

Lie Down in Green Pastures

Thomas and Glory tried all the midwife's recommendations on how to induce labor: Evening primrose oil, blue cohosh tea, omelets laced with castor oil, and meditative strolls under a full moon followed by conscious, loving sex. They had walked the whole length of Old Colfax Road one evening, had hiked as far out as the apple orchard adjoining the property another night. Glory filled everyone in on the details of how they managed their sex with her enormous cauldron belly. But nothing was bringing on the child. So finally the midwife suggested they go allopathic. It was somewhat illegal, but she could administer graduated injections of Pitocin. The danger was minimal, the midwife said, though for her, drugs of any kind were always a last resort.

After the Pitocin, Glory's contractions came on with a fury, and calls went out to their dearest friends Jenna and Paul, and then to quite a number of folks whom you'd have to say were more groupies of Thomas' than anything else, people who were inspired by him and regularly attended his discussion groups at the Grange on living with soulful simplicity or who came to Thomas and Glory's "less is more" summer potlucks out on the acreage where the children ran free and sometimes naked, and the adults, between plates of garden-fresh food and rounds of score-free volleyball shared their hopes and fears about the future of humankind. Bill and Carol Silver-Wren, Marjorie, the beekeeper, Guy Westerford and his wife who were learning to raise miniature sheep, Old English Babydoll Southdowns that grazed the organic fields and

orchards. Also, someone phoned Sarah, the young one working with Thomas on his latest book. Sarah was always out at his cabin workspace up on Hollister Hill stoking the woodstove, typing drafts of chapters on the Selectric, trying her hand at small line edits.

Some months before—it was synchronicity—Thomas had found Sarah out on the highway in an afternoon drizzle. Only one wiper worked on the old truck, and all Thomas saw in the mist and the rain was the peeling red bark of the roadside Manzanita and a thumb jutting out from under a yellow hooded parka. Up at the house, Glory had hung Sarah’s damp woolen cardigan on their porch line and served her oatcakes and linden berry tea. “I want to learn raised bed gardening and composting and—and your Earth Shepherd philosophy,” Sarah had told them, pulling from her satchel a dog-eared copy of one of Thomas’ early pamphlets on sustainability. And almost instantly she had become his assistant. “You will learn much more here at the Grange than in any university,” Thomas had told her in his quiet prophetic voice, his wife nodding that it was indeed true.

So all these people were there when Glory let out the horrid cries—those shrieks of labor, “I can’t, I can’t go on with this—!” and then, in an almost anti-climactic whoosh, gave birth to a burgundy red, nappy-haired little girl whom the midwife swiftly caught up in her arms, wiped clean with a damp cloth and wrapped in a bundle of warm cotton blankets. But there was too much blood. Glory bled till the sheets soaked through. Her sky blue eyes turned a filmy grey. “I’m not—air—the window—air—!”

Thomas' wife, all woman, their voluptuous goddess for better or for worse. In that instant, it didn't matter that they all loved Thomas more.

The midwife, a Quaker from up on the Ridge, serene, a whisperer, she wore felt boots instead of leather, suddenly was almost bossy. She bundled Glory in her own blood and blankets and ordered the men to carry her out to the car. "Make way, comin' through!" Guy Westerford and Paul hauled Glory like a heifer calf down the hall, ducking through the low-ceilinged mudroom, knocking jackets and woolen scarves from their pegs. Out in the driveway, the midwife directed them. Sarah would drive the Plymouth. Thomas would be in the back with Glory who would lie still, completely still, on a bed of towels. Sarah watched out the rearview mirror as pickups and vans blocking their way were moved aside.

"Aren't you coming with us?" Sarah said to the midwife out the half-rolled window. A pillow of prematurely grey hair fell from the midwife's head. No, no, too risky, she could get slapped with a huge fine, could even be arrested, jailed for practicing medicine without a license. "What about the baby?" Sarah asked glancing back towards the house. Jenna, their newest mother, still nursing, would stay with the baby however long was needed, the midwife announced.

As Sarah sped them down the mountain in the Plymouth, her whole being shook with the responsibility of this moment, the responsibility of saving Glory. She had always wanted to make a difference, a *big* difference. That was why she had come to the Grange, this was why she was helping Thomas with his work. But she never could have imagined anything like this, Glory draped across Thomas' lap, a pale figurine half

buried in an old quilt, her beautiful river of hair a mass of tangle, Glory, with that lusty laughter and sharp tongue, always nagging Thomas about leaving trails of dirty cups and dishes. She was the only one nervy enough to talk to Thomas like that. It just wasn't like Glory to be so quiet, so small.

“Speed!” Thomas called up from the backseat of the Plymouth. And so she did, through the grassy hills dotted with unshorn sheep, through a dense patch of Ponderosa Pine, out onto the freeway for a stretch, then down into the ugly sprawl at the town's east end. Wendy's, Tower Burgers, McDonald's—“poison shacks” they called them back at the Grange.

Big O Tires, Sarah had gone there with Thomas once to buy retreads for the truck, and afterwards, they had parked. Thomas had wanted to pull over in a secluded field just off Dry Creek Road, to show her the wildflowers, he had said. Poppies and Lupine, a hint of Baby Blue Eyes—the meadow a lazy smear of orange, yellow and lavender blossoms canopied by low sprawling trees. His arm close around her, she could feel his breath on the crown of her head, his tentative scraggle of beard, like adolescent boy whiskers but with a wisp of surprising silver mingling in among her own hair. His words, “These annuals are an integral part of the plant community, Sarah, sustaining the oak tree as the oak tree sustains them.”

Glory stirred in the backseat. “Thomas,” she called out delirious, “where *are* we?”

Through the rearview mirror, Sarah caught Thomas' eye. “I'm not sure, I don't know when to make the right turn—”

“Thomas, Thomas, where *are* we?”

“Turn at the, the DMV, then the World Savings—” he told Sarah.

“At or after the World Savings?”

“Thomas, Thomas, if I *die*—”

“Faster!” Thomas called out, his eyes fixed on Glory with tenderness and terror.

Sarah pressed her foot against the pedal until the engine valves clattered.

None of them back at the Grange, and they were glad of this fact, had ever had reason to visit this hospital. But now, here Sarah was in the hospital’s bright florescent glare. Making her way to a desk that read ‘emergency,’ she tripped on the double-waxed floor, strands of her hair flying.

“We’ve got trouble out in the car,” she called out to the nurse at the station, “Kind of bad trouble.”

Paramedics hustled Glory out of the Plymouth and wheeled her off on a gurney. Sarah and Thomas sat in clamshell chairs while nurses pointed from behind the desk, “He’s the husband---” Finally one called Thomas into a small examining room. He motioned for Sarah to come, too, and they sat together in scared silence in a room where everything was labeled hazardous. The ER doctor came. They had stabilized Glory, he told them. But then eyeing his clipboard, he wanted to know why Glory had no obstetrician and why she had not been followed through any phase of her pregnancy. “And who,” he said, “delivered the child?”

Sarah expected Thomas to give the hospital a kind but forceful speech on their right to choose a natural birth, on the vital role of modern-day midwifery. She had

heard him hold forth on so many topics like this up at the Grange. But Thomas, his head down, his fists stuffed in his coat pockets, stumbled all over his words.

“We read up,” he said kicking the mud off the sides of his boot. “We delivered it—ourselves.” And when they passed him the forms to authorize them to transport Glory by ambulance to the larger city hospital fifty miles further down the hill where they treated cases like this, he was fumbling so badly he could barely sign his name much less defend his Earth Shepherd philosophy.

It had been close, the attending physician at the city hospital told Sarah and Thomas late that night, she’d lost an enormous amount of blood, but Glory, he said, would be fine. Perhaps, they could even bring her home in the morning.

They were allowed into the area where Glory lay. A nurse had changed her into a gown. An IV was slowly pumping life back into her.

Thomas leaned in close. “Glory?” he said in a half-whisper but just loud enough for Sarah to hear. Glory stirred, reached for him with her eyes.

“We have a girl—Glory, it’s a beautiful girl.”

Sarah and Thomas got a room in a hotel near the hospital, glitzier than they’d have wanted, and quite expensive for Thomas, who lived somewhat hand to mouth installing solar panels, designing yurts and writing editorials for Agri-Watch, but they needed all the convenience they could get at this point, and some serious rest. From the hotel they were finally able to call and find out about the baby. Jenna, swept up in surrogate motherly bliss, told Thomas the child was just fine, was a sleeping jewel, and

Thomas, his whole face lit up as he whispered into the receiver to his new little girl, “You are my precious star.”

Precious star—it was what he had called Sarah one night some five or six months before, the night they had first made love. They had been up in the cabin working later than usual that evening, trying to get down on paper some breakthrough or other that Thomas had had in one of his theories. She’d had a difficult phone conversation with her parents earlier that day—a fight really. “What about your interest in cultural anthropology?” her father had said. “What about your Peace Corps application?” He was concerned, he said, that she was getting seriously sidetracked. As she and Thomas snacked on Glory’s humus smeared on Ak Mok crackers, Sarah, cross-legged on the cabin floor, had finally confided, “It’s great hanging out with your community, with people with such incredible vision and purpose, and especially with you, Thomas. But you’re all so much older and I’m not sure I know who *I* am.” Perhaps it was something in her tone, or maybe Thomas read a desire in her she hadn’t yet let herself know. But he had pushed aside the food on the floor in front of them, had reached over, touched her face, and then had kissed her, and with all that had followed that night and the ones after that, she had ceased to think of boys or men her age—who could ever think again of that?

Their hotel room had a royalty theme, gilded paisley curtains and velveteen wallpaper, but it all felt sterile, worse even than the hospital because at least at a hospital, there was some medical germ-preventative justification for a dehumanized environment, Sarah thought, but when you’re trying to sleep—. In some strange way,

though, the coldness of the room made her feel safer. As she watched Thomas stuffing his socks into his boots, climbing out of his trousers, then pulling back the gaudy bedspread, she thought, surely he will understand that they can not—not on this night, with Glory losing all that blood—not on this night, with the birth of that beautiful—. In all the rush to get Glory to the hospital, Sarah had only had a moment to see the child, only a moment to glimpse its tiny wrap-around fingers, the little arms stretching, reaching out from the blankets, that sweet delicate face, with eyes not yet open. Thomas, Sarah, thought, would spend a lifetime looking into those eyes.

“Only we know what this is,” Thomas had told her, touching his finger to his lips and then to hers that first night. Sarah felt guilt where Glory concerned, but never envy. Thomas called Glory his house-frau when she trailed behind picking up after him. And he had nicknamed Sarah his young sapling tree. “Sarah, you can be anything,” he’d told her after they had first made love. He had seen Glory in that innocent way at one time, She knew. One afternoon potluck, the Silver-Wren’s brought jugs of organic Zinfandel, and Thomas had fallen into reminiscence. “Picture Glory, twenty years ago—just turned seventeen, traipsing through the middle of Grand Central Station, golden hair down to her ass, linen skirt sweeping the filthy floor,” he said, “Wearing a necklace made from pop-tops and yarn. Strapped to her back, she had this steel string guitar her mother’d bought with green stamps. She never saw the pimps and dealers—she was so gloriously unaware of the world’s dark recesses.” Thomas had brought Glory to his fifth-floor walk-up in the Village, he told them all, played her Janis and Jimi. “After a while, I said to her, you should know this about me, Glory, I have a

pretty grand vision. It involves an exceptional kind of community living. We were out on the fire escape. The more I told her, the more excited she got. I had to hold onto her—”

But over the years, Glory had changed. Thomas had as much as said that at times. She had become headstrong, bullish even, and dug her heels in about how the finances would be handled. She didn’t always have such a high opinion of Thomas. No, if there was anyone to envy it was this newborn child, this being, and if there was anyone to step aside for—

The hotel room’s drapes blocked what would have been an awful glare from the street, but they also kept away the gentle shimmer of the night sky. The smell of disinfectant permeated their sheets, and in their too-firm Queen bed, Thoma pulled her up close against him. When Sarah lay still, too still in his arms, he let go a little, or so it seemed. And for a second she breathed easier. He knows, *we* know the wrongness of this moment, that we cannot do this. But Thomas, it was such weak justification, sounded almost like pleading, called out into the unnatural darkness of their stuffy regal room, “I just need—to release some tension—the stress, can’t you understand that—?” She was young, and in the end, she had let him have what he wanted, but years later she would still remember how there had been nothing precious about it.

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