



"couldn't have seen it anyway."

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couldn't have seen it anyway. Where he sat on the kitchen steps a triangle of shadow covered him.

"Who is that?" she asked.
Come on, girl.
"You know me, girl." He leaned forward and she saw that he wore sunglasses--the mirror type that glitter.

"No," she said. *I* "I can't say I do."

"Well, it don't matter. I'm just passing." There were ten yards between them, but his words licked her cheek.

"You from the town?"

"Uh uh. I'm stone country. Got anything to drink?"

"I suppose. Inside."

"Oh, well," he said as though that settled it and he would rather go thirsty.

"Holler," said Consolata. "One of the girls'll bring you something." She felt light, weightless as though she could move, if she wanted to, without standing up.

Don't you know me better than that?
"Come on," said the man. *asked.* "I don't want to see your girls. I want to see you."

Consolata laughed. "You need your glasses much as me."

Suddenly he was next to her without having *even* ever stood up.

~~And~~ ^{was} smiling like he was having (or expecting) such a good time. Consolata laughed again. It seemed so funny, comical really, the way he had flitted over to her from the steps, and how now he was looking at her--flirtatious, full of secret fun. Not six inches from her face he removed his ^{tall} ~~big~~ hat. Fresh, tea-colored hair came tumbling down, cascading over his shoulders and down his back. He took off his glasses then and winked, a slow seductive movement of a lid. His eyes, she saw, were ^{round} ~~peppermint candy~~ and green as new apples.

In candlelight on a bitter January evening Consolata cleans, washes and washes again two freshly-killed hens. They are young, poor layers, with pins difficult to extract. Their hearts, necks, giblets and livers turn slowly in boiling water. She lifts the skin to reach under it, fingering as far as she can. Under the breast, she searches for a pocket close to the wing. Then holding the breast in her left palm, the fingers of her right tunnel the back skin, gently pushing for the spine. Into all these places--where the skin has been loosened and the membrane separated from the ⁷ ~~smooth~~ flesh it once protected--she slides butter. Thick. Pale. Slippery.

X — X
Pallas wiped her eyes with the heel of her hand and then blew her nose. Now what should she do?

^{latest}
This ~~last~~ phone call was not very different from the initial one.

Just shorter. But the frustration at not being able to speak, to say

^{it produced}
~~anything was~~ the same. And she remembered the helpless anger

^{what had}
~~when she had first called her father last summer.~~
^{passed for conversation with}

Jesus Christ where the hell are you? We thought you were

dead. Thank God. They found the car but it's bashed to hell on one

side and somebody stripped it. You okay? Oh, baby. *Daddy*. Where is

he, boy is his ass over. Tell me what happened. Your bitch mother's

not making any sense as usual. Did he hurt you? *Daddy, no*. Well,

what? Was he alone? We're suing the school, baby. Got them by the

short hairs. *It wasn't him. Some boys chased me*. What? *In their*

truck. They hit my car and forced me off the road. I ran and then--

They rape you? *Daddy!* Hold on sweetheart. Jo Anne get me that

detective guy. Tell him I got Pallas. No, she's okay, just get him, will

you? Go ahead, baby. *I'm* Where are you? *Will you come and get me*

Daddy? Of course I will. Right away. Do you need money? Can you

get to an airport, a train station? Just tell me where you'll be. Wait.

Maybe you should call the police. The local ones I mean. They can get

you to an airport. Tell them to call me. No. You call me from the station. Where are you? Pallas? Where you calling from? Pallas, you there? *Minnesota*. Minnesota? Jesus. I thought you were in New Mexico. What the hell's up there? Bloomington? No, St. Paul. Are you near St. Paul, sweetheart? *I'm not near anything, Daddy. It's like country.* Call the police, Pallas. Make them come get you, you hear? *Okay, Daddy.* Then call me from the station. *Okay.* You got that? You're not hurt or anything. *No Daddy.* Good. Okay now. I'll be right here or Jo Anne will if I go out. Boy what you put me through.

But everything's going to be okay now. ^{Take care of} We'll ~~talk about~~ that asshole ^{we have to talk.} when you get back. Okay, now? Call me. Love you, baby.

^{Talk. Sure.} But she had not called anybody. ^{See Dee} Police, her mother or him. ^{traveling all the same.} Until last August. He was furious, but wired her money to get home.

^{of me} If they had laughed behind her back before Carlos, if they had joked at her expense then, it came to her only as a ^{pale} light sensation, ^{broken gesture} an ~~odor~~ upon entering study hall; an eye slide as she turned away from her locker; an unstable smile as she joined a crowded lunch table. She had never been truly popular, but her address and her father's money hid the fact. Now she was an open joke (Pallas Truelove ran off with the jaaa-ni-tor don't you love it?) ^{that} no one tried

to hide. She was back in that place where final wars are waged, deep
in the ~~poisonous waters~~ ^{trenches} of high school, where shame is a walk down
the hall, ~~failure~~ ^{a fumble with} the combination lock ~~in the locker room~~ and loathing
is a wafer of bubble gum clogging a fountain. Where aside from the
exchange of clothes and toys, there are no good intentions. Where
smugness reigns, judgments instant, dismissals permanent. And the
adults ~~hadn't~~ ^{haven't} a clue. Only prison ~~was~~ ^{could be} as blatant and as frightening, for
beneath its rules and rituals scratched a life of gnawing violence.
Those who ~~lived in~~ ^{came from} apparently peaceful well-regulated homes were
overtaken by a cruelty that visited them as soon as they entered the
gates. Cruelty dressed in juvenile glee.

Pallas tried. But the humiliation wore her down. Milton pumped
her about her mother. He had been warned about the consequences
of marrying outside his culture, and every warning had come true.
Pallas was vague, noncommittal. He was still pursuing a lawsuit
against the school for its lax and endangering ~~atmosphere~~ ^{environment}, not to
speak of its criminally inclined employees. But the "victim" of the
"abduction" had gone willingly; and the destination of the "across
state lines" journey was the "victim's" own mother. How criminal
could that be? Was there something going on in the father's home

they should know about? Something that made her want to, ^{eager to} escape to her mother? Furthermore nothing untoward had happened on school grounds--except the repair of the "victim's" car and safe guidance home. Also the "abduction" took place during the holiday when the school was closed. Moreover the "victim" had not only gone willingly, she had cooperated and deceived to voluntarily accompany a man (an artist, even) who had no priors and whose demeanor and work at the high school was exemplary. Had she been assaulted by him, sexually? The "victim" said No, no, no, no. Did he drug her, give her something illegal to smoke? Pallas shook her head, no, remembering that it was her mother who did that. Who were these people who hit your car? I don't know. I never saw their faces. I got out of there. Where to? I hitched and some people took me in. Who? Some people. In a church kind of place. In Minnesota? No, Oklahoma. What's the address, phone number? Daddy, give it up. I'm home, ^{yeah but} okay? I don't want to have to worry about you. Don't. Don't.

But Pallas didn't feel well. Everything she ate added a pound in spite of the fact that she threw most of it up. Thanksgiving she spent alone with food Providence had prepared. Christmas she begged relief. Milton said No. You stay right here. Just Chicago, she said, to

visit his sister. He agreed, finally, and ^{executive} made all the arrangements. ^{had his secretary}

Pallas stayed with her aunt till December 30 when she took off
(leaving a reassuringly misleading note) ^{Tulsa} for ~~Oklahoma~~. At the airport
she hired a car and driver to take her ~~all the way~~ to the Convent. Just
a visit, she said. Just to find out how everybody was, she said. ~~But~~
^{Who was she fooling? she knew} all the while ~~knowing~~ what Connie said was true. Now what?

Consolata tilts the fowl and peers into their silver and rose
cavities. She tosses in salt and scours it all around then rubs the
outer skin with a cinnamon and butter mixture. Onion is added to
the bits of neck meat, hearts and giblets speckling the broth. As soon
as the hens are roasted brown enough and tender she sets them aside
so they can reclaim their liquids.

Lukewarm and shallow the tub water rose only to her waist.
Gigi liked it deep, hot, heavy with bubbles. The plumbing in the
mansion was breaking up: producing colored water, heaving and
sometimes failing to rise to the second floor, ^{the} well water passing ^{ed}
through a wood fed boiler nobody other than herself was interested
^{preserving} in. ^{She was a regular nuisance in the mansion} ~~She made a nuisance of herself~~ trying to bathe in gallons of piping

was a ~~hardship~~ ^{as usual} she endured for the pleasure it gave her,
hot water. Seneca had helped out, bringing several pails of steamy
water from the kitchen stove to the bathroom. Better than nothing,
~~she supposed.~~ For bubbles she poured in grains of Ivory Snow and
whipped the water up as best she could although the result was a
disappointing slime. She had asked Seneca to join her in the tub, got
the usual refusal and although she understood why her friend
preferred not to be seen naked, Gigi couldn't resist teasing her about
the infrequency of her bathing. The bloody toilet tissue she had seen,
but the ridges on Seneca's skin ~~she~~ ^{only been} had felt under the covers. Blunt
and obnoxious as she could be, Gigi could not ask her about them. The
answer might come too close to the bleeding black boy scene.
~~Just~~ ^{She} Gigi stretched her legs out and lifted her feet to admire them as
she had done many times when she ran them up K.D.'s spine while she
lay in the ~~tk~~ ^{hay loft} and he sat with his naked back to her. She missed him,
now and then. His chaotic devotion full of moods and hurts and
yearning and lots and lots of giving in. Well, she had dogged him a bit.
Enjoyed his availability and adoration because she had so little
experience of either. Mikey. Nobody could call that love. But K.D.'s
version didn't stay fun for long. She ^{had} teased, insulted or refused him
once too often and he chased her around the house, grabbed her,

smacked her. Mavis and Seneca had pulled him off, ^{used} ~~waved~~ kitchen equipment ^{on him} and got him out of there--all three of them answering his curses with better ones of their own.

Ah, well. This is a new year, she thought. Nineteen seventy five. New plans since the old ones turned out to be trash. When she finally got the box out of the ^{bathroom tile} ~~floor~~, she whooped to find it full of certificates. The bank officer was tickled ^{too} ~~to death~~ and offered her twenty-five dollars for the pleasure of framing them or putting them in a display case for the amusement of his customers. Not every day you could see documentation of one of the biggest scams in the West. She ^{dollars} negotiated for fifty and stomped out of the bank ordering Mavis to just drive, please.

She would ^{make} ~~encourage~~ Seneca ^I ~~to~~ leave with her. For good this time. Get back in the fray. Somehow. Somewhere. Her mother was unlocatable; her father on death's row. Only a grandfather left in a spiffy trailer in Alcorn, Mississippi. She had not thought about it too carefully, but now she wondered exactly why she had left. The fray, that is. It wasn't just the bleeding boy or Mikey's trick about the couple making out in the desert, or the short guy's advice about clear water and entwined trees. Before Mikey the point of it all was lost to

entertainment and adventure. Provocative demonstrations,
pamphlets, bikerings, police, squatters, leaders—^{and talk talk so much talk} none of it was
serious. Gigi lifted dripping wet hands to ^{reclasp a} ~~readjust~~ the rollers in her
hair. "Bastards," she said aloud. And then, not knowing who were
the bastards that infuriated her so, she slapped the awful bathwater
hissing "Shit!" with each stroke. It calmed her after a while, enough
for her to lean back in the tub, cover her face and whisper into her
palms, "No, you stupid, stupid bitch. ^{Because you} ~~You just~~ weren't tough enough.
Smart enough. Like with every other god damn thing you got no
staying power. You thought it was going to be fun and that it would
all work. In a season or two."

Gigi was not the crying type; even now, when she realized she
had not liked herself in a long long time, her eyes were ^{desert} ~~bone~~ dry.

Consolata is peeling and quartering small brown potatoes. She
simmers them in water seasoned with pan juices, bay leaf and sage
before arranging them in a skillet where they turn darkly gold. She
sprinkles paprika and seeds of blackest pepper over them.

tk [Mavis here]

Six yellow apples, wrinkled from winter storage, are cored and floating in water. Raisens are heating in a saucepan of wine.

Consolata fills the hollow of each apple with a creamy mixture of egg yolks, honey, ^{pecans}~~walnuts~~ and butter, to which she adds, one by one, the wine-puffed raisens. She pours the flavored wine into a pan and ^{plops}~~sets~~ the apples down in. The sweet warm fluid moves.

The little streets were narrow but straight. But as soon as she made them they flooded. Sometimes she held toilet tissue to catch the blood, but she liked to let it run too. The trick was to slice at just the right depth. Not too light so the cut yielded too faint a line of red. Not so deep it swole and gushed over so fast you couldn't see the street. Although she had moved the map from her arms to her thighs, she recognized with pleasure the traces of old roads, avenues that even Norma was repelled by. One was sometimes enough for months. Then there were times when she did two a day, hardly giving a street time to close before she opened another one. But she was not reckless. Her instruments were clean, her iodine (better than Mercurochrome) plentiful. And she had added aloe jelly to her kit.

The habit, begun in one of the foster homes, started as an accident. Before her foster-brother--another kid in Mama Greer's house--got her underwear off the first time, a safety pin, holding the waist of her jeans together where a metal button used to be, opened and scratched her stomach as Harry yanked on them. After they were tossed away and he got to her panties, the bloodline excited him even more. She did not cry. It did not hurt. When Mama Greer bathed her she clucked "Poor baby. Why didn't you tell me?" and Mercurochromed the jagged cut. She was not sure what she should have told: the safety pin scratch or Harry's behavior. So she pin-scratched herself on purpose and showed it to Mama Greer. Because the sympathy she got was diluted, she told her about Harry. "Don't you ever say that again. Do you hear me? Do you? Nothing like that happens here." After a meal of her favorite things, she was placed in another home. Nothing happened for years. Until junior high school, then the eleventh grade. By then she knew that there was something inside her that made boys snatch her and men flash her. If she was drinking Coke with five girls at a dime store counter she was the one whose nipple got tweaked by a boy on a dare from his singgering friends. Four girls, or just one, might walk down the street, but when

she passed the man sitting with his baby daughter on a park-bench, it was then he lifted his penis out and made kissing noises. Refuge with boy friends was no better. They took her devotion for granted but if she complained to them about being fondled by friends or strangers their fury was directed at her so she knew it was something inside her that was the matter.

She entered the vice like a censored poet whose suspect lexicon was too supple, too shocking to publish. It thrilled her. It steadied her. Access to this under garment life kept her own eyes dry inducing a serenity rocked only by crying women, the sight of which touched off a pain so wildly triumphant she would do anything to kill it. She was thirteen and not cutting sidewalks when Kennedy was killed and the whole world wept in public. But she was eighteen when King was killed one spring and another Kennedy that summer. She called in sick to her waitressing job each time and stayed indoors to cut short streets, lanes, alleys into her arms. Her blood work was fairly easy to hide. Like Eddie Turtle, most of her boy friends did it in the dark. For those who insisted on answers she invented a disease. Sympathy was instant for the scars did look surgical.

The safety available in Connie's house had become less intact

when Pallas arrived. She had spent a lot of time trying to cheer and feed her for when Pallas wasn't eating she was crying or trying not to. The relief that descended when the girl left last August disappeared when she returned in December--prettier, fatter, pretending she had just stopped by for a visit. In a limosine, no less. With three suitcases. It was January now and her night sniffling could be heard all over the house. Seneca did another street. An intersection, in fact, for it crossed the one she'd done a moment ago.

The table is set; the food placed. Consolata looks at the women's faces and says "If you want to stay here you have to do what I say. Eat how I say. Sleep when I say. And I will teach you what you are hungry for." The women look at each other and then at the Connie they do not recognize. What is she talking about, they wonder. This sweet, unthreatening old lady who seemed to love each one of them best; who never criticized, who shared everything but needed little or no care; required no emotional investment; who listened; who locked no doors and accepted each as she was. What is she talking about, this

ideal parent, friend, neighbor in whose company they were safe from harm.

"If you have a place you should be in and somebody who loves you waiting there, then go. If not stay here with me. There is someone one who wants to meet you."

No one left. There were ^{a few} some nervous objections, some giggling but in time they came to see that they could not leave the one place they were free to leave.

Gradually they lost the days.

In the beginning the most important thing was the template.

First they had to scrub the cellar floor until its stones were as clean as ^{on a} rocks ^{Then} at the shore. They ringed the ^{place} whole space with candles.

Consolate ^{→ over} told each to lie down. How should we lay? However you feel. They tried arms at the side, outstretched above the head, crossed over breasts or stomach. Seneca lay on her stomach at first then changed to her back hands clasping her shoulders. Pallas lay on her side, knees drawn up. Gigi flung her legs and arms apart while Mavis struck a floater's pose, arms angled, feet pointing in. When each found the position she could tolerate ~~on the hard floor~~, another

was
instructed
to

to undress and lie down. In flattering light
under the Consolata's soft vision they did
as told.

leaned over her ^{and} to paint the body's silhouette. Once the outline ^{each got down to lie} was complete they returned to it, lying within it. Naked in candle light.

Stories rose up like frameless screens. They feel the heat in the floor. Cadillac, the shock of cold air in the Higgley Piggledy, they know their tennis shoes are unlaced, and a bra strap annoys each time it slips from the shoulder. The Armour package is sticky. They see the sleeping twins and feel the ^{parental} satisfaction although they notice one's head is turned awkwardly. They adjust the sleeping baby head then refuse, outright refuse, what they know and drive home ^{away they climb stairs} carrying franks and babies and purse together in their arms. Saying "They don't seem to want to wake up, Sal. Sal? Look here. They don't seem to want to." They kick their legs underwater, but not too hard for fear of waking fins or scales also down below. The male voices saying saying push their own down their throats. Saying, saying until there is no breath to scream or contradict. ————> (over)

Life, real life, intense life ^{shifted to} becomes increasingly down there in limited pools of light, ^{in air} smokey from kerosene lamps and candlewax.

[Cool but not as cold as their bedrooms ^{made uncomfortable by} saturated as they are with frozen recollections.] The templates drew them like magnets and they

↓
Mavis shops for
tubes of paint, sticks of colored chalk. Paint thrower
& chamois cloth.

Each one gags on tear gas, moves
her hand slowly to the scraped shin.
the turn ligament. Runs up and down
the stairs by day. Sleeps in a ball
with the lights on at night. Folds the
500 dollars ^{in the foot of} ~~into~~ her socks.

begin to fill them in. First with natural features: breasts and pubic

hair, toes and ears and hair on the heads. Seneca ~~began to duplicate~~ ^{in pale blue}

^{one of} her more ^{elegant} ~~ornate~~ scars. ^{And} Then once, when she had the hunger to slice

her inner thigh, she chose to mark the ^{instead} ~~body~~ ^{opening} lying on the cellar floor.

They spoke to each other about ^{what had been drawn} ~~these~~ signs. Gigi drew a locket around

^{her} the body's throat, heart shaped, ~~silver~~, ^{about it} and when Mavis asked her

^{Gigi said} ~~what it was, she told her~~ it was a gift from her mother which she had

thrown into the Gulf of Mexico. Were there pictures inside, asked

^{Pallas} Mavis. Yeah, ~~said Gigi~~. Two. Whose? Gigi didn't answer, she simply

reinforced the dots marking the locket's chain. Pallas had ^{put} ~~drawn~~ a

baby in ^{her} the template's stomach. When asked who the father was she

said nothing but drew next to the baby a woman's face with long

eyelashes and a crooked fluffy mouth. They pressed her, but gently

without joking or scorn. Carlos? The boys who drove her into the

water? Pallas gave the crooked mouth two long fangs.

January folded away, February too. By March after weeks of
whispers, shouts and ragged sobs the bodies were ^{full of} ~~the~~ careful etchings

of body parts and memorabilia ^A ~~were complete~~. Yellow barretts, red

peonies, ^A green crosses on a field of white. ^A Majestic penis pierced

with a Cupid's bow.

^{brushes}
Mavis Shopped for tubes of
oil paint, trap

2/25/33

passed
By March the days were uncut from
night. ~~Monologue~~ ~~collapsed into~~ [ragged] ~~into~~ shrieks
accusations undone by
~~ragged sobbing ended in~~ murmurs of love.

A visitor stopping by would have heard
nothing — but may have wondered why
the garden was as yet unfilled, or why

