

Wilderness House Literary Review 4/1

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Click click

clack clack the class repeats what the professor says African Storyteller supposedly a hard class but I'm acing it *clickety clickety clackety clackety* I never repeat after the professor I have enough problems speaking in my own language he runs around the stage hunched over in his baggy assed jeans and blue suede running shoes a gray haired scrawny white man who's lived in Africa half his adult life he's a nut which usually I like in people but not him he's a marathon runner who hates all student athletes because we get out of class to travel on the weekends he thinks it's easy for us but he doesn't know how different it is for the women's teams no lobster steak dinners for us we eat Subway Chinese at best on the road I've eaten Subway sandwiches white bread all the veggies mayo mustard vinegar and oil with a dash of pepper across half the country thanks to University of Wisconsin soccer the sunlight falls into the room through the top windows it's a big classroom holds one fifty in a marble building the oldest on campus the pillars and doorways chiseled Grecian columns and archways I would come to class even if I didn't like learning the stories and culture of southern Africa just to look at the sun glancing off the marble and dashing off the swaying bouncing leaves outside the windows it's hot in here *cluck cluck clank clank*

Very good class very good the professor says and wrings his hands and walks to the podium in the middle of the stage he flips through some papers *Okay* he says *open your books to the story The Girl Who Dragged Her Entrails Through Life Behind Her On The Ground* he looks over the top of his glasses while we open our books I am excited I read this one five times this is a story I understand *her father cut her open her stomach with an axe ripped out her entrails and flung them down beside her then he left her to die by the river now why did he do this class* he pauses *class* I keep silent even though I know the answer *He believed her to be barren* a man from the middle of the room says the sun flashes across the ceiling then goes away I look at the tops of the trees through the windows flailing and bouncing like they have something to say something important! a girl child in her seat in some classroom any classroom anywhere the trees bounce say listen to what she has to say! *Yes* the professor says *what else She disobeyed him when he told her to pick yams* someone else says a man in the back I turn in my seat look at him he has a thin beard *Yes* the professor says starts running around the room again *but what is implied in this story in the information the storyteller gives to the listener but never comes right out and says* I am afraid to talk in class I am afraid everyone will laugh stare think I'm crazy weird gross lock me up throw away the key *The storyteller uses information both as a means by which he gives information to the listener and he uses it as a smoke screen to hide knowledge, a knowledge that may*

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be too much for the listener to hear outright or a knowledge that breaks the rules of that particular society She was a girl and her father preferred sons a woman's voice floats through the room joins the sunlight dancing off ionic columns and marble leaves the professor does not respond he's getting agitated he's spent his whole life studying stories from southern Africa learning the Khosa's clicking language so he can teach it to us white kids in Wisconsin he starts rubbing his jaw Because she was stupid a man yells out four rows in front of me looks at the man to his left they laugh the professor folds his arms across his chest says nothing someone else laughs Patty flashes through my head her dark pony tail skinny legs what happened to her! what happened to her! screams through my head more laughter from the back of the room it feels the whole room is laughing in my ears everyone everything the whole world laughing at me while dad hurts me and Patty laughing who cares mother turns away blames me where is Patty! my father laughing his face over mine while the world watches She was raped I nearly scream her father raped her the guys stop laughing everyone turns looks at me I am angry I am freaked out I don't know what's happening the professor claps his hands together Yes yes yes this is what the storyteller says without coming right out and saying it The Girl Who Dragged Her Entrails Through Life Behind Her On The Ground is a story about the father daughter incest taboo found in every society which is so taboo that in fact one cannot directly address the taboo itself I think I am going to vomit I feel Patty everywhere she is the marble leaves ceiling columns trembling green and gold leaves outside I remember the beauty! I remember the beauty of her love! I clutch the writing board over my lap press my palm into the metal bite of the spiral notebook stare at the back of the seat in front of me listen to us breathe listen to us breathe listen to us breathe! the blonde wood pressed into a semicircle to fit the curve of a back a standard back an average back a male back I stare until my feelings are severed ripped out dragging behind me picking up dirt loose pieces of grass stray sticks I stare at the curved wood in front of me until my feelings are dead