

When they took him, she was licking berry juice off her thumb. The last thing she saw him doing that day on his own was walking, just walking ahead of her toward home, as springy and sure of himself as a boy. He would never do that again.

Someone must have told them about him, that there was no river pilot, who was a white man, who knew the river as he did. "A Tibbetston farmer and boatman of unusual height, with the two barns and the biggest fish shed, and with a wife that reads and writes like a man, on the hill that doesn't have a name, where Surrey Road goes up between the bay and the river."

Or maybe it was simpler: "You want a man named William Mowlan."

William Mowlan. The initials of his name were the stars of the constellation Casseiopeia, which was sometimes a W, and sometimes an M. It felt good to Lavinia to have a husband whose name was in the sky.

For the time he was gone, she did not look up at night in clear weather, not even once. She would only look up at fog, at storm clouds.

She really had thought there was a God. She had thought that the proof of an actual, fair God was right over her head at night, in the stars and changeable planets, and the wide, white carpet of the Milky Way, which swirled in the sky so close to the top of the hill, she used to feel she might hold up her hand and touch it.

She would never have believed it was possible for one human being to love another the way she loved her husband. She was six months pregnant when they took him. He had wanted to name the child, if a girl, for her. Sometimes he called her by her childhood nickname: Vinna. Sometimes he said her name in three syllables, like everyone else did: La-vin-ya. But it was best

when he said it in four. La-vin-ee-ah. The child she was pregnant with was a girl. She didn't give it a name.

They came out of the woods on the bay side. They must have been in hiding, waiting. There were six of them. One of them had taken off his coat, and had slung it on his shoulder, and it seemed for a moment that they were lost. They were not armed. They were very young, maybe eighteen or twenty. Lavinia's first thought was that the soldier might have taken off the coat because of the heat.

Even as William turned to meet them, they threw the coat on his head and tied the sleeves behind him. They had a litter, dragging behind them, which Lavinia hadn't noticed until they were putting him on it. The litter was made with a five foot long strip of canvas, which must have been part of a sail. It was attached to two poles. They also had rope. It took them no more than half a minute to secure him. They were shipmen, they'd crossed an ocean, they knew how to tie knots.

They looked as if they'd done this kind of thing before. Four of them carried the litter. Two of them held onto his legs, which were far too long for the canvas. Lavinia knew exactly how long it was by the length of his legs that didn't fit.

They ran with him into the woods on the other side of the road, toward the river. They had horses waiting for them, tied to trees. They left the poles of the litter behind, but took the canvas.

If she hadn't been pregnant, she could have run after them faster. She was tall herself; when she stood beside her husband, the top of her head was level with his shoulder. But running after them faster would not have helped.

The Englishmen disappeared very quickly with him. She would never remember that she'd been screaming and calling. For the rest of her life, she would only be able to speak in a voice barely louder than a whisper. People who met her for the first time thought she did this because she was flower-like, shy.

She didn't go hungry. People from the town were always coming by. Jacques Wabanaki and his wife, Naomi, looked after her, and considered her a part of their family. Her brother, Patrick, and her sister, Josephine, who was always called Jossey, came to stay with her for a while, and didn't push her to go back to town life.

Her mother had died long ago in childbirth--of another child who hadn't lived. She had never stopped missing her mother. Her father, Robert Rouse, ran a sawmill near York: he was a hearty, good man, and he'd made sure his children were educated, even though he was not. This especially applied to Lavinia, the first-born. "Lavinia got the brains, Patrick got the good looks, charm, and imagination, and Jossey got the spunk, the wit, and good nerves," he would say of them, as if, altogether, his three children made up a perfect person. He bought Lavinia all the books she wanted, with money that couldn't really be spared, and never complained of the expense. Almost everything Lavinia read in her youth came from England.

She would wish she had a different language.