

Burn Her in the Morning

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“Goddamnit!” He yelled... smashing the lamp against the wall. Shards of glass exploded across the room, causing an array of screams and wails. Oil dripped down onto the floor, pooling against the soles of his shoes. The air was heavy with fireplace smoke. The man swept his papers off his desk in frustration, his lips frozen in a snarl. Two tiny shadows shrank behind the old rocking chair, whimpering. The man growled and hissed, before a muted: “Get out of here.”

“I’ll take them away, sir,” murmured a kindly voice from the corner. A servant woman stood tall, despite her trembling. The children ran into her arms and grasped at her skirts. She looked up with hesitation, waiting for him to speak.

“Go on, now, and leave before I beat you within an inch of your life,” the man’s voice wavered like he couldn’t decide between a conversation or a yelling match. Soon he was the only one left in the room. The silence was deafening. The man paced in circles, shaking his head and muttering to himself. A locket with a tiny picture inside lay on the ground, shattered into pieces. He gathered the shards into his hand, and let them crumble back down on to the floor. It was a still light outside, but the curtains were drawn, and the room was blanketed in shade. He strode forward, then paused for a moment, in front of an ornate dresser. The man pulled out a worn bible, with the inscription “*Samuel Parris.*” He brought his face up to the pages, and took in a deep breath, almost as if he could inhale the words of God himself. Samuel pulled on a long coat, and cracked open the front door. The glowing sun burned his eyes, and it took him at a couple minutes to adjust. He blinked like a madman, squinting as he strode into the gold evening light. The cooler air relieved his face, and he pulled his oily black hair behind his ears. He wandered through the streets for a good few minutes, before finding a worn wooden bench and relaxing

into it. Pulling out his bible, he began to recite his most treasured verses over and over again. For he was a good man. A good man who loved his family, and who loved God. At least that's what he told himself.

Up in the house, Tituba ushered the frightened children into their bedroom. The room was almost impeccably clean. Small wooden toys cast menacing shadows on the walls. The woman whipped around and locked the door behind them. Saying a silent prayer to herself as she did. She turned to the room, and looked into the eyes of the little girls standing in front of her. They were so young, they had no right to grow up this way, in shadows, in fear of what might happen. Their eyes were filled with hurt; they weren't old enough to understand. She pulled them close, and whispered "everything's gonna be alright, babes." Her clothes smelled of flour and sugar, her coarse, dark hair smelled of exotic spices. Suddenly, the air felt calmer, and more comforting.

She guided them onto the floor, and pulled out an old storybook, her favorite. It was a tale from Barbados, it was written in her native language, but she read it in English for the girls. She wove tales of wild animals, who roamed through lush forests and tall grasses. Her hands made the movements of colorful birds who would glide through the breeze. She traced patterns down their arms, where fish would swim with the current. Tituba told stories of young boys and girls, who foolishly ventured out, and found themselves in dangerous situations. As she read, her heart began to hurt with sadness, as she read this book to her daughter a long time ago. The girls had the same look of wonder in their eyes that her own did. Tituba quickly turned around to wipe a tear from her eye, disguising it as a yawn. She felt a lump in her throat, and swallowed hard, forcing it down. Her hands trembled as she turned the pages, and finished it quickly before her voice wavered too much to speak. Her heart was empty from the loss of her old family, but the

girls she had been hired to take care of ended up filling the gap. However, Tituba couldn't step out into the street without getting dirty glares from the villagers going about their day. When she held the girls' hands, she couldn't help but notice the painful difference in their appearances. She couldn't help but think about the fact that they were fair, and white like the snow. Their hair lay smooth and straight against their heads. Tituba's dark skin stood out in a crowd of Puritans, and she only took comfort in the understanding eyes of other servants, much like her.

"Tituba?" The youngest asked, peeking up at her. "I'm hungry," she spoke in a soft voice, tugging at her sleeve.

"Of course, my dear," the woman said, as she snapped out of her trance. "Go wash your hands, and fetch me a pot of water." The girls scrambled off, racing off, their footsteps reverberating through the walls as they did. As soon as she was alone, Tituba sighed and placed two fingers against her temple, her head beginning to throb. Her limbs were exhausted from the constant chores, but she knew she couldn't stop now. Smoothing the wrinkles from her skirt, and adjusting her hair into a tight bun, she made her way downstairs and into the kitchen. Tituba stopped and sighed, remembering the events of earlier. Roughly ten minutes later her hands were black up to her elbows in oil, and the floor was spotless. She poked and prodded at the lingering coals in the furnace, adding wood until it roared and leapt.

"We're back!" two voices exclaimed from the door. They teetered back and forth, carrying a large pot of cool water between them.

Tituba rushed over, and pulled it from them, "Thank you dears, now go have a seat at the table, please." She walked over to the fireplace and gently set the pot down over the flames. The woman niftily tied an apron around her waist, and wiped the sweat from her brow. She began to dice tomatoes and cucumbers, and throw them into the pot. As she did this, she couldn't help but

notice the tremble in her hands, which caused her to arbitrarily knock over any object within her grasp. Her stomach was a pit of worry, and the uneven light of the fire seemed to make monsters out of the various furniture in the room. She jumped at sudden noises, her eyes flickered back and forth between the door and the girls. Tituba laded steaming porridge into bowls, and placed small strips of salted meat onto a tray. When everything was finished, she placed the food onto the table, and poured two glasses of cider for the girls. Tituba cast a heavy sigh, and peeked through the curtains to look for her master. The streets were draped in darkness, and the dying sun painted the sky purple. The man was nowhere to be found. "I'm sorry girls, I don't know when your father will be here."

She turned back to the room, and eased herself down across from them. They sat silently, hands neatly folded into their laps, their lips a straight line. "Hey now, it'll be alright," she smiled reassuringly. "Lets all say a prayer before we eat," she closed her eyes and held their hands, their combined voices echoing a familiar Puritan chant. With a final "amen," they lifted their eyes and the children began to eat.

One of the girls looked up from her meal, asking: "Tituba, will you sing us a song?" The wind had begun to howl outside, and the branches of a tall oak scratched frightfully against the windows.

"Of course," she spoke, and began to hum a familiar tune, a lullaby. The girls' faces immediately crumpled into sadness. The youngest sniffled and put her head in her arms. "What's wrong, babe?" Tituba asked, her face awash with concern.

"W-when we used to be a family, my parents would sing lullabies to us," the eldest explained. In the candlelight, her face appeared to have aged many years. "Without their songs, it's hard to fall asleep at night."

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Tituba wondered, feeling guilty about her responsibilities as a caretaker.

Neither of them said anything. Both girls started to clear their plates before Tituba interrupted them by gently moving their arms away. She enveloped them in a big hug, not wanting to let go.

“You can always trust me,” she whispered. “Remember that.” The kind figure took a step back and looked them both in the eyes, before taking their plates away for them.

Across the street, Samuel Parris was making his way towards the house. Dark clouds had moved over the sky, and it signaled a storm coming. Bracing himself against the wind, he stepped unsteadily (this was also due in part that he was perhaps slightly drunk). He gazed with bewildered eyes at the sight of Tituba and the girls hugging, and scoffed. His astonishment quickly turning to jealousy and anger. *Why is that woman trying to take my family? Does she not know I am their father and that I love them? They don’t need her.* His brow creased in fury, and his hands trembled. He adjusted his coat, and held his hat against his head (making sure the wind wouldn’t steal it away), and pushed his way inside.

Tituba and the girls jumped suddenly, hands by their sides and an obedient look in their eyes. The howling of the wind outside suddenly became louder, and the cracking fire in the back sounded like a cackling ghost. “What in the Devil’s name is going on in here?” he demanded.

“We were just talking, Mr. Parris,” said Tituba, stepping in front of the girls. “I made them dinner.”

“I disapprove,” said Parris, “just give them food and make yourself hidden. You are to serve my children, not convene with them. They don’t interact with people like you.”

“Of course, you are right,” Tituba agreed, signaling her displeasure only with a slight twitch of her lip.

“Come on girls, let’s go to bed,” the man ushered, beckoning them with a hand. Neither of the children moved.

“No,” they responded, staring down at their feet, wishing they could disappear.

“No?” he said, with mock surprise. They said nothing, and simply stared at the ground. He scoffed and grabbed both their wrists, and dragged them away. They yelped, and struggled against his grip, looking back at her for help. Tituba opened her mouth to protest, but Samuel shot her a murderous look. Instantly she shrank away, remembering what would happen if she disobeyed him. Soon enough, Samuel returned, having shoved the girls inside their room, and shutting the door tight. His right hand twitched like he was going to reach for his mallet, but seemed to stop himself. Tituba looked up, hands trembling.

“Get out of here, you witch,” Samuel spat, leaning against the table. His bones ached from the cold, and he heaved from the effort. Tituba obliged, leaving before he changed his mind and attacked her.

Samuel paced through the kitchen, before grabbing a lit candle and making the trek up to his room. As he walked down the hallway, each step weighed him down further. His eyes traced the portrait on the wall, of a beautiful woman he used to know. Maybe someday he would get rid of it, but it was too hard to pry it off the wall. The halls felt empty, his heart ached. By the time he got to his room, his felt like heavy chains were weighing him down. He knelt next to the bed, holding his candle in one hand. He dripped hot wax into his palm, gasping as it burned and left red marks on his skin. His whispered words to God, holding his Bible open with the other hand. He cried silently, he prayed for his family to be complete again, and he prayed to go back in time

and do it all over again. He closed his fist so tight his knuckles turned white, and prayed for Tituba to die. He whispered, “Oh good Lord, if you will do justice by me, you will let the witch burn by the stake, and let her sins burn alongside her. I know she is a sorceress, and practices dark magic in order to hoax my children. Let your holy light cure all evil from this world, and protect my family. Amen.” With those last words, he collapsed against the floor, his energy drained.

The next morning, he woke abruptly to the sound of a wail from downstairs, and rushed to the scene, his hair messy and his eyes wild.

Tituba was frantically grabbing at the two younger girls who were having fits on the floor. Their eyes rolled back in their heads, and their limbs moved in unusual ways. She spoke frantically to herself in Arawak, her eyes shut tightly and her muscles stiff as she knelt on the hard, wooden floor.

Parris stood there in shock, “What’s happening?” His eyes turned towards the woman next to the children, “what did you do?” he shouted. His eyes were bloodshot and bags hung from his eyes, he had the look of a madman. He took a step back from the scene, a tentative finger pointed towards his slave. “G-get away from them, you monster.”

Tituba looked up, “I didn’t do anything, I swear,” she held the girls in her arms, they had gone limp, and their breathing was faint. In the distance, they heard the sounds of shouts and metal banging against the ground. Parris and Tituba, who had each somehow forgotten their argument, rushed to the window and pulled back the curtains. The town was marching to their house, faces awash in rage. “Burn the witch! Burn the witch! Burn the witch!” They yelled, brandishing shovels and pitchforks. They moved like puppets, and their eyes were glazed over as if possessed.

“They’re here for you,” Samuel muttered, thinking to himself. He fiddled with the cross over his chest.

Tituba looked at him with fear in her eyes, and he looked back with no remorse. She turned to the children on the floor, they laid still, and she rushed to them, blocking out the noise from the street. “Oh my- this can’t be happening,” she felt desperation fill her bones. She looked up at Samuel Parris, asking: “is this what you wanted?”

He gulped, and averted his gaze to the floor. “Once you’re gone, they’ll be fine.”

Tituba shook her head in disbelief.

Suddenly, Samuel Parris opened the door, and yelled out: “She’s here! The witch is here!”

The crowd stormed in, and two priests grabbed Tituba’s arms, and bound them behind her with rope. They pulled her away, held her on to the floor.

She struggled: “Get off of me! I have done nothing!” Her screams were drowned out by the sound of the crowd yelling for her death. They yanked her to her feet, and walked her through the crowd. Her gaze was fuzzy, and her mouth felt dry. Masses of people around her shoved her, pushing her around as though it were a game.

All of a sudden she fell quiet, and as she finally stepped through the door of the house, she turned around one last time. Everything moved in slow motion. The faces of the people screaming around her, frozen. The girls began to sit upright, blinking their eyes before widening them at the sight of her. Their mouths opened in a scream but the crowd pulled them away. Tituba suddenly remembered their days together, telling stories, cooking meals, and playing games. A tear fell down her cheek, as she realized she would never know it again. Another tear fell once she realized that she would never ever go back to her home, feel the warm sand beneath

her feet or the breeze in her hair. Finally, Samuel Parris met her eyes, and she almost saw a flash of guilt.

Tituba snapped back to the present when a gruff voice spat in her ear, “Come on, slave.” She turned and held her head high, walking with long strides towards the sun. The morning breeze whipped around her shoulders and carried her as she walked. Her heart ached with sorrow for all that she had lost, and all the future she was missing. Tituba’s feet marched on, ironically leading herself to her own death. As she arrived at the center of the town square, and climbed onto the platform, she held nothing but bravery in her heart. Distantly, she heard a priest speaking, but she could barely understand. Her vision became hazy, the world became soft, and she fell into it.