

Writer

Someone is walking under a black sky towards a house. A white house with wooden slats, blue grey on the lintels and window frames, on the doors, the shutters, overhang of the roof. The roof is slate.

The house is preserved, fresh, clean. The garden is tangled like uncivilised hair. But it stops at the white walls. Is stopped.

The garden is full of wild roses and ground elder and poison ivy and blackberry bushes with rejected black clusters – the birds do not eat them. It is wild, it is excess, but it stops at the house, and at the gate – held back by keys and words, a decision made by them. And from the gate to the front door runs a path like the one created by God between two seas: sterile – clear, ready.

It is not night; it is dawn. The darkness is from a storm ready to come.

The woman has hidden her face under a veil. She is dressed for church, a large cross balanced on her protruding belly – she is pregnant. Her hat is black and has a crow's feather pierced into it for decoration. She is dressed for a funeral.

She pauses at the gate – looks left, right, and behind her. Then pauses some more, her hand on the latch. She is pouring courage into herself: this is an act of will.

And then she enters the garden...enters the house, mounts the stairs, mounts another, smaller, set of stairs, opens the door, and enters the attic.

She does this all quickly – quickly but while carrying weight – because she has started, and it is waiting.

She looks up at the open window. Her breathing is hard here. She remembers a conversation and reaches forward to close the window. But her fingers touch the metal and her commands are overridden – stopped, and then reversed: her fingers stop, her hand retracts, the window stays open.

Now the woman comes and sits at the desk. She types a sentence on the typewriter. Just one sentence but slowly, using only one finger from each hand. She is searching to find the right letters. She narrows her eyes before each press of a key – bracing for the bite. And then she pulls the finger away, with pain and effort: the machine is hungry, it doesn't want to let her finger go. She feels the bites, has heard the tales, but she continues. Sometimes, we deny what we know.

It is while she is typing that the storm makes its entrance: it is shouting, but the air inside is fast becoming like cotton wool – thick and abrading her throat as she breathes, making the sounds distant even though they are just the other side of the roof.

Then.

She is thrown backwards in the chair and one of her hands is made to bring up her dress, all the way, uncovering her belly. Her eyes are switched off – open but off – and the machine types a response onto her stomach, slow, then faster, then ranting, throwing its words from the keys, and bruising them into her skin. Her body twitches in time to each stroke, and she feels its ventriloquism as a good thing.

A minute of this, and ten more seconds, and then-

The woman stands. Gasping for air and bent more and more double. One hand reaches and fumbles towards the words which she has typed but does not get there. The other hand goes onto and then moves all the way around

her belly: clutches it.

Blood drips through her underwear and onto the ground.

Then crawls, like a line of ants, up the table leg. Yes, it does. The woman doesn't see this, but she can feel what is happening. Still, she moves steadily – in pain – out of the attic, down the stairs. Steady. At first. Sadness and success mixed on her face.

Then, the blood that is coming from her makes a sudden surge and becomes thicker, as thick as reins.

The woman starts to run.

The woman runs as well as she can – which is hardly at all – out of the house and along the pathway and out of the gate. Once she is out of the gate there is a tearing in the rope of blood that is being drawn up from her into the house. She continues, slower and slower, away from the house, and the rain washes away the dotted red line that would have shown where she had been.

Her blood runs out as she reaches her home. She steps up once, twice, then falls against her door. Closes her eyes and looks up and feels the rain and does not cry. She feels the water coming down and onto her, she feels the baby coming but knows that her body is the only thing moving, and she waits for her own movement to end, also.

The man who brings the milk gets to her house. He sees her, crosses himself and breathes deeply, glad he doesn't have to shut her eyes. He does not run to get help because she is dead. He continues his round. He does shout at the crow that is watching. It ignores him.

When he's at the part of town where there are people, he tells a boy and the boy runs to get the priest, and once again the town is talking about this woman.

The man who found her and the priest both say – and it is true - that the baby was half out of her, and she was at her door, and this means that people think that she was going to get help. They think she was leaving her house, not coming back to it.

And the writer?

Well, she left the window open.

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