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We have a proprietary ink formula that I developed really early on so that everything would be brighter. And now our licensees have to sign a confidentiality agreement. It's typical of a four-color process, but we use a special mixture to make those colors. It's a *secret*.

—Lisa Frank

And how will our dreams, if we manage to go to sleep, suggest the next practical step? Which would you say it was: wild, or elegant, and why? Now as I come to the end of my rope, I noticed the color is incredibly beautiful. And that embossed box.

—John Cage, *On Robert Rauschenberg*

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Chromatic

God prayed for rooftops and got the alphabet. Houses were to come first. Then umlauts. Then love. Instead, it starts with After and follows with Before. If ancestry is a tracing back, forestry must be a going forward. On a test: If (you pin a photograph of Artaud to a tree), then (matrimony). God watches while you rearrange your desires from Aching to Zero. There are _____ species that haven't been named. If we do not name them, there will never be a record of their eyes. If I found I could love a child, I'd call her Olive, I'd eat her before the world ends. My mother is a house. She came first. Then gunshots. Then love. God is when you cry at your body. God is what the president calls *a lo mejor*. If my name starts with M, I am sisters with Morose, Moonrise, Machine. I remember when giving birth to animals meant a future of luck and hauntings. *Haunting*: an object that acts out in terror. *Memory*: an emotion made of string. God calls you terrible names. You still show him your noose. Loss is what comes after xylophone. Xylophone is how we strike our longings into sounds, how our violence sings.

T h e L i n c o l n C h a i r

President Lincoln sits on a chair in the middle of a field on the day that he is murdered. He sits quietly and rubs his forehead with his hand. After several hours, President Lincoln stands up and walks into the forest. John Wilkes Booth arrives to find the chair empty, and so continues walking through the clearing. Mary Todd Lincoln sits on the chair in the middle of the field, engrossed in the movement of waves across the tall grasses. John Wilkes Booth arrives and fires his revolver into Mary Todd Lincoln's head and continues walking through the clearing. William Tecumseh Sherman sits on the toppled chair in the middle of the field, engrossed in the movement of fire across the tall Georgians. John Wilkes Booth arrives and ignites a blaze into William Tecumseh Sherman's head and continues striding through the clearing. Annie Oakley sits on the stool in the middle of the field, engrossed in the playing cards she shuffles. John Wilkes Booth arrives and puts a sure shot into Annie Oakley's head and continues to walk through the clearing as the cards flutter down. Charlie Chaplin sits on the cane in the middle of the chair, enraged at the movement of tramps across the field. John Wilkes Booth arrives and, with perfect comedic timing, fires his

revolver through Charlie Chaplin's hat and into his head and continues walking through the clearing. Mae West sits on the sofa in the middle of the field, engrossed in the movement of red lipstick across her face. John Wilkes Booth arrives and applies his revolver into Mae West's head and never ceases to walk through the clearing. Gerald Ford sits on the throne in the middle of the field, engrossed in the economic crises moving across the tall masses. John Wilkes Booth arrives and pardons his revolver's blast into Gerald Ford's head and continues limping through the clearing. A shopkeeper from Cleveland, a rabbi, a lawyer from Australia, Crispin Glover, Carrie Fisher—they all fill the same space on the chair in the middle of the place, engrossed by the things that happen after the other things happen. John Wilkes Booth arrives and arrives again, he fires and fires again into the heads of the shopkeeper from Cleveland and the rabbi and the lawyer from Australia and Crispin Glover and Carrie Fisher and continues walking and walking through the clearing. Then come men and women and children from Spain and from Nepal. They come from the bush, from the desert, from the city. One by one, everyone sits on the thing in the location of the place, engaging one thing while another thing happens, as a human performs an irrevocable action into the symbolic operations center of the person. Finally, John Wilkes Booth sits on the chair in the middle of the field, takes a moment to watch the movement of waves across the tall grasses, and then fires his revolver into

John Wilkes Booth's head. President Lincoln returns to the chair, the last man, and watches the waves move across the grasses in the field. His head aches. He lights a pipe; the smoke rises up and up and up. The world is wide and strange and empty.

L e a p

At the bottom of a hill a white tabby still jumps, is always jumping. No, not always, just is. Now and is then, is later. Wind crawls down the hill, nestles the cat, caresses the rattlesnake who loves the cat, connects both into a creature that rises above the cedars and pushes into the houses which frustrate the sweet descent of this hill, which can no longer be there, a collapsing, sweeping presence, feeling its way toward you. A leaf presses upward, acts as a chant for creatures with no voice, because I said nothing then and say so little now. The cat can do naught but leap, the snake coil, and the leaf describe, unknowing, the exact trajectory of then into today, into Oakland, into my hands' chance.

D e s i g n

Mandrake, blood, milk, diagrams, geometric figures, circles, pentacles, stone and wood, symbols and symbols and symbols, some cups and some rods, alphabets, ash, purified water, interdigitated scraps of parchment, a cat, a rat, and a snake, circles, wands, salt, numbers, thumbs, a cauldron or saucer, a ghost, petrified wood, books, programs, fern seed, rabbits feet, eggs of snakes, and so much design to arrive where we find ourselves now: near an ocean, in a city overlooking a church, under a sky which in summer makes the roofline look like great mountains in the distance, cold and vast as a glacier as the wind, within a skein of streets and commerce and information slick with its own newness, and finally by ourselves.

Clamor

Try to distinguish one force from another, or envision a civilization that is connected to a sound. Were a single red bird to enter, would its information be added or transmuted? The word “bright” opens a door for the bird, a lens to iris into a room of flowers, into a swelter of bodies thrumming against a dynamic they cannot name but nonetheless resist. Hope, or whatever stands in its place, emanates in the corner as fire, matches the bird for color, competes for sound and adoration, and were we to see it, we still would not hear its voice or the bird’s—we would write of it, paint it, and continue heroically to make something.

G e s t u r e

A small piece of nothing crawls into the corner. It is at the end of its line; this is where it lives, where we live, the only place where existence will shrug its shoulders and bear whatever weight we may bring. Perspective unfolds into terrible awe too fast. We've had friends who for this have fallen, who invited these vertiginous angles and edges in, coyly glancing as they walk toward the bedroom. I move my hand in your direction; my hand indicates the gulf between everything. When I love, my hand moves. If I could, I too would find a corner and wait. I would place my gaze into this painting of a snake, wisely tangled, smooth in branches. I would offer you fruit and curl up in your lap.

Chime

It's undirected. Light fades, revealing an environment clinical and unrehearsed. I step out, wondering where everyone has gone, recalling the first time you and I met. When it comes to sound, maybe you are right: there is no forever, there are no operators, only a wood floor which thrums, a family in a painting whom I have never met, a ringing that hovers like a ghost in the lone chair—yet none of these are truly themselves either. If this sound were a diagram, we would know where to explore, and when we looked up at the clouds, we would not see ships or whales or architecture—we would only see water in suspension. As the lights dim, you can almost see it.

Little Doll Africa

I

Little doll's eyelids flutter up. The room is dark. How does she know she's in a room? But as soon as she thinks this, the dark no longer feels like a room. The air in Little doll's porcelain nostrils is thick and hot and humid and reeks of decay, and about her she hears a deep hum, as if insects were murmuring about something, murmuring about her, Little doll, who in no way deserves their attention. Or are these voices some great engine pumping away, away, away, as if in the hold of a ship? Dark so dark Little doll can't see her little finger, so dark she can't imagine her broad forehead, her nose which anyway is hardly visible, her pucker, her dimpled chin. *Why so dark? What so dark? Who put me here?* Little doll wonders. Don't go into this dark, Little doll. Better be elsewhere. *But aren't I already here? So how can I leave what I don't understand? Yes yes,* sings Little doll to herself, *I'm already in it, I'm already in it.* In what? Again Little doll pauses to wonder, for she is a great wonderer, and in her way, something of a genius of

everything that Little doll is. “I would like to speak to my mother,” Little doll requests. Waits in the dark for an answer, but she only hears the pumping, the scraping, the wheezing, *great whale of breath around me, the voices of my ancestors, of all dolls who also one day woke into the dark, like me, just like Little doll, which is what I am and can only be, bereft of mom, dad only a dream, so why ask for them?* Little doll often feels on the verge of a giggle, but it almost never comes, and now doesn’t seem the right occasion. *I don’t know where I am*, she thinks again, and then thinks nothing, while within she hears her Little doll voice echoing her. And then Little doll’s eyes clack open—but weren’t they already open?—clack open again, and all around her, as she whirls to see where she is, dark Bush dolls upon dark Bush dolls wheel and swirl and whine like saws toward her.

2

Don’t just stand there, Little doll. Run! But she’s rooted to the earth, the heat, the dream, she’s stunned into disbelief, a condition not worthy of Little doll, it’s really not. Nervous, she pulls at her flannel panties, coughs—*cuff! cuff!*—into her sticky Little doll hands. “Oh my, it’s awfully hot, wherever it is I am,” she says aloud, more not to hear the horror buzzing toward her than herself, and is

all the more shocked almost out of her Little doll mind when a voice beside her replies, "Yes, it certainly is." "Wha?" says Little doll and sees dimly, as if her own porcelain skin were emitting a low-wattage glow, a doll shape beside her, one of ridges and stiff contours and a tight little mouth and an extra pair of hands attached at each wrist. "Don't you know where you are?" asks the rigid shape. "No," Little doll pants out, unable to mask the fear beneath her exasperation, "but can you tell me...?" "Africa," the doll beside her interrupts, "Africa, Africa. Don't you know that yet?" *Africa?* thinks Little doll. Yes, that's where she is. *Oh my. Africa? What am I doing here? It's a dream, it's not; it's a dream, it's not.* "It's not a dream," says Practical doll. "Not a dream?" That's right, Little doll. Listen to Practical doll. You might learn something. But Practical doll has her own worries. Here come the buzzing Bush dolls, a thousand of them or more, running on their toes, their hands outstretched, slash marks for mouths, blowing a rotten meat-scented wind before them. "We've been away too long, we're burnt in half," they chant as they rush toward Little doll and Practical doll, the latter standing in Little doll's strange green light, the former trying her best not to reveal to the other how flustered she is, never so flustered before, *but I can't show it, not Little doll, I'll meet this peculiar moment....* Run, Little doll! Run! And with a final glance back at Practical doll squealing and

crumbling under the Horror doll swarm, she runs up a hill, praying they won't follow.

3

Poor Little doll, what have you done? No sooner thought than atop the hill Africa lights up, the whole continent ablaze with morning light, the veldt's heat and scent washes over her, the trees rustle with birds and bugs and monkeys, and Little doll is sure now it's a dream, this Africa, otherwise why aren't the Bush dolls still chasing her? I could answer that if I wanted, but Little doll must explore for a moment, if she can find it, her intangible being as she squats down to pee, no more than a thimbleful but astringent in her nostrils. *There it is*, she thinks, as a point in space fades in on her mind's screen, begins to hum, that's it, but the glowpoint as quickly fades out. "*Tant pis*," Little doll says, hitching up her flannel panties. "Maybe next time." Odd that her pee leaves a green stain in the dust. *If I had my psychology books*, Little doll thinks, *I might consider the stain's aetiology, assuming it has one, but I don't have my books. I'm in Africa, not a library, after all. Of course I might be in a library or a museum, but no, I'm in Africa. The heat, the veldt, the trees and the monkeys, the nightmare behind me, the day ahead to explore all things African, and all things Little doll, too.*

How I can natter on, thinks Little doll skipping down the slope, making dust clouds with her shiny black one-strap shoes. I don't know what comes over Little doll sometimes, she's much too much for herself. *Yes, that I am*, she starts up her ditty, swinging in the heat, the sun so bright it burns away vision, *no matter, no matter, it's all mine to explore, la dee la dee*, then trips over a rock or root—*whoops!*—and stumbles smack into the arms of a giant termite. “Wha?” You can say that again, Little doll, but it won't make your situation any better. “Wha, wha, wha?” Little doll squirms and squiggles, squiggles and squirms, but Giant Termite doll won't let go, wriggles its tongue in her deepest folds and drools all over her.

4

Who would have thought, Little doll thinks (not exactly trying to make the best of a bad situation, more just doing what comes naturally to Little doll), *that insects of the order Isoptera had tongues*. Giant Termite doll may or may not have heard what Little doll thought, I can't say, only that it doesn't hesitate for a moment with its advances upon the matter, so to speak, in its hands. Its feelers slip and slide over Little doll's curves, its eyes leak tears red with hunger, its Giant Soldier Termite jaws clack before Little doll's face.

Oh, Little doll, who's to help you now? "I ur," she says, "I urr..." but that's all she can say before the jaws envelop her. *Oops*, thinks Little doll as her head vanishes into darkness, *oops and gamoosa*, whatever that means, something she must have heard in a movie, which this is not. No, this is the maw of the Giant Termite doll, who wishes upon Little doll—she's sure of it—no good. This is darkness without mind, as silent and implacable as a suicide's tongue. Think, Little doll, in all your Little doll dimness, think. And suddenly she's out again and Giant Soldier Termite doll spits and pushes her away. Precious porcelainity! Of course her carapace protected her from this white-faced pulper of woodflesh, panting and slaving in front of her—you old white monster!—who bows to Little doll, slithers off to its mound, leaving her alone and gleaming, a golden egg in the landscape, while above scream and wheel birds of prey. *Well, you're welcome to that monster who just tried to eat me*, Little doll wishes up to the birds, who pay her no notice—she's not food, not even a morsel, too tainted even for Giant Termite doll, so nothing to us in our vaultedness. Still, she feels a little exposed out here amongst the thousand termite mounds stretching out to the horizon, where the sun is spreading its last rays, reddening the east and the west. Already? *The day passes quickly here*, thinks Little doll and wonders where she might spend the night, because she certainly does not wish to reenter the

bush, thank you. Perhaps, then, in that hut over there that looks like a hat?

5

Off Little doll goes, preening and la-dee-da-ing and shaking her golden curls, if she had them, which she doesn't, only this spun-plastic mop of hair that, in a certain light—this one, for example, as the sun performs its last show of the evening—appears almost life-like. *A hut that's a hat*, she sings, *a hat that's a hut*. *With its arboreal archives and apodictic antelopes, its amulets and animism and anthill of other words beginning in "a," isn't Africa accommodating?* *A hat that's a hut*, she sings, *a hut that's a hat*, as night settles around her like a warm glove. But the hut really is a hat, she can see that, now that she stands above it, her Little doll eyes wide open. "My, my," she says, rubbing her eyes with the backs of her hands, a bit grimy, she notices, from the heat and the dust. *Must be something wrong with my perspective to have mistaken a hat for a hut. Of course it's a safari hat, anyone can see that. Look at its rounded dome, listen to it clank when I tap it. Maybe*, Little doll thinks, *I could wear it*, though obviously it's far too large for Little doll's head. She bends down and tries to lift it but can barely make it budge. *Whoof*, she puffs, and tries again, raising the rim an inch

or two, and out of the crack pops a doll tinier than Little doll. Tinier than me? That's right, Little doll. Lots of things are tinier than you. Ants, for example, or some ants, but not antelopes. Clarissa doll, too, as you see. Don't you recognize her? *Clarissa doll? Well, sort of, I mean, I think so.* "What are you doing in Africa? I mean," says Little doll, "how'd you get away from London and all? Such a big book, so small a doll." To which Clarissa doll, taking only a cursory look at her surroundings, replies that she did not "get away from" anywhere. "I am indeed here in all my extraordinary attraction, though I dare say, if I may, I'm pleased not to see anywhere Mr. Lovelace. I assure you that I have no intention to serve as a delineation of the clash of civilizations. Nor am I here to paint over or perpetuate national or racial or gender inequalities. Beyond this, as if to prove your emotion of surprise, I have no idea why I am here, certainly I'm no mistress of the dark continent, but how glad I am that Mr. Lovelace isn't near."

6

What abuse Clarissa doll must have suffered (death at least) to utter such gibberish, thinks Little doll, still astonished by what popped out from the hat. *Amazing,* she thinks, *when you come to*

think about it. Whence Clarissa doll? Why Clarissa doll? Where? But Clarissa doll, her tresses dragging over scrub and dirt, already is entering the bush. "No," Little doll shouts. "Don't go there, Clarissa doll!" Too late. She's already been swallowed up by the dark (Little doll winces at the metaphor's aptness). "Good luck, Clarissa doll," Little doll calls out, waving futilely to the doll born from a hat and a big book. I, for one, don't want to think about what awaits Clarissa doll in the bush; perhaps you shouldn't either, because now Little doll is peeking under the hat again. Should I or shouldn't I? Little doll asks herself, as if she had a Jungian night to make up her mind. Little doll, you're no Jungian, I mean not in the strictest sense, I mean I, too, wouldn't mind enlightening the dead, I mean I like that everything irrupts from the collective unconscious, so I must have as well, but still, I mean...and then suddenly Practical doll is beside her and says, "Don't do it, Little doll. Don't lift it." "Wha? Practical doll?" "Yes, it's me, I escaped the dark Bush dolls just in time and am here to warn you against looking under that hat there in the dirt, because you never know, you know, Little doll, what you're likely to find in there." "But Practical doll, you sound a little funny to me, like your throat's clogged with cream or something." "The Bush dolls went for my throat, see?" and in the moonlight Little doll thinks she sees a slash in the shape of a quarter moon, or is it a lemniscate? "Come with me, Little doll, back into the bush. It might be the Lord of Death doll under there, and

you know what they say about Lord of Death doll.” Little doll thinks about this a moment, then says, “You mean about its inordinate fondness for beetles, as Haldane reportedly said to a priest?” “That and other things,” Practical doll responds, now tugging at the hem of Little doll’s tattered dress. “But, Practical doll,” Little doll says, swatting away one of Practical doll’s double hands and then glancing up at the wobbly teeth in Practical doll’s stiff face, “I thought you *were* dead.” “Dead? Me? Practical doll? Yessss,” Practical doll sighs and vanishes, and from out of the sigh, Ghost doll reforms itself like some celluloid ectoplasm, then it too shimmers, vaporizes. Only the raw-meat nightscent left on the wind. You were right, Little doll. That wasn’t Practical doll. That was Ghost doll. Now let’s see what’s under that brim.

7

Little doll lifts the hat again. *Why not, it’s just an ordinary safari hat lost by some hunter or writer or tourist or movie star*, thinks Little doll, who in no way is enamored of movie stars, no matter their nationality, though she has seen her share of peculiar movies, none of which, not even those featuring Kong dolls, is as strange as waking up in Africa, being chased by buzzing dark Bush dolls, slavered over and near swallowed up by Giant Soldier Termite doll, and almost tricked into reentering the bush (poor Clarissa doll!) by

Practical doll who wasn't really Practical doll but Ghost doll, and *oh my*, Little doll thinks and feels a little faint, though curiously this time the hat's as light as a feather. Steady, Little doll. But when she peeks under the hat, Wind doll (who else could it have been?) pushes against her back, and down goes Little doll into the darkness under the hat, which clamps back onto the ground without a wobble. "Ooof," says Little doll, brushing her dress and standing back up, her eyes clacking open and shut, open and shut. *My goodness. I can't see a thing. Am I blind?* No, Little doll, far worse than that. *Wha?* That's right, Little doll is back in the bush again, bereft of light, with only Little doll to comfort Little doll. Listen up. *Wha?* Don't you hear something? *Buzzing Bush dolls?* No, that's not a buzzing or humming. *Is it singing?* "No, it's me, Juju doll, come to your aid." And, yes, there she is, Juju doll jangling with light and smelling of baked bread and mustard and pine cones, with buttons for eyes, a smoking cigarette for a mouth, and a body like a haystack wrapped in colored lights. A real spectacle, this Juju doll. "But what is it you do," asks Little doll, wrinkling her unwrinkable nose, "I mean, other than light things up in the bush?" "Little doll, don't you even see the road you're on? Are you Little doll or Dishabile doll?" "*Little doll,*" Little doll snaps back, though her dress is rather dusty, her tresses, if she had them, tattered, I wish someone would come shine Little doll's shoes. "Haven't you learned to shine your own shoes, Little doll?" "I certainly have not, I mean, I don't even

have a chamois. Perhaps we could ask that figure up ahead.” Juju doll jangles and sparks, rattles and moans, “That’s no Figure doll, Little doll,” then slaps her mouth and vanishes.

8

If not Figure doll, then what is it? Bush dolls! Lots of Bush dolls! They stand there a hundred meters up the road eyeing Little doll who is concentrating on trying to make herself as inconspicuous as possible. Little doll, do you imagine, as did Bousquet, that you are your own hiding place? You aren’t. You’re as transparent as Dream doll dreaming. And then Bush dolls put their palms together and from their palms Spider doll plops to the earth. Spider doll born from the palms of Bush dolls willing to mock puzzling existence, what do you want with Little doll? “Just wait and see,” Giant Spider doll says, her acidic words sizzling in the dust as she scurries up the road toward Little doll, who suddenly feels her porcelainity as brittle as the carapace of a desiccated beetle. Out of the prints in the dust made by Giant Spider doll, tiny spiders spring up as if they were Gotthelf dolls from Switzerland with sermons in their mouths. And behind them, running again on tiptoes, dark Bush dolls swarm and chant: “Little doll, are you ready for a little vis-à-vis? What made you assume one existence is more valuable than another? Bush dolls want to eat you like meat. Mother of Bush

dolls wants to eat Bush dolls. Father of Son of Bush doll dreams he's in a wasteland holding Son doll's hand. We are the dolls of the Bush, we are Bush dolls," sing the mad Bush dolls as they cavort ever closer. And Giant Spider doll keeps coming closer and the spiders continue to sprout in the road and Little doll keeps trying to make herself invisible, though we've told her that's a definite no-go. Not a safe place to be after all, the Interior, is it, Little doll? Thought you'd be safe under the hat? *I didn't. I didn't. Help, Juju doll*, thinks Little doll to herself. "Help," she says, aborting her attempt to become invisible, her heavy eyelids still closed tight. The wind whirls, the air burns, Bush dolls scream toward her. Then Little doll, her head bent down, clacks up her lids to find on the ground a button, a thread, a needle.

9

That's right, Little doll. Surely you must have seen your non-existent mother sew with thread and needle a coat to a button. Gets right to it, does Little doll, as alacritously as her stiff fingers allow (stiff with age, Africa ages one), then stabs the needle into Spider doll's thorax the moment before she pounces. A tautness for a second, then a *pop* and the needle slides in as easily as a knife into soft butter. *Goodness. Did I do that?* She tosses monster and needle over her shoulder, then pulls tight the thread, which ripples

along the road and shakes off the other spiders, as well as the astonished, no-longer-buzzing Bush dolls. Shakes them where? *Into the African air.* “*Abh, abh,*” says Little doll, “*choo!*” sneezing a cloud of dust from her nostrils. Carrion birds lift off from their platforms in the trees. Crocodiles have doll-like eyes. Little doll decides to follow the thread, that’s the best thing, that’s what I’d do if I were you, Little doll. Days pass with her on Thread road, through Empty doll-town and More Empty doll-town she walks. Day doll turns to Night doll, Night doll to Dawn doll, Dawn doll to Noon doll, Noon doll to Dusk doll, Dusk doll to Midnight doll, Midnight doll to 3 a.m. doll to Sleep doll and More Sleep doll, until Little doll begins to wonder if there’s an end to Thread road. Don’t worry, Little doll. Up ahead, yes, she sees it now, stands a cabinet, its wood sunbleached, its door open. *That looks like a nice place to rest,* thinks Little doll. Are you sure? *Why not?* Can’t you see, Little doll? That’s Lord of Death doll guarding the cabinet, grim as Cerberus. *Lord of Death doll? She’s here? So Practical doll who was Ghost doll was right.* Yes, there Lord doll is, all thousand eyes of her, each eye a mouth, each mouth an eye, you can’t tell if there’s a primal mother eye or mouth because all the eye-mouths look alike, ashen and bloodshot. Somewhere Dream doll wakes up again, but not in Little doll Africa; no matter, then, to Little doll who right now would welcome a dream from Dream doll or Counter doll or Counterfeit doll or Any doll or Anything-but-this-Damned doll,

which is what she is, this Lord of Death doll with her thousand awful eyes. All these eyes wobbling and goggling her. It's enough to madden any Little doll, which Little doll isn't—that is, she's not just any doll, but Little doll herself. "*Basta, basta,*" she says, stamping her foot on the earth. "You old Eye doll, old Totem doll, old Lick-Little-doll-to-Death doll you. Why, you're nothing, nothing, nothing but an Inside-Out-Potato doll!"

10

Lord of Death doll shimmers—*old what doll?*—waggles her eyes, hisses, spins, pops into the night. Now nothing separates Little doll from the open cabinet, exposed how long to the sun and wind? Cautiously she steps up to it, rattles the door on its hinges, peers in, but can't see much, dusk having fallen like a sack over the bush. Careful, Little doll. You don't know what's in there. It might be linen, it might be moonlight, it might be an event of blackness. *On the other hand,* Little doll thinks, *I do know, sort of, what's out here.* But still she hesitates. And who can blame Little doll, who's survived dark Bush dolls, Giant Termite doll, Ghost doll, Spider doll, and even Lord of Death doll. *All these bad dolls,* thinks Little doll, *maybe there are more of them. But maybe inside the cabinet I'll be free of Ghost dolls and Spider dolls and Bug and Humbug dolls.* So she lifts her Little doll left foot into the cabinet (how dusty and

worn her shoe is, the plastic strap cracked in many places) but hesitates again. Half-in, half-out Little doll? *Yes*. What are you afraid of? *Goodness, I mean, everything. The world at least. Will I die?* Who knows, Little doll? Maybe the seven dolls of narrativity will dance before your mesmerized eyes. *Will my mother be one of them? My father? Am I at the leading edge of the end of things, or just the beginning? I don't know, I don't know*, she mutters to herself, *Little doll of indecision is all I am, and the night's not getting any lighter*. Little doll, haven't you seen how brave you are? I mean, inside might be more dolls of awakening, of change and further change, of turn and encounter and alone. Even Death-and-Transfiguration doll might be there. *Really?* She might be. *And birds and snakes and cheetahs and chimpanzees and all of Africa as shiny as a marble?* Could be, Little doll. *Well then*, thinks Little doll, *perhaps there's no end to adventure*, and lifts her other Little doll foot into the cabinet. *Kind of dark in here*, Little doll notices. Then Wind doll blows shut the door.

1873 · 205

Marjorie Daw

(1873)

I sat with the Daws until half past ten, and saw the moon rise on the sea. The ocean, that had stretched motionless and black against the horizon, was changed by magic into a broken field of glittering ice, interspersed with marvellous silvery fjords. In the far distance the Isles of Shoals loomed up like a group of huge bergs drifting down on us. The Polar Regions in a June thaw! It was exceedingly fine. What did we talk about? We talked about the weather—and you! The weather has been disagreeable for several days past,—and so have you. I glided from one topic to the other very naturally. I told my friends of your accident; how it had frustrated all our summer plans, and what our plans were. I played quite a spirited solo on the fibula. Then I described you; or,

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

(1873)

I turned round; I found a goblet on the wash-stand; I took Lycidas's heavy clothes-brush, and knocked off the neck of the bottle. Did you ever do it, reader, with one of those pressed glass bottles they make now? It smashed like a Prince Rupert's drop in my hand, crumbled into seventy pieces,—a nasty smell of whiskey on the floor,—and I, holding just the hard bottom of the thing with two large spikes running worthless up into the air. But I seized the goblet, poured into it what was left in the bottom, and carried it in to Morton as quietly as I could. He bade me give Lycidas as much as he could swallow; then showed me how to substitute my thumb for his, and compress the great artery. When he was satisfied that he could trust me, he began his

rather, I didn't. I spoke of your amiability, of your patience under this severe affliction; of your touching gratitude when Dillon brings you little presents of fruit; of your tenderness to your sister Fanny, whom you would not allow to stay in town to nurse you, and how you heroically sent her back to Newport, preferring to remain alone with Julia

work again, silently; just speaking what must be said to that brave Julia, who seemed to have three hands because he needed them. When all was secure, he glanced at the ghastly white face, with beads of perspiration on the forehead and upper lip, laid his finger on the pulse, and said: "We will have a little more whiskey. No, Julia

1852.205

Silver and Pewter

(1852)

Perhaps some reader may indignantly exclaim that this course of action was wrong on the part of the Meeks and of Masterton, that it was a compromise of justice to suffer such a villain as Carter proved himself to be, to escape. It was in a certain sense a compromise which, under certain circumstances arising from a certain state of the courts of justice, those, situated as Masterton and the Meeks were, would be very likely to make and would have a good foundation of justification for making. These certain circumstances were that Carter was the son of a wealthy nabob of the city, who would spare no means to defend that son, no matter what might be the evidence of his guilt, and the certain state of the courts of justice was, that a Slipper Vampire would

The Forest

(1852)

The latter was with her father nearly all day—for occasionally he would send her away for exercise, when Margaret took her place, apparently to Mr. De Groot's great content. There was this peculiarity in his disorder, that he suffered from it most at night, the day being comparatively a period of remission. Certainly, one would have supposed that the cares and society of his daughter would have been welcome to him in these hours, if in any; yet it was evident that he rather suffered than enjoyed her presence. Nevertheless, he was nervous if he missed her at the hour when she ought to appear, but as soon as he was satisfied of her being in the mission, he really seemed to prefer that she should be out of his sight. Some of her attitudes and movements around

be ready, for money, to take up a case like that of Carter's, and with a bold front, an unlicensed tongue, and in the full armor of legal technicality, stand before judge and jury, insult the witnesses for the prosecution, no matter how respectable they might be, and by hints and open assertion, go even to the length of calling in question the virtue even of Julia

the room, or near his bed, appeared to annoy or startle him more than others. Many sick persons are singularly fastidious on this head, especially those afflicted with nervous diseases; but it is commonly some want of grace, some angularity of posture, some awkward or hurried motion, that offends them. What displeased (if it was displeasure) or at all events disagreeably affected her father in Julia

1854 • 184

The Unfortunate Mountain Girl

(1854)

Eltham was thrown constantly into the society of Mrs. Huntington. Indeed, he was always among the invited guests at Paterson's; for Matilda, though she had seldom met him during their long separation, still regarded him as a very particular friend. He and Morton, who was a cousin of hers, were invited to join, as often as it should be convenient, in their private family circle. Eltham, who was much fonder of joining a social circle of friends, than of mixing in promiscuous society, soon became almost an inmate of the family. His presence at first inspired bitter thoughts in the blighted heart of Julia; but as they had met as friends during her husband's life, so they met now. Eltham remembered his early love only as a bright dream, and he often smiled when he

Totemwell

(1854)

Unable any longer to remain in her chamber, she threw a shawl over her shoulders, and descended into the garden. It was a cold, gray day; the sky hung low, and now and then a snow-flake fell through the thick air. In the far west, a narrow streak of blue alone gave promise of a brighter morrow. Well pleased with the desolation that reigned over all around, Julia walked slowly along, with her eyes on the ground, till, coming to the farthest part of the garden, she stopped to gaze on the scene before her. Close at her right hand an apple-tree stood in bold relief against the sky. It was the tree that Philip had planted; and his parting words, as they stood together beside it in their happy and innocent childhood, now all at once rang loudly in her ears. She surveyed

thought of his waking disappointment. All resentment had long been dead, and he regarded Mrs. Huntington as an early and dear friend. She was changed, entirely changed; and in the melancholy widow, with her white, marble cheeks, and smileless lips, none would have recognized the healthy and happy Julia

the tree with strange interest. It had grown with extraordinary strength and vigor, but its trunk was sadly bent and misshapen; innumerable shoots had started forth from its root and branches, which marred alike its usefulness and beauty; and Julia

Bertha's Engagement

(1875)

“Not knowing all that I am forbidden to tell, there yet may linger in your heart some unbelief in the stern necessity that has torn your life from mine—some vague hope that time or a miracle can change it. Fearing this, and acting from a solemn sense of duty, I have placed a barrier against all such possibilities. We can never meet as we have done again. In order to make this inevitable I have battled against all weakness, and for your sake more than my own turned resolutely from the past. My honor demanded it. The great future which lies before a public man like myself demanded it. Your own peace of mind demanded the sacrifice, and I have made it. Bertha, I am engaged to another—a woman who loves me as you loved me, even perhaps with a deeper

A Question of Honor

(1875)

“What followed you know. I cannot relate, I can scarcely even in my thoughts venture to dwell upon, her great tenderness and gentleness when she sent for me. One thing, however, I must say in self-defense—in order to prove that I was not guilty of the cruelty of which this evening you seemed to think me capable. She asked no questions, she simply said, ‘I know the truth!’—and how could I deny it, even if denial would have brought conviction to her, which I doubt? She seemed like one who had already left the passions of earth behind—a calm had come to her which no emotion had power to break. That I have suffered keenly from the thought that such a knowledge should have cast a shadow over her last hours, you will believe—yet I cannot clearly

abandonment, because all the strength of her gentle nature concentrates in the one word—love. Bertha, when we meet again, I shall be a married man. I hope then and now, there will be friendship between us. Nothing need prevent that, nothing should prevent it, for the lady I am pledged to marry is Julia

see in what manner to blame myself. I can hear you say, with your eyes shining like stars, that honor should have kept my heart loyal to Julia. Alas! the truth must be written, and you must forgive it as well as you can—in the sense of supreme love, my heart never was given to Julia

1867 · 192

The Dead Letter

(1867)

It was the first day which had really seemed like spring. It was warm and showery; there was a smell of violets and new grass on the air. I had my office-window open, but as the afternoon wore away, and the sun shone out after an April sprinkle, I could not abide the dullness of that court of law. I felt those “blind motions of the spring,” which Tennyson attributes to trees and plants. And verily, I was in sympathy with nature. I felt *verdant*—and if the reader thinks that to my discredit, he is at liberty to cherish his opinion. I felt young and happy—years seemed to have dropped away from me, like a mantle of ice, leaving the flowers and freshness to appear. Not knowing whither my fancy would lead me, I walked toward the mansion, and again, as upon that

Hugo Blanc, the Artist

(1867)

The road they were following gradually left the river, and began to ascend more and more as they approached the mountains, which lie but a few miles from the shore. At length the driver, who received his instructions from Grey, who was riding with him, turned suddenly to the left and entered a lane bordered on either side by magnificent chestnuts, oaks, and other forest trees, and a few rods in advance of them a beautiful cottage could be partially seen through the trees which surrounded it. The noise of the approaching carriage had aroused the inmates, and a large gate, which opened into the lane, was swung back upon its hinges by one of the servants, and the carriage, following a semicircular carriage-way, drove up in front of an elegant veranda,

autumn afternoon upon which I first saw Eleanor after her calamity, I turned my steps to the arbor which crowned the slope at the back of the lawn. Thinking of Eleanor, as I saw her then, I entered the place with a light step, and found Julia

and the happy travelers alighted amid the boxes and packages, opened and unopened, which covered it from one end to the other. A few rooms had been put in order, and as they were gathering upon the veranda, what was their surprise to see Joe Tyson come forward to welcome them, followed by his wife and the sweet little Julia

C o n t r o l R o o m

It was when these girls were talking to you that you sort of came to what you called “terms,” and it was these preoccupations that prevented growth. They were inhibitors; they removed a sense—“that sense!” we called it—of possibility that should have been present.

I was at the mixing board, so soundless. I had no sense of irony; what I felt was immaterial, which was to say it did not matter. I could have stepped over you for hours and hours; the processional along the canal, the first canal, would have taken over my life at that point.

“The black suit, driver,” was as obvious a statement as any I might have made at the time.

The office, we said, was “open,” and what this meant depended, as was so often the case, on context. I was calling it “context,” being cunning and unscrupulous.

“You’re so inscrutable,” Hugh said, but I had to bluff him. That it would sound bad—tinny, thin—coming out of the stereo was self-evident.

That I was coming out of the speakers myself was, considering the context, self-evident.

Mummies, Next, Mortar

Wet TP is like whisper, gets what song ears never hear even when listened to as careful as any girl could. The only lotion I have got is calamine. The only shampoo kills lice, scalps the skull. We would as kids pick at each other's little lice even after we had run out of mayonnaise. We wet our sheets and set the lice on fire. We wet the dog and put her in the oven.

This cupboard is bare all besides. I am glued to the tube, hungry for hot wings, a wedge for the swelling. I am a nibbler, tug at meat with careful bites, my index fingers sticky. Sweat driks down.

I am just dirty.

I kissed a flying fuck on the mouth midair just before it went splat six feet deep, under the drink, beside the bones of my dust dog, Lo. Lo who died because her heart was her liver and her liver was a bone she swallowed whole. She swallowed a whole rope and that was what made her feel on fire and that was that.

But I can't be yours, I told him to myself. I can't be your sleeping dog. I can't wait these dog days whole. Could you be pleased to answer my questions?

His tongue is soap and water and as slippery and I keep drinking. I drink how if I do, the bad taste will turn into the shiny and silver poisons that fall out of my mouth, rotting the table and tasting how chewing dark grounds and wet bark would. So I, instead, swallow it all. If I swallow all of who I say, it does not spill out wet. All of who I say does not mess my chin, my neck, and make spill down. It is not soapy or runny.

Would it feel how it feels to swallow a whole rack of ribs whole and swallow way down the blood and the bite? I ask and I ask.

Calm down, Miss. An eel is an eel.

And as slippery as anyone.

I sucked on the eel so my head could rest peaceful. Daylight savings six feet deep, under the drink, beside the bones of my Lo. How soft went that limp city! I found the chests were each empty when I pried. The more that I pried, the more I was slipped splinters. I have bought a lot of tweezers.

I say to him please.

I say, Say it, please, once out loud. Say, do you know what leapt? Do you know what went when you left?

Says he can't see me, but he sure can smell, and I taste how a girl tastes, how a land line stays put, stays still. Says he can't hear what I got to say, but he sure can smell, and I smell how a spoon shines in soapy water.

Waiting will kill a person how ropes do.

I keep to myself lying in the grass outside and waiting for him dungareed and calm how radiators stay in labor. I am outside the reunion. I am waiting for him to stop being fifteen, sixteen. I wait until the wet wedge on his plate stops tasting of a tongue and falls onto the floor so I can kiss it on its lips who knew him inside and out because he licked them like he was hungrier. He licked them like he could stand to gnaw. I wait and spin a radio fuzzy up. I wait how it is left out on the counter with all the lights on and the windows flung wide open, breezing threes.

Why are you an unopened man? I practice singing this out loud waiting outside for him in the grass. Ask him to grow his hair back overnight. Ask him to rip all the warts on him off and stop growing plaque this instant. It is that easy, I say.

He tells me whoa calm down like I could buck him off of me or neigh or whinny.

I am waiting for the grass to itch pink again, for calamine to verde verbatim.

Someday, he will say it but I will know those notes already.

I will laugh in his face to keep from crying how a horse would cry, lips smacking, like he is some ring on fire that horse must gallop up to unscared. Someday, I will rub myself raw, pink, and laugh. I will laugh my belly soapy, laugh until the belly waters silvering,

falling out, keeping me from kissing. I chewed at my lips and they are both pretty puffy, but I still swallow them wholly, flying by the two-liter at a time, and still they taste to me of soapy water.

T a p i o c a

The Finns were mostly our cousins, browns and blondes. They were They Who Play Rough. They would pry cinderblocks from the ice with shovels to chuck at us. They would light our dolls' hair on fire, the smell a smell of a burnt-up diaper.

The smallest of us wore them, sometimes, out.

We would get dropped off by Aippä. She would leave, it seemed, for forever. We passed the hours by the house of the neighborman who took stake in his mailbox. He buried, our cousin said, his brother under there.

The neighborman was from a town called what sounded like Tapioca. Our Finnish cousins down the road burned our hair, pulled us up by the handful, held us swung by the fist. They hid our mittens, stiffed our fingers.

We hated tasting tapioca how we hated elderly canned tuna sandwiches. We spat alfalfa over sinks. We hated afternoon date squares, their smells.

The Finns did not have to bathe. They washed up in their ukki's shack he made. They would put it against us: his own two hands. The shack was a test, a place you throw water on rocks and

with your sounds long say sauna. You try to steam out the wuss, try to make it not breathe. You are something if you do not need to lift the ladle, get bucket water up to your nostrils to stop the singeing. Blow on your cousin's skin, he might yelp. You might sting him so he cannot breathe inside the shack.

The top shelf champ would keep you bowing on the low bench if you braved staying. If you stayed you would be breathing into your innie or outie, would be folding.

Bow down to the big boy or girl who would dunk your head in the bucket water and hold it fossilized for you. The wuss would gust out the door. They would run a cold path, swim backward and stare at the shack and pray, backstroke all the way to Bootjack, to Dreamland where they sell tough steaks.

You had to feed the fire as wuss. Open the iron box, black and wicked, scraping your spine, this noise, this croak worse than a frog fried against the grill of Aippä's car. You had to ball up old articles about your uncles and their sports. You crumbled the recruits and the strawberry festival queens and the burden on us because of the lost mine.

Our cousins were brothers and ugly. Their underwear was hanging on clotheslines in the front yard. They skipped school to make up games, to kill crawfish with their boots. Their long johns dangled spew. Tāti could not get to scrubbing their gunk.

Our mother scrubbed blood out of her silken slippers and under-pant crotches, we had watched. Our mother often got called into the office.

Tapioca seems like spew seems and stays. The town is called another name. To us, it is still Tapioca, what we know of it: snow-plows on Finlander roadnames, the neighborman, carhoods, pylons in the driveway, the occasional parade. The neighborman comes out, sits on the hood, shakes open his newspaper, wears binoculars.

We like to be spied on. We hate neighbors. We hate tapioca and pudding-type things tasting too vanilla.

It is because we play dead the neighborman goddamns us. We lie on his lawn, and one of us crosses our arms over the grave of his good-for-nothing brother. One of us plays pooch. The hamtongue of a dog, a cold cut pink to drip spit. We see Xs for eyes, how our fingers nub crayons, pressing too hard drawing supertime trout. At our cousins', we must eat dead trout straight from the bay, off wusses' wormed lures.

The neighborman has got no garage, no kids, no wife. He has ice cold beverages.

We hear Would you care for a beverage when Tāti brings in the relatives. We get ourselves locked out of houses. We get fed roast under the clothesline. We hold down our cousins' brother and drown him pretend, hold down the one in diapers next. We play

resurrection, make mummy bandages. We use this word we heard—appendages. The sissy one plays Mary Magdalene.

It makes the day long. Nobody tucks us in tight. We wait for headlights to blind us through what is called a bay window.

The one Finn we bring back to life. First we kiss his nose and pen his palms, then we tickle his fist open when he won't go along and play dead how we would like. The sissy undresses the dead. The zippers sometimes catch. Dead Finn flinches when his skin is pinched up in his denim. We make fun.

Lie down, Sisyphus.

Reciting:

Bless us O Dog

Give us some snack

If you do not

Then, we pause.

There are not enough seatbelts in our car. The middle ones pinch the chub. The metal is freezing even in summer. We slide the buckle to unbore ourselves on Tapioca roads. The drive takes us a while, and we talk to ourselves in low tones. We play private games when we drive.

Aippä says, Silently, silently.

When we stay with our cousins, we sleep outside under the sky with the bugs beeping. They itch, we rash. Come one bag to the next. The sissy sneaks in, scared of outdoor sounds.

Some nights, we sleep almost naked. It is too much to burrow in our confining bags. Keeping still makes the glitter bugs blink more on and off for us. We don't know when she'll come for us.

She is in the bathtub, unhappy. She is soaking.

Leave me be.

We'll see, she'll say if we ask.

We go.

She hangs a bed sheet in the backyard that is soaked like somebody got killed, maybe the neighborman's family. Our bed is too small, so we sweat glue together. Spiders nip our wrists. We welt. She leaves bleach out on the counter we think is juice. Pink insulation swigs and pulls our wall. We try to get over the cold.





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