

**North of San Francisco:
Male Rituals, Initiation,
Discipline, and Transcendence.
As in *Casablanca*, Sooner or Later
Everyone Comes to...**

S&M RANCH

Foreman Dogg Katz was a young fox with a goatee, so Peter Eton-Cox made a phone call to S&M Ranch. Torture, he figured, is a relative pleasure. Some tortures please the tortured. Some tortures please the torturer. Only in San Francisco, Peter thought, are physical values consensually inverted. In the Midwest, pleasure causes religious guilt and pain. In California, pain is as sweet as the pleasure of tonguing on a loose tooth. Some pain hurts so good you just can't stop.

Such strange thoughts swam through his head as he drove north from the City across the Golden Gate Bridge toward Sonoma County. Peter had a good hour's drive to ponder why men like him preferred a place like S&M Ranch.

Fuck. Three topics about which people rally and march and lose their cool are: religion, politics, and corporal punishment. Odd. People argue religion and politics back and forth. Punishment by comparison was so taboo, that good old corporal punishment was rejected almost without argument or debate. Sometimes Peter felt like a voice crying in the wilderness. Corporal punishment was out of fashion with the social consciousness

that coddles offenders. He wished America would return to corporal punishment: flogging, heavy bondage in solitary confinement, behavior modification, electroshock clamps on balls and dicks and tits and tongues, hanging by the wrists, branding, punitive tattooing, painful and invasive medical procedures involving sutures and catheters and probes and enormous enemas administered by inexperienced health care workers who would benefit from the chance to practice.

Delaware, Peter had noted in a newspaper clipping, had reinstated the whipping post for teenage delinquents. A young guy whipped by a burly guard in the semi-public setting of a county jail courtyard learns a lesson on his stripped back that no amount of probation or juvenile-hall time could ever teach. And he'd learn it without being corrupted by spending ninety days with worse bad boys who'd tutor him into the truly finer points of delinquency. In addition, a twenty-minute flogging is cheaper for the taxpayers who then do not have to support the juvenile delinquent for the term of his sentence. Peter liked the idea of swift and defined justice meted out in corporal punishment to the men and boys convicted of nonviolent crimes like bouncing bad checks, or offending the public decency, or hitchhiking.

For the violent criminal, Peter had other thoughts. Instead of executions that waste a convict's healthy body, he favored harvesting a criminal's body parts for transplants to those in need. Gary Gilmore, condemned to death in Utah, should not have been strapped into a wooden chair, hooded, and executed—wasted, literally—by rifle fire. Gary Gilmore should have been slowly harvested. First his eyes, then his inner ear mechanism, his kidneys and lungs one at a time, his skin, and finally his heart.

Once society fully adjusts to the morality of transplants, people must adjust to the desirability of Ultimate

Harvest as a legitimate corporal punishment where the entire body of the criminal pays off his debt to society.

The men at S&M Ranch, led by Whipmaster Dogg Katz, had left San Francisco with the cloning of the Castro. They were advance guard of the exodus north where same-as/same-as men could still pass as unlabeled men among the rough-and-tumble redneck straight breeders in their boot jeans, down vests, CAT caps, and 4WD trucks. The brotherhood at S&M Ranch had retreated away from the incestuous urbanity of City slickers whose horizon was no higher than the skyline of the Castro. They had returned to live among the kind of men who had made them prefer men in the first place. They had by choice abandoned the Castro to the clones, the dronies, and the phonies who dressed and acted in ways you hoped you'd never see men dress and act.

With ritualistic intent, the men of S&M Ranch abandoned the City to live lives dedicated almost monastically to simple manly discipline—defined by absolute corporal punishment—in the northwoods of Sonoma County. Even the Elite Corps of “The 15” chose their S&M Weekend Encampments not far from the secret preserves of S&M Ranch where corporal punishment and discipline were a way of life.

When Peter called the Ranch, Dogg Katz told him to high-tail it up Highway 101 past Sausalito and on up through fastidious Marin County to laid-back Sonoma County. Dogg had two good-looking ranch hands—code-named “Rip” and “Strip”—and the largest toy collection in California. The working barns, noisy with cattle and sheep dogs, were fully equipped: hoists, pulleys, crosses, woodsheds, burial pits, hog pens, fence posts, wooden spools coiled with barbed wire, harness sheds with metal dockers to install rubber-rings for slow castration, and a four-holer outhouse set over a bondage board sunk so

deep in the cool Sonoma clay that a man tied down underneath that brick shithouse looked up spreadeagle at a new understanding of gravity's drop, splat, and plop. The three S&M cowboys, Dogg Katz particularly, offered their services through the classified ads in various queer papers. Their best encounters, they found, came to them by word-of-mouth. Dogg had invited Peter for free.

The afternoon was bright with the spring light that makes Sonoma County look like Ireland when the Cowboys met Peter at the top of the road leading back to S&M Ranch. Rip and Strip and Dogg were strong, weathered, handsome workingmen in their early thirties. Their bodies were as good as their heads. They ran on instinct about what, and how much, and how heavy, were the painful tortures and disciplines they could lay out on an urban man driving to the county in need of corporal punishment. With Peter, they had no particular script. Even Peter had no idea where the afternoon at S&M Ranch might take the four of them. They had all played together before. Hitting and switch-hitting. Even Dogg Katz, the famous top, balanced himself regularly with heavy corporal punishment delivered by itinerant men passing through. Peter was open to anything that felt good with these men.

Dogg offered a joint they smoked in the sun before heading up, north of the main ranch house, past one of the corrals where a naked bear of a chunky man lay tied down spreadeagle, face up, dick up, in the dirt. A mestizo Mexican man, cleaning his own toe nails with a buck knife, sat vigil off to the side on a wooden box that had once been Peter's prison for three days. Peter remembered the mestizo well. Along the trail, a sling hung like an ominous sexual hammock between four large pine trees. They walked past several small outbuildings, one of which Peter recognized from an underground video called *Woodshed Whipping*. Peter smiled when they

crossed past the Hanging Tree where, several weekends before, he had seen a slender naked man sitting astraddle a horse. His hands were tied behind his back. His dick stood up a full attention taller than the saddle horn. A noose was knotted tight around his neck. His eyes were stoned with sexual fear. Another rope was wrapped tight around his chest and back and secured under his sweating armpits to sustain most of his weight when the posse of five men, gathered around his horse, slapped the gelding into a sudden gallop that jerked the naked and bound man into a terrifying swing through the cool air. The noose pulled at his throat enough to make his tongue swell out and his wild eyes bulge in his young unshaven face. Peter noticed the cigar butts and cigaret butts still lying on the ground where the group of men had stood and smoked while the rustler hung dangling and twirling, with his dick at full throbbing hardon, for their amusement, until they all came and someone sucked the hanging cowboy off and cut him, sobbing, down.

The three Cowboys led Peter into their Whipping Stall. He pulled out a gram of MDM and offered some hits all the way around. Dogg motioned them to kick back on the blankets covering the bales of hay. A can of Crisco stood atop a Stall post. The mirrors in the Stall reflected the four of them back across the rack and the whipping horse and the leather-covered weight-lifting bench. They all smiled at each other. Easy. Measuring out the weight of the needs of each man in the Stall. One by one, led by the Dogg Himself, Rip and Strip turned to Peter who under the joint and the MDM had turned in on his own self. The Cowboys were sensitive men. They knew what unspoken thing Peter needed. They knew what he only then was beginning to realize.

Dogg stood up, long, lean, and lanky, to piss. He popped the buttons of his 501 Levi's and reeled out his big uncut dick. He looked at Peter. Then he walked

deliberately across the Stall to a galvanized trough running the length of one wall and emptying into a metal pail. The sound of his dog piss was heavy as rain on a sheet-metal roof of a kennel. His yellow flow drained like a thick, slow waterfall off the end of the pipe into the bucket. Peter had seen that bucket lifted and tilted to fill an enormous six-quart red-rubber enema bag equipped with a long hose fitted with a double nozzle that was among the most corporal of punishments.

Peter had seen a man tied spreadeagle, face down in a sling, at S&M Ranch. His belly had hung free beneath the sling, and his furry butt stuck up in the air between his wish-boned legs. Dogg Katz, who liked butts inside and out, had held up the double nozzle like a prize. Rip shoved one big black fist-sized nozzle up the man's ass. Strip fastened the other big black dick-sized nozzle tied like a piss gag into the man's mouth. The Dogg Himself slowly released the clamp on the red-rubber hose, so that the slow, excruciating trickle of hot posse piss drained torturously down into the man's body, filling his butt to exploding with all the piss his mouth could not swallow. He was tied and plugged and connected into piss distending his hanging belly from both ends. Where it entered his body was his no-choice choice. What piss he failed to drink went down his asshole. Either way his belly and guts kept filling up, distended into a daddy-belly worth punching, till his mouth barfed and his butt spouted and the whole process started over again. Only worse.

Slowly the value came home to Peter of the generosity of three men turning their time and energy to shine on him. To refuse their touch would be perhaps a sin in a world where real touch is more often rejected than received. Was the touch of the Cowboys on him the invocation of some ancient male ritual? What would they do to him? And why did he have no strength, when they touched him, to resist them? On his truck radio driving

up the Eagles had sung, "Some dance to remember. Some dance to forget." Peter wanted to forget nothing. He wanted to remember everything. He knew nothing finer than the deep, wild ways men play with each other.

The three Cowboys' rope-calloused hands began to remove his shirt. They pulled off his boots and Levi's. They dressed him in black leather chaps with the codpiece pulled off, leaving him naked with his crotch and butt framed in black leather front and back. His cheeks stood out, molded by the tight leather. They pulled on his boots and zipped the chaps down tight and locked the zippers closed with padlocks. They cinched heavy leather restraints around first one booted ankle and then the other. They tightened thick padded leather restraints around both of his wrists.

Peter stood bound in leather, inspected, in the middle of the straw-covered Whipping Stall. The four men studied each other. There was no pretense among them. No role-playing. No barriers. No masks. The stripping had been of more than clothes. They preferred aptitude to attitude. Peter had arrived, already naked, in the need the Cowboys saw in him. They coached his need and his feelings up out of him. They were not executioners. He was not one of the *Penitentes*. There was no guilt in all of this to be expiated. These men, instead, were concelebrating priests of a man-to-man ritual older than all the previous gods ever worshiped on Folsom. They were a quartet of men in perfect post-urban alignment under the watchful eye of Dogg Katz.

The Cowboys led him to the padded black-leather exercise bench. They fastened his body belly-down. His dick was cinched with rawhide. His wrists and ankles were tied to rings welded to the steel legs. His bare butt rose exposed defenselessly. A heavy powerlifter's leather belt was laid across the small of his back and cinched under the bench. He was tied tightly into place. He felt

Dogg Katz's huge unshaven chin and moustache push between his cheeks and he felt Dogg's tongue pierce his pucker and suck the tip of his fudge.

Wordlessly they executed their sure moves. Peter knew the choreography. He thought to resist, but thought again about this almost unique chance to receive. Slowly, the men walked around his bound body. Studying. Gauging. Plumbing the intensity of the depths to which they all might descend together. One after the other, the Cowboys picked whips of gradual intensity. One after the other, they took turns flicking his butt, pinking his cheeks, reddening his white skin with light welts. Peter at first made small noises and then, growing used to the fine play of their belts and whips on his bare butt, fell into a rhythm of acceptance. He was on his journey to the land of corporal punishment.

The Cowboys played him: easy to rough. Had a stranger on a City street struck him a quarter as hard he would have felt injured. The smashing slap of their belts bit in like layers of their energy laid flat across his flesh. Could anyone observing have known the sensual truth? A young son patted on the butt by his father smiles up at the man. A young son, guilty of some disobedience and spanked no harder than the pat his father gave him earlier in play, feels the full sting and cries at the intent. With no guilt in this Whipping Stall, the beating was not one of atonement, but of pleasurable at-one-ment.

Peter's leather-bound dick hung beneath him, stretched through a hole strategically placed in the weight-bench. While Dogg, growling, crawled under the bench and sucked his rockhard cock, Rip and Strip were beating Peter. He was being beaten by them. They were in concert of celebration in one mind. By turns they whipped his ass. Each Cowboy choosing each time a different instrument of corporal discipline: hand, gloved hand, riding crop, belt, cat, cane. Varieties of each one

applied lightly, then rising sensually from the easy beginning to full thick-armed force.

This was corporal punishment, pure and simple: the uncomplicated beating of a man by men.

After more than an hour's slapping, spanking, belting, and whipping, they released him from the bench. They stood him on his feet and silently turned him to view his glowing red butt in the mirrors. The shackles stayed on his wrists and ankles. They laid him back on the mattress and sat and smoked while they talked to each other and he stared silently at the rafters in the barn.

Peter had not known this would happen. He had intended only to drive away from the City, fleeing Castro, Folsom, and then-some, seeking some consolation among some pioneer survivors who had left the City behind for all their own reasons. And to Peter, a man's true reasons were the most important thing to his head. The greatest treason, he figured, was for a man to do the right thing for the wrong reason.

Peter understood the peculiar and upbeat New Masochism. It was not the tired alcohol, tobacco, and bar-leather masochismo ritualized by untherapeutized guys who need to be kicked down twelve steps in order to have guilt-driven sex. Peter could appreciate a good Degradation Bottom. But he himself didn't need the degradation excuses of leather wannabes' abuse in order to find psychic permission to bottom out to beatings, cocksucking, boot-licking, rimming, and whatever *merde* was *du jour*. His head permitted him to acquit his New Masochism in a way that maintained his dignity as a male. The heavy physical endurance of pain and discipline raised him to the noble league of jocks enduring the rigors of practice under a serious coach, raised him to the dignity of young warriors suffering for all the right reasons the transcendental pain of the Sundance Ritual, their chests and tits skewered and pierced and their

bodies suspended from their chests as part of their ritual passage from carefree boyhood into responsible manhood. Peter understood why a Boy Called Pony became a Man Called Horse. He understood the totem rituals of tattooing, piercing, scarification, and branding.

He had not suspected these three Cowboys would take him into a scene his conscious mind had not known he needed. He, in truth, was no sexual S&M ingenue, but he had not really defined how much he needed this trip to S&M Ranch. He could hardly have prepared himself for the Cowboys giving him an unexpected gift, the best kind worth giving. He surrendered to their control. Openly, gladly, even gratefully he accepted their hard caresses. Peter, laidback, had that floating pure feeling that people have during out-of-the-body experiences. He had long ago forgot about this kind of special masochistic hunger in himself. Beyond the drug, beyond the pain, with these men, he was in a stage of rising consciousness grounded in absolute physical pleasure.

The Cowboys took him again: next round, next level. This time they picked him up bodily and hung him upside down by his ankles, face into the post. Six feet above, his booted feet were spreadeagled wide apart on opposite sides of the rough beam down around which came his legs. His dick and belly pressed into the wood of the post. His head dangled a foot off the straw-covered floor of the Whipping Stall. His face rubbed into the rough wood. He wanted to say something as they bound him with cinch-ropes tighter and tighter into totally immobile bondage. But he could not speak. He could not bear to break their intense sexual concentration. They were all four beyond words.

He hung silently upside down.

Their bondage forced him to hug the post. They took yards of rope and began to slowly cinch his spreadeagle ankles toward one another. They wrapped his legs in

his chaps tight into the ropes. Suspended upside down and cinched bellytight into the post, he could not move. A moment of panic swept over him. He raised his head slightly. They moved around his inverted body. He could see only their dusty boots and the frayed heels of their filthy boot jeans. He could hardly believe they were wrapping more rope around his waist and torso. They pulled his chest and shoulders tight into the post. Dogg Katz took the first of three wooden dowels and inserted the wood into the rope web and turned it clockwise causing all the tight ropes to tighten even tighter. He repeated the clockwise turn-and-tightening with the other two dowels increasing the square-inch pressure of the bondage. The hair on Peter's chest and belly snagged splinters on the post. The inflatable penis-gag parted his lips, depressed his tongue, and filled his throat.

Peter was hanging, head down toward the barn floor, pressure cinched against a whipping post with his red-welted ass framed for beating by three serious men already credentialed with their serious intensity. S&M Ranch took men where they consented to go...and then one step beyond. "Abandon Limits, All Ye Who Enter Here." What more defined reality could a man ask for? For such moments, a man's place in the universe seemed quite clear. Hanging by his heels. Bound immobile. Deep-gagged. Whipped. To be whipped even more. His butt hung framed by the chaps, exposed at the exact height of their chests and whip-swinging arms.

Again, one by one, the Cowboys took turns beating him. One man laid into him. The other two watched, stroking their dicks, picking their next instruments from the footlocker full of whips, belts, quirts, bamboo, drilled and studded fraternity paddles, and a cat-of-nine-tails made from a stranded mix of rubber straps, leather thongs, and hemp rope. Peter dropped beneath words to guttural sounds. Their beating was penetrating deep into

him, making everything civilized in the City fall away, until there was nothing left but the sound of the whip followed by the sting and the pain and the welt and the wait for the next crisscross blow. His own sounds, even to him, sounded as if they came from someone else, some inner primitive, gagged deep inside him.

The flat thwack of the belts made echoes resound off craggy nerve-cliffs inside his body. The quick cut of knotted cats scythed through golden underbrush in an uncharted wilderness deep inside him. The three Cowboys ganged up on him for a long and serious three-way whipping. Each took an identical whip. One after the other they alternated flogging him. In the geography of his body, he felt acres of primeval timber thrown into brilliant upheaval by bodyquakes trembling down the length of his completely suspended, bound and tied, immobile self.

Peter could not tell how long the Cowboys beat him. He cared nothing for clock time. He thought of nothing. No headlines. No job. No relationships. For now everything disappeared. There was only this beating. Only this purifying, simplifying corporal punishment. He was serious as an ascetic monk on the Western range. He had only to feel and receive. He trusted their judgement. He knew they would whip him more thoroughly than he had ever been beaten before. He was glad when finally he felt the pinking sting of his butt begin to ooze red and finally run with blood. He could feel with each blow the fine spray of his own assblood splashing hot across his sweaty back.

This was real. Unlike most encounters that seemed unreal, surreal, he was no longer living a jerkoff abstraction, talking of theories and fantasies of S&M over restaurant coffee. He was restrained. Immobile. He had once been the best little boy in the whole wide world and he guessed maybe he still was. The quality of the men whose company he kept convinced him of that. This

was, he knew for sure, one of the ways men of a certain mind touched and evened each other out, so they never made the climb into the bell tower with an AK47. Their private intensity, judged perverse by the world, was antidote to a global village of breeders that was truly, madly, deeply, publicly perverse. Their passion kept them from going insane in a world of crazed ballot boxes, hostages, meltdowns, ethnic cleansing, gender blackmail, and bears getting in touch with their Inner Goldilocks.

Sailors, Peter had read, often had their backs tattooed with the Virgin and Jesus. They hoped that, if ever they were to be stripped for flogging, that the Whipmaster would show them some mercy out of respect for the religious picture tattooed across their backs. Peter had never felt his body to be more of a sacred vessel than at this whipping. If grace existed in the universe, then he was hanging suspended and open to the flow. The harder the Cowboys whipped him, the less nay-saying he felt, until, transcended beyond all negativity, on the edge of Total Yes, he heard the crack of the bull whip across the barn.

Dogg Katz, who had a reputation as big as the legendary whipmeister Fred Katz, warmed up his big arm for the final workout. Peter heard the bull sing through the air and crack louder each time Dogg Katz's arm repeated the stroke more vigorously in the warm air of the Whipping Stall. Rip and Strip, like an opening act for a main attraction, finished off their flogging and stood back sweating and waiting to witness the ultimate "Beating by Bull Whip" of one man by another.

In the silence, only boots shuffled under the heavy step of Dogg Katz warming up with the bull whip. Peter tried to raise his head. His body, with the beating, had tightened in, under the ropes and dowel-twists, ever closer to the whipping post.

Something had happened. Earlier, Peter's dick had

been rockhard. Now he was quiescent. The leather thongs tied around his cock had made his everhard cock feel like a coldcut laced out dark and purple. He didn't care about dick. This game had progressed beyond genital sex. Maybe it was the MDM that took the energy from his dick and shot it to his head. Maybe it was endorphins. Maybe it was God. He knew they had dared to go beyond games, turning his body into a medium for conjuring something up in the barn so raw and primitive it had no name and was rarely called for by men.

They had left civilization now.

It was more than driving up to S&M Ranch. They were somewhere in the deep past and somewhere in the deeper future. This was nothing like the mindless highs of urban culture. This rush defined *rush*.

Around him, Rip and Strip greased their wet dicks in anticipation of this consensual blood rite. Dogg Katz licked his lips. Dogg Katz sniffed Peter's buttohole. Dogg Katz licked that pucker, stuck in his finger, pulled out the stink, sniffed it, and sucked it down.

Peter had never been bull-whipped. He had witnessed lashings in old movies on late-night satellite-dish, and he'd bought those *Brute Force* whipping videos where that International Mr. Leather Joe Gallagher is whipped till he quivers, but he had never thought he would ever be tied upside down with his bleeding cheeks primed and ready for a Cowboy with a professional whiphand. He didn't know if he wanted it or not. Dogg Katz was a legend. This moment might never come again. He sensed it. He embraced it. He loved himself, yeah, and it was weird, but he loved these men, whoever they really were, and he loved this whiphand Cowboy Dogg more than he had ever loved or felt anything in his life.

Peter thought the first blow of the bull whip would never land. Then, cracking, the bull cut lightly like a small sting, tentative, into his cheeks. Dogg Katz timed

his blows, layering each succeeding lash in under the burn of the cut before. Peter felt the rising intensity. He knew Dogg was clever enough not to go so far as to violate the integrity of his body and ruin the reputation of S&M Ranch. But he knew that long before that limit, there were marks he wanted that would last for weeks.

The bull cracked and sang louder, faster, heavier. Peter felt everything. He felt nothing. He was inside himself. He was outside himself. He was one with them. He could feel the energy of the Whiphand Cowboy, Dogg Katz, flowing down into him. His blood ran down his back toward his shoulders. The clock stopped. He was screaming. The clock was running backwards. He was in ecstasy. The clock melted down. His body was quivering. The men were untying him, taking him down, lowering him, laying him flat out on the floor, standing him up to see their work on his butt, walking him to the mattress, laying him back, sitting together with him, and him with them, and all of them together.

Dogg Katz stuck his leather-dog-tongue between Peter's bloody cheeks and, to the victor go the spoils, ate the trophy leather-dog-hole that relaxed, tightened, pushed, pulled, and finally blew like a mud dam. Rip and Strip knelt in close to Dogg.

The beating had not exhausted Peter. The beating had been fine foreplay. The bull whip had opened him up: head and body. There was no resistance left in him. Even if they had taken him out to the four-holer out-house, where men were kept tied to the bondage boards in the cesspit in the broiling Sonoma heat, he would not have objected.

Rip and Strip grinned shit-eating grins at each other. They reached over to Peter and secured his wrists, then raised his shackled ankles to chains hanging over the mattress in the straw.

Dogg Katz, licking his lips, was greasing up his fist.