

*Dear Mrs Roots I went to the Eastern Shore! and here is what happened—*

Francis finds herself standing in a *bump in the road*, outside an unpainted country store. A sign swings 'US Post Service, Assawoman, VA'. She pulls open the door with a ding of a bell and is immediately greeted by what must be the postmaster, a large man of around 55-60, standing in front of a wooden mahogany chest with many drawers. "*Hello cousin!*" a *sallow woman* with long black hair comes over from behind the wooden grill. They announce their hospitable and, to Francis' surprise, country welcome. Somewhere, somehow down the line, she is related to these people. They seem friendly enough, she thinks. They hand her some papers and documents about a man named Michael Holland. They say he is a mariner.

Over a lunch of blackened shrimp and cheesy grits at the Yacht Club in Crisfield, a couple of miles from Marion Station, Francis meets another possible relation, an Elizabeth Tull, née Coulbourne. They take to each other immediately. In between conversation about the state of Francis' garden back in Virginia, they discuss the family. Elizabeth shows her some documents about the Coulbournes and a picture of a *large beautiful desk* which may well have been from Pomfret itself.

They leave the Club, and get into Elizabeth's car, driving out of town, up the long road from Crisfield towards Marion Station. Elizabeth owns another property round here, around 150 acres, but nowhere near as old as Pomfret. The long road they are on, Route 413, used to be the Pennsylvania Railroad, connecting Marion with the rest of Maryland and States beyond. They pass scattered houses here and there as they make their way up the long stretch through fields and pastures. Francis catches sight of a huge red, slightly elongated strawberry propped up on the side of the road. Someone is selling strawberries. According to Elizabeth, they were quite a thing in Marion's heyday. The place was considered the strawberry capital of the state until the railroad got closed down. Since then, Marion has become somewhat a ghost town. Elizabeth is going to the Strawberry festival next month, perhaps Francis will too?

At a crossroads it looks like they are in the centre of the village. A couple of wooden clapboard buildings here and there: an old freight station and another kind of country store, with two flags hung outside, not dissimilar to the neither picturesque nor pretty one in Assawoman. "Each road round here is named after someone significant", says Elizabeth Tull. "In fact, we just drove past Holland Crossing and Coulbourn's Cove." Francis chuckles, how amusing she thinks, a piece of her ancestry still remains. The car makes a loop round the village and returns down the highway, driving past a small painted wooden sign advertising 'Accohannock Tribe Inc Oyster Fritters'.

If Francis had looked at that sign for more than just a fleeting moment, for longer than her to realise that she was actually rather full from lunch, to actually think about the area and even the town she visited not long before. To think back to that name, Assawoman, a cross stream. To look at the settler street names she finds herself surrounded by in a territory

presided over by the Annemessex Indians, a tribe of the Pocomoke Indian Nation'. To realise her forefather's part in Native American displacement and commitment to the expansion and protection of white colonial settlers by taking and ruling over suggestively 'free' land. In that moment in the car with her gaze out front, anticipating the old house and what she could write to Joan, Francis displaces them again, appropriating ownership and daydreaming a false sense of entitlement over an area that she has never actually been too before.

What she also does not see is her forefather's greater connection to these tribes. His inclusion in the drawing up of a treaty, of *setting out and ascertaining to Indian lands and enquiring into their grievances*. Of having the granted authority to *destroy, kill, burn and take all enemies, Indians or others if they disturb the peace of this Lordship*.

The car slows and takes a left out of the highway and onto a *track made up of sand and oyster shell*. An avenue of trees stretches out in front of them for about a mile. A deer skips in front, meeting eyes with Francis momentarily before jumping back into the trees. The whole place seems surprisingly isolated and out of the way. She thinks of Joan in England, wishing she were here with her, *exploring and researching together*. The house stands in a clearing, at the end of the long winding lane surrounded by *ancient holly trees more than 40 foot high and vast boxwoods*. On one side, the family burial ground. On the other, a tenant house and garage. It looked exactly like the print, kept framed on the wall amongst other family portraits and photographs back home in Virginia. *A white clap board federal style house with a galleried porch, slightly neglected along with the garden*.

Elizabeth introduces her to *charming* George Eders, the new owner of the house. A *successful building contractor in New Jersey*, he moved to Maryland with plans to restore it. He invites them in, taking them on a tour through the house: moving from the oldest to the newly restored parts, showing them each room, delightfully bright and airy, discussing the history of the area, replacing the word 'plantation' with phrases like the old house or just Pomfret. Removing the word as if it and its meaning never existed. Preoccupied by the story, lost in the white clapboard and elegant rooms with fine carpentry. Francis documents each room carefully with her camera. Mr Eders describes his plans to install heating, a very expensive venture she is sure. They move from the bedroom into the upstairs corridor. Passing a black and white photograph showing a field, with rows and rows of plants. Strawberry plants. Workers lined up, backs bent, busy picking. Francis did see mention something about Coulbourne and farming in her research. Perhaps this is what Coulbourne started when he took up the land? She looks at the workers, remembering a name. *Sippio*. Her thoughts only go that far as she is immediately led out onto the gallery to look towards the garden. *Sippio*, a name mentioned in a will somewhere. The name of a slave, one amongst several the Coulbournes own, working on Pomfret land, bequeathed to a son. Francis' unconscious dismissal, her eyes leaving the photo, completely disregards the significant role played by those enslaved in the establishment of most, if not all, 'founding' families fortunes.

They stand and look out, discussing the future of the overgrown garden. Francis brings up the 'help' back home. She needs to find a new gardener of her own. Delaney is out of action, but *it is not so easy now and they want the earth for anything they undertake*. Mr Eders hastily agrees, concerned with the price of his heating venture for the house. Elizabeth Tull goes on, "there's been some awful happenings in and around Crisfield, *most of them committed on blacks by blacks*". Francis thinks to herself and the state of the area, oh the world has *deteriorated since her youth. SUCH A PITY.... She really had a wonderful childhood*.

Before they leave, Mr Eders quickly directs them towards what is left of the tenant house. The roof looks half caved in and everything is so overgrown and jungle like with ivy covering half the wall on one side. 'You may well be interested in this...we found quite the collection'. He shoves open the wooden replacement for a door and steps briefly inside before returning to the two women with a large cardboard box brimming with memorabilia. He puts it down on the ground and starts rummaging through. "Seems to me", he says, "Pomfret, the Coulbournes or someone else had rather a big connection to Marion's biggest export". He puts out on the ground a dusty frame surrounding a small cross-stitched embroidery of two strawberry plants intertwined. Francis is curious, drawn to the image, wondering who did this work. Rather amateur sure, but interesting nonetheless. She uses similar colours in her own embroidery. Other artefacts join the ground by the frame: some catalogues, a napkin, some papers, a letter. Mr Eders unrolls a poster. Strawberries are everywhere, all over each artefact. Francis opens up a catalogue, every page rosy red announcing crops with names like *Lucky Strike, Premier, World's Wonder, Missionary*. Banners, announcements and catchphrases promising satisfaction, quality, bigger profits, success (or your money back). Elizabeth Tull holds a small square Kodak print in her hand. A photo of a dining table, laid out with a beautiful flower centrepiece. A silver bowl of what she assumes are strawberries, piled high.

Francis' eyes return to the embroidery, attracted to the patterned crosses, the various shades of red entwined with green. She may not know it yet, or ever will, but she is touching on something significant here. Something beyond Pomfret, her research, her letters, her connection to Coulbourne. She will become subject to a new type of legacy, propelled by the facts missed out.

Sorry this has been all about my visit to Pomfret, but I thought that you would be interested. I wish that poor D felt well enough to come over, I am going to try and take him to see the house at Marion Station, he will like the marsh and the wild fowl even if he can't really see the house, tho I think he could see the kitchen, as that is on the level ground. Much love to you and the dogs. Bo.