

DAILY DIARY

June the 6th

Again.

We woke up this morning in a cabin, and I found this book under my pillow. I don't know if I've kept a diary before.

That 's not a memory that remains with me. Of course, that is the point of a diary: to remember for you. But how is one to remember if one can keep neither their diary nor the memory of a diary? Well, that is my plight, and there is nothing to be done about it.

What did I see when I woke? Our bunk has five girls, including me. I do not recognize the others (of course, I do not truly recognize myself), but I know immediately that one is the serpent. The serpent I remember. Still, I commit her to the page because I do not know how long I shall remember. I suppose I will put it to the test and see if I wake up tomorrow to find these words. If so, then, at least for a time, I will remember who I am.

For that is something that I also remember: I often do not remember myself. Not truly. I do not remember myself, and I

have not remembered myself many times. This is a fact. Remember it as a fact. I commit it to the page as a fact.

I have not always been here, nor did I come to this place in any kind of normal way. I did not ride a horse, or walk, or sit in a carriage as it jostled me over lumps and dips. I simply appeared here, much as I have appeared in other places before. These are facts that I do not remember, but I feel them. I feel them deep in my soul that I have been to other places and woken in strange beds. I feel it, so I record it as a feeling.

I was writing about what I saw when I woke. We are five.

One is a serpent. The walls are wooden, like a cabin, but there are many decorations and festoons. It seems to be a gay place, though I feel no gaiety. Perhaps, when we rise and go out into the world, I shall feel something other than the dread and forgetfulness that weigh on me.

But perhaps not, for I have chanced a look out the window and there is a heavy fog over the land. No, as I sniff

the air, it is not fog, but smoke. I have awakened in a smoky land, and now I must close this first record, for they are rousing themselves and looking about. They all look frightened and confused. I shall endeavor to comfort them as I can, even the serpent — if she will allow me.

My name is Phoebe. Remember that.

June the 7th

Huzzah! I have found my words from yesterday, and none are a surprise to me. At least for now, I remember accurately.

I could not write more yesterday because our day was full of labor. It was smoky work, for the clouds hid the sun and stung our noses. I do not know where the smoke comes from, or it seems to arise from the very earth, and sometimes it appears as if the cabins are ablaze, and the trees, and the river. But these are apparitions, for all is whole.

We are apparently the ones in charge of something Saman — tha calls a 'camp,' though it looks the antithesis of a camp

to me. There are so many buildings that it might be a small town, and I have seen nary a tent nor a teepee. The mad one and the dull one agreed that we are in this 'camp,' and so I acquiesce with protest, as does the serpent. This is, perhaps, one of the few things she and I are aligned on.

As I mentioned, our day was full of labor. Yesterday, we took canoes out of a building by the river that arcs across the northern and eastern edges of these 'camp-grounds.' I have only traveled in such a boat once with my uncle, but I have seen many. However, in my years, I have never seen a vessel so well constructed as the ones we carried yesterday. They were sturdy and painted bright green with red lines running along under the gunwale.

We didn't just have to bring the canoes out. There were oars, strange, bright orange vests, and many lines with flags and some with egg-shaped devices, which I was instructed—once more by Samantha—are buoys, though they do not look like the buoys I have seen. There was sweeping to be done, and

boards to be replaced on the dock. It is strange that five young women are asked to do this kind of labor. It is also strange that I do not know who asks us to do it. We just know.

June the 7th Continued

Today was another day of sweeping, lifting, and carrying. We went into the bunkhouses and tidied them for the incoming children. One bunk is full, which will be pleasant, I suppose, for the girls within. Though there is a pesky boulder set just outside the door that one must constantly avoid when carrying things.

I expect that someone could easily trip on it and dash their brains out, especially with seven girls stamping in and out at once. Seven girls, seven beds, seven satchels that Samantha calls rucksacks. I am suspicious of the number, and am curious if, indeed, we will see seven girls here in a week's time.

Samantha came up to me today and made a show of comforting me. No, a 'show' is uncharitable. She did try to comfort me.

I believe she saw me looking forlorn and homesick, which I am.

I feel as if I've been homesick for a thousand years. But I could tell that, despite her more obvious intentions, she was also seeking her own comfort. She has the double pain of being sick for her home and of enduring the mockery of the serpent and her mad assistant. I have sought to never hate, but to obey the Lord's command to love my enemies and to pray for them. But I find this command exceedingly difficult with the ser ... no, Theresa. If I am to try to obey the commands of divine love, I must not turn her into a devil. Still, it is very hard when she stares at me with her serpent eyes and leers as if she wants to do unspeakable things to me.

Lord, grant me peace and charity. And sleep. I ache all over from this work!

June the 8th

Today was beautiful, and we could see the sun several times between the patches of smoke. Beyond the haze and sharpness of the air, the day was marred only by one unfortunate encounter. Breakfast was pleasant. Though there are many things that are strange and surprising in this place, the food is often wonderful. And, at least when we break our fasts, it is familiar. Sausage, bacon, eggs, cheese, fruit, and bread. The other food is good too, but it is often new to me. Ground meat pressed into round disks with cheese, mustard, tomato ketchup, pickles, and onions between two pieces of the softest bread I've ever eaten. Potatoes cut thin, fried, and generously covered in salt. Chicken made into little hunks and breaded to be dipped in sauces. They are all delicious, but where do they come from?

We walked to the archery range today to prepare it for our incoming 'campers,' as Samantha names them. Many of the targets had to be remade with new straw, and three of the

bows had cracked over the winter. Charity and I went into the forest to find young saplings to cut to give us greenwood to shape into new bows. We know how to do this, but I have no memory of learning this skill or craft. Charity is not, as I first suspected, burdened with a 'molasses mind' as my father would have said. She is slow to speak, quiet, and simple of intention and feeling. I sense that perhaps she is the most morally upright of us all, the most righteous before the Lord who loves a pure heart. I am duly admonished by the Spirit in Charity's presence, for my pride is reminded that it is not swiftness of thought, nor steadiness of hand that is the most treasured imitation of our Lord. Instead, it is goodness, simple and true.

As we walked and spoke concerning the forest about the camp, I saw within her the same sadness that I see in all of us, even Theresa with the serpent eyes. We are, all of us, longing to return home. But I suspect that none of us has a home to return to. I believe that I have not had one for

many years.

I have read back over the entries in this journal and find that I have not forgotten anything of importance since we woke up on the first day. That is reassuring. Though I can remember little from before that waking, at least I am not losing days as they pass.

Oh! I almost forgot to record the one black stain on today.

I went into the archery cabin to find a knife to whittle the saplings that Charity and I found, and came upon the two Theresas harassing Samantha. I understand why she fears them, for they have about them a darkness, but I do not understand why she allows them to treat her thus, when she could just walk away. Still, I told them to let her be, and, after a long moment in which I thought the older of the two—the one I have called 'the serpent'—would hurl herself at me, they laughed and left the cabin. Samantha was so sad, but we comforted each other.

I am confused by everything, and even more so as I ponder

the reason why the Theresas were treating Samantha so poorly.

June the 9th

When we woke, a light rain was falling over the camp. The sky was still smokey, though I think the rain helped cast some of it away. As we walked to breakfast, Samantha and Charity spoke to each other for perhaps the first time. They talked of dancing, and both admitted that they had never been to a dance. I don't understand how that could be. Have they never visited a neighbor who hosted a dance? Have they never been to a May Day? What do they do at Christmas celebrations? My suspicions about who we are and what we are continue to grow. I fear where they will lead.

Unfortunately, I cannot say what happened after we walked to breakfast and the conversation about dancing, for I cannot remember. We walked to the 'Mess Hall,' ate, and now we are here. Everyone is sleeping except Theresa the Younger. She is

staring at me, and her lips are moving as I write. I suspect, though I can't see clearly, that she is mouthing the words as I put them down. This fills me with dread, but I must not give in to my fears. I must not change my behavior because others appear to be consumed by unclean spirits.

Still, though I wish to write, there is nothing more to say.

Sadly, I bid myself goodnight.

Sweet dreams to you, dear Phoebe, oh, my soul. May you be forgiven your sins and stand boldly tomorrow.

June the 10th

Though the smoke has cleared, for which we are all grateful, today brought a new, troubling aspect to our lives at the camp. We took the canoes out onto the river, though I don't believe any of us know why. We all simply woke up with the conviction that that was our purpose for the day. If I have not written about this before, this has been our general experience the whole time. Though I suspect the impression is getting stronger. We wake up now with both a conviction of our goal for the day and an ever-stronger sense of purpose. We aren't just to do the things in our heads, but we are 'meant' to do them, as if we were fulfilling a divine mandate.

Of course, this has been disturbing. It remains disturbing. That and the smoke.

To this great pile of disturbances is added a tale of strange woe. Today, upon our canoes, we spotted what first appeared to be a large white boulder sticking up out of the water at

the bend of the river. My first sighting of the rock filled me with curiosity, which soon turned to dread. For, while the other girls noted its strange shape, I saw something that I believe only the elder Theresa saw as well. The stone did not reach the bottom of the river, but floated atop a dark, wavering body, like a monstrous and malformed snail. I blinked, and something pulled me down into the darkness. Not in my flesh, but my spirit. I could feel myself slipping down, through the bottom of the canoe, and into an ocean that felt boundless. I knew there was a midnight sky somewhere above me, but I could not dream how far above. In that strange darkness I could still see, and what I saw shook me and shakes me again as I write. For there were many forms, like bodies wrapped in dark cloth that fluttered in the wavering waters. Forms like the dead in their shrouds, though these were heavy, brown or black waxen things, bound about with great cords and linked by their feet to great ropes that plunged down into the darkness.

Hundreds I saw. Thousands. Thousands of Thousands.

I blinked, and I was on the canoe once more. I saw the white shell, for a shell it was, before us, and I saw that Samantha was getting too close. I pointed, not daring to raise my voice, and whispered to her that it was alive. I'm not certain that she heard me, but I saw the fear in her eyes - she had been afraid all day, though I don't know why - and she rowed hard to stay away from it.

I will not write in detail what I saw when she hit it and fell in. The writhing and slipping mass that twisted there, the moaning that I heard within my head cause me to sweat and shiver here in my bed. But I will put this down.

When Samantha went under, we all acted. The two Theresas stood in their canoe and began to chant in a language I did not understand. Charity - sweet Charity took up her oar like a warrior and set to clubbing the shell. And I did little more than lean down and pull Samantha up from the water and the moaning beast.

By the time I had pulled her onto our boat, the 'twins,' as Samantha calls them, were screaming, and God forgive me, their screams comforted me. For I saw the thing shrink back into its shell. Then we were away, floating down the river once more. I don't know how long the encounter lasted, perhaps not more than a few seconds. But unless I forget all things, it shall remain with me forever.

There is one more thing I need to relate about today, and it is not less strange than the encounter on the river. Once we were safely on dry land, I felt the world slipping away into fog and smoke. It was like I was falling again, but not into the depths of the waters. Instead, I fell back, among the trees, as if the world had tilted on its side. The trees rushed past me, sticking out like rungs on a broken ladder as I plummeted. Then the world turned again and I was upon my feet staring at a road. It was a strange road, metaled, black, and with orange lines running down its center. I am not certain I would have known it was a road at all except

that some part of my memory told me it was.

Without knowing why or how, I stepped out into the middle, pointed, and spoke a word. I don't know what word it was.

I only know that I spoke it three times. Then I turned and the world turned and I was falling up past the wrong-way trees. Up until I was once more standing on the grass by the bank. Then Theresa with the serpent eyes looked at me and nodded. I think there was something sad in her face, something that I don't remember seeing before.

Now I'm here.

No. Heavens. Did that happen today? Or did it happen before? I can't tell.

June the 11th

Today we cleaned out Josie's Bunk, and I had the strangest memory. Well, first, the day started out extremely dusty, and I thought that perhaps the smoke had returned. Happily, it was only an exceedingly dry day, and we did not have

to endure the smell of smoke working its way into everything. Still, there was some coughing and irritated noses because of the dust. While we walked with handkerchiefs pressed to our faces, I admit that I was finding it difficult and distracting to listen to Charity speak so softly about her worries. I believe that young woman does little except worry. Of course, I understand her anxiety, but I feel that she makes too much of it, as we are all in the same situation together.

While I found myself distracted, I noticed that the path underfoot had changed from the ruddy clay that makes up most of the paths here to a lighter, sandier earth that reminded me of my home. I remember so little of home, but seeing that ground lit a candle in the dark places of my mind, and I knew in an instant that I was walking the path from my house to the little shed where father kept his tools. When I looked up, I was alone, and, indeed, there was father's shed standing open in a hazy morning light. And for ten paces, I was back in Stone Ford, and nothing was amiss.

When I took that tenth step, however, I was bombarded with a thunderclap of pictures and sounds, all rolling over me. I saw myself alone, standing in my mother's garden, but knowing that she was nowhere to be found. I saw myself comforting a young woman with long brown hair, and then we two, comforting a third. I saw a school, and a wonder of light and music. Cameo after cameo flashed before me and was gone.

With my next step, the world was as it had been, and Charity was speaking of her inability to remember anything. But in that moment, I remembered much. I remembered myself and how I had come to this place alone. I remembered when Theresa came, and then Charity. I remembered the fair, and the school, and the terrible house of madness.

Some of those images remain, but most have faded. I remember names, however. Names and impressions. And a feeling. One terrible feeling over it all.

The feeling that there is someone else here, and that she is watching us. Every moment was saturated with the cloying,

overwhelming sense of that other pair of eyes.

That feeling remains with me now. Even as I think about the bunk and its seven "ruck sacks" as Samantha calls them, and how I wonder what those seven girls will be like, I feel as if I am being observed.

Perhaps that feeling will disappear when the camp is full of laughing girls for we will have to care. I don't believe I have seen an optimistic person for - I was going to write 'a long time' but I don't know how time works. The Prince of Denmark was right! Time is out of joint. I can only hope some clarity will come tomorrow along with our campers.

Oh, before I finally close my eyes, I must add one bright spot! I have just noticed a sign above my bed. I believe Charity has made it for me. It says, "Phoebe's Home Away" and it is adorned with a beautiful pink flower. It is not a rose, though it reminds me of one. Its scent is familiar, but I cannot remember how. I wonder if I have seen it before in all my lost days. In any case, it is lovely to

have such a gift and token of our friendship ward me while I sleep. Now I regret my words about Charity's worry. Oh, Spirit of Love, make me kinder!

June the 12th

A storm is coming. It's the same storm. It's always the same storm. I have lost so much of what I remembered yesterday, but new thoughts have appeared in their place. I can see myself, or whatever is left of me. I can see the storm coming in and rolling over us, blocking out those who might have come and filled this place with laughter and joy. But there is only one, and she will arrive soon.

Then, after a short time, we must leave.

Where we will go, I do not know. What I do remember is the farm empty of all but the one who watches us. Once, of course, she only watched me. But then she watched us. And us. And us. And us. She watched me on the farm, and us in the house, and in the forest, and in the

house made for mad people. She watched us in the fields, and by the river, and in the middle of an empty town.

She watched us at the fair, and in the schoolhouse, and again, in the town. The town, the river, the eyes watching.

Which Hell is this? What have we done to deserve this?

Were we greedy, or proud, or lazy, or gluttonous? Did we lust or take out our wrath on others? Is that why God has cast us down?

The water has begun to fall, and I can see it pattering on the windows of the school, and sending us scurrying into the fair's tents. I can hear the thunder clamoring over my father's toolshed and bellowing outside of a high tower as I lie upon my sickbed.

But I have never had a sickbed.

They were supposed to come. But only one did. Her name is Ashley. Samantha calls her 'Ash.' I wonder if that is an omen.

Tomorrow we will make our masks and dance by the water.

But I don't know why. I don't know what the Beast Moon is, and yet I know that sometimes we celebrate it. I don't know what the Feast of Silver Water is, and yet, my heart longs for it, though it has no moon. What is the Festival of Candles, and why do we not celebrate it tomorrow?

I feel that I am going mad. I feel that I have already gone mad. Oh God, have mercy on me. Please look upon your servant, feeble as she is, and have mercy! If I have affronted Thee, then I repent! Show me what I have done, and I will remake myself anew! Please, God! Please, don't take my mind.

It is the only good thing about me.

June the 13th

Tonight, I dance. Tonight, I will wear his face. Tonight,
they will bow before me. Tonight, will I roar and leap and
raise my claws.

June the 14th

I wore his face. I was the fear, and he is coming.

My love is dead. My love is coming.

The sky is green. The sky is blue. The sky is yellow and
casts everything in its golden light.

The sky is breaking.

I can feel the air breaking.

There will be no tomorrow. There will be only today. There
will be no tomorrow. There is only today.

Time lingers.

Time lingers.

He will not come to me.

I freeze and am turned to stone, a spring-loaded thing, taking
my steps again and again.

Come to me, love. Come and set me free. You are mighty.



