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Much as I had looked forward to reading this book, I’m not certain I can go on. Not that the writer has failed me so far—in fact, at only page sixty, I feel on intimate terms with the narrator. The last thing I want is to abandon her here, newly married, just come to Kansas which is still a territory, pre-Civil War.

But there have been readers before me who had little mind for those who would follow. There were signs from the beginning: a gooey smudge on the flyleaf, reddish-brown, centered precisely, and dropped one-third of the way down on the otherwise blank page. Chocolate, I prefer to imagine.

Yuck, I thought, but turned the page quickly and began. And for the first four chapters, I read on, uninterrupted, until, early in chapter five, small oily stains appeared, butterfly-style, in perfect opposing-page symmetry. Potato chip crumbs, stuck and pressed, and brushed away by subsequent readers.

Then, for six consecutive pages, dry brown broken things, tucked into the gutter, puzzled me completely—until I found a cluster better preserved.
—the bud-stems of grapes.
By mid-chapter, pages no longer lay flat:
a reader's hand, pressed against
or smoothing down the right hand page

would detect bumpy presences beneath.
Someone ate a lot of grapes for a good
long while and then got a taste for
—there was no mistaking it—bright yellow-white

hunks and strands, flattened now,
curlicued and well-stuck to the pages,
still held the fragrance—oranges, oranges,
oranges, until I could read no more.