



"None of the current DuPres..."

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DuPres

None of the current generation liked or approved of the Convent women but that was way beside the point. The actions of Brood and Apollo had insulted them; Wisdom Poole was brother to their daughter-in-law and in his participation in a group intent on hurting women--for whatever reason--they would quickly see the monster's handiwork. And so they did. When Lone told them all she had heard and what she knew, Pious wasted no time. He instructed his wife Melinda to get over to the Beauchamps place; tell Ren and Luther to meet him. He himself would get to Deed Sands and Aaron Poole. Melinda said they ought to notify Dovey but they could not agree on how to do that if Steward was there. Lone didn't know if they had already started for the Convent or were waiting for sunrise but said she would risk it and inform Dovey who could, if she wanted to, let Soane know what was going on.

Tired from their nightdance but happy the women return to the house. They clean themselves ^(over) and ^{at} nap until 4:00 when they wake to prepare for the day. One mixes dough while another lights the stove. Others gather vegetables for the noon meal and set out the breakfast things. The bread kneaded into mounds is placed in tins to rise.

clean themselves and ask Consolata to
tell them more about Pliedade.

② Her voice made ~~each~~ ^{proud} women weep in the streets

① We sat ^{on} ~~by the sea~~ ^{shorewalk}. She ~~wrapped me in water~~ ^{bathed me in emerald}
~~her hair when the sun was too hot.~~ ^{when}

③ Coins fell from the fingers of artists, ~~lawyers~~ ^{and}
and police. ~~when she sang~~ and the world's
greatest chefs ~~gave us~~ ^{[killed us to treat their} food.

④ She had songs ~~to make the waves~~ ^{that could still} a wave ~~each~~
~~so it paused~~ ^{to make it in its cure} as if ~~to~~ listening to language
it had not heard since the opening ^{sea}.

- Sheep herders
~~travelers~~ came down from mountains to
remember their lives ~~in~~ her songs. Travelers
refused to ~~board~~ ^{homebound} ships.

(At night) ~~her breath~~
- She ^{took the stars} smelled of pineapple and saltwater
^{out of her hair}
She wrapped me in ~~her hair~~ ^{it} and

^{The women}
They sleep, wake and sleep again
Under the ~~spell of~~ ^{images of} parrots and ^{crystal} seashells they
go to bed and wake and ^{a singing woman who} never speaks.

The men separate.

Sunlight is yearning for brilliance when the men arrive. The stone-washed blue of the sky is hard to break but by the time the men park behind shin oak and start for the Convent the sun had cracked through. Glorious blue. The water of the night rises as mist from puddles and flooded crevices in the road's shoulder. When they reach the Convent, they avoid loud gravel crunch by ^{weaving} ~~walking~~ through tall grass and occasional rainbows to the front door. The claws, perhaps, ^{out of the world} snatch Steward over the top. Mottled and glistening from the rain they flank the steps. As he mounts between them he raises his chin and then his rifle and shoots open a door that had never been locked. It slants inward on its hinges. ^g Sunlight follows him in splashing the walls of the alcove where sexualized infants play with one another through flaking paint. Suddenly a woman with the same white skin appears and all Steward needs to see are her sensual appraising eyes to pull the trigger again. The other men are startled but not deterred from stepping over her ~~and waiting for Deek's orders~~. Fondling their weapons, ~~feeling~~ ^{are} so young and good they are reminded that guns ~~serve~~ ^{are} more than decoration, intimidation or comfort. They are meant.

Deek gives the orders.

The men separate.

The three women in the kitchen hear a shot. A pause. Another shot. Cautiously they look through the swinging door. ^{Backed by} light from the slanted door shadows of armed men loom into the hallway. The women race ~~to~~ the game room and close the door seconds before the men position themselves in the hall. They hear footsteps pass and enter the kitchen they have just left. No windows in the game room—the women are trapped and know it. Minutes pass. Arnold and Jeff Fleetwood leave the kitchen, notice then open the game room door. An alabaster ashtry slams into Arnold's temple, exhilarating the woman wielding it. She continues to smash until he is down on all fours while Jeff, taken off guard, aims his gun a tick too late. It flies from his hand when a cue stick cracks his wrist and then, on upswing, rams into his jaw. He raises his arm first for protection then to snatch the point of the cue when the frame of St. Elizabeth of Sienna breaks over his head.

The women run into the hall, but freeze when they see two figures exit the chapel. As they run back to the kitchen, Harper and Menus are close behind. Harper grabs the waist and arm of one. She

is a handful so he doesn't see the skillet swinging into his skull. He falls, dropping his gun. Menus, struggling to hold the wrists of another, turns when his father goes down. The stock that drenches his face is so hot he can't yell. He drops to one knee and a woman's hand reaches for the gun spinning on the floor. ^{it's} Half-blinded he yanks her left ankle. She kicks at his head with her right foot. Behind him a woman lifts a kitchen knife and plunges it so deep in the shoulder bone she can't remove it for a second strike. She leaves it there and escapes into the yard with the other two. *scattering card fowl as they go.*

Coming from the second floor Wisdom Poole and Sargeant Person see no one. They enter the schoolroom where light pours through the windows. They searched behind desks pushed to the wall even though it is clear nobody, even a child, is small enough to hide there.

^{a Black and Decker} Down below under long slow beams of Flashlight Deek, Steward and K.D. observe defilement and violence and perversions beyond imagination. Lovingly drawn evil carpets the stone floor. K.D. fingers his palm cross. Deek taps his shirt pocket where sunglasses are tucked. He had thought he might use them for other purposes, but he wonders if he needs them now to shield his sight from this sea of

depravity beckoning below. None dares step onto it. More than justified in their expectations, they turn back and climb the stairs. The schoolroom door is wide open; Sargent and Wisdom motion them to enter. Bunched at the windows, all five understand: the women are not hiding. They are loose.

Shortly after the men left Sargeant's place, the citizens of Ruby arrive at the Oven. The rain is slowing. The trash barrel swirls with debris. The stream has crested but doesn't overflow its banks.

Instead it seeps underground. ^{ing}Where the rain cascades off the Oven's head ^{that here}it meets mud speckled with grout flakes washed away from bricks. As its concrete base is undermined the Oven shifts, just slightly, on one side. The impacted ground on which it rests ^{unable to}can no longer support its weight. In trucks and cars the citizens go to meet the men.

^{awful}Neither sister needs persuading for both have known something troubling was happening. Dovey asks Soane to drive. Each is silent with loud, rocketing thoughts. Dovey has watched her husband destroy something in himself for forty years. The more he gained, the less he became. Now he may be ruining everything. Had twenty-five

years of rampant success confused him? Did he think because they lived away from white law, they were beyond it? Of course no one could ask for a more doting husband and as long as she ignored the unknowable parts, their marriage seemed perfect. She misses the little foreclosed house where her friend visited. Only once since K.D. took it over has he come to her and that was in a dream where was moving away from her. She called; he turned. Next thing she knew she was washing his hair. She woke, puzzled, but pleased to see that her hands were wet from the suds.

Soane is chastizing herself for not having talked, just talked to Deek. Told him she knew about Connie; that the loss of their third child was a judgment against her--not him. After Connie saved Easter's life Soane's resentment against her disappeared and, because the two of them had become fast friends she believed she had forgiven Deek also. Now she wondered whether her fear of suffocating in air too thin for breathing, her unrelieved mourning for her sons were ways of punishing him without seeming to. In any case she was certain that routing the Convent women had something to do with their marriage. Harper, Sargeant and certainly K.D. wouldn't lift a hand to those women if Deek and Steward had not authorized and

manipulated them. If only she had talked twenty-two years ago.
Just talked.

"What do you think?" Dovey broke the silence.

"I can't."

"They wouldn't hurt them, would they?"

Soane cut off the wipers. There was no need for them now.

"No," she answered. "Just scare them. Into leaving, I mean."

"People talk about them all the time, though. Like they were--
slime."

"They're different is all."

"I know but that's been enough before."

"These are women, Dovey. Just women."

"Whores, though and strange too."

"Dovey!"

"That's what Steward says and if he believes it--"

"I don't care if they're--" Soane couldn't imagine worse. Both
became quiet.

"Lone said K.D. is out there."

"He would be."

"You think Mable knows? Or Priscilla?" asks Dovey,

"Doubt it. Hadn't been for Lone, would we?"

"It'll be all right, I guess. Aaron and Pious will stop them. And the Beauchamp's. Even Steward won't mess with Luther."

The sisters laughed then, small hopeful laughs, soothing themselves as they sped through glorious dawn air.

Consolata wakes. Seconds earlier she thought she heard footsteps descending. She assumed it was Pallas coming to nurse the baby lying beside her. She touches the diaper to see if a change is needed. Something. Something. Consolata goes chill. Opening the door she hears retreating steps too heavy, too many for women. She ~~turns and bends over the baby~~ ^{she} considers whether or not to disturb ^{the baby's} ~~its~~ sleep. ^{then} Quickly slipping on shoes and dress, ~~she~~ ^a decides to leave the child ~~sleeping there~~ on the cot. She climbs the stairs and sees immediately a shape lying on the alcove tile. She runs ^{to} ~~toward~~ it and cradles the woman in her arms. Blood smear ^s her cheek and the left side of her dress. The pulse at the neck is there but not strong; the breathing is shallow. Consolata rubs the fuzz on the woman's head and begins to step in, deep, deeper to find the pin point of light. Shots ring from the next room.

Men are shooting through the window at three women running through tall grass and scotchbroom. Consolata enters ^{bellowing} shouting "No!" ~~(screaming)~~

The men turn. ^(over) Deacon Morgan needs the sunglasses, but they are ^{Nestled} ~~folded~~ in his shirt pocket. He looks at Consolata and sees in her eyes what has been drained from them and from himself as well.

There is blood on her cheek. It takes his breath away. He lifts his hand to halt his brother's and discovers who, between them, is the stronger man. The bullet enters her forehead.

^{Soane} ~~Soane~~ is screaming. Dovey is staring.

skilled labor and craft. But the families held on to what they could and what they had gained from 1798 when the first DuPres carried a white napkin over his arm and a prayer book in his pocket. The belief that sustained them was not grim. Virtue, random goodness, made them smile. Deliberate righteousness lifted their hearts as little else could. They did not always know what it was, but they spent a lot of time trying to find out. Long before Juvenal was appointed to the state house supper conversation of a DuPres table focussed on the problems each member was having, how each and all could handle or help. And always the turn was on the morality of a deed, the clarity of motives, what benefit to his glory and his trust. None of the

Consalata
then narrowing her gaze as though distracted by
something high above their heads, she whispered "You're
back."