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[L4]

(See over)

—>

They were young girls. In a year they would be bleeding—hard. Skin clear and death defying. They had no business in that business.

Time moves along for grown people, but the young are stuck in ^{it} ~~the moment~~ like bugs who, after lapping ^{in syrup} ~~syrup~~, can't move and believe that the sticky world around them is ^{to their heart's content} ~~forever now~~.

May who should know known better ^{reminded me of them. She wanted to} thought the same that the battle of life ~~thicken time, in it~~.

~~was to get it to stand still and~~ the day Mr. Cosey told us who he was marrying was the opening day of her personal December 7. ^{Blown out of time} She changed in an eye blink. ^{From tolerant to} ~~FK~~ Viscious. She wasn't always like that.

When I first saw her standing next to Billy Boy she looked ~~just~~ like the last daughter of a preacher who had to accept clothes from his congregation—an under-loved girl in an over-mended coat. The little scrap of fur collar, the lettuce green dress and black and white pumps ~~made~~ put you in mind of a rummage sale. And while I was wondering where Mr. Cosey's son ~~had~~ found ^{her} his wife, she raised Billy Boy's hand to her mouth

Christine's
to pierce her daughters

skin and fill her with
cannery
the want and rot it lived in.

but until Mr. Casey

She tolerated their friendship
if ~~even~~ a joke

it into ~~was~~ a classic call.

against death
if Heed and Christine
whatever the
~~quits~~ own wishes -
had their ~~plans~~

May put a stop
to ~~the~~ pity.

Heed
Christine's

You are always thinking about death I told
her. No, she said. Death is always thinking
about me.

That was to explain why she saved
and mended and preserved and stored. Death
was trying to open the gate and she needed
all she could collect to stave him off.

Her daughter ~~ma~~ was the soft spot.

the way A route to the loss of everything:
not only

She ~~And~~ had to be protected, sheltered ^{came in and} from
what killed her husband, but from ~~a kind~~ the
of living death of being poor. Heed ~~As~~ her

was the death's beak - ~~crashing~~
pushing through the door ~~being~~ looking
eager to pierce ~~filling her with~~
to ~~drag~~ ~~not~~ and want
~~and threatening staining~~

her daughter's
skin

and kissed it. The way her eyes ^{ate} ~~swallowed~~ everything, traveling up and around the hotel lobby, I thought she would behave like a visitor expecting to be waited on. I was dead wrong about that. She put off unpacking her suitcase; just changed out of that hand-me-down dress and started in. "Let's," she said. "Let's polish this. Let's move that, clean here, wipe there..." How could we ^{help} but smile. Mr. Cosey most of all, seeing his son had chosen a wife bound to be a plus.

She moved Billy Boy from waiting tables to tending bar and then booking performers which left Mr. Cosey to think about money and play. Even pregnancy didn't slow her down. May was the first mother I saw who weaned her baby at three months. When Billy Boy died and Mr. Cosey went low, May kept things up and going. ^{for seven years. dedicated} ~~Seven years of dedication~~ rewarded with "I'm taking a wife. You know her. Christine's little friend." Rewarded by watching her father-in-law marry her eleven year old daughter's playmate and put that playmate ahead of everything including herself, her own daughter and all she had worked for. Not only that. She had to teach and train the playmate to take charge of us. Still, there was more to it than age. May's new mother-in-law was not just a child, she was a Johnson. In

no wild dream could ^{She}~~May~~ have invented a family that scared her more. The
 fool on German Syrup labels. The savage on Czar's Baking Powder. The
 brain dead on Alden's Fruit Vinegar, Korn Kinks Cereal, J.J. Coates Thread
 and the fly-blown babies on Sanford's Ginger. That's who she saw when
 she looked at the Johnsons. She might be braiding Christine's hair in the
 bedroom, patting cool water on her temples in the kitchen, wherever, ^{she was} her
 talk was the same: shiftlessness was not a habit; it was a trait; ignorance
 was destiny; ^{and dirt}~~poverty~~ lingered on by choice. She ^{Shuddered}~~sighed~~ when she said that,
 being the daughter of a preacher, she really tried to dredge up Christian
 love, but failed whenever she looked at a Johnson. Or heard about them.
 Listen to some of their names, she said. ~~overblown~~ names people give to
 mules and fishing boats. Bride. Welcome Morning. Princess. ^{Starlight} Righteous
 Spirit. Solitude. Heed the Night. But the main calamity for her was the
 greed of the parents, Wilbur and Surrey, who thought sitting in a rowboat
 with a string was work. Having lost two kids to the ocean they first ^{used}~~used~~
 their grief like a begging cup, then as a tax levied on their neighbors. So
 why not let their youngest girl marry a fifty-two year old man in exchange
 for who knew how much money changed hands. If he gave them a two-

dollar bill, May said, a ^{dollar and fifty cents} ~~refund~~ was due. But we all knew Mr. Cosey never bought anything cheap—or if he did, it came to have value in time. Like a child who would soon grow up and bear other children.

I guess that's what he told his friends and himself. But not me. He never told that to me because I had worked for him since I was fourteen and knew better. He ^{picked her because} liked her.