

THE WOMBING

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Cold wind blew through the market square. Margarete stood shivering, loosely clad in a dress a size too small that the overseer had pulled from a sack an hour before. There was a rip on one side and a rusty stain at the hem that could have been blood, but Margarete was too frozen to notice. The dress provided no protection from the wind nor the icy grains of snow it carried within.

Margarete was third in the line of women who waited in silence for their turn to mount the roughly erected stage that dominated the market square. The noise of the gathered crowd sounded sharp in her ears. Despite the early hour, most of those gathered were there for the auctioneer's free whiskey. Drunk men were likely to pay for the liquid were being pa