

NEW HAVEN

I put the wedding presents--enamel pots and pans, the matched china sets of dishes, the casseroles and flatware, the placemats and monogrammed towels--into cupboards and drawers, on shelves in my little kitchen. It's like playing house. I am waiting to have a baby. There's not much to it, this waiting. Mr. and Mrs. Droz live upstairs in what used to be their whole house. Mr. Droz passes by my kitchen door several times a day, his pipe clenched in his teeth. He usually stops in, drawn by the aroma of something I'm cooking. He lifts the lid off whatever is simmering on the stove--simmering is about all I can manage--and suggest a spice or a splash of wine. I'm a terrible cook. When I invited Mom and Dad to dinner, I spent most of the day preparing what I thought they would like. I stretched the limits of my culinary abilities with a special cheesecake: Dad's favorite dessert. The recipe called for pounds of "grating cheese", so I used cheddar and ended up with a concoction that was more like a huge, round, melted cheese sandwich. I'm trying to learn what to do with my hours now that I'm not in school. The baby's room is all fixed up with a crib and a mobile of little stuffed corduroy fish. The bathinette has lots of plastic pockets which I've filled with safety pins and tiny tee shirts and cloth diapers. In November, before the baby is born, President Kennedy is assassinated. The whole country sits shocked in front of TV for days and days. I am 20 years old. I have completed two years of college. I have a baby boy. William--we call him Matt--behaves just like a child out of the pages of Dr. Spock's Baby Book. He eats well, sleeps a lot, and when he's awake, he's very cheery. I have a baby seat on the back of my bike, so I take him on all my travels. It's harder than I thought to shop for groceries and do laundry with a little baby in tow. I don't know anyone here, except a few student wives, and they seem to be a lot happier about housework than I am. Most of the good times are with Bill's friends. Bill is gone most days and many nights. He belongs to a 'secret society' called Wolfshead. I'm not sure what that's all about, but it seems to please the men to have a special place all to themselves. I get the impression that there's lots of leather and books. Also a handball court. It all seems rather silly. Bill has a study of his own in this apartment. My desk is in the bedroom. I've been writing poems some. The Yale Literary Magazine accepted one. Some days I'm quite happy with my new life. I feel kind of grown up even though it seems, still, like a game. But some days I'm bored and lonely and wonder if I'll ever be able to finish school and be a writer. Matt comes with me everywhere, even to parties and nightclubs. He dozes right off, as if he were in his own bed. We visit Rye a lot. Rita and Mom treat Matt like their own possession. They are definitely better mothers than I am. I love this little boy, but the dilemma is: a baby needs attention of one sort or another all day, but the activities really aren't enough to fill a day, just to fragment it. I miss school. Birth control is illegal in Connecticut, but the hospital has an experimental program that I can participate in. They're testing I.U.D.'s. Birth control is forbidden by the Church, but I'll be damned if I want to get pregnant again soon! We're taking Matt on a cross country trip this summer. He'll ride on the shelf of the Datsun sports car. Bill keeps having suspicious evenings with female students. Also, he's jealous of any of my relationships with his friends. I hate jealousy! The more one protests one's innocence, the guiltier one sounds. We move to a new apartment because Bill thinks Mr. Droz is too nosy. I discover I'm pregnant. With the I.U.D. still in! I cry for days. I'm just getting used to one baby! I'm 21½. We're moving to Chapel Hill, North Carolina so Bill can get a graduate degree. Maybe something interesting will happen to me there.

NEW HAVEN

At first I thought I was just having gas pains, but it soon became clear that I was, instead, having a baby. It took four hours. The nurse who held my hand was called Miss Darling, and she loved you... you were her first baby! Grandpa came right up to New Haven from Rye when he heard. I took you home in a couple of days. Considering I never learned a thing about babies, even though my house was full of them growing up, I figured out how to take care of you pretty quickly. I gave you baths in the kitchen sink because the tub seemed as huge as the Atlantic Ocean. Sunny afternoons, you sat in the back yard in a little spring chair. You loved riding in the bike seat and in the car. Your favorite toys were pots and pans. And balls. As you got bigger and learned to eat by yourself, you favored dumping whole plates of food on your head. Everyone visited you. You were quite happy to take whatever and whoever came along. Mom and Dad were excited about their first grandchild and the Matthews family was thrilled that there was yet another William Procter Matthews--boy heir. Grandpa in Cincinnati arranged to have your portrait taken with the other three William Matthews. They kept the perfect poses; I kept the ones that showed you twisting and howling and squirming off Pop's lap. You had a mind of your own, always.

NEW YEAR, NEW HAMPSHIRE

*"How few have ever had anything more of a
choice in government than in climate?"*

John Adams; Thoughts on Government

The Hunger Moon draws icy tides upriver,
heaving gray-green slabs of seawater
onto the salt marshes. Inland, a house
rides snow swells into evening
while inside the householder, satisfied
in the knowledge of a well-provisioned root cellar,
a woodshed stacked with even cords,
pulls the shutters to, turns from the darkening window.

And still, quarrelsome winds bay down the chimney.

The urge to retreat to hearth
and leatherbound studies of certainty
is as strong as the pull of the moon;
but there are times
when what we may need most
are the rude and raucous disputations
that sputter and spark
like bonfires on frozen ponds,
attracting a quorum of neighbors.



It's a short walk around the east corner of the house and down the path to the privy. The trees are quiet this morning after yesterday's blue October wind shook loose most of their leaves. The presser flows against an oak. I'm alone for a few minutes, not in a closed space mirrored in tile and chrome, but in a wooden outhouse with a glass door and a view of the thinning woods, backlit by the morning sun.

I do love my luxuries. Maybe it's just that one's notions of luxury change.

I came to this house two years ago, late in the evening through a snow crust that buckled under the lightest step. The white pine were letting down their snow with a sound like rain falling. The room was warm, drowsy with the noise of the woodstove, as I ate a meal of

NOTES FROM THE PRIVY

home-raised pork, potatoes and broccoli from a garden growing of green, I thought: this is luxury. It Marie Harris from that night that I began thinking about convenience, warmth, ease, luxury... because to live here meant pumping water into a bucket and heating it on the stove for dishes and baths. It meant splitting wood. It meant gardening and putting by, saving garbage for garden and chicken and goose, gathering kindling before the snow. It meant an outhouse.

The outhouse has a shingled roof and a glass door that lets in the sun. The toilet paper sits in a coffee can since the day a squirrel discovered it and dragged it around the woods like a kid on Halloween. The walls hang with dried vagaries and the best postcards that come in the mail (we have one friend who has discovered a paradise of old postcards, one more flowered and gilted and watered than the rest; he will not share his source, but promises a second round of postcards all year).

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places he travels). There's a hearth broom in one corner and an ash bucket in the other. And there's one more accessory: the chamber pot. Our is a fine and graceful enameled one, rescued from the ignominious fate of the planter.

The privy, out of the house and down the path, the privy with a glass door, is a phenomenon with which not everyone is prepared to deal. Its main advantage to the skeptical visitor is that it's the only option. Novelty (and, I'm sure, the reassuring thought that their fully equipped toilet is waiting at home, ready to be flushed, tidy-bowled, deodorized, covered in terrycloth) is another. Using an outhouse for the first time since camp, or simply for the first time, is a kind of adventure for some of our visiting friends and relatives. Some of them re-enter the house smiling, as though they'd survived something. My mother visited a while ago and adjusted quite cheerfully to facilities that her mother would have taken for granted. Children seem to regard the outhouse as an amusement. But what happens in the rain? in winter? at night?

Which brings me back to my notion of luxury and how it's changed. In the rain, in winter, at night I take the appropriate gear off a hook--slicker, waxed Japanese umbrella, a hat or parka-- or from the shelf--boots, flashlight-- and make my way down the path remarking that the leaves need raking or huge Orion is low in the sky, that the crysanthemums have not frosted yet or the new apple tree could use some fence, that the moon is the most astonishing orange or there are fewer acorns this year, that the snow on the path could be shoveled again. The air is cold or wet. The trees are bent with ice and clatter in the wind or they are full, green and soft. Once a hawk against running clouds. Always blackbirds and jays. Sometimes a flying squirrel. Never the same look at woods or sky.

I haven't lived quite this way before, mindful of just where food and heat come from, careful of water in September, taking the day in deep breaths instead of gasps. Still, I do love my luxuries: dinners out, a bottle of wine, a day in Boston's bookstores... It's just that the list gets longer: the first pitcher of our own maple syrup, a long summer bath in the river, a month of cold before snow for night skating on the pond, homemade apple wine, hundreds of daffodil bulbs under the snow and hundreds of daffodils all spring... Time to work and time leftover. Time out.

My delight in the leisurely passing of autumn from the vantage point of the privy is most emphatically not shared by a writer friend who feels that, having been born into the 20th century, she intends to take full advantage of every convenience it has to offer. I share many of her views. I intend to have her up for a visit to take a look at one of mine.

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RFD #2
Barrington, NH 03825
603-664-7654

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NOVEMBER

It's quiet here, if silence
is understood to include
the racket of jays,
acorns hitting the roof,
the scatter of a headless chicken
in the leaves.

The simplest vowels clot in my throat.

I stare at the old hen's head
on the stump.
The eye milks over;
the beak finishes its death sentence.

NOV.

INTROIT

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is understood to include
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NOVEMBER

October

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The simplest vowels clot in my throat.

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The eye milks over;
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?

OHIO PILGRIMAGE

The great-grandmother turns her back
in the driveway, leaving us waving
at the lawn sprinkler.

The cornfields repeat.
Nothing is as monotonous
as disappointment.

By evening we have come as far
as Stark County, a horse-and-buggy zone
where bearded men and bonneted women
are riding out,
and sturdy young adults play an old game
with hoops
in a front yard.



GET
ME
TO A
PHONE
BOOTH

CRYBABY
WEEKS

PALIMPSEST

© 2008 USPS
Recycling logo

Advancing clouds sponge out the hills
on twilight's leading edge.
Snowfall rubs away all traces
from the meadow's hornbook.
What shadows remain bespeak
deep tracks, imperfectly erased.

This is for you tonight:
and I love you
only we can see.

MH 04.29.10

TO
M. HARRIS
PO Box 703
BAKE, NCTN
NH 03825



peace

in the middle of my new parlour i have, as you may remember, a curious republic of industrious hornets; their nest hangs to the ceiling, by the same twig on which it was so admirably built and contrived in the woods. its removal did not displease them, for they find in my house plenty of food; and i have left a hole open in one of the panes of the window, which answers all their purposes. by this kind usage they are become quite harmless; they live on the flies, which are very troublesome to us throughout the summer; they are constantly busy in catching them, even on the eyelids of my children... all my family are so accustomed to their strong buzzing, that no one takes any notice of them; and though they are fierce and vindictive, yet kindness has made them useful and harmless.

crevecoeur

FOR ALL I HAVE IN MIND.

PLANTING ONIONS

I rake up rocks and the white roots
of witch grass, a cold beetle,
a rusty nail bent to a square angle,
trying to make the bed smooth enough
for all I have in mind

(~~which is too much, as always,~~)

as I lay out the rows

setting sticks gnawed by rot for markers,

pushing spidered root ends

into dirt dark and loose

from sufficient summers *of attention*

~~of my absorption in such particularness~~

of soil and water and seed,

a door through to even deeper secrets

a door home.

*now
ending*

easier

PORTSMOUTH

After spending a week living with Russ and Mary (is this the perfect marriage?) in their incredible Victorian mansion in Northwood, I have found an apartment in Portsmouth. Shades of Chapel Hill! Lots of modern appliances and not much class. But suitable for this single woman and her two sons. Best of all, it's in the Little Harbour school district... Already the boys have made their room home: sports pictures stapled to the walls, double decker beds, closet full of clothes and games... and we acquire two kittens. Kleenex stays with us; the yellow one leaves home soon after he arrives. Across the way: Cecile and her two daughters. I make two decisions. The first is to get sterilized. I don't want to keep swallowing pills forever. I don't want more children. The second is to take what little money I have saved and go away on a short vacation. Christmas. Bill will come here and stay with the kids. I leave for Paris. Three weeks in Paris cement my identity as a grown up woman alone. I explore. I look at everything. I meet strangers. I speak French enough to be understood. I ruin all my clothes in a Paris laundromat. I haunt the places I have read about. I drink Beaujolais nouveau. I write in my journal sitting in Le Select Latin cafe near my hotel, sipping tea with lemon or cheap red wine. I put pictures of Willy and Sebastian on my wall. This is the first time I have left them and gone off by myself. I have to believe that everything's OK. After all, their father is with them... And I come home and walk on the beach with Bill. I even suggest that we might be together again. He says 'not yet', and I remember Annie's words... if he can't live without me, then he oughtn't live with me at all. Willy is in fourth grade with Loretta Downs. She's embarked on a program called Treasures, which is designed to give her students a concrete sense of themselves...along with math and social studies and English. Willy's thriving. His best friend is the son of a teacher at Little Harbour...David Cohen. Bill tends to have one best friend. Sebastian has many. He loves second grade. Nana Fletcher is his teacher. Sebastian is dramatic. Eg. Upon arriving home from school one afternoon and upon being asked by his mother the question that all mothers ask every weekday afternoon--how was your day?-- Sebastian replied: I might as well be dead. This gives one an indication of how that particular day went. The hours with the kids are special. They are learning and growing so fast! Willy has discovered girls. And Jimmy Cliff ("I Can See Clearly Now"). Sebastian has discovered a life separate from Willy. They go their separate ways. Sebastian now draws more than Willy. They both do exceedingly well in school. I talk to Mary endlessly on the phone. Sigmund Abeles paints my portrait (with skull) and does skteches of the boys. I miss Ithaca terribly. I'm getting an official divorce. My parents don't approve. My parents have never approved of anything I've done. Well, they have 9 more kids to influence! I take the kids to lots of movies. I've gotten a part time job with the New Hampshire Commission on the Arts, running the poetry-in-the-schools program. AliceJamesBooks--a wonderful poetry publishing cooperative--has accepted my book! A whole book! Arthur Yanoff paints my portrait. We spend time together. He's unlike any man I've met... sort of crazy... as interested in my writing as he is in his painting...not macho...he asks me to move in with him... in the country...I'm running out of money and ideas...he offers me my own space...and a radical way of living... the kids are with their father in Colorado for the summer...can I bring them back to yet another new home?... but it has so much! rooms of their own... The fact is, I'm not putting the kids first (much as I'm told I should)... I'm following my own impulses... I think I'm a little out of control. Also, as a woman alone with precious few resources, I'm trying to think about a long range plan... Come home, boys... another new home.

PORTSMOUTH

Right away we got a new TV, a new record player, two kittens and bikes. I tried to make this small new home appealing. Then you went to Little Harbour. Amazingly, you both loved school immediately. Great teachers. Great friends. And a whole new town to explore. It was just the three of us... and all three of us were trying things out. Portsmouth had movies and city streets and bowling alleys and all the good city things. And the school was much like East Hill: loose, progressive, arts oriented. You both could continue pursuing all the things you loved, and you found friends who loved those things, too. And there were the endless halls of Sagamore Apts. to explore. And stores nearby for gum and baseball cards. We skated on the cemetery pond in the dead of winter. We played volleyball. We did everything together, as a threesome. (How was Christmas vacation with your father while I was in Paris?) Willy... it took you most of the school year, but, because of Miss Downs, you learned to accept Eddie. Sebastian, you fit into your new surroundings like you were born into them!

This part of the narrative won't have separate pages... our lives were too intertwined for me to separate them into my thread and your threads... we lived, the three of us, our lives together. Where I went, you went. Who I saw, you saw. We listened to the same music, watched the same TV programs, read the same books. You had your friends... their parents were my friends... you played sports... I played the same ones... I was a small kid again, heedless of the strictures of motherhood that I'd been asked to attend to for so many years. I guess I was a mother... but I was a kid, too. Even though I was reveling in my new freedom, I was, at the same time, more involved with you two than I ever had been when it was expected of me.

Good year! Then you went west for summer (and camp and archery and canoeing and the like... not to mention a reunion with Underdog) and when you came back, it was to yet another house, another set of friends, another school, another man in the house.

"You were powerless. You were passengers..."

PORTSMOUTH AGAIN

Each time I move, I leave fragments of myself behind. Now I'm in a tiny apartment above a beauty parlor. No room for most of my stuff, so it stays behind at Arthur's. I got a job almost immediately at Theater by the Sea... some box office work at night, administrative work in the afternoon. I keep the same crazy hours as the actors and crew. After work, I go to The Press Room to unwind. It's a new bar run by two great men: Jay and Finn. It's like my livingroom. Cathy comes to live with me, to share the rent and start her life away from her parents. It's manageable, though cramped. I've never really known this sister who's ten years younger than I am. It's a peculiar experience. Now I'm the part time parent. I spend time with the boys through their letters and some vacations. Not all vacations, because their Grandparents keep enticing them off to exotic places and I couldn't stand in the way of that. Christmas alone. Not bad. Very peaceful. Winter is easy to take in a city when one has no wood to split, no car to jump start, no driveway to plow... I watch winter like a movie. I'm dating a few men, but only Andrew is really interesting. Not the least of his charms is that he cooks gourmet meals for me and prepares elegant winter picnics. At least he doesn't want a wife. Or a mother. Or a maid. ! My best friends are the actors and actresses at TBS. They live insane lives and somehow I can identify with that. Work at the theater isn't easy, but it beats hell out of being a waitress. I'm still working on Interstate... many of the poems have been accepted by magazines. Last year I won a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship, but I had to spend most of it on Arthur's debts. Still, the recognition of my work as a writer was wonderful. I miss Willy and Sebastian. Their letters are hysterical. I guess Iowa's OK. They seem anxious to return to Boulder, though. And now, just as I'm becoming accustomed to living alone, Charter Weeks walks into my life! Against all my better judgements, I'm in love. Is this what love is? Is it the fact that flies in the face of better judgement? In love! I realize, with a shock and a twist of pain, that this must be THE VERY FIRST TIME IN MY WHOLE LIFE THAT I'VE BEEN IN LOVE. 34 years old and in love for the first time. My God. If it weren't so wonderful, it'd be ridiculous. I spend all my free time with him. We have such fun. His house in the woods is a little marvel. And he cooks and cleans for himself! At last, a man who isn't a little boy. Summer. Willy and Sebastian are here. We divide our time between Portsmouth (Prescott Park, "Guys & Dolls", movies) and Barrington (tents, pumping water, chores). There's a pond and a river to bathe in. Showers off the front porch with a watering can. A community of wacky people. I meet wonderful Charlie Davisson. I quit my job at TBS. Charter works at an ad agency and gives me as a gift the whole fall off... to write and read and think... We talk and talk our histories, or disappointments, our lives--until all of the past is rendered harmless and finished. Now, after all these years of wandering and searching, I can settle. Now I can complete Interstate. Will the boys like him? Will they like me?

POSTSCRIPT

A letter arrives from a poet in Pondicherry;
he has found my name in a directory.
We begin to ask each other questions
across an enormous ignorance of small things.
He describes the flowers outside his door.
I send him a curl of birch bark.

Friend Thangappa, have you seen snow? Right now
it is sifting into the cracks in my woods.
Birches are not as white as snow.
Please send me something from India that I've never seen.

Next, you and I will assign the leaders
other leaders as pen pals.
At first they will have difficulty
so we will give them some questions
to start with:

Do you sleep with a pillow?
When is your birthday and what do you want for it?
What do you eat for lunch?

Soon they will catch on and devise their own conversations.

In time they will want to visit and stay over,
and, like the lonely giant in the fairytale,
will shrink themselves to small size
so as not to frighten each other.
Finally, they will hurry to their secret rooms
and transform the bones of their dead
into jackstraws.
They will take off their shoes and socks,
bend their heads over the game.

PRODIGAL

for Bill

Your voice flexes
under the ocean
with news of adventure
and unkeepable promises.

I hear my own voice
along the trans-Atlantic cable.
Announcements of arriving trains
strike a bone in my ear.

The raspberry thicket is decorated
with indigo bunting.
The green vestment is braided
with goldenrod, a tablecloth
for a feast.

You will come back
telling stories
I have never forgotten.

Marie Harris
PO Box 203
Barrington, NH 03825

Prodigal
for Bill fils

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under the ocean
with news of adventure
and unkeepable promises.

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Announcements of arriving trains
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telling stories
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QUIETISM

The temptation is to float
in a green dinghy
with shipped oars
in ruffled water.

Snapping turtle on soaked log,
leather and crust.
Fat, guttering lotus.
Flared lipped pitcher plant
pulsing in heat
Dinosaur toad.
Dragonfly hemming the air.

Here, without the ache and chafe
of daily betrayal, of lies
like blackflies at the earlobe,
I could fall
into a heresy of contentment.

QUIETISM

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in a dinghy with shipped oars
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leather and crust.
Flared lipped pitcher plant
pulsing in heat.
Dinosaur toad.
Dragonfly hemming the air.

Here, without the ache and chafe
of ~~daily~~^{old} betrayal, of lies
like blackflies at the ear^{lobe},
I could fall
into a heresy of contentment.

RELATIONS

The smallest yellow flowers grow out of the water,
suspended on star rafts.

And water lilies, channel markers.

A wind keeps everything alive.

Here we are in a green canoe,
a makeshift family.

One jumps in, one dives,
one drops a shirt in the water,
one laughs.

Adam and Eve and Pinch Me
went out on a raft.

Adam and Eve got drowned.

Who was left?

Swim.

Anything can happen now.

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Adam and Eve got drowned.

Who was left?

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Anything can happen now.

REMAINS

A settling in the snow,
a quiver of spruce bough,
the echo of an owl's wingbeat:
all absences are conspicuous.
And how swiftly memory takes over,
making much of a scattering
of feathers and bones!

REMAINS

A settling in the snow,
a quiver of spruce bough,
the echo of an owl's wingbeat:
all absences are conspicuous.
And how swiftly memory takes over
making much of a scattering
of feathers and bones!

RETURNING

I walk up to a white horse and stroke her cheek. She rubs her head against my shoulder; I give her a carrot. I murmur my stories to her as I brush withers, legs, belly. She quivers but remains still. I ease the bit into her mouth and vault onto her bare back. We disappear at a collected canter into a foggy wood. It is afternoon. No one waits for us at either end of this version.

When I married--white satin gown, white lace veil long enough to reach the ground even if I had been riding a white horse--I imagined I would be transported into my dream, a modern dream, but one that would include a hero. I would explore my forests alone and come home after dark to tell him the stories. He would be rapt. But the stories hung like unopened saddlebags. We parted.

Now here I am, walking up to the white horse again. We are both older. She chews the carrot slowly; I mount her in a motion that is not a vault, but I am up, and we're off into the red and yellow wood and no one waits, exactly, but someone is there when I dismount, home to tell my stories. And he does not say that he has heard them all before or that they do not tell him something about how we dream.

Dear Marie,

I do like the simple clarity of "Our First Summer" and would like to hold onto that one for the marriage anthology.

I'm also quite taken with "Returning" but have several editorial suggestions I'd like you to consider. Maybe I will just type up a suggested version, though I do feel you need some positive image at the end, that transforms.

I am planning on someday doing an anthology called: UNBRIDLED PASSION, Writers Riding, and if this doesn't go in FIRST COMES LOVE, I may just hold it for that.

Anyway, please don't take offense, but consider:

RETURNING

I walk up to a white horse and stroke her cheek. She rubs her head against my shoulder. I give her a carrot. I murmur my stories to her as I brush her withers, legs, belly. She quivers but remains still. I ease the bit into her mouth and vault onto her bare back. We disappear at a collected canter into the wood. It is afternoon. No one waits for us at either end.

When I married-- white satin gown, white lace veil, long enough to reach the ground even if I had been riding a horse-- I imagined I would be transported into a dream, a modern dream, but one that would include a hero. I would explore, come home after dark to tell him my stories. He would be rapt. But the stories hung like saddlebags. We parted.

Now here I am, walking up to the white horse. We are both older. She chews the carrot very slowly. I mount her in a heavier motion, but I am up and we are off into the red and yellow wood. When I return, someone is waiting. Someone is there when I dismount, home to tell my stories. And he does not say he has heard them before, but that they are light-filled openings.

Let me know what you think, how you might re-vision it, and get back to me, ok? What is the address of Slow Loris Press?

Best, Laura

→
please
send me
your
copy
if you
want to

Dear Marie,

I do like the simple clarity of "Our First Summer" and would like to hold onto that for the marriage anthology.

I'm also quite taken with "Returning" but have several editorial suggestions I'd like you to consider. Have I

Marie, I also want to hold "Driving Drunk," for The Broken Bed section. May I suggest one minor change, towards the very end, from: into the next phone pole and kill all of us. (to--- into the next phone pole and kill us all. Outright.

I just think that sounds better, reads smoother. Anyway, please. This is a good one. Subtle but effective.

RETURNING

I walk up to a white horse and stroke her cheek. She rubs her head against my shoulder. I give her a carrot. I murmur my stories to her as I brush her withers, legs, belly. She listens but remains still. I ease the bit into her mouth and vault onto her bare back. We disappear as a collected center into the wood. It is afternoon. No one waits for us at either end. When I married-- white satin gown, white face veil, long enough to reach the ground even if I had been riding a horse-- I imagined I would be transported into a dream, a modern dream, but one that would include a hero. I would explore. I come home after dark to tell him my stories. He would be right. But the stories hang like saddlebags. We parted. Now here I am, walking up to the white horse. We are both older. She chews the carrot very slowly. I mount her in a heavier motion, but I am up and we are off into the red and yellow wood. When I return, some one is waiting. Someone is there when I dismount, home to tell my stories. And he does not say he has heard them before, but that they are light-filled openings.

Let me know what you think, how you might re-tell it, and get back to me. I'll want to be the address of slow motion.

Wendy

THE RING

It might as well never have happened, so distant are the wide church steps, the organ chords, the wedding guests and, like the ^{13th} ~~eleventh~~ fairy godmother, Marina. But I would not have invented this story, nor could I have prevented its happy ending.

I had been wearing a red and white striped wash and wear travelling dress that night in Paris when it occurred. It was in a third class hotel and I wanted him to forget the girl in Norway. We overslept and missed our flight home. The rest of the group went on without us and we caught another flight which landed us in New York at almost the same time. My father had arranged for all of us to be passed through Customs, but we came through another gate and had our bags opened. I was tired and hungry to be alone.

And later it was true that I was pregnant. I needed money. Marina came with me when I sold my mother's charm bracelets and ^{my} ~~a~~ signet ring and two pairs of earrings. Marina and I had been friends in high school. Now we went to different branches of the same college and saw each other once in a while.

I arrived with him for my appointment early in the morning. The waiting room was crowded with people who were sick. A woman and her cranky child. A young man with a bruise on his cheek and his arm in a sling. I read a magazine. The old man opposite me did not read. There were more women with children. More young men with wounds. Name after name was called off. Never mine. He grew restless. I dozed off. We waited and waited until, as the light was leaving the windows and the high buildings began to glimmer, I was called into the office.

The doctor--I still remember his name--sat behind a dark desk, behind color photographs of his large family, and asked me if I wanted to do what I was doing. And I began crying because I was tired and I pushed five one hundred dollar bills across the desk at him. He asked me to wait in a small room and I kept crying because I was so tired. And then I was out in the hall by the elevator and this voice at my ear...is it over? is it over? Let's get out of here. And it took until

the ground floor for me to explain that it wasn't over. Nothing had happened. So we went back up again and the doctor was annoyed and said he'd come to the hotel in the morning now get out of here, both of you.

He did come, carrying a black house call bag. ^{Alone.} There were some preparations. A shot. I helped him move two heavy, scratchy hotel armchairs to the foot of the bed and he arranged my legs over them. My legs were heavy. I remember talking too much. I could see out the window into the windows across the street. There was a pounding on the door. I wanted to answer. I had ordered a sandwich. I wanted to say I wasn't hungry any more. ^{the doctor} He made me keep still. Finally the sandwich went away.

And the telephone rang from somewhere else in the city. Is it over? And I said yes, it's over and please bring me a box of Kotex and when he returned with the Kotex he told me how embarrassed he'd been to buy it. He wanted to make love. He felt, he said, lonely and ignored.

^{again} And later ^{we} got married. My mother was worried that her fitted satin wedding dress would reveal my ^{condition}. But I looked perfect: as beautiful as she had and as happy. I stepped out of the long black limousine. The bridesmaids were giggling in the vestibule, adjusting their hats. My father was behind me, saying something to the driver and lighting a cigarette. For a moment I was alone on the church steps, and into that moment came Marina. She pressed a gold signet ring into my gloved hand. I stared at it. My own initials. "I bought it back," she said.

The music began. I continued up the steps and into the story, as though nothing had interrupted it.

The next time

THE RING

It might as well never have happened, so distant are the wide church steps, the organ chords, the wedding guests and, like the thirteenth fairy godmother, Marina. But I would not have invented this story, nor could I have prevented its ending.

I had been wearing a red and white striped wash and wear travelling dress the night in Paris when it occurred. It was in a third class hotel and I wanted him to forget the girl in Norway. We overslept and missed our flight home. The rest of the group went on without us and we caught another flight which landed us in New York at almost the same time. My father had arranged for all of us to be passed through Customs, but we came through another gate and had our bags opened. I was tired and hungry to be alone.

And later it was true that I was pregnant. I needed money. Marina came with me when I sold my mother's charm bracelets, two pairs of earrings and my gold signet ring. Marina and I had been friends in high school. Now we went to different branches of the same college and saw each other once in a while.

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the ground floor for me to explain that it wasn't over. Nothing had happened. So we went back up again and the doctor was annoyed and said he's come to the hotel in the morning now get out of here, both of you.

He did come, carrying a black house call bag. I was alone. There were some preparations. A shot. I helped him move two heavy, scratchy hotel armchairs to the foot of the bed and he arranged my legs over them. My legs were heavy. I was talking too much. I could see out the window into the windows across the street. There was a pounding on the door. I wanted to answer. I had ordered a sandwich. I wanted to say I wasn't hungry any more. The doctor made me keep still. Finally the sandwich went away.

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When it happened again, I married him. My mother was worried that her fitted satin dress would reveal my condition, but I looked perfect: as beautiful as she had and as happy. I stepped out of the long black limousine. The bridesmaids were giggling in the vestibule, adjusting their hats. My father was behind me, saying something to the driver and lighting a cigarette. For a moment I was alone on the church steps, and into that moment came Marina. She pressed a gold signet ring into my gloved hand. I stared at it. My own initials. "I bought it back," she said.

The music began. I continued up the steps and into the story, as though nothing had interrupted it.

Rites

I hold this dusty bird,
its whole body pumping in my palm;
I wish I were very young
so all I'd need: a candle,
some dead insects, milk-soaked bread,
a shoebox lines with grass, someone
to help dig.

RIVER BED

Like the freshet
that wells from some
deep and secret place,
rises and spills
over scree, eddies around
ankles of fern, swells
into a leaf carrying
stone carrying
fish carrying
earth carving stream,
stronger and stronger,
full and purposeful
as it yearns
toward the river,
the inevitable sea...

like that
love will describe
its long
deepening course
through the terrain
of your lives.

Epithalamium for Julian & Sheryl
July 26, 1997

Marie Harris, Godmother