



## Florens story

---

No Known Copyright

Princeton University Library reasonably believes that the Item is not restricted by copyright or related rights, but a conclusive determination could not be made.

You are free to use this Item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use.

## Princeton University Library Disclaimer

---

Princeton University Library claims no copyright governing this digital resource. It is provided for free, on a non-commercial, open-access basis, for fair-use academic and research purposes only. Anyone who claims copyright over any part of these resources and feels that they should not be presented in this manner is invited to contact Princeton University Library, who will in turn consider such concerns and make every effort to respond appropriately. We request that users reproducing this resource cite it according the guidelines described at <http://rbcs.princeton.edu/policies/forms-citation>.

## Citation Information

---

Morrison, Toni. 1931-

Florens story

1 folder (partial)

## Contact Information

---

## Download Information

---

Date Rendered: 2019-09-05 01:15:38 PM UTC

Available Online at: <http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/qb98mm062>

## Florens story

Sir, a nouveau riche completing a deal in Maryland, offers to purchase a mother and daughter from an acquaintance who has paid only a portion of what he owes to Sir. Not really a purchase actually an exchange for the debt the acquaintance owes. The mother begs no. She wants to stay with her nursing son. Sir accepts the daughter, Florens, as gift to his wife and partial payment of the debt. They had been making beer from sassafrass when the decision is made.

Arriving in upstate New York, Florens can not speak. Later she stutters. She sleeps with Lila, an older woman, described as a "praying Indian", who works at the farm [her status: slave, unpaid servant?] is not clear. The two of them sleep together in cowshed in a broken sleigh behind boards in winter when the cow flops are frozen and have no smell. In summer they sleep in a kind of teepee that Lila instructs on its building. Other slaves or indentured persons are: Soladad [about 12 yrs old], who sleeps in the house; Will and Scully, two white men who belong to another farm, but work daily for Sir and Mistress as

*in the cookhouse*  
Sleeping on floor w/ my mother is not as nice as  
sleeping with Lila in the <sup>broken</sup> sleigh. ~~to cold weather~~ we put planks  
up and wrap our arms together. Cow flops are frozen and have no smell.  
In summer... <sup>only</sup> Soladad sleeps in the house with Mistress and Sir.

The gate you is beautiful. Your iron work is to see. The house too, waiting for glass windows. TK love making in rooms freshly built. (after Will & Scully leave)

Sir wants to be taken there the there is no forgetting He tells Master to hurry. Never mind the spring rain. The sickness alters his mind as well as his face. Will & Scully go to carry him to the almost complete house. He is sleeping and never wakes. Neither Master nor we know if he is alive for even one minute on the stamp pad on the floor.

labor in exchange for land leased from Sir for the neighbor's grazing stock. Sir is making a lot of money. (He brokers cargo in the south; goods and people.)

Now he is building a new house which he will name tk: big, with a root cellar, several rooms, fireplaces in the bedrooms and wants a fancy portal and gate leading to the property. Hires a smithy.

The smithy works with his shirt off and sleeps under his hat near his horse.

Florens falls in love with the smithy. As often as they can, which is usually night, they meet to talk, talk. Florens loves talking so much, she begins to do it over the faded ink of an accounts book: cleaning out a chest, in order to put in it the new linens and clothes Sir has bought, she finds among the worn nightshirts, corsets, newspapers etc. a cache of accounting books in a language she cannot read. Mixed in with accounts are verses from the Bible, poems and "sayings." Florens writes over the words and into the spaces between the lines.

<sup>she is</sup> Soledad gets pregnant. Father unknown and she won't say. Mistress is

not pleased. Sir is; he sees another worker he won't have to buy—hopes it is a boy. Will and Scully each deny paternity. Lila believes it is Sir's. She <sup>says she</sup> "has her reasons" for this belief. <sup>Also</sup> Neither am I. Now Lila and I have to x x

Florens, having been sold away from her mother is envious of baby

2 Mothers nursing walking children scare me. I know where their eyes go when they choose. My own mother looks at me hard (see ms p. 4)



brother whom her mother chose over her. Mother and brother appear off and <sup>holding her shoes</sup> on to say they are dead, and to watch Florens. When they tell her they are dead, Florens has grief but no forgiveness.

Soledad sickens. Her baby did not survive. Lila and Florens healthy. Smith cures Soledad. Then disappears, leaving no trace of himself (except a 'presence' in the places he and Florens visited) and not staying to say goodbye. Florens thinks of escaping. Farm without the smithy is unbearable to her, but she is frightened to leave alone. Sir is away in Maryland. When he returns he falls ill and dies. Will and Scully refuse to work on the house further. They are afraid of the illness and when the neighbors hear of it, a combination of envy, differing religious beliefs and fear, they are unavailable as well. The woman (Mistress, Lila, Florens and Soledad) have to attend Sir's body. No preacher will come close, and bury it. Mistress falls ill. Soledad is recovering. Only Lila and Florens left. Mistress sends her to find smithy (who has cured Soledad) and Florens is thrilled to do it.

Journey is hazardous. After she leaves the wagon, a leaving made necessary because the other passengers have escaped. She makes her way on her own. First she encounters some Algonquin girls bathing. One speak<sup>s</sup>

English. A kind encounter. Second she ends up in a village during a witch investigation. The woman who gives her shelter, has a daughter implicated in craft and is about to be interrogated. The woman has whipped her daughter's legs to bleeding, because demons do not bleed. The next morning is the interrogation, during which the interrogators have trouble deciding between Florens' letter and her black skin. Is she a demon or a good slave? They are so distracted by this question, they allow the daughter is not of the craft. They will study the letter and decide the next morning. Obviously, they hope Florens will take the hint and leave so they won't have to come to any conclusion. She does. The mother and daughter are grateful and give her food and directions for her journey. (The daughter with the wayward eye guides her part of the way.)

When Florens arrives at the forge, the smithy is happy to see her. He lives with a small boy, his son or a ward. Florens sees only someone she loves and needs standing hand in hand with a rival child.

The smithy agrees to return to the farm to tend Mistress, but only if Florens stays to mind the boy, as it is impossible for all three to travel together quickly. Florens agrees. The child will not come near her, allow her to touch



him and he does not speak. Florens becomes convinced he is a demon. He comes to the doorway at night and stares at her. ["At night, while you are gone, he comes to the door to look at me until I wake. Then he turns away and I can smell sassafrass."] She has dreams/nightmares in which she needs protection from the child. Recalling the events of the village and the mother's solution to an inquiry of demon finding, Florens cuts and slashes the child's legs to see if he bleeds. While doing so, the guise of 'protection', 'detection' falls away and she feels a kind of blood lust. The rage of the abandoned. He screams. And something in his eyes reminds her of the bathing Indian girls and their washing of a baby before re-swaddling it on its cradle-board. Florens washes the child's legs and bandages them. The boy is terrified of her; will not eat the food she offers him, nor drink the water she holds before him. She ties his hands, so she can clean and tend his wounds. She tries to do this tenderly, but he kicks and kicks.

The smithy returns, and his smile falls away when the child crawls to him, whimpering, on infected, pus filled legs.

Grief. No forgiveness.

Now, writing on the backs of Sir's invoices, living with Lila and Mistress

ledger  
floors and  
5  
walls  
of the new house by lamplight

and Soledad, sometimes in the old house, sometimes in the not yet finished new one, Florens explains while waiting for her mother and brother to show up.

Two forms of slavery; 1. The official form; and 2. The one generated within. Both equal isolation and shame. Betrayal is what we add. Mercy is what is withheld.

11. b. fear of night darkness turns to its protection.  
a feeling of belonging. (at end<sup>1</sup> of her narrative) *surrender to*