



## "I dream a dream that dreams back at me..."

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I dream a dream that dreams back at me. I am on my knees in soft grass with white clover all around. I think there is a sweet smell and lean close to get it. But the flowers have none. I notice I am at the edge of a lake. The blue of it is more than sky, more than any blue I know. More than Lina's beads or the heads of chicory. I am loving it so, I can't stop. I want to put my fingers deep there. I want to. What is making me hesitate, making me not touch the beautiful blue of what I want?<sup>?</sup> I make me go close, lean over, clutching the grass<sup>for balance</sup>. Right away I take fright when I do not see my face there. Where my face should be is nothing. I put a finger in and watch the water circle. I put my face near enough to drink<sup>Where is it hiding? Why? (over)</sup> or kiss but I am not even a shadow there. When I wake Madre is there and her baby boy is Malaik this time. Holding her hand. She is moving her lips at me but she is holding Malaik's hand in her own.

I know you will come but morning does and you do not. All day. Malaik and me wait. He stays as far from me as he can. I am inside, sometimes in the garden but never in the lane where he is. I am making me quiet but I am loose inside not knowing how to be. Horses move in

Then Daughter Jane <sup>Kneels</sup> ~~appears~~ next to me and look in  
the water  
saying Don't cry, you will find it.  
she is saying.

where I ask but she is gone.



someone's pasture beyond. The colts are never still. Never still. I watch until it is too black to see. No dream comes that night. No Madre either. I lie where you sleep. Along with the sound of blowing wind there is the thump of my heart. It is louder than the wind. The fire smell of you is leaving the pallet. Where does it go I wonder. The wind dies down. My heartbeat joins the sound of mice feet.

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 looking toward where you ride away. Sudden looking at him I am remembering 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. Bits of metal bite them. I look and see the curl of a garden snake edging toward the threshold. I watch its slow crawl until it is dead in the sunlight. I touch your anvil. It is cool and scraped smooth but it sings the heat it lives for.

I never find Sir's boots. Carefully, on my toes I go back into the cabin and wait.

The boy quits the lane. He comes in but will neither eat nor talk. 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. On bleeding feet I run 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. I am trying to stop him not hurt him. That is why I pull his arm. To make him stop. Stop it. And yes I do hear the shoulder crack but 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. A little blood comes from his mouth hitting the table corner. Only a little. He drops into fainting just as I hear you shout. I don't hear your horse only your shout and know I am lost because your shout is 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 question of it? I am first to get the knocking away. The back of your hand strikes my face. I fall and curl up on the floor. Tight. The feathers are moving again. No question. You choose the boy. You call his name

first. You <sup>take</sup> ~~make~~ <sup>to</sup> him lie down with the doll and <sup>ro-</sup> 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.

No. 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?

Your head is empty and your body is wild.

I am adoring you.

And a slave to that too.

You alone own me.

Own yourself, woman and leave us be. You could have killed this  
child.



No. Wait. You put me in misery.

You are nothing but wilderness. No constraint. No mind.

You shout the word, mind, mind over and over and then you laugh  
saying as I live and breathe, a slave by choice.

ON MY KNEES

I reach for you. You step back saying get away from me.

I have shock. Are you meaning I am nothing to you? That I have  
no consequence in your world? <sup>that (over) is in the water before you are</sup> 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.

You find <sup>from me</sup> My face hidden in the water  
only to crush it.



Jacob Vaark left his grave to pay visits to his beautiful house.

"As well he should," said Willard.

"I sure would," answered Scully.

It was still the grandest house in the whole region and why not spend eternity there? When they first noticed the shadow, Scully, not sure it was truly Vaark, thought they should creep closer. Willard, on the other hand, warned of the consequences of disturbing the risen dead. Night after night they watched, until they convinced themselves that no

one other than Vaark would spend haunting time there: it had no previous tenants and the Mistress forbade anyone to enter. Both men respected—if not understood—her reasoning.

For x years the neighboring farm population made up the closest either man would know of family. A good-hearted couple (parents), and three female servants ( sisters, say) and them helpful sons. Each member dependent on them, none cruel, all kind. Especially the master who, unlike their more-or-less absent owner, never cursed or threatened them. He even gave them gifts of rum during Christmastide and once shared a tipple straight from the bottle. His death had saddened them enough to disobey their owner's command to avoid the poxed place; they volunteered to dig the last, if not the final, grave his widow would need. In dousing rain they removed five feet of mud and hurried to get the body down before the hole filled with water. Now, thirteen days later, the dead man had left it. Very like the way he used to re-appear following weeks of traveling. They did not see him—his definitive shape or face—but they did see his ghostly blaze. His glow began near midnight, floated for



a while on the second story, disappeared, then moved ever so slowly from window to window. With Master Vaark content to roam his house and not appear anywhere else, scaring or rattling anybody, Willard felt it safe and appropriate for him and Scully to stay loyal and help the Mistress repair the farm; prepare it also for nothing much had been tended to after she fell ill. June on its way and not a furrow plowed. tk The shillings she offered, one a week, was the first money they had ever been paid, raising their work ethic from duty to dedication, from pity to profit.

There was much to be done because, hardy as the women had always been, they seemed distracted, slower, now. Before and after the blacksmith healed Mistress and the girl, Florens, was back where she belonged, a pall had descended. True, Lina went about her work carefully, but Scully thought she was simmering. Like green apples trembling in boiling water too long, the skin near to breaking, needing quick removal, cooling before mashed into sauce. He had wasted hours over the years secretly watching her river baths. Unfettered glimpses of her buttocks , that waist, those syrup-colored breasts were no longer available. Mainly

his missed what he never saw elsewhere: uncovered female hair, aggressive, seductive, black as witchcraft. Seeing its wet cling and sway on her back was a quiet joy. Now, no more. Wherever, if ever, she bathed he was convinced she was about to burst.

Mistress had changed as well. The mourning, said Willard, the illness—the effects of all of that was plain as day. Her hair, the brassy locks that once refused her cap had become pale strings drifting at her temples, adding melancholy to her newly stern features. Rising from her sickbed, she had taken control, in a manner of speaking, but avoided as too tiring tasks she used to undertake with gusto. She laundered nothing, planted nothing, weeded never. She cooked and mended. Otherwise her time was spent reading a bible or entertaining one or two people from the village.

"She'll marry again, I reckon," said Willard. "Soon."

"Why soon?"

"She's a woman. How else keep the farm?"



"Who to?"

Willard closed one eye. "The village will provide."

They laughed recalling the friendliness of the deacon.

Sorrow's change alone seemed to them an improvement; she was less addle-headed, more capable of handling chores. But her baby came first and she would postpone egg-gathering, delay milking, interrupt any field chore if she heard whimper from the infant's basket always nearby. Having helped with her delivery, they assumed godfather status even offering to mind the baby if Sorrow needed them to. She declined, not because she did not trust them; she did, but out of a need to trust herself.

Strangest was Florens. The docile, needful creature they knew had turned to rock. When they saw her stomping down the road two days after the smithy had visited Mistress' sickbed and gone, they were slow to recognize her as a living person. First because she was so <sup>and blood-spattered</sup> bedraggled and, second, because she passed right by them, <sup>Surely</sup> although a sudden burst of sweating men out of roadside trees ~~in front of her~~ would have startled

*(over)*  
*any* *especially* *a female*  
*frightened* *leaped away* *out of* *her path*

a human. Breathless and still alarmed from a narrow escape, in their minds anything could be anything. Both were running as fast as they

could back to the livestock under their care before the pigs ate their litter.

Much of the morning they had spent hiding from an insulted bear, a har-

rowing incident they agreed was primarily Willard's fault. The netted

partridge hanging from the older man's waist was supplement enough for

two meals each so it was reckless to press their good fortune and linger

just so he could rest beneath a beech and puff his pipe. Both knew what

a whiff of smoke could do in woods where odor was decisive: to flee, at-

tack, hide or, as in the case of a sow bear, investigate. When the laurel

hell that had yielded the partridges suddenly crackled, Willard stood up,

holding his hand out to Scully for silence. Scully unsheathed his knife

and stood also. After a moment of uncanny quiet—no birdcalls or squirrel

chatter—the smell washed over them at the same moment the sow crashed

through the laurel clicking her teeth. Not knowing which of them she

would select, they separated, each running man hoping he had made the

correct choice, since play possum was not an option. Willard ducked



But this one neither glanced their way  
nor altered her pace. Both men

behind an outcropping, thumb tamped his pipe and prayed the ledge of slate would disable the wind's direction. Scully, certain he felt hot breath on his nape, leaped for the lowest branch and swung up onto it. Unwise. Herself a tree climber, the bear had merely to stand up to clamp his foot in her jaws. Scully's fear was not craven, however, so he determined to make at least one powerful gesture of defense however hopeless. He snatched out his knife, turned and without even aiming, rammed it at the head of the agile black hulk below. For once desperation was a gift. The blade hit, slid like a needle into the bear's eye. The roar was terrible as, clawing bark, she tumbled to the ground on her haunches. A ring of baying dogs could not have enraged her more. Snarling, standing straight up, she slapped at the stuck blade until it fell out. Then down on all fours she rolled her shoulders and wagged her head from side to side. It seemed to Scully a very long time before the grunt of a cub got her attention and, off balance by the blinding that diminished her naturally poor sight, she lumbered away to locate her young. Scully and Willard waited, one treed like a caught bear himself, the other hugging rock,



both afraid she would return. Convinced finally that she would not, cautiously sniffing for the smell of fur, listening for a grunt, the movement of the other, or a return of birdcall, they emerged. Slowly, slowly. Then raced. It was when they shot from the wood onto the road that they saw the female-looking shape marching toward them. Later, when they discussed it, they decided she looked less like a visitation than a wounded redcoat, <sup>bloody</sup> barefoot but proud.

Sold for seven years to a Virginia planter, young Willard Bond expected to be freed at age 21. But x years were added onto his term for infractions—theft and assault—and he was re-leased to a wheat farmer far up north. Following two harvests the wheat succumbed to blast and the owner turned his property over to mixed livestock. Eventually, as overgrazing demanded more and more pasture, the owner made a land-for-

toil trade with his neighbor, Jacob Vaark. Still, one man could not handle all that stock. The addition of a boy helped.

Before Scully's arrival, Willard had suffered hard and lonely days watching cattle munch and mate, his only solace in remembering harder but more satisfying ones in Virginia. Brutal though that work was, he was not lonely. There he was one of twenty-three men working tobacco fields. Six English, one native, twelve from Africa by way of Barbados. The comradery among them was sealed by their shared hatred of the overseer and the master's odious sons. It was upon the latter that the assault was made. Theft of a shoat was invented and thrown in just to increase Willard's indebtedness. He had trouble getting used to the rougher, colder region he was moved into. At night in his hammock, trapped in wide, animated darkness, he braced himself against the living and the dead. The glittering eyes of a stag could easily be a demon, just as the howls of tortured souls might be the call of happy wolves. The dread of those solitary night gripped his days. Swine and cattle were his sole companions, until the owner returned and carted away the best for



slaughter. Scully's arrival was met with welcome and relief. And when their duties expanded to occasional help on the Vaark place, and they developed an easy relationship with its servants, there were just a few times he over drank and misbehaved. Earlier on, Willard had run away twice, only to be caught in a tavern yard and given a further extension of his term.

An even greater improvement in his social life began when Vaark decided to build a great house. Again, he was part of a crew of laborers, skilled and not, and when the blacksmith came, things got more and more interesting. Not only was the house grand, but its enclosure was to be spectacular.

tk

Immediately he admired the smith and his craft. A view that lasted until the day he saw money pass from Vaark's hand to the blacksmith's. The clink of silver was as unmistakable as its gleam. He knew Vaark was getting rich from rum investments, but learning the blacksmith was being

paid for his work, like the men who delivered building materials, unlike the men he worked with in Virginia, roiled Willard, and he, encouraging Scully, refused any request the black man made. Refused to chop chestnut or haul charcoal for his fires; 'forgot' to shield green lumber from rain. Vaark chastised them both into sullen accommodation, but it was the smith who calmed Willard down. Willard had two shirts, one with a collar, the other more of a rag. On the morning he slipped in fresh dung and split the shirt all the way down its back, he changed into the good collared one. Arriving at the site, he caught the blacksmith's eye, then his nod, then his thumb pointing straight up as if to signal approval. Willard never knew whether he was being made fun of or complimented. But when the smithy said, "Mr. Bond. Good morning," it tickled him. Virginia bailiffs, constables, small children, preachers—none had ever considered calling him 'mister'—nor did he expect them to. He knew his rank, but did not know the lift that small courtesy allowed him. Joke or not, that first time was not the last because the smithy never failed to address him so. Chuckling to himself, Willard understood why the girl,



Florens, was struck silly by the man. He probably called her 'miss' or 'lady' when they met in the wood for supper-time foolery. That would excite her, he thought, if she needed any more than just the black man's grin.

"In all my born days," he told Scully, "I never saw anything like it. He takes her when and where he wants and she hunts him like a she-wolf if he's not in her eye. If he's off at his bloomery for a day or two, she wilts till he comes back hauling slag. Makes Sorrow look like a nun."

Only a few years older than Florens, Scully was less bewildered by her demeanor than Willard was. He thought of himself as an astute<sup>†</sup> judge of character, felt he, unlike Willard, had a wily, sure-shot instinct for the true core of others. Willard judged people from their outside: Scully looked deeper. Although he relished Lina's nakedness, he saw a purity in her, some clean, impenetrable virtue. Her loyalty, he believed, was was not submission to Mistress or Florens; it was a sign of her own

self-worth— a sort of keeping one's word. Honor, perhaps. And while he joined Willard in making fun of Sorrow, Scully preferred her over the other two servants. If he had been interested in seduction, that's who he would have chosen: the look of her was daunting, complicated, distant. The un-blinking eyes, smoke-gray, were not blank, but waiting. It was that lying-in-wait look that troubled Lina. Everyone but himself thought she was daft because she talked out loud when alone, but who didn't? Willard spoke to cattle regularly and Mistress always chatted directions to herself while at some solitary task. To dismiss Sorrow as 'the odd one' ignored her quick and knowing sense of her position. Her privacy protected her; her easy coupling a present to herself. When pregnant, she glowed and when her time came she sought help in exactly the right place from the right people.

If he had been interested in rape, Florens would have been his prey. It was easy to spot that combination of defenselessness, eagerness to please and, most of all, a willingness to blame herself for the meanness of others. Apparently, from the look of her now, that was no longer



Swinging her hips  
true. The instant he saw her marching down the road—whether ghost or soldier—he knew she had become untouchable. His assessment of her unavailability, however, was impersonal. Other than a voyeur's obsession with Lina's body, Scully had no carnal interest in females. Long ago the world of men and only men had stamped him.

Also, unlike Willard's, Scully's opinion of Mistress was less generous. He did not dislike her, but looked on her behavior of the master's death and her own recovery not simply as the effects of ill health and mourning. Underneath her taking charge was something cold if not cruel. Refusing to enter the grand house, the one in whose construction she had delighted, seemed to him a punishment not only of herself, but everyone, especially her dead husband. What both husband and wife had enjoyed, even celebrated, she now despised as signs of both the third and seventh sins. However well she loved him in life, his death must have made her hate him.

I walk the night through. Alone. It is hard without Sir's boots.

Wearing them I could cross a stony river bed. Move quickly through for-

ests and down hills of nettles. What I read or cipher is useless now.

Heads of dogs, garden snakes <sup>that</sup> all is nothing. But my way is clear since

losing 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. ~~How little~~ I  
<sup>am nothing</sup>  
~~mean~~ to you. 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 wrest it from me and toss it away. Our clashing is long. I am trying to tear you open. Malaik is screaming. You pull my arms behind me. I twist away and escape you. The tongs are there, close enough. Close enough. I run. Then walk. Then float. An ice floe cut away from the riverbank in deep winter. I have no shoes. I have no kicking heart no home no tomorrow. I walk the night. The feathers close. For now.

*If ever you heal*

<sup>^</sup>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<sup>71K</sup> and when I wake it takes time to pull away, leave this room<sup>^</sup> 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 want-

ing 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. Hear me <sup>will</sup> ~~you~~ go on. ON. ON.

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.

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Democraticunderground  
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Allure (of evil)  
(paradise.