

Laura Madeline Wiseman

## THE LONG CON OF 1862 (OR *FINGERSMITH*)

*fingersmith*

You must have a job, but not a real one. Or be robbed. Or die of boredom. You have options. To nurse unwanted babies whisky until sold on the black market. To melt down gold and silver. To unstitch initials on silk kerchiefs, smooth out holes. You've a good heart. You've a mind of a thief. You believe you can read bodies like print. You as fingersmith unlock all. You've found your calling. Now act.

*mountebank*

You maid to a kept girl. Your part is to convince her to marry a scoundrel posed as beau. Once married, she'll be locked in a madhouse and you and the scoundrel will split the profit. Try to teach her dance. Try cards. Try to file her tooth by thimble. Try to hold her close to sleep her. Try to make her love you. Kiss her mouth, part her clothes, and find not money beneath petticoats, but love. You undress her and dress her up again. Through rain you watch her ask you if she should marry. You give her to a scoundrel posed as beau. You slip her into madness. You have found love, but keep to money. When you find yourself in a madhouse, don't be surprised. Hold onto her glove.

*double-crossed*

You in a room of other women. Your drab clothes. Bars on windows, some you can see, some you can't. What's it like to be tricked by love? To be kept under lock and key? To starve? There is a woman here who mutters. Another pained by arthritis. No one believes the stories you tell. You can't believe your dreams of kissing girls. Were you really maid? Or mistress? Perhaps thief? Did she love you? How long had she played you? At night, with a key blank you saw away a shape. You carve a star home. No one hears you grate against metal or sees the blood on your hands.

*espial*

You trip through countryside with a bumpkin who guilts you for pinching a round of bread. You'd bed him for silence, only you see right away he's in love with a scoundrel who posed as a beau. Are you surprised when you find her you can't bring yourself to the doorknob. You can't threshold. You in a rented room with filthy bedclothes. You window watch. You want to revenge or to ravish. To attract or to attack. How will you her. How her. How you.

*requite*

You decide to confront. There is blood spilled, knives. You've been double-crossed, triple, and so on, until reality is a tenuous thing, stretched tight between a room of people, webbed out to the world. She murders. Or is it you? A scoundrel who posed as a beau now a puddle on the floor. Her eyes like a pair of hearts.

*pearl*

You as bumpkin ride to her unkept castle and climb stairs to her chamber. Notice the quiet filled with all the bodily sounds of you. She will be friending books. Stand to watch her finger pearl buttons. She wants to know if you've come to murder her. Have you? Have you come to the slickness of her? To repay a madhouse? When you kiss her remember you are thief and she, though spoiled, has a gold heart. How will you cross the heart? How will you swear to die?