

# Labour OF Louisa

a short story by yasmine killeen

(CREATIVE WRITING SUB CATEGORY)

Labour of Louisa tells the story of a young girl, who lives and works on her family's farm along with her Aunt Mariam and co-worker Eddie. Louisa soon discovers that she is pregnant, much to the disapproval of her overbearing, religious Aunt and is subjected to her ongoing abuse. But as she begins to accept what is to become of her life, she learns some sinister things about the people around her, and the pregnancy itself.

Silhouette, a word newly learnt, new to a young pair of ears, to these ears sounded beautiful, and this word was French, adding to its appeal drastically in a prestigious sense, a word used by great artists across America and Europe. So too was the phenomenon beautiful, when it occurred in nature during a sunset, and the sky would turn orange or pink, and transform something complicated into something that possessed little detail but took on a whole new meaning.

But tonight the pitch black silhouette of a mountain range which overwhelmed the landscape looked more like a void within the sky, slowly consuming the bright colours of twilight until only the darkness of night remained. A pair of eyes did their best to focus on what lies within, what could be lurking amongst the trees, staring right back at her with malicious intent. But as time went on and night began to take hold of the earth, the sharp golden outline of the range began to blend into the background and the mountains became unidentifiable. The sight, no matter how eerie had been breathtaking, the ride was usually bumpy back to the ranch, and the sound of the engine never failed to interrupt a string of thoughts within the passengers' heads, who were too afraid to get lost in thought due to the engine sounding as if it was to blow at any minute.

But the dusk had triumphed over the dust that embedded itself in the gears, those poor gears and cogs whose teeth were rotten and audibly voiced their disapproval of a truck of this age to continue on as a mode of transportation. Even so, the car ride back home had been romantic, the different hues and shades had put the front passenger at ease. Whatever quarrels she had with returning to the farm had started to feel irrelevant, and the thought of another popped into her mind. She'd tell him about the view in excruciating detail, so he'd begin to feel his own presence in that moment. Somehow, he was already in the truck, in the backseat staring in awe at the explosion of colour through the window. In the desert, such peace was hardly ever felt.

But eventually the glow disappeared from the horizon and evening swept across the expanse, until it felt impossible to make out the very dimensions of the dashboard. Through the windshield only a few feet ahead could be comprehended and there was a sense between the pair, driver and passenger, that a figure, or creature was about to pop out from the abyss and attempt to lay waste of them. For the girl in the front seat this was dreaded, for the other it was yearned for, an opportunity under the cover of darkness, for roadkill. Suddenly each bump felt harder, as if intended for bruising, and the journey home on the track felt eternal.

*"It's sundown, she said she'd be back at four."* There was little beauty to be found in the sunset for Mariam Montgomery. No purplish hues which made the sky look surreal or unbelonging to the monotonous earth, no intricate pattern formed by the clouds which resembled the likeness of a checkerboard, only the explosion of a dull yellow, which hid behind the black silhouette of an imposing mountain range which was as eerie as the sound of the wind, which travelled down from the peaks and into the barren valley below.

Nature began to tease the woman carrying stacks of firewood into the house who ignored the splinters that were embedding their way into her skin. At first she felt appreciative of what she thought was an owl exchanging its wisdom through its song to the other wildlife in trade for a night of solace, but as if she wasn't worried enough about the whereabouts of her niece, she was quick to realise that the song was the howl of coyotes. Like the rooster's call to rise in the morning, the coyote's scream was a warning to stop all work and retreat to bed. The desert was unforgiving as it was isolated. No matter how well one was acquainted with their surrounding environment, even if they had resided there for centuries, they would be no match for treachery that occurred when the landscape turned black. Suddenly they bore no ownership.

*"Mary! Lights! I see lights comin' this way!"* Eddie said, pointing into the distance. He had been sitting on the fence, pretending to shoot birds down with a stick. Despite previous concerns about the safety of her niece, Mariam's eyes shot up, then proceeded to act like all was well and got on with her task. She pretended not to care about the arrival of a run down truck, whose tires could be heard crushing specks of dust and grain as it pulled in. It intended to park closer to the door, so the front passenger could make a swift escape inside, but instead Mariam stood her ground, fearlessly and with no intention of allowing the vehicle to go anywhere. Her gaze on the girl inside did not fret as the headlights slowly began to blind her. She could not see into the windshield but the pair could definitely see her expression, completely emotionless but somehow enraged. It was in her eyes and pursing lips.

*"Who's in the car Mary? Who's there?"*

*"Ed, you moron, who'd ya think?"*

When the door opened so did it release the workings of a heated argument, too far gone to make out the cause, but its conclusion was not only seen but felt by all within a five mile radius, when the girl stepped out and slammed the car door behind her, given its condition the driver hollered, concerned for its frail condition. This concern was left ignored as she attempted to storm past Mariam, her pigtails swung back and forth as if they had a mind of their

own, just as annoyed and just as disappointed. Mary glimpsed back and saw the driver side window slide down, to say she was greeted would sound too kind. He grinned with rotten teeth, sweat beading on his forehead, and barely lifted his dirty hand to signify a hello. The only thing pleasant about his appearance was his hair, somehow styled to perfection in a trendy swoop and unfazed by the direness of their location. This must've been what had first caught the attention of her 17 year old niece. Yet it was still not enough for her to return a gesture of any kind. She followed her in.

*"Lou! Lou! You're back!"* Eddie shouted, jumping from his place on the fence post to chase after the pair.

*"Yes... I'm back. Tell me what you did today."*

*"Well miss, I checked on our cow today with doc, he listened in on her stomach or something, and he said that the baby's gonna be arriving soon!"*

*"That's great Eddie, do you gotta name for it yet?"*

*"Louisa..."* Mariam tried her best to cut into what sounded like urgent matters, but Louisa was trying her best to make it to the bedroom without a fight.

*"The mama's gotta come up with one, don't she?"*

*"No Eddie! She's gonna let you decide! You'll pick the name! Any ideas?"*

*"Louisa..."* Mariam repeated.

*"Eddie! I'll name it after me, imagine Lou, a cow called Eddie." Mariam took advantage of his untuned laughter.*

*"Lousia Montgomery, you were expected here at four. You were needed."*

*"Something came up Auntie M. I had things to do. Eddie! I saw the most beautiful sunset today, and I wanted to tell you all about it soon as I got home."*

*"You gave me your word, I had to get Eddie to help me again, that's the fifth time he's had to do your chores."*

*"Eddie, do you mind doing my chores for me? Does it bother you having to help me out from time to time?"*

*"Not at all Miss Lou, I like helping. That's what strong men are for!"*

*"You see? He loves it!"*

*"You can't keep doing this Louisa, when his daddy sent him here to work he wanted him to be treated fairly. You can't be dumping your tasks on him all the time."*

*"It's not all the time! Just today I had to get some space, some fresh air."*

*"Lord, how could you find fresh air with a guy like that?"*

*"Eddie, the sky, it had turned bright orange, then pink and purple, have you ever seen a rainbow, it was like that, just a whole bunch of 'em colours."*

*"Lousia, I asked you a question, how can you do anything with that fella always breathing right down your neck."*

*"What you want me to say, you want me to call my boyfriend sick? Why are you always so hard on him?"*

*"He is sick, he makes me sick, makes me wonder why God had to introduce you to such a thing. Speaking of which, what are you doing on Sunday?"*

*"Got plans."*

*"Not anymore, you don't, you'll be accompanying me to church then."*

*"What? Uh uh. No way! You never make Eddie go! Can't you take him, instead?"*

*"His father don't want him attending. I can't see why though. The thing that the boy's in need of most is a miracle."*

*"Nuh uh, I promised myself I wouldn't step foot in that church ever since I heard what the Reverend was preaching."*

*"Reverend David has been a terrific help to us. He said he was praying for our farm to see better days."*

*"I don't think we should be trusting a man like that. Something's not right with that preacher. He's always making quips about my shoes."*

*"They weren't appropriate, anyone could've seen that, coming into the house of God dressed like that, with all eyes on you, always having to show off." All of a sudden Lou felt light headed, and dizzy, so she began a full retreat to her room.*

The old grandfather clock began to chime around the hour of 8pm. It had been passed down from Mariam's great grandmother, who had received such an item as a late wedding gift. Great Grandma Georgina, in Mariam's mind, was the spitting image of a woman who had lived a long, fulfilling existence, and existence to which so nourishing its contents still lingered on her face through wrinkles and moles alike. She was a lady of prestige that Mariam looked up to envious of the grace that so many women of such an age capture. In her mind she was wise, and on many occasions Mariam would picture her and Georgina, chatting over the excruciating concept of the morning tea break, as Georgina would pass down remnants of a fabricated knowledge to any situation her great grand daughter seemed sufficient. The relationship was idyllic, and Edith would sometimes question whether or not if she ever was to come face to face with her manifestation if she would perhaps prefer her creation.

In truth, Georgina had received the clock at the ripe age of 19, to congratulate her on a recent wedding to Terry Montgomery, who in his loneliness on his father's farm, had convinced an 18 year old girl, to sleep with him and end the corresponding loneliness that filled her heart as she was just as isolated on her parents ranch two miles up the track. She would fall pregnant and the two would be married only a few weeks later. In one of Terry's drunken rampages, he would take his wife's neck in both hands and squeeze, and was now left with two children to raise on his own. Mariam didn't like this story, so in her mind Georgina became Queen Elizabeth, instead of some teenage girl who got knocked up. The only evidence that persuaded Mariam's mind into thinking she was an older woman was an old sounding name.

Around 9 what some would call the calming symphony of crickets began to become deafening. So deafening that Louisa began to question whether or not the crickets had a new surge of confidence, now no longer fearful of the human race and subjected to singing their song in a low matter, and were ready to claim the earth as their own. *"Want help cutting your food, Eddie?"*  
*"Nah Ms Lou, I'm getting a hang of it."*  
*"Whatever you say."* He didn't look it cuz his fork was held in his fist, and he had to twist it around in order to get the food in his mouth. He chewed loudly and bits of potato were landing on his lap. With the farm work it was different, it came naturally to him. He could put his mind to a job and get it done quicker than any of the other workers could. Mariam would then send him onto the next job, again he'd get it done not only in a matter of minutes, but with great efficiency too. Lou had good reasoning to believe that these great results were due to his fear. He didn't want to disappoint the others and wanted to show that he was capable. But mostly he was scared of Mariam, they all answered to her and if anything happened on the farm she was the first to know about it. First to rise, last to sleep. She was like a rooster.

*"So what's the plan for tomorrow?"* Mariam was keen on schedules.  
*"We're out of chicken feed, I'd take the car but one of 'em tires is flat. So I'll probably get to work on that."*  
*"Is that all you're gonna do?"* This backhanded comment was met with a long sigh. So high in volume that it sounded as if it were a plea to leave.  
*"Of course not, I'm gonna fix the fence, another posts dropped off."*  
*"You can thank Eddie for that, he keeps tryna balance on 'em like he's a trapeze artist or something."*  
Eddie, unresponsive and distracted, watched a light bulb on a cable swing back and forth with tremendous levels of focus and his food was soon forgotten. As of 9:30 it was the only source of lighting left unextinguished. This was a rule that Mariam had recently enforced, given she didn't want to draw any unwanted attention to the property. It sat out in the open desert, and despite its rundown appearance, struggled to blend into its surroundings.

Louisa's stomach was starting to hurt, she cupped it and pressed in attempts to locate its most tantalising ache. *"Lou, how come you ain't barely touched your food yet?"*  
*"I lost my appetite."* She wasn't sure if it was the sight of mushed up peas in between her Aunt's false teeth, or the sounds that Eddie kept making as he threw back a glass of water. But suddenly the pain turned to nausea, and she made a dash for the bathroom.

*"What's gotten into her?"* Eddie couldn't reply, his mouth was too full. Mariam placed her fork softly on the table, and tried to listen in on what was going on behind the swiftly shut door. She could hear her niece being sick and immediately began to question its cause. Had she eaten something off? Her plate was full. Did she have a virus? Where could she have gotten something like that from? Whatever it was, Mariam didn't think too much of it and continued to allow herself to enjoy the meal.

But Louisa's groans became more alarming, and at the same moment Louisa made a startling realisation, so too did Mariam's expression swap from calm to that of a woman who had just had a revelation.

The door was practically smashed in, and upon hearing it's great burst, the girl's attempt to scream caused her to gag on the throw-up that was still lodged in her throat, her legs kicked and her shock caused her to miss, spew landed on her dress. But she barely had enough time to react before Mariam kicked her face, in a flash her head hit the floor, more remnants of the stomach crawled down her neck. Mariam grabbed onto her hair and her witch-like nails began to seep into her skull.  
*"Little whore! What did you do!"* Louisa was unresponsive, but a slap across the face brought her back, nearly.  
*"You stupid girl. You did things with that man! Didn't ya?"* She shut the door so Eddie did not have to see, and throughout Louisa's beating, she felt little regret. Only an infatuation with the idea of being a mother.

Over the next coming weeks, Lou's stomach began to get bigger. The bump was small but she yearned for it to grow, to really hold it in her arms, to hug the hill on her belly with more affection. And how she longed to feel a kick, proof that it could hear her and the glorious stories she was already sharing with her bump. Mariam still made

sure she was doing her fairshare of work on the farm, she did little to acknowledge the babies existence. Lou's heart, which for a split second she mistook as little taps from the baby's foot, started to beat at a rapid pace as her and Eddie used pitchforks to gather hay for the horses.

*"Eddie! I think it's kicking! Come quickly, feel it kick!"* He dropped the fork and raced over, so excited that his hand accidentally scraped over her breast.

*"Nevermind, I must've imagined it."* Somehow he looked more disappointed than she did.

*"Lou, why're you happy 'bout havin' this in you. Mrs. Mary always hits you for it, she's always praying in her room for it to go away."*

*"I don't care what my Aunt thinks, I've always wanted a baby! Now I've got one! And I'm gonna raise it right! Haven't you ever wanted kids or somethin' Ed?"* Judging by his expression, obviously he had never thought about it.

*"But you're gonna be an Uncle! How 'bout that? Uncle Eddie. It's got a nice ring to it, huh?"* Previous confusion morphed into pure amazement, a look Lou thought only young children were capable of. He repeated it over and over again. *'Uncle Eddie, Uncle Eddie'* He clapped and jumped up and down, suddenly he could hardly wait to meet his niece or nephew. Neither could Lou, to be called Mama.

Louisa had now become a regular church goer, each Sunday Aunt M. dressed her up in multiple layers, and dragged her to a little white house just outside of town. To get there, they had to trek up a hill, and Mariam considered it a reward when completing their venture to salvation each week. She also found the whole journey fulfilling when mass concluded, and found satisfaction in the minimum effort it took to travel back down the hill. That was what she deserved for her faithfulness. Louisa would utilize the time when she wasn't labouring to sing the baby to sleep, she taught it lullabies, the same ones that she could slightly remember her own mother reciting to her almost fifteen years before.

When they reached the church Father David was outside greeting everyone, and before they reached the crowd Mariam pushed her handbag in front of Lou's belly, intending for her to grab hold and use it to cover up her abomination. The abomination was much bigger now, it felt sore but Louisa knew that in the years to come she would miss such a time. The beauty that is pregnancy. Unfortunately for Aunt M. this made it increasingly harder to hide.

*"Ladies, how are we this fine afternoon?"*

*"Excellent Father, all thanks to Him, our days have been much easier on the farm, we take them as they come with his strength. God Bless."*

*"God Bless you Mary, Miss Louisa, how have you been feeling recently?"* The question had felt entirely specific, and Louisa noticed him glance if not for a second at her lower half. She guessed the jig was up, but was surprised at his lack there of it. Even more so was she surprised, with Mariam insisting that they sit in the front row, when usually she was hidden in the back.

*"My friends, last night I was called upon by He himself, he didn't say much through speech, but through a feeling, a feeling that spread down from my head and into my stomach. And I felt it, I felt His divine touch. And I didn't hear but I felt a name. He wanted me through my salvation of you all, which he has witnessed with a great appreciation, to save this person and rid them of an evil that they have been subjected to. Not only them but her caregiver, who has done all she can to save her niece from the evil festering in her very uterus, not to mention has taken in a young man who has learning incapacities. Friends you should all be familiar with the Montgomery family, and the tragedy that the devil himself has dealt them over the years. But there is a difference this time around, there is something I and I alone can do about this monstrosity. And with your belief I may be able to save this poor child. Louisa Montgomery, would you be so kind as to stand before the church?"* Betrayal, in its finest, cruelest form. She couldn't do it, she couldn't rise. But she did so, shakily at first, because she wanted to be brave. Brave for her baby.

*"Could you come here for all to see, dear?"* Aunt M. must've told him about her condition. She must've asked him to intervene. Lou wanted to run, she eyed the exit. But the Reverend must have seen this, cuz he stormed up and grabbed her arm, practically dragging her to the cross.

*"This child, yes she has sinned, she has had relations with a man, but her age, how could one as naive and as ignorant as this stupid girl know the consequences of her sin? Do you think she is ready to bear such a thing? Do you think she can properly raise and teach this child the ways of our faith?"* Her body began to shut down, yet her heartbeat boomed within her chest, and she struggled to pull breaths into her throat. It all went by in a blur.

*"Friends, do not blame this girl, for how could she know of such things. But that is what the devil does, he feeds off others ignorance to find his way into their minds. Which is why my friend's we shall never be called upon or pursued by him, for we are smarter than anyone who doesn't wish to join our church."*

*"He has attempted to claim this girl, but we will not let him have her, we shall rid her and ourselves of that evil growing inside her. Louisa, we shall rid you of this burden."* He took her stomach in his hands, and pulled and tugged and scratched and massaged.

*"Leave her demon, leave her flesh, leave her bones, haste your suckling on her nutrients, robbing her of energy and life force. Loosen your grip on her body, get out, get out!"* She collapsed, and all she could remember was the Reverend standing over her, his arms stretched up to the ceiling, as if he was victorious and had truly performed a miracle.

Louisa waited outside for Aunt to finish conversing with Father David, probably to express her gratitude for his sermon. She sat on a large rock, and was overwhelmed with a throbbing sensation emitting from her legs. She threw off her shoes, and they were bright red from swelling. *Must've been from walking up this hill all those times, she thought.* She rubbed up and down her belly, as if she was consoling it. *"It's gonna be okay."* She whispers, to calm her child and to comfort herself.

*"How come you don't want me to have this baby, Aunt M? Can't you be happy for me?"*

*"Why would I be happy? The baby's a bastard and you've done a disgusting thing. You think I'm gonna raise your bastard? After I had to put up with you for years? Is this how you repay me? God as my witness I won't do it!"* She did not feel any ounce of triumph as they walked back down, she only shed tears as her feet suffered from the tormenting terrain. She could only put her arm around her Aunt as she relied on her to carry her back, which was torture on its own.

After a few days of bed rest, Eddie had a surprise for Louisa. Despite her disapproval he helped her up from her makeshift sanctuary, carefully as to not harm or put any unwanted pressure on the baby. He walked her through the property, and made her close her eyes before opening the door to an old storage room.

*"3, 2, 1...Open 'em."*

Not used to the place's appearance, she thought she had walked into a completely different house. What was once filled head to toe with garbage, was now filled with light. The walls were painted like the sky, blue but not like the one you can see from Earth. The blue you saw when you went a bit higher, above the clouds. And the sun purifies the sky. Everything had been cleared away, empty, except for a crib.

*"The baby can't stay in the barn. So I thought it should have its own room."*

Upon closer look, she noticed a series of clouds, not intricately painted, there was very little detail. But she could almost see Eddie there, his tongue sticking out as he swirled his brush around until he was satisfied with a little white cloud. His efforts just hit her. So grateful she wept, embraced him and wept again.

*"Do I get to choose the name like last time?"*

*"Edd, I'm sorry but I've already picked them out. Grace after my mother if it's a girl, and Benjamin after my father if it's a boy."* She now wanted to have the birth here, a natural one. And she could almost see it. Her baby running around in the light, looking for their mother. And she could see a little girl, as clear as day. It was Grace.

Three weeks later a baby calf was born. Louisa was doing her best to hurry back to the barn with a pale of water for the exhausted mother. So connected she felt to the cow, like they were sisters. Both with life maturing within their bodies, and Louisa knew that the mother could sense the presence of another inside her. Lots of animals were capable of that. Perhaps it was in her scent.

Eddie was holding the newborn calf in his arms, he sat cross legged in the hay and laughed as it tried to lick his face. Lou was relieved, the baby was safe and seemed healthy.

*"Where's the mum, how's she doing?"* She asked. The calf was squirming and Eddie started laughing harder now, trying not to let it escape. It was slippery and Ed's arms were slick with a sort of grease until just below his shoulders.

*"Ed, where is she?"* He ignored her and kept playing with Eddie Jr, mimicking his high pitched squeals with a big smile.

Her eyes started to search for the mother cow, the rest of the cattle were there. Without lifting his gaze he told her *"Dead, Lou! She didn't make it, it's dead!"* Lou stared at him, waiting for him to look up and explain, but he kept his eyes on the little cow, he was infatuated with it.

*"I shot her, Lou, she was in pain so I shot her!"* In disbelief she ran further into the stables, checking each one before she saw it, the mother lay dead, shot twice, once through the head and once through the stomach. *Damn*

*Eddie must've tried to put her down through her belly* she thought. It's eyes were black and the flies had already begun to land. The smell was completely overwhelming. Her bowels made the scene look even more so grim, but they weren't the result of a blow to the stomach, they were due to the ill-fated labour. But there was a lot of blood, the wounds hadn't stopped gushing, and the hay turned red around the corpse. The wounds weren't clean, they blew skin and flesh clean off, they looked like craters in her body and Lou tried not to look deeper into that abyss, to see some organ mutilated and blown to bits.

Across the barn she could hear the calf cry out, obviously trying to reach its mama. Louisa agonised to weep over the sight, but she couldn't even look away. Slowly she began to see herself, laid out across blood soaked hay, her dress beginning to turn red, and her stomach exploded into fragments.

*"Eddie! Get out, you halfwit! Close your eyes at least!"* There was little relief to be obtained within her lifestyle. But it was through simple things like a shower, that could somewhat repress those maternal afflictions and give her a few seconds of tranquility. As she found great delight in warm water spreading over her belly, so large now she had to lean back, Eddie accidentally stumbled into the bathroom. Despite her best efforts to cover herself with the curtain, he had gotten a good glimpse.

*"Sorry, sorry miss Louisa, but your body looks nothing like Mary's."*

*"Eddie? Did you walk in on Mary too?"* Lou's fear was suddenly surpassed by a rather humorous thought, of her poor aunt getting walked in on, she must've jumped right out of her own skin!

*"No Ms Lou, other way round she walked in on me."*

*"Were you the naked one? You should know better Eddie!"* Now she was giggling, the foolish boy.

*"Nah she was."*

*"What are you talking about, what do you mean?"* Louisa just kept on cleaning herself.

*"Well I was in my room, and I was sleep'n, then I woke up and she was standing there."*

*"Well, what was she doing?"* She was already used to him there as she started to rinse.

*"Nothin' just standing there. So I asked her, I said Mrs Montgomery, what're you doing in my room and she didn't say nothin', she was wearing this robe and she started taking it off in front of me."* Instantaneously, Lou stopped scrubbing, and felt as if she had risen out of the bathroom and had gone through the roof, then came crashing back down to the tiles. She couldn't hear and couldn't react for a few seconds.

*"What?"*

*"She got this stain on her belly too, it's brown."*

*"Yeah, her birthmark."* Louisa was familiar with it, when they used to bathe together when she was little. "Then what happened, Eddie?"

*"Well I kept staring at her, I'd never seen a lady naked before, her skin was awfully wrinkly too, I thought girls were meant to be smooth. Her breasts were, but all over I mean. But I asked her again, cuz I thought I was in trouble for something, but she came closer, then got on top of me. I got this feeling down there, my pants felt tight."* Lou glanced out behind the curtain, he was twiddling his fingers nervously, and doing laps throughout the room.

*"When did she do this?"* He revealed that it had been a couple months ago, before they knew about Lou's pregnancy. Disgust and enraged, she felt these emotions with more intensity than she ever had.

*"Ed, why didn't you tell me?"*

*"Ms Monty told me not to tell anyone, she made that clear after."* After...after. *"But after you brought it up..."*

*"No I didn't."*

*"Huh, yes you did Lou?"*

*"I asked you to get out! Get out Eddie, get out! Now!"* It couldn't have been some sick joke, how else did he know about the birthmark. Her Aunt, to say in that moment that she felt disconnected from her would be an understatement. Suddenly they were miles apart. Her treachery, Lou was suddenly reminded of her constant shaming, that resulted in her ongoing despair.

She had made up her mind, she'd take her daughter, her son, and leave. Either convince Jeffery to take her elsewhere or, if he didn't agree and wanted to stay, she'd take off on her own. She had some money, all from a little tin can under her bed. Money that she had scraped together and saved over the years. It was certainly enough for a bus fair, she'd pack a bag the night before and leave before the rooster got up. It takes about one hour to walk, but by the time the others were up, she'd be long gone. It could take her east, west, she didn't care.

As she stepped out, a wave of pain knocked her down, she was coughing, and could barely breathe. Mariam found her seemingly unconscious, yet still shivering on the cold, tiled floor.

The bench was cold, and Louisa struggled to feel any small fragments of comfort. The dress didn't cover much, and she wondered if this was intentional.

*"How are we today Ms. Montgomery?"*

*"Doctor, I'm worried about my baby, I haven't been feeling all that swell."*

*"Oh congratulations, you're due soon?"*

*"No, not for a number of months."*

*"Really? How far along are you?"*

*"I'm about three months in."*

*"I see... your stomachs are awfully large. Must be a big baby!"* He listened in on her chest, examined her feet and legs, drew blood and took a few other tests.

*"Louisa, would it be alright if you came back in a week's time? I'd like to run your tests by some other professionals and get their opinion on this."* All she could do was nod.

*"Louisa I have some news for you, take as long as you want to process this, the first thing, is that, you're not pregnant."* The baby started to kick. Louisa was so happy that she ignored him.

*"Doctor! Feel my stomach, the baby's finally kicking!"* She grabbed his palm and placed it on her belly.

*"I can't feel anything ma'am."*

*"No, don't say that, I can feel it right now! Can't you? My Grace!"*

*"The reason for your bloated stomach actually has to do with your heart muscles."*

*"She's strong! Feel how strong she is."*

*"You see, you may have a virus which has weakened said heart muscles, so your heart has difficulty distributing blood throughout the rest of your body. Are you listening to me? Ms. Montgomery, it's called cardiomyopathy."*

*"No, you're wrong, I'm pregnant."* Her eyes, upon hearing its name, instantaneously filled with tears, yet she still stared at her belly, smiling at the child she knew lied within.

*"We need to act quickly, what you're going to need is surgery."*

Suddenly, Louisa couldn't feel her anymore.

*"She must've gone to sleep."*

The crib was taken out of the nursery, and replaced with Louisa's bed. She felt that it was right to spend the rest of her time there. She was in need of a heart transplant, and where could they have found the money for such a thing? She was doomed, she had been for months. And yet her bloated tummy remained, baring nothing more than a disease. She had shown affection, and a great deal of it, to the thing that was inflicting death upon her body. She had nurtured and adored her killer. Yet, she still continued to talk to Grace. Anything to put an ease to the crippling loneliness Louisa was forced to digest before her annihilation. Alone everyday, her Aunt, who due to the looks filled with nothing but disdain, kept her distance. Apart from providing her meals and medicine, she was hardly ever in the room. Mariam knew that Louisa had caught on, and perhaps her Aunt found solace in the fact that she wasn't going to be around for much longer. She was returning Lou to her parents, who was excited to see them again. But she wept every day, to such an extent that she felt as if her very skin was to peel off. She wept because fate had dealt her such a violent hand. Because it was unfair that she had to leave so soon, so early. Never able to accomplish her goal of being a mother. She was entirely alone. At night she called out for her daughter, telling her to go to bed. Other times she was so exhausted that she couldn't muster a single sentence. Outside the windows life went on, Eddie worked on the farm as a little calf followed him around and grew, Mariam wore extra layers to church each Sunday.

In a room intended for birth, it was now being prepped for death, a coming and a going, in a way it was the same. A cycle. She was about to leave the Earth similar to how Grace was to enter it. There was still something living inside her stomach, but it was death, suckling away at the breast that was her existence. It stripped Lou of her hair, and stole the calcium from her bones and teeth. Until she decayed. The room which once looked so blue, was now burned into Louisa's head as her final view of the world.