



A Mercy Draft Fragments

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Don't be afraid. My telling can't hurt you in spite of what I have done and I promise to stay quietly on the page—weeping a bit or occasionally revealing a shimmer of fear—but I will never again unfold my limbs to rise up and bare teeth. I only want to explain. You can call what I tell you a confession, if you like, but one full of curiosities familiar only in dreams and during those moments when a dog's profile plays in the steam of a kettle. Or when a corn husk doll, splayed in the corner of a room at first sight, is sitting on a shelf when you turn your head and it's not clear how it got there. Stranger things happen all the time everywhere. You know. I know you know. One question is who is responsible? Another is can you read? If a pea hen refuses to brood I read it quickly and, sure enough, that night I see my mother standing hand in hand with her little boy, my shoes jamming the pocket of her apron. Other signs take time. Even now it is difficult. Too many signs, ^a clear portent clouding up. I ^{them} sort and recall, yet I know I am missing much. Let me start with what I do know. [^]

The beginning begins with the shoes. I could never abide being barefoot

and used to beg for shoes, anybody's shoes, even on the hottest days. My mother, frowning, is disturbed by what she says⁵ are my prettified ways.

I'm ^{relentless} Dangerous, she says, but she lets me wear them. As a result, Lila says, my feet are useless, will always be too tender for life and never have the strong soles, tougher than leather, ^{that} life requires. It's true. Lila is right. I have the hands of a slave and the feet of a well born lady. So when I set out to find you, she and Mistress give me boots to fit a man, not a girl. They stuff them with oiled corn husks and tell me to hide the letter inside my stocking—no matter the itch of the seal.

My head is light. Nothing frightens and tempts me more than this assignment. From the day you disappear I dream and plot ^{escape,} a run-alone, with no one, out beyond the maples and butternut, over the hills, but which way? Who will tell me? Who lives in the wilderness between this farm and you and will they help or harm me? Do you remember the boneless bears in the valley? How when they move their pelts sway as though there is nothing underneath? Their smell belying their beauty, their eyes remembering us from when we are beasts too. You telling me that is why it is fatal to look them in the eye. They will approach, run ^{toward} to us to love and play. There are giant birds nesting out

which
And we
2 misandry and
and and
shoot.
That's not all.

there too, bigger than cows, Lila says, and not all Indians, she says, are like her, so watch out. "A praying Indian" they call her, but she bathes herself everyday and Christians never do. She wears ^{colored beads} ~~tk~~ on her arm and dances in secret at first light when the moon is small. More than fearing loving bears or birds bigger than cows, I fear pathlessness in the dark. How, I wonder, can I find you then? ^{At last} ~~Now~~ there is a way. I am under orders. It is arranged. And although I am happy the world is breaking open ^{for us} ~~to me~~, its newness alarms me. To get to you I must ^{leave} ~~live outside~~ the only home, ~~without~~ the only people I know. Lila says, from the state of my teeth, I seem to be around six when I am brought here. We ~~have cooked~~ cherries for jam ten times since then, so I must be sixteen. Before ^d ~~this place~~ I spent ^{my} ~~my~~ days picking okra and sweeping the yard; my nights on the floor of the cook house with my mother. Saturdays we learn to read and write. Four of us hidden near the marsh with the Reverend. He has a slate. We have sticks to draw through sand; pebbles to mark words on flat smooth rocks. I forget almost all of it until you. I like talk. Lila talk, Soledad talk, stone talk. Best of all is your talk. Lila says my talking on stone was in the colony where Sir has business. So that is where my mother and her baby boy are buried. Or will be if they ever decide to rest. Sleeping on the floor with

them is not as nice as sleeping in the cowshed in the broken sleigh with Lila. In cold weather we put planks around and wrap our arms together. We don't smell the cow flops because they are frozen and we are deep under blankets. In summer Lila makes a ^{cool} pointed place to sleep out of branch and hides protecting us from mosquitoes. Soledad alone sleeps in the house with Mistress and Sir. The men helping you, Will and Scully, never do because their own master won't have it. They ^{are} ~~work as~~ exchange for land leased from Sir.

→ Since your leaving with no goodbye, summer passes, then autumn and with the waning of winter the sickness comes back. When Sir returns, no one believes those little sores are going to be Soledad's old sickness. He screams at night and cries in the day. Then he is too weak to do either. He has bought only seasoned slaves, including me who survived measles, and could not help envying us our health and feeling cheated of his new house. I can tell you it is still not finished. The gate of course is beautiful; your ironwork wondrous to see. The house is grand, just waiting for its glass windows. Sir want^s to be taken there, although there is no furniture. He tells Mistress to hurry hurry never mind the spring rain. The sickness alters his mind as well as his face. Will

and Scully are gone so when we ^{women} carry him into the house without windows he

is sleeping and never wakes. Neither Mistress nor we know if he is alive for

even one minute to ^{men} feel the new ^{wood} floors ^{he lies on} under him. Still we do not say the word ^{aloud}

until we bury him and Mistress notices six of them on her chin. Now she has twenty-nine. She wants you here much as I do. For her it is to save her life; for me it is to have one.

You probably don't know anything at all about what your back looks like whatever the sky holds: sunlight, moon rise. I rest there. My hand, my eyes, my mouth. When I first see it....

Tr tk

We are alone. No one to dig Sir's grave but us. Will and Scully stay

away. I don't think they want to. I think their master makes them. ~~After all,~~

^{because of the sickness,}
~~they are payment to Sir, not owned by him.~~

Soledad says Sir always has a

clever way of getting without giving. The man in ^{the other colony} Maryland is not paying the

whole amount he owes to Sir. ^{So} Sir says he will take the woman and girl (not the

baby) and the debt is gone. My mother, the woman, begs no. Her baby boy is

still at her breast. Take the girl, the daughter. ^{Me.} Sir agrees but re applies the debt

and determines the balance owing. Soledad tells me these things. Sir's cleverness. She is with child. Father unknown and she won't say. Will and Scully each deny paternity. Lila believes it is Sir's. Says she has her reasons for thinking so. Mistress is not pleased. Neither am I. Not because our work is more, but because mothers nursing walking children scare me. I know how their eyes go when they choose. My own mother looks at me hard, saying something I can not hear. Saying something important but holding the little boy's hand.

Jacob Vaark galloped along, sweat so heavy it salted his eyes. His horse, Regine, accustomed to colder climate, was drenched and panting for water. Finally he glimpsed the wide iron gates and guided Regina through them. Trotting, slowly he passed a few poorly kept quarters. Empty all of them, in the tobacco fields, he reckoned. The comfortable smell of the leaves, like fireplaces and good women serving ale, cloaked the estate. The road ended at a small brick plaza, announcing a prideful entrance to the house. He stopped. A boy appeared and, dismounting in some pain, Jacob Vaark handed over the reins, cautioning the boy.

"Water. No feed."

"Yes, sir." said the boy and turned the horse around, murmuring, "nice lady, nice lady," as he took her away.

Jacob Vaark climbed the steps, then retraced them to stand back from the house and appraise it. Imposing, he thought, and very impressive. Two long windows, at least twenty-five hands tall, flanked the door. Four more windows above on a wide second story resting on six pillars. Tk

Easy, he thought. How easy to build such a house in Southern colonies. Soft wood, no caulking, everything designed for breeze, not freeze. Long dining room, parlor, no kitchen to speak of with a cook house out back. Easy living, but the heat...

He removed his hat and wiped the sweat from his hair line with his sleeve. Then, fingering his soaking collar, he mounted the steps.

Seated at a small table in the parlor, windows closed to the burning air, Jacob Vaark drank sassafras beer and studied his host, a Mr. D'Ortega. Disaster had struck, according to D'Ortega. Jacob Vaark knew all about it, but listened politely to the version this client/debtor recounted. D'Ortega's ship has sunk not two hundred feet from shore. It had been anchored there for a month

waiting for a vessel, due any day, to replenish what he had already lost. A third of his cargo had died. Fined by the British for throwing their bodies into the Bay; forced to scoop up the corpses—what they could find—(they used pikes and nets, D'Ortega said, a purchase which itself cost two pounds, six.) And ordered to burn or bury them. He had to pile them in two drays (sixteen s.), cart them out to low land where saltweed and crocodiles would finish the work.

Does he cut his losses and let his ship sail on to Barbados? No. A sloven man, stubborn in his wrong headedness like all of the Roman faith, he waited in port for a month for a phantom ship from Portugal carrying enough cargo to replenish the heads he has lost. While waiting to fill his ship's hold to capacity, it sinks and he has lost not a third, but all, except the crew, who were unchained, of course, and four unsalable Africans red-eyed with anger.

Tk

We are seven, excluding the Brothers Ney, and the horses are not the only ones made nervous by snowflakes in springtime. Their haunches tremble; they shake their manes. We are nervous too, but we sit still as the flakes come down and stick to our shawls and hats; sugaring our eyelashes and flouring the

men's wooly beards. Two women face into the wind that whips their hair like corn silk; their eyes slits of shine. The others cover their mouths with their cloaks and lean against one another.

Sudden snowfall on tender leaves is pretty. Perhaps it will last long enough on the ground to make animal tracking easy. Men are always pleased in the snow where killing is best. No one can starve if there is snow. And in spring, the river is full of spawn and the air of fowl. Although this snow will not last, it is heavy, wet and cold. I draw my feet under my skirts, not for warmth, but to protect the letter. The satchel I clutch on my lap.

Mistress makes me memorize the way to get to you. I am to board the Brothers Ney wagon in the morning as it travels north on x road. After one stop at a tavern, the wagon will arrive at Hartkill just after midday where I disembark. I am to walk left, westward on another road called x which I will know by the arrows carved into the bark of a cedar. But the Brothers Ney are late. When I climb aboard and find a place among the others, it is already late afternoon and the tavern needs lamplight when we reach it. At first I don't see it, but one of us, a boy with his hair in a pigtail, points and then we all do. Winking through the trees is a light. The Neys go in. We wait. They return to water the

horses and us. After that it is silent. The snow ends and the sun is gone. Six drop down, the men catching the women in their arms. The boy jumps alone. The three women with skin like mine motion to me and I drop down too. They move off back down where we are coming from, stepping as best they can figure in tree shelter at roadside, places where the snow is small. I don't follow. Neither can I stay in the wagon. I can't be alone with strange men when, drunk and annoyed, they discover their cargo is lost. I go west into the trees. Everything I want is west. You. Your talk. The medicine you know that will make Mistress well. You will read the letter and come back with me. I have only to go ten miles west. Two days. Three nights.

[insert F] [moving into the trees parallel to road. Land slopes down; she loses sight of road. Lost. Night. Has lila's calf skin pouch around neck and satchel of food on her shoulder.]

Tk [Algonquin girls bathing in stream]

I walk down the path and over a narrow bridge past a mill wheel turning in a stream. The creaking wheel and rushing water are what shape the quiet. Hens sleep and dogs forbidden. I am so thirsty I climb down the bank and lap

from the stream. It tastes like candle wax. Heavy with water I make my way back to the path. I need shelter. The sun is setting itself. Two cottages have windows but no lamp shines through. The others resemble small barns that can accept the day's light only through open doors. None is open. There is no cooksmoke in the air. I am thinking everybody has gone away. Then I see a steeple on a hill beyond the village and am certain the people are at evening prayer. Rather than go there, I decide to knock on the door of the largest house, the one most likely to have a servant on watch. Moving toward it, I look over my shoulder and see a light further away. The single lit house in the village. I go to it. Rocks interfere at each step rubbing the sealing wax hard on my sole. Rain starts. Soft. It should smell sweet with the flavor of the pines and sycamores it has crossed, but it has a burn smell, like pin feathers singed before the boiling.

Before I can knock, a woman opens the door. She has green eyes. The rest of her is a black frock and a white cap. Red hair edges it.

"Who hath sent you?" She is suspicious and holds up her hand, palm out, as though I might force my way in.

"I am alone, please. Shelter sends me here."

She says words as written in the bible.

"Hast thou no protection, no companion"?

"No, mam."

"Art thou from this earth or elsewhere?"

"This earth, mam. I know no other."

"Art thou Christian or heathen?"

"Never heathen, mam, although I am told my father was."

"Where doth he abide.?"

The rain is getting bigger. Hunger wobbles me.

"I never knew him. My mother is dead."

"Orphan. Step in."

I try to eat slowly and fail. Sopping hard bread into lovely, warm barley porridge, I don't lift my head except to say "thank you" when she ladles more into my bowl. She places a handful of raisins next to it.

I notice a girl lying in a narrow box of straw. Under her head is a blanket roll. One of her eyes looks away; the other is as straight and unwavering as a she wolf. I don't think I should initiate anything so I wait for the girl or the

woman to say something. When I finish the food down to the last raisin, the woman asks what is my purpose traveling alone.

"My Mistress has sent me on an errand."

"It must be vital to risk a child's life in these parts."

"Yes, mam. Mistress is dying. My errand can save her."

"Not from the first death. Perhaps from the second."

I don't understand her meaning. I know there is only one death, but many lives beyond it. Remember the owls in daylight? We know right away who they were.

The girl lying in straw raises up on her elbow. "This be the death we have come here to die." Her voice is deep, like a man's though she looks to be younger than me. The woman doesn't reply and I do not want to look at those eyes again. "No thrashing can change it though my flesh is cut to ribbons." She stand then and limps toward the lamp. Holding it waist high, she lifts her skirts. I see dark blood beetling down her legs. In the light pouring over her pale skin her wounds look like living jewelry.

The woman speaks. "Those lashes may save thy life."

Tk

The woman closes the lamp and stretches on a pallet; the girl returns to her straw. I lie down on the floor. Their voices slide over me.

"I am not a demon. I am not."

"We will know comes the morning."

"They will allow that I am."

"The knowing is theirs."

"Truth is mine."

"Be still lest He hear you."

"He will not abandon me."

"Nor will I."

"Yet you bloodied my flesh. Why?"

"How many times do you have to hear it? Demons do not bleed."

You never told me that and it's a good thing to know. If my mother is still alive she can be teaching me such things.

The story of a life is not a life. Life is much better, or worse, than its rendition.

So, trust me.

All will end well, and if not, the cost will be deferred.

promise to stay quietly on the page—weeping a bit or occasionally revealing a shimmer of fear—but I will never again unfold my limbs to rise up and bare teeth. I only want to explain. You can call what I tell you a confession, if you like, but one full of curiosities familiar only in dreams and during those moments when a dog's profile plays in the steam of a kettle. Or when a corn husk doll, splayed in the corner of a room at first sight is sitting on a shelf when you turn your head and it's not clear how it got there. Stranger things happen all the time everywhere. You know. I know you know. One question is who is responsible? Another is can you read? If a peo hen refuses to lay and I see my mother standing hand in hand with her little boy, my shoes jammed in the pocket of her apron, I read it quickly. Other signs take time. So the beginning begins with the shoes. I could never abide being barefoot and used to beg for shoes, anybody's shoes even on the hottest days. Lila says my feet are useless will always be too tender for life and never have the strong soles, tougher than

* My mother, however, is a hardy one. She says she can
my petting ways. Dangerous, she says. But lets me know what
It's a result

Don't be afraid. My telling can't hurt you in spite of what I have done and I promise to stay quietly on the page—weeping a bit or occasionally revealing a shimmer of fear—but I will never again unfold my limbs to rise up and bare teeth. I only want to explain. You can call what I tell you a confession, if you like, but one full of curiosities familiar only in dreams and during those moments when a dog's profile plays in the steam of a kettle. Or when a corn husk doll, splayed in the corner of a room at first sight is sitting on a shelf when you turn your head and it's not clear how it got there. Stranger things happen all the time everywhere. You know. I know you know. One question is who is responsible? Another is can you read? If a pea hen refuses to ^{broadly} lay and I see my mother standing hand in hand with her little boy, my shoes jammed ~~in~~ the pocket of her apron, ^{TK (over)} I read it quickly. Other signs take time. So the beginning begins with the shoes. I could never abide being barefoot and used to beg for shoes, anybody's shoes even on the hottest days.* Lila says my feet are useless, will always be too tender for life and never have the strong soles, tougher than

* My mother frowning, is disturbed by what she says are my prettified ways. Dangerous, she says. But lets me wear ~~out~~ them. As a result

Even now it is troublesome; ^{too many} signs, clear portent clouding up. ^{Over and over} I sort
and recall yet I know I am missing much,
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leather, life requires. It's true. Lila is right. I have the hands of a slave and the feet of a well born lady. So when I set out to find you, she and Mistress give me boots to fit a man, not a girl. They stuff them with oiled corn husks and tell me to hide the letter inside my stocking—no matter the itch of the seal.

My head is light. Nothing frightens and ^{tempts} seduces me more than this assignment. From the day you disappeared I dream and plot a run—alone, with no one, out beyond the maples and butternut, over the hills, but which way? Who will tell me? Who lives between this farm and you ^{in the wilderness} and will they help or harm me? ^{also you} Remember the boneless bears in the valley? ^(over) Their smell belying their beauty, their eyes remembering us from when we are beasts too. You telling me that is why it is fatal to look them in the eye. They will approach, run to us to love and play. There are giant birds too, bigger than cows, Lila says, ^{nesting out there} and not all Indians, she says, are like her, so watch out. "A praying Indian" they call her, but she bathes herself everyday and Christians never do. She wears tk on her arm and dances in secret at first light when the moon is small. More than ^{fearing} loving bears or birds bigger than cows, I fear pathlessness in the dark. How I wonder can I ^(over) run or find you then? Now there is a way. I am ^{is breaking yet} under order. It is arranged. ^{to me} Now the world breaks open, and its newness alarms

their pelt's swaying like when they move
as tho' nothin' is underneath

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To get to you

me. ^{must} How ^{outside} can I live ^{without} without the only home, the only people I know? Lila says, from the state of my teeth, I seemed ^{to be} around six when I ^{am brought} came here. We have cooked cherries for jam ten times since then, so I must be sixteen. Before this place I spent my days picking okra and sweeping the yard; my nights on the floor of the cook house with my mother. Saturdays we learn to read and write. Four ^{of us} children ^{marsh} without slates, hidden in the ^{mud} woods with the Reverend. He ^{has} uses a slate. We have sticks to draw through sand; pebbles to mark words on flat smooth rocks. I forget almost all of it until you. I like talk. Lila talk, Soledad talk, stone talk. Best of all is your talk. Lila says my talking on stone was in ^{the} the colony where ^{Sir has buessness} Maryland. So Maryland is where my mother and her baby boy are buried. Or ^{Province of Maryland} will be if they ever decide to rest.

^A Since your leaving with no goodbye, summer passes, then autumn and with the waning of winter the sickness comes back. When Sir return^s from Maryland, no one believes those little sores are going to be Soledad's sickness. He screams at night and cries in the day. Then he is too weak to do either. He has bought only seasoned slaves, including me who survived measles, and could not help feeling cheated and envying us our health. ^{of his house} ^B Still we do not say the word until we bury ^{Sir} him and Mistress notices six of them on her chin. Now

The sickness as deforming and abhorably the same as the one you saw Soledad suffers last year and your cure gives her.

she has twenty-nine. She wants you here much as I do. For her it is to save her life; for me it is to have one.

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Tr tk

Sir's
We are alone. No one to dig his grave but us. Will and Scully stay

away. I don't think they want to. I think their master makes them. After all,

they are payment for land leased from Sir, not owned by him. ^{Sir Soledad says} Sir has a clever

way of getting ~~labor~~ without giving ~~money~~. The man in Maryland is not paying

the whole amount he owes to Sir. Sir says he will take the woman and girl (not

the baby) and the debt is gone. My mother, the woman, begs no. Her baby

boy is still at her breast. Take the girl, the daughter. ^{Cover} Sir agrees but re applies

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Sir's cleverness. Lila tells me more; ~~that the woman makes a terrible choice out~~

~~of no choice~~. Lila is not the one who is there watching the woman, where her

eyes go when she chooses. I am there. She looks at me hard, saying

See
note p. 2 at
bottom

~~Sir looks at me, my shoes make him laugh. He~~

something I can not hear. Saying something important but holding the little boy's hand.

O.V.

We are seven, excluding the Brothers Ney, and the horses are not the only ones made nervous by snowflakes in springtime. Their haunches tremble; they shake their manes. We are nervous too, but we sit still as the flakes come down and stick to our shawls and hats; sugaring our eyelashes and flouring the men's wooly beards. Two women face into the wind that whips their hair like corn silk; their eyes slits of shine. The others cover their mouths with their cloaks and lean against one another.

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Tk [Algonquin girls bathing in stream] opens the door. She has green eyes. The rest of her is a black frock and a white cap. Red hair edges it.

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"This earth, mam. I know no other."

"Art thou Christian or heathen?"

"Never heathen, mam, although I am told my father was."

"Where doth he abide.?"

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"Yet you bloodied my flesh. Why?"

"How many times do you have to hear it? Demons do not bleed."

still a You never told me that and it's a good thing to know. If my mother were still alive she would be teaching me such things. ~~As it is, I learn from you alone.~~

~~The story of a life is not a life. Life is much better, or worse, than its rendition.~~

The story of a life is not a life. Life is much better, or worse, than its rendition.

So, trust me. ~~well, and if not, the cost will be deferred.~~

All will end well, and if not, the cost will be deferred.

still alive she would be teaching me such things. As it is, I learn from you alone.

Don't be afraid. My telling can't hurt you in spite of what I have done and I
promise to stay quietly on the page weeping a bit or occasionally revealing a
sliver of fear—but I will never again unfold my limbs to rise up and bare
teeth. I only want to explain. You can call what I tell you a confession, if you

The story of a life is not a life. Life is much better, or worse, than its rendition.

So, trust me.

All will end well, and if not, the cost will be deferred.

[insert A]

^{begin}
The beginning began with the shoes. I could never abide being barefoot
and used to beg for shoes, anybody's shoes, even on the hottest days. Lila says
my feet are useless, will always be too tender for life and never have the strong
soles, tougher than leather, life requires. It's true. Lila is right. I have the
hands of a slave and the feet of a well born lady. So when I set out to find you,
she and Mistress give me boots to fit a man, not a girl. They stuff them with

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[insert A]

The beginning ^{begins}~~began~~ with the shoes. I could never abide being barefoot and used to beg for shoes, anybody's shoes, even on the hottest days. Lila says my feet are useless, will always be too tender for life and never have the strong soles, tougher than leather, life requires. It's true. Lila is right. I have the hands of a slave and the feet of a well born lady. So when I set out to find you, she and Mistress give me boots to fit a man, not a girl. They stuff them with

oiled corn husks and tell me to hide the letter inside my stocking—no matter the itch of the seal.

My head is light. Nothing frightens and ^{seduces} agitates me more than this assignment. ^{From the day you disappeared} I have been dreaming and plotting a run—alone, with no one, out beyond the maples and butternut, over the hills, but which way? Who will tell me? Who lives between this farm and yo^u and will they help or harm me?

[insert B]

^{Now} The world breaks open when I think of escape and its newness alarms me. ~~How~~ ^{can} I live without the only home, the only people I know? Lila says,

from the state of my teeth, I seemed around six when I came here. We have ^{cooked cherries for jam ten times} had ten harvests since then, so I must be sixteen. Before this place I spent my

days picking okra and sweeping the yard; my nights on the floor of the cook house with my mother. Saturdays we learn to read and write. Four ^{of us} children

~~without slates~~, hidden in the woods with the Reverend. ^{He had a slate. We had} sticks ^{to} drawn through sand; pebbles to mar words on flat smooth rocks. [insert C] Lila says ~~that~~ ^{my talking on stone} was

in Maryland. So Maryland is where my mother ^{and her baby boy are} is buried. Or will be if they ever ^{decide to rest.} find her body.

^{with no good bye} Since you left, summer passed, then autumn and with the waning of

(C)

Almost all of ^{it} which I forgot until you
I like ~~talk~~. Lila talk, Silence talk. Paper talk.
Best ^{is} your talk. Stone talk

(B) Remembered ⁱⁿ the valley where ~~we saw the~~
boneless bears? Their smell belying their beauty,
their eyes remembering us from when we
were beasts. You said that, is why it is
dangerous to look them in the eye. They
~~would~~ ^{will} approach, run to us to love and
play. There are giant birds too, bigger
than cows Lila says and not all Indians, she
says, are like her - a praying Indian. So they
say, * ~~but~~ ^{she still wears} ~~and~~ ^{in secret at first} ~~she~~
~~was floating~~ ^{is small} ~~dancing~~ ^{when the} ~~at dawn~~ ^{moon,} ~~light after the fast~~
More than ^{is small} ~~floating~~ ^{is small} ~~dancing~~ ^{is small} ~~at dawn~~ ^{is small} ~~light after the fast~~
bigger than cows, I fear fathlessness
in the dark. How can I run or find you
then? Now there is a way. I am ordered.
it is arranged.

* But she bathes ^{herself} ~~everyday~~ and Christians never do.

When Sir returns from Maryland
back
~~winter the sickness came.~~ No one believed those little boils were anything other
~~than until Master died.~~ He screamed night and day. He had bought only
~~seasoned slaves, including me who survived measles, and could not help~~
soreas are going to be what Soledad had.
then grew weak and died

feeling cheated and envying us our health. Still we did not say the word until after
we buried him and

Mistress noticed six of them on her chin. Now she has twenty-nine. She wants
you here much as I do. For her it is to save her life; for me it is to have one.

You probably don't know anything at all about what your back looks like
whatever the sky holds: sunlight, moon rise. I rest there. My hand, my eyes, my
mouth. When I first saw it.

Tr tk

We are seven, excluding the driver and his helper, and the horses are not
the only ones made nervous by snowflakes in springtime. Their haunches
tremble; they shake their manes. We are nervous too, but we sit still as the
flakes come down and stick to our shawls and hats; sugaring our eyelashes and
flouring the men's ^{wooly} beards.

[insert d]

Sudden snowfall on tender leaves is pretty. Perhaps it will last long enough on
the ground to make animal tracking easy. Men are always pleased in the snow

(d)

that
wind whips their hair like ^{cornsilk} in

two women face into the

their eyes
slits off &
shine.

The others ~~hold~~ ~~apart~~ ~~cloths~~
~~against~~ their mouths
and lean against
one another.

cover their
mouths
with their
cloaks

where killing is best. No one can starve if there is snow. And in spring, the river is full of spawn and the air of fowl. Although this snow will not last, it is heavy, wet and cold. I draw my feet under my skirts, not for warmth, but to protect the letter. *The satchel I clutch on my lap.*

[insert E]

#first I don't see it, but one of us ~~seven~~, a boy with ~~his~~ brown hair in a pigtail, points and then we all do. Winking through the trees, *is the lamp* a light. ~~The rest stop. Tk~~
Neys The driver and his ~~mate~~ go in. We wait. They return to water the horses and us. After that it is silent. The snow ends and ^{now} the sun is gone. Six drop down. *(over)*
The three with skin like mine Three women *^* motion to me and I drop down too. They move off back down where we are coming from, stepping as best they can figure in tree shelter at roadside, places where the snow is small. I don't follow. Neither can I stay in the wagon. I can't be alone with strange men when, drunk and annoyed, they discover their cargo is lost. I go west into the trees. Everything I want is west.

sketch *Talk* You, ~~Your words.~~ The medicine you know that will make ~~my~~ Mistress well.

You will read the letter and come back with me. I have only to go ten miles west. Two days. Three nights.

[insert F]

→ The men catch the women. The boy jumps down alone.
And I follow.

(E) Mistress makes me
I am to board — have memorized the way to get to your forge.
X's the New Brothers wagon with travels north on X Road
in the morning as it
After one rest stop, the wagon will arrive
at Hartkill, ^{at midday} where I disembark.
I am to walk — Left, westward on another Road called X
but there is no sign which I ^{will} ~~can~~
^{know} recognize by the ^{arrows} By and by I
Come to a village ^{with a smithy} ^{carved into the bark of a cedar.}
But the New Brothers are late. ^{when}
climb aboard and find a place among the others
it is already afternoon and ~~we~~
reach the Haven ^{needs lamplight} ~~in darkness~~ when
we reach it.

Tk [Algonquin girls bathing in stream] Indians - daily ; Europeans - seldom
or never

I walk down the path and over a narrow bridge past a mill wheel turning
in a stream. The creaking wheel and rushing water are what shape the quiet.
Hens sleep and dogs forbidden. I am so thirsty I climb down the bank and lap
from the stream. It tastes like candle wax. Heavy with water I make my way
back to the path. I need shelter. The sun is setting itself. Two cottages have
windows but no lamp shines through. The others resemble small barns that can
accept the day's light only through open doors. None is open. There is no
trace of ^{cooks}smoke in the air. I am thinking everybody has gone away. Then I see
a steeple on a hill beyond the village and am certain the people are at evening
prayer. Rather than go there, I decide to knock on the door of the largest
house, the one most likely to have a servant on watch. Moving toward it, I look
over my shoulder and see a light further away. The single lit house in the
village. I go to it. Rocks interfere at each step rubbing the sealing wax hard on
my sole. Rain starts. Soft. It should smell sweet with the flavor of the pines and
sycamores it has crossed, but it has a burn smell, like pin feathers singed after
boiling.

the hen is
boiled.

Before I can knock, a woman opens the door. She has green eyes. The rest of her is a black frock and a white cap. Red hair edges it.

"Who hath sent you?" She is suspicious and holds up her hand, palm out, as though I might force my way in.

"I am alone, madam. Shelter sends me here."

She says words as written in the bible.

"Hast thou no protection, no companion"?

"No, madam."

"Art thou from this earth or elsewhere?"

"This earth, madam. I know no other."

"Art thou Christian or heathen?"

"Never heathen, madam, although I am told my father was."

"Where doth he abide.?"

The rain is getting bigger. Hunger wobbles me.

"I never knew him. My mother is dead."

"Orphan. Step in."

I try to eat slowly and fail. Sopping hard bread into wonderful warm

partridge
barley, I don't lift my head except to say "thank you" when she ladles more into
my bowl. She places a handful of raisins next to it.

I notice a girl lying in a narrow box of straw. Under her head is a blanket
roll. One of her eyes looks away; the other is as straight and unwavering as a
she wolf.¹ I don't think I should initiate anything so I wait for the girl or the
woman to say something. When I finish the food down to the last raisin, the
woman asks what is my purpose traveling alone.

"My Mistress has sent me on an errand."

"It must be vital to risk a child's life in these parts."

"Yes, madam. My Mistress is dying. My errand can save her."

"Not from the first death. Perhaps from the second."

I don't understand her meaning. I know there is only one death, but
many lives beyond it. Remember the owls in daylight? How we ^{knew} recognized who
they were ~~in the meadow?~~

The girl lying in straw raises up on her elbow. "This be the death we have
come here to die." Her voice is deep, like a man's though she looks to be
younger than me. The woman doesn't reply and I do not want to look at those
eyes again. "No thrashing can change it though my flesh is cut to ribbons."

She stand then and limps toward the lamp. Holding it waist high, she lifts her skirts. I see dark blood beetling down her legs. In the light pouring over her pale skin her wounds look like living jewelry.

The woman speaks. "Those lashes may save thy life."

Tk

The woman closes the lamp and stretches on a pallet; the girl returns to her straw. I ^{lie}~~lay~~ down on the floor. Their voices slide over me.

"I am not a demon. I am not."

"We will know comes the morning."

"They will allow that I am."

"The knowing is theirs."

"Truth is mine."

"Be still lest He hear you."

"He will not abandon me."

"Nor will I."

"Yet you bloodied my flesh. Why?"

"How many times do you have to hear it? Demons do not bleed."

You never told me that and it's a good thing to know. If my mother were

Don't be afraid. I only want to explain. My telling can't hurt you in spite of what I have done and I promise to stay quietly on the page—weeping a bit or occasionally revealing a shimmer of fear—but I will never ^{again} unfold my limbs to rise up and bare teeth. You can call what I tell you a confession, if you like, but one full of curiosities familiar only in dreams and during those moments when a ^{dog's} ~~witch's~~ profile plays in the steam of a tea pot. Or when a cloth doll, splayed in the corner of a room one minute is sitting on a shelf the next and it's not clear how it got there. ^{As you know better than anyone, signs mean things. Reading them is knowing}

I can't describe the beginning because I don't know when that was, but I }
(over)
do remember the shoes. I could never abide being barefoot and used to beg ^{on the hottest day} for shoes. Anybody's shoes, ^{says} and Lila ^{are} said my feet were useless, would always be too tender for life and never have the ^{strong} ^{tougher} good soles, stronger than leather, life requires. ^{It's true} Lila is right. I have the hands of a slave and the feet of a well born lady. So when I set out to find you, she and Mistress give me boots to fit a man, not a girl. They stuff them with oiled corn husks and tell me to hide the letter inside my stocking—no matter the itch of the seal. ⁴ My head is light.

~~Before I came to this cold place~~
I was allowed shoes every day. Here
weather determines the protection.

Nothing frightens and agitates me more than this assignment. I have been ^{a run} dreaming and plotting escape—alone, with no one, out beyond the maples and butternut, over the hills, but which way? Who will tell me? Who lives between this farm and yo^u and will they help or harm me? ^(B) The world breaks open when I think of escape and its newness alarms me. How can I live without the only home, the only people I know? Lila ^{says} said, from the state of my teeth, I seemed around six when I came here. We have had ten harvests since then, so I must be sixteen. Before this place I ^{would} spend my days ^{picking okra and} sweeping the yard, and my nights on the floor of the cook house with my mother. Saturdays we learned to read and write. Four children with ^{out} four slates, hidden in the woods with the sticks drawn through sand; pebbles to mark ^{smooth} rocks ^{words on flat} words on flat Reverend ^(C) Lila says that was in Maryland. So Maryland is where my mother is buried. Or will be if they ever find her body.

Since you left, summer passed, then autumn and with the waning of winter the sickness came. No one believed those little boils were anything other than x until Master died. He screamed night and day. He had bought only ^{who survived measles} seasoned slaves, including me, and could not help ^{feeling cheated and} envying us our health. Still ^{did} we ^{did} not say the word until Mistress noticed them ^{six of} under her night dress. ^{Now she has twenty-nine.} She wants you here much as I do. For her it is to save her life; for me it is to have one.

TR TK

You probably don't know anything at all about what your back looks like whatever the sky holds: sunlight, moon rise. I rest there. My hand, my eyes, my mouth.

We are seven, excluding the driver and his helper, and the horses are not the only ones made nervous by snowflakes in springtime. Their haunches tremble; they shake their manes. We are nervous too, but we sit still as the flakes come down and stick to our shawls and hats; sugaring our eyelashes and flouring the ^Eman's beards. ^(d) Sudden snowfall on tender leaves is pretty. Perhaps it will last long enough on the ground to make animal tracking easy. Men are always pleased in the snow where killing is best. No one can starve if there is snow. ^{Now that} is come ^(over) And in spring, the river is full of spawn and the air of fowl. I draw my feet under my skirts, not for warmth, but to protect the letter.

→ ^(E) I don't see it, but one of us seven, a boy, points and then we all do.

Winking through the trees, a light. Tk The driver and his mate go ^{IN} on. We wait.

They return to water the horses and us. After ^{that} it is silent. The snow ends and the sun is gone. Six drop down. Three women motion to me and I drop down too.

^{The women, two men and the boy,}

They move off back down where we are coming from, stepping as best they can figure in tree shelter at roadside, places where the snow is small. I don't follow.

~~I have an errand~~ Neither can I stay in the wagon. I can't be alone with strange

76
This snow will not last, ^{now}
Although this snow will not last, ^{now}
~~Still the snow is~~ heavy, wet and cold,

men when, drunk and annoyed, they discover their cargo is lost. I go west into the trees. Everything I want is west. You. Your words. The medicine you know that will make my Mistress well. You will read the letter and come back with me. I have only to go ten miles west. Two days. Three nights.

→ (F)

Tk [Algonquin girls bathing in stream]

I walk down the path and over a narrow bridge past a mill wheel turning in a stream. The creaking wheel and rushing water are what shape the quiet. Hens sleep and dogs forbidden. I am so thirsty I climb down the bank and lap from the stream. It tastes like candle wax. Heavy with water I make my way back to the path. I need to find shelter. The sun is setting itself. Two cottages have windows but no lamp shines through. The others resemble small barns that can accept the day's light only through open doors. None is open. There is no trace of cooking in the air. I am thinking everybody has gone away. Then I see a steeple on a hill beyond the village and am certain the people are at evening prayer. Rather than go there, I decide to knock on the door of the largest house, the one most likely to have a servant on watch. Moving toward it, I look over my shoulder and see a light further away. The single lit house in

the village. I go to it. Rocks interfere at each step rubbing the sealing wax [^] had [^] on my sole. Rain starts. Soft. It should smell sweet with the flavor of the pines and sycamores it has crossed, but it has a burn smell, like a ~~chicken~~'s pin feathers singed after boiling.

Before I can knock, a woman opens the door. She has green eyes. The rest of her is a black frock and a white cap. Red hair edges it.

"Who hath sent you?" She is suspicious and holds up her hand, palm out, as though I might force my way in.

"I am alone, madam. Shelter sends me here."

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"Hast thou no protection, no companion"?

"No, madam."

"Art thou from this earth or elsewhere?"

"This earth, madam. I know no other."

"Art thou Christian or heathen?"

"Never heathen, madam, although I am told my father was."

"Where doth he abide.?"

The rain is getting bigger. Hunger wobbles me.

"I never knew him. My mother is dead."

still of "Orphan. Step in." ching me such things. As it is, I learn from you alone.

I try to eat slowly and fail. Sopping hard bread into wonderful warm mush, I don't lift my head except to say "thank you" when she ladles more into my bowl. She places a handful of raisins next to it.

I notice a girl lying in a narrow box of straw. Under her head is a blanket roll. One of her eyes looks away; the other is as straight and unwavering as a she wolf.⁵ I don't think I should initiate anything so I wait for the girl or the woman to say something. When I finish the food down to the last raisin, the woman asks what is my purpose traveling alone.

"My Mistress has sent me on an errand."

"It must be vital to risk a child's ^{life} ~~like~~ in these parts."

"Yes, madam. My Mistress is dying. My errand can save her."

"Not from the first death. Perhaps from the second."

I don't understand her meaning. I know there is only one death, but many lives beyond it. Remember how we recognized them in the meadow? TK Owls...

The girl lying in straw raises up on her elbow. "This be the death we have come here to die." Her voice is deep, like a man's though she looks to be younger than me. The woman doesn't reply and I do not want to look at those

still alive she would be teaching me such things. As it is, I learn from you alone.

She stands then and limps toward the lamp. Holding it waist high, she lifts her skirts. I see dark blood beelling down her legs. In the light pouring over her pale skin her wounds look like living jewelry.

The woman speaks. "Those lashes may save thy life."

Tk

The woman closes the lamp and stretches on a pallet; the girl returns to

The story of a life is not a life. Life is much better, or worse, than its rendition.

So, trust me. *not a demon. I am not.*

All will end well, and if not, the cost will be deferred.

"They will allow that I am."

"The knowing is theirs."

"Truth is mine."

"Be still lest He hear you."

"He will not abandon me."

"Nor will I."

"Yet you bloodied my flesh. Why?"

"How many times do you have to hear it? Demons do not bleed."

You never told me that and it's a good thing to know. If my mother were

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Don't be afraid. I only want to explain. My telling can't hurt you in spite of what I have done and I promise to stay quietly on the page—weeping a bit or occasionally revealing a shimmer of fear—but I will never unfold my limbs to rise up and bare teeth. You can call what I tell you a confession, if you like, but one full of curiosities familiar only in dreams and during those moments when a witch's profile plays in the steam of a tea pot. Or when a cloth doll, splayed in the corner of a room one minute is sitting on a shelf the next and it's not clear how it got there.

I can't describe the beginning because I don't know when that was, but I do remember the shoes. I could never abide being barefoot and used to beg for shoes. Anybody's shoes and Lila said my feet were useless, would always be too tender for life and never have the good soles, stronger than leather, life requires. Lila is right. I have the hands of a slave and the feet of a well born lady. So when I set out to find you, she and Mistress give me boots to fit a man, not a girl. They stuff them with oiled corn husks and tell me to hide the letter inside my stocking—no matter the itch of the seal. My head is light.

Characters stay

Don't be afraid. These tales will lie quietly on the page—weeping sometimes or occasionally exposing a shimmer of fear—but they will never unfold their limbs to rise up and bare teeth. They are ~~restful~~ ^{harmless} for the most part because they are, after all, ~~about~~ ^{inventions—} other people, familiar only in dreams and during those nano seconds when a pirate's profile plays in the steam of a tea pot. Or when a doll, splayed in the corner of a room one minute sits on a shelf the next and it's not clear how it got there. Interesting but not important and certainly not disturbing enough to halt the day's routine or alter an ocean liner's course. They...

The story of a life is not a life. Life is much better, or worse, than its rendition.

So, trust me.

All will end well, and if not, the cost will be charged elsewhere.

Billed
deferred

Don't be afraid. These people will stay quietly on the page—weeping
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unfold ^{my} their limbs to rise up and bare teeth. ^{What I have to say TS} They are harmless for the most part
because they are, after all, ^{CONTAINING} inventions—curiosities familiar only in dreams and
during those ^{with's} [nano seconds] when a pirate's profile plays in the steam of a tea
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course.

I have learned to like them in spite of the grief they have caused.
Something infected each one. I just don't know what it was.

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~~So,~~ trust me.

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Nothing frightens and agitates me more than this assignment. I have been dreaming and plotting escape—alone, with no one, out beyond the maples and butternut, over the hills, but which way? Who will tell me? Who lives between this farm and yo and will they help or harm me? The world breaks open when I think of escape and its newness alarms me. How can I live without the only home, the only people I know? Lila said, from the state of my teeth, I seemed around six when I came here. We have had ten harvests since then, so I must be sixteen. Before this place I spend my days sweeping the yard and my nights on the floor of the cook house with my mother. Saturdays we learned to read and write. Four children with four slates, hidden in the woods with the Reverend. Lila says that was in Maryland. So Maryland is where my mother is buried. Or will be if they ever find her body.

Since you left, summer passed, then autumn and with the waning of winter the sickness came. No one believed they little boils were anything other than x until Master died. He screamed and screamed. He had bought only seasoned slaves, including me, and could not help envying us our health. Still we would not say the word until Mistress noticed them under her night dress. She wants you here much as I do. For her it is to save her life; for me it is to have one.

You probably don't know anything at all about what your back looks like whatever the sky holds: sunlight, moon rise. I rest there. My hand, my eyes, my mouth.

We are seven, excluding the driver and his helper, and the horses are not the only ones made nervous by snowflakes in springtime. Their haunches tremble; they shake their manes. We are nervous too, but we sit still as the flakes come down and stick to our shawls and hats; sugaring our eyelashes and flouring the man's beards. Sudden snowfall on tender leaves is pretty. Perhaps it will last long enough on the ground to make animal tracking easy. Men are always pleased in the snow where killing is best. No one can starve if there is snow. And in spring, the river is full of spawn and the air of fowl. I draw my feet under my skirts, not for warmth, but to protect the letter.

I don't see it, but one of us seven, a boy, points and then we all do. Winking through the trees, a light. The driver and his mate go on. We wait. They return to water the horses and us. After it is silent. The snow ends and the sun is gone. Six drop down. Three women motion to me and I drop down too. They move off back down where we are coming from, stepping as best they can figure in tree shelter at roadside, places where the snow is small. I don't follow. I have an errand. Neither can I stay in the wagon. I can't be alone with strange

men when, drunk and annoyed, they discover their cargo is lost. I go west into the trees. Everything I want is west. You. Your words. The medicine you know that will make my Mistress well. You will read the letter and come back with me. I have only to go ten miles west. Two days. Three nights.

Before I can knock, a woman opens the door. She has green eyes. The
Tk [Algonquin girls bathing in stream] cap. Red hair edges it.

"Who hath sent you?" She is suspicious and holds up her hand, palm
out. I walk down the path and over a narrow bridge past a mill wheel turning in a stream. The creaking wheel and rushing water are what shape the quiet. Hens sleep and dogs forbidden. I am so thirsty I climb down the bank and lap from the stream. It tastes like candle wax. Heavy with water I make my way back to the path. I need to find shelter. The sun is setting itself. Two cottages have windows but no lamp shines through. The others resemble small barns that can accept the day's light only through open doors. None is open. There is no trace of cooking in the air. I am thinking everybody has gone away. Then I see a steeple on a hill beyond the village and am certain the people are at evening prayer. Rather than go there, I decide to knock on the door of the largest house, the one most likely to have a servant on watch. Moving toward it, I look over my shoulder and see a light further away. The single lit house in

the village. I go to it. Rocks interfere at each step rubbing the sealing wax had on my sole. Rain starts. Soft. It should smell sweet with the flavor of the pines and sycamores it has crossed, but it has a burn smell, like a chicken's pin feathers singed after boiling.

Before I can knock, a woman opens the door. She has green eyes. The rest of her is a black frock and a white cap. Red hair edges it.

"Who hath sent you?" She is suspicious and holds up her hand, palm out, as though I might force my way in.

"I am alone, madam. Shelter sends me here."

She says words as written in the bible.

"Hast thou no protection, no companion"?

"No, madam."

"Art thou from this earth or elsewhere?"

"This earth, madam. I know no other."

"Art thou Christian or heathen?"

"Never heathen, madam, although I am told my father was."

"Where doth he abide.?"

The rain is getting bigger. Hunger wobbles me.

"I never knew him. My mother is dead."

"Orphan. Step in."

I try to eat slowly and fail. Sopping hard bread into wonderful warm mush, I don't lift my head except to say "thank you" when she ladles more into my bowl. She places a handful of raisins next to it.

I notice a girl lying in a narrow box of straw. Under her head is a blanket roll. One of her eyes looks away; the other is as straight and unwavering as a she wolf. I don't think I should initiate anything so I wait for the girl or the woman to say something. When I finish the food down to the last raisin, the woman asks what is my purpose traveling alone.

"My Mistress has sent me on an errand."

"It must be vital to risk a child's life in these parts."

"Yes, madam. My Mistress is dying. My errand can save her."

"Not from the first death. Perhaps from the second."

I don't understand her meaning. I know there is only one death, but many lives beyond it. Remember how we recognized them in the meadow?

The girl lying in straw raises up on her elbow. "This be the death we have come here to die." Her voice is deep, like a man's though she looks to be younger than me. The woman doesn't reply and I do not want to look at those

eyes again. "No thrashing can change it though my flesh is cut to ribbons."

She stand then and limps toward the lamp. Holding it waist high, she lifts her skirts. I see dark blood beetling down her legs. In the light pouring over her pale skin her wounds look like living jewelry.

The woman speaks. "Those lashes may save thy life."

Tk

The woman closes the lamp and stretches on a pallet; the girl returns to her straw. I lay down on the floor. Their voices slide over me.

"I am not a demon. I am not."

"We will know comes the morning."

"They will allow that I am."

"The knowing is theirs."

"Truth is mine."

"Be still lest He hear you."

"He will not abandon me."

"Nor will I."

"Yet you bloodied my flesh. Why?"

"How many times do you have to hear it? Demons do not bleed."

You never told me that and it's a good thing to know. If my mother were

still alive she would be teaching me such things. As it is, I learn from you alone.

I met a man ~~some~~ ^{one} ~~day~~ ^{night}. I knew him for sixty-two nights. Nothing
of weight happened to me before I met him and nothing good has
happened since he left.

The story of a life is not a life. Life is much better, or worse, than its rendition.

So, trust me. ~~There were seven of us, excluding the driver, but the horses are the~~

All will end well, and if not, the cost will be deferred. ~~has tremble, they shake~~

~~their heads. The flakes came down suddenly sticking to our shawls and~~
~~hats, sugaring our eyelashes and flouring the men's beards. I drew my feet~~
~~under my skirts, not for warmth but to protect the letter that nestled between~~
~~the cotton and my sole. A safer place than simply in my shoe, for even~~
~~pulling down the jeans became the worst of tortures against my skin. I've~~
~~always had tender feet. As a child I couldn't run with other children and~~
~~begged shoes, anybody's shoes, no weak ones. My told me I was forfeiting~~
~~the strength and agility of cow feet that would develop soles tougher than~~
~~leather.~~

JUSTINE TWO

I met a man ~~some time ago~~. I knew him for sixty-two nights. Nothing of weight happened to me before I met him and nothing good has happened since he left.

There ^{are} were seven ~~of us~~, excluding the driver, but the horses are the only ones alarmed by the snowflakes. Their haunches tremble, they shake their heads. The flakes came down suddenly sticking to our shawls and hats; sugaring our eyelashes and flouring the mens' beards. I drew my feet under my skirts, not for warmth but to protect the letter that nestled between the cotton and my ^{skin} ~~sole~~. ~~A safer place than simply in my shoe, but it was~~ irritating ~~none the less because the wax seal rubs against my skin.~~ ^{hurts} I've ^{have} ~~always had~~ tender feet. As a child I couldn't run with other children and begged shoes, anybody's shoes, on week days. Lily told me I was forfeiting the strength and agility of bare feet that would develop soles tougher than leather.

for twenty five years to life. She was granted parole, finally, after seventeen years, and I had no choice but to be there when she walked through the gates since I had put her behind them.

2nd

Nobody. No one will tell you these things. If they know them, they won't write them down because then they will have to cross it all out since no one will believe them. So why tell ? But I am writing these things for me, not for you, and I will set them afire when I am through.

My name is Curl because they said so. I remember when it was another sound such as Just-teen or Jus-tina. But when I was put in the stable, they called me Curl.

TWO

I met a man. I knew him for sixty-two nights. Nothing of weight happened to me before I met him and nothing good has happened since he left.

Nobody. No one will tell you these things. If they know them, they won't write them down because then they will have to cross it all out since no one will believe them. So why tell? But I am writing these things for me, not for you, and I will set them ablaze when I am done.

My name is Curl because they said so. I remember when it was another word that sounded like Just Teen, or Just Tina. But when I was moved to the stable, they called me Curl. Wendy said it was "girl." They were calling me "girl." But ~~that doesn't make sense.~~ We were a lot of girls, and they called her Wendy.

tk

We are seven, excluding the driver, ^{and} but the horses are not the only ones ^(in spring) made nervous by the snowflakes. Their haunches tremble, they shake their heads. ^{We} The others are nervous too, but ^{we} they sit still ^{as} while the flakes come down and stick to our shawls and hats; sugaring our eyelashes and ^(insert for ff) flouring the mens' beards. I draw my feet under my skirts, not for warmth but to protect the letter that nestles between the cotton and the skin of my foot. A safer place than in the bottom of my shoe, but the wax seal hurts. I have tender feet. As a child I couldn't run with other children and begged shoes, anybody's shoes, on week days. Lily told me I was forfeiting the strength and agility of bare feet that, if I let them, would develop soles tougher than leather and even save my life.

I don't see it, but one of ^{us} ~~we seven~~, a boy, points and then we all do.

~~Winking through trees a light.~~ Tk

~~the driver and his mater~~ go in. We wait. They return to water the horses and us. After it is silent. ^{The snow is gone, and the sun as well.}

Six drop down. Three women motion and I drop down too. They move off back down where we come from, stepping as best they can figure in the

^{tree shelter}
^{at}
^{roadside,}
places where the snow is small.

I have an errand Neither can I stay on the wagon. #
~~hoof tracks.~~ I don't follow. I go west into the trees. Everything I want is west. ~~The man.~~ *You Your you* His words. The medicine he makes that will make my mistress well. He will read the letter and come back. I only have to go ten or twelve ^{more} miles. Two days. Three nights. ~~Joining the six~~

for ~~It is spring now and the sudden snowfall on tender leaves is pretty.~~

Perhaps it will last long enough, ~~or remain deep enough~~ on the ground, animals can be easily tracked. The man was pleased in the snow where killing was best. No one can starve if there is snow. And in spring the river is full of spawn and the air of fowl.

Tk

*Shelter
Indian girls in water.*

I walk down the path and over a narrow bridge past a mill wheel turning in a stream. The wheel creak and rushing water are what shape the quiet. I am so thirsty I climb down the ~~ban~~ ^K and lap from the stream. It tastes like candlewax. Heavy with water I make my way back to the pathway. I need to find shelter. The sun is setting itself. Hens sleep and dogs forbidden. Two cottages have windows but no lamp ⁿ shines through. The others resemble small barns that can ^{only} accept the day's light through open doors.

None is open. There is no trace of cooking in the air. I am thinking everybody has gone away. Maybe there is a church standing beyond the village near its graveyard and the people are at evening prayer. I decide to knock on a door, but I see a light further away. Moving toward it I have to climb a rise. Rocks interfere at each step rubbing the sealing wax hard on my foot.

She says words my mistress reads from the Good Book. 'Thy' and 'thou,' and 'hast.'

"Hast thy no protection, no companion?"

"No, madam."

"Art thou from this earth or elsewhere?"

"This earth, madam. I know no other."

"Art thou Christian or heathen?"

"Never heathen, madam, although I am told my father was."

"Where doth he abide?"

"I never knew him. ~~Nor~~ ^{is dead} my mother."

"Orphan. Step in."

I try to eat slowly and fail. Sopping hard bread in warm mush I don't

lift my head except to say "thank you" when she ladles more into my bowl. I notice the girl lying in a narrow box of straw. Under her head is a blanket roll. One of her eyes looks away; the other is as straight and unwavering as s she wolf. I don't think I should initiate anything so I wait for the girl or the woman to say something. When I have finished the food, the woman asks what is my purpose traveling alone.

"My mistress has sent me on an errand."

"It must be vital to risk a child's life in these parts."

"Yes madam. My mistress is dying. My errand can save her."

"Not from the first death. Perhaps from the second." *abandon me.*

I do not understand her meaning.

The girl lying in straw raises up on her elbow. "This be the death we have come here to die." Her voice is deep like a man's tho she looks to be younger than me. *to know, I am thinking. If I had a mother, she*

The woman does not reply and I do not want to look at those eyes again.

"No thrashing can change it though my flesh is cut to ribbons." she stands and limps toward the lamp. Holding it waist high, she lifts her skirts. Dark blood beetles in the light pouring over her pale skin [fix]

The woman speaks. "Those lashes ^{may} have saved thy life."

Tk

The woman stretches on a pallet; the girl returns to her straw. I lay down on the floor. Their voices slide over me.

"I am not a demon. I am not."

"We will know comes the morning."

"They will allow that I am."

"The knowing is theirs."

"Truth is mine."

"Be still lest He hear you."

"He knoweth all things; heareth all things; He will not abandon me."

"Nor will I."

"Yet you bloodied my flesh. Why?"

"Demons canst not bleed."

That is good to know, I am thinking. IF I had a mother she would teach me such things.

TWO

I know a man. I know him for sixty-two nights. Nothing of weight happens to me before I meet him and nothing good is happening since he is gone.

My name is Curl because they say so. I remember another name but when I am moving to the stable, they are calling me Curl. Wendy says no, not Curl. They are calling me "girl." But we are a lot of girls, and they are calling her Wendy.

tk

We are seven, excluding the driver, and the horses are not the only ones showing nervous by snowflakes in springtime. Their haunches

tremble, they shake their heads. We are nervous too, but we sit still as the flakes come down and stick to our shawls and hats; sugaring our eyelashes and flouring the mens' beards. Sudden snowfall on tender leaves is pretty. Perhaps it will last long enough on the ground and animal tracking is easy. The man is always please in the snow where killing is best. No on can starve if there is snow. And in spring, the river is full of spawn and the air of fowl. I draw my feet under my skirts, not for warmth but to protect the letter that nestles between the cotton and the skin of my foot. A safer place than in the bottom of my shoe, but the wax seal hurts. I have tender feet. As a child I couldn't run with other children and begged shoes, anybody's shoes, on week days. Lily told me I was forfeiting the strength and agility of bare feet that, if I let them, would develop soles tougher than leather and even save my life.

with yellow hair
I don't see it, but one of we seven, a boy, points and then we all do.

Winking through trees a light. Tk

The driver and his mate go in. We wait. They return to water the horses and us. After it is silent. The snow is gone and the sun as well.

Six drop down. Three women motion and I drop down too. They move off back down where we are coming from, stepping as best they can figure in tree shelter at roadside; places where the snow is small. I don't follow. I have an errand. Neither can I stay in the wagon. I can not be alone with strange men when, drunk and annoyed, they discover their cargo is lost. I go west into the trees. Everything I want is west. The man. His words. The medicine he makes that makes my mistress well. He will read the letter and come back. I have only ten or twelve miles more. Two days. Three nights.

Tk [shelter; Indian girls in water]

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Before I ^{CAN} knock a woman opens the door. She has ~~red hair~~ and green eyes. The rest of her is a black frock and a white ^{cap.} shawl. *Red hair edges it.*

"Who hath sent you?"

"I am alone, madam. Shelter sends me here."

She says words my mistress reads from the Good Book. 'Thy' and 'thou,' and 'hast.'

"Hast thy no protection, no companion?"

"No, madam."

"Art thou from this earth or elsewhere?"

"This earth, madam. I know no other."

"Art thou Christian or heathen?"

"Never heathen, madam, although I am told my father was."

"Where doth he abide?"

The rain is bigger. I think the wet will ruin the letter. *Hunger wobbles me,*

"I do not know him. Nor my mother."

"Orphan. Step in."

I try to eat slowly and fail. Sopping hard bread in warm mush I don't lift my head except to say "thank you" when she ladles more into my bowl. *TK handful of raisens placed on the (wooden) table,*
I notice the girl lying in a narrow box of straw. Under her head is a blanket roll. One of her eyes looks away; the other is as straight and unwavering as ^a she wolf. I don't think I should initiate anything so I wait for the girl or the woman to say something. When I have finished the food, the woman asks what is my purpose traveling alone.

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1 ee / *sing down her legs.* Dark blood beetles in the light pouring over her pale skin [fix]

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Tk

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"Truth is mine."

"Be still lest He hear you."

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"Nor will I."

"Yet you bloodied my flesh. Why?"

"Demons canst not bleed."

That is good to know, I ~~am~~ ^{still had} thinking. If I am having a mother, she ~~is~~
^{would be}
teaching me such things. For ~~now only the man is~~ teaching me.