



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

mess of his silk shirt as he carries it into the house. On the little porch, he makes no attempt to knock and the door is closed but not latched. He enters and looks about for a suitable place for his trunk. He sets it down on the floor and examines the house. It has three rooms: modest, lived in, male but no indication of the personality of its owner. A cookstove is cold; but the fireplace has a heap of ash that is warm, though there are no embers. The occupant has been gone perhaps a day, maybe two.

After he has seen to the placement of his trunk, he goes back to the carriage to get the woman. The removal of the trunk has displaced the weight, and the carriage is tipping a little on its axis. He opens the door and pulls her out. The long coat he is wearing drags in the mud [n.b. didn't he put his coat around her/ If so why is he wearing it now?] as he carries her into the house. He lays her down on a cot, and then curses himself for not having pulled the blanket back first. Now she is on top of it and the coat is all there seems to be to cover her. Its ruin may be permanent. He goes into a second room and, examining a wooden trunk there, finds another blanket. He retrieves his coat and covers the woman with the second blanket. Now he opens his own trunk and selects a white cotton shirt and flannel waist. He hangs his wet shirt on a chair and puts on the dry things. Then he sets about trying to make a fire. There is wood in the wood box, and in the smallest room (akin to a store room) a can of kerosene. But no matches. For a long time he looks for matches and finally finds some in a can, wrapped in a bit of ticking. Five matches,

to be exact. The kerosene has evaporated by the time he locates the matches. He is not adept at this. Other people have always lit fires in his life. But he persists and at last has a good roaring fire. Now he can sit down, smoke and prepare himself for the return of the man who lives there. A man named Henry Hope[?]. A man of no consequence, except a tiny reputation as a tracker. One or two escapades signalling his expertise in reading trails. Once. A long time ago. And was even called "tracker" or "hunter"-he can't remember which. Hunter Hope, when his name was Henry, or so he was told. But who cares what the nigger's first name is. Except the woman who regretted ever knowing him at all. And would have regretted the baby he gave her too, given it away, except it was golden and she had never seen that color except in the sky and in bottles of champagne. She said. "But he's golden. Completely golden!" So they named him that and didn't take him to the orphanage where white girls deposited their shame.

He has known that for seven days, eight now. And he has known Henry Tracker/Hunter's name and location for two. Information that came from the woman who cooked for them and who smiled and shook her head every time she looked at him. Even when he was a tiny boy with a head swollen with fat champagne colored curls, and ate the pieces of cake she held out to him, her smile was more amusement than pleasure. When the two of them, the woman and the cook, bathed him they sometimes passed anxious looks at the palms of his hands, the drying of his hair. They told him that. The woman and the cook. Miss Vera and Sylvia. (try to close this space)

Golden and Sylvia Sylvia and Golden. Golden and Silver. Niggers. He knew that. Had always known it. What he had not known was that there was only one kind--her kind. Black and nothing. Like Henry Tracker/Hunter and like the filthy woman snoring on the cot.

The rain has stopped. He looks about for something to eat that doesn't need to be cooked--ready made. He finds nothing but a jug of liquor. He samples it and sits back down before the fire. In the silence left by the rain that has stopped, he hears hooves. At the door he sees a rider staring at his carriage. He approaches. Might you be Mr. Hope? The rider doesn't blink. Mr. Tracker? Hunter? "Vienna," says the rider. "Be back direcklin." He doesn't understand any of it. And he is drunk now anyway. Happily. Perhaps he can sleep now. But he shouldn't. The liquid black woman might wake or die or give birth or....