t bring herself to look. She stayed behind the false safety of her clenched eyelids and tried to focus on anything but what Jack had done to her wrist.

“Now Evie, come on. There’s no reason to be jealous. Just ‘cuz I got a girlfriend, she ain’t gonna replace you. I’m still your big brother, an’ nothin’s gonna change that, okay?” Lucas’s hand tightened on Gail’s leg, reassuring and hushing her at once.

There was a moment of silence.

“Promise?” Eveline asked finally, sounding small and more like a child than she ever had.

“I swear on mamma’s grave,” he said with an audible grin.

“Your mamma ain’t dead yet!” she tittered. Lucas chuckled, adjusted his hold on Gail. She bit her cheek to silence the noise she almost made when her wrist was jolted.

“I mean it all the same. You know I got you them root beer barrels you like so much from town. I’ll bring ‘em to ya as soon as I get everythin’ sorted, a’right?”

“Oh okay. I love you, Lucas,” Eveline said with an eerie lack of inflection or genuine emotion. To Gail’s ears, it sounded like a threat and an ultimatum.

“I love you too, little sister,” Lucas answered as easy as a summer breeze.

And then he was moving again. Gail stole a look. Eveline was gone, if she’d ever physically been there. The room behind them, which upon further inspection had indeed once been some kind of morgue, was a mess. Jack’s body was unmoving, but she thought she saw the flesh writhing on his face where the bat had taken a chunk out of his skull. She clenched her eyes shut again and focused on Lucas’s heartbeat.

She could feel his breath on the top of her head, and she honed in on that warmth, and the warmth of his body against hers as he carried her. His hands, as always, were cold, but she didn’t mind. She never wanted him to let her go.

She couldn’t stop the small noises of pain as he started to ascend stairs, as his gait shot tiny sharp bolts of agony through her wrist, but his quiet shushes and nonsensical soothing words, spoken into the crown of her head, helped.
As he carried her, she could see through stolen glances that the morgue room had been just beneath the main house. And though this was strange, it was just more of the same. Now there was only Lucas carrying her like she weighed nothing at all.

He carried her back up to the second floor, and as he passed through the door, he kicked it shut behind him. It sealed with a series of beeps.

“Fuckin’ piece of shit…” he muttered. “Shoulda put a failsafe on it.”

He brought Gail back to his room, which was now illuminated by the lamp, and carefully set her on the couch.

He lowered to a crouch in front of her, looking her over where his eyes ultimately landed on her broken arm. A number of large cardboard boxes were stacked haphazardly in front of the door to the back room, stamped with a food shipping company. She was puzzling over them when Lucas, shoving his sleeves up to his elbows, took her left arm and examined it more closely.

His lips were pressed into a straight line, his brows tight so that a tense line formed between them. The brief glance Gail gave her wrist nearly made her faint, and she rolled her eyes toward the ceiling to allay the nausea. It didn’t hurt as much as it had at first, but the way it looked… her wrist wasn’t supposed to bend that way, twisted sideways and folded back nearly flush with her forearm. Knobby bones jutted against her skin, and black bruising was spread around the entire area like a shitty abstract tattoo.

“It’s already startin’ to heal… I’m gonna have to re-break it,” Lucas said to her. He was studying her face. She shook her head. He offered a weak smile, but he had that same look of pity in the set of his eyebrows. “If I don’t, it’s gonna get stuck this way and it’s gonna hurt worse later.”

She kept shaking her head, and she didn’t give a fuck about later. Her eyes were tearing up again and she let them. A tremor started in her chest, and she knew it would become a sob if she let it.

“I don’t care,” she said in a shaky voice. Lucas smiled a little bigger and shook his head at her with infuriating kindness. He stroked her forearm.

“It’ll just hurt for a minute, Gail, I promise.”

“You left me alone with your fuckin’ family,” she said as more hot tears spilled over. The line of his lips pressed tighter.

“You shoulda stayed in here where I left you,” he said without anger, nodding to the discarded rope on the floor. “You prob’ly woulda been fine in here til the power came back on.”

Gail snarled at him.

“You know I had to try,” she grated, not sure what exactly she was angry about. Lucas nodded.

“Ah know… that ya did,” he said with a sigh, propping his chin up on his palm with his other hand. “I’m sorry.”

What little anger she had bled out and she sniffled and swiped her nose with the back of her other forearm.

“You fuckin’ better be.”

“I am. Maybe you know now that hall lock is as much to keep you in as to keep them out. It won’t
stop Evie, but the rest of ‘em don’t bother me much.”

Gail sniffed wetly. Something changed in his expression, then, the same thing she’d seen before, like she was a specimen he was studying. This time she couldn’t overlook it.

“What? Why are you lookin’ at me like that,” she demanded. He lightly stroked the inside of her tender forearm with his thumb.

“We can talk about all that, but first you gotta let me fix this. Your wrist’s all jacked the fuck up.” And then, as if he’d just heard the accidental pun in what he said, he snickered. She glared at him and he cleared his throat. “Sorry. Uh… no way to tell ya this, but this’s gonna hurt like a sum’bitch.”

Gail shook her head again, but this time it was in resignation. Lucas cupped the side of her face with his other hand and locked eyes with her. Usually that look of pity would have been infuriating. But right now, Gail was wallowing in it.

With little encouragement, he drew her down off the couch, holding her hurt arm out to the side. He shifted his legs to sit indian-style, and she straddled his lap. Anticipating the pain, she buried her face in his neck.

He still smelled like wet dog, but underneath it was the scent that was uniquely him. The same smell that saturated his bed pillow and the couch, and everything else. She breathed deep.

He didn’t give warning. One-handed, he jammed his thumb into the place where her hand and forearm met at an unnatural angle, and straightened it against his other fingers. The bones cracked and grated, and Gail let go of the muffled wail she’d been holding back, into the damp fabric of his shoulder. Her arm was on fire.

“I’m sorry,” he grunted, and with another twist, numbness flooded her where he was resetting the bones. Gail sobbed, mindless. He rocked her on his lap, kissed the top of her head, and held her broken wrist still in an iron grip, impervious to her weak attempts to pull it away.

Waves of agony and nausea alternated between pins and needles and Gail felt her teeth sink into something soft and pliant. Lucas’s throat bobbed and he grunted as hot, salty blood flooded her mouth, but he didn’t let up with the soothing nothings he spoke into her mess of curls.

Slowly, the agony started to subside. The heat lessened to a mildly irritating prickle, and Lucas’s grip loosened. Gail became aware that he wasn’t holding onto her arm anymore, that he was just hugging her to him and petting her back. She also realized that she’d bitten him pretty severely, not that he was the least bit bothered. She pulled her mouth off of him and bloody spit drooled onto his hoodie. A deep and ugly bite mark was starting to heal on the side of his neck, blood seeping thick and slow.

“See? That wasn’t so bad.”

Gail took a deep, shuddering breath, and then let it out again in a weary laugh. She wiped her face off on her shoulder.

“That was fucking awful.”

He shrugged.

“Not as bad as havin’ yer neck broken, Ah’ll tell you that much.”
Gail stared in wonder. She remembered now, all the things that had preceded this and her laughter died. She shook her head, still not quite believing it herself, though she’d seen it with her own eyes.

“You can’t die,” she stated. He shrugged again, a blank look on his face.

“Donno. Haven’t yet, an’ believe me, I’ve tried.”

The meaning of his words sank in slowly. She leaned back on his lap so that she could rest on the couch, looking at him discerningly. His hands slid down to rest on the tops of her straddled thighs. She never would have thought he’d be someone who would try to kill himself. But for once, she didn’t see any layers of falsities, just him.

“That’s dark, man,” she said with a bit of sadness, massaging her still-healing wrist. Lucas’s eyes dropped, but he didn’t seem to share the same feelings about it.

“Eh… it was awhile ago. Ate a bullet from one o’ my old man’s handguns. Next thing I knew, I was wakin’ up covered in my own blood and piss with a fucker of a headache.” He pursed his lips and ran a hand over the top of his scalp as if remembering the pain. He snorted, then. “Also tried feedin’ muhself to the gators out back once. Don’t really know what happened to the one ‘at swallowed me. I think it kinda… exploded. Rather not go through that again.”

Gail didn’t want to laugh. The whole thing was absurd, surreal. Here she was, talking to what was, essentially, an immortal. Neck broken, gunshot to the head, devoured by gators… she almost wanted to know what else he’d come back from. What would have to happen so that he didn’t. And for the first time, Gail wasn’t thinking about her own escape.

“Did Evie make you do it?” she asked. She was starting to develop a hatred in her heart for that girl the likes of which she’d never before experienced.

He shook his head, dead serious.

“Nah… that was me tryin’ to get away. She don’t let go so easy though. Which uhh… brings me to the topic at hand.” He cleared his throat and brought a finger to his mouth, eyeing her as he puzzled over his words. “Remember earlier… when Eveline told you to bite off your tongue?”

Gail scoffed and leaned back against the couch further with her arms on the cushion so her wrists dangled over the front. She didn’t miss how his eyes went to her breasts for the briefest of seconds, as if he were physically incapable of not looking.

“Course I remember. You don’t forget shit like that.”

“Yeah well… thing is, you shouldn’t’a been able to resist her. Eveline’s gift don’t work that way.”

“Didn’t you say something about it happening over time? Like in bits and pieces?”

He shrugged, drawing his hands down her thighs, stroking her skin absently. Whatever Jack had taken from her had long healed, the pain forgotten. All that was left was Lucas’s long-fingered white hands raising goosebumps wherever they touched her blood-crusted leg.

“Either she’s there or she ain’t,” he stated, arching a brow. “If she’s there, there ain’t no arguin’ with ‘er like you did.”

Her eyes lighted on the door to the hall that was wide open still. At the moment, Lucas didn’t seem concerned about Eveline showing up.
“You’re the one that knows shit about this, not me. What’s that mean?”

When she looked back at Lucas, she was momentarily taken aback by the unreserved excitement shining in his wide open eyes.

“Ah don’t know... ‘cept... maybe...” he chewed on his lower lip and slid his hands up to her hips, startling her with the way his hands wrapped around them, possessive and a little overeager. He leaned forward and dropped his voice. “Maybe yer like me. Maybe Evie don’t got a hold on you like everyone else... after all, you never ate none of that shit my mamma likes to serve up. You were only exposed to it through uhh...” He screwed up his eyes and the end of his sentence devolved into snorting. Gail rolled her eyes, only half-annoyed with his persistent immaturity.

“So... what you’re sayin’ is... you’re immune. And since I got it from you... so’m I?”

“I might need ta send a coupla emails...” he said, half to himself. “Fuckin-a... what if that’s what happened? What if... what if I ain’t alone no more?”

Gail didn’t know what to say to that. She was still stressed from the whole clusterfuck of a day, enough that she was sure the gravity of what he was saying would hit her later. Now, though, she didn’t want to talk about it anymore. She didn’t want to talk about Eveline or the ‘gift’, or any of the fucked up shit she was starting to take for granted.

And besides, Lucas, more animated and unguarded than she’d seen him look in a while, didn’t seem to have his mind on such dark matters.

With his hands creeping behind her back, he leaned forward and started to gently kiss her cheek, her jaw, her neck.

“Hold on,” she said, without stopping him. “Why?”

“Why?” he repeated, breathing her in noisily through his nose and then groaning as if he were getting high off the smell of her.

“Why ain’t you... why aren’t we affected?”

He snorted and leaned back enough that she could see his shit-eating grin. Now he glanced over his shoulder to the door, but something told Gail that if Eveline were around, they would both know. They’d feel her. His hands snaked under the back of her shirt, spanning her waist with his fingers.

“Well... I got some friends in uhh... high places, Gail,” he sniggered, his brows tightening in an expression of mischievous pleasure that made her smile even if she didn’t know why. “Y’see... there’s a lot more to this shit than ya think... layers o’ intrigue. Shady groups with more money’n they know what to do with, ya know the type. I got a good thing goin’ right now, sure, but not like they could blame me fer gettin’ a bit bored after two years of doin’ this shit by myself.”

She smirked as he leaned in to resume where he’d left off.

“Yer tellin’ me you’re a spy?” She asked. He snickered against her cheek and worked his arms up higher under her shirt. “Boy, that’s the worst pick-up line I ever heard.”

“How ‘bout if I told you I was a criminal mastermind who can’t die?” he murmured.

He had a point.

“Lucas,” she said, finding it a little harder to think. She was tired, but she could sit here all day and
let him do his thing. “Door.”

Lucas growled. He slipped his hand down to her ass and got a good handful of it before he started to rise. Somehow he managed to pick her up and bombard her face with greedy presses of his lips as he stumbled to the door. He slammed it shut with a foot. She clung to him laughing as he bore her back to the couch, this time dropping her into the sinking cushions.

She really liked that couch.

“We gotta get you outta these clothes,” he said with a wicked grin.

“You too. You stink like a—” her words turned into a groan when his hand found her breast and squeezed.

“Well I went around half the stores in the fuckin’ parrish tryin’ to find some goddamn lotion for my woman,” he said, peeling her shirt over her head. She started to unzip his hoodie, amused with how much he favored that kind of top, and that he never seemed to wear anything under them. Or his pants. “An’ hair conditioner.”

She laughed to think that Lucas considered hair conditioner some hoity-toity luxury, but then he barely had any hair as it was. She ran a hand over his scalp now, pushed his mouth against hers. The other hand, the one he’d managed to set correctly without much effort, roamed over the bare skin of his sunken belly and the soft hairs there.

“Oh fuck,” he murmured between gentle nips and licks. “Forgot the food. Shit’s thawed by now—”

She slipped her hand under the waistband of his jeans and fingered the base of his growing cock, and with his whimper the food was forgotten. His hips jerked forward and now he was scrambling to undo his belt.

She made it as difficult for him as possible, arching up against him and tonguing his mouth like she was dying of thirst. Lucas moaned into her and, in a fit of impatience, whipped the entire belt out of the belt loops and threw it on the floor. Gail helped him out of his jeans and hoodie and then it was just his naked body crushing hers into the soft cushions. He was rock hard, but he wasn’t trying to use it just yet. She was still wearing the boxers, anyway, stained with her own blood.

She would have enjoyed a good hard fuck any time, certainly with him. But right now he was savoring her like a delicacy and she wasn’t going to stop him. Maybe he knew on some level that she needed something a little softer, anyway, to get past the ugliness from before.

“You get my tampons?” she snickered as he painted her hot skin with his moist tongue, down the line of her throat. Both of his hands grabbed her breasts and kneaded them, firm, but shy of discomfort. He looked up at her from where his chin was sitting in her cleavage with a devilish smile.

“Yeah I got yer fuckin’ shit. Next time yer comin’ with me. Never been so scared in my life. So many… goddamn… choices.”

She snickered, gratified that he’d done as she’d asked. Yeah, she’d like that, she decided. Going shopping with him. Tearing up the town, they could own the place with their unusual condition, if they wanted. She let herself get lost in the fantasy of some kind of future with Lucas as he kissed his way to the peak of her breast. She wasn’t going to let reality ruin this.

And then that long tongue of his slipped out and slurped the tight bud with shameless relish. A line
of heat shot down her spine straight to her pussy and she mashed his head down into her breast harder, sighing with a smile. He flicked her other nipple with his fingers and now she pushed herself up into him, needing more. If the couch wasn’t going to swallow her, Lucas was.

She wiggled her hips so his stomach rested between her thighs, needing that contact against her crotch. She could feel herself getting slick. It didn’t take much when it came to him, it seemed.

He groaned against her nipple and suckled, with one arm wrapped behind her back, holding her in place as if she weren’t already rooted there.

She stroked his upper back, the hard edges of his shoulder blades and the wiry muscle sliding beneath his skin. The hand toying with her other tit started to creep lower and Gail bit her lip to stifle the needy noises she wanted to make. Ever the gentleman, he gripped the softness of her belly, building up the anticipation before going under the waistband of the boxers.

She pretended that they were just picking up where the left off that morning, that everything in between had been a bad dream.

“Lucas,” she breathed, and the hungry sound he made when she spoke his name made her insides clench. “I thought it was the gift that was making me feel this way. But I… I think I…” She couldn’t find the words. Nothing seemed to fit what she was trying to say. She wasn’t good at coming up with pretty words. When his fingers found her slippery warmth and probed gently between the folds, she stopped trying.

A tight ball started to form in her chest. She cradled his head against her chest with one hand and peered down at him. Her other hand was clawed into the skin between his shoulder blades, as if she were scared he’d disappear if she didn’t hold on tight.

Lucas had his cheek rested against her breastbone, and he was looking right up at her with his mouth open. His eyes were shining and his cheeks had spots of pink high on the bone. His fingertips, cool against her scalding, moist flesh, started to roll around the folds surrounding her clit. Gentle and regular, he stirred up the warmth until it started to spill over and spread.

“I ain’t gonna leave you again,” he said thickly, swallowing hard. She felt her eyes burning and turned them up to the ceiling to stop them from doing what she was afraid they’d do. It was stupid, stupid. And so fucking perfect. She felt Lucas’s lips flutter against the side of her breast, and then to the dip in her collarbone, to the lump in her throat.

This time when their mouths met, it was urgent, ravenous. She bit his lip and he made a choked noise, but he didn’t bite her back. The fucker was all sweetness, now, something she never would have expected, nor thought to expect.

When her hips started working against him, he took the cue and picked up his pace. He plucked and gently pulled at the tender bead of flesh. Some other finger stroked the space between her cunt and clit, churning the fire until she ached, tilting her hips up, begging wordlessly. Lucas didn’t make her suffer. She could feel his thumb rubbing her clit, now just one mass of nerves, while he stretched his other fingers and dipped them into her. He hooked them around so the sensations worked together seamlessly.

He breathed ragged gasps into her mouth and she obliged the same, no longer present enough to kiss him with any accuracy. She could feel his hard cock grinding against her, as much from her own motions as his, and the wetness streaking her belly told her how badly he wanted to fuck her, but at the moment, all that seemed to matter to him was her.
She watched him with bleary vision, and not once did he break away from their locked eyes. His lips curled in fierce focus as he plunged his fingers in deeper, dragging his calloused fingertips through the ribbed flesh just at the entrance and never letting up on her swollen and tender clit.

She was on fire, barely conscious of how she was fucking herself onto his hand. The warmth of him, and the hard ridges of his chest and ribs bore down on her. Her hands clawed down his back, and he shuddered. His hand worked at her furiously until she couldn’t tell one sensation from another.

The tightness grew in her hips and she spread her thighs open as far as she could, until her hips strained, desperate to alleviate the ache. She didn’t know if she actually said the words ‘fuck me’ but Lucas got the message all the same.

He only let go for a second, as long as it took to tug her boxers off and pop his dick into her clenching hole and push into her. The feeling of being stretched set off a chain reaction, and without any further help, Gail came with his lips sealed over hers, swallowing her hoarse cries.

Lucas thrust into her, carrying her onward through the waves of heat and making them stronger, dragging them out longer until her eyes rolled back and she forgot herself entirely.

Lucas curled his long body over hers like a shell, burying his face in her curls. One arm was wrapped around her side while the hand that had been inside of her gripped her face. She started to come down, even as his cock started to bring up more delicious pangs of building pleasure, and without a second thought, took his damp fingers into her mouth. She suckled the sweet tang of herself off of them and he whimpered, watching her mouth with feverish eyes.

His hips rocked, steady but smooth, filling her to the point of sweet pain before drawing back again. Her legs were jelly, flopping in time with his movements and she just let him take her, gave herself to him without a second thought. Even through the climax, she felt that tight ball in her chest grow and she sobbed a wordless, plaintive plea for him to keep going, to never stop.

“I fuckin love you…” he groaned, sweaty against her face, holding her tighter just shy of squeezing the breath out of her. Gail’s eyes started burning again. She grabbed his mouth with hers to hide her hot tears from him.

A tremor passed along his spine and with a throaty noise, she felt his cock throb against the taut wall of her cunt. He fucked her through the waves as he came, spilling into her and leaking out around him until they were one sweaty, sticky mess tangled together on the couch.

Even then, greedy to taste her, he nuzzled her neck, licking the salty sweat off of her skin. His bristly scruff tickled her and she giggled like a giddy teenager when it sent shivers down her arms.

They didn’t move from their positions for a long time, until their breaths slowed, and then until Gail’s hips started to feel stiff. Then, using the sheet to sort of half-assed clean up the mess, he slipped into his place behind her with his face pressed against the back of her head, same as earlier. Except now, she was comforted by the feeling of his narrow body behind hers.

He traced lazy lines up and down her arm, and Gail thought she might doze off like this. He certainly seemed like he was.

She could get used to this. But by the way he was fidgeting, she could tell he wanted to say something. She didn’t think she could handle any more emotional confessions.

“I have a uhh… awkward question ta ask you,” he said, clearing his throat. She steeled herself,
awake again, wondering what he would consider awkward.

“Hm?”

“Well uh… I guess I never thought about it ‘til now, seein’ as how I ain’t been with no one else… but uh…”

Gail knew, then, what he was getting at and laughed.

“Idiot,” she said sliding his hand to her waist and covering it with hers. “I got an I.U.D. put in. Don’t need to fill the world with anymore trash like me.”

“A what now?”

“I.U.D. Means a thing they shove up into my uterus so I can’t get knocked up.” By his long sigh of relief, Gail knew she’d hit on what had only now occurred to him. “Good thing one of us has half a brain at least.”

“You ain’t trash,” he grinned into her hair, wrapping his leg through hers and tangling their fingers together. “Yer a fuckin queen.”

It was too corny to be insincere, and for that she was more than a little touched.

“Swamp queen, maybe,” she snickered, and followed with a yawn. Lucas made a contented noise and, after a deep breath that pressed his ribs against her back, he seemed to settle.

As he dozed off, Gail was only mildly disconcerted with the fact that he hadn’t considered what could have happened, had she not already had her own situation taken care of. What would even come of a baby born into this situation? She didn’t want to think about it, so she let her mind stay blissfully blank as she drifted off in his arms.

-------------------------

Her bladder woke her not long after she’d fallen asleep.

Not wanting to disturb him, she carefully slipped out from under his arm. He stirred and mumbled a complaint, but otherwise didn’t seem totally aware.

Gail padded naked down the hallway and to the bathroom, scratching her ass and yawning.

On the counter by the sink was a three-pack of toothbrushes and a new tube of toothpaste. She saw to her needs, groggy and zoning out on the toilet. After that, she took her time and scrubbed the stale sour taste out of her mouth with her new toothbrush, smirking when she considered that this was usually one of the signs that a fling was starting to get more serious. She’d have to find a place to keep her tampons, just as an added invasion of his personal space. She spat the foamy paste into the sink before she remembered the water didn’t work. Oh well.

On the rim of the bathtub was what looked like an economy-sized container of hair conditioner with flowers and fruit on the label. She sighed dreamily, thinking of the man back in the office going out of his way to buy this for her, scanning the numerous brands and types, before picking the one with the most horrendously girly label. Next time she’d ask for some hair oil, maybe some leave-in conditioner.

She did a half-assed once-over of her face using the single shard of broken mirror. She looked the same but… somehow… more ashen. The shadows under her eyes seemed deeper and her eyes…
they were the same near-black brown color, but there was a strange tint to them, like a thin oily sheen. She thought of how Lucas’s eyes looked, and Jack’s, and was uncomfortable with her own reflection, suddenly. She hoped that all she needed was more sleep.

Rubbing her arms, she decided to sleep now and try to recover from the terrible day.

But on her way back, she noticed that the door to his workroom wasn’t locked this time.

With a surreptitious glance to the office, and the sound of Lucas’s deep, steady breathing, she decided to poke her head inside.

She reached around the door to find the light switch, and light flooded the table. The hand traps he’d tested on her before were in pieces, scattered with various tools. By the blade sitting there, it seemed like he’d taken her advice to heart.

She was almost ready to go back to the room and join him for a good snuggle when something caught her eye. A small, green blinking light.

Eyeing the floor for small hazards that might hurt her bare feet, she made her way over to the back cabinet where the TV was sitting.

There, on top of the TV, plugged into a wall charger, was her cellphone.

Her pulse leaped into her ears and she swallowed, her mouth suddenly dry and feeling gritty with toothpaste.

With a shaking hand, she picked it up and turned on the screen.

Her stomach flipped inside of her and she felt cold all of a sudden. And paranoid. She looked behind her, but the hallway was empty. She didn’t sense Eveline, either. She was alone with this. She even considered that Maybe Lucas had seen the messages, but it wasn’t possible without the right PIN.

She put in the code to unlock it, and noted in passing that by the date, she’d been in the Baker house for four days. Just four.

Immediately, 4 unread message notifications filled the screen, all from the same caller.

Beaumont, or at least his most recent number.

The earliest message was from the same night as the robbery, but it seemed there was no reception anywhere but in this part of the house. Chewing on her lip hard enough to split the skin, she read the first one.

‘J not answering. Call me.’

The next one was from the early hours the next morning.

‘Saw u on the news. U fucked up. Where r u? Wheres J?’

He sent another later on. She estimated that she’d been struggling through Lucas’s puzzle at the time, unaware that Beaumont had been trying to contact her, and him unaware that she wasn’t receiving any of his texts.

‘U better be dead. Else ur gonna be.’
She could imagine that one spoken in Beaumont’s cool, honey-smooth voice and a cold pit opened in her gut. From anyone else, it might have been laughable. From him, it was deadly serious.

The last message was sent probably around the time Lucas was destroying her composure with his tongue in this very room.

*I know u aint dead. Also know u haven’t left the state. Enjoy ur money while u can.*

“Beaumont, you beautiful asshole,” she said without humor.

He was fucking dangerous. He didn’t care about the money, he had plenty of that. What he cared about was his reputation. And by his measure, she’d threatened it. He had no idea what she’d actually been through. Clearly, he assumed she’d just run off with the cash. As loyal as she’d been to him as his gun for the past couple of years, she would have been insulted if she weren’t so on edge by the new threat he posed, regardless of the nightmarish situation she’d stumbled into.

With another glance to the door, she began furiously typing. Her short, shallow breaths seemed loud in the room, which was otherwise eerily silent.

*’Trapped in hillbilly hell. They got J. Ur money’s safe. Get me out. Sending coords.’*

She tapped the geotag button and her thumb hovered over the send button.

Images flew through her head, of really leaving this place, and burning it to the fucking ground just like she told Lucas she’d do, first chance she got. She also told him she’d gut him in his sleep, but that sure as fuck wasn’t going to happen anymore. Things had changed. She’d changed, and she wasn’t sure that it bothered her anymore.

Maybe it was everything catching up to her finally, maybe it was the fact that she hadn’t eaten in a day or so, but she couldn’t stop quaking.

She shook her head. She needed to do this.

She forced a tense smile, and then she hit ‘send.’

She hit the factory reset on her phone before putting it back exactly as it was.

Back in the room, she looked down at Lucas’s sleeping face, mouth open and drooling, and she took her place at his front. He tightened his arm around her and rumbled contentedly, and with a plan hatching in her head, Gail wiggled into the curve of his body and let herself sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! I hope no one minds the creative liberties I took with how the ‘gift’ works. Please tip your writer! I accept payment in the form of comments and kudos ; ) every word means a lot to me

If you're interested in the playlist I've thrown together for this story, go here.
Lucas was already awake by the time Gail started to surface from her sleep, had been for hours. When she woke up, he was fucking around on the internet and listening to some music through headphones loud enough that she could hear the steady cracking beat through them. Somehow Gail slept through him putting away the food, as evidenced by the empty boxes sitting in front of the door to the back room. She couldn’t remember the last time she’d slept so heavy.

She sat up and rubbed her eyes, yawned and stretched. Then she sat there, staring at the back of his hooded head as it bobbed to the music as she let the grogginess subside some. The hand that wasn’t on the mouse clicking around some web forum or other was drumming on the armrest of his desk chair.

Gail absently rubbed the inside of her thigh to alleviate a phantom memory of the pain she’d endured the day before at the hands of Lucas’s father. It didn’t hurt anymore, but without something to distract from it, she could feel it prickling where she’d been skinned. Smooth skin had grown back, the fat, too, but she swore she could feel a tiny imperfection at the edges of the healed injury.

She’d gotten the shit kicked out of her more than a few times before this. The earliest she could remember came courtesy of her mother’s boyfriends, men who talked sweet but didn’t seem to mind showing her mother the back of their hands when they needed an ego boost. Gail was not exempt.

She learned early on to fight back, even if it meant getting hit harder. As she got older, she found that she preferred the unquestionable authority that came with holding a gun, even if she could appreciate a good brawl. The look on some drunk redneck’s face seconds before they realized they’d underestimated her was worth a few bruises or a split lip.

Even so, never, in the entirety of her disreputable career had she been made to feel as helpless against someone who meant to do her harm as she had against Jack Baker. Never had she been so thoroughly at the mercy of a malevolent entity as she was currently with Eveline.

She was alright, for now. She wasn’t soft enough to let it get to her. But the fact that Lucas’s timely intervention was all that had been between her and knowing what, and where, her ‘sweetbreads’ were, was goddamned unnerving. She would die happy not knowing what it felt like to be cut open by a bone saw.

At the moment, however, she would gladly give a finger for a cup of fuckin coffee. Considering, of course, that it would grow back.

She didn’t know how Lucas managed, but when her eyes fell on the empty cans and bottles of energy drinks scattered around his desk, she got her answer. Whatever he was doing was thoroughly engrossing, because he hadn’t even looked her way.

She stretched and walked over to Lucas to take a closer look over his shoulder at what was holding his attention. Forum posts by people with cartoon avatars and usernames consisting of a string of
numbers. Unsettling when paired with their messages, which looked at first to be discussions of house products and hardware, but she was able to piece together as the components for homemade explosives.

Lucas didn’t participate, he only scrolled and read, and occasionally turned his head the leftmost screen, adding items to a list. All the while, the subdued percussion pounded through his massive, expensive-looking headphones.

Gail didn’t know what inspired her. Maybe she felt a little generous. Maybe she just wanted to interrupt him, just to prove that she could. Or maybe she just felt like it. Either way, she got his attention when she got on her hands and knees and nudged past him to crawl under his desk.

He scooted back in his chair and peered down at her with a baffled, amused expression as she cleared the various bits of trash and detritus to make a nice spot on the floor in front of him. The desk wasn’t high enough for her head to clear, but she didn’t need it to.

He lowered his headphones and the music that had been blasting straight into his eardrums spilled out. It sounded harsh, like heavy metal with electronic elements.

“Uh… g’mornin’?” he said with a curious upswing, tilting his head to the side to better see her. He looked like he thought she might have cracked.

Gail gave him a slow smile, but didn’t answer him. The light of the monitors bounced off his eyes and she saw the moment he caught on by the way they narrowed and his mouth quirked. She put her hands on his bony, denim-clad knees and pushed them apart. Lucas settled down in his chair and scooted it forward a few inches, tucking his bottom lip under his upper teeth. She nodded to his crotch. Well?

It was almost funny how fast he got his fly open. Gail slid her upper body forward between his open legs, upper chest touching the front of his seat, and plucked one of his hands off his zipper. She took his index finger to her lips and darted her tongue out, swiping the tip as dainty as a cat drinking water.

Lucas’s reaction was instantaneous. His eyes widened and then rolled back. The other hand snuck around to the crotch of his jeans and squeezed himself through them, as if to adjust himself or alleviate some discomfort. Gail felt a little tingle between her own legs at his shameless arousal.

She pulled his finger deeper into her mouth, slicking it up and sliding it along the surface of her tongue up to the base knuckle. Lucas groaned and his other hand reached up and rubbed his eyes and back over his forehead. He adjusted his position, sank down a little farther in his seat. She let go of his finger, and he immediately moistened his lips with her spit and licked it off.

Gail was starting to see the appeal of being under a table. It was counterintuitive, but she had the upper hand.

She slid her fingers up his thighs and hooked them around the waistband of his jeans. She started tugging them down, and Lucas obliged her by helping. His dick popped out when the jeans were pulled down past his ass, as hard as it was. She shoved the pants down where they bunched around his ankles.

She took it by the base in one hand and hooked the other around his bare ass where it was sitting. She pushed herself forward and didn’t bother with preamble, she just puckered her lips and took him in. The throaty whine Lucas made when his cockhead hit the back of her wet mouth sent a jolt straight to her clit, and made her pussy clench. One of his hands gripped his own thigh, the other
settled, almost reverently, on top of her head. She’d tolerate it as long as he didn’t grab her hair, or try to shove his dick down her throat.

Holding him in place with her arm, she pulled her head back, running her tongue underneath the shaft to where it swirled around his flare cockhead. Then she took it all the way in until her lips grasped him at the base and pubes tickled her nose. His dick was big enough that it made her jaw ache to keep from biting him, but she could deal with it.

He was clean, and his skin was hot and tight in her mouth, and now that she was in charge of the pace and position, she was enjoying the hell out of sucking him off.

“Fuuuhck… Gail,” he gasped as he tipped his head back against the head of the chair. The music played on, tinny and harsh, through his earphones hooked around his long neck, but he didn’t seem to be paying attention to it anymore.

She pulled him in deep, let her throat muscles work, swallowing at much of him as she could take before she needed to breathe. She was pretty good at it, but she liked to save it for when she felt it was justified, when she felt the guy had earned it.

Lucas had gotten his neck broken fighting for her. Had smashed his old man’s head open like a watermelon to get her away from him to safety. If anyone deserved some tender attentions, it was him. Gail bobbed down again, until his shaft wedged open her jaw and his glans met the hard back of her throat. She dragged it out, lips tight, cheeks sucking in.

She had to shift her kneeling position to lessen the pressure between her legs; she was getting wet, just from doing this. Some part of it had to do with Lucas and how much he was enjoying it.

His fingers started knotting in her hair, and his breath whistled through his nose, audible, even, over the music. He started making tiny movements with his hips, jerking when she sucked him down, and spreading his thighs wider when she pulled back. He looked pretty funny with his pants around his ankles, toes in his white socks curling into the thread of the carpet. Cute, even.

Gail picked up the pace, prompted by the way he was breathing harder and rougher. His chest puffed and his head rolled. His eyes peered down at her under the edge of the desk, bright and unfocused, forehead wrinkled and brows cinched. His mouth hung open, and he rolled his tongue along the bottom lip until it glistened with his spit.

She tightened the arm hooked around him, forced him forward, and opened up her throat.

“Yer so beautiful, baby,” he groaned with slitted eyes watching her take all of him into her, as his fingers tightened in her hair. She grazed him with her teeth when she pulled out again.

It was meant to be a warning, for him to be careful with her hair, but she should have known that the scrawny bastard would like it. His hips flexed and strained forward in an attempt to get his cock back into her mouth, but he didn’t push it.

She slid her hand from the base of his cock up to the crook of his thigh and hip. She rested it on the hard dip of his stomach, which was rising and falling fast like a winded animal. She tightened her fingers, digging her nails into the skin of his abdomen. He liked the pain, and she knew it, if for no other reason than the way his dick jumped in her mouth, somehow got even stiffer.

He whimpered when she pulled it down past the back of her tongue, chewing on his lip until she was sure it was bleeding. Too soon, his whole body shuddered. Gail took him in hard. She felt the shockwaves of his climax straight from his balls to his cockhead, before it surged into her throat in
hot spurts. She swallowed it down, didn’t mind the texture or taste. Hell, if she was totally honest with herself, she even kind of liked it, at least with him, not that she would ever tell him that. The best part, however, came from watching him as he got off, and feeling his stomach flex and shudder under her nails.

He’d barely finished cumming before he pulled himself out of her mouth, shoved back the chair and bent down to kiss her. A messy, sloppy, jizzy kiss, but he didn’t seem to give a fuck. On his knees, pants still around his ankles, he pulled her out from under the desk and clamped her close so his tongue could take the place of his cock in her mouth. His stubble abraded her skin.

Gail started laughing, pushing him off. Lucas fell back with a dopey grin on his face, softening cock flopping between his thighs.

“You’re nasty, boy,” she said, swiping her mouth with the back of her forearm, though it wasn’t exactly a criticism.

“I ain’t the one gettin’ all naughty and shit under the table,” he said, halfway to tugging his pants up. And then he snorted, “oh. Wait.”

“Mmmm hmm,” she said with a wicked smirk and an eyeroll. How could he forget what he did to her? “I’m taking a fuckin’ bath. I hope you got some towels somewhere. And some clothes.”

Lucas’s brows popped up. “Heeell yeah! I gotcha covered, baby.”

Gail pulled herself up and stretched her knees with a pop, casting him a suspicious look. Lucas levered himself to his feet by his chair, sagging pants in hand.

“You jus’ enjoy yer bath, hunny bun, Ah’ll take care o’ the rest,” he said, wiggling his eyebrows in a cartoonish expression of mischief. “You just take yer time now… and lemme know if you want some uhh… help.”

She uttered a short laugh with the way his bugging eyes flickered to her crotch and the obscene way he flicked his tongue out between his lips.

“Hold that thought for later,” she said with a wink, opening the door. He managed to slap her ass cheek before she got through, though, and she was almost embarrassed by the way she tittered. Like a fucking love-sick teenager. She didn’t care, she was in a great mood and she was seriously considering enjoying her bath.

She cast a glance toward the workroom door when she got into the hallway. He’d closed it and locked it again at some point. She wondered if it had even occurred to him that she might have gone in there and seen where he’d left her phone.

She wasn’t ready to dismiss that possibility. But he hadn’t said anything, so she didn’t worry about it. Still, a sense of steely apprehension came with the thought of what she’d set in motion.

She brushed her teeth on the toilet, spat the foam into the bowl, and flushed it down. Then she started running the water, rinsing her toothbrush underneath to wash it off. When it was hot enough, she climbed in. There, she slid down with her body wedged in the narrow width of it. She spread her thighs, feet braced on the wall until the gushing torrent hit her right between the legs.

“Fuck,” she gasped as it immediately started battering her clit, strong, diffuse, relentless pressure. It ramped up the tight heat building in her belly until her skin vibrated with it and the muscles in her stomach and thighs tensed. The water level rose, but she was going to come before it got deep enough to get in the way.
Her hips started moving on their own, until she was aware of nothing except the way it made the water roll around, like a massive tongue that didn’t tire. There was a sharp pinch, and Gail bit back a moan. She came almost too hard, and threw back her head, smacking it on the side of the tub. Not hard enough to ruin the moment, but enough to knock the bottle of conditioner Lucas had balanced on the edge onto the floor.

She let her legs slip down into the water as the aftershocks wracked her and made her feel like her bones had turned to jelly. With a satisfied sigh and a smile, she sank into the water and let it fill up to her shoulders before turning it off.

She listened to the steady drip-drip and breathed in the steam until she felt a bit more recharged. Then she reached over the rim and grabbed the fallen bottle of conditioner. She read over the ingredients. Somehow, he’d managed to get a brand that was suited to her hair type. It wasn’t cheap shit, either, even if the label was horrendous.

She popped open the cap when she felt a tickle behind her eyes. She blinked it away. And like a bad dream, Eveline was standing in the middle of the bathroom.

“Fuck,” Gail muttered through her teeth, tensing. “Don’t you ever knock?”

“I don’t have to. This is my house.” Eveline’s tone, and her nasty, pale little face looked calm, but Gail didn’t think that meant anything. Snakes sometimes looked nonthreatening, right up until they bit you.

“I guess it is.”

“I like your hair,” Eveline said.

“Thanks, I grew it myself,” Gail said, not sure if the compliment would come with an order to rip it out or something worse.

She did her best to ignore the girl as she squeezed a fat blob of the conditioner into her palm. She was momentarily distracted, though, when she saw Evie toying with her own hair. The little girl brought a long, black tress in front of her face to look at it, her lips pursed, and then twirled it around her finger. It was a very childlike thing to do, and Gail actually forgot for a moment what she was looking at.

“Lucas loves you,” Eveline said, all of a sudden.

She avoided having to answer that by leaning back and dunking her hair in the bath water. When she emerged, she started to spread the glob of conditioner in her hair. Fuck that little bitch if she thought Gail would be unnerved.

“Yeah. He told me.”

“He loves me more, though,” Eveline said. Gail felt a sickening cramp in her chest and stopped for only half a breath.

She kept hearing that same voice tell Jack that Gail probably tasted real good.

“You’re probably right,” she said with a neutral face, lathering in the conditioner. “You are his little sister, after all.”

“I made him prove it.” Eveline’s eyes narrowed to dark slits and her mouth stretched in a smile. “You wanna know how?”
Gail didn’t answer, she just stared.

“I made him eat his arm. It was really funny, he got sick halfway through and barfed! Can you believe it? I laughed so hard.” Eveline’s smile fell away like it had never been there. “And then I made him eat that, too.”

Gail’s guts twisted and she tasted stomach acid in the back of her mouth. She couldn’t fake a nice face anymore, and just let her expression hang. Eveline held her hands clasped in front of her.

“He must really love you, then,” Gail said impassively.

“They all do. You’re going to love me, too. If you don’t, I’ll make you.”

Gail pulled her knees to her chest.

All she could think about was if she’d be willing to chew off her own arm to get out of a trap like this.

“Eveline, I already do love you,” she said, deciding that she’d rather not have to make that decision. Ever. ”And to Lucas, I’m always going to be number two next to you.”

She felt like her mother, placating one of the faceless bastards of her past. It made her feel sick. She didn’t like feeling this way, like she had to lie to save her own skin. But there was no way to overcome this threat. Whatever Eveline was, it wasn’t a human being with weak spots she could shoot, or hit.

Luckily for her, the girl creature seemed to take well to flattery. Eveline’s creepy face lit up with a bright smile. Dead eyes, though, as if she didn’t actually see through them, but was observing Gail and her surroundings by some other means.

“I guess you’re okay, then... you can stay. For now.”

Gail didn’t have a chance to say anything, because Eveline was gone. She let out her breath. The bath water was getting cold.

She dunked her hair beneath the surface and rinsed it, clouding the water with the conditioner, and then she pulled the plug.

When she opened the bathroom door, trailing a puddle behind her, she found where Lucas had placed a folded towel, old-looking but clean, on the other side.

She zoned out for a second staring at it. She was haunted, maybe even forever changed, by the mental images that Eveline’s casual mention of her horrific torture of Lucas had conjured in her. Things she did not doubt for even a second. She wondered if it had happened before or after Lucas had regained control of his free will. She didn’t know which would be worse.

Any sense of peace was completely shattered.

But it was okay.

Eveline had just reminded her that there would be no peace. Not ever, as long as Gail was inside this house. She had already considered that there would be no peace for her outside of it, either.

She dried herself off and combed her fingers through her damp hair. Lacking clothes to change into, she wrapped the towel around herself and walked down the hall to Lucas’s room.
He was sitting in his chair, peeking over to the door when she came in. He was barely suppressing some jittery energy, his eyes darting over to the couch. A dark spot in the corner of her eye caught her attention.

Lucas had laid a black dress, tags still on, over the back of the couch, like an offering.

“I uh… I forgot about it. With all that shit that happened, an’ all.” He drummed his pinky and thumb against his leg. Then he stood up fast and strode over to it. “The lady at the store said this’d prob’ly fit you, when I showed her…” Lucas held his hands out in front of him, cupping invisible breasts, then following an exaggerated hourglass shape, and then reaching around the invisible woman and cupping the ass two-handed. He made a little thrust with his hips, bit his lip and screwed up his eyes like he was fucking her.

It was a wonder Lucas hadn’t been arrested at some point during his trips to town. She imagined the horror that must have been on the poor clothing store employee’s face and lost it, laughing hard enough to bring a tear to her eye.

“Did you really do that?”

“She mighta jus’ been sain’ that to get me out of the women’s department, though…” he said, smirking like a mischievous little kid, smug as fuck in the face of Gail’s amusement.

Thinking of Eveline, Gail stepped in the room and closed the door behind her before going over to take a look at the dress.

“Lucas,” she said, giving him a wry look. “This ain’t a dress. It’s a slip.”

“A what?” he asked, blank-faced.

Gail bit her lip to keep from laughing at him when she picked it up. It was a piece of shapewear with a low front and probably scarcely enough of what could be considered a skirt to cover her upper thighs. She looked to his expression. His pale blue eyes were shot wide, brows up as he waited with apparent bated breath.

“You’re supposed to wear it under things. It ain’t outerwear.”

“Ain’tcha gonna try it on at least?” he asked. The tinge of disappointment in his voice twisted around her heart. Something had changed for sure between his violent rescue of her the night before, and the conversation with Eveline moments before. She was having trouble thinking about him without some measure of pity.

“Lucas…” she said, before trailing off. “Lucas, I got something I need to tell you.”

Lucas’s eyes narrowed slightly, and the hopeful expression started to fade.

“What?”

Gail closed her eyes.

“I found my phone,” she said. When she opened her eyes, she avoided looking at him. Her hand holding up her towel tightened and twisted in the terrycloth material. “I sent my boss a message. I told him that y’all killed Jerel, and I told him to come get me. I told him where I was. Gave him coordinates. He’s probably going to wait for nightfall, but then I have little doubt that he’s coming for me. And his money.”
Lucas was silent as she talked. She saw him slip his hands into the pockets of his hoodie, and knew he was watching her.

“Why?” he asked. Gail stole a glance. His brows were pinched, eyes sunken and calculating.

She took a deep breath. She tightened her jaw and glared at the wall.

“I want him dead. But I can’t do it by myself… I need help. Your help.”

She heard him breathing slow, and heard him swallow. She hoped that the lack of an immediate explosion of temper meant that he wasn’t angry. But as the seconds dragged, she started getting nervous. Strangely, she was less nervous about being hurt, or punished, and more concerned about how he felt about it all.

“Well you just tell me what you need, and I’ll make sure you get it.” His voice was terse and thick, like he was choked up. Gail searched his face. She felt her throat tighten when she saw the fierce shine in his eyes. But underneath it was the cold, vicious light that was always there on some level. That was exactly the side of him she wanted right now.

“You left the phone out for me didn’t you?”

A cold smirk rose on his mouth, and he quirked his head as he looked at her.

“I even charged it up all nice, jus’ for you.”

Gail stared, at once angry with being manipulated, and, honestly, a little impressed.

“You wanted me to contact the outside world?”

He shrugged and gave her an evasive smile.

“Didn’t think you’d be so stupid as to call the cops, but I figured you’d wanna take care of your affairs.”

“What if I’d just been calling for help?”

He pulled his hand out of his pocket and looked at his nails, indifferent.

“Well... you woulda broke my heart, Gail, that’s whut. I’m glad you ain’t so short-sighted. But, either way, I’d’a got some fresh bodies for Evie by way of whoever was dumb enough to come get you. Delivery, straight to the front door! But the point is… ya didn’t. Next time, gimme a lil more warnin’ so uh we got some more time to plan. Now, question is, what do ya need?”

Gail was a little overwhelmed with his show of solidarity. He had her back, better than anyone else she’d been with as far as bloody business was concerned. In fact, she realized, she probably could have just asked without sneaking around. It would have saved her a lot of stress.

“I need my shotgun,” she said.

“Done,” he answered without hesitation. She let that sit for a moment.

“Really?”

“Yeah. But you gotta do somethin’ for me,” he said with a slow-growing smile. He moved to right in front of her and tucked his thumb into the towel on either side of her breasts, teasingly caressing her skin underneath.
“What?” she asked, immediately thinking about what she’d already done for him that morning. She was grateful but she wasn’t about to start giving blowjobs on command.

“You got to pour your sweet ass into that dress... slip... thing, before I give it to ya.”

Gail smirked up at him. That she could do.

“I’m gonna need some help with that too. Them things fit tighter than a second skin.”

She let go of the towel, and with no help from him, let it drop into a crumpled pile around her. He immediately devoured the sight of her with a close-mouthed groan, and adjusted his crotch. Her heart fluttered.

She turned away from him with a coy toss of her hair, and picked it up. She hadn’t only been acting like a tease. She’d never really worn things like this herself; she wasn’t exactly a fancy-dress kind of woman. Nevertheless, she was going to give it a solid effort. She found which end the straps were on and bent over, knowing exactly what kind of show she was giving Lucas. She spread the inside of the slip wide enough to step into and started hitching it up over her calves.

Lucas uttered a choked noise.

“Got-damn you weren’t lyin’,” he rasped as she tugged it up her thighs. It caught on the swell of her ass, as she knew it would.

“You gonna help me or just stand there starin’ like a fuckin idiot?” she chided, a little out of breath from the effort. He made a vocal gulp before she felt him come up behind her, pressing his erection against her butt. Hard as a fucking rock. She snorted, endlessly amused by how easy he was. It was immensely gratifying to have that effect on someone, she wasn’t going to lie. She felt his hands slide down her lower back and cup her butt. He didn’t waste the opportunity to give it a good squeeze before he grabbed the edge of the tight sheath.

Together they tugged it up over the widest part of her ass and hips, with Lucas making little noises and sighs the entire time. Gail gave it a little wiggle to pull it past her waist. Lucas’s long-fingered hands snaked around under her arms and grabbed a handful of tit in each sinewy palm, squeezing.

“You smell fuckin’ amazing,” he moaned, pulling her back tight against his front and burying his face in her damp hair. The deep breath he took was almost obscene.

Gail was smiling, though he couldn’t see it. She slipped her arms through the thin straps and pulled them onto her shoulders. Then, swatting away his hands, she yanked the front up as far as it would go. She made a few minor adjustments, tried tugging the bottom down a little more, but it didn’t want to stretch past her upper thighs, as she’d suspected.

She turned slowly to face him and met the most slack-jawed-yokel-looking motherfucker she’d ever seen. Goggle-eyed and dumb, his fists were clenched so hard his knuckles were white.

“Wait, wait,” he said, holding up a finger with eyes popping wide with a manic grin. He scrambled away, almost clumsy in his eagerness and, kicking aside the empty boxes, threw open the door to the back room. She heard him move some things around in the dark, stub his toe on something and curse. And then he came back out, holding her beloved, single-barrel, pistol-grip shotgun. Gail was dumbfounded when she realized that it had been within her reach the whole time, just sitting in the back room.

He extended it to her, a weird focus in his narrowed eyes. He was breathing so loud she might have made a joke about it, but she was just too goddamn happy to see her gun again. She took it from
him and hefted it up to her eye, inspecting it.

She stroked the barrel reverently, gave the fore-end a good pump. It was empty. Without saying a word, Lucas dug around in his pockets. His hands emerged full of as many shotgun cartridges as he could hold, even dropping a couple. He shoved these at her. She accepted his offerings with a snort and, lacking a place to put them, dropped them on the couch. She loaded one in and snapped it shut with a satisfying crack.

Lucas made a strained noise, and she finally tore her attention away from the gun to look at him.

The man looked like he was in intense pain. By the size of the hard-on he was sporting, he might have been.

“Is this getting you hot?” she asked with a smug grin. She posed with a hip popped, the gun rested over one shoulder and pointed at the wall behind her.

Lucas whimpered, adjusted his crotch again as he eyed her good and slow from toe to head, and then came toward her.

“Get on your fucking knees,” she ordered, swinging the gun around and stopping him. She pointed the barrel at his forehead, only perhaps an inch away, as steady as a dream. The weight of it felt good in her hands. She felt powerful again, like she could do anything, and no one, not Jack nor Eveline could stop her. A warm shiver passed through her and left goosebumps in its wake.

Lucas had a funny half-smirk on his face as he did what she said. He landed heavily on his bent knees, arms limp at his sides. He was drawing loud, shaky breaths.

With a sharp smile, Gail licked her lips.

“Wish I’d known that all it would take to beat you was have you on the business end of my loaded shotgun while wearin’ a piece of women’s undergarments.”

“Mmm,” Lucas groaned. “Ya know… what’d make this… even better?”

Gail flashed a sharp smile.

“Bein’ covered in the blood of my shithead boss while you fuck me, and him, into a pile of red goo?”

Lucas leaned into the barrel until she was sure it would leave a mark and giggled, the same high-pitched noise she’d heard over the speakers.

“Will you marry me?”

“Yeah,” she said with a smile. “But first, you an’ me got some business to take care of.”

“I already got some ideas about that,” Lucas panted, swallowing noisily. The goofy grin on his face, matched with the wicked glint in his manic eyes and the boner straining against the crotch of his jeans, made her heart beat a little faster. “How do ya feel about… party games?”

--------------------------

Chapter End Notes
As of July, I've changed the story slightly by removing the last part. It was a personal choice to help the rest of the story flow more easily. Don't worry, you won't miss it. Thanks for reading! Let me know what you think. Tip your writer! I accept payment in the form of comments or kudos :) <3

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!