



"care; required no emotional investment..."

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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. What is she thinking, this perfect landlord who charged nothing and welcomed anybody; who could be confided in or ignored; this play mother who could be coddled or walked out on depending on the whim of the child.

"If you have a place," she continued, "that 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 ^{Nervous} a few questions, ~~some~~ ⁹ nervous giggling ^{NO at all} but in time they came to see that they could not leave the one place they were free to leave.

a bit of
pouting
and
simulated
outrage

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 rocks on a shore. Then they ringed the place with candles. Consolata told each to undress and lie down. In flattering light under Consolata's soft vision they did as they were told. How should we

^{Lie}
~~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, knees pointing in. When each found the position she could tolerate on the uncompromising floor, Consolata walked around her and painted the body's silhouette. Once the outlines were complete each were instructed to remain there. Unspeaking. Naked in candlelight.

They wriggled in discomfort, ^{after} after a while, but were reluctant to move outside the self-chosen silhouette painted just for them. Often they thought they could not bear another second, but none wished to be the first to give in before those pale watching eyes. Consolate spoke first, describing a place where ~~jewels were as plentiful as grapes tk~~

^{That} which is how the loud dreaming began. Stories rose in that place. High above ^{the} guttering candles ^{*} and it was never important to know who ^{said} spoke the dream or whether it had meaning. They enter the heat in the Cadillac, feel the shock of cold air in the Higgley Piggledy. They know their tennis shoes are unlaced, and that a bra strap annoys

* the dust ~~laden~~
laden bottles of
wines.

white sidewalks met the sea and fish
the color of plums swam alongside the
children. She spoke of fruit (food?) that
tasted the way Sapphire's look and
boys using emeralds for dice: scented
cathedrals made of gold where gods and
goddesses sat in the pews along with
the congregation. Of carnations tall
as trees. Then she told them of ~~the~~ a
woman who sang but never spoke a
word.

each time it slips from the shoulder. The Armour package is sticky. They inhale the scent of sleeping infants and feel parental ^{copy} satisfaction although they notice one's head is ^{lying} turned awkwardly. They adjust the sleeping baby head then refuse, outright refuse, what they know and drive away home. They climb porch stairs carrying frankfurters and babies and purse 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 ^{forever saying} saying saying push their own down their throats. Saying, saying until there is no breath to scream or contradict. Each one blinks and gags from tear gas, moves her hand slowly to the scraped shin, the torn ligament. Runs up and down the halls by day, sleeps in a ball with the lights on at night. Folds the five hundred dollars in the foot of her sock. Yelps with pain from a stranger's penis and a mother's rivalry more ^{lethal} ~~deadly~~ ^{gun.} than a ~~fist.~~ →

In loud dreaming monologue ^{is no different from a} ~~turns sometimes~~ into shrieks; accusations directed to the dead and long gone are undone by murmurs of love. Exhausted, enraged they rise and go to their beds vowing never to submit to that again but knowing full well they will.

winces at

→ recoils from a mother's rivalry

as corrupting as heroin

more/as ?

as fatal as cocaine

- ^{alluring} ~~intimate~~ and fatal as heroin

→ alluring, fatal, like cocaine

And they do.

Life, real and intense, shifted to down there in limited pools of light, in air smokey from kerosene lamps and candlewax. The templates drew them like magnets. It was Pallas who insisted they shop for tubes of paint, sticks of colored chalk. Paint thinner and chamois cloth. When the material arrived they all understood and began to begin. First with natural features: breasts and pudenda, toes, ears and head hair. Seneca duplicated in robin's egg blue one of her more elegant scars, one drop of red at its tip. Later on, when she had the hunger to slice her inner thigh, she chose instead to mark the open body lying on the cellar floor. They spoke to each other about what had been drawn. Gigi drew a heart locket around her body's throat, and when Mavis asked her about it, she said it was a gift from her ^{father} ~~mother~~ which she had thrown into the Gulf of Mexico. Were there pictures inside? asked Pallas. Yeah. Two. Whose? Gigi didn't answer, she simply reinforced the dots marking the locket's chain. Pallas had put a baby in her 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

~~Seneca~~

Seneca

Are you sure she was your sister? Maybe
She was your mother. ^{Why?} Because ^{No} sister would do
that.

Are you saying that?

said and what had been drawn. Are you
Sure she was your sister, Seneca. Maybe she
was your mother. Why? Because no
Sister would do such a thing.

her into the water? Pallas gave the crooked mouth two long fangs.

January folded. February too. By March days passed uncut from night as careful etchings of body parts and memorabilia occupied them. Yellow barrettes, red peonies, a green cross on a field of white. A majestic penis pierced with a Cupid's bow. Rose of Sharon petals, Lorna Doones. A bright orange couple making ^{heavy?} steady love under a childish sun.

With Consolata in charge, like a new and revised Reverend Mother, feeding them bloodless food and water alone to quench their thirst, they altered. Forgot about the moving bodies they wore and thought only of the ^{living} ~~live~~ but stationary ones in the cellar. ^{below?} / fix

A customer stopping by would have noticed little change. May have wondered why the garden was as yet untilled, or who had ^{scratched} ~~painted~~ SORROW on the Cadillac's trunk. May even have wondered why the old woman who answered the ^{knock} ~~door~~ ^{did not} ~~no longer wore~~ ^{cover her awful eyes with} sunglasses; or what on earth the younger ones had done ^{with} ~~to~~ their hair. But a ^{neighbor} ~~friend~~ would notice more: the charged air of the house, the sense of surfeit, a markedly different look in the eyes of its inhabitants.