

WHAT THE LADIES DO

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The vague impression of an 1800s drawing room. Anachronistic details. Elizabeth (the eldest cousin) reads the bible in Latin. Mary (the youngest cousin) darns stockings. Charlotte (This is her father's house) embroiders a handkerchief. They sit quietly.

MARY

I suppose we ought to *replace* the stockings sometime.

CHARLOTTE

Yes.

Beat.

MARY

But it does make me feel so *useful*, mending them.

CHARLOTTE

It's good to feel useful. *(Beat.)* I don't know where we'd get the money, just now, for new stockings.

MARY

True.

Beat.

MARY

I suppose we could knit them ourselves.

CHARLOTTE

We could.

MARY

At least, for the regular kind of every day stocking. Not necessarily the nice, going-to-a-party kind of stocking.

CHARLOTTE

No, not those.

MARY

I don't know that I have the crafts-person's-type ability there. With silk stockings. To knit them, I mean.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, Mary.

MARY

Silk must be difficult to work with.

CHARLOTTE

I imagine it is.

Beat.

MARY

I suppose we'll have to save up for silk.

CHARLOTTE

We'll have to, I agree.

MARY

We may have to give up other purchases. Perhaps...less embroidery floss...

CHARLOTTE

Perhaps. Although...

MARY

Yes, dear Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

Although, I do *so* enjoy embroidery. I would hate to leave off my favorite hobby.

Mary pulls a piece of bubble gum from her cleavage. She blows bubbles.

MARY

Yet, to look well at the next ball...

CHARLOTTE

Ah. Yes.

MARY

Sacrifices must be made.

CHARLOTTE

Henry will be there.

MARY

Yes.

CHARLOTTE

He is very partial to you.

MARY

Oh, I don't know. I looked a fright at the last ball.

CHARLOTTE

Much better than I did, though. You have newer hair ribbons.

MARY

True.

ELIZABETH (*reads from book*)

Listen, cousins! "*Carpe Diem. Carpe Noctum. Ominus.*" Which translates roughly to, "Think not of what you want, but only what God wants. Never buy new stockings when you can darn the old. There is honor in boredom. So saith the Lord."

CHARLOTTE

Amen.

MARY

I wish I were as learned as you, Elizabeth, and could read Latin.

CHARLOTTE

It is so edifying to hear how *relevant* the words of God are to our daily struggles.

ELIZABETH

Indeed.

CHARLOTTE

Though I am glad we have dear Elizabeth to read it for us, as I daresay I would not enjoy the toils of learning Latin.

MARY

Perhaps you are right, cousin.

ELIZABETH

We each have our skills, and contribute uniquely to the home.

MARY

That is so. Charlotte is a fine musician.

CHARLOTTE

And you, Mary, draw marvelous portraits. *And* you are the best at mending stockings.

MARY

And all my prettiest dresses have your embroidery, Charlotte.

ELIZABETH

Charming.

Elizabeth goes back to reading. Beat.

MARY

Perhaps we could write to my uncle for more money. For the stockings.

CHARLOTTE

Surely my father is too busy to concern himself with such things. With the state of the country.

MARY

Yet oughtn't he concern himself with whether his daughter marries well?

CHARLOTTE

Do you think stockings will achieve this end?

MARY

Henry will be there.

CHARLOTTE

Yes.

MARY

He is very partial to you.

CHARLOTTE

Sometimes it seems...but then I couldn't presume...

MARY

Nonsense, Charlotte! You are the most charming dancer, and he can't help but want to fuck you—just like everyone else.

Mary turns Charlotte around and slaps her butt. They mimic loud sex.

ELIZABETH

Don't exaggerate. It's a sin.

CHARLOTTE

Indeed.

Beat. Mary and Charlotte sit.

CHARLOTTE

Yet...perhaps I will write to Papá.

MARY

It is for the best.

Beat.

MARY

I suppose we oughtn't wait too long to write. The post is so unreliable.

CHARLOTTE

True.

Beat.

MARY

Should I get you some paper, dear Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

I believe I will wait until evening, my love.

MARY

Oh. Of course.

ELIZABETH (*reading from book*)

Listen, cousins! "*In Excelsis Deo. Veni, Vidi, Vici. Ominus.*" This translates roughly to, "Trust your father in all things as you trust your heavenly father, and never lean on your own understanding. Never ask for more if you do not know the sum total of what is available. Assume you are ignorant, and always take no for an answer. Requiring silk is not God's way, but man's. So saith the Lord."

MARY

How often you come upon passages that speak to our own times and troubles, Elizabeth!

CHARLOTTE

It is as though God guides your eye as you read.

ELIZABETH

I sometimes feel his presence in my studies, it is true.

MARY

We are blessed to be so guided.

CHARLOTTE

I feel our blessings keenly as an AK-47 blast to the heart.

MARY

That is very keen.

CHARLOTTE

Perhaps this is the Lord's way of warning us against the sin of greed. How can I ask my dear father for more money when I have no knowledge of the family's finances?

MARY

Oh, cousin, you are so good and prudent. Of course you cannot. With the state of the country...

CHARLOTTE

So true. Expectations mustn't be high.

ELIZABETH

It is best to have no expectations at all.

MARY

Indeed.

Beat.

CHARLOTTE

The ball is in a fortnight. We might save some funds by eating more vegetables from the garden.

MARY

That may help, but I don't imagine that it will suffice to buy *three* pairs of stockings.

CHARLOTTE

No.

ELIZABETH

But perhaps if you abstain from purging after every meal and instead simply skip eating altogether, it would leave more for the rest of us.

Beat.

MARY

Perhaps I could put off buying new pencils.

CHARLOTTE

And *I* could focus my attention on the garden, rather than embroidery—for a while?

MARY

That would certainly help.

ELIZABETH

This ball...will, ah, *everyone* be there?

MARY

Oh, yes. Everyone.

ELIZABETH (*at her book*)

Ah...and...Henry will be there?

CHARLOTTE

Oh, yes!

ELIZABETH

Yes?

Pause.

MARY (*sighs*)

He is...quite partial to you.

ELIZABETH

Oh? I hadn't noticed.

CHARLOTTE

He did speak...kindly of you. At the last ball.

ELIZABETH

I had no idea. Of course, my interest is in less...worldly things.

MARY

Of course.

CHARLOTTE

That is your reputation, my dear.

ELIZABETH

Yes.

Beat. Elizabeth reads.

ELIZABETH

Take heed, cousins! "*Persona Non Grata. Alma Mater. Quid Pro Quo. Ominus.*" Or, roughly, "Give to your cousin what is yours, and ask for nothing in return. Give to the godly first, then the learned, then to the

eldest, before the rest. May her feet ever be clothed in silk stockings and her dance card stay full. Blessed are the women that give to their betters, even down to their last pencil, and do not complain, but rejoice in their better's good fortune. So saith the Lord."

Pause.

CHARLOTTE

It... honestly says that?

ELIZABETH

Indeed, my cousin.

MARY

How appropriate.

ELIZABETH

The Lord works in mysterious ways.

CHARLOTTE

No shit.

Pause.

MARY

I...feel rather faint. How odd. I fear I shall be too ill to go to the ball. In a fortnight.

Mary gives a tiny cough.

CHARLOTTE

My dear, if you are ill, I must remain here and tend to you!

MARY

No, my darling, and miss your chance to dance with Henry? You shouldn't!

CHARLOTTE

It would be no sacrifice for you, my love.

MARY

Well...if you insist. We shall need plenty of pencils and embroidery floss, to keep up our spirits during our confinement.

CHARLOTTE

Indeed. We had better travel to town in the morning to stock up.

MARY

We may also have need of some mutton or beef. A hearty stew would surely bolster our health!

CHARLOTTE

Just so. And Cheese puffs!

MARY

Fuck yes!

Mary and Charlotte high five. Pause.

ELIZABETH

Of note, sisters! "*Vox Nihili. Felix culpa. Ominus!*" Or, roughly-

MARY (*reading an issue of Cosmo*)

I'm afraid I am too tired for the scripture now, dear Elizabeth.

CHARLOTTE (*lights a cigarette*)

We mustn't tire Mary. Her health is delicate.

MARY

Perhaps we can resume another time.

CHARLOTTE

That would be ideal, cousin.

MARY

We shall have a charming time here, all together.

CHARLOTTE

Yes! Simply charming.

ELIZABETH

It shall be most marvelous, I am sure. Yet, I should so hate to attend the ball without the company of my sweet cousins.

MARY

You—what?

ELIZABETH

Whether my stockings are silk or cotton, it would be most imprudent of me to shun the kind invitation I received, *personally*, from Mrs. Henrys Mother. After all-

MARY & CHARLOTTE

Henry will be there.

ELIZABETH

Ah. Well, yes, I imagine he will, but that is not my concern. I simply *hate* to be rude, is all. That's all.

MARY

Indeed.

CHARLOTTE

Well—I should hate for you to be unaccompanied. At the ball.

MARY

Oh, yes, that would be dreadful!

ELIZABETH

Nonsense.

CHARLOTTE

My dear cousin, I am afraid I would be remiss in my duties as your cousin if I did not warn you against going alone! It would be scandalous!

MARY

Shameful.

CHARLOTTE

Shocking!

MARY

Slutty.

ELIZABETH

And yet, I must.

MARY

Do you know, I believe I am feeling better already.

CHARLOTTE

Oh?

MARY

I think I shall be well enough to attend the ball in a fortnight after all.

ELIZABETH

Oh.

CHARLOTTE

Miraculous!

ELIZABETH

Praise the Lord.

MARY

Yes!

ELIZABETH

Right now!

MARY

Oh—er

ELIZABETH

Cousins! We must not take His blessings for granted! On your knees!

Elizabeth drops to her knees. Mary and Charlotte reluctantly follow.

ELIZABETH

Dear God, our heavenly father, and Jesus, his son, the Christ, who in some ways is our brother, if you think about it, and Dear, Dear, Holy Spirit, whom I feel come to me in the night and fill me up and touch my spirit and hold me in his heavenly tender arms, Oh God! Oh God! Oh, Go-

Elizabeth is in a sexual rapture thinking of the Holy Spirit.

MARY

-Thank you for making me healthy.

ELIZABETH

Thank you, Lord!

MARY

Thank you for, uh, protecting me from disease.

ELIZABETH

Thank you, Jesus!

MARY

Thank you for making us all beautiful and accomplished, that Henry might marry one of us, or even each of us in succession, should his first wife mysteriously die.

Charlotte looks disturbed-ly at Mary.

MARY

In Jesus' name-

ELIZABETH

In his heavenly name, in his precious grace, in his lovely, manly visage
and his soft beard-

CHARLOTTE

Henry has a beard.

ELIZABETH

Oh Lord! Amen! Amen! Amen!!

MARY

Amen.

CHARLOTTE

Amen. (*sexy voice, mocking*) Amen! Ah, Men, men, men!!

Mary and Charlotte laugh, standing. Elizabeth, furious.

MARY

Thank you, cousin, for leading us in prayer.

ELIZABETH

Communing with the Lord is one of my greatest pleasures.

CHARLOTTE

We couldn't tell. (*beat. Mary snickers*) I feel so—invigorated by our, er,
spiritual communion that I fear I cannot return to embroidery just now.

MARY

Shall we take a turn about the room?

CHARLOTTE

Certainly.

They link arms and walk around the perimeter of the room, gaining speed. They speed up until they are running. They suddenly stop.

CHARLOTTE

How refreshing! I'm quite refreshed.

She removes an overdress and tosses it aside.

MARY

Oh, yes, me too.

Mary tears off her skirt and tosses it aside.

CHARLOTTE

Girls. I've just had a marvelous idea.

ELIZABETH

Indeed.

CHARLOTTE

Let's have a game!

MARY

Oh, let's!

ELIZABETH

Oh. I don't think-

CHARLOTTE

We must have three to play!

ELIZABETH

I would be more edified, I think, by continuing to study scripture.

MARY

Don't be a shit-head. You need to practice or you'll suck at the ball and embarrass us.

ELIZABETH & CHARLOTTE

Henry will be there.

CHARLOTTE & MARY

He is very fond of you.

MARY & ELIZABETH

Is he?

CHARLOTTE & MARY

Of course!

ELIZABETH

Oh, very well.

CHARLOTTE

Baller! I shall be queen and you shall be my courtiers.

Charlotte stands at center and begins to do motions with a solemn air. She bows, waves, twirls, etc. Mary and Elizabeth mimic her as best they can. Charlotte's movements become more difficult and silly and she culminates with the splits. Elizabeth falls with a loud thump.

CHARLOTTE

Aha! We have a loser! You must pay the penalty of a forfeit.

ELIZABETH (*struggling to stand*)

Jesus, Mary, Joseph.

Jumping up, Mary tugs off another piece of clothing, as does Charlotte. They both freely remove clothing until the end of the play.

CHARLOTTE

The loser must pay the queen seven compliments without using the letter "I."

ELIZABETH

I don't-

MARY (*each time Elizabeth messes up*)

BZZZZZZT!

ELIZABETH

Oh, fine!

MARY

BZZZZZZT!

ELIZABETH

My Queen: You are lovely.

Charlotte counts each compliment on her fingers.

ELIZABETH

You are clever. You are a talented sing- er- musician-

MARY

Bzzzzt!

ELIZABETH

Ah! You are, er, cool. You are godly. You are talented at embroid- uh- embarrass. Uh. Me.

Charlotte, irritated, counts this as the fifth compliment.

ELIZABETH

You dance passably.

ELIZABETH

You are. Er. You're. Short.

CHARLOTTE

Charming.

Mary is ready! The following game is played rhythmically and quickly.

MARY

New game! The minister's cat is an alarming cat.

ELIZABETH

Oh! The minister's cat is a bearable cat.

CHARLOTTE (*at Elizabeth*)

The minister's cat is a cunty cat.

Mary takes up the game of insulting Elizabeth with gusto.

MARY (*at Elizabeth*)

The minister's cat is a douchey cat.

ELIZABETH

The minister's cat is an elderly cat.

CHARLOTTE (*at Elizabeth*)

The minister's cat is a fucking cat.

MARY (*at Elizabeth*)

The minister's cat is a gaudy cat.

Elizabeth realizes she is being insulted & tries to fight back.

ELIZABETH

The minister's cat is a haughty cat.

CHARLOTTE (*getting meaner*)

The minister's cat is an insufferable cat.

MARY

The minister's cat is a judgmental cat.

ELIZABETH(*almost drops the rhythm*)

The minister's cat is a k-killer cat.

CHARLOTTE

The minister's cat is a lonely cat.

MARY

The minister's cat is a manic cat.

ELIZABETH (*getting angrier*)

The minister's cat is a nasty cat.

CHARLOTTE

The minister's cat is an o – o an o-

MARY

Aha! We have a loser!

ELIZABETH

Ha.

CHARLOTTE

No, it's-

MARY

You must pay the penalty of a forfeit!

CHARLOTTE

Oh, very well.

MARY

The loser must don a blindfold and go about the room, kissing as many ladies as he—that is, she—can capture!

Mary removes a hair ribbon and blindfolds Charlotte.

MARY

Go!

Charlotte gropes around the room, trying to catch someone. After a few moments she catches Mary. They giggly kiss. Then they begin making out pretty intensely. This goes on for a while. Too long.

ELIZABETH

Oh, really! Now, stop that!

MARY (*breaking away*)

What?

ELIZABETH

This is indecent!

CHARLOTTE (*removes the blindfold*)

Better this than the holy spirit.

ELIZABETH

I – how dare you!

MARY

Don't be such a prude.

CHARLOTTE

Yeah! You need to relax!

Charlotte goes and opens Elizabeth's shirt a bit.

MARY

Maybe your corset's on too tight.

Mary tries to loosen Elizabeth's dress.

ELIZABETH

Stop! Stop that!

CHARLOTTE

Oh my god, you're such a fucking bore.

ELIZABETH

I'm a good Christian lady!

MARY

Loosen up.

Mary and Charlotte tug at Elizabeth's cloths and hair.

ELIZABETH

Get away! I'm a good girl!

CHARLOTTE

Good at what, exactly?

ELIZABETH

Good at, at, I'm—I'm just good! a good girl! God will punish you!

MARY

God's busy blessing bankers, he's not paying attention to us.

Elizabeth takes a handgun from her dress and points it at them.

ELIZABETH

God will punish you through my hallowed hands!

CHARLOTTE

Woah, calm down.

ELIZABETH

No! I'm a good girl, a good girl!

MARY

Yeah, ok, sure.

CHARLOTTE

Whatever you say.

ELIZABETH

In Excelsis, Deo! Vini vidi vici. Ominus!

MARY

Why don't you just...Elizabeth, my dear cousin—please, set down the murder machine.

CHARLOTTE

Let's all just calm down.

ELIZABETH

I try to do my duty by you, to educate you, to make you be ladies, to make you be good girls! But you don't know! What even is a good girl, you don't know, you don't know!

MARY

Yes, sure, please just-

CHARLOTTE

-Just, yes, you're right, you're an example to us-

ELIZABETH

A Good Girl knows her place! (*Elizabeth shoots Mary.*)

A Good Girl respects her elders! (*Shoots Charlotte.*)

A Good Girl keeps her eyebrows in two individual parts, but thinks she is ugly anyway!

A Good Girl never curses, or thinks filthy thoughts!

A Good Girl never reaches out to touch another needing broken person in this world and tell them, "me, too!" Oh, me too!

A Good Girl never hides in the bathroom after meals with her fingers in her throat, eyes and nose dripping into the acid sludge running down her

chin, thinking of Marlon Brando and knowing this is the only way she will ever be loved!

A Good Girl swallows whatever is put in her mouth, and says THANK YOU, THANK YOU VERY MUCH! THANK YOU VERY MUCH! THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

I AM A GOOD GIRL. Are **you** going to be a good girl? Are you? Are you?

END