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for my parents
The Girl in Question

What the girl goes through to get here—thickets, coverlets, the half-built halls of this manor and its elegant, crumbling drawbridges, the tease of the moat beneath. She stops at its banks. Her frock is on wrong but she can't help herself, and what's below knows her, knows her buttoning hands. Hello she says back to the water you wouldn't let me float would you? but the moat would like her to unroll the grass on the other side, to fasten it shut like skin over a sore. She hesitates. Behind her the chanting. She knows there is a boy in the wood who has dropped to his knees and drawn a circle and is saying each of her secret names. Susanna he says Silent Dog and White Scarf and she tightens hers to hear her pulse. Mend my wrapping coat he says I am so cold. The water begs, the boy begs her and she could pull a girl from the storm cellar, a twin, tornado-legged and frozen, from her hiding-place in the icebox, the place she learned her breath's real shape, a twin from the shaved-grass garden. She could teach them how to mend, to wait for the final girl on the road, the one who will not answer. How to wait for the answer. How to tell them apart.
Points of Issue

Errors or peculiarities in a book that help to differentiate it from other editions.

No one else’s marginalia inside. An unbroken spine and a pliable binding. No one else’s marginalia unless it was penciled into her first pages then thoroughly erased. No ellipses but in the last chapters and then only in soliloquy. No strands of hair in the meadow chapter, nothing ripped out in the two after that. And halfway—a blank page, and a scrawl and dash from the girl. The final story of the back garden and her coiled braids and the dappled grey you kept too long.

The harmonica on the dashboard and the girl who taught you your scales. And the book you were always reading, the pulled-off, pockmarked cover, the weight. The night you left it in the truck bed and in the morning its swollen pages. The girl reading your father’s Wordsworth, the scrolling clouds in the meadow, your hands steady
on her heaving chest. The final story of the back garden and the coiled girl telling you no. The pages after that.
Bildungsroman

Her ripped red frock
on the wet lawn, her inside
it. She knew years had passed
since the woolly caterpillars.
Her mother’s lips still the color
of the yew berries that could not
be eaten in threes & then there
was the boy who wanted if only
she missed with her cherry
bombs. She went to the copse
behind her house, it had arms.
She was her dress. And then
there was the dog & the dog
understood. He hated the bow
holding his neck together, he knew
the clawed halls of her own. So
he fed her crabapples, mashed
them soft with his mouth & when
she could talk again he doctored
her with the under-sink chemicals,
nosed the cabinet door open—
she happily sucked their nozzles,
pumped their levers, she gained
strength, her mouth opened
& closed now, if slowly. He took
her to the party with the polio
children, she daintily licked each
of their half-eaten cakes when
proffered by his black paw. Then
her arms! She shoved her stuffed animals against the wall & demanded alibis, the dog said for their own sakes, he slammed his head’s black gavel against hers & declared everyone innocent of every crime. She was overcome. The dog crawled under the porch & she dragged her small body along. She mulched herself in with the dog gone flimsy & wet, she ate from his warm belly to help with the growing. She grew.
Magician’s Girl

You’ll know when. My gossamer singlet flushes
to its ends in fire. The black hats, too, begin
to hate you. One wrong word & their brims curl
to reveal knives. By Thursday, the floor translates
your foot-falls as Morse code. At your step,
the oubliette opens. Another narrow not-death
& the curtains become girls again. They leave
you again. They don’t love you like Mother does,
bound to the velvet board, febrile Mother willing
your water-tank, your white-gloved touch,
the part of her night where she is finally a half
of you. Despite the involvement of blades. Despite
my holding-down hands. She knows
about your knob-kneed bedmates, their soft
white hair. Girls lost in the long warren
of your arms. Big-toothed girls, girls who disappear
& disappear. You blame yourself. Why? You
don’t know that what you do in the dark
of your room—I do it too? Watch closely. Here
are my man’s hands. Here is my girl’s mouth, speaking—
Lies I Told

I never made my living
on the phone. I didn’t see you,
I’m sorry. Maybe the cold
rain, or the nighttime. Anyway,
gin is my favorite. Your house
is fine; I always walk two miles
to work and I’d love to see
your succulents. Of course
I never wore your Arran sweater
while I stirred the red sauce. I always
washed my hands. I washed
my sheets, between, and when
they were red, I’d made it up
that morning. When I laid late
in bed, I was reading, the book
of course Russian. I wore the lace,
the piece you talk about. I didn’t
tear it on purpose. Your dog
seemed to like the hot backseat,
lying in the sun that way
like a lover. I never loved anyone
before I loved you. The far end
is the shallow one, I promise,
I came here as a child.
I’ll never need another father.
I clapped for you, afterward,
but the banquet hall was so familiar
and you were so familiar, up there,
and I was so happy.
Postcard from Perugia, Post-Wedding

I told my mother everything
I’d had. About the ashes.

About the last hotel. The towels
suspended from their bars, black-
streaked from my eyes. The flies
that follow us, waiting. Balconies

where he hangs to test his grip. For
me. My swallowed key. Beloved

throwing a blow-out sale before
closing. Those of us surviving on

just one name. The last time I put
my own to paper. If elopement

implies bride as white rabbit, these streets
teeem with top hats. But she knows

all this. I was born here, you know.
The Virgin Disambiguates

Today, a test to identify my bones, the door to your room swung shut. Don’t say anything with your mouth. Try this: before words, a lettered spine, one language ancient, more aware than you of what body means. Today a mouse, unboned, blacked like rot beneath our door,

a dirty coin. You argue like a Tudor scholar—for the right to touch, you play upon compliant and complaint. Before you ask, Marvell’s mistress sent no letters, pored instead over her own anatomy. O gray mouse, I disjoint. My body, a dark fillet under your door.

Bone saws can’t cut through tongue. Ignore this blinding white of alphabet, letters on my slate-cold body, my mouth a harmless cocktail. Bar the door, Maria, this door of new-grown bones.