



"absence was hardly noticed..."

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How long will it take will she get lost will he be there will he come
will someone steal her? She wanted shoes, real shoes, not the ~~canves~~
scraps that covered her feet and it ^{only} was when Lina 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 un-
bearable 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 among strangers for six weeks to get to this land."

She has told this to Lina over and over. Lina being the only one left whose understanding she trusted and whose judgment she valued. Even now, in the deep blue of a spring night, with less sleep than her Mistress, Lina was whispering and shaking a feathered stock around the bed.

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

She fixed her eyes on Lina who had put away her wand and now knelt by the bed.

"I know you," said Rebekka and thought she was smiling although she was not sure. Other familiar faces sometimes hovered then went away: her daughter; the sailor who helped carry her boxes and tighten their straps; a man on the gallows. No. This one was real. She recognized the anxious eyes, the tawny skin. How could she not know the single friend she had, and to confirm that moment of clarity, said "Remember? We didn't have a fireplace. It was cold. So cold. I thought she

was a mute or deaf, you know. Blood is sticky. It never goes away however much...." Her voice was intense, confidential as though revealing a secret. Then silence as she fell somewhere between fever and memory.

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 mid day when the women were allowed another hour on deck. Then she talked to the sea. "Stay still, don't hurtle me. No, move, move, excite me. Trust me, I will keep your secrets: that the smell of you is like fresh monthly blood; that you own the globe and land is afterthought to entertain you; that the world beneath you is both graveyard and heaven."

Immediately upon landing Rebekka's sheer good fortune in a husband stunned her. Already sixteen, she knew her father would have shipped her off to anyone who would book her passage and relieve him of feeding her. A waterman, he was privy to all sorts of news from colleagues and when a crewman passed along an inquiry from a first mate—

*
Description

a search for a healthy, chaste wife willing to travel abroad, he was quick to offer his eldest girl. The stubborn one, the one with too many questions and a rebellious mouth. Rebekka's mother objected to the 'sale'—she called it that because the prospective groom had stressed 'reimbursement' for clothing, expenses and a few supplies—not for love or need of her daughter, but because the husband-to-be was a heathen living among savages. Religion, as Rebekka experienced from her mother, was a flame fueled by a wondrous hatred. And any drop of generosity to a stranger threatened the blaze. Rebekka's understanding of God was faint, except as a larger kind of king, but she quieted the shame of insufficient devotion by assuming that He could be no grander nor better than the imagination of the Believer. Shallow believers preferred a shallow god. The timid enjoyed a violent god. In spite of her father's eagerness, her mother warned her that savages or non-conformists would slaughter her as soon as she landed, so when Rebekka found Lina already there, waiting outside the one room cottage 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, or because both were hopelessly ignorant of how to run a farm, they became what was for each a companion, 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. Then, when the first infant was born, Lina 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 turned her fate over to others and became prey to scenes of past disorder. The first hangings she saw in the square amid a cheerful crowd attending. She ^{was} probably 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 their neighbors,

she was present at a drawing and quartering but, although too young to remember every detail, her nightmares were made permanently vivid by years of re-telling and re-describing by her parents. 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 very year she stepped off the ship a mighty settlers-versus-natives war two hundred miles south was over before she heard of it. The violent squabbles between local tribes or with militia that peppered parts of this region seemed a distant, manageable back drop in a land of such space and perfume. The absence of city and shipboard stench rocked her into a kind of drunkenness it took years to sober up and take ^{sweet air} for granted. She clasped her hands under her chin gazing at trees taller than a cathedral, wood for warmth so plentiful it made her laugh then weep for her brothers and the children freezing in the city she had left behind. She had never seen birds like these, or tasted fresh wa-

ter than ran over visible white stones. There was adventure in learning to cook game she'd never heard of 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 song louder than steeple bells. Yet the thought of what her life would have been had she stayed crushed into those reeking streets, spat on by Lords and prostitutes, curtseying, curtseying, curtseying 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 separatists, 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. She still remembered her parents' disappointment when the festivities were cancelled and their fury at an easily swayed monarch. Her discomfort in a garret full of constant argument, bursts of enraged envy and sullen dis-

approval of anyone not like them 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 for domestic service. But the one place she got turned out to require running from the master and hiding behind doors. She lasted four days. After that no one offered her another. Then came the bigger rescue when her father got notice of a man 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 or the inclination to peddle goods, open a stall or be apprenticed ^{in exchange shelter} for food, her prospects were servant, prostitute, convent, wife and although horror stories were told about each of those careers, the last one seemed safest. The one where she might have children and therefore be guaranteed ^{available to her} some affection. As with any future, it depended on the character of the man in charge. Hence marriage to an unknown husband in a far off land had distinct advantages: separation from a mother who had barely es-

caped the cucking pond; from male siblings who worked days and nights
 with her father and learned their dismissive attitude toward the sister who
 had helped rear them from him; but especially escape from the leers and
 rude hands of any man, drunken or sober, she might walk by. America.
 What ever the danger, how could it possibly be worse. The intermittent
 skirmishes of men against men, arrows against powder, fire against
 hatchet that she heard about from her husband and neighbors could not
 match the gore of what she had seen since childhood. The pile of frisky,
 still living human entrails held before the felon's eyes then thrown into a
 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 a tomahawk paled. She did not know what other
 settler families nearby once knew of routine dismemberment and vio-
 lence, but she did not share their alarm when, three months after the fact,
 news came of a pitched battle or a peace gone awry. ~~Among her Baptist~~^{then}
~~neighbors~~ she was deliberately soft spoken. In their meeting house she
 was accommodating and when they explained their beliefs she did not

* At first when she settled on Jacob's land, she visited
 the local church, ^{some five miles away} and met a few vaguely suspicious villagers.

roll her eyes. It was when they refused to baptize her first born, her exquisite daughter, that Rebekka turned away. Weak as her Church of England faith was, there was no excuse for not protecting the soul of an infant from perdition.

More and more it was in Lina's company that she let the misery seep out.

"I chastised for a torn shift, Lina, and the 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. But she had delivered four healthy babies, watched three surrender at a different age to one or another illness, and then watched Patrician, her first born, who reached the age of five and provided a happiness Rebekka could not believe, lie in her arms for two days before dying from a broken crown. And then to bury her twice. First in a fur-sheltering ^{ed} coffin because the ground could not accept the lit-

the box Jacob built, 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, with not even a full day to mourn Jacob, her grief was fresh cut, like hay in famine. Her own death was what she should be concentrating 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 left Jacob and traveled to Patrician's matted hair, the hard, dark cake of soap 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 pelts 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 to the damp and gazed at every clod and clump ^{that fell} [^] fall. She stayed there all day and through the night. No one, not Jacob, Sorrow or Lina could get her up. And not the Minister either, since he and his flock had been the ones whose beliefs stripped her children ^{of} [^] redemption. She growled when they

touched her; threw the blanket from her shoulders. They left her alone then, shaking their heads, muttering prayers for her ~~to be~~^{ress} forgiven. At dawn in a light snowfall Lina came and arranged jewelry and food on the grave, along with scented leaves, telling her that the boys and Patri-cian 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 the Minister. There had been a summer day once, when she sat in front of the house sewing and talking profanely while Lina 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.

personal space. The range of baggage, clothes, speech and attitude spoke clearly of who they were long before their confessions. One, Anne, had been sent away in disgrace by her family. Two, Judith and Lydia, were prostitutes ordered to choose between prison or exile. Lydia was accompanied by her daughter, Patty, a ten year old thief. Elizabeth was the daughter, or so she said, of an important Company agent. Another, Abigail, was quickly transferred to the Captain's cabin and one other, Dorothea, was a cutpurse whose sentence was the same as the prostitutes. Rebekka alone, her passage prepaid, was to be married. The rest were being met by relatives or craftsmen who would pay their passage—except the cutpurse and the whores whose costs and keep were to be borne by years and years of unpaid labor. Only Rebekka was none of these. It was later, huddled 'tween decks and walls made of trunks, boxes, blankets hanging from hammocks, that Rebekka learned about them. The ^{pre-}pubescent girl-thief-in-training had the singing voice of an angel. The agents 'daughter' was born in France. ^{By the time they were fifteen} The two mature ^{lewd behavior.} prostitutes had been turned out of their family homes for ~~adultery~~. And

the cutpurse was the niece of another one who taught her her skills. They lightened the journey; made it less hideous than it surely would have been without them. Their ale-house wit, their know-how laced with their low expectations of others and high levels of self-approval, their quick laughter delighted and inspired Rebekka. If she had feared her own female vulnerability, traveling alone to a foreign country to wed a stranger, these women corrected her misgivings. If ever night moths fluttered in her chest at the recollection of her mother's predictions, the company of these exiled, thrown away women eliminated them. Dorothea, with whom she became most friendly, was especially helpful.

"A virgin?" Dorothea laughed and announced the find to everyone in ear shot. "Judy, do you hear? An unripe cunt among us."

"Well, two aboard, then. Patty is another." Judith winked and smiled at the little girl. "Don't trade it cheap."

"She's ten!" said Lydia. "What sort of mother do you take me for?"

More laughter loud enough to agitate the animals behind the planks that separated ^{the women} ~~them~~ from the stock. A crewman, perhaps on orders, stood above them and closed the hatch.

"Bastard!" someone shouted as they were plunged into darkness. Dorothea and Lydia, crawling around, managed to find the sole lamp available. Once lit, the dollop of light pulled them close.

"Where is Abigail?" asked Patty. She had taken a liking to her the first day they set sail.

"Captain's pick," said her mother.

"Lucky whore," Dorothea murmured.

"Bite your tongue. You haven't seen him."

"No, but I can surmise his table," Dorothea sighed. "Berries, wine, mutton, pasties...."

"Tormentor, Leave off. Steady. Maybe she'll send us some. He won't let her out of his sight. Pig...."

"Mil^k straight from the udder, no dirt or flies on top, stamped butter..."

"Leave off!"

"I have some cheese," said Rebekka. "And biscuits."

They turned to her and a voice chimed, "Aw, lovely. Let's have tea."

The oil lamp sputtered, threatening to throw them back into a darkness only travelers in steerage can know. Rocking forever sideways, trying not to vomit before reaching the tub, safer on knees than feet—all was just bearable if there were even a handspan of light.

The women scooted toward Rebekka and suddenly, without urging, began to imitate what they thought were the manners of queens. Judith spread her shawl on the lid of a box. Elizabeth retrieved from her trunk a kettle and a set of spoons. Cups were varied—pewter, tin, clay. Lydia heated water in the kettle over the lamp, protecting the flame with her

palm. It did not surprise them that no one had any tea, but both Judith
 and Dorothea had rum hidden in their sacks. With the care of a butler,
 they poured it into the tepid water. Rebekka set the cheese in the middle
 of the shawl and surrounded it with biscuits. Anne offered grace. Breath-
 ing quietly, they sipped spirited water and munched stale biscuits, dain-
 tily brushing away the flakes. Rebekka recalled how each of them, in-
 cluding the ten year old, lifted her little finger and angled it out. Remem-
 bered also ^{how} ocean slap exaggerated the silence. They were ^{blotting out} ~~dream-~~
~~ing~~, perhaps, as she was, ~~of~~ what they fled and what might await them.
 Wretched as was the space they crouched in, it was nevertheless blank
 where a past did not haunt nor a future beckon. Women of and for men,
 in those few moments they were neither. And when finally the lamp died,
 swaddling them in black, for a long time they did not stir. Oblivious to
 footsteps above, or the lowing behind, ^{Unable to} ~~They could not~~ see the sky, so
^{for them} time [^] was simply the running sea, unmarked, eternal and of no matter.

Upon landing they made no pretense of meeting again. They knew they never would so their parting was brisk, unsentimental as each gathered her baggage and scanned the crowd for her future. It was true; they never met again, except for those bedside visits Rebekka conjured up.

He was bigger than ^hhe 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.

"You took ^{of} your hat and smiled. Smiled and smiled." Rebekka thought she was answering the grin of her new husband, but her parched lips barely moved as she entered the scene of their first meeting. She had the impression, then, that this was what his whole life had been about: meeting her at long last, so obvious was his relief and satisfaction. Following him, feeling the disabling resilience of land after weeks at sea, she tripped on the wooden walk and tore the hem of her gown. He did

not 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.

He seemed shy, at first, so she thought he had not lived with six people in a garret; had not grown so familiar with small cries of passion at dawn they were like the songs of peddlers. It was nothing like what Dorothea had described or the acrobatics that made Lydia hoot, nor like the quick and angry couplings of her parents. Instead she felt not so much taken as urged.

"My northern star," he called her.

They settled into the long learning of one another: preferences, habits altered, others acquired; disagreement without bile; trust and that wordless conversation that years of companionship rests on. The weak religious tendencies that riled Rebekka's mother were of no interest to him. In fact, he was indifferent, withstanding ^{himself} all pressure to join the vil-

lage congregation, but content to let her be persuaded if she chose. After some initial visits and Rebekka chose not to continue, his satisfaction was plain. They leaned on each other root and crown. Needing no one outside their sufficiency. Or so they believed. For there would be children, of course. And there were. Following Patrician, each time Rebekka gave birth, she forgot the previous nursing interrupted long before weaning time. ^{forgot} Breasts leaking still; or nipples prematurely caked and too tender for underclothes.

As the children died and the years passed, Jacob became convinced the farm was sustainable but not profitable. He began to trade and travel. His returns, however, were joyful times, full of news, his exploits [tk] If on occasion he brought her young, untrained help, he also brought home gifts. A better chopping knife, a hobby horse for Patrician. It was some time before she noticed how the gifts were becoming less practical, even whimsical. Silver tea service which was put away immediately; a porcelain chamber pot quickly broken by a crawling baby; a heavily worked hair brush for hair he only saw in bed. A hat

here, a lace collar there. Four yards of silk. Rebekka hid her suspicions with a smile. When finally she asked him where was this money coming from, he said "New arrangements," and handed her a mirror framed in silver. Having seen come and go a glint in his eye as he unpacked these treasures so useless on a farm, she should have anticipated the ^{d-}say he hired men to help clear trees from a wide swath of land at the foot of a rise. A new house he was building. Something befitting not a farmer, not even a trader, but a squire.

We are good, common people, she thought, in a place where that claim was not merely enough, but prized, even a boast.

"We don't need another house," she told him. "Certainly not one that ^{size} big."

"Need is not the reason, wife."

"What is, pray?" Rebekka cleared off the last of the lather.

"What a man leaves behind is what a man is."

"Jacob, a man is only his reputation."

"Understand me." He took the cloth from her hands and wiped his chin. "I will have it."

And so it was. Men, barrows, a blacksmith, lumber, twine, pots of caulk, hammers and pull horses, one of which once kicked her daughter in the head. The fever of building was so intense she missed the real fever, the one that put him in the grave. As soon as he collapsed, word went out to the Baptists and even Sorrow was no longer allowed among them. The laborers left with their horses and tools. The blacksmith was long gone, his ironwork a glitter like gates to heaven. Rebekka did what Jacob ordered her to do: gathered the women and struggled with them to lift him from the bed and lower him on to a blanket. All the while he croaked, hurry, hurry. Unable to summon muscle strength to aid them, he was dead weight before he was dead. They hauled him through a cold spring rain. Skirts dragging in mud, shawls asunder, the caps on their heads drenched through to the scalp. There was trouble at the

gate. They had to lay him in mud while two undid the hinges and then unbolted the door to the house. As rain poured over his face, Rebekka tried to shelter it with her own. Using the driest part of her underskirt, she blotted carefully lest she disturb the boles into pain. At last they entered the hall and situated him far away from the window space waiting for a glazer. Rebekka leaned in close to ask if he would take a little cider. He moved his lips but no answer came. His eyes shifted to something or someone over her shoulder and remained so till she closed them. All four, herself, Lina, Sorrow and Florens, sat down on the floor planks. One or all thought the others were crying, or else those were rain drops on their cheeks.

Rebekka doubted that she would be infected. None of her family had died during the pestilence; no red cross was painted on their door. So to have sailed to this clean world, this fresh and new England, marry a stout, robust man and then, on the heels of his death, to lie mattering on a perfect spring night felt like a jest. Congratulations, Satan. That

was what the cutpurse used to say whenever the ship rose and threw their bodies helter-skelter.

"Blasphemy!" Elizabeth would shout.

"Truth!" Dorothea replied.

Now they hovered in the doorway or knelt by her bed.

"I'm already dead," said Judith. "It's not so bad."

"Don't tell her that. It's horrid."

"Don't listen to her. She's a pastor's wife now."

"Would you like some tea?"

"I married a sailor, so I'm always alone."

"She supplements his earnings. Ask her how."

"There are laws against that."

Yes but surely
"They would not have them if they didn't need them."

"Listen, let me tell you what happened to me. I saw this man...."

Just as on the ship, their voices knocked against one another. They had come to soothe her but, like all ghostly presences, they were interested only in themselves. Yet the stories they told, their comments, offered Rebekka the distraction of other people's lives. Well, she thought, that was the true value of Job's comforters. He lay festering in pain and moral despair; they told him about themselves ^{and} on when he felt even worse, he got an answer from God saying, Who on earth do you think you are? Question me? Let me give you a hint of who I am and what I know. For a moment Job must have longed for the self-interested musings of humans as vulnerable and mis-guided as he was. But a peek into Divine knowledge was less important than gaining, at last, the Lord's attention. Which, she concluded, was all Job ever wanted. Not even proof of His existence—he never questioned that. Nor proof of His power—^{he} everyone understood that. He wanted simply to catch His eye. To be recognized not as worthy or worthless, but to be noticed as a life form

by the One who made and unmade it. Not a bargain; merely ^{a wish} a drop of mercy.

But then Job was a man. Invisibility was intolerable to men. What complaint would a female Job dared to put forth? And if, having done so, and He deigned to remind her of how weak and ignorant she was, where was the news in that? What shocked Job into humility and renewed fidelity was the message a female Job would have known and heard every minute of her life. No. Better false comfort than none, thought Rebekka, and listened carefully to her shipmates.

"He knifed me, blood everywhere. I grabbed my waist and thought No! No swooning, my girl. Steady...."

When the women faded, it was the moon that stared back like a worried friend. Lina snored lightly on the floor at the foot of the bed. (*over*)
~~Rebekka once thought loneliness would be her worst enemy~~ when Jacob was away. When neither Patrician nor Lina was enough. When the local Baptists tired her out with talk that never extended beyond their fences

At some point,
The wide untrammelled space
that ^{once} throttled her became vacancy.
A beautiful yet oppressive absence, when
~~Jacob was away~~ She learned the
intorcacy of loneliness, "Colours, soundless
and ^{very very} still!

a variety living in error
of others

their healthy undeed
children.
Each an accusation etc.

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Report as she was
by these strictures, she held
and their personal grudge, their
children. Each kind one of her died

it was
she said it was
non-baptism that
non-baptism that
would not
be around
truth in the
view to

Besides they had
~~separated~~ even stricter
~~lines separating~~
narrower
definitions of God's
preferences than
her parents. ~~Outside~~ other than
themselves (and
those who agreed) none
they believed the saved
was paved. The
possibility was open
However to most
except children of Ham
and Judah (?)

In addition to the
Catholics
children of Ham and
the tribes of Judah
there were
to whom
grace
there
was no
denial.

redemption was eternally denied

unless it ^{went} ~~was~~ all the way to heaven. Those women seemed flat to her, convinced they were innocent and therefore free; safe because churched; tough because still alive. A new people re-made in vessels old as time. Children, in other words, without the joy or the curiosity of a child. ^{* — see note} They were poor company and of no help to her with solitude that came close to dread; that could rise up without prelude and take her prisoner. She might be bending in a patch of radishes, tossing weeds with the skill of a pub matron dropping coins into her apron. Weeds to fodder the stock. Then as she stood in molten sunlight pulling the corners of her apron together, the comfortable sounds of the farm would drop. Silence would fall like snow floating around her head and shoulders, spreading outward to quiet ^{wind-driven} moving leaves, dangling cowbells, the whack of Lina's axe chopping firewood nearby. Her skin would flush then chill. Sound would return eventually, but the loneliness might remain for days. Until, in the middle of it, he would ride up shouting,

"Where's my star?"

Conversation: "if you know
Hein etc."

"Here in the north," she'd reply and he would toss a bolt of calico at her feet or hand her a packet of needles. Best of all were the times when he would take out his fiddle and embarrass the songbirds who believed they owned twilight. A still living baby would be on her lap. Patrician would be on the floor, mouth agape, eyes aglow, as he summoned rose gardens and shepherds neither had seen or would ever know. With him, the cost of a solitary, unchurched life was not high.

Once, feeling fat with contentment, she curbed her generosity, her sense of excessive well being enough to pity Lina.

"You have never known a man, have you?"

They were sitting in the brook, Lina holding the baby, splashing his back to hear him laugh. In frying August heat they had gone down to a part of the brook that swarming flies and viscous mosquitoes ignored. Unless a light canoe sailed by very close to the bank no one would see them. Patrician knelt nearby watching how her bloomers stirred in the ripples. Rebekka sat in her underwear rinsing her neck and arms. Lina, Lita,

naked as the baby she ^{hold} in her arms, lifted him up and down watching ^{his} hair re-shape itself in the current. Then she held him over her shoulder and sent cascades of clear water over his back.

"Known, Miss?"

"You understand me, Lina."

"I do."

"Well?"

"Look," squealed Patrician, pointing.

"Shhh," whispered Lina, "You will frighten them." Too late. The vixen and her kits sped away to drink elsewhere.

"Well?" Rebekka repeated. "Have you?"

"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 baby to its mother, Lina stood and walked to the ^{forsythia} bushes where her shift hung. Dressed, she held out a hand to Patrician who clambered up the bank.

Left alone with the baby who more than any of her children favored their father, Rebekka ^{savored again} ~~felt on that day~~ the miracle of her good fortune. Wife beating was common, she knew, but the restrictions—not after nine at night, with cause and not anger—were for wives and only wives. Had he been a native, Lina's lover? Probably not. A rich man? Or a common soldier or sailor? Rebekka suspected the former since she had known kind sailors but, based on her short employment as a kitchen maid, had only seen the underside of gentry. Other than her mother, no one had ever ^{struck} struck her. Fourteen years and she still didn't know if Mum was alive. She once received a message from a captain Jacob

knew who moored at Swansea. Eighteen months after he was charged to make inquiries, he reported that her family had moved. Where no one could say. Rising from the brook, laying her son on the ^{warm grass} ~~ground~~ while she dressed, Rebekka wondered what her mother might look like now. Gray, stooped, wrinkled? Would the sharp pale eyes still radiate the shrewdness, the suspicion Rebekka hated? Or maybe age, illness had softened her to benign, toothless malice.

Confined to bed now, her question was re-directed. "And me? ^{How do I look?}" What lies in my eyes now? Skull and cross bones? Rage? Surrender? ✓ All at once she wanted it—the mirror Jacob had given her which she silently re-wrapped and tucked in her press. It took a while to convince her, but when Lina finally understood and fixed it between her palms, Rebekka winced.

"Sorry," she murmured. "I'm so sorry." Her eyebrows were a memory, the pale rose of her cheeks collected now into buds of flame red. She traveled her face slowly, gently apologizing. "Eyes, dear eyes,

forgive me. Nose, poor mouth. Poor, sweet mouth, I'm sorry. Believe me, skin, I do apologize. Please. Forgive me."

Lina pried the mirror away.

"Miss. Enough. Enough."

Oh, she had been so happy. Jacob home and busy with plans for the new house. The blacksmith, who worried everybody except herself and Jacob, was like an anchor holding the couple in place above untrustworthy waters. Lina was afraid of him. Sorrow grateful as a hound to him. And Florens, poor Florens, she was completely smitten. Of the three only she could be counted on to get to him. Hostile Lina would have begged off; pregnant Sorrow could not have. Rebekka had confidence in Florens because she was clever and because she had motive to succeed. And Rebekka had a lot of affection for her, although it was some time developing. Jacob probably believed a girl close to Patrician's age would please her. In fact, it insulted her. Nothing could replace the original and nothing should. So she barely glanced at her ^{when she came} ~~then~~ and had

no need to later because Lina took the child so completely under her wing. In time, Rebekka thawed, depended more and more on Florens' eagerness for approval. "Well done." "Thank you." Any civility delighted her. Jacob said the mother had no use for her which, Rebekka decided, explained her need to please. Explained also her attachment to the blacksmith. Trotting up to him for any reason, panicked to get his food to him on time. Jacob dismissed it: the blacksmith would soon be gone. No need to worry, besides the man was too skilled and valuable to let go, certainly not because a girl was mooning over him. Jacob was right, of course. The smithy's value was without price when he cured Sorrow of whatever had struck her down. Pray to God he could repeat that miracle. Pray also Florens could persuade him. They'd stuffed her feet in good strong boots. Jacob's. And folded a clarifying letter of authority inside. And her traveling instructions were clear.

It would be all right. Just as the pall of childlessness coupled with bouts of loneliness had disappeared, melted like the snow showers that signaled it. Just as Jacob's determination to rise up in the world had

ceased to trouble her. She decided that the satisfaction of having more and more was not greed, was not in the things themselves, but in the pleasure of the process. Whatever the truth, however driven he seemed, Jacob was there. Had been. With her. Breathing next to her in bed. Reaching for her even as he slept. Then, suddenly, he was not.

Were the Anabaptists right? Was happiness Satan's lure, his tantalizing deceit? Was her devotion so frail it was merely bait? Her stubborn self-sufficiency outright blasphemy? Is that why at the height of her contentedness, once again death turned to look her way? And smile? Well, her shipmates, it seemed, had got on with it. As she knew from their visits, whatever life threw up, whatever obstacles they faced, they manipulated circumstances to their advantage and trusted in their own imagination. The Baptist women trusted elsewhere. Unlike her shipmates, they neither dared nor stood up to ^{the fickleness of} life. On the contrary, they dared death. Dared it to erase them, to pretend this earthly life was all; that beyond earth was nothing; that there was no acknowledgment of suffering and certainly no reward; they refused meaningless and the random. What

excited and challenged her shipmates horrified the church women and each set believed the other deeply, dangerously flawed. Although they had nothing in common with the views of each other, they had everything in common with ^{one thing:} ~~understanding~~ [^] the promise and threat of men. Here they agreed where safety and ^{risk} ~~danger~~ lay. And both had come to terms.

Some, like Lina, who had experienced both salvation and destruction at their hands, withdrew. Some, like Sorrow, who apparently never knew other females, became their play. Some fought. Others obeyed. And a few, like herself, after a mutually loving relationship, were helpless when the man was gone. But was that not the way it should be? Adam first, Eve next and also, confused about her role, the first outlaw? →

The dry tongue in Rebekka's mouth behaved like a small animal that had lost its way. And though she understood that her thinking was disorganized, she was also convinced of its clarity. That she and Jacob ^{free} could talk and argue about these things made his loss intolerable. ^
Whatever his mood or disposition, he had been the true meaning of mate.

The Baptists were not confused
about any of this.

Adam (like Jacob)
if the husband was a good man
(like Adam) why goad and undermine
him?

Also There were limits and levels of sin.
And most happily repentance.
to behavior

T/K
Tolerated N's but believed
they were a lesser people to whom
heaven was accessible
but grace was not.

Also their view of afterlife. What had the
woman told her. About heaven etc. That it was not
the formal place
of 24 hour praise song
She prays fervently.

or.
but an exciting real life
where all choices
were perfect
and perfectly ex-
cited T/K

Now, she thought, there is no one except servants. The best husband 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, as she should be, a slow-witted girl warped from living on a ghost ship. Only Lina was 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 she return will he and is it already too late?

Like the second year when Jacob was away
* Snow storm + K.

~~was~~ God ^{responsi} ~~done~~ ^{ble} that
for that miracle. }

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