



"of their eternal lives..."

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of their eternal lives, their cleaving won't mean a thing. Amen."

Some of the amens that accompanied and followed Reverend Senior Pulliam's words were loud, others withholding; some people did not opening ~~ing~~ their mouths at all. The question, thought Anna, was not why but who. Who was Pulliam blasting? Was he directing his remarks to the young people, warning them to shape up before their selfish lives collapsed? Or was he aiming at their parents for allowing the juvenile restlessness and defiance that had been rankling him since 1973? Most likely, she thought, he was bringing the weight of his large and long Methodist education to bear down on Richard. A stone to crush his colleague's message of God as a permanent interior engine that once ignited roared, purred and moved you to do your own work as well as His--but if idle rusted, immobilizing the soul like a frozen clutch.

That must be it, she thought. Pulliam was targeting Misner. Because surely he would not stand before the bride and groom--a guest preacher asked to make a few (few!) remarks before the ceremony to a congregation made up of almost everybody in Ruby only a third of whom were members in Pulliam's church--and frighten

them to death on their wedding day. Because surely he would not insult the bride's mother and grandmother who wore like a coat the melancholy of tending broken babies, and who not only had not chastized God for this knockout blow to everything they dreamed of, but whose steadfastness seemed to increase as each year passed. And although the groom had no living parents, surely Pulliam did not intend to embarrass his aunts--to put the feet of those devout women to the fire for caring (too much perhaps?) for the sole "son" the family would ever have now that ^{Soane's} ~~Olive~~'s boys were dead and Dovey had none, and who had not let mourning for either of those losses tear them up or close their hearts. Surely not. And surely Pulliam was not trying to rile the groom's uncles, Deek and Steward who behaved as if God were their silent business partner. Pulliam had always seemed to admire them, hinting repeatedly that they belonged in Zion not Calvary where they had to listen to the namby-pamby sermons of a man who thought teaching was letting children talk as if they had something important to say that the world had not heard and dealt with already.

Who else would feel the sting of "God is not interested in you." Or wince from the burn in "if you think love is natural you are blind".

Who else but Richard Misner who now had to stand up and preside over the most anticipated wedding anyone could remember under the boiling breath of Senior "take-no-prisoners" Pulliam? Unless, of course, he was talking to her, telling her: cleave unto another if you want, but if you are not cleaving to God (Pulliam's God, that is) your marriage is not worth the license. Because he knew she and Richard were talking marriage, and he knew she helped him organize the young disobedients. ^{he was} "Be the Furrow".

Rogue mint overwhelmed the flower arrangements around the altar. Clumps of it, along with a phlox called Wild Sweet William, grew beneath the church windows that at eleven o'clock were opened to a climbing sun. The light falling from the April sky was a gift. Inside the church the maplewood pews, burnished to a military glow, set off the spring-white walls, the understated pulpit, the comfortable almost picket-fence look of the railing where communicants could kneel to welcome the spirit one more time. Above the altar, high into its clean clear space, hung a two-foot oak cross. Uncluttered. Unencumbered. No gold competed with its perfection or troubled its poise. No writhe or swoon of the body of Christ bloated its lyric thunder.

~~not~~ The women of Ruby did not powder their faces and they wore no harlot's perfume. So the voluptuous odor of phlox and sweet william, disturbed the congregation, made it reel in anticipation of a good time with plenty good food at Soane Morgan's house. There would be music by anyone: July on the upright piano; the Men's Choir; a Kate Golightly solo; The Holy Redeemer Quartet; a dreamy-eyed boy on the steps with a mouth organ. ^{There} ~~Their~~ would be the press of good clothing; silk dresses and starched shirts forgotten as folks leaned against trees, sat on the grass, mishandled second helpings of cream peas. There would be the shouts of sugar-drunk children; the crackle of wedding gift paper snatched from the floor and folded so neatly it seemed more valuable than the gift it had enclosed. Farmers, ranchers and wheat growing women would let themselves be yanked from chairs and clapped into repeating dance steps from long ago. Teenagers would laugh and blink their eyes in an effort to hide their want.

But more than joy and children high on wedding cake, they were looking forward to the union of two families, and an end to the animus that had soaked the members and friends of those families for four years. Animus that centered on the maybe-baby the bride had

not acknowledged, announced or delivered.

Now they sat, as did Anna Flood, wondering what on earth Reverend Pulliam thought he was doing. Why cast a pall now? Why diminish the odor of rogue mint and phlox; blunt the taste of the roast lamb and lemon pies awaiting them. Why fray the harmony; derail the peace this marriage brought?

Richard Misner rose from his seat. Annoyed, no, angry. So angry he could not look at his fellow preacher and let him see how deep the cut. Throughout Pulliam's remarks he had gazed expressionless at the Easter hats of the women in the pews. Earlier that morning he had planned five or six opening sentences to launch the sacred rite of matrimony, crafted them carefully around Revelations 19:7,9, sharpening the "wedding feast of the Lamb" image, coring it to reveal the reconciliation this wedding promised. He had segued from Revelations to Matthew 19:6, "So they are no longer two, but one flesh," to seal not only the couple's fidelity to each other but the renewed responsibilities of all Morgans and Fleetwoods.

Now he looked at the couple standing patiently before the altar and wondered whether they had understood or even heard what had been laid on them. He, however, did understand. Knew this lethal

view of his chosen work was a deliberate assault on all he believed. Suddenly he understood and shared Augustine's rage at the "proud minister" whom he ranked with the devil. Augustine had gone on to say that God's message was not corrupted by the messenger; "if [the light] should pass through defiled beings, it is not itself defiled." Although Augustine had not met Senior Pulliam, he must have known ministers like him. But his dismissal of them to Satan's company did not acknowledge the damage words spoken from a pulpit could wreak. What would Augustine say as anodyne to the poison Pulliam had just sprayed over everything? Over the heads of men finding it so hard to fight their instincts to control what they could and crunch what they could not; in the hearts of women tirelessly taming the predator; in the faces of children not yet recovered from the blow to their esteem upon learning that adults would not regard them as humans until they mated; of the bride and groom frozen there, clasping hands, desperate for this public bonding to dilute their private agony. Misner knew that Pulliam's words were a widening of the war he had declared on Misner's activities: tempting the young to step outside the wall, outside the town limits, shepherding them, forcing them to transgress, to think of themselves as civil warriors.

Suitable language came to mind but, not trusting himself to deliver it without revealing his deep personal hurt, Misner walked away from the pulpit to the rear wall of the church. There he stretched, reaching up until he was able to unhook the cross that hung there. He carried it, then, past the empty choir stall, past the organ where Kate sat, the chair where Pulliam did, on to the podium and held it before him for all to see--if only they would. See what was certainly the first sign any human anywhere had made: the vertical line; the horizontal one. As children, their fingers drew it in snow, sand or mud; laid it down as sticks in dirt; arranged it from bones on frozen tundra and broad savannahs; as pebbles on river banks; scratched it on cave walls and outcroppings from Nome to South Africa. Algonquin and Zulu, Laplanders and Druids--all had a finger-memory of this original mark. The circle was not first, nor was the parallel, nor the triangle. It was this mark, this, that lay underneath every other. This mark, displayed in the placement of human facial features. This mark of a standing human figure poised to embrace. Remove it, as Pulliam had done, and Christianity was like any and every religion in the world: a population of supplicants begging respite from begrudging authority; harried believers ducking

fate or dodging everyday evil; the weak negotiating a doomed trek through the wilderness; the sighted ripped of light and thrown into the perpetual dark of choicelessness. Without this sign, the believer's life was confined to praising God and taking the hits. The praise was credit; the hits were interest due on a debt that could never be paid. Or, as Pulliam put it, no one knew when he had "graduated." But with it, in the religion in which this sign was paramount and foundational, well, life was a whole other matter.

See? The execution of this one solitary black man propped up on these two intersecting lines to which he was attached in a parody of human embrace, fastened to two big sticks that were so convenient, so recognizable, so embedded in consciousness as consciousness, being both ordinary and sublime. See? His woolly head alternately rising on his neck and falling toward his chest, the glow of his midnight skin dimmed by dust, streaked by gall, fouled by spit and urine, gone pewter in the hot dry wind and, finally, as the sun dimmed in shame, as his flesh matched the odd lessening of afternoon light as though it were evening, always sudden in that climate, swallowing him and the other death row felons, and the silhouette of this original sign merging with a false-night sky. See how this official murder out

of hundreds marked the difference; moved the relationship between God and man from CEO and supplicant to one on one? The cross he held was abstract; the absent body was real, but both combined to pull humans from backstage to the spotlight, from muttering in the wings to the principal role in the story of their lives. This execution made it possible to respect--freely, not in fear--one's self and one another. Which was what love was: unmotivated respect. All of which testified not to a peevish Lord who was his own love, but to one who enabled human love. Not for His own glory--never. God loved the way humans loved one another; loved the way humans loved themselves; loved the genius on the cross who managed to do both and die knowing it.

But Richard Misner could not speak calmly of these things. So he stood there and let the minutes tick as he held the crossed oak in his hands, urging it to say what he could not: that not only is God interested in you; He is you.

Would they see? Would they?

For those who could see it, the groom's face was a study.

He looked up at the cross Reverend Misner was holding holding

holding. Saying nothing, just holding it there until time became unbearable and the unendurable silence was sprinkled with coughs and soft encouraging grunts. The open windows were not enough; suddenly the groom began to perspire in his beautifully cut black suit. Anger shot through him like a .32 bullet. Why was everybody using his wedding, messing up his ceremony, to extend a quarrel he could care less about? He wanted it over. Over and done with so his uncles would shut up; so Jeff and Fleet would stop spreading lies about him, so he could take his place among the married and propertied men of Ruby, so he could burn all those letters from Arnette. But especially so he could flush that Gigi bitch out of his life completely. Like sugar turning from unreasonable delight to the body's mortal enemy, his craving for her had poisoned him, rendered him diabetic, stupid, helpless. Following months of risky sweetness, she had become indifferent, bored, even hateful. In tall corn he had waited for her; in moonlight he had crept behind hen houses to meet her; spent money that was not his to entertain her; lied to get something other than a truck to drive her; planted a marajuana crop for her; carried ice in August heat to cool the inside of her thighs; bought her a transistor she adored, a chenielle robe she laughed at. Most of all he had loved

her, an aching, humiliating, self-loathing love that drifted from pining to stealth.

He had read the first letter he got from Arnette, but the others he put in a shoe box in his aunt's jam closet and was in a hurry to destroy them (or maybe even read them) before anybody discovered the eleven unopened envelopes posted from Langston, Oklahoma. He assumed they were all about love and grief, love in spite of grief. Whatever. But what could Arnette know of either the way he did? Had she sat through the night in a copse of shin oak to catch a glimpse? Had she trailed a beat up Cadillac all the way to Demby just to see? Had she been thrown out of a house by women? Cursed by women? And still, still been unable to stay away? Not, that is, until his uncles sat him down and gave him the law and its consequences.

So here he was, standing at the altar, his elbow holding the thin wrist of his bride; aware of the heavy breathing at his right of his soon-to-be brother-in-law; and the animosity of Billie-Marie burrowing into the back of his head. He was certain it would go on forever, this blocked rage, because Misner seemed to be struck dumb by the cross he held.

A cross the bride gazed at in terror. And she had been so happy.

At last so very very happy. Free of the bleak sadness that encased her as soon as she was home from college: the unrelenting suffocation in her parents' house; the brand new disgust that accompanied the care of her broken niece and nephew; the need for sleep that alarmed her mother, annoyed her sister-in-law and infuriated her brother and father; the flat out nothing-to-do-ness interrupted only by wonder and worry about K.D. Although he had never answered her first twelve letters, she'd kept on writing, but not mailing, forty more. One a week for the whole first year she was away. She believed she loved him absolutely because he was all she knew about her self--which was to say, everything she knew of her body was connected to him. Except for Billie ^{Delia} Marie, no one told her there was any other way to think of herself. Not her mother; not her sister-in-law. When, ^{she came} during her senior year, home for Easter, he ^{fx} asked to see her, came twice for dinner, took her to Steward's ranch to help with the Children's Day picnic, and then suggested they get married it was a miracle that lasted all spring down to this brilliant day in July. Everything perfect: her period had come and gone; her gown, made entirely of Soane Morgan's lace, was heavenly; the gold band tucked into her brother's vest was engraved with both their

initials intertwined. The hole in her heart had closed, finally, and now, at the last minute, the preacher was acting strange, trying to hold up the marriage, delay, maybe even destroy it. Standing there, his eyes like bullets, holding a cross as though nobody had ever seen one before. She pressed her fingers into the arm that held hers, willing Misner to get on with it. Say it, say it! "Dearly Beloved, we are gathered here... We are gathered here." Suddenly, soundlessly, in the muffled silence that Misner imposed, a tiny rent opened in exactly the place where her heart's hole had been. She held her breath and felt its increase, like a run in a stocking. Soon the little heart tear would yawn, stretch wide, wider sapping all her strength until it got what it needed to seal and permit the heart to go on beating. She was acquainted with it, thought marrying K.D. would permanently heal it, but now, waiting for "We are gathered here...", anxious for "Do you take this...", she knew better. Knew exactly what was and would always be missing.

[tk Billie-Marie]

*Insert
attached.*

With or without chew in his mouth, Steward was not a patient man.

SAY IT, PLEASE, SHE WHISPERED. AND HURRY. HURRY.
IVE GOT THINGS TO DO.

#

BILLIE DELIA SHIFTED THE BOUQUET OF FREESIA FROM
HER LEFT HAND TO HER RIGHT AND TURNED HER GAZE
FROM THE LACE TREMBLING ON THE BRIDE'S HEAD TO
THE BACK OF THE GROOM'S NECK AND THOUGHT IMMEDIATELY
OF HORSES. ALTHOUGH IT WAS HE WHO HELD IN HIS NAME
THE MEMORY OF A LEGENDARY HORSE RACE, IT WAS SHE
WHOSE LIFE HAD BEEN MAIMED BY IT. THE WINNING HORSE
WAS OWNED BY TK WHO, ONCE UPON A TIME HOISED HER
ON ITS BARE BACK. HE WAS LAUGHING, SAYING WENEEED
SOME MORE HORSEWOMEN IN THIS TOWN! EVERYBODY CRYING
FOR A MOTOR CAR NEED TO MOUNT UP THESE CHILDREN
EARLY! BILLIE DELIA WAS THREE YEARS OLD TO LITTLE
FOR UNDERWEAR AND NOBODY NOTICED OR CARED HOW
PERFECT HER SKIN FELT AGAINST THAT WIDE, NAKED EXPANSE
OF ANIMAL FLESH. TK LED HER AROUND AND AROUND
THE SCHOOL YARD WHILE SHE STRUGGLED TO GRIP THE
HORSE WITH HER ANKLES. THE GROWN UPS SMILED, TAKING
PLEASURE IN HER PLEASURE. FROM THEN ON, WHEN SHE
BEGGED FOR RIDES, EVERYBODY ACCOMODATED HER. EVEN
HER GRANDFATHER SAID SHE WAS A NATURAL NO SCREAMS,
NO FEAR. THEN ONE DAY. TK PROMISED TO COME COME
BY AFTER CHURCH SERVICE AND LET HER RIDE WITHOUT
HIS HOLDING THE REINS. STILL IN HER SUNDAY CLOTHES
SHE WAITED IN THE YARD WHICH WAS NEXT TO THE SCHOOL
HOUSE YARD. WHEN SHE SAW HIM LEADING X DOWN CENTER
STREET, BILLIE DELIA RAN OUT INTO TO STREET WHERE
SHE PULLED DOWN HER SUNDAY PANTIES BEFORE RAISING

to complement the yellow buds
The (blossoms)
were closing so
she knew they
would. Only
the tea roses
remained
sturdy with
(a) promise you
could count on
to be kept. she
had suggested
baby's breath but
no one had any;
then white
yarrow but
she regretted
carrying a weed that
wedding is so
there they were
both of them
water hungry
and tea roses
with thorns

Covered by Mrs. Delia

from Mrs. Delia's
searching eyes
to

x years after the race

frowning

that K.O.
had ridden
when Ruby
was
started

while calling TK a Retrograde

Folks said TK but they

until

had

coming

clomping behind

the after church crowds
blending through

the middle of Center



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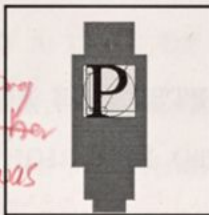
The wait Misner was forcing on everybody, silently holding a cross, seemed natural to her. ^{or surprise} (did not bother her, it was



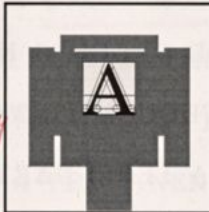
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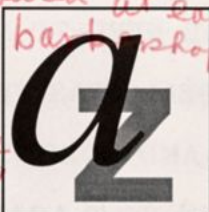
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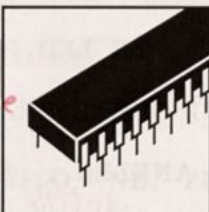
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Just one more piece of foolishness that made up this foolish wedding that everybody thought would stop the war.

But the battle was not between the Morgans, the Fleetwoods and those who sided with either. It was true that Jeff had taken to

carrying a gun; that Mr.

Steward and Fleetwood had shouted at each other

in the street, that Mrs.

had spread the story about an

abortion taking place in the convent,

that Pulliam had preached a

sermon on innocent blood

taken from Jeremiah

11:5 ("Before I formed you in the

womb I knew you, and before

you were born I consecrated you.")

But to Billie Delia - that

was a dodge. The real

battle was not about disagreement

men but about disobedience

which meant, of course, that

the men were fighting about who

controlled the women, and

children and the babies.

Misner was on the other

side. Now

he was making

looked as though he would wait

til it understood his position.

Wandered into
A book room
to buy
Collect in
people, came to Mendel's
booker shop, to grant
and sigh over a story
not for hours but

Senin Pulliam, had Scripture and history
on his side.
Misner had Scripture and the future
on his.

like the quarrel about the words
on the Owen's lip.

SHE PULLED DOWN HER SUNDAY PANTIES BEFORE RAISING
HER ARMS TO BE LIFTED UP ON TO X BACK. EVERYTHING
SEEMED TO CRUMPLE AFTER THAT. SHE GOT AN UNINTELLIGIBLE

SPANKING FROM HER MOTHER AND A DOSE OF SHAME IT ~~SHE~~ ^{understand}
~~TOOK HER YEARS TO ACKNOWLEDGE.~~ FROM THEN ON SHE

SUFFERED TEASING IN SCHOOL MORE MERCILESS BECAUSE
HER MOTHER WAS THE TEACHER: ^{Suddenly there was} A DARK LIGHT IN THE

EYES OF BOYS WHO FELT COMFORTABLE STARING AT H
ER AND SHE ^{Suddenly} ~~SENSED~~ A CURIOUS BRACING IN THE WOMEN,

^{look from} SOME WARNING ~~INT~~ HE MEN, AND A PERMANENT WATCHFULNESS
FROM HER MTOHER. ONLY MRS. DOVERY MORGAN AND

HER SISTER SDOANE TREATED HER WITH EASY KINDNESS.

^{But} AND IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR ANNA FLOOD, HER TEENS
WOULD HAVE BEEN UNLIVABLE. ^{Not did} ~~IN ADDITION~~ ANNA FLOOD AND THE

MORGAN LADIES MAKE HER FEEL THE FREAKISHNESS OF
BEING AN ONLY CHILD, PERHAPS BECAUSE THEY HAD

FEW OR NO CHILDREN THEMSELVES. MOST FAMILIES BOASTED
NINE, ELEVEN EVEN FIFTEEN CHILDREN. AND IT WAS NATURAL

THAT SHE AND ARNETTE, WHO HAD NO SISTERS AND ONLY
ONE B ROTHER, BECOME ~~GOOD~~ BEST FRIENDS. ~~EVERYONE~~ ^{ELSE}

ASSUMED ^{she} ~~BILLIE DELIA~~ WAS THE WILD ONE, THE ONE WHO
NOT ONLY HAD NO QUALMS ABOUT PRESSING HER NAKEDNESS

ON A HORSE'S BACK BUT PREFERRED IT. ^{would drop her drawers in public on Sunday} ALTHOUGH IT
WAS ARNETTE WHO HAD SEX AT FOURTEEN (WITH THE GROOM),

BILLIE DELIA CARRIED THE BURDEN OF A LOOSE GIRL WITH
~~APPETITES REGULARLY SATISFIED.~~ IN FACT SHE WAS UNTOUCHED..

SO FAR. SO FAR. BEING HELPLESSLY IN LOVE WITH A
PAIR OF BROTHERS, ^{the} ~~HER~~ VIRGINITY THAT NO ONE BELIEVED

~~IN~~ HAD BECOME AS MUTE AS THE CROSS REVEREDN MISNER
WAS HOLDING ALOFT. ^{Now} HSI EYES WERE CLOSED. HIS JAW

MUSCLES WORKING OVERTIME. HE HELD THE CROSS AS
THOUGH IT WERE A HAMMER HE ^{was trying not} ~~LONGED~~ TO BRING DOWN
ON SOMEBODY'S HEAD. BILLIE DELIA WISHED HE WOULD
OPEN HIS EYES, ^{again} LOOK AT THE GROOM AND BUST HIM OVER
THE HEAD WITH IT. BUT NO: THAT WOULD EMBARRASS
THE BRIDE WHO HAD WON, FINALLY, ^{the} A HUSBAND HER BRIDESMAID
DESPISED. ^{A husband who} HE HAD PROPOSITIONED HER BEFORE AND AFTER
HIS THING ^w ITH ARNETTE. ^{A husband who} WHILE ARNETTE WAS AWAY HE
HAD FORGOTTEN ALL ABOUT HER AND CHASED ANY DRESS
WHOSE WEARER WAS UNDER FIFTY. ^{A husband who had} MEANWHILE HE ^{his future bride} LEFT
ARNETTE PREGNANT AND ON HER OWN. BILLIE DELIA HAD
NEVER HEARD OF SUCH A THING. ANY GIRL WHO GOT
PREGNANT IN RUBY COULD COUNT ON MARRIAGE _ WHETHER
THE BOY WAS ^{eager} ~~WILLING~~ OR NOT _ BECAUSE HE STILL HAD
TO LIVE ^{near her family and} WITH HIS ~~FAMILY AND NEAR~~ ^{own} HERS. BUT NOT
THIS GROOM. THIS GROOM LET THE BRIDE SUFFER FOR
THREE YEARS AND ONLY CONSENTED TO A WEDDING WHEN
HE WAS KICKED OUT OF ANOTHER WOMAN'S BED. KICKED
SO HARD HE COULDN'T GET TO THE ALTER FAST ENOUGH.
BILLIE ~~DEALIA~~ ^{She} REMEMBERD VIVIDLY THE DAY THE KICKER
HAD ARRIVED IN SHOES ^{already} DESIGNED FOR THE GROOM'S BEHIND.
BILLIE DELIA'S HATRED ^{of her} WAS INSTANT AND WOULD HAVE
BEEN ETERNAL HAD SHE NOT TAKEN REFUGE ^{after} ON THE CONVENT
HERSELF ONE CHILLY OCTOBER DAY. A QUARRELL WITH
HER MOTHER HAD TURNED UGLY. HER MOTHER FOUGHT
HER LIKE A MAN. SHE HAD RUN TO ANNA FLOOD WHO
TOLD HER TO WAIT UPSTAIRS WHILE SHE DEALT WITH SOME
DELIVERY MAN BUSINESS. BILLIE WAITED FOR WHAT SEEMED
LIKE HOURS, LICKING HER SPLIT LIP AND TOUCHING THE
GROWING SWELLING UNDER HER EYE. WHEN SHE SPIED

APPOLO'S TRUCK, SHE SLIPPED DOWN THE BACK STAIRS
AND WHILE HE WAS MAKING PURCHASES, SHE GOT INTO
HIS CAB. NEITHER OF THEM KNEW WHAT TO DO. APOLLO
OFFERED TO TAKE HER OUT TO HIS FAMILY'S PLACE.
BUT, ASHAMED OF HAVING TO EXPLAIN HER FACE TO HIS
PARENTS AND PUT UP WITH THE STARES OF ANY ONE OF
HIS THIRTEEN BROTHERS AND SISTERS, SHE ASKED HIM
TO DRIVE HER OUT TO THE CONVENT. THAT WAS THE
FALL OF 1973. WHAT SHE SAW AND LEARNED THERE CHANGED
HER FOREVER. AGREEING TO BE ARNETTE'S BRIDESMAID
WAS THE LAST SENTIMENTAL THING SHE WOULD EVER
DO IN RUBY. ~~EVERYTHING ABOUT HER HAD ALTERED.~~
~~EXCEPT HER HELPLESS DOUBLE LOVE.~~

love of horses and her

*She got a job in Demby, bought a car
and probably would have driven
it to New York City except for her*

So he was surprised to find himself calm watching Misner's behavior. All around and in back of him the congregation had begun to murmur, exchange looks, but Steward, believing he was less confounded than they were, did neither in spite of no soothing wad of tobacco. As a small boy he had listened to Big Daddy describe a sixty-five mile journey he'd taken to bring supplies back to Haven. It was 1920. A sickness called rocking pneumonia gripped Haven and Big Daddy was one of the few able bodies able to go. He went alone. On horseback. He got what he needed in X County and, with the medicines bundled under his coat, the other supplies tied to the horse, he lost his way and found himself after sunset unsure of which way to go. He smelled, but could not see, a campfire that seemed to be fairly close by on his left. Then, suddenly, to his right he heard whoops, music and gunshots. But he saw no lights in that direction. Stuck in darkness with invisible strangers on both sides he had to decide whether to ride toward the smoke and meat smells or toward the music and guns. Or neither. The campfire might be warming robbers; the music might be amusing lynchers. His horse decided. Smelling others of its kind it trotted toward the campfire. There Big Daddy found three Sac and Fox men sitting near a fire hidden in a hole. He

dismounted, approached carefully, hat in hand, and said "Evening."

The men welcomed him and learning of his destination warned him against entering the town. The women there fight with their fists, they said; the children are drunk; the men don't argue or debate, but speak only with firearms; liquor laws don't apply. They had come to rescue a family member, who had been drinking in there for twelve days. Already one of them was searching for him. What's the name of the town Big Daddy asked. Pura Sangre they answered. At its northern edge was a sign: No Niggers. At its southern edge a cross. Big Daddy spent several hours with them and, before light, thanked them and left--backtracking to find his way home. When Steward heard the story the first time he could not close his mouth, thinking of that moment when his ^{grand?} father was all alone in the dark, guns to the right, strangers to the left. But the grown ups laughed and thought of something else. "No niggers at one end; a cross at the other and the devil loose in between." Steward didn't get it. How could the devil be anywhere near a cross? What was the connection between the two signs? Since that time, however, he had seen crosses between the titties of whores; military crosses spread for miles; crosses on fire in negros' yards, crosses tattoed on the forearms of

dedicated killers. Whatever Misner was thinking, he was wrong. A cross was no better than the user. Now he fingered his mustache and saw his twin shift his feet and grab the pew in front of him.

Soane, sitting next to Deek, ^{listening to his heavy breathing} ~~hearing him breathe~~, knew she had made a mistake. She was about to touch her husband on the arm to caution him from rising when Misner lowered the cross at last, and spoke the

opening words of the ceremony. Deek sat back and cleared his sinuses, but the damage was done; ^(lover) peace and goodwill ^{summed by the announcement of the wedding} were

^{now} shattered. The reception at her house would be a further digest of the

problem and, unbeknownst to others, Soane had made the mistake of inviting Connie and ^{the Convent Women} ~~her house~~ guests to the wedding reception. She was about to hostess one of the biggest messes Ruby had ever seen.

Finally Kate Golightly touched the organ keys, and when the couple turned around to face the congregation, Soane cried. Partly at the sad bright smiles of the bride and groom, partly in dread of the malice, set roaming now, and on its way to her house.

The children shone like agate; the women were brilliant in their still fresh Easter clothes; the men's shoes squeaky new glistened like

They were right back where they
had started when Jefferson Fleetwood
pulled a gun on
& K. D., ~~got into a shouting match~~; when
Merner had to interrupt a pushing
match between Steward and Arnold;
and Mable sent no cake to the
All Church
X cake Sale.

melon seeds. At the beginning everyone was trying hard not to rile one another because the division between Misner-thinking people and Pulliam-thinking people was clear. Reverend Pulliam was there bending toward Mrs. Fleetwood, nodding and smiling. Misner had not arrived. The laughter was low, cautious. The coos over the gift table excessive. Everything was carefully cheerful for a while. Then the Cadillac came. It took just ten minutes for the people in the parlor and on the porch to give up trying to concentrate on the bride's dress, the food, the antics of sugar-drunk children because it was hard, too hard to ignore the scene developing around the Oven.

The convent women are dancing, throwing their white dust. Connie did not come, but her boarders did. Mavis drove the Cadillac with Gigi and Seneca in the back and a somebody new in the passenger seat. None of them was dressed for a wedding. They piled out of the car looking like Go-go girls: painted eyes, no lipstick, obviously no underwear, no stockings. Jezebel's storehouse raided to decorate arms, earlobes, necks, ankles and even a nostril. Mavis and Soane greeting each other on the lawn were uncomfortable. The other women surveyed the food tables, said "hi" and wondered if there was anything other than lemonade and punch to drink. There wasn't, so

DEEK's over view

they did what a few other young people had already done: drifted out of the Morgan's yard and strolled past Anna Flood's store to the Oven. The few local girls that were there clump together and withdraw to the oak tree, leaving the territory to the Poole boys: Apollo, Brood and Hurston. The Seawrights: Timothy and Spider. To Destry, Uane and Roy. Menus joins them, but Jeff does not. Neither does the watchful groom. Dovey is removing the fat from a ham slice when the music hits. She cuts her finger and sucks it while Otis Redding screams "Awwwww, lil girl...." Outside the window and on down the road the beat and the heat are merciless.

The Convent women are dancing, throwing their arms over their heads they did this and that and then the other. They smile and yip but look at no one. Just their own rocking bodies. The local girls look over their shoulders and snort. Brood, Apollo and Spider, steel muscled farm boys, sway and snap their fingers. Hurston sings accompaniment. Two small girls ride their bikes over; wide-eyed they watch the dancing women. One of them, with amazing hair, asks can she borrow a bike. Then another. They ride the bikes down Central Street with no regard for what the breeze does to their long flowered skirts, or how pumping pedals plumped their breasts. One coasts with

her ankles on the handlebars. Another rode the handlebars with Brood on the seat behind her. The other two laugh with the rest of the boys.

Anna and Kate ^{carried their plates of food} ~~walk~~ to the edge of Soane's garden.

"Which one?" whispered Anna.

"That one there" said Kate. "The one with the rag for a blouse."

"That's a halter," said Anna.

"Halter? Looks like a starter to me."

"She the one K.D. was messing with?"

"Yep."

"I know that one there. She comes in the store. Who the other two?"

"Beats me."

"Look. There goes Billie-^{Delia}Marie."

"Naturally."

Oh, come on, Kate. Leave Billie alone. (over)

[tk]

The hair at the top of her head, sectioned off with a red plastic barret, would have been a small pompdour or a curl had it been longer than

Anna and Kate waited several beats before getting their laughter free. ~~One thing~~, thought Anna, whatever else, ^{the coquettish women} Nasty dancing ~~was~~ probably saved the reception. Nothing like other folks' sins for distraction. Maybe Richard's young people were right: We are the fur row of this Brown. And where is he anyway?

They spooned potato salad into their mouths. Behind them Georgia ^x came murmuring "My, my my."
Hello Georgia, said Kate.

"Have you ever seen such a carrying on? Bet you can't find one ^{whole} brassiere in the bunch ^{Georgia held the crown of her hat} of ~~any~~ ^{in the breeze} ~~at all~~."

"Why you ^{all} smiling? ~~I don't think this is in the breeze~~ ~~It's~~ ^{I am} a funny." ~~at all~~."

"~~I~~ No, it's not ~~know~~," said Kate.

"This is a wedding ^{remember?} after all."

"~~Yes~~ Georgia, you right about that."

How Would you like to have somebody dancing nasty at your wedding?"

~~Of course not~~ said Kate, ^{shook her head sympathetically while} pressing her

lips tightly so no smile ^{could} seep ~~past~~ through.

Anna tried to look seriously affronted before this stern preacher's wife, thinking ^{Dear Jesus} ~~to~~.

~~Can't~~ wouldn't last an hour in this town if I married Richard.

"I'm going ^{to} ~~think I~~ have to get Reverend to stop

this ~~at~~," said Georgia and moved resolutely toward Soane's house.

two or three inches. In the event, it was neither. Just a tuft held rigid by the child's barret. Two other hair clips, one yellow, one powder blue, also held fingerfuls of hair at her temples. Her dark velvet face was on display and rendered completely unseen by the biscuit size discs of scarlet rouge, the fuschia lipstick drawn crookedly beyond the rim of her lips, the black eyebrow pencil that trailed down toward her cheekbones. Everything else about her was dazzle and clunk: white plastic earrings, copper bracelets, pastel beads at her throat and much, much more where all that came from in the bags she carried: two BOAC carrier bags and a woven metal purse shaped like a cigar box. She wore a white cotton halter and a little bitty red skirt. The hose on her short legs, a cinnamon color thought agreeable to black women's legs, was as much a study in running as her high heels were in run-over. Inner arm skin and a small, sturdy paunch suggested she was about fifty years old, but she could have been eighty or thirty. The dance she danced on the up escalator, the rolling hips, the sway of her head called to mind a by gone era of slow grind in a badly lit room of couples. Not the electric go-go pace of 1976. The teeth could have been done anywhere: Kiingston, Jamaica or Pass Partner, Louisiana; Addis Abbaba or Warsaw. Stunning gold,

they dated her smile while giving it the seriousness the rest of her clothing withheld.

Most eyes looked away from her--down at the floating metal steps under foot or out at the Christmas decorations enlivening the department store. Children, however, and Dee Dee Truelove stared.

California Christmasses are always a treat and this one promised to be a marvel. Brilliant skies and heat turned up the gloss of artificial snow, plumped the green and gold, pink and silver wreaths. Dee Dee, laden with packages, just managed to avoid tripping off the down escalator. The woman with the rouge and gold teeth distracted her. In spite of the difference in circumstances, Dee Dee and the woman favored one another. There was no question that both were unattractive, but once in a while a close friend would look at Dee Dee, shiver, and wonder if she was more than that--actually revolting. The shiver would pass quickly, however, along with the friend's shame at having had such a thought because the earrings that hung from Dee Dee's lobes were 18 carat; the boots on her feet were handmade; her jeans custom made and the buckle on her leather belt was

handsomely worked silver. In addition Dee Dee drove a red Toyota with built-in 8 track tape deck, and lived in a magnificent house with two servants. Her father was a lawyer with a small client list but two were big-time, cross-over black entertainers. As long as Milton Truelove kept them on top, he didn't need to acquire more, although he kept a look-out eye for other young performers who might hit the charts and stay there.