



Home Draft, as "Frank Money"

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FRANK MONEY

THEY ROSE UP LIKE MEN. WE SAW THEM. LIKE MEN
THEY STOOD.

WE SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ANYWHERE NEAR THAT
PLACE. LIKE MOST FARMLAND AROUND LOTUS, GEORGIA,
WARNING SIGNS WERE PLENTIFUL. IN ADDITION TO THE
THREATENING SIGNS, WIRE MESH FENCES WITH WOODEN
STAKES EVERY TEN OR SO FEET ENCLOSED THE PROPERTY.
BUT WHEN WE SAW A CRAWL SPACE THAT SOME ANIMAL
HAD DUG—A COYOTE MAYBE OR A COON DOG—WE
COULDN'T RESIST. JUST KIDS WE WERE. THE GRASS WAS
SHOULDER HIGH FOR HER AND WAIST HIGH FOR ME SO,
LOOKING OUT FOR SNAKES, WE CRAWLED THROUGH IT ON
OUR BELLIES. THE REWARD WAS WORTH THE HARM GRASS
JUICE AND CLOUDS OF GNATS DID TO OUR EYES, BECAUSE
THERE RIGHT IN FRONT OF US, ABOUT FIFTY YARDS OFF, THEY

STOOD LIKE MEN. THEIR RAISED HOOVES CRASHING AND STRIKING, THEIR MANES TOSSING BACK FROM WILD WHITE EYES. THEY BIT EACH OTHER LIKE DOGS BUT WHEN THEY STOOD, REARED UP ON THEIR HIND LEGS, THEIR FORE^{legs}ARMS AROUND THE WITHERS OF THE OTHER, WE HELD OUR BREATH IN WONDER. ONE WAS RUST-COLORED; THE OTHER DEEP BLACK, BOTH SUNNY WITH SWEAT. THE NEIGHS WERE NOT AS FRIGHTENING AS THE SILENCE FOLLOWING A KICK OF HIND LEGS INTO THE LIFTED LIPS OF THE OPPONENT. NEARBY, COLTS AND MARES STOOD ALOOF, LOOKING AWAY. THEN IT STOPPED. THE RUST-COLORED ONE DROPPED HIS HEAD AND PAWED THE GROUND WHILE THE WINNER LOPED OFF IN AN ARC, NUDGING THE MARES BEFORE HIM.

AS WE ELBOWED BACK THROUGH THE GRASS LOOKING FOR THE DUG OUT PLACE, WE LOST OUR WAY. NEITHER OF US PANICKED UNTIL WE HEARD VOICES, URGENT BUT LOW, ON THE YONDER SIDE OF THE FENCING. I GRABBED HER ARM

AND PUT A FINGER TO MY LIPS. NEVER LIFTING OUR HEADS, JUST PEEPING THROUGH THE GRASS, WE SAW THEM PULL A BODY FROM THE BACK OF A MULE AND THROW IT INTO A HOLE ALREADY WAITING. ONE FOOT STUCK UP OVER THE EDGE AND QUIVERED, AS THOUGH IT COULD GET OUT, AS THOUGH WITH A LITTLE EFFORT IT COULD BREAK THROUGH THE DIRT BEING SHOVELED IN. WE COULD NOT SEE THE FACES OF THE MEN DOING THE BURYING, ONLY THEIR TROUSERS; BUT WE SAW THE EDGE OF A SPADE DRIVE THE JERKING FOOT DOWN TO JOIN THE REST OF ITSELF. WHEN SHE SAW THAT BLACK FOOT WITH ITS CREAM-COLORED, MUD-STREAKED SOLE BEING WHACKED INTO THE GRAVE, HER WHOLE BODY BEGAN TO SHAKE. I HUGGED HER SHOULDERS TIGHT AND TRIED TO PULL HER TREMBLING INTO MY OWN BONES BECAUSE, AS A BROTHER FOUR YEARS OLDER, I THOUGHT I COULD HANDLE IT. THE MEN WERE LONG GONE AND THE SUN WAS A CANTALOPE BY THE TIME WE FELT SAFE

ENOUGH TO DISTURB EVEN ONE BLADE OF GRASS AND
 MOVE ON OUR STOMACHS SEARCHING FOR THE SCOOPED-
 OUT PART UNDER THE FENCE. I THOUGHT I COULD FORGET
 ABOUT THE BURIAL AND JUST REMEMBER THE HORSES. THEY
 WERE SO BEAUTIFUL. SO BRUTAL. AND THEY STOOD LIKE
 MEN.

Breathing. How to do it so no one would know he was
 awake. Fake a deep rhythmic snore, drop the bottom lip. Most
 important the eyelids should not move and there must be a regular
 heartbeat and limp hands. At 2:00 a.m. when they checked him to
 determine if he needed another shot they would see the patient in
 room 17, sunk in a morphine sleep. If convinced, they would
 loosen his wrist cuffs. The trick of imitating semi-coma was to
 concentrate on a single neutral object. Ice, he thought, a cube of it,
 an icicle or on ice-crusted pond, or a frosted landscape. No. Too
 much emotion in frozen hills. Fire, then? Never, too active. He
 would need something that stirred no emotion, encouraged no
 memory—sweet or shameful. Just searching for such an item was
 agitating. Everything reminded him of something loaded with pain.
 Visualizing a blank sheet of paper drove his mind to the letter he
 had gotten—the one that had closed his throat: "Come fast. She be

*fortune and
 #11 playing dead in a Kitzape,
 3 waiting for the ambulance*

dead if you tarry." Finally, he settled on the chair in the corner of the room. Wooden. Oak. Lacquered or stained. How many slots in its back. Was the seat flat or curved for a bottom. Hand crafted or machine made. If hand crafted who was the carpenter and where did he get his lumber. Hopeless. The chair was provoking questions not blank indifference. He would have to concentrate on heartbeat and limp hands. At 2:00 a.m. when they checked him to

Breathing. How to do it so no one would know he was awake. Fake a deep rhythmic snore, drop the bottom lip. Most important the eyelids should not move and there must be a regular ^{immobilizing} heartbeat and limp hands. At 2:00 a.m. when they checked him to determine if he needed another shot they would see the patient in room 17, ^{FRANK MONEY} sunk in a morphine sleep. If convinced, they would ^{might} loosen his wrist cuffs. ^A The trick of imitating semi-coma was to ^{so his hands could enjoy some blood.} ^{which would smother any hint of life.} concentrate on a single neutral object. Ice, he thought, a cube of it,

an icicle or an ice-crust pond, or a frosted landscape. No. Too much emotion ^{attached to} in frozen hills. Fire, then? Never, too active. He would need something that stirred no emotion, encouraged no memory—sweet or shameful. Just searching for such an item was agitating. Everything reminded him of something loaded with pain. Visualizing a blank sheet of paper drove his mind to the letter he had gotten—the one that had closed his throat: "Come fast. She be

^{face down muddy}
* Like playing dead in a kill zone,
' listening to the enemy's head

dead if you tarry." Finally, he settled on the chair in the corner of the room. ^{as his object.} Wooden. Oak. Lacquered or stained. How many slats in its back. Was the seat flat or curved for a bottom. Hand crafted or machine made. If hand crafted who was the carpenter and where did he get his lumber. Hopeless. The chair was provoking questions not blank indifference. He would have to concentrate on something else, a night sky, starless or, better, train tracks. No ^{no trains} scenery, just ^{endless} the endless tracks.

They had taken his shirt and laced boots but his pants and army jacket (neither an effective suicide instrument) were hanging in the tiny closet. He just had to get down the hall to the exit door that was never locked after a fire broke out on that floor and a nurse and two patients died. That was the story Crane, the orderly, rapidly chewing his gum, ^{had} told ^{him}, but he believed it was simply convenient for the staff's smoke breaks.

^{Two days earlier}
~~The day before~~, when he was handcuffed in the back seat of the patrol car, he had swerved his head wildly to see where he was

and where he was going. Nothing in particular stood out except the flashing of an OK Diner display and a huge yard sign for a tiny church: AME Zion. If he succeeded in getting out that's where he would head: to Zion. Still, before escape, he would have to get shoes somehow, someway. Walking anywhere in winter without shoes would guarantee his being arrested and back in the ward until he could be sentenced for vagrancy. Interesting law, vagrancy, meaning standing outside or walking without purpose anywhere. Carrying a book would help, but being barefoot would contradict "purposefulness" and seal a complaint of "loitering."

Better than most, he knew that being outside wasn't necessary for legal or illegal disruption. You could be inside, living in your own house for years and still men with badges and guns could force you, your family, your neighbors to pack up and move—with or without shoes. *Twenty years* Not all that long ago, as a four year old, he had a pair, though the sole of one flapped with every step. Residents of fifteen houses had been cleansed from the edge of tk town. In spite

of threats from lawmen and pleadings from his ^{neighbors} friends, one elderly
 named Crawford to vacate.
 man refused. He was beaten to death with rifle butts and tied to

the oldest magnolia tree in the county that grew in his own yard. ^{the one} Maybe it
 was loving that tree which he said his great grandmother
 planted, that made him so stubborn. It did hurry the rest.

So shoes were vital. Four a.m., before sunrise, he managed
 to ^{loosen the canvas cuffs} ^{put on his pants and jacket} unshackle himself, dress and creep down the hall. Except for the

weeping from the room next to the exit, all was quiet—no squeak of
 an orderly's shoes, or ^{smothered} giggles and no smell of cigarette smoke. The
 hinges groaned when he opened the door and the cold hit him like
 a hammer.

The iced iron of the fire escape steps was so painful he
 jumped over the railing to sink his feet into the warmer snow on the
 ground. Holding the collar tight at his throat, preferring ^{for} curb snow

^{avoiding shovel clean} to pavement, he ran the six ^{long} blocks as quickly as he could to the

parsonage of AME Zion, a small two-story clapboard. The steps to
 the porch were thoroughly cleared of snow, but the house was
 dark. He knocked, hard, he thought, considering how stiff his
 hands were, but not threatening like the bam bam of a citizen's

Maniac moonlight doing the
work of absent stars, matched by
his desperate frenzy. Lightning his
hunched shoulders and foot steps
left in snow.

group, or a mob or the police. Insistence paid off; a light came on and the door opened a slit, revealing a ^{gray haired} man in flannel robe, holding his glasses and frowning at the impudence of a pre-dawn visitor.

~~Frank~~ ^{He} wanted to say "Good evening," or his name, but his body shook violently like a victim of St. Vitus Dance and his teeth chattered so uncontrollably he could not make a sound. The man at the door took in the full measure of his shaking visitor, then stepped back to let him in.

"Jean! Jean!" He turned to direct his voice up the stairs before motioning ^{the visitor} ~~Frank~~ to the sofa.

"My name is Locke, Reverend John Locke. Yours?"

"Frank. Frank Money."

^{Locke looked up and away from bare feet to the clamped collar.}
 "You from down the street? At that hospital?"

Frank nodded while trying to rub life back into his fingers.

Reverend Locke grunted. "You lucky. They sell a lot of bodies out of there."

"Sell?"

"Uh huh. To the medical ~~college~~ ^{school}."

Locke fiddled with the door's lock, re-securing it.

"What for?"

"Doctors need to work on the poor dead so they can help the live rich."

"John, stop." Jean Locke came down the stairs tightening the belt of her robe. "That's just foolishness."

"This is my wife," said Locke. "And while she's sweet as honey, she's also wrong."

"Evening, ma'am. I'm sorry to..." Frank stood.

She cut him off. "No need for that. Keep your seat," she said and disappeared into the kitchen.

Frank did as told. Except for the absence of wind, the house was hardly less chilly than outside, and the plastic slip covers stretched taught over the sofa did not help.

"Where you headed, brother?" asked Locke. He was still standing with his hands behind his back.

"Georgia."

"You don't say. That's quite a ways. Does Brother Money have any?" Locke smiled at his little wit.

"Had some when they picked me up," Frank answered, although he could not remember how much Lily had handed him.

"But it's gone now, right?" Locke squinted. "Police looking for you?"

"No." said Frank. "No, sir. They just hustled me up and put me in the crazy ward." He folded his hands before his mouth and blew warm air on them. "I don't think they brought any charges."

"You wouldn't know if they did."

Jean Locke returned with a basin of cold water. "Put your feet in here. It's cold but you don't want them to heat up too fast."

Frank sank his feet into the water, sighing "Thanks."

"What'd they get you for? The police." Locke asked.

What indeed. It was beyond him. He couldn't explain it to himself, let alone someone else. Was he screaming? Hollering at some passerby, some schoolchildren? Was he banging his head on a cement wall or hiding behind trees in somebody's back yard?

"Acting up," he said. "Something like that."

"How long you been back?"

Frank raised his head. "How'd you know? A year, about."

Locke shook his head and was about to speak when Jean came back with a cup and a plate of crackers. "It's just hot water with lots of salt in it," she said.

Frank sipped and then gulped down the rest. When Jean brought him more, her husband said, "Jean, ^{look and} go see what's in the poor box."

"He needs shoes, too, John."

There were none to spare, so they put four pair of socks and some ripped galoshes next to the sofa.

"Get some sleep, brother. You got a rocky journey ahead and I don't just mean Georgia."

Frank fell asleep between a wool blanket and ^{the} plastic slipcovers and dreamed a terrible dream that ended in fire. He woke to the smell of toast and biting sunlight. It took a while, longer than it should have, to register where he was. The residue of two days' drugging was leaving but slowly. Wherever he was, he was grateful the dazzling sunlight did not hurt his head. He sat up and noticed socks folded neatly on the rug. Then he heard murmurs from another room. Staring at the socks, it all came into

focus: the hospital escape, the snow run, finally Reverend Locke.

So he was ready, back in the real world when Locke came in and

four hours of sleep felt,
asked how he ~~had~~ slept.

heaven
"Like a log," said Frank.

Locke showed him where the bathroom was and placed

shaving kit and hairbrush on the sink edge. Shod and cleaned up,

Sat down at the enamel topped table and
Frank [^]ate a breakfast of oatmeal and over-buttered toast. ^{IN} ~~On~~ the *middle of*
[^]table lay three one-dollar bills and a wash of coins. *the* ^(over) [^]

"Seventeen dollars," said Locke. "There is a bus to St Louis where you can get a train to Atlanta, but when you get to St Louis, here's what you do."

He instructed Frank to get in touch with a Reverend Jessie Maynard pastor of a Baptist church on tk street, and that he would call ahead and tell him to look out for another one.

"Another one?"

It could have been a poker pot,
except ~~for the~~ ^{it seemed far more} of hard won. ~~Like~~
The dimes slipped from small coin purses;
the nickels reluctantly given up by
children who had other (sweeter) plans
for them; the dollar bills representing
the generosity of a whole family.

"Well, you not the first by a long shot. An integrated army is integrated misery. You all go fight, come back, they treat you like dogs. Change that. They treat dogs better."

Frank stared at him, but didn't say anything. The army hadn't treated him so bad. It wasn't their fault he went ape-shit every now and then. As a matter of fact the discharge doctors had been thoughtful and kind, telling him the craziness would leave in time. They knew all about it, but assured him it would pass. Just stay away from alcohol, they said. Which he didn't. Couldn't. Until he met Lily.

Locke handed Frank the flap ^{for N from} of an envelope with Maynard's address and warned him to cross the river into East St. Louis as fast as he could. That Maynard had a big congregation and could offer more help than his own small flock.

Jean had packed six cheese sandwiches and three oranges into a grocery bag, handed it to him along with a watch cap.

Frank put on the cap, thanked her and, peering into the bag, asked, "How long a trip is it?"

"Don't matter," said Locke. "You'll be grateful for every bite since you won't be able to sit down at any bus stop counter. Come on, now. I'll drive you."

At the ticket window, Locke converted the coins into paper money and bought Frank's ticket. Standing in front of the Greyhound's door, ^{he} Frank turned to Reverend Locke and held out his hand. As the men shook hands they held each other's eyes, saying nothing and everything, as though 'goodbye' meant what it once did: God be with you.

There were very few passengers, yet Frank dutifully sat in the last seat, trying to shrink his 6' 3" body and holding the sandwich bag close. Through the windows the bleak winter landscape became more melancholy as the sun brightened the bare trees, the lonesome houses with little red wagons upside down in the snow-mushed yards. Only the 1952 trucks looked alive. As he mused

about what it might be like in those houses, he could imagine nothing at all. Again, as was almost always the case when he was alone and sober, whatever the surroundings, he saw a boy pushing his entrails back in, holding them in his palms like a fortune's teller's globe shattering with bad news; or he heard a boy with only the bottom half of his face intact, the lips calling mama. And he was stepping over them, around them to stay alive, to keep his own face from dissolving, his own guts under that oh so thin cover of flesh.

They never went away, these pictures, or others even worse.

Except in sleep, sometimes, in a liquored stupor, perhaps. Only with Lily, whom he'd left behind, had the pictures faded, moved behind a screen in his brain, yes, but waiting, waiting and accusing.

Why didn't you help him? Pull him along the way you did Mike?

And all that killing you did afterwards? Women running, dragging children along? And that old one-legged man on a crutch hobbling at the edge of the road so as not to slow down the other, swifter ones? You blew a hole in his head because it would make up for

the frosted urine on Mike's pants and avenge the lips calling mama. Did it? Did it work? And the girls. What did they ever do to you to deserve what you did to them? All unasked questions multiplying like mould in the shadows of the photographs he saw.

There was no love from Jessie Maynard. ^{in tk} Help, yes. But the contempt was glacial. The Reverend was devoted to the needy, apparently, but only if they were properly clothed and not a young hale, 6'3" veteran. He kept Frank on the back porch near the driveway where a green Cadillac lurked, and smiled knowingly as he said, by way of apology, "My daughters are inside the house." It was an insult tax levied on the suppliant for an overcoat, sweater and five ten-dollar bills.

Desperation to get to Georgia increased his anxiety about whether he would have another incident: uncontrollable, suspicious, destructive and illegal. It took a while, but now he could tell when it was coming. ^{it happened} The first time he was quiet, just sitting on a bus next to a brightly dressed woman. Her flowered skirt was a world's

worth of color. Her blouse a loud red. Frank watched the flowers at the hem of her skirt blackening and her red blouse draining of color until it was white as milk. Then everybody, everything. Outside the window—trees, sky, a boy on a scooter, grass, hedges. All color gone like a black and white movie screen. He didn't yell then because he thought something bad was happening to his eyes. Bad, but fixable. He wondered if this was how dogs or cats or wolves saw the world. At the next stop he got off and walked toward a Chevron station, its black flames shooting out from the V. He wanted to get into the bathroom, look in the mirror to see if he had an eye infection, but the sign on the door stopped him. The sun hurt him. Its mean light drove him to look for shade. Still he didn't shout, didn't smash anything, didn't accost strangers. That came later when the pain wouldn't stop nor the fury. Now he ^{if the signs gave notice,} ~~can~~ could tell when it ^{ed} ~~was~~ starting and hurry up and hide.

Sitting on the train, the rocking and singing rails soothed him into sleep so sound he missed the beginning of the riot, but not its

end. He woke to the sobbing of a young woman being comforted by white-jacketed waiters. One of them nestled a pillow behind her head; another gave her a stack of linen napkins for her tears and the blood pouring from her nose. Next to her, looking away, was her silent, seething husband—his face a skull of shame and its partner, rigid anger.

When a porter passed by, Frank touched his arm, asking "What happened?"

"You didn't see that?"

"No. What was it?"

"That there is the husband. He got off at the stop to buy some coffee or something back there." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "The owner or customers or both kicked him out.

Actually. Put their feet in his butt and knocked him down, kicked some more and when his lady came to help, she got a rock thrown in her face. We got them back in the car, but the crowd kept the

yelling up till we pulled away. Look," he said. "See that?" He pointed to egg yolks, not sliding now but stuck like phlegm to the window.

"Anybody report to the conductor?" Frank asked him.

"You crazy?"

"Probably."

The porter, whose name tag said Taylor, chuckled. "You want a shot? I got some Johnny Red in my case."

"Yeah. Oh, yeah."

Frank's taste buds, uninterested in cheese sandwiches or fruit, came alive at the mention of whiskey. Just a shot. Just enough to settle and sweeten the world. No more.

The wait seemed long and just when Frank was convinced the porter had forgotten, Taylor returned with a teacup, saucer and napkin. Johnny Red trembled invitingly in the thick white cup.

"Enjoy," said Taylor, then rocked along the aisle to the sway of the train.

The abused couple whispered to each other, she softly, pleadingly; he with urgency. He will beat her when they get home, thought Frank. And who wouldn't? It's one thing to be publically humiliated. A man could move on from that. What was intolerable was the witness of a woman, a wife, who not only saw it, but had dared to try to rescue, rescue! him. He couldn't protect himself and he couldn't protect her either, as the rock in her face proved. She would have to pay for that. Over and over again.

insert

KOREA, HOSPITALS, AT TABLE AND FROM CERTAIN GARBAGE CANS. NOTHING, HOWEVER, COMPARES TO THE FOOD PANTRY IN TK. I REMEMBER STANDING IN LINE AT CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER WAITING FOR A TIN PLATE OF DRYHARD DISCS, ALREADY SHOWING GREEN, AND PICKLED PIGS' FEET. IT WAS THERE THAT MAMA HEARD THE WOMAN AHEAD OF HER EXPLAIN TO THE VOLUNTEER HOW TO SPELL AND

PRONOUNCE HER NAME. MAMA SAID IT WAS THE SWEETEST
THING AND THE SOUND OF THE NAME WAS LIKE MUSIC
AMIDST THE ARGUE AND HEAT OF THE CROWD. X WEEKS
LATER WHEN HER BABY, DELIVERED ON A MATTRESS IN
REVEREND BAILEY'S CHURCH BASEMENT, TURNED OUT TO BE

MAMA WAS PREGNANT WHEN WE WALKED OUT OF TEXAS.

SOME FAMILIES HAD TRUCKS OR CARS AND LOADED ALL THEY
COULD. OTHERS, LIKE MINE, WALKED FOR MILES UNTIL MR.

TK CAME BACK FOR US ^{after} ^{ing} HAVING DROPPED HIS PEOPLE AT THE
STATE LINE. MY SHOE SOLE FLAPPED UNTIL PAPA TIED IT UP

WITH HIS OWN SHOE LACE. I HAVE EATEN TRASH IN JAIL,
KOREA, HOSPITALS, AT TABLE AND FROM CERTAIN GARBAGE
CANS. NOTHING, HOWEVER, COMPARES TO THE FOOD

PANTRY IN TK . I REMEMBER STANDING IN LINE AT CHURCH

OF THE REDEEMER WAITING FOR A TIN PLATE OF DRY, HARD

^{cheese}
~~BISCUITS~~ ALREADY SHOWING GREEN, AND PICKLED PIGS'

FEET. IT WAS THERE THAT MAMA HEARD THE WOMAN AHEAD

OF HER EXPLAIN TO THE VOLUNTEER HOW TO SPELL AND

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THING AND THE SOUND OF THE NAME WAS LIKE MUSIC
AMIDST THE ARGUE AND HEAT OF THE CROWD. X WEEKS
LATER WHEN HER BABY, DELIVERED ON A MATTRESS IN
REVEREND BAILEY'S CHURCH BASEMENT, TURNED OUT TO BE
A GIRL MAMA NAMED HER YCIDRA, TAKING CARE TO
PRONOUNCE ALL THREE SYLLABLES. EVERYBODY ELSE CALLS
HER 'SEE'. I ALWAYS THOUGHT IT WAS NICE, HOW SHE
THOUGHT ABOUT THE NAME, TREASURED IT. AS FOR ME, NO
SUCH MEMORIES. I AM NAMED FRANK AFTER MY FATHER'S
BROTHER. LUTHER IS MY FATHER'S NAME; IDA MY MOTHER'S.
THE ONLY INTERESTING PART IS OUR LAST NAME. MONEY.
OF WHICH WE HAD NONE.

Ycidra

A mean grandmother is one of the worst things a girl could have. Mamas are supposed to spank and rule you so you grow up knowing right from wrong. Grandmothers, even when they've been hard on their own children, are forgiving and generous to the grandchildren. *True?*

See got out of the zinc tub and took a few dripping steps to the pot belly stove where a kettle of hot water hissed. She poured it into the cooling tub water and sat back down. *in it* She wanted to linger in the tub while a soft afternoon light encouraged thoughts to tumble. Regrets, excuses, righteousness, false memory and future plans mixed together or stood like soldiers in line. Well, that's the way grandmothers should be, she thought, but for little Ycidra Money it wasn't like that at all. Because Mama and Papa worked from before sunrise til dark they never knew that Miss Noella poured water instead of milk over the shredded wheat *See* and her brother ate for breakfast. Nor that when they had stripes and welts on their legs they were cautioned to lie, to say they got them by

playing out by the stream where brambles and huckleberry vines
 grew. Even grandfather Salem was silent. Frank said it was
 because he was scared Miss Noella would leave him the way his
 first two wives did. Noella, who had collected a five hundred
 dollar life insurance payment upon her first husband's death, was a
 serious catch for an old unemployable man. Besides, she ³⁹owned
 her house. ^{So valuable to} She was ~~the third wife of~~ Salem Money ^{had a Ford and} so he never
 made a sound when the salt pork was halved for the two of them
 and all the children got was its flavor. Well, yes, the grandparents
 were doing them a big favor letting some homeless relatives live in
 their house after the family got run out of Texas. She herself was
 born on the road, which Noella took as a very bad sign for the new
 baby's future. Decent women, she said, delivered babies at home,
 in a bed attended to by Christian women who knew what to do.
 Although only whores went to hospitals, at least they had a roof
 overhead when the baby came. Being born in the street, as she put
 it, was prelude to a worthless life. ^{year they were able to rent a}

The house was big enough for two, maybe three, but not for grandparents plus Papa, Mama, Uncle Frank, and two children. For a year ^{See} See slept with her parents on a pallet on the floor; Uncle Frank in two chairs put together; little Frank slept on the back porch, either in the hammock or the slanty wooden swing, even when it rained. Her parents, Luther and Ida, worked two jobs each—Ida picking cotton in the day and sweeping the lumber shacks in the evening. Luther and Uncle Frank were field workers and very happy to have jobs since most of the young men around there had enlisted in the war and when it was over didn't come back to work cotton or lumber. Then Uncle Frank enlisted too. He got in the navy as a cook and glad about that because he didn't have to handle explosives. But his ship sank anyway and Miss Noella hung the Gold star in the window as though she, and not ^{one of} ^{'s} a Salem ex-
^{wife} wife, was the honorable mother who had lost a son. Ida's job at the lumber yard gave her the asthma that finally killed her, but it paid off because at the end of that year they were able to rent a

place from Old Man Shepherd who drove in from Jeffrey every Saturday morning to collect the rent.

^GSee remembered the relief and the pride they all took to be in their own house with their own garden and their own laying hens. There they could let Mr. Haywood put them on his monthly list of people who needed supplies from the general store in Jeffrey. Sometimes he would bring back chewing gum and mint balls, free, for the children. Jeffrey had the sidewalks, running water, stores and a bank and a school. Lotus was separate, with no sidewalks or indoor plumbing, just houses and two churches, one of which a teacher used for reading and arithmetic. ^GSee thought it would have been better if there were more books to read—^{NOT}just Grimm's Fairy Tales, ^{AND}a book of Bible passages for young people.

That, she believed, was the reason she married a rat. If she hadn't been so ignorant living in a no-count, not-even-a-town, place with only chores, church, and nothing else to do, she would have known better. Watched, watched, watched by every grown up

And ordered by every mother.

29

from sunrise to sunset. Come here, girl, don't you know how to sew? Yes mam. Then why is your hem hanging like that? Yes, mam. I mean no Mam. Is that lipstick on your mouth? No mam. What then? Cherries, mam, I ate some....Cherries, my foot. Wipe your mouth. Come down from that tree, you hear me? Tie your shoes, put down that rag doll and pick up a broom, uncross your legs ^{go weed the garden} don't you talk back to me. When ^GSee and a few other girls reached fourteen and started talking about boys, ^GSee was prevented from any real flirtation because of ^{her} big brother, Frank. The boys knew she was off limits because of him. That's why when Frank reached eighteen, enlisted and left town, she fell for what Noella called the first thing she saw wearing trousers instead of overalls.

His name was Principal but he called himself Prince. A visitor from Atlanta to his aunt's house, he was a good-looking new face with shiny, thin-sole shoes. All the girls were impressed with his big

huge book before walking back to her parents' house. Frank had

city accent and what they believed was his knowledge and experience. See most of all.

Splashing water on her shoulders, she wondered why she didn't at least ask the aunt he was visiting why he was sent to the backwoods instead of spending the winter in the big, bad city. But feeling the space where her brother had been, she had no defense. That's the bad thing, she thought, about having a smart, tough brother close at hand to take care of and protect you—you are slow to develop your own brain muscle. Besides, Prince loved himself so deeply, ^{so} completely, it was impossible to doubt his conviction. So if Prince said she was pretty, she believed him. If he said at fourteen she was a woman, she believed that too. And if he said I want you for myself, it was Noella who said, Not unless y'all are legal.

Whatever legal meant. Ycidra didn't even have a birth certificate and the courthouse was over a hundred miles away. So they had Reverend Pike come over and bless them, write their names in a huge book before walking back to her parents' house. Frank had

enlisted so his bed was where they slept and where the great thing people warned about or giggled about took place. It was not so much painful as dull. ^G See thought it would get better later. Better turned out to be simply more and while the ^{its} quantity increased, its ^{real} pleasure lay in its brevity.

There was no job ^{in let's} Prince allowed himself to take so he took her to Atlanta. ^G See looked forward to a shiny life in the city and when, after a few weeks of ogling at water coming from the turn of a spigot, inside toilets free of flies, street lights shining more regularly than the sun and as lovely as fireflies, women in high heels and gorgeous hats trotting to church two, sometimes three ^{the beautiful dress her husband bought her and} times a day—after ~~those~~ [^] weeks of dumbfounded delight, she learned that Principal had married her for an automobile.

Noella had bought a used station wagon from Shepherd the rent man and, since Salem couldn't drive, Noella gave her old 1939 Ford to Luther and Ida—with the caution that they give it back if the station wagon broke down. A few times Luther let Prince use

the Ford

it on errands: trips to the post office in Jeffrey for mail to or from wherever Frank was stationed, first Kentucky, then Korea. Once he drove to town for throat medicine for Ida when her breathing problems got worse. Having easy access to the Ford suited everyone because Prince washed away the eternal road dust that floured it; changed plugs, oil and never gave lifts to the boys who begged to join him in the car. It was natural for Luther to agree to let the couple drive it to Atlanta, since they promised to return it in a few weeks.

Never happened. She was all alone now, sitting in a zinc tub defying heat with warm water while Prince was cruising around with his thin-sole shoes pressing the gas pedal in Chicago, for all she knew. When Prince left her to her own devices, See rented a room on a quiet street, a room with kitchen privileges and use of a washing machine. Her friend, Thelma, helped her get a job dishwashing at Bobby's Rib House and fused the friendship with blunt counsel.

"No fool, like a country fool. Why don't you go back to your folks?"

"Without the car?" Lord, thought ^CSee. Noella might have her arrested.

Ycidra agreed with Thelma, but more than anything she wanted desperately to talk to Frank. Her letters to him were about weather and Lotus gossip. Devious. But she knew that if she could see him, tell him, he would not laugh at her, quarrel, or condemn. He would, as always, protect her from a bad situation. Like the time he, Mike and some other boys were playing soft ball in a field. See sat nearby, leaning on a ^{prick} tree. Their game bored her. She glanced at the players intermittently, focused intently on the nail polish she was picking from her nails, hoping to remove it all before Noella could berate her for 'flaunting' her little hussy self. She looked up and saw Frank leaving the mound with his bat only because others were yelling. "Where you going, man?" "Hey, hey. You out?" He walked slowly away from the field and

Chestnut?

disappeared into the surrounding trees. Circling, she later learned. Suddenly he was behind the tree she leaned against swinging his bat twice into the legs of a man she had not even noticed standing behind the tree. Mike and the others ran to see what she had not. Then they all ran, Frank dragging her by the arm—not even looking back. She had questions: “What happened? Who was that?” The boys didn’t answer. They simply muttered curses. Hours later, Frank explained. The man was ^{nt} from Lotus, he told her, and had been hiding behind the tree flashing her. When See pressed her brother to define “flashing”, and he did so, she began to tremble. Frank put one hand on top of her head, the other at her nape. His fingers, like balm, stopped the trembling and the chill that accompanied it. She followed Frank’s advice always: recognized poisonous berries, learned to shout when in snake territory, the medicinal uses of spider webs. His instructions were specific, his cautions clear.

But he never warned her about rats.

Four barnyard swallows gathered on the lawn below. Politely equidistant from each other they peck-searched through blades of drying grass. Then, as if summoned, all four flew up in a tree.

The quiet seemed to slither, then boom. Its presence more theatrical than noise. It was ^{like} the quiet of the Lotus house afternoon and

evening as she and her brother figured out what to eat, do or talk about. Their parents worked sixteen hours and were hardly there.

^GSee, towel-wrapped, went to the window and raised it to just below the place where the screen was torn. Remembering how

unwelcome drop-in visits to her grandparents' house were, unless

Noella needed them for chores. Salem was uninspiring since he was mute about everything except his meals. Noella the wicked

witch. Frank and ^GSee, like some forgotten) Hansel and Gretel,

locked hands as they navigated the silence and tried to imagine a future.

Standing at the window wrapped in a scratchy towel, ^GSee felt her heart breaking. If Frank were there he would once more touch

the back of her neck with four fingers, his thumb ^{Just under her ear?} stroking her nape.

Don't cry, said the fingers; the welts will disappear. Don't cry;

Mama is tired; she didn't mean it. Don't cry, don't cry girl; I'm

right here. But he wasn't there or anywhere near. In the

photograph he'd sent home, a smiling warrior in a uniform holding

a rifle, he looked as though he belonged to something else,

something beyond and unlike Georgia. And there she stood, ^{alone in the} her

body already throwing off the good the ^{tub} soak had done and

beginning to sweat. She towed the damp under her breasts then

wiped perspiration from her forehead. She raised the window

above the screen tear. The swallows were back bringing with them

a light breeze and an odor of sage growing at the edge of the

yard.

Cooled she unhooked the blue and white dress, Principal had bought for her the 2nd day once.

Dressed, finally, she dragged the tub through the kitchen and

out the back door. Slowly, carefully she rationed the bath water

onto the wilted grass; a little ^{bucket full} here, a little there taking care to let her

feet but not her dress get wet.

*in Atlanta. 11/5
Ray arrived*

*Ray's silky touch still
pleased her as did the star
of blue dahlias on a white background*

(over)
^

^{needed to see}
~~Back in the house, she decided to visit~~ Thelma, her upstairs neighbor. ~~She opened the door without knocking~~ and found her friend at the kitchen sink.
"I saw you out there." "You think sloshing dirty water is going to green up that yard?"
^{Thelma didn't turn around.}

"Can't hurt."

^{Thelma wiped her hands.}
"Yes, it can." "Mosquitoes be doing their blood dance the whole night long. All they need is a smell of water."

"Sorry."

^{Thelma wiped her hands and patted her apron pockets for Camels. Lighting one she exhaled up and down.}
"I don't doubt that. That's a pretty dress. Where'd you get it?"
^{Thelma led them into the living room.}

"Prince bought it for me when we first moved here."

^{snorted.}
"Prince." Thelma ~~sucked her teeth~~. "You mean Frog. I've seen no-counts by the truckload. Never saw anybody more useless

than him. Do you even know where he is?"

~~Both women~~ plapped down on ~~Thelma's~~ ^{the} sofa.

"No."

^

37

She sat at the table and thought
about her situation: today was Monday;
she had 6 dollars; rent due at month's end
was twice that. ^{next} payday Friday she would
get 8 dollars. Fifteen dollars total
minus 12 left her three dollars
for every thing else: sanitary napkins,
a movie, shoe repair, bus fare. Fortunately
~~the meals were~~ ^{meals were} on her job.
Salutar: ~~another as other job.~~
more work.

"A what?"

"They got a cook-housekeeper, but they want a maid-type person to help the husband. He's a doctor. Nice people."

"You mean like a nurse?"

"No. A helper. I don't know ^{bandages} and iodine I guess.

His office is in the house, the woman said. So you'd live in."

She said the pay was good as any, but since it was rent free - ~~that~~ ^{that} made all the difference."

^{Williams} Sarah, the housekeeper, opened the door. She took Cee's shopping bag and smiled. "Step ^{on} in. The doctor's wife will be down shortly."

"Thanks you. Can I take off these shoes for a second?"

(Sarah laughed) "You walked from the bus stop?" "Who ever invented high heels was trying to kill us. Can you tell me what all I have to do?" (over)

She'll tell you ^{same} ~~But~~ the doctor ^{himself} ~~will~~
tell you what you really need to know.

After a glass of cold water, a bathroom
freshening, Cee was led into a
living room ^{that seemed to her} more beautiful than
a movie house. Cool, plum colored
velvet, filtered light through ^{heavy} lace
curtains. Mrs. Scott ~~feather~~ ^{rested}
^{her hands resting} on a tiny pillow; her ankles crossed,
nodded and knotted Cee to sit.

Without even lifting an arm Cee ^{suspected} ~~could~~
~~smell~~ the ^{small} sour in her armpits ^{was}
her employer.

Born in Atlanta

No Mam. Little place South, called Lotos

Any children?

No Mam

Married?

No Mam

"You want to?"

"No."

"Well thank the Lord for that."

"I need a job, Thelma."

"You got one. Did you quit Bobby's?"

"No. But I need something better. Better paying. After I pay the rent I have to eat at the restaurant, whether I want to or not."

"Bobby's food is the best. You can't eat anywhere better."

"I know, but I need a real job where I can save. And no, I'm not going back to Lotus."

"Well, ^{just might be} ^{you in luck} just so happens I heard about something couple ⁶ weeks ago ¹ ~~when I was~~ in the beauty shop."

"What?"

"A couple in tk—just outside the city—^{they} need a second."

Can't
fault you
for that.
Your family's
crazy.
Mean,
maybe. Not
crazy.
Heck.
They named
you ~~what~~
Ycidra.
That is mean.
"Thelma?"
"Ok. Ok."

Can't'd from back of p. 39

What church affiliation? Any?

Assembly of God in Lagos. But, I--

They jump around? Assemblies of God
Mam?

Never mind. You'll be assisting
the doctor. Are you a ^{high school} graduate?

No Mam.

Can you read?

Oh Yes mam.

Count?

I worked a cash register.

That's not what I asked you

I can count, Ma'am.

Well you may not need to. I don't really
understand or care to my husband's work -
Experiments & so on. Sarah will show
you your room & introduce you to the doctor

NAME, FIRST AND LAST, THEY SCREAM WITH LAUGHTER AND SAY: THERE AIN'T NO SUCH THING. ALL MONEY IS FAKE. NO END OF PLEASANT TALK AFTER THAT AND IT'S ENOUGH TO KEEP OUR FRIENDSHIP GOING WAY AFTER IT'S DRIED UP JUST SO THEY CAN MAKE LAME JOKES: HEY, MONEY, HOW YOU MAKING IT? HEY, MONEY! GOT SOME? MONEY, COME ON OVER HERE. YOU OWE ME.

TRUTHFULLY, OTHER THAN A FEW GLIMMER OPPORTUNITIES, I'VE KNOWN ONLY FOUR WOMEN. THREE OF THEM WERE SERIOUS RELATIONSHIPS AND I LIKED THE SMALL-BREAKABLE THING INSIDE EACH ONE. WHATEVER THEIR PERSONALITY,

WOMEN ARE EAGER TO TALK TO ME WHEN THEY HEAR MY LAST NAME. MONEY? THEY CHUCKLE AND ASK THE SAME QUESTION: WHO NAMED ME THAT OR IF ANYBODY DID. IF I MADE IT UP TO MAKE MYSELF FEEL IMPORTANT OR WAS I A GAMBLER OR THIEF OR SOME OTHER KIND OF CROOK THEY SHOULD WATCH OUT FOR? WHEN I TELL THEM MY WHOLE

NAME, FIRST AND LAST, THEY SCREAM WITH LAUGHTER AND SAY: THERE AIN'T NO SUCH THING. ALL MONEY IS FAKE. NO END OF PLEASANT TALK AFTER THAT AND IT'S ENOUGH TO KEEP OUR FRIENDSHIP GOING WAY AFTER IT'S DRIED UP JUST SO THEY CAN MAKE LAME JOKES: HEY, MONEY, HOW YOU MAKING IT? HEY, MONEY! GOT SOME? MONEY, COME ON OVER HERE. YOU OWE ME.

TRUTHFULLY, OTHER THAN A FEW QUICK OPPORTUNITIES, I'VE KNOWN ONLY FOUR WOMEN. THREE OF THEM WERE SERIOUS RELATIONSHIPS AND I LIKED THE SMALL BREAKABLE THING INSIDE EACH ONE. WHATEVER THEIR PERSONALITY, SMARTS OR LOOKS, SOMETHING SOFT LAY INSIDE EACH. LIKE THE BREAST OF A BIRD'S BONE, SHAPED AND CHOSEN TO WISH ON. A LITTLE V, THINNER THAN BONE AND BARELY HINGED, THAT I COULD BREAK WITH A FOREFINGER IF I WANTED TO, BUT NEVER DID. WANT TO, I MEAN. KNOWING IT WAS THERE, HIDING FROM ME, WAS ENOUGH.

IT WAS THE FOURTH WOMAN WHO CHANGED
EVERYTHING. IN HER COMPANY THE LITTLE WISHBONE V
TOOK UP RESIDENCE IN MY OWN CHEST AND MADE ITSELF AT
HOME. IT WAS HER FOREFINGER THAT SCARED ME AND IF IT
WASN'T FOR THAT LETTER, I'D STILL BE HANGING FROM HER
APRON STRINGS. SHE HAD NO COMPETITION EXCEPT FOR THE
HORSES, A MAN'S FOOT AND YCIDRA TREMBLING UNDER MY
ARM.

Lily

The men were nicer than the women. At least they called her
by her name and didn't mind if their costume was off or a bit
stained. The women called her 'girl', as in "Where's the girl?"
"Girl, where's my Pond' cleanser?" Plus they had fits if their
costumes weren't perfect.

Lily's resentment was mild because her entry costume was
a financial promotion from simply "beach babe" and she got to

Lily

The ^{actors} men were nicer than the ^{actresses} women. At least they ~~called~~ called her by her name and didn't mind if their costume was off or a bit stained. The women called her 'girl', as in "Where's the girl?" "Girl, where's my Pond's cleanser?" Plus they had fits if their costumes weren't perfect.

Lily's resentment was mild because seamstress/wardrobe was a financial promotion from simply ^{janitress} ~~housekeeper~~ and she got to
cleaner

show off the sewing skills her mother had taught her: slip stitch, blanket stitch, chain, back, yo-yo, shank button and flat. In addition, Ray Stone, the director, was polite to her. He produced two sometimes three plays a season at the Skylight Studio and taught acting classes the rest of the time. So, ^{small and} poor as it was, the theater was as busy as a hive all year. In between productions and after classes, the place hummed with intense argument and sweat misted the foreheads of Mr. Stone and his students. Lily thought they were more animated then than on stage. She couldn't help overhearing these quarrels, but she didn't understand the anger that wasn't about a scene or how to say some lines. Now that the Skylight was shut, Mr. Stone arrested, and she out of a job it was clear she should have listened closely.

It must have been the play 'TK'
The visit from ^{two} ~~several~~ men in snap brim hats

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