

aftermath, she has two weeks' worth of supplies, fetched by the cook on her request. And now this surprise pie. Two weeks and a mostly uneaten pie will do nicely.

Commented [CB1]: I removed the hyphen bc the modifier is an adverb ending in ly (CMOS 7.86).

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And then the staff will return and she can continue staying home. There is so much to want out there.

Instead of returning to the window seat, Violet wanders into the sunken living room. Off-center, over the fireplace, a younger portrait version of her father presides. He smiles at her from a gold-edged frame, chin tilted down in the manner of the tall. She gets her height from him. The background, though sparse, evokes apple trees. A representation of the orchard a half mile from their house. Her father's business. Now hers. Not that he's taught her anything about it. The fruit is being picked now, September. She will have to figure out what to do. The longtime foreman, Lawrence Roberts, will help. She doesn't know how much of the harvest gets turned into cider and how much the other. Maybe she can sell the land after this year's harvest. But then where will Mr. Roberts, his staff, and the seasonal workers find jobs?

Commented [CB2]: CMOS 7.89 says not to hyphenate. (I feel like the hyphen police!)

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Violet pulls the piano bench out, then sits and adjusts the folds of her nightgown. *You're such a spinster*, she thinks, then shakes it off. It's been months since she's practiced. She throws her shoulders back, lifts her whole carriage, grows even taller than usual just by paying attention to her body. Piano posture. It's an old habit from her childhood lessons. She plays poorly if she slumps. She lifts the keyboard cover. The hinge rubs on the wood, and she's worried it'll leave a mark. Violet's father is not here to ask whether she should daub a bit of oil along the track or rub a smidge of wax there to fix it. She can still stretch an octave plus two notes with her left hand, and nearly that far with the right. *Fingers meant for the piano*, her father used to tell his friends.

She runs a few scales, stumbling, then she glances over at the fireplace again. Her father's portrait holds its permanent smile, lips closed, one corner raised as if he knows something the viewer does not. The artist accentuated his round face with shadows. Or it's the years of fireplace smoke darkening the original. She can still see the marks on the brick where her mother's portrait used to hang, a few inches to the right of her father's. Maybe she would rehang his in the center. She should have done that years ago.

Sam Hand nods, then says the night watchman reported seeing a woman perched in a tree on the edge of the orchard, right when he smelled smoke and went to investigate. It could have been a man. It could have been a bird. It could have been anybody. It could have been nobody. That's how stories go. They may or may not include a thread of fact.

"A woman?" It seems obvious to Matthew, knowing what he does, that he needs to tell the chief about Sunday night.

"Lawrence didn't investigate," Sam Hand adds. "Just kept heading toward the building with the stills in it, because that's what George Radford paid him for."

The chief adds that one of the firefighters thought he saw a woman-shaped shadow, too, but he couldn't swear to it. Matthew writes L-a-w-r-e-n-c-e R-o-b-e-r-t-s in his notebook. He could ask around at the fire station to identify who else might have seen her, but he probably won't, because an uncertain witness doesn't make for good copy. With this report, straight from the chief's mouth, he could get a few column inches on the front page of Sunday's edition.

Woman in Tree Sighted During Blaze.

Today's paper ran with the headline: "First Murder!" with bold black font and that insistently ugly exclamation point. It's not too surprising there hasn't been a suspicious death before. Good people live here. They left the ruffians in the city and set out for a quieter existence. Beechville is no place for a bootlegger to live. Matthew has often thought that the community would be much improved if something happened to Mr. Radford. But he meant jail time or fines. Not this. *Fire's the worst way to die*, Matthew thinks, which then gets him thinking about his wife. Her fingers slipping from his. *Dying alone is better, though*, he adds, *for the people left behind.*

Sam Hand sighs. Matthew can tell it's not enough evidence, what his men have found. Not yet. He probably has them out right now hunting down leads.

"I have information," Matthew says. "It could be key."

The police chief raises his eyebrows. They are curly, prominent. Matthew admires men with power and wishes his eyebrows would grow in that strong. That people would turn to greet him when he

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Anytime he objected to Jean's carelessness or lack of rules for their daughter, there it came: *Eleanor says*. The Eleanor in the middle of their marriage had dark skin and wore her hair knotted in a piece of cloth. She, like many of their neighbors, had moved out of New York City in search of a quieter lifestyle. The Bensons had hired her to tend their twins, and on her off-hours, she nannied and babysat just about every child in town, including Violet when George and Jean went to parties. Did every husband in Beechville suffer through *Eleanor says* at dinnertime? George suspected as much. Children loved Eleanor. After church they trailed her like a kite string while the parents spoke of the weather or the stock market or the fastest way to get a loaf of bread to rise.

And speaking of bread, Eleanor started baking for their neighbors, handing over pies and frosted cakes and loaves hot out of the oven without saving any for him or Violet. She didn't even take credit for these treats! Just left them on stoops and porches of families she deemed worthy. The Gordons received a cranberry pie when Jim caught a bad fever. Mr. Bourne, an egg custard to build strength before his appendix operation.

"It's called being a good citizen," Jean told him.

But what had happened to being a good wife and mother? George noted that his wife let herself taste each creation, but she never saved any for him and Violet.

The first year of a new century was supposed to be good luck, but when Violet was five, George came home from the orchard, bribes paid and bottles corked, and found his precious girl's face in bandages. She had climbed the slate pile in the back yard and fell, cutting her cheek on a sharp edge. Jean rocked the girl in the chair in the master bedroom while pressing chips off the ice block to the injury. When he came home, she sprung out of her mother's lap and into his arms.

"I'm okay," she insisted. "Don't you worry."

George hugged his girl, then set her down and held her hand. Facing his wife. Jean had coached her on what to say, to assuage his worries, to make sure he didn't get mad at her for inattention. But that's exactly what he did: accuse.

"If you had been watching her—"

Commented [CB10]: From the paragraph that follows, it looks like this should be Jean.

Commented [CB11]: This line is so similar in wording to one in the paragraph before Jean's dialogue. Could you vary one of them? Maybe "there were never any leftovers" or "she whisked each creation away before he or Violet could get a bite," or something along those lines.

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