

MARK WUNDERLICH

LETTER TO J.

With your hand over my mouth, your body on my back, I still attempt refusal. In my head, the tattered curtain falls to the stage, the actors give over iron-scorched costumes to the laundress, the carts wheeled away with their props of paste.

Your mother interests me. Today I think of her lying in the cool recess of your plantation home, splayed in her negligee upon the candlewick spread, her six French boys on their knees around her, a rosary clicking off sins bead by bead.

Once you told me of the house maid who spilled her change on the front porch—money she'd pinched from your pockets in the laundry. You knelt to help her gather it up. The money didn't matter to you, though her small revenge clings to you like a burr.

I pretend you are the father. I am the child stepping into the bath. My pale limbs texture with gooseflesh and the water is too hot. When I call, you come to me, wash my small body which once was your body, curled in the smallest cell of your sex. You handle me gently but with contempt.

Your teeth have left their impress on my thigh. When you hurt me, I press my face to the pillow and do my sums. Two wings and a feathery heart do not add up to bird. Fathers and sons continue to multiply.