



"Don't be afraid..."

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I walk the night through.

It is hard without Sir's boots. Wearing them I could ^{cross} ~~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. ^{But my way is clear, SINCE LOSING} 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. ^{You take it from me and toss it away.} Our clashing is long. I am trying to tear you open. ^{Mahak is crying.} You
^{pull} hold my arms behind me ^(over) hard. ^{You tie me up.} How little I mean to you.
 When the drayman comes he is afraid of me so you do not unbind my
 wrists. ^{water} 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.

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

twist away and
I escape^{you}. The ANvil is there, close
enough. Close enough. I run. Then walk.
Then float.

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 then remove them, shorten them and put them back. We clean where Sir dies but are forbidden to be anywhere else in this house. Spiders reign in comfort here 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. She makes us all, Lina, Sorrow, Sorrow's daughter and me, 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 she believes her piety demands. Her churchgoing alters her but I don't believe they tell her to behave that way. These rules are her own and 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 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. I learn this from Daughter Jane. Her bloody legs do not stop her. She risks. Risks all to save the slave you throw out.

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.

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

I will keep one sadness. That all this time I can not know what my Madre is telling me. Nor can she know what I am wanting to tell her.

That she can be happy now because the soles of my feet are hard as cypress.