



Golden

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When her father found out, he stood up then sat down and then stood up again. His left hand patting around the air searching for something. A shot of whiskey, his pipe, a whip, a shot gun, the Democratic platform, his heart--she never knew. His rage filled the room, and made it creak. He began to cry just thinking of what had happened to his daughter. He cried until the rage, blooming and filling the room could be squeezed back into human proportions and he could do a proper thing. Her mother, however, had the final cut: her eyebrows were perfectly still but the look she gave Vera Louise was so full of repulsion the daughter could taste the sour saliva gathering under her mother's tongue, soaking the insides of her cheeks. No word, then or ever, passed between them. And the lingerie case full of money that lay on Vera's pillow the following Wednesday was, in its generosity, heavy with contempt. More money that anybody in the world needed for a year or two away from home. So much money the message was indisputable: die, or live if you like, elsewhere.

1. His name, for obvious reasons was Golden Gray. Gray because that was his mistress' last name (much, much later it was also the color of his eyes), and Golden because after the pink birth-skin disappeared along with the down on his head, his flesh, chastened of practically all blackness, was radiantly golden and floppy yellow curls covered his head and the lobes of his ears. Nowhere as blond as his mistress' hair once was, but its sunlight

color, its determined curliness, endeared him to her. Not at once. It took a while. Only Belle, the cook, laughed out loud the minute she laid eyes on him and thereafter every day for eighteen years.

The three of them moved to a fine sandstone house on [tk] street, far away from [tk] where both Vera Louise Gray and Belle were born. And what Vera Louise told her neighbors was partly true: that she could not bear the narrow little way of her hometown.

From the beginning, he was like a lamp in that quiet [shaded?] world house. Given a fussy spoiling by Vera Louise and a laughing indulgence by Belle. Simply startled each morning by the look of him they vied for the light he shed on them. Belle laughing, laughing, fed him test cakes and picked every single seed from the melon before she let him eat it. Vera Louise dressed him like the Prince of Wales

2. He is in a closed two-seat carriage. The horse is a fine one--black. Strapped to the back is his portmanteau: large and crammed with wonderful shirts, linen, including embroidered sheets and pillowslips; a cigar case and silver toilet articles. He is wearing a long coat, vanilla colored with dark brown cuffs and collar. He is a long way from home and it begins to rain furiously, but since it is August, he is not cold. The carriage strikes a stone and he hears, or thinks he does, a bump on the back of the hansom, which is probably the dislocation of his trunk. He reins in the horse and climbs down to see if any damage has been done to his things. He discovers that the trunk is loose--the rope has slipped and it is leaning. He unties everything and re-secures

it, more strongly than ever, to the carriage. Satisfied with his efforts, but annoyed at the heavy rain , the spoiling it is doing to his clothes and speed of his journey, he looks around him. In the trees to his left, he sees a naked and very black woman. She is covered with mud and leaves--dirty. Her eyes are large and terrible. As soon as she sees him, she starts and turns suddenly to run, but it turning before she looks away, she knocks her head against the tree she has been leaning against .[Her terror is so great, her body flees before her eyes are ready to find the route of escape] The blow knocks her out and down. He looks at her with repulsion, and moves forward to get back into the carriage. He want nothing to do with what he has seen--in fact the 'vision' appears to be all he is running from. When he picks up the reins, and looks at the horse's rear he notices that it is also black, naked and shiny wet, and his feelings about the horse are of security and affection. It occurs to him that there is something wrong about feeling one way about his horse and another about a human. He decides to at least investigate what it is and what has happened to the naked woman now lying in the weeds. He ties up his horse and sloshes back in driving rain to the place where the woman fell. She is still sprawled there. Her mouth and legs open. A small hickey forming on her head. Her stomach big and tight. He leans down, holding his breath against infection or odor or something. Something that might touch or penetrate him. She looks dead or deeply unconscious. There is nothing he can do, and for that he is relieved. Then he notices a rippling movement in her

stomach. The baby inside her is moving. He does not see himself rescuing her, but the picture he does imagine is himself walking away a second time, climbing into his carriage and leaving her to any other fate that might befall her. He is uneasy with this picture of himself, and does not want to spend any part of the time to come remembering having done that. Also there is something about where he has come from and where he is going that encourages in him an insistent, deliberate recklessness. An anecdote, an action that would unnerve his mother and defend him against his father. Maybe. He takes off his long coat and throws it over the woman. Then he gathers her up in his arms and carries her, stumbling, since she is heavier than he supposed, to the hansom. With great difficulty, he gets her into a sitting position in the carriage. Her head is leaning away from him and her feet are touching his splendid but muddy boots. He is hoping her lean will not shift, although there is nothing he can do about the dirty bare feet against him, for if he shifts her again, she may lean against him and not the side of the carriage. As he urges the horse forward, he is gentle for fear the ruts and the muddy road will cause her to fall forward or touch him in some way.

He is heading toward a house in Crucible, or rather a ways out from that village. The house where his father lives. And now he thinks it is an interesting, even funny, idea to meet this nigger whom he has never seen with an armful of black, liquid female. Provided, of course, she does not wake and the rippling in her stomach stops. That bothers him--that she might regain conscious-

ness and be more than a presence. He has not looked at her for some time. Now he does and notices a trickle of blood down her neck. The hickey is not the cause of her faint; she must have struck her head when she fell. But she is breathing still. Now he hopes she will not die--not yet, not until he gets to the house described and mapped for him [be Belle[The rain seems to be following him; whenever he thinks it is about to stop, a few yards on, it gets worse. He has been traveling for six hours, at least, and has been assured the journey would end before dark. Now he is not so sure. He doesn't relish night coming on with that passenger. He is calmed by the valley he is now entering--the one it should take an hour to get through before he reaches the house just this side of Crucible. It is the longest hour filled with recollections of luxury and pain. When he gets to the house, he pulls into the yard and over to the stable[a shed with two stalls]. Both stalls are empty. He takes his horse into one and wipes her down carefully. Then he throws a blanket over her and looks about for water and feed. He takes a long time over this. It is important to him and he is not sure he is not being watched by someone in the house. In fact, he hopes he is; hopes the nigger is watching open-mouthed from a crack in the planks that serve as wall..

Still, no one comes out to speak to him, so perhaps there is no one. After the horse is seen to (and he has noticed that one shoe needs repair), he returns to the carriage for his trunk. He unleashes it and hoists it over his shoulder. It makes a further