Sarah

JUDITH. OI, THAT'S ENOUGH OF THAT! Making a noddy of yourself gal.

The other MATRONS *flock around* SARAH HOLLIS, *shocked.*

CHARLOTTE. Are you alright Mrs Hollis?

SARAH HOLLIS *splutters and spits but nods her head.*

EMMA. Here, take my handkerchief.

ELIZABETH. This is, that is a dirty wickedness, what / she is

JUDITH. Shhh. Let her speak.

SARAH HOLLIS *takes some time to gather herself. She swallows. Eventually:*

Start

SARAH HOLLIS. When I began my labours with my son that was a hot day though late in the year and I was taken with a desire to have trees all around me and not be seen. I delivered my daughters in warm dark rooms full of women, but on this occasion I wished to be wholly private, which is something I will regret until the day I die, but that's no use shutting the gate after the pig has escaped.

I found myself

,

excuse me.

KITTY. You're alright love. Take your time.

SARAH HOLLIS *nods her thanks. A pause. She resumes.*

SARAH HOLLIS. I found myself in the woods behind Triple Plea Lane. I do not know how I got there or how long I was moaning in the loam until I spied a woman, gathering blackberries, squat in front of the brambles, her apron covered in black stains.

Her skin was pink and her hair was golden and pinned like a cottage loaf on her head with a pretty stone hanging from each ear.

It was the 20th October, well after Michaelmas and too late to be blackberrying. This is something my mother was very superstitious about, so I called out, even in my discomfort, to tell her not to eat the fruit, for the Devil will have put his hoof on it, but the woman turned and said I am the Devil.

And I saw how pretty she was, and each stone that hung from her ears was a pearl-white tooth, and I saw the hooves beneath her skirts, and that her chin was wet, for she wasn't gathering blackberries after all but spitting on them to make them sour.

End

I was stunned with fear but could not move, gripped as I was by a boiling pain. She said I will help you and I cried no no no I do not want your help but I could not stop her and after a while I was grateful for her cool hands on my hot head and how she held me round the waist while I braced my legs against a tree and pushed and pushed and when the head came out she went down on her knees and I felt her fingers in me as she pulled gently at the boy's shoulders, till out he came like a hull from a strawberry.

And she bent her head and tore the rope between us with her teeth and we were cleaved apart but she put him in my arms and he began to suck straight off and for a moment I felt a perfect happiness.

But then I heard a grunting and a snuffling and a laughter full of obscenity and I looked up and saw the woman, in her true form now, transformed. Still a woman, but naked now and bald and her dugs hung down like rotten pears, her whole skin was a rippling canker and her breath was reasty[4] and she was bleeding from between her legs, and left a trail of meat behind her.

I looked down at my boy giving suck and saw her bloody kiss on his head and suddenly I was overcome with terror. And even though I was brimful of love I thought, I had better kill him so I went down to the river and wrapped him in my petticoat with some stones. But he gurgled so prettily I could not do it. So I put my petticoat back on and took him home

4. Rancid.