

# Tangled in Chains

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Mabel was a pretty Southern belle from a wealthy family of slave owners living in Louisiana in the early 1800s. Her delicate frame, flowing Brunette locks, and fair complexion made her very popular, drawing the attention of many suitors throughout the State. However, her physical beauty didn't mirror the true nature of her soul.

Despite her tender age, she held very clear views when it came to social policies, staunchly advocating for the institution of slavery. As her siblings all died very young, she stood as the rightful heiress, alongside her future husband, to her family's plantation. She had heard of certain fellow slave owners expressing remorse over their slaves' conditions and thinking about ways to improve their living conditions, but she remained resolute in her determination to emulate her parents' cruel treatment of their enslaved workforce.

The slaves in her plantation knew how she always recommended maximum severity when it came to punishment, harboring a deep-seated resentment towards her as a result.

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One late summer afternoon, feeling in a pensive mood, Mabel went for a long stroll in the fields. Without realising it, taken as she was by the perfumes of flowers, she reached a very remote area of the plantation where she had never been before. The lush vegetation concealed the path she had taken and soon Mabel realized she had become hopelessly lost. The panic, combined with the summer heat made her faint, until, at some point, a pair of elderly female slaves returned from their toil in the fields noticed her. A cheeky smile appeared in their faces as they saw the opportunity to seize control of the situation, whispering mischievously to one another: "Oh Lawd, look at dat! Miss Mabel done fainted, all by herself out in dem woods! We's gonna show her a lesson she won't be forgettin'!"

With mischievous intent, the two elderly slaves retrieved a weathered bag from an old chest hidden in their rooms and began applying a dark dye on her face. They also applied an itchy lotion on her lips, making them swell, and rubbed her Brunette hair with a thick liquid that left it black and kinky. They took off her white dress to get an easier access to her skin and her and applied the same dark dye on her whole body. As the dye was applied, it spread the brown color to all her immaculate skin, turning it into a rich mocha color.

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Mabel woke up half-naked, surrounded by two slaves and to make it worse, her skin was dark brown. She was terrified but she put on a brave face and said: "Oh my word, what on earth have you done to me? Release me this instant, you \*\*\*\*\*!"

"Well now, darlin', we was only tryin' to revive ya, no need to be riled up, child! We done put some ointment on ya, aimin' to make ya blend in a bit more. 'Round these parts, them fellas, they might take advantage if they caught wind of a fair white gal in their midst, all pretty and such!"

"Shit, it's not coming off!" - she said, frantically trying to return her skin to its pristine hue by running it with her fingers. "I... I need to go now!"

"Listen up now, it's done got dark, and there ain't no way you can be goin' back to our grand mansion at this hour. You best reckon it's best to spend the night right here, child."

She decided to leave anyway, and demanded to be given her clothes. With a giggle, one of the women told her that her dress got torn off in the attempt of resuscitating her, but that she could borrow her finest dress, which she handed to her. It was the usual slave outfit for women, with plenty of dirty patches and it smelled like sweat but Mabel couldn't go around half naked, so she put it on anyway. In the process of dressing up, she noticed how her hair had also drastically changed. She demanded to be given a mirror and they gave her a dirty, small mirror in which she saw the reflected image of a slave girl. "Is that me? Oh gracious heavens!"

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The light was scarce out there, as the moon was only a thin sickle, and finding her path would have been even more difficult, so she resigned herself to seeking refuge in the shelter of the night, surrendering to slumber amidst the uncertainties that surrounded her.

As the sun's gentle rays began to pierce the morning sky, stirring the young woman from her restless sleep, she was met with a heartbreaking revelation. She learned that a search party had passed by while she lay in peaceful slumber, but after giving her sleeping body a quick glance, they walked past her shelter.

In despair, she decided to run after the search party, clad in the torn garments that marked her as a slave girl. Her darkened skin, the texture of her kinky hair, and her slave girl attire rendered her indistinguishable from the countless others working in the plantation.

Undeterred by these disheartening odds, Mabel reached the search party, her voice hoarse and unrecognisable from frantic pleas. Fear mingled with hope, she implored the party to take her back, but, despite her fervent appeals, the search party cast a fleeting glance upon her dirt-streaked form, their gaze devoid of recognition or compassion. They turned her away, leaving Mabel stranded in the harsh reality of her situation, a bitter reminder that her physical appearance had become an indistinguishable mark of her servitude.

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Surprised by the girl's accent, not matching that of a slave girl, a man from the search party kept thinking about her and, after a long, unfruitful search, he took a detour to talk again with her. Mabel had tried finding the path, but after a while walking in the scorching summer sun without her hat she started feeling dehydrated. Regretfully, she had to come back to the two old women, who offered her something fresh to drink. Mabel felt dizzy as she drank it, but she quickly recovered as she spotted the man walking towards her. A glimmer of hope, maybe not everything was lost!

"May God bless ya, good sir! Save me, I beg of ya!" - she screamed. The old ladies giggled in the background.

"Oh lawd, why in the world am I talkin' like this? Ya gotta believe me, I ain't no slave, I'm Mabel, I tell ya!" - she said, grabbing his arm.

"This is strange, I could swear this girl was speaking very different earlier today!" - the man said, keeping her away from him.

"Good evenin', kind sir! You see, Betty, she's always been mighty fond of imitatin' them fancy white ladies and their accents. But now, she's plumb exhausted, bless her soul, and she's talkin' in her regular voice! Please pardon her, good sir, if she done caused ya any trouble or wasted your precious time. She didn't mean no harm, I assure ya."

Satisfied with the explanation, the man left the poor girl sobbing, instructing the old ladies to put those young arms to work.

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After he left, the old women explained to Mabel that they secretly administered a potent tonic that caused her speech to become slurred, impairing her ability to communicate clearly and effectively: "We done gave ya a special tonic, darlin', one that makes ya talk like us folks 'round here. Now ya not speakin' like a fair lady anymore, all proper and refined!" In addition to sabotaging her speech, they decided to assign her arduous tasks in the scorching fields. As she toiled under the relentless sun, the heat took its mental toll on Mabel, leaving her sunbaked and disoriented. The direct exposure to sunlight also further deepened her darker skin tone. Any semblance of a coherent plan for escape was shattered, as her mind became clouded and her senses dulled by the relentless combination of sun and exhaustion. The bitter taste of defeat mingled with her disappointment, as she realized her hopes to regain her life had been shattered.

In due time, Mabel reluctantly came to terms with her fate as a slave girl, resigning herself to the cruel reality of her circumstances. However, she pleaded to be assigned to a less harsh and more humane task. Fortuitously, her delicate frame did not go unnoticed by one of the stable boys. Moved by sympathy for the alluring young Black woman, he saw fit to assign her a new duty—the cleaning of a large warehouse. Yet, beneath his kind gesture, Mabel couldn't help but sense something more behind his lingering gazes. She was well acquainted with the harsh realities faced by the most attractive slave girls and had to take in account that the possibility to get forcibly impregnated by a lowly stable boy was more than a possibility. With a mix of gratitude and wariness, Mabel trudged through her duties, tormented by the relentless struggle to maintain a fragile equilibrium between survival and the elusive dream of genuine freedom.