



"Seated at last..."

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Seated at last, he listened to the talk around him, which was all sugar—which was to say rum—its price and demand becoming greater than tobacco's. He would look into it. TK

A fiddler entered for their merriment and their money, and, having played less well than himself, raised Vaark's spirits enough to join in the singing.

After a meal of tk, he secured bed space with just one man in it and thought about the disappointing day, ^{AND} The disgust of having accepted the girl as part payment. Once again a Stuart had lost the throne and another barred from it. To everyone's relief, a protestant couple ruled and one day, thought Vaark, a suit against D'Ortega would succeed and he would not be forced to settle for a child as ^{a percentage of} ~~part payment for~~ what was ^{due} ~~owed~~ him. He knew he had rationalized the bargain by thinking Rebekka would welcome her, but what was truer than that was another thing. There was no good place in the world for waifs and whelps other than the generosity of strangers. Even if bartered, given, apprenticed, sold, tricked for food, labored for shelter or stolen, they were less doomed under adult control. He felt a pulse of pity for them knowing well their wretched lot back home and found it hard to refuse if called on to rescue an unmoored, unwanted child. When the sawyer asked if he ~~wanted to rent~~ ^{would take} the

sullen, woolly headed girl he found half dead on a river bank, Vaark
said 'YES.' If he added on the lumber
~~acquiesced~~. Agreeing, as now, that his farm could use her. That was as true

now with this child that the mother was throwing away, as it had been a decade
earlier with the one they called Sorrow.

*Only Lila had he purchased
outright - but she was a woman - not a child.*

Narrow as the bed space was and despite the heat, he slept well enough.

Probably because his dreams were of a grand house of many rooms rising on a
hill above the fog.

Since your leaving sudden with no goodbye, summer passes, then

autumn and with the waning of winter the sickness comes back. Not like before with Sorrow but now with Sir. When he returns this time he is different, slow and hard to please. He sweats and wants water all the time and no one wants to believe the blisters are going to be Sorrow's old sickness. He vomits at night and weeps in the day. Then he is too weak to do either. He reminds us that he has bought only seasoned slaves, including me, who are survivors of measles so how is this happening to him? He can not help envying us our health and feeling cheated of his new house. I can tell you it is ^{yet} ~~still~~ not finished. The gate is still beautiful; your ironwork wondrous to see. The house is grand, waiting only for window glass. Sir wants to be taken there even though there is no furniture. He tells Mistress to hurry hurry never mind the spring rain pouring down for days. The sickness alters his mind as well as his face. Will and Scully are gone and when we women each holding a corner of a blanket carry him into the house without windows he is sleeping with his mouth wide open and never wakes. Neither Mistress nor we know if he is alive for even one minute to smell the new cherry wood floors he lies on. 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 because of the sickness. The ^{Deacon} ~~Pastor~~ does not come

does he dream
the congregation.
a friend. Neither do any of his members.
even though he is Anabaptist. Still, we do not say the word aloud until we bury him next to his children and Mistress notices two in her mouth. Pox. After we say it the next morning two are on her tongue, twenty-three on her face. Thirty-three in all. She wants you here as 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. The first time I see it you are shaping iron in fire. The shine of water runs down your spine and I have shock at myself for wanting to lick there. I run away into the cowshed to stop this thing from happening inside me. Nothing stops it. There is only you. Nothing outside of you. My eyes not my stomach are the hungry parts of me. There will never be enough time to look how you move. Your arm goes up to strike iron. You drop to one knee. You bend. You stop to pour water first on the iron then down your throat. Before you know I am in the world I am killed by your back. My mouth is open, my hands shaking and the heart is stretching to break. I think if you turn and see me seeing you I will die. But when I see your face again I am not dead. For the first time I am live.

Night comes and I steal a candle. I carry an ember in a pot to light it.
To see more of you. When it is lit I shield the flame with my hand. I watch you
sleeping. I watch too long. Am careless. The flame burns my palm. I run
away not knowing then you are seeing me seeing you.

Tr. 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. A boy with a pigtail sits on the wagon
floor, his hands tied to his feet. He and I are the only ones without blankets
covering our feet.

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 skirt, not for warmth, but to protect the letter. The cloth of food 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 the post 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 ^{an Indian trail} ~~another road~~ which I will know by the sapling bent into the earth with one sprout growing skyward. But the Brothers Ney are late. When I climb aboard and take a place at the tail behind the others, it is already late afternoon. The others do not ask me where I am headed but after a while are pleased to whisper where they have been. By the sea, the women say, they cleaning ships, the men repairing docks. They are certain their years are paid up but hear the master say no, more time is necessary. He sends them away, north, to another place, a tannery for two more years. I don't understand why they are sad. Everyone has to work. I ask did you leave someone dear behind. All heads turn toward me and the wind dies. Daft, the man says. A woman across from me says, young. The man says, same. Another woman raises her voice to say leave her be. Too loud. Settle down back there the driver is shouting. The one who says I am daft

bends down to scratch his ankle scratching for a long time while the others cough and scrape their shoes as if to defy the driver's command. The woman next to me whispers, there are no coffins in a tannery, only fast death.

The tavern needs lamplight when we reach it. At first I don't see it, but one of us, a man, points and then we all do. Winking through the trees is a light. The Neys go in. We wait. They come out to water the horses and us and go in again. After that there are scuffling sounds again. I look down and see the rope that falls from their ankles twisting along the wagon bed. The snow ends and the sun is gone. Quiet, quiet, six drop down, the men catching the women in their arms. The boy jumps alone. Three of the women motion to me. My heart thumps 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. My fear is like ice. I must not be alone with strange men when, liquored and angry, they discover their cargo is lost. I have to choose quick. I choose you. 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 hear what I have to say and come back with me. I have only to go west. Two days. Three nights.

I am walking in trees lining the road. North where the sapling bends into the earth with a forced sprout that points to the sky. Then west to you. I am hurrying to gain ground before all light is over. The land slopes sharply and I have no way to go but down as well. Hard as I try I lose the road. Tree leaves are too new for shelter so everywhere the ground is slop with snow and my foot prints slide and pool. The sky is the color of currants. Can I go more I wonder. Should I. Two hares freeze before bounding away. I hear water running and move in the dark toward the sound. I need Lila to say how to shelter in wilderness.

Lila could not bear to enter or go near it. It was to be the third and final house. The first one Sir built was weaker than the bark covered one she herself was born in. The second was strong—four rooms of stone large enough for a modest family. Yet at the very moment when there were no children to occupy or inherit it, he meant to build another, bigger, double storied, fenced and gated like the one he saw on a business trip. Mistress had sighed and confided to Lila that at the least the doing of it would keep him more on the land. "Trading and traveling fill his pockets," she'd said, "but he had been content to be a planter when we married. Now...." Her voice had trailed off as she yanked away at the ^{swan's} turkey hen's feathers.

But it turned out ~~all~~ bad. When the house was close to completion he fell sick with nothing else on his mind.

Sir mystified Lila. All whites did. Once they had terrified her, then they had rescued her. Now they simply puzzled her. Why, she wondered, had Mistress sent a love sick girl to find the smithy. If she is not stolen or killed, if she finds him safe she would not return. Why should she? Lila had watched with mild envy and constant amusement the courtship that began the morning the smithy came to work on Sir's foolish house. The girl had stood still, a

startled doe, when he dismounted his horse, doffed his hat and asked if this was the Vaark place. Lila had shifted the milk bucket to her left hand and pointed up the hill. Mistress, leading the heifer, had come around the corner of the barn and asked him his business, sucking her teeth when he answered.

"Dear Lord," she murmured and, pushing out her bottom lip, blew hair away from her forehead. Then, "Wait here."

As she led the cow to pasture the smithy locked eyes with Lila before returning his hat to his head. He never once looked at the girl standing nearby, not breathing, holding the milking stool with both hands as though to help gravity keep her earthbound. When Mistress returned, rubbing her hands on her apron, he removed his hat once more and did something Lila had never seen a workman do: he looked directly at Mistress, lowering his glance, for he was very tall, never blinking. In the town Lila had been taken to, after the conflagration had erased her village, that kind of boldness was legitimate cause for a whip. An unfathomable puzzle. Whites could calmly cut children down, blast old men in the face with muskets louder than moose calls, but were enraged if a not-white looked a white in the eye. On the one hand they would torch your home; on the other they would feed, nurse and bless you. And one,

at least, could become your friend, which is why she slept on the floor beside Mistress's bed and kept watch in case Sorrow interfered or Mistress needed soothing.

Once, long ago, had Lila been older or tutored in healing she might have eased the pain of her family and all the other Abenaki dying around her: on mats of rush, lapping at the lake's shore, curled in paths within the village and in the forest beyond, but most tearing at blankets they could neither abide nor abandon. Infants fell silent first, and even as their mothers heaped earth over their bones, they too were pouring sweat and limp as wet rope. At first they fought off the crows, she and two other children, but they were no match for the birds or the smell and when the wolves arrived, all three climbed as high into a chestnut as they could. They stayed there all night. By noon the next day just as they had decided to make a run for one of the canoes in the lake, men in uniforms came, their faces wrapped in rags. News of the deaths that had swept her village had reached out. Lila's joy at being rescued turned to ice as the soldiers, having taken one look at the birds feeding on the corpses strewn about, shot the wolves then circled the whole village with fire. The children screamed from the trees until the men heard them and caught each in their

arms as they jumped.

She was taken to tk, where she lived among kindly Presbyterians. There ^{h?} she learned how much ~~they~~ ^{were pleased to have her because they} admired native women who, they said, worked at least as hard as they themselves did, but despaired of their men who simply fished and hunted like gentry all day. Impoverished gentry, that is, since they owned nothing, certainly not the land they slept on, preferring to live as entitled paupers. And since some of the church elders had heard horrible tales of or witnessed themselves God's wrath toward the idle and profane-flinging black death followed by raging fire on the proud and blasphemous city of their birth—they could only pray that Lila's people understood before they died that what had felled them was another clear sign of His displeasure. Afraid of losing another family, Lila let herself be improved by these worthies. So it took a long time for her to notice the difference between property and earth, and even longer before she was strong enough to piece together scraps of what her mother taught before dying in agony. Neglected rites, hidden meanings, a way to be in the world.

Lila had placed magic pebbles under Mistress's pillow; kept the room fresh with mint and forced angelica root in her patient's festering mouth to

keep the bad spirits out of the sickroom. She prepared the most powerful remedy she knew: devil's bit, mugwort, St. John's wort, maiden hair, and periwinkle; boiled it, strained it and spooned it into Mistress's mouth. She considered repeating some of the prayers she learned ~~as a child~~ among the ^{Presbyterians} Christians, but since none had saved Sir, she abandoned the notion. He went quickly. Begging to be taken to his third house. The big one, useless now that there were no children or children's children to live in it. No one to stand in awe at its size or to admire the wrought gate that the smithy took two months to make. But if the smithy's work was a frivolous waste of a grown man's time, his presence was not. He brought one girl to womanhood and saved the life of another. Sorrow. Vixen-eyed Sorrow with black teeth and a head of wild, wooly hair the color of a setting sun. ^{Leased} ~~Accepted~~, not bought, by Sir, she joined the household after Lila but before the girl and still had no memory of her past life except being dragged ashore by whales.

"Not whales," Mistress had said. "Of course not. She was treading water in the North River in Mohawk country, near to drowning when two young sawyers trawled her in, wrapped her in a blanket and brought their father to the river bank where she lay. It is said she had been living alone on a foundered

ship."

Not then, not ever had she spoken of how she got there or where she had been. The sawyer's wife named her Sorrow and following a winter of feeding the daft girl who kept wandering off getting lost, who knew nothing and worked less, a strange, melancholy girl to whom her sons were paying very close attention, the wife asked her husband to get quit of her. He obliged and offered her to the care of a customer he trusted to do her no harm. Sir. When Sorrow arrived, Mistress barely hid her annoyance but admitted the place could use the help. If Sir was bent on travel, two female farmers were not enough. Lila was ^{a tall} fourteen ^{year old} when Sir bought her. He had searched the advertisements posted at the printer's in tk. "A likely woman who has had small pox and meazles....A likely Negro about 9 years....Girl or woman that is handy in the kitchen sensible, speaks good English, complexion between yellow and black....Five years time of a white woman that understands Country work, with a child upwards of two years old....Mulatto Fellow very much pitted with small pox, honest and sober...White lad fit to serve...Wanted a servant able to drive a carriage, white or black...Sober woman who.... Likely wench, 29 years with child....stout healthy, healthy strong, strong healthy likely, sober, sober, sober,

until he got to "Hardy female, sober and prudent, available for exchange of goods or specie, Christianized and capable in all matters domestic." Expecting the arrival of ^ahis new wife, he required precisely that kind of female on his land.

Tk (over)

Lila watched while Mistress trained Sorrow to sewing, the one task she liked and was good at, and said nothing when, to stop her roaming, he said, Sir made the girl sleep by the fireplace all seasons. A comfort Lila did not envy even in bad weather. Her people had understood shelter for a thousand years and, except for the deathfeet of Europeans, might have understood it for a thousand more. As it turned out the sachem had been dead wrong. Hard company, was Sorrow, needing constant attention. As at this very daybreak when, out of necessity, she had been trusted with the milking. The cow, Sorrow said, had kicked when she touched her. Lila left the sickroom to mind the heifer—talk to her first, hum a little then slowly cradle the tender teats with a palm of cream. The spurts were sporadic, worthless, except for the cow's relief, and after she had oiled her into comfort, Lila rushed back into the house. No good could come of leaving Mistress alone with Sorrow. The girl dragged misery like a tail. There was a man in Lila's village like that. His name she had

By then her swollen eye had calmed and the
bruise on her face barely noticeable.
They never asked her what had happened *,
~~perhaps they didn't need to~~. What they did
was consult with the printer about the wording
of an advertisement. "Hardy female...." ~~MTK~~

* and there was no point in telling them. She
had no standing in law and ^{no one} ~~who~~ would take
her word against a white.

MTK [walks to
farmer after
canoe ride]

forgotten along with the rest of her language, but it meant "trees fall behind him," suggesting his influence on the surroundings. In Sorrow's presence, eggs would not allow themselves to be beaten into foam, nor yeast bread rise. Now, more than unreliable, more than wandering off to talk to grass and grapevines, she was pregnant and soon there would be another virgin birth and, perhaps, this one would not die. But if Mistress died, what then? To whom could she turn? Although the Baptists once freely helped Sir build the second house, the barn and happily joined him in felling pine for the post fence, a cooling had risen between them and his family. Partly because Mistress cursed them for shutting her children out of heaven, but mostly, thought Lila, because Sorrow's lurking frightened them. Now, of course, nobody, Baptist or any other would come to a poxed house. Don't die, Miss. Don't. Herself, Sorrow, ~~a new born~~ ^{perhaps} and Florens—three unspoken for women and an infant out here, alone, belonging to no one, became wild game for anyone. None of them could inherit; none was ^q attached to a church or recorded in its books. Female and illegal they would be interlopers, squatters if they stayed on after Mistress died, subject to purchase, hire, ^{assault} exile. The farm could be claimed by or auctioned off to the Baptists. Lila had relished her place in this small, tight family but now

saw its folly. Sir and Mistress believed they could have honest, free-thinking lives but without heirs all their work meant less than a swallow's nest. Their drift toward independence produced a self-centered privacy and they had lost the refuge and the consolation of a community.

Life, everything depended on Mistress's survival which depended on Floren's success.

Lila had fallen in love with her right away, as soon as she saw her shivering in the snow. A frightened six year old who did not speak for a long time but when she did her light, sing song voice was a delight to hear. Somehow, some way, the child assuaged the tiny yet eternal yearning for the home Lila once knew where everyone had anything and no one had everything. There was hunger in the child's eyes that Lila thought was like her own. A quiet, easy companion, the child learned quickly, was eager to know more and would have been the perfect one to find the blacksmith if only she had not been sickened with love of him.

Tk 5: Florens ,Algonquin girls bathing in stream

*Florens eats the
rest of her food
Recalls Lila's story
about bad love
her own*

6

How long will it take will she get lost will he be there will he come will someone steal her? She liked shoes when she first came, and only when Lila noticed and made her some, did she say a word.

Rebekka's thoughts bled into one another, confusing events and time but not people. The need to swallow, the pain of doing so, the unbearable urge to tear her skin from the bones underneath stopped only when she was unconscious—not asleep because as far as the dreams were concerned it was the same as being awake.

"I shat in a tub for four weeks to get to this land."

She has told this to Lila over and over. Lila being the only one she has

ever talked to without restraint. The only one whose understanding she trusted and whose judgement she valued. Even now, in ^{the} dark of ^{a spring} night, with less sleep than her mistress, Lila was burning something to soothe her patient, put her to sleep. Whispering and shaking a doll around the bed.

"Among strangers," said Rebekka. "There was no other way for us women packed like cod between decks."

There was nothing in the world to prepare her for a life of water, on water, about water, sickened by it and desperate for it. Mesmerized and bored by the look of it especially at night when the women were allowed another hour on deck. Then she talked to the sea. "Stay still, don't hurt me. No, move, move, excite me. Give me something I can eat. Here is my spit, my peelings, my waste. Keep my secrets way down below and I will keep yours: the smell of you is like fresh monthly blood; you guzzle moonlight like Pa guzzles ale; you own this place and land is afterthought to entertain you; the world in and beneath you is your heaven and, if truth be told, maybe ours as well."

They had warned her that savages or non-conformists would slaughter them all as soon as they landed, so when she found Lila already there, waiting outside the one room log house her new husband had built for them, she

bolted the door at night and would not let the raven-haired girl with impossible skin sleep anywhere near. Fourteen or so, stone faced she was, and it took a while for trust between them. Perhaps because both were alone without family, or because both had to please one man they became what was for each a kind of friend. A pair, anyway, the result of the mute alliance that comes of sharing tasks, of depending on the rhythm of one to hold the head while the other one tied the trotters. Or one turning the soil while, trailing behind, the other marked open the row. And then, when the first infant was born Lila handled it so tenderly, with such knowing, Rebekka was ashamed of her early fears and pretended she'd never had them. Now, lying in bed, her hands wrapped and bound against self-mutilation, her lips drawn back from her teeth, she remembered everything, in no particular order. The first hangings she saw in the square amid a happy crowd attending. She was barely two years old, and the death faces would have frightened her if the crowd had not mocked and enjoyed them so. With the rest of her family and most of her neighbors, she was present at a drawing and quartering but, although too young to remember every detail, the dreams of it were made permanently vivid by years of re-telling and re-describing by family members. She did not know what a 'fifth

monarchist' was—then or now— but it was clear in her household that execution was a festivity as exciting as a king's parade. Brawls, knifings and kidnaps were so common in the city of her birth, that the warnings of slaughter in a new, unseen world were like threats of bad weather. The violent squabbles between local tribes or with militia that peppered this region seemed a distant, manageable back drop in a land of such space and perfume. Trees taller than a cathedral, wood for warmth so plentiful it made you laugh then weep for ~~the shivering~~ ^{freezing} children in the city she had left behind. She had never seen birds like these, or tasted fresh water that ran over visible white stones. There was adventure in learning to cook game and acquiring a taste for roast swan. Well, yes, there were monstrous storms here with snow piled higher than the sill of a shutter. And summer insects swarmed with a song louder than church bells. Yet the thought of what her life would be had she stayed crushed into those reeking streets, spat on by Lords and prostitutes, curtsying, curtsying, curtsying still repelled her. Here she answered to her husband alone and paid polite attendance (time and weather permitting) to the only meeting house in the area. Anabaptists who were not the satanists her parents called them—as they did all non-conformists—but sweet, generous people for all their confounding

views. Views that got them and the horrible Quakers beaten bloody in their own meeting house back home. Rebekka had no bone deep hostility. Even the king had pardoned a dozen of them on their way to the gallows. Still she remembered her parents' disappointment when the festivities were cancelled. Her discomfort ^{in a house full of} ~~with~~ constant argument, bursts of rage made her impatient for some kind of escape. Any kind.

There had been an early rescue, however, and the possibility of better things in Church School where she was chosen as one of four to be trained and educated for domestic service. Then the big rescue when her father got notice of a man overseas looking for a strong wife rather than a dowry. Between the warning of immediate slaughter and the promise of married bliss, she believed in neither. Yet, without money, her prospects were servant, prostitute, convent, wife—the last one the safest. [Tk] The intermittent skirmishes of men against men, arrows against powder, fire against hatchet that she heard about from neighbors could not match the gore of what she had seen since childhood. The pile of frisky, still living human entrails ^{held before the} ~~thrown into a~~ ^{felon's eyes then} ~~bucket and~~ tossed into the Thames; fingers trembling for a lost torso; the hair of a woman guilty of mayhem bright with flame. Compared to that, death by

shipwreck or tomahawk paled. She did not know what the settler families nearby once knew of routine dismemberment and violence, but she did not share their alarm when, three months after the fact, news came of a pitched battle or a peace gone awry. With ^{her} ~~the few~~ neighbors she was soft spoken; in the meeting house she was accommodating and when they explained their beliefs she did not roll her eyes. It was when they refused to baptize her first born that Rebekka turned away. More and more it was in Lila's company that she let misery seep out.

"I chastised her for a torn shift, Lila, and next thing I know she is lying in the snow. Her little head cracked like an egg."

It would have embarrassed her to mention personal sorrow in prayer; to be other than stalwart in grief; to let God know she was less than thankful for His watch. She had delivered four healthy babies, watched three surrender at a different age to one or another illness, and then watched Patrician, the first born, who reached the age of eight and provided a happiness Rebekka could not believe, die in her arms with a broken crown. And then to bury her twice. First under branches because the frozen ground could not accept the coffin so they had to leave her to freeze in it, and second in late spring when they could

place her among her brothers with the Anabaptists attending. Weak, pustulate, her own death was what she should be trying to concentrate on. She could hear its hooves clacking on the roof, could see the cloaked figure on horseback. But whenever the immediate torment subsided, her thoughts traveled to Patrician's matted hair, the soap cake she used to clean it, the rinses over and over to free every honey-brown strand from the awful blood darkening like her mind to black. Rebekka never looked at the coffin waiting under branches for thaw. But when finally the earth softened, when Jacob could get traction with the spade and they let the coffin down, she sat on the ground holding on to her elbows oblivious of the damp and watched every clod and clump fall. She stayed there all day and through the night. No one, not Jacob, Sorrow or Lila could get her up. And not Pastor either since he and his flock had been the ones whose beliefs would not let them baptize her newborns. She growled when they touched her; threw the blanket from her shoulders. They left her alone then, shaking their heads, muttering prayers. At dawn in a light snowfall Lila came and arranged jewelry and food on the grave, along with scented leaves, telling her that her children, the boys and Patrician, were stars now, or something equally lovely, yellow and green birds, playful foxes, or the

rose tinted clouds collecting at the edge of the sky. Pagan stuff, true, but more satisfying than the I- accept- and- will-see- you- at- Judgment Day prayers Rebekka had been taught and heard repeated by Pastor. There had been a summer day once, when she sat in front of the house sewing and talking profanely while Lila stirred boiling linen at her side.

I don't think God knows who we are. I think He would like us, if He knew us, but I don't think He knows about us.

But He made us, Miss, no?

He did. But He made the tails of peacocks too. That must have been harder.

We sing and talk. Peacocks do not.

We need to; peacocks don't. What else do we have?

Thoughts. Hands to make things.

All well and good. But that's our business. Not God's. He is doing something else in the world. We are not on His mind.

What is He doing, then, if not watching us?

God knows.

Then they sputtered with laughter, like little girls hiding behind the stable

loving the danger of their talk. She could not decide if Patrician's accident by a cloven hoof was rebuke or proof of the pudding.

Now here, in bed, her deft, industrious hands wrapped in linen lest she claw her self bloody, she could not tell if she was speaking aloud or simply thinking.

a tub... strangers
"I shat in ~~public~~..."

[tk: other women on the ship]

He was bigger than she imagined. All the men she had known were small, hardened but small. Mr. Vaark (it took some time before she could say, Jacob) picked up all three of her boxes after touching her face and smiling. Following him, feeling the strange resilience of land after weeks at sea, she tripped on the wooden walk and tore the hem of her gown. He did not even turn around, so she grabbed a fistful of skirt and trotted along to the wagon, refusing the hand he offered to help her mount. It was seal and deal. He would offer her no pampering. She would not accept it if he did. A perfect equation for the work that lay ahead. And the sorrow. ^(over) None of her family had died during the pestilence; no red cross was painted on their door. So to have sailed to this ^{clean} ~~unsullied~~ world, this fresh and new England, ^{marry a stout and robust man} ~~and~~ then lie mattering

TK: His slow change / " he brought her

First she noticed how the gifts had become less practical, than whimsical: Silver tea service, which was put away; porcelain chamber pot, heavily worked hair brush (for hair he only saw in bed). Rebekka hid her wander with a smile. Where was this money coming from, "New arrangements" he said, but nothing more. Having noticed a glint in his eye, as he tk, she should have anticipated the day he hired men to help him clear a wide swath of ~~trees~~ ^{trees} ~~between~~ at the foot of a rise. A new house, something befitting, "a noble."

MTK We are good common people, she thought, in a place where that ^{play on} is not merely enough - but prized. We don't need another house, she told him. He lifted his chin for the razor she held.

Need is not the reason, wife.
What pray? ^{She cleared off} the last of the father.
What a man leaves behind is what a man is.
"Jacob, a man is only his reputation."

He snatched the cloth and wiped his face. "Understand me" I will have it.

And so it was. Men, barrows, a smithy, lumber, ^{turns, pots of hammers, nails,} ^{TK and} pull horses one of which had ^{already} kicked her daughter in the head. ~~It was hard to tell~~ ^{if} the fever of building was so intense she missed the real fever, the one that put him in the quiver. ^{was} The men left the smithy, long gone ^{his iron work like gates to heaven} ^{As soon as he collapsed,} ^{Word went out to} the village and even Sarrin was no longer allowed among them.

So she did as he bid: gathered the women and struggled with them to leave him on ^{to} a blanket. All the while he croaked, Hurry, Hurry, ~~But~~ ^{to aid them} unable to summon muscle strength, he was dead weight (before he was dead). They hauled him ^{asunder} through the steady rain. Skirts dragging in mud, shawls ~~drenched~~, the caps on their head drenched the scalp. There was trouble at the gate. They had to lay him in

to p. attached a cold spring

~~tap~~ mud while two opened it, and ~~against~~ ^{then} unbolted the door of the house.

As Rain poured over his face, Rebekka ^{sheltered it} ~~wiped it~~ away with her ^{own} ~~soaking~~ ^{wife} ~~about~~ the driest part of her undershirt. She ^{blotted} ~~blotted~~ carefully, lest ^{she} ~~the~~ she disturb the bullets into pain.

~~When~~ ~~at~~ last they entered the hall, & ~~put down their load,~~ situated him ^{far} away from the window space waiting for a glazer.

Rebekka leaned in close to ask if he would take a little ale. He ^{moved his lips but} ~~did not~~ no answer came. His eyes shifted to something or someone over her shoulder and remained

so till she closed them. All ~~the~~ ^{four} herself, sorrow, Lila and Florens

She ~~did~~ sat down on the floor planks, and ~~listened to the rain.~~ ^{One or all} ~~they~~ could have been crying but perhaps it was ~~the~~ ^{only} rain. drops on their cheeks.

Rebekka did not ^{know if} ~~doubt~~ whether she would be infected.

on a perfect spring night felt like a jest. Congratulations, Satan.

The moon stared back as though to give her company like a worried friend. Lila, snored lightly at the foot of the bed.
She thought loneliness would be her worst enemy when Jacob was away.

When neither Patrican nor Lila was enough. When the villagers beyond tired her out with talk that never extended beyond their fences. But then he would ride up and toss a bolt of calico at her feet or hand her a packet of needles.

Best of all were the times, not many but often enough, when he would take out his fiddle and embarrass the songbirds who believed they owned twilight.

Patrican would be on the floor, mouth agape, eyes aglow, as he summoned rose gardens and shepherds neither ^{had seen or} would ever ~~see or~~ know. *TK conversation w/ Lilq (over)*

Now, she thought, there is no one except servants. Jacob gone and buried by the women he left behind; children rose-tinted clouds in the sky. Sorrow frightened for her own future if I die. Lila steady, unmoved by any catastrophe as though she has seen and survived everything. And Florens? How long will it take will he be there will she get lost will someone steal her will he return?

** That's what the outpurse used to say whenever the ship rose and threw their bodies into the hull.*

You have never known a man, have you?
They were sitting in creek water. Lila holding the baby
splashing its back to hear it laugh.*

Known, Miss? ^{face} into the water, then raised her head & wiped her eyes.
Rebekka dipped her ~~head~~ ^{face} into the water, then raised her head & wiped her eyes.
You understand me, Lila.

I do.

Well?

Once.

And?

Not good. Not good, Miss.

Why was that?

I will walk behind. I will clean up after.

I will not be thrashed. No.

Handing the boy to its mother, Lila stood ^{and} walked to the limb where her shift hung.
Dressed, she held out a hand to Patrician who clambered up the bank. ***
^{a hidden part of} and joined her.

* In flying heat they'd gone down the stream ~~unknown to the~~ ^{how}
that swarming blackflies ignored. ** Patrician ^{knelt} sat nearby watching her
bloomers stirred in the ripples. Rebekka ^{sat, in her underwear} ~~wore only a blouse~~
~~and under~~ ^{she held in her arms} rinsing her neck and arms. Lila ~~was~~ ^{was} naked as the
baby ^{lifted} ~~in and out~~ up and down ^{pushing} his hair re-shape.
Then she held him over her shoulder and sent
ripples of clear water over his back.

*** unless a canoe sailed by, no one would see them.

*** Left alone with the infant, Rebekka was reminded of her good
fortune. ^{ever struck} Other than her mother, no one had ~~beaten~~ ^{beaten} her. Wife Beating was
common, she knew, but (Google "wife beating law 17th C")

I come into a part where cows are grazing among the trees and I know if cows are in the woods a farm or village is near. Neither Sir nor Mistress will let their few heads loose like that. They fence the meadow because they want the manure and not a quarrel with neighbors. Mistress says Sir says grazing will soon die in the meadow so he has other business because farming will never be enough in these parts. Black flies alone will kill all hope for it if marauding wild life does not.

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. It is the single lit house in the village so I ^{choose}~~decide~~ to go there. Rocks interfere at each step rubbing the sealing wax hard into 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 is much bigger than Lila and has green eyes. The rest of her is a brown frock and a white cap. Red hair edges it. She is suspicious and holds up her hand, palm out, as though I might force my way in. Who hath sent you she asks. I say please. I say I am alone. No one sends me. Shelter calls me here. She looks behind me left and right and asks if I have no protection, no companion? I say No madam. She is not persuaded and asks am I of this earth or elsewhere? Her face is hard. I say this earth madam I know no other. Christian or heathen, she asks. Never heathen I say. I say although I am told my father was. And where does he abide, she asks. The rain is getting bigger. Hunger wobbles me. I say I never knew him and my mother is dead. Her face softens and she nods saying orphan, step in.

She tells me her name, Widow Ealing, but does not ask mine. You must

excuse me, she says, but there is some danger about. What danger I ask. Evil, she says, but you must never mind.

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. We are in a good sized room with fireplace, table, ^{stools}~~chairs~~ and two sleeping places—^a~~the~~ box bed and a pallet. There are two closed doors to other places and a kind of closet, dim with a partial wall at the rear where jugs and bowls are kept.

Then I notice a girl lying in the 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 begin any words so I wait for the girl or the Widow to say something. At the foot of the bed of straw is another very small one. A kid lies there, too sick to raise its head or make a sound. When I finish the food down to the last raisin, the Widow asks what is my purpose traveling alone. I tell her my mistress has sent me on an errand. She turns her lips down saying it must be vital to risk a female's life in these parts. My Mistress is dying, I say. My errand can save her. She smiles then

and looks either toward the fireplace or the kid. Not from the first death, she says. Perhaps from the second.

I don't understand her meaning. I know there is only one death, not two and many lives beyond it. Remember the owls in daylight? We know right away who they are. You know the pale one is your father. I think I know who the other ones may be.

The girl lying in straw raises up on her elbow. This be the death we have come here to die, she says. Her voice is deep, like a man's though she looks to be younger than me. Widow Ealing doesn't reply and I do not want to look at those eyes anymore. The girl speaks again. No thrashing, she says, can change it though my flesh is cut to ribbons. She stands then and limps to the table where the lamp burns. 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.

This is my daughter Jane, the Widow says. Those lashes may save her life.

It is late, Widow Ealing is saying. They will not come til morning. She closes the shutters, turns off the lamp and stretches on the pallet. Daughter

Jane returns to her straw. The dark in here is greater than the cowshed, thicker than the forest. No moonlight seeps through a single crack. I lie between the sick kid and the fireplace and my sleep is broken into pieces by their voices. Silence is long, and then they talk. I can tell who it is not only by the direction of the sound but because the Widow says words in a way different from her daughter. A more singing way. So I know it is Daughter Jane who says how can I prove I am not a demon, and it is the Widow who says sssst it is they who will decide. Silence, silence, then back and forth they go. It is the pasture they crave, Mother. Then why not me? You may be next. Two say they have seen the Black Man and that he—the Widow does not say more for a while and then, she says we will know comes the morning. They will allow that I am, says Daughter Jane. They talk over each other: The knowing is theirs, the truth is mine, truth is God's, then what mortal can judge me, you talk like a Spaniard, listen, please listen, be still lest He hear you, He will not abandon me, nor will I, yet you bloodied my flesh, 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 not dead she can be teaching me these things.

I believe I am the only one who falls asleep , and I wake in shame because the animals are already lowing. Tinny baas come from the kid as the Widow picks it up in her arms and takes it outside to nurse the dam. When she returns, she un-shutters both windows and leaves the door wide open. Two hens strut in, another flies through a window, joining the others in their search for scraps. I ask permission to use the commode behind a heavy hempen curtain hanging in the closet. When I finish and step around the wall I see Daughter Jane holding her face in her hands while the Widow freshens the leg wounds. New strips of blood gleam among the dried ones

At table for a breakfast of clabber and bread, the Widow and Daughter Jane put their palms together, bow their heads and murmur. I do likewise, whispering the prayer Reverend Father taught me to say at night, Madre repeating with me. Pater Noster... At the end I raise my hand to touch my forehead and catch Daughter Jane's frown. She shakes her head meaning no. So I pretend I am adjusting my head cloth. The Widow spoons jam onto the clabber and we two eat. Daughter Jane refuses so we eat what she cannot. Afterwards the Widow goes to the fireplace and swings the kettle over the fire. I take the bowls and spoons from the table to the back where a basin of water

sits on a narrow table. I rinse and wipe each piece carefully. The air is tight. Water rises to a boil in the fireplace kettle. I turn to see steam forming shapes as it curls against the stone. One looks like the head of a dog.

All of us hear footsteps climbing the path. I am in the back behind the wall cleaning up and although I can not see them, I hear their talk. The Widow offers the visitors ^{stools}~~chairs~~, they refuse, a man's voice saying this is preliminary yet witnesses are several. Widow interrupts him saying, her daughter's eye is askew as God made it, it has no special power. And look, look at her wounds. God's Son bled. We bleed. Demons, never.

I step away from the wall and into the room. Standing there are a man, three women and a little girl who reminds me of myself when my mother sent me on. Each turn to look at me as the little girl screams and hides behind the skirts of one of the gasping women. The man's walking stick clatters to the floor causing a hen to flutter out the door. He retrieves it, points it at me saying who be this? One of the women covers her eyes, saying God help us. The little girl wails and rocks back and forth. The Widow waves both hands saying, she is a guest seeking shelter from the night. We took her in –how could we not–and fed her. Which night? the man asks. This one past, she answers. One woman

speaks saying I have never seen any human this black. I have seen some says another, this one is as black as others I have seen. She is Afric. No, says another. Just look at this child, says the first woman. She points to the little girl shaking and moaning by her side. Hear her. Hear her. It is true then, says the man. The Black Man is among us. This is his minion. The little girl is inconsolable, sobbing, trembling. The woman whose skirts she clings to takes her outside where she is quickly quiet. I am not understanding anything except that I am in danger as the dog's head shows and Mistress is my only defense. I shout, wait. I shout, please sir. I think they have shock that I can talk. Let me show you my letter, I say, quieter. It proves I am nobody's minion but my Mistress. As quick as I can, I remove my boot and roll down my stocking. The women stretch their mouths, the man looks away then slowly back. I pull out Mistress's letter and offer it but no one will touch it. The man orders me to place it on the table but he is afraid to break the seal. He tells the Widow to do it. She picks at the wax with her finger nails. When it falls away she unfolds the paper. It is too thick to stay flat by itself. Everyone, including Daughter Jane, who rises from her bed, stares at the markings upside down and it is clear only the man is lettered. Holding the tip of his walking stick down on the paper,

he turns it right side up and holds it there as if the letter can fly away or turn to ash minus flame before his eyes. He leans low and examines it closely. Then he picks it up and reads aloud.

The signatory of this letter, Mistress Rebekka Vaark of Milton, vouches for the girl person into whose hands it has been placed. She is owned by me and can be identified by a burn mark in the palm of her left hand. Allow her the courtesy of safe passage and witherall she may need to complete her errand. Our life, my life, on this earth depends on her speedy return.

Signed Rebekka Vaark

Other than a small sound from Daughter Jane, all is quiet. The man looks at me, looks again at the letter, back at me, back at the letter. You see, says the Widow. He ignores her, turns to the two women and whispers. They point me toward a door that opens onto a store room and there, standing among carriage boxes, and a spinning wheel, they tell me to take off my clothes. Without touching, they tell me what to do. To show them my teeth, my tongue. They peer at the candle burn on my palm, the one you kissed to cool, they look under my arms, between my legs, they walk around me, lean down to inspect my feet. Naked under their curiosity I watch for what is in their eyes.

No hatred is there or fear or even disgust, but looking at me, my body, across distances without recognition. Cows look at me with more connection when they raise their heads from the water trough. The women look away from my eyes the way you say I am to do with the bears so they will not come close to love and play. Finally they tell me to dress and leave the room shutting the door behind them. I put my clothes back on. I hear them quarrel. The little girl is back, not sobbing now but saying, she pinches me, here and here. A woman's voice asks would Satan write a letter. Satan is all deceit and trickery, says another. But a woman's life may be at stake, says the Widow. Who will be punished then? The man's voice booms, we will tell the others, we will study on this, pray on it and return with our answer. It is not clear, it seems, whether or no I am the Black Man's minion. Dressed I step into the room and the little girl screams and flails her arms. *the women rush out.* I am instructed by the man not to leave the house. He takes the letter with him. The Widow follows him down the path pleading, pleading.

Then she returns to say they need time to discuss more among themselves. She has hope because of the letter. Daughter Jane laughs. Widow Eastling kneels to pray. She prays a long time then stands saying I have

to see someone. I need his witness and help.

Who, asks Daughter Jane.

The sherif says the Widow.

Daughter Jane curls her mouth behind her mother's back as she leaves.

I am tight with fear and watch Daughter Jane attend her wounds. The sun is slowing down.

Daughter Jane boils duck eggs and when cool wraps them in a piece of cloth. She folds a blanket and hands it to me, motioning with two fingers to follow. We leave the house, scurrying around to the back yard. All manner of fowl cluck and fly from our feet. We run through the pasture. One ^{goat} ~~cow~~ turns to look. The other does not. We squeeze between the fence slats and enter the trees. Now we walk, softly, Daughter Jane leading the way. The sun empties itself, pouring what is left through tree shadow. Birds and small animals are still eating and calling to one another.

We come to a stream, dry mostly, muddy elsewhere. Daughter Jane tells me how to go, where the ~~wagon~~ trail will be that takes me to the post road that takes me to the hamlet where you are. I say thank you and lift her hand to kiss it. She says no, I thank you. They look at you and forget about me. She

watches as I step down into the stream's dry bed. I turn and look up at her. Are you a demon I ask her. Her wayward eye is steady. She smiles. Yes, she says. Oh, yes. Go now.

I walk on alone except for the eyes that join me on my journey. Eyes that do not recognize me, eyes that examine me for a tail, an extra teat, a man's whip between my legs. Wondering eyes that stare and decide if my navel is in the right place, if my knees bend backward like the foreleg of a dog. They want to see if my tongue is split like a snake's, if my teeth are filed to points to eat them with. To know if I can spring out of the darkness and bite. Inside I am shrinking. I walk though the dry bed shaded by watching trees and know I am not the same. I am losing something with every step I take. I can feel the drain. Something alive is leaving me. I am a thing apart. With the letter I belong and am lawful. Without it I am a shivering rabbit, a crow without wings, a minion with no tell tale signs but a darkness I am born with, outside, yes, but inside as well and the inside dark, is small and toothy. Is that what my mother knows? why she chooses me to live without? Not the outside dark we share, Madre and me, but the inside one we don't. ~~Or~~ is this dying mine alone? Suddenly it is not like before when I am always in fear. I am not afraid of anything now. The

sun's going leaves darkness behind and the dark is me. I am at home.

Tk: 8 Sorrow

She did not mind when they called her Sorrow so long as Twin kept using her real one. It was easy to be confused. Sometimes it was the housewife or the sawyer who needed her; other times Twin wanted company to talk or walk or play. Having two names was convenient since Twin couldn't be seen by anybody else. So if she were weeding the radish patch or sweeping saw dust and heard the name Captain used, she knew it was Twin. But if any voice called 'Sorrow,' she would know what to expect. Preferable, of course, was when Twin called from the doorstep or whispered in her ear. Then she would quit any chore and follow her identical self.

They had met beneath the surgeon's hammock in the empty ship, looted of rice, cloth, ammunition—everything. All people were gone or maybe killed and she might have been too had she not been deep in an opium sleep in the surgery. Taken there to have ^{boils} ~~the~~ removed ^{from her neck}, she drank the mixture the surgeon said would cut off the pain. So when the ship foundered she did not know it, and when all ^{the} un murdered (hands and officers and passengers) ^{escaped} abandoned ship she didn't know that either. What she remembered was waking up after falling

to the floor under the hammock all alone. Captain, her father—nowhere.

Before coming to the sawyer's house, Sorrow had no memories of living on land, and now the ship, the only home she knew, was erased as well. Except for a dim trace of Captain. After days searching for others and food; nights listening to wind and lapping sea, Twin joined her under the hammock and they have been together ever since. Together they skinned down the broken mast and started walking the shoreline. The bits of dead fish they ate intensified their thirst making them incautious enough to wade away from the rocks into a lagoon just when the tide was coming in. Both were swept out to deep water, both treaded as long as they could until the cold over came their senses and they swam not landward, but toward the horizon. Very good luck, for they entered a neap rushing headlong to shore.

Sorrow woke up with a warm wet cloth on her forehead and cool fingers holding her hand. The smell of milled wood overwhelming. TK ?

The housewife told her it was monthly blood; that all females suffered it and Sorrow believed her until the next month and the next and the next when it did not show. Twin and she talked about it, about whether it was instead the going that took place behind the stack of clapboard, both brothers attending,

instead of what the housewife said. Because the pain was outside between her legs, not inside where the housewife said was natural. The hurt was still there when the sawyer asked Sir to take her away, saying his wife could not keep her.

] Sir said, Where is she? And Sorrow was called into the mill.

"How old?" asked Sir.

When the sawyer shook his head, Sorrow said "I believe I have eleven years now."

Sir grunted.

"Don't mind her name," said the sawyer. "My wife calls her Sorrow only because she was abandoned. However be that, she will work well without complaint."

As he spoke Sorrow saw the side smile on his face.

She rode in the saddle behind Sir tk miles with one stop. Since it was her first time astride a horse, the burning brought her to tears. Rocking, bumping, clinging to Sir's waistcoat, finally she threw up on it. He reined in, then, and lifted her down, letting her rest while he wiped his coat with leaves. She accepted his canteen, but the first gulp spewed out along with whatever was left in her stomach.

"Sorrow, indeed," mumbled Sir.

She was grateful when they got close to his farm and he took her out of the saddle so she could walk the rest of the way. He looked around every few yards to make sure she had not fallen or sickened again.

Twin smiled and clapped her hands when they glimpsed the farm. All along the trail riding behind Sir, Sorrow had looked around with a fear she knew would be even deeper had she not been suffering nausea as well as pain. Miles of hemlock towered like black ship masts and when they fell away Cathedral pine, thick as the horse was long, threw shadows over their heads. No matter how she tried, she never saw their tops which, for all she knew, broke open the sky. Every now and again, a hulking pelted shape standing deep in the trees watched them pass. Once when an elk crossed their path, Sir had to swerve and turn the frightened horse around four times before it would go forward again. So when she followed Sir into a sun drenched clearing and heard the cackle of ducks neither she nor Twin could have been more relieved. Unlike the housewife, Mistress and Lila both had straight teeth. Before anything, food or rest, Lila insisted on washing Sorrow's hair. Not only the twigs and leaf bits stuck in it bothered her, she feared lice. It was a fear that

surprised Sorrow who thought lice, like ticks, fleas or any of the other occupants of the body were more nuisance than danger. Lila thought otherwise and after the hair washing, scrubbed the girl down twice before letting her in the house. Then, shaking her head from side to side, she gave her a salted rag to clean her teeth.

In the darkness of that first night, curled on a mat near the fireplace, Sorrow slept and woke, slept and woke lulled continuously by Twin's voice describing the thousandfold men walking the waves, singing wordlessly. How their teeth glittered more than the whitecaps under their feet. How, as the sky darkened and the moon rose, the edges of their night black skin silvered. How the smell of land, ripe and loamy, brightened the eyes of the crew. Soothed by Twin's voice and the animal fat Lila had spread on her lower part, Sorrow fell into the first sweet sleep she had had in years.

Still, that first morning, she threw her breakfast up as soon as she swallowed. Mistress gave her yarrow tea and put her to work in the vegetable garden before leaving to feed the stock, Patrican skipping along behind her. It was Lila who told her she was pregnant. If Mistress knew, she never said, perhaps because she was pregnant herself. Sorrow's birthing came too soon

for the infant to survive, but Mistress delivered a fat boy who cheered everybody up—for six months anyway. They put him with his brother at the bottom of the rise behind the house and said prayers. Lila wrapped Sorrow's ^{tiny delivery} ~~baby~~ in linen and set it a-sail in the ^{brook} ~~river~~ out of the way and far above the beavers' dam. It had no name.

For three years life among them was tk. With Twin, Sorrow never wanted for company. Even if they made her sleep inside, there were stories to listen to and they could steal away during the day for strolls or larks in the forest. ^(over) And although another of Mistress' baby boys perished, Patrician seemed saved. For a while Lila was persuaded that the boys' deaths were not Sorrow's fault but when Patrician broke her neck she changed her mind.

TK Florens' arrival
Twin's evaluation/
Visit to Pastor

Then came the smithy.

Tk

It was while lying in the meadow at the forest's edge, listening to Twin tell a favorite story—the one about mermaids, fish girls, with pearls for eyes and dark green locks of seaweed hair racing one another, riding the backs of whales—that Sorrow first saw the smithy and Florens coiled around each other. Twin had just

There were cherries, too, and ^{usual NUTS} ~~FF that~~ the
deacon. ~~offered her~~. But she had to be quiet.

Once he brought her a neckerchief which
^{(filled with stones and}
she ~~threw~~ IN the creek, knowing such
finery would raise Lila's alarm as well as
Mistress'.

gotten to the part where ^{seabirds} ~~gulls~~, ^{Noticing the} seeing foam trailing the fleet like shooting stars, were joining the race when Sorrow put one finger to her lips and pointed with another. Twin stopped speaking and looked. The smithy and the girl were rocking and, unlike female farm animals in heat, she was not standing quietly under the weight and thrust of the male. What Sorrow saw yonder in the grass under a hickory tree was not the silent submission to a slow going in a ^{church pew} ~~hay~~ left or a hurried one behind a pile of clap wood that Sorrow knew. This here female stretched, kicked her heels and whipped her head left, right, to, fro. It was a dancing. Florens rolled and twisted from her back to his. He hoisted her up against ^{hickory} ~~the cedar~~; she bent her head into his shoulder. A dancing. Horizontal one minute, another minute vertical.

Sorrow watched until it was over; until stumbling like tired old people, they dressed themselves. It all ended when the smithy grabbed Florens' hair, yanked her head back to put his mouth on hers. Then they went off in different directions. ^(over) ^

Tk Twin & Sorrow

One thing they both knew: Florens could never, would never hurt a soul.

It amazed her to see that ^{none of the} ~~all her~~
goings she ^{knew} ~~had~~, No one had ^{ever} Kissed her
mouth.
^

Tk 9: Florens arriving at smithy's

There is no blood and the sound is light, no more than the crack a wing of roast grouse makes when you tear it, warm and tender, from its breast.

10.

Neither one will want your brother. I know their tastes. Breasts provide the pleasure more than simpler things. Yours will rise soon enough and become irritated by the cloth covering your little girl chest. And they will see and I will see them see. No good follows even if I offered you to one of the boys in the quarter. Figo. You remember him. He was the gentle one with the horses and played with you in the yard. I saved the rinds for him and sweet bread to take away for the others. Bess, his mother, knew my mind and did not disagree. She watched over her son like a hawk as I did over you. But it never does any lasting good, my love. There was no protection. None. Certainly not with your appetite for shoes. It was as though you were hurrying up your breasts and hurrying also the lips of an old married couple.

Understand me. There was no protection and nothing in the catechism to tell them no. I tried to tell Reverend Father. I hoped if we could learn our

He screams and screams ^{then} and faints. I hear your horse before your shoot and know I have lost. That I will never know again in this world the ^{sight of} your ^{welcome}

smile

letters somehow some day you could make your way. Reverend Father was full of bravery and said it was what God wanted no matter if they imprisoned him or hunted him down with gunfire for it as they did others who taught us to read. He believed we would love God more if we knew the letters to read. I don't know that. What I know is there is magic in knowing.

When the tall man came again, I saw he hated the food and I saw things in his eyes that said he did not trust Senor, Senora or their sons. His way, I thought, is another way. His country far from here. There was no animal in his heart. He never looked at me the way Senor looked. He did not want.

—> I don't know who is your father. It was too dark to see any of them. They came and took three of us including Bess. They said they were told to break us in. There is no protection. To be female in this place is to be an open wound that cannot heal. Even if scars form, the festering is ever below.

A miracle is needed.

One chance, I thought. There is no protection but there is difference.

You stood there in the shoes and the tall man laughed and offered to take us to close the debt. I knew Senor would not allow it. I said you. Take you, my love.

I knelt before him.

The tall one was sweating, laughing, restless. But he said yes.

stayed on

It was not a miracle. It was mercy. I dropped to my knees.

You will kneel to read this, squat, perhaps in a few places. I apologize for the discomfort. Sometimes the tip of the nail skates away and the forming of words is disorderly. Reverend Father never likes that. He raps our fingers and makes us do it over. I stop my telling only when the lamp burns down. Then I sleep among my words. The telling goes on as dream and when I wake it takes a while to pull away, leave this room and do chores.

Tk [re: Mistress, Lila, Sorrow. Loss of the smithy]

There is no more room in this room. The floor is covered. From now you will stand to hear me. The walls make trouble because lamp light is too small to see by. I am holding light in one hand and carving letters with the other. My arms ache so but it is good to tell you this. I did not know it when I hurt the child. ^{JK} I am near the door and at the closing now. What will I do with my nights when the telling stops? All of a sudden I am remembering. You won't

read my telling. You don't know how to. Don't laugh. Maybe one day you will learn. If so, come to this farm again, open the gate you made, enter the new house, climb the stairs and enter this room in daylight. If you don't read this no one will. These careful words, closed up and wide open, will talk to themselves. Round and round, side to side, bottom to top, top to bottom all across the world that is this room. Only here am I Florens. In full. And forgiven.

END