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Maureen Blackmon

Steven hurt my bottom again. Ma beat me with a firewood stick again. Pa yell at me. He say I worthless and he say I so ugly he cannot sell me. I want to die. I hurt so bad all over. My hands and elbows and knees have blood on 'em. My back hurts worse. Steven laugh. The Betner family froze last week, all of 'em. Ma Betner live longest Pa say. Mr. Cotton find her with baby in her snow cloak, both hard as rocks. I want to die. Ma gonna kill me when Steven hurt my bottom again. She say it my fault.

I try to be a mouse. Curl up inside my sleep shirt in the mouse corner far away from fireside. Maybe she not see me. Brian hurt my bottom soon. I hear him laugh with Steven. I want to die. Timmy younger than me but already bigger. I freeze like Ma Betner and baby. Snow deep. Maybe I go to privy and keep walking to my tree. Maybe run past my tree. Only not when light, Timmy grab my hair, hold me for Ma to beat me again. Maybe leave at night. Night colder. Steven and Pa stay up past dark drinking liquor. Maybe I sneak out to privy. Pa say Ma Betner never felt death. Maybe her baby not feel death either. I want to die.

I want baby doll. Like the other free girls at market day. Some got baby dolls with hair; some just got corncob baby dolls. I take corncob baby doll, something to love and hold. I call her Jane in my head. She have blue shirt and green britches. Nice brown boots and gloves. Yellow hair, nice button eyes, red thread for mouth, black for eyes and nose and ears. I love her.

My bare feet against my sore bottom. Like this my idea. My sleep shirt and hair hide me like a mouse. Please gods of the sacred tree, help me. I want to die. My Ma gonna kill me tomorrow.

I put on my outdoor shirt and britches. Lace 'em up tight 'cause it cold outside. I lace my boots and gloves careful 'cause the frogs about to tear loose. I want baby doll. I want to die. My snow cloak by the door on a hook. I move my hair so I can see. I do not see Ma. The door closed, leather tight. I can push through 'cause I so small. I scared. I got to get my snow cloak and squeeze past the door. I want to die. Freeze like Ma Betner's baby. That baby small. Maybe freezing not take long.

Something happen outside. Timmy come running in, grab the big blanket from the clothes shelf. He run out. The door leather untied. I so scared. I got my snow cloak. I get real scared and cry back to mouse corner. I hear Chester. He old plow horse. He take Ma to Middle Village for market day. When Chester snorts are far away I look outside. Ma on her side on the porch with the big blanket on her. Her head has blood. Pa gonna beat me bad for that. He think I did it. I must go. Goddess of Mercy please move my feet. I cry in mouse corner so hard my body hurts worse.

I hear boots on porch. Pa and Steven and Brian are back from breaking ice in the fields. I am gonna get beat again for Ma. I look up when the door open. Kill me now.

They fairies. Five white fairies. They drag Ma inside to heal her. They have brown and black faces. Fairies like that, Ma say. Fairies from the north foreign folks and heal us Southlanders. Timmy clean the big fireside pot. North Folk Fairies need clean pots to heal, I heard Ma say that.

I see a yellow haired girl like me with the fairies. She have yellow hair and blue eyes. She real young and tall. She hand tools to the black face fairy. A brown face fairy scrub something. The other brown face fairy has needle with horse hair in it. The other brown face fairy busy, I cannot see. The girl like me drops something and starts to cry. Black face fairy kisses her on the

head and whispers something to make her smile. I think white face girl fairy have a baby doll with hair.

When the fairies leave, I sneak out. Timmy with Ma near fireside. I try to run to the fairies, but they ride walkers. I cannot keep up. The snow too deep, I too little, and ice everywhere. I want a walker. Free girls at market have walkers and dolls with hair.

I walk fast. Timmy grab my hair and hold me down for Ma. I cannot go home 'cause Ma gonna kill me in the morning. Pa gonna kill me now. Steven gonna laugh. I hurt so bad. My butt hurts. My snow cloak lets in air and I get cold. I like Ma Betner's baby. I hard as a rock.

My hands and feet are on fire. I scream. I open my eyes. I inside a room with fireside. I look around. I see girl feet, white ones, brown ones, and black ones. The girl voices say words I not understand. They laugh in music. I roll over on my sore back. Black face fairy smiles down at me.

She have green eyes. She say in music. "Who are you?"

I cry loud. "Maureen Blackmon. Keep me please. I want to die."

I touch the smile of black face fairy.