

*From Jennifer Maiden's **The Metronome***

**Hillary and Eleanor: 12: The Vineyard**

*(Hillary Clinton had said that her favourite president is Abraham Lincoln)*

Eleanor Roosevelt woke up and gave up.

Hillary Clinton and Abraham Lincoln

were still chuckling on the balcony

together in the brisk New Hampshire snow,

which flew about the old hotel like paper.

Eleanor made herself a pot of coffee. Cup

and pot in hand, she joined them in the storm,

which seemed to worry neither. They

were sipping coffee, too, it apparently

still hot despite the intervening hour.

They smiled to include her. She refilled

their cups and placed the pot on a cold chair,

rimed white beside her. She hadn't often

spoken to Lincoln. When she was First Lady,

her office had been the quaint Lincoln bedroom,



which in his life had been a sitting place  
for cabinet meetings, and not where he slept.  
One of her secretaries had seen him, though,  
on the bed putting on his boots, and run  
out shrieking, so Eleanor figured he must  
have adjusted to the new bed sometime, although  
it was an odd, elaborate thing that looked  
doll-housy, like most of the White House,  
and she always had suspected he'd good taste.  
She'd never herself *seen* him in that room,  
although he used to bump around a lot, and  
her Scottie, Fala, often barked at him.  
The White House always seemed so full, she  
thought, of dogs barking at ghosts. He seemed  
amenable to questions, so: 'Was it you,'  
she asked, 'who made all that odd noise  
when I was writing letters?' 'Yes, of course,  
but I was never aware of others in a space  
as much as they were aware of me,' he said,  
'I compensated for that with great compassion



for those that clearly suffered. I would place  
baby birds back in their nests. I would have  
given suffrage to the slaves. John Booth  
heard me say so in a speech, and killed me.’  
It seemed quite true and simple. Hillary, so  
thrilled by his company that she’d kept  
her crazy campaign smile until then, was  
immediately still and calmly candid: ‘I  
have lost New Hampshire here to Sanders,  
and it meant more to me than a primary  
state, because it was a symbol. A Goldwater  
girl, I changed to back McCarthy. When  
he almost won New Hampshire, it was such  
a promise to me of transition. Now  
I mistrust my own position. Eleanor  
has warned me that a saint can stoop to murder:  
I was so giddy when we took Gaddafi out, I  
found myself drunk with death. Did you ever  
feel that about Confederate dead?’ He thought  
about it very slowly, cradling coffee.



The snow had stopped about them, noisily  
like a choir turning pages. He quoted,  
“He is trampling out the vintage  
where the grapes of wrath are stored.” As  
you thought in a speech, Mrs. Clinton, my life  
after the war would have been wrathless,  
except I think they’d have seen my suffrage  
for their slaves as the worst revenge of all. I  
have often stared from that Whitehouse window  
across to where the battlefield had been. That  
was one of the noises you heard sometimes, in  
the daytime, Mrs. Roosevelt. Yes: there  
is a grandeur in having killed, if those around  
you think it gives you dignity. A once-poor man  
like me or an over-advised woman, always must  
learn to resist it by much long reflection. But  
I did not mean that you ignore the counsel  
of those like Mrs. Roosevelt’: teasingly.  
‘Oh, Eleanor doesn’t advise me,’ said  
Hillary, ‘she heckles me.’ And the two First



Ladies exchanged a conspiracy of eyes. He  
felt like a young intruder there, in spite  
of Hillary's hour of attention. He said, 'I  
am never quite easy with women, but  
my wife and I shared the loss of all but one  
of our sons and we even endured  
seances together. I am surprised, Mrs. Clinton, that  
it was not my attitude to money you saw  
as my most attractive feature. You remember  
that I began Federal Income Tax, started banks  
to enrich the common currency, and built  
railways to promote employment, break  
up the bitter distances. It was to me all part  
of the living Rights of Man, which always flutter  
not like tall flags but like lost little wings  
in need of constant rescue.' 'That doesn't sound, dear, like  
your campaign speech, but Sanders', said Eleanor,  
sourly, but saw that her lively young friend  
was spacing out on death again: 'Is it,'  
she asked gently, 'that execution?' Hillary



nodded: 'Bill always made a point of showing  
he supported the death penalty: so much so  
that he went to the execution of a black  
man he wouldn't pardon. Eleanor, that man  
was so retarded he told the guards he'd leave  
the dessert from his last meal for next day.

You know we brought in laws to reduce  
welfare, put more blacks in jail. I'd say  
the kids in the gangs were "super predators". I  
went along with everything Bill did,  
not just about his women, Mr. Lincoln.

I am funded by private prisons. Private prisons.'

He guessed that she had talked herself to tears,  
by trying to avoid them. He did not know  
how best to comfort, except that his words  
enlarged always beyond his intention. He  
said, 'The grapes of wrath aside, Mrs. Clinton,  
I was not a religious man, but knew the Bible  
back to front and sideways - those two things  
do often go together - and I'm thinking now



of the parable of the vineyard: the last worker  
earning as much as the first one who came in.  
They will say you steal your campaign from Sanders  
but in the last it will not be election  
that concerns you but the mercy you regain.  
Let your husband suffer his slow death by numbers.  
Let your husband on his own endure that pain.’  
Eleanor saw that her friend had lost  
the movements of a little-marching-girl, the  
drilled expansive gestures, and relaxed  
in her bright pastel coat as the snowfall  
restarted around them like crushed gems  
falling out of the blackness, where no one  
felt cold. Hillary became genuinely eager  
to talk of the Thirteenth Amendment: ‘You  
used so much trickery, coercion, mastery  
of numbers yourself to outlaw slavery. Surely  
that shows some artfulness required at  
all time to do good?’ For some reason, Eleanor  
remembered Hillary’s holidays with Bill in



the Dominican Republic with the Kissingers  
at the home of de la Renta. She herself enjoyed  
Oscar's first perfume with its muskless  
spicy breeze from flowers, its utter  
union of the inner and the outer. Kissinger,  
she thought, had not been good, however,  
for Hillary. She said, 'The bombing of Cambodia  
did not deserve a Nobel Peace Prize, dear.'  
Drinking his own reflection, in the coffee  
still warm in the snowlight, Lincoln said,  
'On the subject of the vineyard, of course,  
it took me a while to come to a total  
conviction to outlaw all slavery, then  
to not only that emancipation but to suffrage.  
Still I reached that. And in truth, you know, I  
always knew I would. I was a wrestler  
in my youth. The arms and legs I twisted  
for the Thirteenth Amendment, Mrs. Clinton,  
were more a wrestling match than great deception.  
I made no one a fool. The only deadmen





were on the battlefield, and then too many,  
and for not one of them I shouted glory. Mrs.  
Roosevelt is right about the late Gaddafi.  
Your husband taught you somehow it is manly  
to enjoy death and that has never left you.’  
Hillary said to no one, ‘I am a Christian’,  
in a tone implying listlessly that the condition  
was neither a curse nor a recommendation.  
Eleanor held her hand, which was becoming  
chill at last in the New Hampshire midnight.  
In this lost light, it seemed to Eleanor:  
‘A blessing that you did take credit  
for the Iran peace, although when there  
you didn’t want to meet them. All the work  
was largely done by Kerry, but it shows  
improving values that you did relent.’  
She added, ‘We should go in soon. I believe  
Mr. Lincoln is quite tired.’ He smiled:  
‘I am usually an early riser, but will stay  
up longer if the future of my country



is at issue as it seems to be here now.’

Eleanor enquired, to snap the tension:

‘Has anyone of us seen that demon cat that appears in the White House basement?’

It was supposed to herald the Wall Street Crash at the start of the Great Depression, and also the Kennedy Assassination. It starts off as a kitten and then grows to a springing demon.’ They shook their heads. ‘Me, neither’, she laughed, ‘You know one thing wrong with Franklin was that he believed them when they told him too early that the Depression was over. He should have kept working on it longer: the same mistake they’re making today.’ Lincoln nodded: ‘Good news does seem married to delay. Dear Mrs. Clinton, you should reveal your speeches to Goldman Sachs and quietly take blame for years of posturing manipulation.’ Lincoln, Hillary thought, could sound like Social Media, in delayed New Hampshire coldness. She



resolved again to avoid the White House basement.

Eleanor carried the coffee pot inside. It was still hot to her touch. She did not question, but she left them both outside a little longer in a small communion.

Hillary was telling him how Bill had incorporated the Confederate Flag in the flag of Arkansas and Lincoln still managed to sound soothing.

The phrase, 'Now he belongs to the ages', said when Lincoln died came to Eleanor's tongue, as the last of the coffee touched it. It was good they all loved coffee so much, she thought. She had heard the demon cat was invented by nightwatchmen, who wanted a night off, but that - the right of a worker to have rest - seemed to her to be a valid reason.

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