



"Don't be afraid..."

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When he left Mistress' room, Lina followed. Sorrow, too, but not before glancing back into the bedroom, where she saw Mistress toss off the sheet and go down on her knees, whispering "Thank you my Lord for the saving grace you have shown me." Relieved by the good news, and exhausted by her weight Sorrow rested on the grass in the shade of the house, stroking the movements in her protruding stomach. Above her through the kitchen window she could hear the clatter of a knife, the shift of a cup or plate as the blacksmith ate. She knew Lina was there too, but she did not speak until a scraped chair announced that the smithy stood. Then Lina asked the questions Mistress had not.

"Where is she? Is she all right?"

"Certainly."

"When will she return? Who will bring her back?"

A silence too long for Lina.

She has been gone three days.
"You can't keep her against her will."

"Why would I?"

"Then? Tell me!"

"When it suits her she will come."

Silence

"You will stay the night?"

"Part of it."

With that he left and strode up the rise to the new house. Slowly he traced the ironwork, stroking every bit of it, a curve here, a join there. Then he went to Sir's grave and stood hatless before it. After a while he went inside the empty house and shut its door behind him.

He did not wait for dawn. He rode off in darkness leaving Mistress ^{*insert from p. 183-4*} weak but mightily soothed and Lina in despair. Between tending Mistress' new requirements and scanning the path for Florens, Lina had no time for anything else. Swine escaped from village sties and tore up a field of maize. Everything was in disarray. The weather was warming and as a result of the cancelled visit of a neighbor's bull, no cow foaled.

Acres and acres need turning; milk became clabber in the pan. A fox pawed the hen yard whenever she liked and rats ate the eggs. Mistress would not recover soon enough to catch the heap the farm was falling into. And without her pet, Lina, the silent workhorse, seemed to have lost interest in everything, including feeding herself. ^{Ten days} ~~Two weeks~~' neglect and collapse was everywhere. So in afternoon silence on an untended farm swathed in smallpox, Sorrow's water broke unleashing her panic. Mistress was not well enough to help her, and remembering the yawn, she did not trust Lina. Forbidden to enter the village she had no choice. Twin was absent, strangely silent or hostile when Sorrow tried to discuss what to do, where to go. ^X She took a knife and a blanket to the river bank the moment the first pain hit. She stayed there, alone, screeching when she had to, sleeping in between, until the next brute tear of body and breath.

Y Had it not been for Will and Scully fishing from a raft, she and her infant might have died there. The men heard her moans and poled their raft to the river's edge. They both understood Sorrow's plight as quickly as they would any creature about to foal. Clumsy a bit, their purpose nev-

X Looking
for Will & Scully
at their fishing
site

ertheless on the survival of the newborn, they set to work. Kneeling in water as Sorrow pushed, they pulled, eased and turned the tiny form stuck between her legs. Blood and more swirled down to the river attracting young cod. When the baby, a girl, whimpered, Scully knifed the cord then handed her to the mother who rinsed her, dabbing her mouth, ears and unfocussed eyes. The men congratulated themselves and offered to carry mother and child back to the farm. Sorrow, repeating 'thank you' with every breath, declined. She wanted to rest and would make her own way. Willard slapped Scully on the back, laughing.

"Right fine midwife I'd say."

"Dern right," answered Scully as they waded back to their raft.

Following the expulsion of afterbirth, Sorrow wrapped her infant in the blanket and dozed a while before squeezing her breasts til one delivered. Although all her life she had been saved by men: Captain, the sawyers' sons, Sir and now Will and Scully, she was convinced that this time she had done something, something important, by herself. Twin's

absence was hardly noticed as she concentrated on her daughter. Instantly, she knew what to name her. Knew also what to name herself.

Two days later

At noon ~~the following day~~, while nursing, she saw a figure climb down from a cart without the help of the driver who hastily drove off. It wore Florens' dress and cap, but its hands were tied and it moved so slowly it took more than a moment for Sorrow to be sure because when she lifted a hand in greeting, there was no response. Not a smile, not even a glance at the suckling. It was as though she were seeing the ghost of Florens, a bound and barefoot one; the real one nowhere in sight. Yet the specter had substance for, with a shriek of joy, Lina ran down the path and, just as eight years ago, threw a shawl around Florens and held her in her arms. Sorrow lifted her baby over her shoulder and watched the two women disappear. Patting the baby's back, she wondered what happened. For all his kindness and healing powers, had she been wrong about the blacksmith? Had Lina been right all along? Suffused with the insight new mothers claim, Sorrow doubted it. He had saved her life with vinegar and her own blood; had known right

*For cost
place
delete*

*insert
1, 180*

away Mistress' state and prescribed solvent to lessen the scarring. Sir
 admired him and his ironwork. ~~When he rode off the rooster had not yet~~
 crowed and he was as cheerful as a bluebird. It was Florens who had
 done a bad thing, she thought. A very bad thing to need tying up. But
 what could it be? Yet, knowing her all these years, Sorrow was certain of
 one thing: regardless of her ferocity under the hickory tree, Florens could
 never, would never hurt a soul.

As the days came and went, the changes became more profound.
 Mistress sent for a Bible, decided to frequent the church, forbade anyone
 to enter the new house. At one point, Sorrow, feeling perhaps the le-
 gitimacy of her new status as a mother, was bold enough to remark to
 her Mistress, "It was good that the blacksmith came to help when you
 were dying." Mistress stared at her. "Ninny," she answered. "God
 alone cures. No man has such power." Even Lina was unnerved. She
 remained obedient to Mistress and even more taciturn, ~~but became al-~~
 most servile to Florens, as tender to her as if she were bruised. Most of
 all Florens changed. Secretly, and protected by Lina, she spent every

insert
p. 180

and seemed to the new
mother

night in Sir's huge empty house, and every day dutifully going about chores. She was not unpleasant, but clearly enjoyed nothing. There had always been tangled strings among them. Now they were cut. Each embargoed herself; spun her own web of thoughts unavailable to anyone else. It was as though they were making separate plans.

Twin was gone, traceless and un-missed by the only person who knew her. Sorrow's wandering stopped too. Now she attended routine duties, organizing them around her infant's needs, and impervious to the insults of others. She had looked into her daughter's eyes; saw in them *By-the-see,* the gray glisten of a winter sea, and said "I am your mother. My name is Complete."

May 9-11

There is only a little blood and the sound is small, no more than the crack a wing of roast grouse makes when you tear it, warm and tender, from its breast. He screams screams then faints. I don't hear your horse only your shout and know I am lost. That I may never again in this world know the sight of your welcoming smile or taste the sugar of your shoulder as you take me in your arms when I arrive. My journey to you is hard and long and the hurt of it is gone as soon as I see the yard, the forge, the little cabin where you are. The smell of fire and ash trembles me but it is the glee in your eyes that kicks my heart over. You are asking me how and how long and laughing at my clothes and the scratches everywhere. But when I answer your why, you frown. We settle, you do, and I agree because there is no other way. You will ride at once to Mis-

tress but alone. I am to wait at the forge, you say. I can not join you because it is faster without me. And there is another reason, you say. You turn your head. My eyes follow where you look.

This happens twice before. The first time it is me peering around my madre's dress hoping for her hand that is only for her little boy. The second time it is a pointing screaming little girl hiding behind her mother and clinging to her skirts. Both times are full of danger and I am expelled. Now I am seeing a little boy come into the forge holding a corn husk doll. He is younger than everybody I know. You reach out your forefinger toward him and he takes hold of it. You say this is why I can not travel with you. The child you call Malaik is not to be left alone. He is a foundling and that his father is leaning over the reins and the horse is continuing until it stops and eats grass in the lane. People from the village come, learn he is dead and find the boy sitting quietly in the cart. No one knows who is the dead man and nothing in his belongings can tell. You accept him until a future when a townsman or magistrate places him which may be

never because although the dead man's skin is rosy the boy's is not. So maybe he is not a son at all.

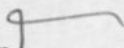
I worry as the boy steps closer to you. How you offer and he owns your forefinger. I am not liking how his eyes go when you send him to play in the yard. But then you bathe my journey from my face and arms and give me soup. It needs salt. Bits of rabbit floating down there. My hunger is sharp but I can not eat much of it. We talk of many things and I don't say what I am thinking. That I will stay. That when you return from healing Mistress whether she is live or no I am here with you always. Never never without you. Here I am not forbidden or given away. No one steals my warmth and shoes because I am small. No one handles my backside. No one whinnies like sheep or goat because I drop in fear and weakness. No one screams at the sight of me. No one watches my body for how it is unseemly. With you my body is pleasure is safe is belonging. I can never not have you have me.

I am calm when you leave although you do not touch me close.
 You saddle up and ask me to water the bean shoots and collect the eggs.
 I go there but the hens make nothing so I know Madre is coming soon.
 The boy Malaik is near. He sleeps behind the door to where you do. I
 am calm, quiet knowing you are very soon here again. I take off Sir's
 boots and lie on your cot trying to catch the fire smell of you. Slices of
 starlight cut through the shutters. Madre leans at the door holding her
 little boy's hand, my shoes in her pocket. As always she is trying to tell
 me something. I tell her to go and when she fades I hear a small creak-
 ing. In the dark I know he is there. Eyes big, wondering and cold. I rise
 and come to him and ask what. What Malaik, what. He is silent but the
 hate in his eyes is loud. He wants my leaving. This can not happen.
 Feathers lift and I feel a sharp clutch of talons inside. This expel can
 never happen again. tk *

In the morning the boy is not here but I prepare porridge for us
 two. ^{Again} He is standing in the lane holding tight the corn husk doll and look-
 ing toward where you ride away. Sudden looking at him I am remember-

nightmare
 plus one
 more day alone
 with boy

ing the dog's profile rising from Widow Ealing's kettle. Then I can not read its full meaning. Now I know how. I am guarding. Otherwise I am missing all understanding of how to protect myself. First I notice Sir's boots are gone. I look all around, stepping through the cabin, the forge, in cinder and in pain of my tender feet. I see the curl of a garden snake edging up the door saddle. I watch its slow crawl until it is dead in the sunlight.

~~I am clear.~~ 

The boy quits the lane. He comes in but will neither eat nor speak. We stare at each other across the table. He does not blink. Nor me. I know he steals Sir's boots that belong to me. His fingers cling the doll. I think that must be where his power is. I take it away and place it on a shelf too high for him to reach. He screams screams. Tears falling. I walk outside to keep from hearing. He is not stopping. Is not. A cart goes by. The couple in it glance but do not greet or pause. Finally the boy is silent and I go back in. The doll is not on the shelf. It is flung to a

corner like a precious child thrown away. Or no. The doll is sitting there hiding. Hiding from me. Afraid. Which? Which is the true reading? Porridge drips from the table. The stool is on its side. Seeing me the boy returns to screaming and that is when I clutch him. ^{*} That is why I pull his arm. To make him stop. Stop it. And yes I do hear the shoulder crack but there is no blood from it. A little comes from his mouth hitting the table corner. Only a little. He drops into fainting just as I hear you shout. But not my name. Not me. Him. Malaik you shout. Malaik.

Seeing him still and limp on the floor with that trickle of red from his mouth your face breaks down. You knock me away shouting what are you doing? shouting where is your ruth? With such tenderness you lift him, the boy. When you see the angle of his arm you cry out. The boy opens his eyes then faints once more when you twist it back into its proper place. Yes, there is blood. A little. But you are not there when it comes, so how do you know I am the reason. Why do you knock me away without certainty of what is true? You see the boy down and believe bad about me without question. You are correct, but why no ques-

* I am trying to stop him. I am trying to quiet him.

tion of it? I am first to get the knocking away. I fall and curl up on the floor. The feathers are moving again. No question. You choose the boy. You call his name first. You make him lie down with the doll and turn to me your broken face, eyes without glee, rope pumps in your neck. I am lost. No word of sorrow for knocking me down. No tender fingers to touch where you hurt me.

Your Mistress recovers you say. You say you will hire someone to take me to her. Away from you. Each word that follows cuts.

Why are you killing me I ask you.

I want you to go.

Let me explain.

Now.

Why? Why?

Because you are a slave.

What?

You heard.

Sir makes me that.

I don't mean him.

Then who?

You.

What is your meaning? I am a slave because Sir trades for me.

No. You have become one.

How?

Head bridled. Body wild.

I am adoring you.

And a slave to that too.

You alone own me.

Own yourself, woman and leave us be.

No. No. You put me in misery.

All wilderness. No constraint.

No. Don't.

Slave.

I have shock. Are you meaning I have no consequence in this world? Now I am living the dying inside. No. Not again. Not ever.

~~Feathers lifting~~, I unfold. The claws scratch and scratch until the hammer is in my hand.

→ ? insert Will & Scully (June 1)

It is hard without Sir's boots. Wearing them I could walk a stony river bed. Move quickly through forests and down hills of nettles. It is also hard without Mistress' letter. They are my only protection. My way fails. What I read or cipher is useless now. Heads of dogs, garden snakes all is nothing. Most of all it is hard without you who I am thinking always as my life and my safety. My safety from harm, from any who look closely at me only to throw me away. From all those who believe

they have claim and rule over me. You say I am wilderness. I am. Is that a tremble on your mouth, in your eye? Are you afraid? You should be. The hammer strikes air many times before it gets to you where it dies in weakness. Our clashing is long. I am trying to tear you open. You hold my arms behind me hard. You tie me up. When the drayman comes he is afraid too so you do not unbind my wrists. I settle. I float. An ice floe cut away from the riverbank in deep winter. I have no shoes. I have no kicking heart no road no tomorrow. The feathers close. For

now.

→ cart w/ vegetables
then a long walk.

You will kneel to read my telling, 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 this 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 time to pull away, leave this room and do chores. Chores that are making no sense. We clean the chipped chamber pot but are forbidden to use it. We build tall crosses for the

graves in the meadow. We clean where Sir dies but are forbidden to be anywhere else in this house. Spiders reign in comfort and sparrows make nests. Mistress has cure but she is not well. Her heart is infidel. All smiles are gone. Each time she returns from the meeting house her eyes are nowhere and have no inside. Like the eyes of the women who examine me behind the closet door, Mistress' eyes only look out and what she is seeing is not to her liking. Her clothes are quiet. She prays much. We all Lina, Sorrow, her daughter and me she makes sleep either in the cowshed or the store room where bricks rope tools all manner of building waste are. No more hammocks under trees for Lina and me. No more fireplace for Sorrow and her baby girl. Mistress does not like the baby. One night in heavy rain Sorrow shelters herself and the baby here, downstairs behind the door in the room where Sir dies. Mistress slaps her face. Many times. She does not know I am here every night else she would whip me too as her piety demands. She is not the same. Neither is Sorrow. She is a mother now. Nothing more nothing less. I like her devotion to her baby girl. She will not be called Sorrow. She has

~~has~~ changed her name and is planning escape. She wants me to go with her but I have a thing to finish here. Worse is how Mistress is to Lina. She requires her company on the way to church but sits her by the road because she cannot enter. Lina is forbidden to bathe in the river and must drive the plow alone. I am never hearing how they once talk and laugh together. Lina is wanting to tell me, remind me that she early warns me about you. But her reasons for the warning make the warning itself wrong. I am remembering what you tell me from long ago when Sir is alive. You say you see slaves freer than free men. One is a lion in the skin of an ass. The other is an ass in the skin of a lion. That it is the withering inside that enslaves and opens the door for what is wild. I know my withering is born in the Widow's closet. I know the claws of the feathered thing did break out on you because I can not stop them wanting to tear you open the way you tear me. Still, there is another thing. A lion who thinks his mane is all. *A She-lion who does not.*

There is no more room in this room. These words cover the floor. 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 but I have need to tell you this. I can not tell it to any one but you. I am near the door and at the closing now. What will I do with my nights when the telling stops? Sudden I am remembering. You won't read my telling. You read the world but not the letters of talk. You don't know how to. Maybe one day you will learn. If so, come to this farm again, open the gate you made, enter this big, awing house, climb the stairs and come inside this talking room in daylight. If you never 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 room. Or. Or perhaps no. Perhaps these words need the air that is out in the world. Need to fly up then fall, fall like ash over acres of primrose and mallow. Over a turquoise lake, beyond the eternal hemlocks, through clouds cut by rainbow to flavor the soil of the earth. Lina will help. She finds horror in this house and much as she needs to be Mistress' need I know she loves fire more.

I will keep one sadness. That all this time I can not know what my
Madre is telling me. She can be ^{happy} pleased to know that the soles of my
feet are hard as cypress.

See? You are correct. Madre too. I am wilderness but I am also
Florens. In full. Unforgiven. Unforgiving. No ruth, my love. None.