

meetinghouse



volume vi

Musket

So, I noticed the amateur when he was an approaching dot. He walked straight like a tree, his musket slung over his shoulder. I almost, *almost*, laughed. An expert hunter would tiptoe, arms in arm, finger on trigger. Anyway, I descended from and squatted beside the tree, keeping it between me and him. In addition, because one can never be too sure with amateurs, I whistled. While I waited for him, I recalled, on the sand, the shape of a Deer's womb.

"Show yourself!"

I showed my hands first because one can never be too careful with these amateurs. His musket was pointed at me: not cocked! His eyes rinsed me, lingering on my chest and hips as if peering into my skirt to see what version of things I had down there. He was hirsute and of average height. To call him tall would be a lie.

Of all the words in the world, he chose, "What is that you are drawing on the ground?"

You meet someone in the forest; you are not sure if they are human or spirit; and your first interest is what they are drawing on the ground? Just why? I maintained an unflinching gaze and said, "Vagina."

He grimaced as if I told him breakfast would be a bowl of hot shit fetched straight from the source. I almost, *almost*, laughed.

His voice went up a notch. "You think I am joking? What are you doing here?"

His ankles were bare: a fellow commoner. "I want a musket. You want a title. Deal if you will, else proceed on your jolly way."

"You are too audacious for a woman!" he sneered.

You are too dull for a hunter, was the reply in my head, but I did not say it. Why? Why, he has the weapon!

"Nobody in this community is interested in your sick bargain," he said.

What I asked for was his musket, not his opinion. *And* he just lied. The body of a liar would always alert a careful onlooker to the upcoming lie. Either their fingers or toes danced to no music,

or they swallowed nothing, or they stammered. If they did none of these, their eyes would give them away. Liars are prone to look to the right right before they lie. His eyes maintained truth, yet, he decided to utter untruth. I almost, *almost*, liked him.

He gulped. "I want an Elephant."

Another lie.

"No. Too dangerous and not worth your musket. You get a Leopard."

"What if you kill me when I give you my musket?"

Humph! This man was padding me with icy exhaustion. I pointed at a Pear tree so far it looked like a shrub. "See that Ube tree over there?"

A nod.

"If I wanted you dead, I could have dropped you right under that tree from on top of this tree." I tapped our shader.

He burst out laughing. It was not faked laughter. He staggered. He held his stomach. He stooped. It was contagious, this laughter. I almost, *almost*, laughed. I decided to teach him a little lesson.

"You are too funny for a woman!"

If he says woman one more time, was the reply in my head, but I did not say it. Instead, I fixed my thick gaze on something distant. He followed my gaze. I was looking at nothing, to say the truth. I'm not sure why humans do this, but once they see someone staring at something, they instinctively follow. Now, when he tells the story of what happened, if shame lets him, he would say that he felt a soft rap on his shoulder. Not a vicious rap, no, a soft rap like the one a mother uses to wake her newborn. Then he would say the rap was followed by a poke on his waist. But that was not how it happened. The "rap," let's stick to his word, and the tickle, not poke, happened simultaneously, not singly. His body, enfeebled by his rapt attention, was further weakened by the tickle. The said "rap" was me relieving his palm of his musket. When he looked at me, I was pointing his musket at him. I literally saw blood vacate his face and head south. If he died, blame shock, not me. His stiff shock was not from fear that a muzzle was at his chest, no, but how I took his musket in the first place. I poked him. Fear and blood flooded back into him. Good.

“If I wanted to kill you, brother, I would have floored you under that Ube tree.”

I turned the musket’s butt to face him, handing it back. He looked at the musket, at me, at the musket. I did not take my eyes off his. He slowly collected his property.

“What if I shoot you now?”

Humph! Wasn’t this man exhausting? “Two reasons why you will not kill me. One. You do not want to offend the Earth God.”

He shrugged. “Two?”

I opened my palm where his bullets were snuggled peacefully on themselves, fast asleep. That stiff shock returned to his eyes.

“For the last time, do you accept my offer of a Leopard for your musket? If no, please, be going.”

Of all the words in the world, he chose, “You are a woman. Aren’t you worried that I could overpower you and cheat you off the Leopard and the musket?”

I smiled. I almost, *almost*, laughed.