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Death By Water

Karen Haughian

**A Thesis
in
The Department
of
English**

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

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Abstract

Death By Water

Karen Haughian

Most of the stories in this collection have to do with travel. The destinations are not important in themselves, but for what they represent to the characters and for the impetus for growth or change that they provide. Travel often aggravates rather than alleviates the conditions the characters are trying to escape.

While in these stories travel serves as a catalyst, naturally it also functions as a metaphor for the personal interior journeys of the characters. Buried fears come to the surface in strange locales, and often they give rise to impetuous or irrational decisions.

Many of the stories focus on couples and the friction that occurs in their relationships as a result of their conflicting reactions to foreign situations and surroundings. Paths diverge quickly in the forced intimacy of travel; often the things the couples in these stories discover about each other lead to their separation. Travel also forces these characters to deal with the here and now. The comfortable routines and distractions of their normal existence are removed, and in the new and sometimes frightening circumstances of foreign lands, they are forced to confront themselves.

Although the very nature of travel allows people to present disguises which are as easily accepted as credit cards, it is personal history which determines these characters' reactions to new environments. Every character does have a history, even if he or she does not want to communicate it or be judged by it on his or her travels.

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Night Driving

Liz is in the basement cold room, which is filled with the pungent smell of last fall's carrots, preserved through the winter in sand, but now rotted. She is searching for her old ice skates, the painting she made when she was sixteen, her wicker trunk.

Travelling light is Liz's specialty. For years her motto has been, Never pack more than you can carry. Jettison the rest. But lately she's been feeling an emptiness, a need to reclaim some of the flotsam and jetsam of her past. But she can't find the skates. Or the painting. Or the trunk. Everything is gone. She goes upstairs to ask her mother, who is at the dining room table working on a jigsaw puzzle.

"Well, we don't have room for all that stuff, Liz. If you wanted to keep it, you should have brought it with you when you moved."

Liz knows this is true. But she would like to think that there is some place on earth where she can leave parts of her personal history, a sort of safety deposit box for memories. It makes her angry that her parents erase all traces of her, throw out or sell anything that she's left behind in garage sales. She tells herself that she is being unreasonable, but she feels betrayed.

She sits down at the table, looking at the puzzle pieces strewn across it.

"This is a really bad corner down here," her mother says. "See how the colour is all the same? I've been working on this every night this week and this is all I've got done."

Liz takes a piece from the table and puts it in.

"You're a natural," her mother says.

"Sure." Liz gets up and goes into the kitchen. Her mother will get all the pieces in without any assistance from her, doesn't want any in fact. Liz picks up the phone and dials her own number in Montreal. When her answering machine comes on she says loudly, "When did they call? All right, I'll be back as soon as I can. Three, four days."

"Who's that, Liz?"

"Looks like I'm going to have to go back sooner than I thought. There are some problems with the contract I did just before I left. I'm going to have to go back and straighten things out."

"So soon? Your father will be so disappointed."

Fat chance, Liz thinks. She's hardly seen him since she arrived. Funny, she thinks, how the things she wants to be the same have changed, the things she wants to change won't.

"You're not going back without seeing your sister?"

"No, mom. I'll pop down to the farm and see her before I head back."

Liz sits at the table in the big farm kitchen, stirring her scotch on the rocks with her finger. Her sister Rhonda is at the sink, briskly washing stalks of pale celery. Liz knows Rhonda doesn't approve of

women drinking scotch, that she herself drinks only the occasional Kahlua and milk. Once, she might have cared about this kind of censorship—but now the whole question of what real men and real women are supposed to drink seems ridiculous. Admiring how the long stalks of celery become perfect half inch half moons beneath Rhonda's knife, she asks, "Do you remember going to visit grandma and grandpa when you were eight and I was six?" Liz remembers her grandmother letting her have pie for breakfast, remembers the cold water that gushed from the red pump outside the kitchen, remembers the nights under the eaves in the bedroom, pulling herself off of her sister as they both rolled giggling into the center of the feather mattress, remembers listening to the soft safe murmur of her parents' and grandparents' voices in the other bedrooms.

Rhonda puts the celery aside and pours boiling water into a clear plastic bowl. The powder in the bottom of it turns bright green. "No."

"You don't remember riding Brandy?" Grandpa had Percherons, huge, majestic animals that spent most of their time in the corral now that Grandpa no longer farmed his own land. Grandpa rented out the land, but he couldn't bear to give up the horses. Liz remembers Rhonda sitting scared and proud high on the horse. She wanted to ride too, but Grandpa said she was too young, he'd let her ride when she was older.

"No."

"You don't remember going out to the chicken coop to collect eggs and the chickens chasing us and grandma coming to rescue us?" They had gone into the dusty old coop and raided the nests, but then couldn't

get out with their booty. They were backed up against the wall, clutching the big brown eggs to their chests, screaming as the chickens advanced with their bright, mean eyes, when grandma had come to see what all the racket was about.

"Not really, no." Rhonda continues stirring the green liquid.

Not really, no. Rhonda always claims she can remember nothing before her ninth birthday, which Liz does not, cannot believe. Her own memories go back to when she was three. But she seems to be the only one in the family who has memories. When she describes things that happened when she was very young, they are usually puzzled. She paints as many details as she can, and sometimes they say, "Oh, that must have been the time we were doing such and such. You were just a baby then." They are amazed that she should have any recollection whatsoever.

Mindy, Rhonda's seven year-old daughter has been hovering just outside the doorway, listening, thinking no one can see her there. She sidles in and rubs up against Liz's shoulder. Children at that age always remind Liz of cats in heat, wanting something that the physical contact doesn't satisfy and not knowing why.

Mindy says, "Liz, tell that story about the time you and Rhonda fell through the ice and almost died."

Liz is always taken aback by the kids' use of the adults' first names. She herself tried it with her mother when she was six, having decided that "mommy" was too babyish for her now that she was in school. But her mother wouldn't answer when she called her Marge,

pretended she didn't even hear Liz until she used the magic word "mommy". But Rhonda and Zak don't bat an eye. Liz wonders if this first-name business blurs the lines between parents and children.

Mindy is tugging at her arm and then bumping up against her with her chest. Liz pulls her around onto her lap. Mindy is sticky, with patches of dried orange popsicle all over her arms and legs, and she is getting too big and too independent for laps, but she allows Liz to take her and hug her like a much younger child.

"She doesn't believe those stories you tell her," Rhonda says in her usual matter-of-fact tone. "She thinks you make them up." She turns and takes ice cubes from the freezer.

Liz looks at Mindy. "I don't, you know. They really happened."

"I know, Auntie Liz," Mindy says solemnly, gently twirling a piece of Liz's hair.

Liz herself doesn't know if the stories are true. They are what she remembers, what she has to pass on, but they may be lies. She tells them, she supposes, in the hope that someone will confirm that they really happened, that the world in her mind truly existed once. She is the only one in the family who seems to have this need to create a mythology.

She wonders what Mindy thinks about these stories. The thought of her mother and her aunt as girls her own age makes her laugh. Liz herself always finds it easier to imagine people as older, never younger.

Mindy begins, "You and Rhonda were coming home from school one day. It was very cold and you had to walk for miles and miles and

the little cocker spaniel, the one with the sad eyes who always sat at his front gate to say good morning when you walked to school wasn't there..."

Liz smiles, hearing her own exaggerations in this much younger voice. The miles and miles were really just one, and it was Vancouver, so it couldn't have been that cold. But children she has realized can parrot surprisingly well. She remembers reading to Mindy when she was four. Mindy had Liz convinced that she was a child prodigy, able to read already. But in fact, Mindy had memorized the words to all her favourite stories, and she always asked for the same books over and over. Liz would get bored, try to convince Mindy that another book would be better, but Mindy wouldn't hear of it. Sometimes Liz tried to hurry through the book, skip pages, but Mindy couldn't be fooled. She knew which words went with which pictures.

Rhonda is watching them. "Mindy, go wash your hands and then come help Liz set the table. It's almost time for supper."

Mindy slides off Liz's lap without a word. Rhonda turns to the freezer with the bowl of bright green jello, the pieces of celery floating in it.

Liz thinks it looks like toenail clippings in toxic slime, but she knows better than to say so to Rhonda. Rhonda doesn't appreciate comments like this, takes them as an attack against her lifestyle. Liz disturbs her routine. "So I guess I'd better hit the road early tomorrow morning, beat the heat."

Liz leaves the farm behind as the sky is just starting to turn from black to indigo. The road up to the Trans Canada highway is paved but narrow, and the wild oats fan into the road, brushing against the sides of the car. The headlights form a tunnel of light ahead, but when she looks into the rearview mirror, there is nothing behind, except the oats closing in. She is glad to be moving again. She wants to be out of the prairies as soon as she can. Already there is a west wind up, pushing her from behind.

It seems to her that she has always been moving. The movement of trains and planes and cars and boats and buses is familiar. When she was young, her family moved again and again, trying on this city and that. Every two years her father would announce that he had been transferred and they were moving to yet another new city. She felt like a prisoner or a prize witness being moved in secrecy to a new hiding place. Rhonda rebelled finally, marrying a farmer, putting down roots, refusing to move. But Liz had kept moving. And now, like an air fern, she grows out but not down.

She drives around Regina on the Ring Road, stops at a roadside picnic area to stretch her legs and eat the lunch Rhonda has packed for her. Her t-shirt sticks to her, and she goes to the trunk to get another one from her suitcase. There is a manila envelope sitting on top of her folded clothes. Curious, she looks inside. Her mother has obviously had an attack of remorse. It's a hodge-podge of old newspaper clippings, ribbons from track and field day wins, her birth certificate, a photograph

of Liz and Rhonda on a shopping mall Santa's lap, and a letter from her grandfather. She carefully unfolds the letter and reads it.

I fell right down on the sidewalk coming from mass after the cold spell we had here and went down to the hospital. They took x-rays and said my ribs were bruised and gave me some pills. I went home and took the pills but the pain in my chest was terrible bad. I couldn't get no sleep whatsoever and Friday last Frank Cowan, Johnny's boy come over and took me to the hospital. The doctors looked at me again and said I had one rib broke and two cracked. They bandaged me up and sent me home on account of they didn't have no beds. The weather here was real nice and the snow was mostly gone. But it got cold again and I guess winter will last a while more. It'll be good when summer comes and I get up to the lake.

Her grandmother, a former schoolteacher, had always been the letter writer, sending graphic, grammatically correct news of which neighbour had given up the farm, whose sons had become an alcoholic, who died in his armchair. Liz didn't know the people her grandmother wrote about. It seemed that every promotion, every transfer to a new city took her family farther and farther away, that she saw less and less of her grandparents. She had hardly known them, but in her mind they had formed part of that solid background of blood and history that she thought everyone was supposed to have. She had always believed that they would wait there in the background for her and promised herself that when she was old enough she would go back and find them, know them. Her grandmother died when Liz was twenty-one. She was sad, but strengthened in her resolve to return, to find the roots. She sent her grandfather Christmas cards telling him she would see him soon—always next summer. He would send back short, almost cryptic letters

in his almost illegible handwriting. She had the money finally saved up for a ticket, was going to surprise him that summer. And then he died. The randomness of death dismays Liz. This letter, the last he sent, two weeks before he died, gave no clues, no warning. She didn't go to his funeral. There was no point, really. She wanted to know her grandfather, not wake his death with strangers.

The day has been unbearably hot, and everyone is lying around in the shade, taking dives into the lake, drinking a lot. No one has the energy to do anything. She has been sent to find her grandfather because it is close to suppertime. She is sweating, and worried because her grandfather is missing. At the farm he can usually be found in the barn or at the corral, but at the lake he wanders off all the time. She has looked everywhere, but can't find him. Finally she goes into the basement of the lake house. It is cool, and she sees her grandfather laid out on the stone ledge of the house foundation. She goes over to him and puts her hand on his cheek, but his skin is cold to the touch.

"Grandpa, grandpa, wake up," she screams.

Her grandfather wakes with a start, looks around, his eyes not really seeing her. "Just threw myself down for a couple of minutes," he mumbles. "Must have fallen asleep there."

She's fingering the letter, unbidden tears rolling down her cheeks, when a large car pulls into the picnic area, pulling an Airstream trailer. The driver has a red face and one brown arm that

looks like it has been grafted on. The woman is wearing sunglasses that make her look like a grasshopper, and her middle-age stomach stretches her white polyester shorts. Their bickering voices float downwind to Liz, but she pays no attention. But she suddenly notices the woman hurrying towards her.

The man calls from inside the trailer, "I thought you said you were going to make some sandwiches, Bunny. And where's the goddamn beer?"

The woman calls over her shoulder, "Hold your horses. I'll be there in a minute." She's close enough now to see that Liz is crying and she hesitates for a moment, then keeps coming. Liz stands and pushes her belongings into a pile in alarm, then gathers them and stalks back to her car. The woman stops as if she's been shot. Her features twist in surprise at Liz's rudeness. But Liz doesn't care. Her grief is private, and she has no desire to be embroiled in the domestic drama of these strangers' retirement years. She drives away without a look behind.

She still fights the west wind which keeps trying to push her car into oncoming traffic. She is desperate to leave the stark geometry of the prairies behind, aching for the rolling hills and curves of the Ontario Shield. She wants to drive forever, never stop. The radio drifts in and out, community after community throwing out its signals as she passes. The road slips beneath her wheels and floats away behind like tickertape. When the gas gets low, she stops at gas/food stations where everyone is anonymous, fuels and moves on.

On the outskirts of Winnipeg she stops at a cheap chain motel, feeling she has not gone far enough but too tired to drive anymore. She likes the chain motels. They make no pretense of having a good view of anything, and they promise nothing but a clean bed. There are no extras, no theme rooms. Everything is always the same, and no reservations are necessary. There is no room service, the sheets don't get changed until you check out and no one bothers you. She takes a long shower and crawls under the bedcovers, falling into sleep almost immediately.

She is driving along a country road when she sees the horse, huge and gray, galloping along the tracks. She knows there is a train coming and she is driving faster and faster, trying to catch up to the horse. He turns and looks at her, his eyes wild, and his big head and shoulders remind her of an Alex Colville painting. She is out of the car now, running behind the horse, tripping on the railroad ties, but she knows that if she can just touch the feathers on his hooves, everything will be all right. She hears the train's shrill whistle and wakes screaming.

The room is filled with the sound of a train thudding past. She stands shakily, dragging the sweaty sheets behind her, and goes to the window, where she can see the caboose of the train disappearing into the night. Someone once told her that if you looked at your hands in a dream you could wake yourself up. She looks at her hands for a moment, wondering if it really works, and then smiles wryly in the dark. It is too late. She is already awake.

She is finally out of the prairies, into the Shield, with the highway twisting and turning through trees, hidden lakes. The day has been sweltering but as evening descends the air is cooled quickly by the breeze from the Great Lakes. She's past Thunder Bay, getting closer to the place of her birth, the place of her past. She suddenly notices that the gas gauge is on empty and pulls into the first gas station she sees. She realizes she's hungry, can't remember the last meal she had, and goes into the restaurant adjoining the garage. It seems to be a local hangout. There is a booth of young men, not teenagers, but not much into their twenties either. She listens while they harass the waitress, a young girl who seems completely unperturbed by them, and brag about cars and the hot little numbers they've laid, and wonders where their truths end and the lies begin. A souped-up Trans Am wheels into the parking spot in front of the window and squeals to a stop in a cloud of dust. The boys in the booth call out, "Here comes your honey," to the waitress who blushes and busies herself behind the counter, not looking up when the Trans Am's driver enters. He is obviously their leader, if they can be said to have one, and his arrival brings their conversation to a fever pitch. Suddenly there is a silence, and she can tell that she is being looked over. She stands abruptly and goes to the cash register. She's waiting for her thermos to be filled when a long, low whistle comes at her. She ignores it, but suddenly the Trans Am driver is beside her.

He slides a hand up her bare arm and says, "Hey, you must be new in town."

"No," she says coldly. "Just passing through." The waitress has turned from the coffee machine and is watching him with an ache in her eyes.

"Too bad," he says. "Why don't you stay a while? Take in the sights." His breath is heavy with alcohol.

"Thanks, no."

"Suit yerself." As he turns away he slaps her on the behind, the way an owner, not a jockey, does a horse, and swaggers back to his buddies' table. They applaud.

She's so stunned, she's speechless. She knows there's nothing to be gained by protest or retaliation. She stands still as a statue, waiting for the waitress to bring her thermos back.

Back out on the highway she opens her window and lets the chill night air roar through the car. The road twists and turns through the jagged rock and she is glad to have to concentrate on driving.

She sees lights coming up fast from behind. Almost as soon as the lights appear in her rearview mirror the car is upon her, riding her rear bumper, gunning to pass. It's the Trans Am. The car's high beams are on and it's all over the road behind her. A halo of headlights appears on the crest of the hill and she grips the steering wheel tightly, waiting for the crash. At the last moment the Trans Am drops back. She keeps to the speed limit, hoping for a straight stretch where the Trans Am can pass safely. But every time there is any length of straight road there is oncoming traffic. She wonders if the driver of the Trans Am has recognized her car, has seen her. Finally there is the break,

and the Trans Am lunges into the other lane and ahead. Heavy metal music blaring from the open windows of the Trans Am rushes at her and fades. She slows, wanting to let as much distance come between her and the Trans Am as possible. She feels a chill move up her spine and rolls up the window. Inside the car it is a cocoon, with the dash lights glowing, the wheels drumming hypnotically on the pavement. As she sweeps around the curves her headlights pick out the features of the jagged rock, like a light show at the pyramids or the Louvre. She is humming *She'll Be Coming Around The Mountain*, a song that they had always sung in the car when she was a child, when she sees the Trans Am, in the other lane, on its roof, the driver's side crumpled like a can of Campbell's soup. She brakes and skids to a stop just past the wreck, pulls carefully onto the narrow berm and sits staring at the road ahead. She waits, convinced that any moment another car will arrive on the scene. Finally she shuts the car off, pulls the key from the ignition and gets out. She walks slowly back to the Trans Am in the moonlight, and crouches down beside the driver's window. The driver is lying like a soft puppet over the ledge of the theatre window of a Punch and Judy show, slumped partway out of the car, with deep red gashes carved into him. Shards of glass are strewn over him like tinsel. She stares at him, unable to tell if he is breathing or not, unable to touch him. The odour of alcohol mixed with a chemical pine scent wafts out of the window. She picks a piece of glass out of his cheek. He doesn't move.

"Are you ready to die?" she whispers.

There is no answer from the puppet. Gingerly she puts two fingers on his wrist, looking for a pulse. There is none. She gets to her feet and stands there in the moonlight, listening to the trees shiver in the night, then turns and crunches back over the gravel to her car.

She isn't far from the next town. As she approaches the lights she realizes how weary she is. She is rubbing the almost invisible scar at her temple, a legacy from her grandfather's dog. She was four or five at the time, and on one of the rare visits to her grandparents' farm. The dog, a golden retriever who was bigger than she, was wolfing down the table scraps her grandfather had slopped into its bowl. She had followed her grandfather outside and was sitting crosslegged beside the dog, watching it eat, talking to it. She reached out to stroke its fur and it turned on her. The whole family rushed out at the sound of her screams. Before they had taken her to the hospital for stitches her mother had suggested in a small, tight voice that the damn dogs should be kept tied up when there were children around. Her grandfather had said, "He's a hunting dog. She shouldn't have been bothering him." The cut had only taken a couple of stitches and had healed quickly, but when she is tired or nervous she often finds herself rubbing it. At the far end of the town she pulls into a motel whose pink neon sign pulses V_CAN__ . She parks in front of the office and steps onto the porch, which creaks warningly beneath her feet. The screen door is locked. She knocks. She is turning to leave when she hears movement within and a man, in a twisted undershirt and soiled, wrinkled trousers, the

belt flapping, comes to the door. He opens the inner door a foot and peers through the space at her.

"I'd like a room," she says.

He looks at her suspiciously. She herself is road-wrinkled, but still not that dangerous looking, she thinks.

"You got somebody with you?" he demands.

She turns and follows his gaze into the darkness behind her.

"No. The room's for me."

He opens the door fully, unlocks the screen door, pushing it open and forcing her back, and steps out boldly, looking around to see if she's brought an army or an orgy with her. "It's forty dollars a night," he says stubbornly. "In advance."

"Okay."

"Cash. We don't take no credit."

"That's fine."

He goes into the office and she follows him. He fumbles around behind the counter and eventually locates a yellowed registration card.

"Driver's license."

She hands him her license. He squints from it to her, finally perceives a resemblance, and continues filling out the card.

"You sure you're alone?"

She wants to say something smart and caustic, but knows it would cost her the room. "Yes, I'm sure."

He hands her a key.

The room smells stale, as if there are dead, decaying mice in the walls. She can hear snoring through the wall, and is amazed that anyone less desperate than she would actually stay here. She explores the room like a spy, quietly, methodically. It is small with little in the way of amenities. There is a faded chenille bedspread on a sagging mattress, an arborite night-table with a Gideon bible in one drawer, a scarred wooden armchair by the window, a television set without cablevision, a tiny bathroom, its fixtures rusty, the linoleum lifting in the corners, a closet with no door, and a door that she discovers, when she pushes on it, leads to the next room where the snorer is sleeping. The door is stopped by a chain lock, and she stands holding her breath, hoping the snorer won't wake. When the breathing continues unmuffled, undisturbed she quietly shuts the door.

She is sitting on the edge of the bed staring into the blackness of the room when she hears a siren. She goes to the window and stands hidden behind the curtains, pushing them slightly to look out. A police car speeds past. She waits at the window, camouflaged in the curtains. Soon she hears another siren. An ambulance. She cannot see it. She waits. When she hears the sirens returning she tenses, preparing herself. The sound stops suddenly, nearby, but she can see nothing on the road out front.

She stands rooted to the spot, thinking she must prepare her defence quickly before they come for her. But her mind fills with useless maxims...don't count your chickens before they're hatched, what goes up must come down, sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, still

waters run deep, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink, he who laughs last laughs best, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, crime doesn't pay. But she has committed no crime. She slumps into the chair by the window, listening, and waiting. But, outside, the night is still again. She doesn't know when she crosses the line between waking and dreaming.

The big gray Percheron is galloping along the tracks. Liz knows there is a train coming and she is running faster and faster, trying to catch up to him. She is crying and he turns and looks at her, his eyes dark and liquid, and says, "Look at your hands, Liz." She looks down and sees that she is holding a large speckled brown egg.

The Photographs

Maggie hadn't heard any footsteps on the stairs, but suddenly she was aware of a firm, constant knocking at the front door. She stopped stirring the sauce and put the spoon on the counter. She wiped her hands on her apron and looked at her watch, in her mind shuffling through pictures of faces she might find when she opened the door. It was 10:24 on a Saturday morning.

He stood easily on the porch, and when he saw the look of surprise on her face he gave her a disarming smile.

"Well, hello there." she said, searching for a name to fit the face, and aware that the pitch of her voice was higher than it would have been had she opened the door to the paperboy or the postman. She deliberately brought her voice down an octave and said, "Come on in, André." She saw his smile change almost imperceptibly as he bent to pick up the canvas bag sitting by his feet. He deposited the bag in the hallway as he followed her into the kitchen.

"Can I get you anything? A coffee, maybe?" she asked, as she busied herself with turning down the element under the saucepot, stirring the sauce and covering it.

"If you're sure it's no trouble," he replied, leaning back in his chair and stretching his legs out lazily.

She poured two cups of coffee and brought them to the table. "So what brings you to my neighbourhood?" she asked as she took stock of his deep, even tan and drew a mental comparison with her own winter-white skin.

"I just arrived yesterday from Mexico. But I was thinking of you since I saw you."

Maggie deflected the obvious compliment nervously. "So how do you manage to avoid working in this frozen hell of a country all winter?"

"I work in Mexico."

"Doing what?"

"I take people out to discover themselves."

"What do you mean?"

"Adventure tours. I take people out in my jeep and show them the country. Take them hang-gliding and diving. Off the battered track."

"Beaten."

"Pardon?"

"Off the beaten track." Maggie smiled awkwardly and he smiled back. "So, three months in Mexico. Tell me about your adventures."

While he recounted his travels she allowed herself to speculate. Why was he here? What did he want? He was just an acquaintance, a friend of a friend, whom she had met only once, months before. When? August? September? She'd been having a beer at a terrasse with Suzanne, a co-worker at the Canada Employment Centre, when Suzanne suddenly jumped out of her chair and called, "André!" Something about him made him stand out from the crowds of

cosmopolitan strollers on the street, dressed in what she thought of as northern safari clothes: sturdy, comfortable-looking shoes, loose-fitting pants with many pockets, a soft cotton shirt, a bandanna around his neck, and a hat tilted at a rakish angle. He turned in the direction of the call and gave a slow easy smile, and then when he spotted Suzanne, wove through the tables to join them. After many glasses of beer at the terrasse, the three of them climbed into André's Jeep and tore at breakneck speeds through the streets to Maggie's apartment. They deposited a wobbly Maggie on the sidewalk, and the jeep disappeared into the night. She hadn't seen him since. Now, here he was. What did he want?

André caught her daydreaming when he said, "What would you do in my place?" She knew that he knew she had not been listening, but he didn't seem offended. He grinned and said, "What's that delicious smell?"

"Oh!" Maggie jumped up and rushed to the stove. "My sauce." He stood and moved toward the stove. Maggie picked up the spoon and began to stir the bolognese sauce. André leaned over the pot, sniffed and nodded approvingly. He leaned against the fridge and watched her stir. Maggie concentrated on the sauce, ignoring the prickling sensation on the back of her neck. She breathed what she hoped was an inaudible sigh of relief when the telephone rang. "Hi, Louise. Can you . . .? Well, of course. No, of course I don't mind. Don't be ridiculous. No, six

o'clock. Don't you dare arrive at nine like you did the last time. Right. See you then. Bye."

When she turned around André was still watching her. She had an uncanny feeling that he had been able to hear everything Louise had said. "Um, would you like to join us for supper tonight?" she asked. "I'm having some friends over...just four or five people. Nothing fancy." She felt herself turning red in the face. Like a bloody schoolgirl, she chided herself. She pointed at the stove. "The sauce. It's for supper." André went and sat down at the kitchen table, seeming to consider the offer very carefully. After a moment he said, "I would like that very much."

Her kitchen was small and Maggie usually directed guests to the living room or sat them at the kitchen table with a glass of wine and firmly refused offers of assistance. Cooking was a solitary activity for her. The selection and division, the chopping and slicing, the creating of symmetry and balance, were all rituals she liked to perform alone. Perhaps it was mindless work, but it was satisfying all the same. She didn't like to be distracted when she was cooking.

But Maggie had no wine to offer her unexpected guest, and he would not be directed to the living room to amuse himself. He claimed a section of the counter and set to work expertly. Instinctively he seemed to know where to find her utensils and cooking ingredients. From time to time Maggie found herself stopped in midaction, watching him. When André lifted the lid on the pot of sauce simmering on the stove, sniffed it with a troubled look on his face and reached for spices, she did

not jump to interfere, as she would normally have done. Looking over her spice rack, he pulled spice jars and began to juggle them. She stopped mixing the cake batter she was preparing to watch him. When he had five jars in the air, she began to applaud his performance. Giving her a look of mock surprise, he expertly snapped the jars down one after the other onto the counter beside the stove and, murmuring something about secret ingredients revealed to him by a medicine man, began gently shaking the spices over the pot of simmering sauce. Maggie turned away and grinned into her bowl of batter.

She trusted him and this shocked her. Why should she trust him? She pushed the question away and went on adding and stirring, content with the simplicity of the acts. When the cake was in the oven, the sauce bubbling, the salad tossed and crisp in the refrigerator Maggie glanced at her watch and said, "Good Lord, I'd better shower and change. You'll have to excuse me." She left André tending the kitchen.

The doorbell was ringing as she came out of the shower. She waited a moment, wondering if André would answer the door, but the doorbell kept ringing. So she pulled on her terry robe and padded, dripping, to the door. André stood outside on the porch, hat low over his eyes. He handed her a bouquet of flowers and walked past her down the hall to the kitchen, a paper bag cradled under his arm. When she emerged from her bedroom, dressed and combing out her wet hair, he handed her a glass of wine, told her to sit at the table and continued whipping butter and garlic in a bowl. She sat in the chair, took a sip of the wine and smiled. He finished preparing the butter, spread it on the

fresh bread he had brought, wrapped it up in tin foil, then laid it on the counter and came over to the table with a glass of wine.

The late afternoon light caught him on the side of his face and Maggie noticed the network of small wrinkles around his eyes. And suddenly she realized that beneath his deep tan he was tired. Like a clip from a movie an image of a sea-gull flying over a vast expanse of water came to mind. It flew with ragged strokes and seemed to be looking for some crop of land, some piece of flotsam to cling to. She had no idea why the image had popped into her head. It was almost as if it had been transmitted telepathically. She concealed the little ripple of fear that ran through her with a bright, brisk smile. "I imagine you'd like a shower too?" she asked.

The look he gave her was nakedly grateful and she turned from it and left the room quickly to get a towel and facecloth for him. When she handed them to him the look was gone. "There's soap and shampoo in the shower. Yell if you need anything else." André winked at her and disappeared down the hall. She stacked dishes in the sink and as he began to sing in the shower, she prepared the living room for the coming guests. When she came back down the hall she noticed his bag on the hall floor. She put it out of sight in her bedroom and continued on her way to the dining room to set the table.

Maggie introduced André as "an old friend from the Gaspésie" to her supper guests and she was surprised when no one questioned his sudden appearance. From time to time throughout the evening she became aware of his eyes upon her and she looked over to catch his

glance. When their eyes met he smiled and gave her a barely perceptible wink, then returned to whichever guest he was presently mesmerizing. Maggie felt as if they were collaborators, although she did not have the faintest notion in what scheme. She did not speculate on the sensation, but felt pleased that her friends had taken so readily to André. He was like a drummer working the crowd, and they fell to his charms one after another. Somehow it legitimized her own swift acceptance of him, put some kind of good housekeeping seal of approval on their collaboration, or whatever it was.

When the last guest left, the two of them picked up dirty dishes and debris and began on the mountains of dishes. As she reached around André to get a fresh teatowel, Maggie caught her breath. He smelled of sweat and dishsoap and she somehow knew that there was a moment coming. She felt unnaturally shaken. She took a fresh towel and a long pull from her wineglass. When the last dish was put away and the kitchen neater than normal, André picked up the remaining half-bottle of wine and walked down the hall to the bedroom. Maggie followed him and leaned awkwardly against the doorframe as he placed the bottle and glasses on the night table and folded back the bedcovers. He walked over to her and lightly put a hand on each side of her neck. "Would you mind if I spent the night here?" he asked.

"No," Maggie said.

They made love slowly, delicately exploring each other. Maggie was amazed at how comfortable she felt with him. Afterwards, as she

began to drift into sleep, André curled around her, she envisioned a stone structure, the steps leading up to it cut by broad bands of light.

André murmured in her ear, "You see it?"

"Mmm..." she replied, not even wondering before succumbing to sleep.

When Maggie awoke in the morning she lay and watched the pattern of light and shade on the bedroom wall. She kept very still, not wanting André to wake just yet, not wanting the day to begin too quickly. When he woke he lazily wrapped her to him and they both lay quietly watching the sunlight and shadows playing on the wall.

"What was that picture I saw last night?" she asked.

"Just something I sent to you. It's an old bridge I know."

She propped herself up on an elbow and looked him in the eyes.

"You're serious, aren't you?"

"Yes. Why not? When we were young, my brother and I used to do that all the time."

At breakfast Maggie was again struck by the differences between them. She, a pale straggly survivor of another Canadian winter, he a nutbrown traveller. She asked him to tell her more about his travels and he brought out a packet of photographs. He flipped through them and picked out a number, which he laid out on the table. He placed the photographs like a tarot card reader and told her about the people and places in the pictures. The ocean was a sparkling turquoise, the mountains majestic, the beaches pristine, the faces smiling.

Enchanting, scenic pictures. They talked until the middle of the afternoon, and she discovered that he had once had a wife, a child, a neat ordered life. And he had left them behind for freedom and adventure. He now made his living taking people on wilderness adventure tours. He said he wasn't ready for the grave yet; he had too many places to see and things to do to get tied down to a job that gave him no pleasure. André seemed to work a charm on her, making her feel like there were whole worlds waiting to be discovered with him. She began to think about the choices she had made. It was strange, this sudden sense that the world was a wide open space, not a series of orderly compartments, or impossible corners. Maggie found herself critically dismissing her own life — felt the pull of faraway places. But she knew she couldn't do what André had done. She had debts to pay. She could not afford to be a free spirit. She would have to content herself with what she always jokingly referred to as her rich inner life. She was, if not happy, at least moderately satisfied.

As the afternoon lengthened, Maggie began to get restless, thinking of the chores she had to do. Sunday was her domestic work day, a get-things-done-for-the-week day, and the week ahead would be chaos if she put the chores aside. André, sensing her mood, asked what her plans were. She listed jobs and heard the tinny unimportance of them as she reeled them off. She would rather have said that she had to dash off in her Lear jet for an afternoon meeting with an Arab oil sheik, before delivering a top-secret package to an internationally renowned spy, but the truth of the matter was that she had housework and laundry

to do. She considered suggesting that he go off and do something for the afternoon and return for supper and a movie in the evening, but discarded the idea as quickly as it surfaced. She couldn't imagine André sitting through two hours of artful entertainment. Movies were, after all, neatly packaged adventures. You paid six dollars to be a voyeur for two hours and then you went back to your own predictable existence. Or she did, at any rate.

But predictable or not, her existence needed ordering; she had things to do. André offered to go to the laundromat with her, but she declined. Maggie was accustomed to doing things alone, she said, and André did not pressure her. When he was at the door she wondered if she was going to regret her decision. But he was gone. She walked through the apartment, stopping in each room, feeling the emptiness, the space that belonged to her. She began to collect clothes and stuff them into laundry bags.

In the laundromat Maggie watched people, imagining their lives. She made up adventures for them according to the costumes they laundered. Although she couldn't help herself watching others, she hated other people watching her. She felt like positioning herself in front of the glass door of the dryer to hide the tumbling pieces of her bureaucratic uniform from prying eyes. How much more exciting it would be to have boas or Balinese sarongs. She didn't want anyone to guess that she spent her days as an Immigrant Reception Counsellor, Class IV, at the Canada Employment Centre. She sat on the hard orange plastic chair at the front of the laundromat, unable to

concentrate on the dog-eared copy of *People* magazine she had found on top of the folding table. As she stared out the window her mind drifted. Like déjà vu, or a prophecy, she saw herself riding in a bright red jeep, pounding over the hardpacked sand of a deserted beach, her hair tangling with the wind. It was the kind of vision that could only be caught out of the corner of your eye; if you looked at it directly it would vanish. She was jolted from her reverie by a teenaged girl who looked like she had removed most of her clothes to do her laundry. "Hey, lady. Is this shit yours?" the girl demanded, pointing at the stopped dryer.

When Maggie returned home she put the clean clothes away, mentally crossing one job off her list. In the kitchen she poured a glass of leftover wine and sat down at the kitchen table, debating what to do next. And then she noticed the package of photographs sitting on the table. For an instant she imagined that André had come back while she was at the laundromat, that he was in the apartment now. And then her mind flew back and she saw the scene again. He had forgotten the photographs, had not put them back in his bag. Curious, she reached over to the envelope and drew the photographs out. The topmost photographs were the ones he had laid out for her to see. She glanced through them again and then shuffled them to the back of the pile and began to lay out the photographs he had not shown her. As she looked at the faces and places in these photographs she tried to figure out why he'd chosen the images he'd shown her. She laid the photographs down one after another and gradually a pattern began to emerge. There was a fortune to be told here, but not the one she had been given. These were

more solemn faces, more lonely landscapes. The final photograph was of a gull against a wet gray sky.

The River at Palca

Black smudged into gray and it was morning. And still the rain fell, battering the mountain peaks and rushing down the slopes, taking the brown earth and depositing it in swollen rivers. Plants were torn from their roots to take the river's color. Pebbles and boulders alike succumbed to the torrents, crashing crazily against each other beneath the bubbling surface.

Valerie dreamt that someone was knocking at the door. When she awoke she discovered that it was the rain pounding on the windowpanes. She had a momentary impulse to hurry to the window, but lay still as a chameleon, soaking up her surroundings. She was in the familiar blue Woods sleeping bag, on a cement floor. Cecil was snoring beside her. They were surrounded by battered old wooden desks. Right. This was a school, the finest and only accommodation available in Palca. She yawned and almost cried aloud from the pain. She put a hand gingerly to her face. Even without looking in a mirror, she could tell she had a second or third degree burn, which had risen in welts during the night. She unzipped the sleeping bag and examined the rest of her body. Her arms were a dangerously deep pink, and her feet were swollen to almost twice their normal size. They too were blistered all over. Two large blisters on her heels had burst, but she had more on the soles of her feet and even between her toes.

Perhaps it hadn't been such a smart thing to do, walking the 20 miles to town when their bus had broken down, especially in hiking boots that had never really been broken in. She had not been prepared for the treacherous journey through the mountains on the dirt track that served as a road. Clutching the St. Christopher's medal at her neck, she had suppressed screams time and again, as the bus slid precariously close to the cliff edges. Valerie had developed a kind of horrified respect for the truck and bus drivers in this country. She didn't like to look at the drivers' eyes, because they were always red-rimmed and glazed. She knew it was because they chewed coca leaves all the time. She suspected they couldn't drive if they didn't, although she had to admit that they were not only fearless, but skilled. Put them in international rally races and they would probably come in first every time. But in a way, it had almost been a relief when their bus, after two minor breakdowns, had finally broken down for good. She and Cecil had been the only foreigners on the bus, and, when it had become obvious that the driver was not going to be able to repair the transmission, they had followed the other passengers who were shrugging their bundles onto their backs, adjusting their head bands, and leading away their animals, some of which had been riding with the passengers inside the bus, while others had been corralled on top in the luggage rack. They made a bright caravan wandering down the road. Cecil had taken out his tripod and extra lenses, and they let the other passengers get ahead so he could get shots of them in their exotic, motley dress. "Ladies and gentlemen, this year's fashion focus is on hats," Valerie had intoned as

Cecil focussed. "It's an essential part of the best-dressed woman's wardrobe...silly or suave, easy or elegant, it's the favourite of all the top designers showing at the shows this spring."

The different Indian tribes could be recognized more by their headgear than anything else. Every part of the country had its own distinctive hat. There was everything from stovepipes and panamas to bowlers and balaklavas. As Valeri and Cecil walked, the others got farther and farther ahead. They didn't seem to hurry, but they didn't seem to tire, either, as Valerie and Cecil did.

At first it had seemed like an adventure, a challenge. They joked about conquering Mount Everest on their next vacation. But after a couple of hours they felt the toll the ancient mountains and the thin air were taking. Although time and the elements had worn down the rough edges of the mountains, they were still steep. When Valerie and Cecil stopped and looked back down from the tops of the gentle rises they could see how high they'd come. And the mountains went on and on as far as the eye could see. They had been walking for hours without seeing a town, another human being, or a vehicle when they heard the sound of a motor approaching. Although they couldn't see it until it was almost on top of them, they could hear it from miles away, because of the horn beeping, which was common mountain driving practice—absolutely essential in the daytime—going into the blind curves. They waited at the side of the road, ready to jump to safety if the driver didn't see them. A mud-splattered jeep with three gringos in it pulled up beside them. The gringos said they were American consultants on a cooperative project

and offered to give Valerie and Cecil a lift to the next town. Cecil was exhausted and gladly accepted the offer. Valerie was tired too, but while they had been walking, she had felt like she was getting some kind of message from the mountains, almost like a voice that she couldn't quite hear with Cecil there. When the Americans said it was only about five or seven more miles to the town, she decided to walk the rest of the way alone. At first Cecil wouldn't hear of it, but Valerie and the Americans convinced him that she'd come to no harm. Finally, he had agreed to go on to the town in the jeep.

Valerie stood in the road and watched them drive away. She waved at Cecil, who peered back anxiously, as if he was still undecided. She stood waiting until she could no longer hear the sound of the jeep. And then with a fresh burst of energy, she began to walk. The stillness of the mountains enveloped her. After the first couple of miles her fatigue returned. She could feel how sunburnt her face was, and every step she took sent piercing pain through her feet and legs. But somehow she felt she had to equal the strength of the mountains. She'd heard that the human body took six months to completely renew itself, all its old cells shed and replaced by new ones. By the end of six months in a new environment, you had, by a kind of osmosis, become it...in every molecule of your being. She liked the thought that these mountains were becoming part of her, giving her some of their palpable power. She felt that the mountains carried her the last miles to the village, leading her down their thin spurs to Cecil, who was waiting impatiently in the fading light.

There was no hotel in the village because no tourists ever stopped there, so the Americans had spoken to the local priest and arranged lodging in the church schoolhouse for them. It was primitive, but they were used to that. Cecil had already explored the nearby stores and found candles, local bread, cheese and wine, and some imported sardines. Quietly they ate by candlelight and climbed, bone weary, into their zipped-together sleeping bags. Sleep came quickly, for it had been a long and exhausting day. Sometime during the night it had begun to rain. Thunder woke Valerie, then lulled her back to sleep.

Now, curious, Valerie arose. She discovered she couldn't walk on her injured feet, and so she shuffled across the cold cement floor on her knees, like a penitent at a shrine. She knelt at the window, staring in fascination at the river hurtling past just beyond the narrow schoolyard. The schoolyard itself was covered in great pools of muddy water, their surfaces like murky mirrors broken again and again by tiny invisible fists.

"What are you doing... praying?" said Cecil's voice behind her.

"Just a minute. This is a collect call from God," Valerie said and continued to gaze out the window. When she figured Cecil was really beginning to believe that she'd found religion during the night, she turned with her eyes rolled up in their sockets and began to shuffle back towards him on her knees.

"Omagawd. You should see your face."

"I don't need to see it. I can feel it. You think this is bad, you should see my little hoofies." She sat down and stuck a foot up in the air. "I can't walk."

"I hate to say I told you so, but I told you so." Cecil extracted a foot from the sleeping bag and held it up. "See. Mine are fine."

"What is this, a meeting of great soles?" Valerie asked as she crawled to the sleeping bag and flopped down. "I think we have an unplanned stopover, Cec. I'm not going anywhere like this."

"Well then, maybe I'll catch a few more winks, if we're in no hurry to hit the road." Cecil pulled the sleeping bag up around his head and said, "Night all."

Valerie got back into the sleeping bag too and lay on her back listening to the rain. Soon, she too was sound asleep.

When she woke, the sun was streaming in through the dusty windows and Cecil was gone. She dressed and pulled out her paperback history of South America. It was heavy going, but she felt obliged to learn something about the country now that she was here. Fortunately, right in the middle of the Incas' downfall, Cecil arrived with still-warm buns, funny little rounds of coarse sugary chocolate and an earthenware cup of coffee.

"Cecil, you never cease to amaze me. Where on earth did you get that?"

"Sorry, madam, trade secret." He watched her drink the coffee and then took the cup from her. He kissed her lightly on the lips. "I've got to get this cup back to the restaurant. I don't think they've got any to

spare." He slung his camera bag over his shoulder. "You need anything? I thought I'd go out and get some shots."

"I think I'll read for a while. Have fun."

Cecil returned about an hour later. "There's a real congregation down by the river. Looks like today's wash day. I got some great shots."

"I wouldn't mind getting outside myself. Looks like it's turned into a gorgeous day. Why don't you help me down to the river and I'll do our laundry too? If the smell wafting over here from your pack is any indication, my sweet, you're due."

They arrived at the community wash area, Valerie riding piggyback on Cecil, who was hugging a pile of dirty clothes to his chest. All the women stopped their washing and talking and stared. Cecil deposited Valerie a little apart from the group of women and went off up the path. She settled herself on a large flat rock and began the wash, as if she did this every Monday. Gradually the women began to chatter to each other again, and it wasn't long before community curiosity sent one of them over to talk to her. Soon they were all gathered around, asking her questions she didn't understand. She sat in the sunshine in the midst of the women, absorbing the excited conversation. It reminded her of the animated groups of women in the fashion district in Montreal where Valerie worked as an advertising director for a women's apparel chain. The women congregated at the bus stop after their day's work in the factories, seemingly never at a loss for things to talk about. She wasn't part of the factory workers' world any more than she was of this one—taking the bus to work was almost as rare an

occurrence as doing her laundry at the river. She felt like a mute queen at the centre of all this attention. She wanted to be able to talk with the Indian women, but her Spanish was barely adequate for hotels and restaurants and airports. They stroked her blonde hair, played with her casual, expensive clothes. She drew back sharply when one of the women accidentally brushed against her feet. Immediately a couple of the older woman had taken her feet in their hands and had a lively, concerned discussion. One of the younger women ran off up the path, returning a few minutes later with some large yellow leaves and soft cloths. They dipped the leaves in the river, wrapped them gently around her feet and then swaddled them with the cloths.

One woman, whom Valerie had not noticed earlier, sat off some distance from the rest of the women. Valerie was fascinated by the futility of the woman's labours. She was pounding white sheets on the rocks and then rinsing them in the muddy river. Surely they would be dirtier after washing than before? The other women ignored the solitary woman and Valerie was curious about her. The woman kept her face averted, but once, when the woman turned for a moment, Valerie saw that she had blue and yellow bruises all across the hidden side of her face. She wished she could ask who the woman was, why she was being avoided, what had happened. But she couldn't.

When Cecil came back to get her, the women had finished her laundry for her, despite her laughing protestations. They cheered as he carried her up the path to the schoolhouse.

The rains started again in the evening , and it was as if the oceans were being emptied. All through the night it stormed.

When Valerie woke in the morning the rain was still driving down. She hobbled to the window on her swaddled feet and knelt in front of it, staring out. The river seemed a lot higher today.

"Is that still God or have you managed to reach room service?"

Valerie jumped. "Oh. You're awake." She did not turn, but she heard the sleeping bag rustle.

"Christ, I'm starving. I was having a dream about buckwheat pancakes with maple syrup and back bacon."

"I wonder what Freud would do with that? Was there fat on the bacon or was it lean?"

"Lean. Is this really morning or am I having a bad dream?"

She rummaged through a pile of clothes at the foot of the sleeping bag and extracted her watch. "I think it's a bad dream." She looked back out the window.

Cecil closed his eyes again, rolled over onto his side and lay unmoving a long time. Finally he said, "I hate rain."

"You know what I'd like? Some croissants and a café au lait, with a little brie and strawberry jam. Come on, Cecil. Get up. Now I'm absolutely starving. We can pack up our stuff and take it up to the little restaurant on the road and have a good hot breakfast while we wait for a bus."

Cecil spoke into the sleeping bag. "And lunch. And supper. The way these buses run we'll be old and obese before one comes along. Why

don't you go on up to the restaurant without me and come get me if a bus comes along. You could even bring me a little something to eat when you're coming back if you like."

"Unh uh, no way. If you think I'm going to run around in the rain just to let you stay in the sack, forget it. I'm this week's invalid, remember? Anyway, where's your spirit of adventure? Just a second... I'll go get some refreshing rainwater and see if that brings you back to your senses!"

Cecil squirmed out of the sleeping bag. "Okay, okay, I'm up." He shuffled to the window and stood there looking out. "Do you really think we're going to get out of here today?"

Valerie watched the goosebumps rising on his buttocks. "I don't know, Cecil. I don't know how anything will be able to get through. But I guess if there isn't a bus we'll just stay here a little longer than we planned."

Cecil continued to stare out the window. "This is crazy. I've never seen anything like it before. My god, you'd think they'd do something about it, wouldn't you? This must happen every year."

Valerie chuckled as she began to dress. "What are you talking about, Cecil? You think they should stop the rainy season or something?"

"No, the roads." He threw a rolled up pair of socks at her. "They don't even have decent roads. You'd think they'd do something."

"Hey, hombre, you're forgetting something aren't you?"

Cecil turned.

Valerie rubbed her index finger and thumb together in the way of the street merchants they'd met all over La Paz. "Remember? Now the road to Cochabamba surprised me. I would have thought that a major artery would be a real road. But I'd say this is pretty much to be expected."

"Yeah, I guess so." Cecil's voice had become business-like. "They probably don't know any better. But, they say ignorance is bliss. It must be a great life... when it doesn't rain." He laughed to himself. "What do you think about getting a little place up in the mountains at home? Live in a log cabin, grow all our own food, get away from the rat race."

"Not a chance, Cecil. I'll just pass on the pioneer experience—pumping water, darning by candlelight, slaving over a hot stove all day, while you're out tilling the fields and hunting our supper."

"We could switch roles. You hunter, me house husband."

"Ha! You can't even cook."

"What do you mean? I can cook."

"Macaroni."

"Well, it's a start."

"Man cannot live on macaroni alone, dear."

"And tuna fish casserole."

Valerie began to make retching sounds.

"Well, you've got to admit, I'm pretty good with room service."

"True."

Laughing, Cecil ruffled her hair. He dressed and stuffed candle stubs, a book and a cup into his backpack. "All right, let's go find those pancakes and croissants."

They hoisted their packs onto their backs and cast a last look around the room before leaving. Cecil opened the door and the cold rain slashed into the room. Wincing, they bent their heads and entered the downpour. They plodded slowly through the sucking mud up the hill and staggered into the roadside restaurant.

Life went on under the rain; children slid on bare brown feet down the hilly roads of the village. Some were driving soggy herds of sheep and hairy pigs from some wet place to some other wet place, others were playing, oblivious to the rain and the infants they carried on their backs.

From steaming cups of thick black coffee Cecil and Valerie watched the wet parade outside. Cecil gave a running commentary on the passing spectacle.

Suddenly he looked around the interior of the restaurant at the small dark men sitting at the other tables. "It's so bizarre," he said, "being able to sit here and say absolutely anything about these locals, knowing they don't understand a bloody word."

"Softly, Cecil. You never know."

Cecil snorted as he drew himself up in his chair. "And if they did? No problem. These guys are so small I could take on five of them with one hand." He looked around the room again. "Do you think these people get enough to eat? I swear I haven't seen one person over five and a half feet tall. I wonder if it affects their brains too?"

"Oh, why don't you stop being the smug tourist?" Cecil swivelled back to face her. She was surprised herself at the sharpness in her voice, but she couldn't stop. "I'm not in the mood for a 'look at the natives' routine this morning, Cecil."

"Boy, you sure got up on the wrong side of the bed today, didn't you? I just meant that malnutrition inhibits growth. It's a scientific fact." There was a warning edge to Cecil's voice.

Valerie looked intently at Cecil for a long moment, then said curtly, "Right. Sorry. Look, let's just not talk for a while, okay? This isn't a great way to start the day." She looked past him and out the door at the thin children in their muddy rags. She knew she was being unreasonable, but couldn't seem to find a way to diffuse the tension. She always got like this a day or two before her period. It was chemical and uncontrollable and she hated it. It made her feel like a stereotype in a magazine, the kind of woman those articles entitled "Good News For PMS Sufferers" and ads for feminine hygiene sprays were directed at. She'd read somewhere about the results of a survey taken of women in prison. which claimed that most serious crimes by women were committed in the week prior to or the first week of their periods. When she'd told Cecil, he had begun to call her his jailbird. But he really was understanding and usually managed to keep his temper in check when hers got out of hand. But her period wasn't due. This had nothing to do with hormones. Maybe it was just that they were both feeling wrung out. They'd been on the road for three weeks and the trip was taking more out of them than they had expected it to.

Suddenly a scream pierced the rain. Valerie lurched from her chair and was out the door and slithering down the hill before Cecil could grasp her arm to stop her. He rose more slowly and went to stand in the doorway, out of the rain. Valerie, mud to her knees, hair already plastered to her head, was standing on the fringes of the ragged crowd gathered at the riverbank at the bottom of the hill. There was a gasp of silence, and then a wailing sound began, rising and falling, gradually increasing in volume as more women fastened themselves to the group. In the centre were the men. From the cantina, Cecil strained to see what was happening, but could see nothing through the crowd of people. He briefly entertained the idea of going down with a camera, but decided against it. The rain slowly drummed the minutes away while he waited for Valerie to return. She had no business down there. Cecil returned to the table in the now-empty restaurant. He briskly stirred his cup of coffee, took a swallow and screwed up his face at the bitter taste. He wished the owner would come back so he could order another cup of hot coffee. The stuff wasn't so bad when it was scalding hot; you couldn't even taste it. He wondered what Valerie was doing down there. The wailing in the distance finally thinned and stopped. This place was beginning to give him the creeps.

Valerie slowly entered the restaurant and sat down at the table as if in a daze.

Cecil turned in his chair to see if the owner had come back. He hadn't. He turned back to Valerie. "So, what's the big event in town today?" he asked.

Valerie did not seem to hear him.

"Hey, Val." Cecil snapped his fingers in front of her face. "Are you with us? Ladies and gentlemen," he announced to the empty restaurant, "our roving reporter is here to give us an up-to-date report on all the news that is news in downtown Palca. And here she is... Valerie!"

Valerie was staring out the door, past Cecil. Finally her gaze flicked to him and then away again. She hesitated, then said slowly, "A woman... she drowned. She...committed suicide...in the river. She was just a young woman. One of the men tried to save her, but she wouldn't let him. She's dead."

Cecil picked up his cup to take another sip of his coffee, stopped halfway, and quickly put it down again, remembering that he had wanted another cup of hot coffee. He scraped his chair closer to Valerie and took her cold wet hands in his. "Hey, honey," he said. "Don't let it get to you. It's okay. We'll be out of here soon."

Valerie could feel the pull of the river—what was the woman's name?—as she sat and looked at familiar Cecil. She tried to see herself in a future when this would be just one of those travel anecdotes, a quirky commentary to accompany Cecil's stunning photographs. Their friends always liked that, said Cecil and Valerie sure knew how to capture the flavour of a country. But she couldn't imagine it. She simply felt like a small frightened child with its face pressed against a murky windowpane. Cecil's lips seemed to be moving again, but all she could hear was the thunder of the river.

A Trick of Light

Doctor G. has been having nightmares. He woke up about half an hour after I got here and started pawing feebly at the air, so I helped him sit up and tried to put his glasses on him. But he swatted my hand away, muttering "damn gypsy", which is, for some reason known only to him, a hideous insult. I put the glasses back on the night-table. If he doesn't want to see, I'm not going to force him. He began whimpering and clutching at his crotch, so I asked him if he wanted to go to the bathroom. He kept on whimpering, but when I tried to swivel him around on the bed to get his feet over the edge of the bed, he cried out as if he was in great pain and said, "Get the cup." The cup? Good Lord. I haven't sat with Doctor G. for a few weeks and I'm appalled at how rapidly he has deteriorated in such a short time. I tried to cajole him out of the bed but he kept going "ah, aahh, ah" and it was all I could do to get the cup beneath his penis before he let loose a stream. He doesn't even want to hold it himself, and let his hands fall away before he was finished peeing. He managed to quite thoroughly soak his pajamas. I can't believe this. It makes me sad and mad. When I first started sitting with him he was a functioning, lucid human being. He should never have been locked up here. As far as I can tell, he's been put in here to die. The hospital staff objected at first, but word came from above that Doctor G. would not be let out. And he would have a round-the-

clock sitter. Apparently, the family made a sizeable donation to the hospital. I can't quite believe that anyone could be that coldhearted. His sons, who are also both doctors, visit rarely, and then they don't stay and chat. They seem to know what they're looking for. They're simply checking vital signs, calculating how much longer it will take him to die. They've already taken over his clinic, and his fortune. It seems spiteful and mean that once or twice a year the big Silver Cloud he used to ride around in comes to take him out for a couple of hours. The chauffeur is big and brawny, and he gently lifts Doctor G. from his wheelchair into the car as if he were no heavier than a child. Doctor G. no longer seems to put up much of a fight. His reaction reminds me of Seligman's learned helplessness theory. We studied it last year in psych. Seligman gave a group of dogs a whole series of inescapable shocks. Later, when these same dogs were subjected to escapable shocks, they were either unable to react and escape or they were slower and more inept than the other dogs who hadn't been given the same series of inescapable shocks. They were conditioned to be passive, apathetic and helpless.

I've never seen Doctor G.'s wife. His girlfriend, Mad, is the only one who really comes to visit. She brings him little presents—bright colourful objects that a magpie would like. These presents are like parts of her that she scatters around or leaves behind—they look like her. She is a big blonde gone blowsy and she favours magenta and yellow. She's a lot younger than Doctor G., although I'd put her in her fifties at least. I don't know what would attract a woman like her to a man like him, or

vice versa. He's a difficult, arrogant man, who does not take well to his straitened circumstances. But I like to think she saw him at his best. She was, so the story goes, his receptionist and mistress for many, many years and Doctor G. was both rich and famous. It's strange to think of him as having had a life before this cell-like room. But there's a framed photograph that she brought for him and put up on the wall, where Doctor G. can see it whether he is prone or sitting. It's an old photograph, taken in a restaurant, and they say it's Doctor G. and Doctor Jonas Salk. She brings him other things too. A bright comforter for his bed, ties, imported licorice pastilles. She's not going to get a dime from his will—his sons are too shrewd to let that happen—but she comes anyway. I wonder if his wife is punishing Doctor G. for his years of infidelity. Is this how people treat each other after decades of marriage? Is this how they get their revenge? It's frightening to think so.

Doctor G. has fallen back asleep. He groans and tosses, but doesn't wake up. Here I sit, knowing I should be studying for my mid-term exam tomorrow. But I can't concentrate. I brought my books and my notes to work with me, and I had every intention of cramming, but I don't feel like it. I want to turn off the lamp on the desk and cry. But I can't. I'm at work. They say that people who study psychology are really trying to figure out what's wrong with themselves. Not only do I study it, I work in it, so I must be a really bad case. But I do know what's wrong with me. I am hopelessly in love.

In my more rational moments, I know that things can't go on like this indefinitely and in my less rational ones, I'm eaten up by jealousy. I detest the fact that Peter goes home to Rita and that I cannot call him whenever I want to. I have tried to be mature and understanding about the situation. Peter says Rita needs him. I believe him. The things he has told me about her difficulties with her ex-husband I have discreetly, casually, verified with other people. Yes, the ex-husband was an alcoholic. Yes, he beat her. Yes, Rita needs Peter. But so do I. He thinks I am so strong, but I need a little tenderness too. This is pure selfishness, I know. But all of this deception and intrigue is really wearing me down. I don't want to be the dark lady, the other woman. I don't want to be with anyone else. Least of all Greg. I feel like I'm leading a double life. I can't tell Greg I don't want to see him any more because I'm in love with his brother. The worst of it is, I don't think he suspects a thing. I know that he has been infatuated with me since we were teenagers. When we were much younger, his friends used to tell me he had a "thing" for me. Now, he tells me himself. I really don't want to hurt him, but the chemistry isn't there. He's a gorgeous looking man, but then, that seems to run in his family. Greg is nice. He tries hard. But I don't want Greg. I want Peter. And I won't accept half measures.

Peter said this isn't the right time for us to get involved. I told him I didn't want to think about a possible relationship in the future, if and when his with Rita ends. He said it wasn't dependent on their relationship ending, but I get the feeling that it is. And I would rather

forget about him entirely than wait. We were sitting in the living room this evening holding hands and I was feeling all raw and exposed. He looked at me with his big sad eyes and I think he knew that I would survive without him. I can't give in to what his eyes say. He wants me, but he's not willing or able to come to me freely. Finally I said I had to get to work, and he said he'd drive me.

When we went outside he said "Look at the moon," and turned to look at me. He was feeling romantic in spite of the fact that we had just decided not to see each other any more.

But I said, "Don't look at it. It will make you crazy."

He said, "I already am."

I looked up at the moon and laughed. "Tell me about it," I said. Then we got into his truck and sat there letting it warm up.

He sat looking at me and said, "What are you thinking right now?"

"I just need some time."

"Time?"

"Yeah. I've got to level out here, get my balance. You really rocked my boat, Peter." I couldn't look at him.

He pulled into the street and pounded on the steering wheel. Then he drove through a red light. He said he hadn't been paying attention, that his mind was elsewhere.

When we got up to College Drive he suddenly asked, "Do you like flying?"

I said, "Yeah. Someday I'm going to have my own plane and fly myself."

"Me too," he said. "Maybe we can fly away together."

"It will never happen, Peter," I said.

"There's nothing wrong with fantasizing, is there?" he said, and reached over to take my hand.

"I can't think about fantasy right now. I have to get my feet back on the ground."

And then we were at the hospital doors. I was late and I wanted to cry. Peter wanted to hold hands and say good-bye.

I hate good-byes. So I vaulted out of the truck and said, "Thanks for the ride."

He looked like he wanted to protest. I didn't want to hear. "Call me when you get your plane," I said and shut the door. I ran into the hospital, and when I got to the elevators and turned back to look he was still sitting there in the truck.

Right now he is probably home with Rita, in the process of forgetting all about me. I have never felt like this about anyone else in my entire life. It's funny. I've always laughed at the idea of love at first sight. I thought it was the kind of storybook lie you always see in magazines and movies. I never thought it would happen to me. But from the first night this thing has been out of control. I had gone to the club with Shea and Louise to see a band everybody had been talking about. I was absolutely mesmerized by the bass player. I couldn't take my eyes off him, and he stared right back at me. Stunning man. Damn

good bass player too. Greg came in while we were there and made his way over to our table. I hadn't wanted to see him that evening, just wanted to be out with friends, but I couldn't very well tell him he couldn't sit with us. He said he had brought down an electronic tuner for his brother and I didn't make the connection until the bass player came and sat with us too. The whole time Greg was talking to him he was staring at me. At some point in the evening I made a joke about jumping into the guy's lap, and when we were leaving Shea decided to help things along. He was walking in front of me, and suddenly came to a dead halt. I crashed into him, and lo and behold I was right beside Peter. I looked around Shea and saw that there was nothing in front of him, absolutely no reason for him to stop. Peter smiled at me and said goodnight. I could feel myself blushing, croaked out a goodnight, and beat a retreat in my usual less than sophisticated way.

I made enquiries and discovered that he was living with a woman called Rita, and that everyone thought he was a wonderful guy. Lovely. I'm going out with his brother and he's living with another woman. End of story. But it wasn't. I stayed away from the clubs he was playing at for months, and figured he would have forgotten all about me. But finally I went with Greg to a club where Peter was playing and the same thing happened. Greg and I had been invited to a couple of parties and we went after the club closed. The first party was pretty sleazy and there was the undercurrent of violence that you know is going to erupt into a fight of some kind. Everyone was really drunk and belligerent. Just after we arrived a man and a woman had a nasty little spat. He went

out and slammed the door and then she went out after him. Then she came back in swearing. A few minutes later the door opened again and I was sure it was going to be the man looking for a fight. But it was Peter. Moments after he walked in Greg said, "This is pretty greasy. Let's check out that other party," and we left. Peter followed us there too. He sat across the room and stared at me. Finally he came over and crouched down beside my chair and said, "So tell me your history." Just then the music stopped and everyone, including Greg, turned to look at us. Awkward. So I put my foot in my mouth and said, "History? Oh, I don't have a history. I was born yesterday." Sometimes I could kill myself for the stupid things I say. I should be muzzled around men I'm attracted to. I avoided him again for months, but finally the inevitable happened. I went to the club with Shea and Louise again, after making Shea promise on pain of death that he wouldn't do anything to embarrass me. Peter came over a couple of times between sets, and then after the last set came over and asked why I kept running away from him. He ended up coming over to my apartment, and we spent the whole night talking. It wasn't long before we found ourselves lying on the couch, wrapped around each other. He said he couldn't believe what he felt about me. He told me he had never experienced anything so powerful with anyone else before. I had been too afraid to say that I thought he was everything I had ever been looking for in a man but the Martha and the Muffins song came into my head, and I said, "Let's call it swimming." "I swim you," he said. "I think I swim you too," I said. About eight o'clock in the morning he said he had to call Rita to let her

know he was okay, which I thought was a pretty considerate thing to do. And then we talked for hours more, about him and Rita, about us. I was hooked.

Roxanne, Mr. Bob and Dixie are acting up tonight. Of all the patients on the ward, she/they are the ones that freak me out the most. From the noises coming through the wall, it sounds like there is some very heavy petting going on, but I know there is no one but Roxanne in there. She's a monster of a girl too—she's so fat that she has rolls of flesh on her back that sag over the waistband of her pants, and she has one of the most painful-looking cases of acne I have ever seen. Massive carbuncles flame over her entire face and down her neck. I feel sorry for her, but I'm also revolted. She's the first multiple personality I've ever been in contact with, and I never quite know how to react. Roxanne is morose, Mr. Bob is sleazebag macho, and Dixie is an incongruous coquette. When Roxanne and her other selves get going in the next room, giggling and squealing, I often wish I could be a fly on the wall. So how am I supposed to study for this stupid mid-term? With Roxanne's party going on next door, Doctor G. and his nightmares, and my mind full of Peter, I'll probably fail tomorrow.

Well, I didn't do wonderfully, but I didn't fail. I'm going to have to crack down on the books, though, or I'm going to lose my scholarship. I can't afford that. Work on the ward has been pretty erratic lately too.

If I don't get called in more often, I don't know how I'm going to pay next month's rent. Although, come to think of it, I might almost prefer to get evicted. The girl who moved in upstairs is turning out to be something of a pain in the ass. The first week or so there was a guy staying with her, and then last night they had a big fight. They screamed and yelled at each other for hours and finally he stormed out. She followed him out into the street and was screaming obscenities after him as he ran down the street. Then she sat down in the gutter and wailed. When she eventually came back into the building, she decided to break the glass in the front door and then sat on the stairs and screamed and cried some more. I finally went out and asked her to shut up. She told me to go fuck myself. I said if things didn't quieten down I was calling the cops. So she went back into her apartment and jumped up and down on the floor...my ceiling. I think she jumped until she was exhausted. But I'm getting a bit sick of the whole thing. I believe I have a right to some peace and quiet once in a while. Yesterday, I was sitting at the kitchen table, trying to read *The Day of The Locust* for last night's class, when I saw something fall past the window. She was throwing kittens off her balcony. I went out and collected them. One of the kittens was stone dead, but the other was, oddly enough, alive and well. I put the dead kitten in a box and put it out in the trash when the noise upstairs subsided, but I'm not sure what to do with the other one, which I have named Mehitabel. I certainly don't want to give it back to her. After I came back inside, she continued to scream at me for a while, and then she seemed to forget all about it. Every time anybody came down

the back alley or into the parking lot across the lane, she called out and invited them up to her place. Strange girl. No one took her up on her hospitality. Anyway, I'd rather not think about my upstairs neighbour too much. I'd rather think about Peter.

When I opened the door this afternoon, and saw him standing there, I tried to be strong. I felt undecided and awkward, and made him feel the same way.

"You shouldn't have come," I said. "It would be easier on both of us if we didn't see each other at all. Maybe these feelings will ebb a little."

"I had to come," he said. "I couldn't stay away."

"I've got a class in half an hour," I said. "Excuse the mess in the house. Do you want some tea?"

He stood very still and watched me with that hungry tenderness in his eyes. "I still swim you," he said.

"I'll bet you say that to all the girls."

"You know I don't." His face showed the hurt and I was sorry.

"Hey, I'm joking. You don't have to get defensive."

He stuck his hands deep into the pockets of his coat. "I'm not."

I pulled his hands out of his pockets and told him his body talk was defensive. The proximity of him, the smell of him overtook me and my last defenses went down.

He continued to play with something in the pocket of his jacket.

"What have you got there?" I asked.

"A present for someone."

I didn't want to pry, didn't want to know who he was giving presents to. I turned away and put the kettle on the stove. When I turned around he held out his hand.

"It's for you," he said. It was a bi-plane, beautifully, delicately fashioned out of wood, still smelling of swedish oil, with a tiny propellor and little wheels that turned. It must have taken hours to make.

I began to cry. He put his arms around me. "Please don't do this to me," I said. "I'm not strong enough."

He held me tighter. We stood by the doorway, unable to move apart, fitting together like tongue and groove.

"We can't do this," I said. I tried to force myself away from him, but couldn't. I decided to skip my class, and somehow, by the end of the evening, before he went back home to Rita, I was bargaining for sharing rights. I'll take this man on any terms. Nothing has ever felt this right before.

Jay arrived last night, unannounced, the way he usually does. I really wish he would find someone who can love him the way he needs to be loved. I like him, but I know I don't love him, and nothing he says can sway me. I know I've let things go on unresolved for too long. He goes back out to his farm and dreams that someday I'll change my mind. I've tried to tell him that it will never happen, that he has to find someone else, but he still believes that one day I will move out to his farm with him. And I suppose it's been to my advantage to let him hang

on to the idea. It's a kind of security, knowing that someone loves you. I know I use men for security. Jay on the farm, Greg here, Elie in New York who calls all the time and constantly offers to send me tickets to come and see him. They're all like anchors, weighing me down, keeping me moored. But I don't want to be anchored any more. Jay has been waiting for me for years now. He has tried to give me space, thinking that I will eventually get tired and realize that he is my main chance. Jay says it doesn't matter what you do in this life, it's who you do it with. I had never given that idea any credence before, but lately I think he may be right. It scares me to think that I would give up everything in a minute to be with Peter. If he said, "Come with me to Tuktoyaktuk tomorrow," I'm afraid I'd say yes. This isn't like me. What's happened to me? This morning, when I got home from the hospital, I climbed into bed, exhausted. Doctor G. died during the night, and I felt like I should be reporting a murder. It didn't have to happen that way. I just wanted to crawl under the covers and hide from the world. Jay, however, was feeling amorous. I told him I wasn't interested, which didn't seem to make any difference to him, and finally I got out of bed and went to make coffee. I brought the coffee back to the bed, gave him a cup, and sat at the foot of the bed with mine. And we got into the same old discussion of why things didn't, couldn't work out with us. While we were talking, the phone rang. It was Peter. While I talked to him, Jay laid back against the pillows and watched me. When I eventually hung up the phone, Jay got out of bed and dressed, all the

fight gone out of him. "I don't know who the lucky man was on the other end of the phone," he said, "but I sure wish I were him."

I feel pretty lucky myself. Not satisfied, but still very, very lucky. I can't believe the power of this relationship, the tangible current that is set up every time I'm around Peter. Three-phase high voltage electricity, he calls it. It is almost spooky, the way I feel this man. The other night Greg and I went to a concert at the Centennial Auditorium. I hadn't really wanted to go, knowing that Peter and Rita would be there, but I couldn't think of a good excuse, and Greg had already bought tickets. We were sitting in the auditorium when I suddenly felt almost an electric shock. Peter had just walked into the auditorium and he looked immediately, directly to where I was sitting, picking me out of thousands of people. For some reason I feel like it shouldn't surprise me that this happens with Peter, but the intensity frightens me. After the concert Greg and I went down to the Bessborough bar to meet some friends for a drink and moments after we got there Peter and Rita arrived. They came and joined our table. Rita took a liking to me. And oh shit, I liked her too. Peter was sitting beside me, and I could feel the hair on my arms standing on end. He took my hand under the table and a minute later, Rita innocently took his other one in hers on the table. It was so soap operish I wanted to scream. I pulled my hand away from Peter. When he got up to go buy some popcorn Rita's eyes followed him across the room. It's pretty obvious that she really is in love with him. I felt like such a shmuck. It would be so much easier not to know this woman at all. I don't want to know her pain. Peter says he talked to her

about making their relationship more open, less traditional. And she said she didn't mind him having female friends. He could see anyone he wanted as long as it wasn't sexual.

I haven't heard from Peter for eight days. I'm worried. I don't want to pressure him, but I have the feeling he is trying to make some kind of decision about us. The last time I saw him he wanted to know what I expected from the relationship, what I wanted, what I foresaw happening with us if he broke up with Rita. I couldn't tell him in so many words. More of the same? All of him? So, I said I couldn't predict what would happen. I said I didn't like the secrecy, didn't want to be his closet lover. I wanted to be acknowledged. But I said he might well be disappointed in me. I can't make any promises. I don't like this feeling that I have to give some kind of guarantee that a relationship with me—public and monogamous—would be any better than the one he has right now with Rita. I can't promise that. I'm desperately afraid that he will find me wanting. But I'm willing to try. I'd just like for us to be able to let this amazing thing between us unfold naturally. I know I don't want to be with anyone else—Jay's gotten the message finally and so has Greg. I'm ready to make a commitment to Peter. I'm ready to try. I guess I didn't make much sense. At any rate, I haven't seen him since. I know when he is working, when he is at practice, when he is at class. I try not to listen for a truck stopping in front of the house, try not to listen for the knock on the door during the hours I know he is free. But I can't help myself. The not knowing is killing me. It doesn't help either

that I've hardly been getting any hours at the hospital. I don't know how I'm going to pay next month's rent. Tonight I'm finally working, but I'm at sixes and sevens. I'm with Lydia, and it's been just a bizarre night.

I was sitting in the dark in the chair beside Lydia's bed, unable to write any more, unable to study. I thought Lydia was sound asleep, but suddenly she took my hand. It was so quiet and so gentle that I began to cry. I just sat there and let the tears roll down my face. It was a strange kind of role reversal—after all, I'm the one being paid to watch over her. When I heard the nurse starting rounds I felt like I should straighten up and be more professional, but it hit me that anyone looking into the room would see Meg the Sitter holding Lydia the Patient's hand.

We sat like that for a long time. Then she said, "Want a cigarette?" She's the only patient on the entire ward who is allowed to smoke in her room. I don't know how she got the privilege, but she did. So we sat and smoked together and the sky began to lighten through the window.

And then she started doing that thing of hers. Lydia is convinced that she is dead. Her fingernails are bitten to the quick. The nurses tell her over and over that if her nails are still growing she is alive. But she insists that your nails continue to grow after you're dead. And she's right. Her fingers are bitten raw. She also believes that she is full of maggots. She methodically, carefully picks them off her body and the sheets and drops them off the bed onto the floor. It's hypnotic to watch

her. And yet she is so practical about it. Maybe it was just a trick of light—I think you can make yourself see anything if you want to or need to enough... believing makes it true—but I too saw something on the covers and picked it off. Lydia's hand stopped in mid-movement and she looked at me to see, I suppose, if I was making fun of her. I had actually picked off a piece of lint, although in my fatigue and in that light, I almost believed that it truly was a maggot. I dropped it on the floor and Lydia continued her toilette alone.

Peter finally came over this evening to tell me that he does not want to see me anymore. He has decided to stay with Rita. He said it had been fun, but that he had learned a long time ago that he couldn't act on whims, simply discard one relationship because another one looked like fun. Fun. I couldn't believe it. When I said I didn't appreciate his taking two weeks to get in touch with me, he seemed surprised. He said he didn't realize that I would be waiting to hear from him. But what hurt the most was that everything he said about us was in the past tense. I wanted to howl, but I managed instead to sound angry and acid. I'm not sure why I did that. Partly, it was because I have never been able to show my hurt to the person who is hurting me. It seems the most dangerous, impossible thing to do. How can you ask for solace from the very person who's hurting you? So I transform my hurt into anger. That's the standard clinical assessment. But I think the other reason I got angry was to frighten him, to make him so

repelled by me he would never want to see me again. I'm afraid I succeeded.

He went on about how busy his life was, and how he didn't have time to sit around and think about personal problems. So I was a personal problem, getting in the way of his busy schedule. Wait a minute, I wanted to say. You were the one who came looking for me. But instead I told him coldly that it was pretty obvious he would do this sort of thing again with someone else. He had done this once, and he would keep doing it. Whatever it was he was looking for in me, he would continue to search for. I said I was very glad to have been able to show him that he was not satisfied with his life, that I felt like I had been the messenger bearing the bad news. So what was there to do but eliminate the messenger? I don't know if any of this is true. But I have to believe that he was lying to me too this evening, that he was putting on as much of an act as I was.

I'm glad to be out of Saskatoon, finished the degree, finished working on the ward. I'm not wild about my job here, but it's an escape of sorts. It's been seven months since I last saw Peter, and I thought I had managed to bury everything that happened last year. But Greg called last night, told me wistfully that he missed me, and relayed the information that Peter and Rita are getting married. I've felt numb ever since the phone call. I keep telling myself that my nails are still growing, but I can't cry.

The Night According to Harold

Harold stands patiently outside the heavy glass doors waiting for Mrs. Pratt to unlock them. The building itself is ready to be condemned, but it remains standing, obdurate and proud, in the centre of the business district, a monument to chaste womanhood. And every evening at ten o'clock Harold breaks all the rules and enters the building. Mrs. Pratt is a matron of the old school, a widow of an unhappy marriage, and allowing Harold into the YWCA is a battle lost nightly with her principles. But let him in she must. So she dawdles on her way to the door, leaving Harold one minute longer than necessary out in the cold, although they both know she can move with lightning speed when circumstances require.

Harold shivers into his army surplus parka, wondering why Mrs. Pratt is taking even longer than usual to let him in. Finally he sees her bulk descending the steps from the upstairs rooms of the residents, whom Mrs. Pratt insists on calling her "girls", although some of them are in their forties and fifties. The residents in turn call her The Hatchet, and with good reason. Mrs. Pratt can be swiftly brutal and keeps the women in a state of dreadful submission.

Mrs. Pratt cannot terrorize Harold as she can the residents. She is uncomfortable around Harold, just as she is around garter snakes. Everyone tells her she is silly to be afraid, but just the same, she avoids

them. But Harold she cannot avoid. She wonders sometimes what would happen if Harold didn't arrive at the door at ten o'clock. Although she cannot admit it, even to herself, Mrs. Pratt welcomes Harold's arrival. He is a great mystery to her, a source of reliable provocation. If he failed to present himself at the doors she would be at a loss. Formality governs Mrs. Pratt and Harold's relationship. She is excessively polite to him, leaving no doubt that she considers him neither intimate nor equal. Every night Mrs. Pratt forces Harold to keep his place as Man. Harold is the scapegoat her husband refused to be.

Harold perseveres. Every night he prepares for work with a mixture of anticipation and apprehension. Tonight, as usual, he endures Mrs. Pratt's charade of passage and escapes as quickly as possible to the basement of the building. There he finds refuge in the boiler room. He warms himself with a cigarette and a cup of coffee from his battered thermos before checking the levels and settings on the massive boilers. When he is satisfied that they will meet their nocturnal obligations he pours himself another cup of coffee and lights another cigarette. He sits in the creaky wooden chair and tilts it backwards, blowing lazy smoke rings into the air, waiting just the right amount of time to insert one into the other. Suddenly in the background of the cloudy circles he notices something missing. He brings the chair down with a thump. His Penthouse calendar is gone. Someone has been snooping in his boiler room and he has a pretty good idea who. He stomps up to the main floor and with an exaggerated show of brute ignorance hauls out his vacuum cleaner and begins cleaning the offices.

He works more slowly than usual, but when he finishes at the end of the hall Mrs. Pratt is still presiding at the front desk, keeping a watchful eye on him. He makes his way down the hallway, getting closer and closer to the stairs leading up to the women's rooms. The women are obliged to clean their own rooms and the common spaces, so Harold never goes up the stairs, but tonight he advances to the first landing, sucking up invisible dirt. Mrs. Pratt hovers officiously behind the counter ready to pounce. Harold bumps his vacuum cleaner back down the stairs and points his long hose in Mrs. Pratt's direction. She abandons her stronghold at the front desk and retreats into the staffroom, hurriedly putting on her coat and escaping the fury of Harold's cleaning to the safety of the brisk night air.

Once Mrs. Pratt is gone Harold can relax into his power. He enjoys his work. He likes the quiet that settles on the building when Mrs. Pratt is gone, broken only occasionally by the sound of the buzzer as one of the residents rings for Harold to unlock the doors. Most of the women are in before Mrs. Pratt departs, but every night there are a few late arrivals. They smile their thanks at him when he turns the bolt on the front door and swings it open gallantly. The residents do not share Mrs. Pratt's opinion of Harold; to them he is simply the man who lets them in after curfew.

By midnight all the residents are in and Harold has finished his chores on the main floor. He returns to the boiler room for another cigarette before approaching the pool area. Harold's heartbeat invariably quickens when it is time to go the pool. He hurries through

this part of his night's labour, bustling around collecting soggy towels and forgotten bathing caps. Then he goes to the utility room and wheels out his cart with the garbage bag, his pail of steaming water, his mop, broom, and squeegee and his assorted cloths and cleaning solutions. Harold never turns his back to the silent pool. It is his constant fear that some night he will arrive at the pool and discover a pale white body floating there. Harold knows his fear is irrational, but he is unable to control it. The essence of woman permeates the warm damp air, tantalizing and frightening him. He can almost see the ghosts of the women who splash and laugh in the pool during the day. He feels that he is being drawn down, down, down. But the Mrs. Pratts of the world will never allow Harold to be part of the living pool of women. All he has is his imagination.

Harold leaves the pool area immaculate. The smell of ammonia cuts through the clinging dampness and the tiles gleam. He prides himself on the transformation that takes place under the direction of his squeegee each night and he feels a sense of relief to be gone from the beckoning pool. He goes next to the showers and change rooms. The showers are disposed of quickly. First, Harold pries up all the drain covers and removes the hair that clogs them. Every night it is the same. Harold marvels that women can lose so much hair and not be bald, but there it is. Once he examined a matted handful of hair that he had pulled from one of the drains. There was every color and every length of hair. Harold wondered how many women he held in the palm of his hand. He couldn't know, and he threw away the hair without counting.

And he has never done it again. He felt a sense of shame that he had been unable to resist temptation even if only for a moment. Now Harold whisks through the showers and on to the change rooms, where he checks his image repeatedly in the mirrors. His ruddy reflection reassures him in the midst of the feminine disarray, strengthening him for the last effort of order.

Harold needs a rest after finishing the pool area. He puts his weapons in the utility closet and goes back to the boiler room. Checking the gauges makes him feel better. The boilers have responded to his ministrations and increased their output. Harold is king in the boiler room, controlling the whole building from the bowels. When night falls, the building becomes the victim of its own decay. The wind creeps in through cracks and loose window frames, and the ancient rotting insulation in the walls is unable to hold in the daytime warmth. Everything depends on Harold and his boilers. And Harold causes the water to become hotter and hotter. It courses through the building through an intricate network of pipes and radiators, puffing and hissing as it fights against the frigid night.

Rejuvenated in the boiler room, Harold returns to the main floor and makes his final inspection of his kingdom. He checks all the doors, grasping the handles firmly and pulling hard. None yields. Certain that everything is secure for the night he goes down the stairs for the last time and lies down on the narrow cot in the boiler room. He falls asleep and dreams that he has found Mrs. Pratt's large white body floating in the pool. A small, satisfied smile drifts across his lips.

The Mustard Jar

Andy Calhoun didn't realize that his wife was trying to kill him until he was promoted to a desk job in the city office. There, surrounded by beige walls and small windows, he had time to consider. Andy was only forty-eight when the corporation decided that he should be brought in from the field. When the personnel manager called Andy into her office she explained that the corporation was concerned about Andy's health. They felt he was getting too old for the rigours of travel. She told Andy that he would be much happier in a job with less travel, less pressure. But the personnel manager told Andy she was not in a position to discuss the matter; she was merely delivering the message for the corporation. Andy sat in numbed silence, knowing that protest was futile. He didn't feel old and, dammit anyway, he didn't feel sick either. He was as healthy as a horse. But the message was clear. Andy would take the job in the office. He had no choice. Mornings he dragged himself out of bed at the last possible moment, ignoring the alarm clock on the night table until its silent face told him it was 7:30. He showered and shaved, then put on his suit and went down to the kitchen with his tie, where Magda knotted it around his neck. He glumly chewed his way through the two eggs, toast and black coffee Magda set before him. Then he departed for the tall building that housed the Power Corporation. Andy hated the surge of the elevator as it carried him to

the fourteenth floor every weekday morning at 8:30 A.M. He had idly noticed one day, as the small stuffy box packed with other scrubbed faces zoomed up and jerked repeatedly to a halt at the various floors, that the floor numbers above the doors skipped from 12 to 14. Andy Calhoun was not a superstitious man, but still he dreaded the sickening plummet of the elevator as it returned him to the underground parking lot at 4:30 P.M. And he resented the stacks of paper that were inevitably piled high on his desk each and every morning. He pined for the touch of live green trees again, longed to be back out checking the line that crept through the wilderness. His only consolation was the prospect of an early retirement...if he lived that long.

Andy had met Magda when he was an earnest seventeen-year-old lineman for the Power Corporation. It was his first real job and he revelled in the responsibility of it. He took orders with genuine pride and never dallied or lingered over a job. He jumped at every opportunity to prove himself and he learned quickly. The foreman liked young Andy and took him in hand to make a man out of him. Andy was a willing student and the foreman was pleased with his progress. Within his first month Andy could swagger with the best of them. After two months he could throw back draught beer with gusto. Within three months he could win five shuffleboard games in a row in any of the taverns of the small dusty towns the crew laid over in without getting into a fist fight with the local losers. At the end of four months he could steer a truck with one lazy finger while casually rolling a thin perfect cigarette with his free hand. After five months he had learned how to water down the

morning nausea that followed a night at the local pub with a big glass of buttermilk chased by strong black coffee, four eggs over easy, bacon, toast, and hash browns. By the end of six months Andy could pinch the nether parts of the most surly waitress with such a look of glad innocence that he never got slapped.

Andy remembered the day the foreman pulled in to Meno's Esso Gas-Café and shouted to the crew that they were going to show Andy the best damn Saskatoonberry pie in the country. They all trooped into the café behind the stocky foreman. And there was Magda, washing dishes behind the counter. She was a looker...straw blonde hair, pale blue eyes, a slight sprinkling of tiny freckles over her nose, and a figure that Andy knew he was going to have dreams about. The minute Andy walked into the café with the boys in the crew and caught Magda's pale blue gaze on him he knew he was going to have to pinch her smooth round behind. He bided his time, staying quiet while the rest of the boys teased her about the lack of marriage material for a girl like Magda out in these parts. They warned her she would end up marrying old Meno if she didn't take one of them pretty quick. She laughed good-naturedly and brought them heavy mugs of black coffee and big pieces of warm Saskatoonberry pie with mounds of creamy vanilla ice cream sliding on the golden crust. Andy chewed his pie slowly and watched her as she bent to wipe the arborite tables and stretched to put the coca-cola glasses on the shelf behind the counter. When Magda returned with the Silex pot to refill the heavy white and green mugs his right hand continued to carry the pie on his fork to his mouth while his left hand slid out all on

its own and neatly pinched the flesh hidden beneath her crisp pink skirt. Magda carefully set the pot on the table, turned to Andy and smacked him...hard.

"Looks like you're new on the crew, mister," she said. "One thing you'd better learn is that you get what you pay for here, and I am not on the menu." Then she picked up the pot and continued to pour coffee into the waiting mugs amid the hoots and laughter of the boys who were falling off their chairs, hysterically punching and shoving at Andy.

Andy turned white, then crimson, the outline of Magda's fingers printed in relief on his cheek. "Sorry, miss," he said sheepishly, struggling with his best boyish grin.

"Just don't let it happen again," she said and flashed a wide perfect smile at him as she turned and walked away.

Andy went outside to roll a smoke in the afternoon sun and when the crew came out in their raucous gaggle he was unusually quiet and distant. He didn't respond to their catcalls; he just turned and climbed into the cab of the orange power truck. The foreman climbed in on the other side.

"Oh yeah, Andy," he said, grinning around his toothpick, "I forgot to tell you about Magda."

"She's something, all right," Andy murmured.

The foreman looked over at Andy, then turned the key in the ignition. At the end of the afternoon the crew straggled into the trucks and returned to the motel in town. The foreman threw the keys of his

truck to Andy and said with an exaggerated wink, "Don't do anything I wouldn't do, eh?"

Magda didn't look very surprised when Andy came back alone at supper time, but she declined his offer to drive her home anyway. So Andy drove back to the motel alone and the next day he was gone, carried away with the crew to the next job site. But two weeks later he returned to Meno's Esso Gas-Café and this time when he offered Magda a ride home to her parents' farm at Paddockwood she accepted. Andy went to see Magda every chance he got and she continued to accept his rides. Six months later she accepted his ring and his proposal of marriage. She left Meno's Esso Gas-Café and went to Prince Albert where she and Andy were married in a small church service. Most of Andy's crew came to the wedding, pelting Andy and Magda with handfuls of rice as they ducked out of the church. Magda's parents stood quietly on the church steps, proud and worried. Even old Meno came to see Magda married.

Andy and Magda took the train to the Rocky Mountains for a week of hotel honeymooning and then they took the bus back to the city of Saskatoon. Andy's parents had a farm in Biggar, and he told Magda that she could go there if anything happened. Had he asked her, Magda would have told him that she'd feel better going to see her own parents if anything bad happened, but she didn't argue with her new husband. Andy rented a tiny house on Avenue B, where he left his bride, then went back north to join his crew. Once a month he came home for a

weekend. Magda fussed over him and sent him back north with neatly wrapped packages of biscuits and buns.

Their first baby was born when Andy had just turned nineteen. He hurried south to Saskatoon on the afternoon bus: to gape at Magda, pale in the hospital bed where she cradled the baby in her arms; to hold the small bundle gingerly in his own tanned arms; to thrust it back at Magda when it moved; to stand grinning like a man possessed as she guided its tiny head to her swollen breast. Andy took the evening bus back to the waiting crew, leaving Magda in the able care of the Grey Nuns at St. Paul's Hospital. The boys pounded him on the back, made crude good-natured remarks about his prowess and virility, and then got him stinking drunk at the hotel pub in Duck Lake. The next morning they pulled him out of bed, hauled him to the truck and got him to his first cool glass of buttermilk. When he stayed flopped down in the shade of the stubby pines at the edge of the cut line after the rest of the crew had gone back to work after the morning coffee break, the foreman yelled with a grin in his voice, "Hey Andy, whatsamatta — your little woman wear you out or what?" Andy tipped his cap in the foreman's direction and went back to work.

When he went back to Magda on his weekends he literally strutted with pride, lifting his rapidly growing son with less and less trepidation. Sometimes Magda would tiptoe into the tiny, still living room and find Andy snoring on the couch, his son Ben drooling peacefully in the crook of his arm. She would smile and tiptoe back into the kitchen.

The years circled past; Andy got his own territory and his own crew. And Magda gave birth to his daughter. Andy drove down to Saskatoon and pulled up at St. Paul's Hospital. He strode through the flutter of Grey Nuns who cooed and settled around Magda. He took his baby girl in his arms and fitted her small blonde head into the curve of his arm. The baby twisted her mouth into what seemed to Andy a smile and fell asleep. The nuns pressed together in their excitement, exclaiming at Andy's way with children. Satisfied, they left the room. Andy grinned and handed the bundle of blankets to Magda, who sat, pale and patient, propped up on the white pillows.

"How long they gonna keep you in here?" he said, jerking his head at the exiting nuns.

"I think I'll be able to go home tomorrow," she answered, tucking the blankets around the tiny fingers poking out of the miniscule flannelette nightgown. "Are you going to stay a couple of days?"

"I'm gonna have to leave Sunday morning. Got a new job we've got to get started on. I'll come back tomorrow to get ya. You look kinda tired — why don't you get some sleep?" he said. Then he kissed her on the top of her head and abruptly wheeled out of the room.

Andy left Magda staring quizzically at the door. His work boots rang out as he strode through the hushed hospital halls and then he was out in the city air, swinging into the power truck and booming out off-key accompaniments to the radio all the way to the house on Avenue B. He got out of the truck and took a long look at the house before turning to stride up the sidewalk of the neighbour's house. Before he

was halfway up the walk the door burst open and there was kind old Lily Sawatsky with her almost blind dog at her heels and his son Ben pushing past her yelling, "Da, Da!"

He swept the boy up and swung him in the air. "Did you miss your old dad?" he demanded as the boy shrieked with delight. But within seconds Ben was squirming to get down and when Andy set him down on the porch he scrambled into the house. Andy thumped his retreating bottom and bellowed, "Hey, what's this? Where do you think you're off to, tiger?"

"I gots a twuck, I gots a twuck," Ben cried and waddled quickly into the living room.

Andy shook his head and followed Lily into her tiny kitchen. He dropped into a chair, his long legs stretching halfway across the faded linoleum floor, and accepted the cup of tea she put before him. Lily stood at the counter and dropped big spoonfuls of sticky oatmeal cookie mixture onto an aluminum tray.

"Were you up to see Magda, then?" she asked.

"Yep."

"How's she doing? How's the baby?"

"Oh, I got myself a real beauty this time. She'll look just like her mother."

Ben strutted into the kitchen, an orange plastic truck in one hand, an old rag doll in the other.

"Whatcha got there, tiger?" Andy said as he reached for the doll. "You don't want to be playing with dolls, now. They're for girls."

But Ben clutched at the doll and the truck and unsuccessfully attempted to scale the heights of the wooden chair beside the counter. Lily looked down and laughed. "Oh, you're one busy boy, aren't you Benny?"

Andy shook his head and picked Ben up and stood him on the chair. "What's that?" he asked, pointing at the mounds on the cookie tray.

"Kookees!" chortled Ben and dropped the truck and doll simultaneously on the floor.

Lily handed Ben a spatula covered with oatmeal and raisins and said, "It certainly has been a pleasure having a youngster around this week. I sure miss the grandchildren since Molly moved away."

"You heard from her lately?" Andy asked.

"I got a letter a couple of weeks ago. She's got a job in Vancouver now. But it's not easy for a single woman with two children, you know. I wish she'd come home, but she says she's got to do this."

"What happened to that husband of hers anyway?"

"Oh, he went chasing off after her when she moved to Vancouver, but she ran him off. He's a no-good drunk, that one. The sooner she gets a divorce the better, if you ask me." Lily picked up the tray and stared absently at it for a minute. "Times sure have changed since I was a girl." She looked down at Ben and smiled. "Well, Buster Brown, should we get these cookies baked for your daddy?"

"Ya, ya, ya," yelled Ben as he gleefully slapped the counter with the gummy spatula.

"Let's get out of Lily's hair, Ben my boy," said Andy as he scooped his son from his perch and carried him off. Lily listened to the sounds of their laughter from the living room as she washed up the dishes and smiled to herself.

Andy picked Magda up at the hospital on Saturday and that night, when both babies were asleep, he trailed her through the tiny house as she restored order. He regarded her buttocks appreciatively as she knelt and reached beneath the sagging sofa and extricated one orange plastic truck, three scuffed wooden blocks and half a mushy brown apple with small tooth marks on its wrinkled skin. Andy leaned in the doorframe of the living room. "Whaddaya think, Mag, think we oughtta get a dog for the kids?"

Magda sat down heavily on the sofa and looked at him with tired steadiness. "A dog, Andy?"

"Yep... a big one?"

"What in heaven's name do the kids need a dog for?"

"Protection."

Magda looked at Andy like he'd gone mad. "Protection from what?"

"Strangers."

"Good Lord, Andy, there's not room for two kids and me in this house, let alone a dog." Her voice was thin and tired, but there was cold steel in it still.

"Well, honey, we're gonna have to protect the kids from strangers, that's all there is to it." Andy grinned and dropped into the armchair that sagged beside the door.

Magda sighed and said very slowly, "Andy, we really don't need a dog, okay? A dog would just be a nuisance. There are no strangers here. We know everyone in the neighbourhood. Or at least I do."

"Well you won't in the new neighbourhood. I think it's best that we get a dog," he answered calmly.

"What new neighbourhood?"

"The one our new house is going to be in."

Magda examined Andy's face for a sign of some kind. In spite of her efforts her face brightened. Trying to sound severe, but only managing hopefulness she said, "What do you think you're talking about, mister?"

"Well honey, I think it's about time we bought a little house of our own, don't you?"

"For a dog?" she said with a wry smile.

"No honey, for us. Whydaya think I was working all this overtime for if it wasn't for a down payment on a house, eh?"

Magda didn't tell him that she had thought he probably drank a lot of his overtime pay with the boys on his crew in the northern pubs. Instead she gently put down the toys dangling in her hands and walked over to Andy. She deposited the mushy apple in the ashtray standing beside the chair and climbed into his lap, wrapping her small arms around his tanned neck.

When Andy left the next morning he carried Magda's famous smile all the way north with him, humming as he guided the orange Power truck down the highway with one thumb on the steering wheel.

The new house on Avenue M welcomed Magda, Ben, the baby Amanda, the sheepdog Casey, and on weekends, Andy. When Amanda was three years old Andy bought a car and they all went north for their first real vacation together. They travelled all the way to Paddockwood to spend a sunny week at Magda's parents' farm.

As Andy lifted Ben out of the back seat of the sleek blue and white Chevrolet where he was jumping up and down on the new upholstery yelling, "Gramma, gramma, we're here!" Magda's father rose from his rocking chair on the verandah and let out a long, low whistle.

"Hit the big time there, did you, Andy?" the old man called. With his slow crooked smile he shuffled down the steps and greeted Magda and the kids.

Andy slapped the dusty hood of the car and laughed. "She's some beaut, eh Henry?" The two men began to drift around the car, Andy thrusting one hand in his pocket while with the other he nonchalantly pointed out all the features of the car. They were oblivious to the two women who were exchanging knowing smiles as they disappeared into the old farmhouse with the two children.

The days snaked by, hot and clear, with Andy and old Henry roaring in and out of the dusty yard in the blue and white Chevrolet. They manufactured excuses for trips to town, surveyed the progress of Henry's crops, went to look at the neighbour's new thresher, stopped in

at all the nearby auctions. The two women remained sequestered in the cool recesses of the house, seemingly content with nothing except each other and the children for diversion. After the evening meal, when the dishes had been cleared away, the children sent out to play, and the men sat drinking beer and the women tea, they sat around the table, talking lazily.

One evening, Old Henry said, "You see that article there in the paper today about that woman who killed her husband?" The subject of the murder got everyone's interest. Henry got up and took the newspaper from the sideboard. "Says here she killed him 'cause he left the top off the mustard jar. Can you beat that?" Old Henry shook his head.

Magda leaned towards her father, trying to see the paper. "How many times?" she asked. "Does it say there how many times?"

Henry stared at his daughter. Magda looked at her mother and the two of them burst into laughter. Henry looked at Andy to see if he knew what the women were laughing about. Andy just shrugged and muttered, "Dames."

On the Sunday they were to return to Saskatoon Magda emerged from the shadow of the house into the brilliant sunshine with Amanda and Ben in tow. As he stood waiting by the Chevrolet Andy was astonished at how pretty Magda still was, with that famous smile lighting up her face as she left the circle of arms and gathered the children into the car. The smile softened as they drove away from the farm and Magda looked out the window with a faraway look in her eyes. But as they passed the weatherbeaten sign of Meno's Esso Gas-Café

Magda looked over Amanda's head and whispered to Andy, "Remember?" He grinned as he guided the big Chevrolet on down the gray ribbon of highway.

Andy was in charge of a big job at the new power station being constructed on the Churchill when his third child was born. When Magda's mother called Andy to tell him that there had been complications with the birth he told her he would come as soon as he could. But Andy couldn't get away for two days. When he arrived at the hospital, with Ben and Amanda eagerly following him, he frightened away even the bravest of the Grey Nuns that swooped and converged at Magda's bedside.

"You okay," he asked Magda.

"I think so, yes. Yes, I'm just fine."

"How's the baby?"

"The doctor says he's going to be okay. They gave him a transfusion and he's getting stronger. They're going to keep us in here for a few days for observation, that's all."

"Did you find a baby, Mommy?" asked Amanda as she squirmed closer to Magda on the high bed.

Magda ran her hand through her daughter's hair. "What, honey?"

"Did you find a baby? Ben said you were going to pick up a new baby for us."

Magda smiled wanly. "Yes, Mandy. You've got a new baby brother."

"Where is he? Can I see him?" Amanda was bouncing with curiosity while Ben stood quietly beside the bed.

"He's sleeping right now. Maybe we can go and look at him later."

"What's the baby's name?"

"Reuben," said Andy, surprising himself with the decision in his voice.

"Reuben," said Magda to Amanda, not looking at Andy.

"Oh... when are you coming home, Mommy?"

"In a couple of days, honey. Are you having a nice time with Grandma?"

"Yeah, but she doesn't read stories as good as you, Mommy."

"Maybe Daddy will read you some nice stories tonight, Mandy."

Andy cleared his throat. "Uh, listen..." he said. "I've got to get back to the Churchill this afternoon. There's a fellow flying up with a load of supplies. And we're behind on that job."

"Mommy's kind of tired, honey. Why don't you go with Daddy and look at the new baby now? I'll see you in two days, okay? You be good for Grandma." Magda turned and squeezed Ben's hand and then closed her eyes.

"Come on, kids, let's go see your new brother," Andy growled as he left the room.

Andy knew his children were growing up when he saw the carriages and tricycles stored in the garage give way to skateboards and hockey sticks. The day he couldn't drive his old Chevrolet into the

garage he decided it was time they moved. Without telling Magda, he began to go for long drives on the weekends, looking for the perfect house with a For Sale sign on it. It was a Saturday afternoon when he found it, a large white house nestled comfortably on a wide lot on Avenue V. He drove back to the house on Avenue M, whistling as he pulled into the driveway, and parked outside the garage. He phoned the real estate agent and with a satisfied smile settled in front of the television to wait for Magda to come in from the garden. She came in with an armload of vegetables and went into the kitchen. Andy remained where he was, leaning back in the lazy boy, his socked feet dangling comfortably over the edge of the footrest. As his eyes followed the action on the screen he called in the direction of the kitchen, "We're moving."

Magda's voice, rising above the clatter of pots and pans, called back, "Did you say something, Andy?"

"I said we're moving."

There was a moment of silence in the kitchen and then Magda appeared in the doorway. "Did you say we're moving?"

"Yep." Andy watched as a player on the screen fumbled the ball and disappeared in a descending flurry of arms and legs.

Magda was standing stock-still in the doorway. "Where?"

"To a new house."

"Why?"

"Why not?"

Magda wiped her hands slowly on the tea towel she carried.
"Because I like it here, Andy."

"You'll like the new place better, Mag."

"Prove it," she said.

Andy stood, went to the front entrance and put his workboots on, and walked out to the waiting Chevrolet. Magda followed him wordlessly and bent into the car. She said nothing as he backed out of the driveway, nothing as he drove down the street drumming his fingers on the steering wheel. When he stopped in front of the house on Avenue V, she examined it through the open window of the car, but made no move to get out. When Andy drove back to the house on Avenue M, she got out and walked into the house without a word, twisting the tea towel she still had in her hands like a noose. She went back into the kitchen, took the steaming ham out of the oven, and turned the burners on beneath the waiting pots. At suppertime, when Andy made the announcement of the move, no one raised objections.

Ben asked, "Does that mean I'll finally get my own room?"

"Yep," said Andy.

"All right!" yelled Ben and stuck his tongue out at Reuben, who kicked him under the table.

Ben, Reuben and Amanda all wanted to know where the house was, if it had a basketball net, if it was closer to a swimming pool, if they would have to go to different schools. Andy finally threw his fork down in mock defeat and said, "Let's go." They stampeded out of the house behind him, leaving Magda at the table where she slowly, methodically, dipped neat squares of ham into the pool of applesauce on her plate and placed them one after another into her mouth, until the plate was clean.

After the last box was unpacked, the last shelf organized, Magda went out and found a part-time job at a florist's shop not far from the new house. "To help with payments," she told Andy.

Andy was incensed and insisted loudly that Magda did not have to go out to work. "You think I can't provide for my family?" he demanded.

But Magda was quietly adamant. And despite the fact that Andy did make good money, even he had to admit that the extra money made life easier. He didn't even object when Magda told him she wanted her own car. He magnanimously presented her with the old blue Chevrolet and bought a new Ford. And when Magda accepted full-time work at the florist's he thought it was probably good for her to get out of the house now that the kids were growing up. She wouldn't have to spend so much time alone.

He was taken aback, however, when he noticed the Jobs list posted on the refrigerator door one Saturday afternoon. He didn't pay much attention to it when he opened the door to get out his first beer. But when he went back for his second he was surprised to see that the first job marked on the list was FIX EAVESTROUGHS. Surely Magda wasn't going to try to do that? She'd kill herself! He read down the list with increasing amazement. TRIM HEDGE. CLEAN GARAGE. CUT LAWN. PAINT SHED. FIX SIDEWALK. FIX GODDAMN FAUCETS. Andy flipped the cap off the beer bottle and walked slowly back to the living room. He settled into his lazy boy and studied the t.v. screen, trying to figure out what he had missed in the game. Suddenly he sat upright and roared, "Ben!"

"What?" Ben's voice drifted lazily from behind the door of his room.

"Cummeer!"

Ben appeared at the door of the living room.

"What the hell are you doing in your room?"

"Studying."

"Well get outside and cut the grass for chrissake!"

Ben gave his father a startled look and disappeared. A few minutes later Andy heard the whine of the lawnmower and settled deeper into his chair. When the football game ended Andy rose wearily, walked out to the Ford, and drove to the hardware store to buy washers for the faucets.

The lists on the fridge continued and Andy gradually came to accept them as necessary weekend evils. But during the week, he barely had time to think of them as he flew over the northern pines in the droning Cessna. He squinted his eyes as he scanned the power lines and thought how lucky he had been. The power corporation had rewarded Andy with a job that made his heart quicken and his feet scar. He lived for the race down the runways when it seemed the little plane would never get the strength to climb into the sky, and waited with barely containable anticipation for the stomach-dropping descent as the plane angled down to the runways in the isolated northern settlements where they stopped in to chat and refuel. He especially loved the pontoon planes and the way they landed with a tugging splash. He couldn't explain the feeling it gave him, this flying through the wilderness, over

the thousands of lakes, the acres of trees. He didn't want to talk about it to Magda or his children, didn't even want to try to put it into words. Sometimes though, he wished that he could bring his sons or his daughter up with him, but he knew they wouldn't be interested. As far as he could figure, none of them liked the wilderness — they didn't even like going to visit their grandparents on the farm.

All of Andy's children had turned out to be city slickers. Ben... well, his boy Ben was an out of work actor. Andy secretly thought his first-born was a fairy, but he never dared mention it to Magda, and anyway, he didn't want to know. Amanda had moved away to Victoria to go to university. Magda and Andy had tried to convince her that it would be better to go to school in Saskatoon where she could live at home while she studied, but Amanda said Saskatoon wasn't for her. She was studying marine biology in British Columbia, although for the life of him Andy couldn't understand why a girl would want to be a biologist. Other girls became home economists, or librarians, or interior decorators. It wasn't that Andy didn't wish his daughter well... he just worried about her. He worried when he and Magda would phone her long distance and a male voice would answer the phone. When Andy asked about these strange male voices Amanda would say offhandedly, "Oh, that's just Bob"...or Dennis, or Bud. When he asked her if she was serious about them she'd laugh and say, "Oh, Dad, *really*." And when he asked her when she was going to settle down and get married she'd just laugh and say, "Dad, I'm never getting married, don't you know?" And when Magda, on the extension phone in the bedroom, said, "Good

for you, honey," Andy knew it was useless to pursue the question. She'd change her mind when the right fellow came along, he'd put money on that. But still, he was disappointed.

Reuben wasn't interested in the northern wilds either. As soon as he had finished high school Reuben went into business. He donned a three piece suit and tie, claimed he was going to be a millionaire by the time he was twenty-five and became an insurance salesman. Andy didn't trust insurance men, but a man couldn't distrust his own son, and when Reuben had approached him about reviewing his life insurance portfolio he couldn't think of any way to say no. Reuben had already talked to his mother, and she was all for it. So Andy and Magda had sat in their own living room and watched the sad series of calamities that befell the widows of uninsured men on the screen of Reuben's portable video unit. They were moved by the stories acted out on the screen and when Reuben had turned his machine off and the living room lamps back on, Magda left the room with tears still rimming her eyes. Reuben presented Andy with a policy that tripled Andy's life insurance coverage and Andy had not even hesitated before writing out the cheque.

As they sat around the kitchen table with coffee and pie, Reuben's sleek video machine innocuously closed into itself in the corner, Reuben joked, "You know how to tell the difference between the fellow whose insurance is paid up and the fellow whose isn't?"

"No. How?" Andy said.

"The fellow with paid up insurance lets his wife drive home after the party." Reuben broke out into a booming laugh that he must have learned at some sales training session.

Andy didn't think Reuben's joke was very funny, but he forced a laugh all the same. A son was a son, even if he did sell life insurance. But Andy knew he would never take Reuben up north with him to share the breathtaking view from the Cessna. No, he couldn't count on any of his kids to understand him.

As he sat behind his desk in his office on the fourteenth floor of the Power Corporation building Andy wondered if it was after he had bought the life insurance from Reuben that Magda had decided to kill him. But no, he had had life insurance before that. Not a lot, he was prepared to admit, but enough so that Magda and the kids would never starve. He'd always been a good provider. He sat and gazed out the window at the other buildings. He watched as a pigeon landed on the narrow ledge of the window, balancing like an acrobat. A scene popped into his mind. Magda was putting Amanda, who must have been eight or nine at the time, to bed. He was sitting in the living room watching t.v. when he heard his daughter's voice whisper, "When's he going away, Mommy?"

"Shh, don't talk like that now. You go to sleep and he'll be gone in the morning."

And then Magda had come into the living room and flopped down in the armchair in front of the television and watched the news as if nothing had happened.

He remembered the first time Magda had tried to kill him. He was up on the roof repairing shingles, and just as he was stepping out backwards to the top rung of the ladder Magda had knocked over the ladder with the two-by-four she was carrying to the back yard. The ladder had swayed for a minute and then crashed to the ground near Magda. From where he lay clutching at the gritty shingles he had heard her drop the two-by-four and swear.

"Are you okay, Andy?" she called up after a minute.

"Yeah. You want to put that ladder back up?" he answered, trying to keep his voice even. When she had managed to position the ladder up against the eavestrough he climbed down and went into the garage where she wouldn't be able to see his shaking hands. Unsteadily he lit a cigarette.

Magda picked up the two-by-four and carried it to the pile already lying on the strip of grass that separated the garden from the house.

"Andy," she called, "are you going to get these flower boxes built today?"

"Just give me a bloody minute, will you, Mag?" he yelled back.

"I just asked, Andy."

"Yeah, yeah, I'll get them done. I want to get the roof finished first." He heard the back door slam.

Then there was the time Andy had taken Magda fishing with him. Just as he was stepping into the boat from the dock Magda had put the motor into reverse. The boat lurched and Andy splashed into the cold water, grateful only that he hadn't fallen in at the stern end of the boat. Magda had stalled the motor and paddled back to the dock by the

time Andy had pulled himself up onto it. He slogged back to the car and changed into dry clothes while Magda waited on the dock, smoothing suntan lotion on her face. Andy got into the boat first and held it steady while Magda climbed in. They fished all day and caught their limit, but Andy never took Magda fishing again.

He remembered, too, the day she had come wheeling into the driveway in the old Chevrolet, just about running him over where he was crouched painting the pickets of the fence along the driveway. And the time she had sent him down the stairs she had just washed, first loading him up to his chin with boxes to put in the storage room. He had slipped on the slick stairs and the boxes had tumbled to the cement floor at the bottom. He had let go of the railing when he heard her footsteps crossing the kitchen floor to the stairwell and had disguised the pain in his wrenched back as he went down to clean the mess. And the time she had put the sprinkler on the lawn, soaking the extension cord leading to the electric pruner he was using to trim the branches of the dwarf apple trees in the back yard. She had chewed up the cord with the lawn mower the week before, leaving the wires exposed and frayed, and he had gotten a nasty shock. He dropped the shears in stunned anger, yelling, "Jesus H. Christ, Magda, what are you trying to do...kill me?"

"Do you have to get upset over every little thing, Andy? I didn't realize that would give you a shock." And shaking her head, she disappeared into the house.

Andy flipped through the memories, trying to find the exact moment when Magda had made her decision. The pigeon flew away

from the window ledge and one of the secretaries knocked lightly on the open door of Andy's office and came in with an armload of papers.

"I'm leaving for the day, Mr. Calhoun," she said. "Will there be anything else?"

"No, thanks," replied Andy. "I'll see you tomorrow." He remained at his desk, staring out the window.

The Falls

Back far, where the river begins, there is safety. You push off from the shore with a long branch from one of the trees that herd up along the edge of the bank, looking for all the world like buffalo in a storm. Thick and solid, calmly waiting out the wind, roots in deep, they huddle their little ones in the centre, protecting them from the worst of the rage.

At first you don't intend to go far. You stick your long branch into the soft mud, where it sinks with a muffled squish, the tip of it sucked up by soft brown lips. For a minute you're stuck there. The mud wants your stick, but your boat is swaying with the water. With a mighty pull you wrench your stick from the soft bottom. You almost topple into the water, but land hard on the bottom of the boat instead as some instinct forces you down into the boat instead of over the side into the water. Your boat drifts away from the brown disturbance.

At the beginning it's like a game. You can see everything really clearly. You know you can make it to shore whenever you please, but the river ripples along, rocking you gently. The sun pours down like hot yellow dreams and you feel great. After a while you start to get sweaty pushing along with your stick and you just stand there between the two seats like a raft poler and play on the surface of the water with the stick. It drags a line in the water, leaving a furrow like the trail of an evening

duck swimming. The line starts straight and then begins to wriggle as the water comes in to close it back up. After a while you sit down on the seat that's not broken and lean back, letting the sun run all over your face. Right behind your eyelids are two hot bright spots. If you squint your eyes up tight you can circle the clear bright spots with colors. After a while it hurts to open your eyes and you lean back and put your feet up on the broken seat, angled sideways in the boat. And you fall asleep like that, not really meaning to, but not fighting it either.

You sleep for a long time. When you wake up it's dark. But you can see some lights not very far away and your boat is sliding along with that sleepy sway. It's like riding a speeding night train through the prairies. The train doesn't stop at the shrinking towns that push their lights out hopefully. It used to maybe. But now it just sways on across those prairies all night long. You lean your nose on the cool glass for a while, but that long cradle rocks you right back to sleep. And in your boat there your eyelids keep sliding closed. So there you are — asleep again without remembering to get scared. A river can do that to you.

The next time your eyes unglue themselves it's starting to get light out again. The crystal stars are flickering and disappearing in a flood of turquoise blue. The river starts to soak up the color and wash it up on the shore. Everything is still. You hear some farm dog bark with shrill, silly urgency every once in a while, but soon it bores itself to a low mumble. Then the quiet creeps back again. The only other sound is the slap slap of the river as it beats time on your boat. The river is wider, and even though you have your stick in the bottom of the boat you know

it's not going to get you anywhere now. The river is too fast and too deep. When you realize that, you wake right up. It's cool in the spreading turquoise morning, but not really unpleasant, just fresh. Gradually things start moving on the banks. As the turquoise thins to clear it washes down on everything, the farms and the fields and the sleepy dogs bumbling in the dew-soaked grass. All day long you sit up, wide awake, the branch lying in the bottom of the boat, useless against the strengthening current.

It's late in the afternoon when the river bends. For a moment your mind races as you try to think of a way to jump to solid footing on the inside fold of the bank. But you are too slow for this river. It grips your boat and shoots you through the fast wide side — too far from the shore to be able to jump safely. You think about diving in and swimming for that shore, but you're moving pretty fast now, and you know that that current is stronger than you. So you settle back down on your seat and wait, and watch, while the day sidles out. It's after the bend that you begin to notice the other streams hurtling into the big river.

After the bend, when you slam helplessly, hopelessly into the big river, it hits you that you can't turn back. This river only goes one way, whether you like it or not. The light keeps creeping away while you try to figure out whether you like that idea or not. After the light has deserted you completely, you sit there feeling the dark worried air flap past you as your boat skids over the water. You hear strange sounds in the thick darkness, and you don't sleep the way you did the first night.

You keep squeezing your eyes into sleep and sometime later realize they are wide open, staring into the blackness. It's those sounds that wake you. They crash through the dense black and collapse on your ears. You turn over and rearrange yourself in the boat, but sleep won't stay with you. Finally you sit up and wait for the turquoise to come and wipe away the black.

But the turquoise doesn't come. Long, low clouds the color of conch hearts push the morning in on a cutting wind. As you look around, a night sound erupts in the growing flush. You follow the sound and see another boat splintering against a rock that offers a jagged edge to the bleeding pink sky. It carves a trough beside the trail your own boat has just left. Stunned, you turn and face forward, downriver. Ahead are more rocks, more wreckage, and a single bobbing dot in the distance. You pick up the branch from the bottom of the boat where it has lain since yesterday and try to maneuver a course around the rocks that appear suddenly, darkly, directly in front of your boat. The wind whips you down the river and you have no time to wonder. Throughout the day you see other boats shooting into the mainstream, flung out from smaller streams. The wind has crumpled up the surface until white flecks cover both in one continuous pattern. There is no line that marks the place where one ends and the other begins.

It isn't until the night that you let tears come. They run down your cold cheeks, and are washed away by the rains that burst through the giant silver cracks of the smashed sky. But finally the wind gathers to a hush and leaves the sky alone. You curl up in the bottom of your

tossing boat, wet, afraid, but too punished to stay awake any more.

When you peel yourself apart the pure turquoise is waiting simply and the black fist of fear is gone.

The river carries you for many more days and nights. Some mornings the turquoise wins , others are just black with thick smears of rouge. You pass the remains of countless shattered boats. Once you see a boat beached on shore and you wonder if it is by accident or design. But you are too far from the bank to ask the ones who are working there. They are trying to extricate a figure which appears more dead than alive from the weatherbeaten boat . And you are pulled downstream too quickly to hear what they would reply if they did have the answer. One day you see the end.

They don't bother me much. I was a nurse once. I can remember being up there with them, looking ahead to the edge where the waters swirled together, hard, dark and fast before that long drop. Our weak boats, bright paint on rotten wood, like match boxes bobbing along. They used to dress us up in white and send us out in those boats just in front of the falls there. A thick metal cable stretched across the river and our boats had guy lines running to it. We were supposed to capture the boats that went too near the edge and rescue their wild-eyed occupants. Most people don't understand that kind of work. They stand on the shore and flap their arms and expect miracles. But the fact of the matter is, sometimes there's nothing you can do. Some boats just can't

be saved. If they still have their sticks, most of those boaters would just as soon poke your eyes out as get saved. I swear, they want to go over that edge. You talk and you talk, but they stick their fingers in their ears, and they'd stick them in up to the elbows if they could. Most times you've got to move in slowly, so slowly they don't even know what's happening until you're almost right on top of them. And then grab them, and hook the tow rope onto their boats, and drag them back to shore. There's not that many that we bring back, though. Oh, they've got some wild tricks. Sometimes their boats capsize out there, and at times like that you've just got to save yourself. A job is a job. You can't go sacrificing yourself for every last loony when they don't even want to get saved. But those people back on the shore don't understand. Sure, they think you should martyr yourself. Every time it happens they jump up and down on their steady little piece of ground and yell till they're blue in the face. The first time you lose one you're all embarrassed and you hunch down in your seat, the damn white uniform making your face look even redder than it already is. Eventually they forget about you and your failure and find other things to flap about. And after a while you don't bother to get embarrassed anymore. You shrug and go on to the next assignment.

The worst ones are the ones that are too exhausted to put up a fight. They just crouch there in the bottom of their boats with weak milky smiles as you tow them back to the bank. And you know that as soon as they've beefed themselves up a bit you're going to meet them out there again. The second or third time out they know all the tricks of the

trade. You can't get near them. Usually they pretend to give up and make you think you can move in. But as soon as you get close, their sticks come flashing out. Once in a while you get clobbered, although if you're smart you learn pretty quickly how to duck the worst ones. Sometimes they get a good shot and shove off, just about overturning your boat as they careen over the edge. And other times, without warning, there's just a swirling eddy that twists their boats out of your grasp and sends them over. But like I said before, there's nothing you can do. It's a job. You just do the best you can. And if those ninnies jumping up and down on the shore think their plan is going to save the world, they're wrong.

"Why, Vivian! What are you doing, sitting here all alone in the dark? It's awfully late, dear. Don't you think you should be in bed? No? Are you having trouble sleeping tonight again? Did you take all your medication? Well, you should be feeling sleepy very soon then. Have you been having those nasty dreams again? Maybe we should talk to your doctor about changing your medication. Yes, we'll talk with him tomorrow. Tomorrow is the day he comes to see you, isn't it?"

Most of them just leave me alone, but this one is new, and she hasn't got the picture yet. She chirps and chatters on, but I don't have the mind to listen to her. She thinks the starch in her uniform hides it, but her fear slips out in loose white threads. She's afraid of the dark and

afraid of the silence. She smokes too much. Her hands don't know quiet. The guy line is fraying, loose metal threads slowly unravelling, and she doesn't know it. I wonder if I should tell her, but I don't think it would do much good anyway. So I just watch her, looking at those threads twisting and breaking, that safety line getting thinner and thinner. She doesn't like me looking at her — she can't look at my eyes, but she can't find anything else in the room that wants her to look at it either. When she hears Manny starting the hourly room check at the other end of the hall she hops off the chair she's perched on and smooths the uniform down with her fidgety fingers and hurries to join him in her stiff peg-legged walk.

Manny's been here for a long time, and he has techniques. He's the muscle man. He's not very tall, only five-nine or so, but he's heavy. When they call him, he moves into action like a John Deere tractor. Manny knows how to instill fear with his big meaty fists. They twitch at the end of his massive arms, waiting for action. And he knows how to calm down a flailer without leaving a mark. He can crumple a patient to the floor with one blow and then arrange the limp body on the bed without a telltale sign. Frank hates Manny. When Manny comes on shift Frank mutters, but he hasn't got the courage to yell at Manny. Manny's taken away just about everything old Frank ever had and Frank just can't fight any more.

I've seen Manny doing the rounds when he thinks no one is watching. He checks his broad slavic features in the mirrors of the tiny toilets that are just inside the doors of all the rooms. He adjusts his hair

and looks like he wants to say something to his reflection. But he doesn't. He runs the ray of his flashlight over the snoring lumps and moves on to the next mirror. Poor Manny. He never wanted to work the night shift.

Manny and that nurse escort each other through the ward, going quickly from one quiet room to the next. When Manny nods, the nurse marks the paper on her clipboard. At the last room, Frank's room, Manny hesitates and I can tell he's thinking about going in there and taking Frank's flashlight away. Ever since they took away his baseball bat, Frank sleeps with his flashlight clutched up tight to his chest, his long arms wrapped around the container of dead batteries. Manny turns away from the room and says with a mean grin, "They oughta give that guy sparks." The nurse giggles and follows him back to the nurses' station with the clipboard. They stop and look down the hall. I know they can't see me sitting here in the darkness of the recreation room, but that nurse knows I'm here. She says something to Manny that I can't hear. He shakes his head and she follows him into the staff room where Manny will lay down on the couch and she will pour herself a cup of coffee. She will put in two packets of sugar, and a long dash of coffee whitener, then light a cigarette before she sits down in a straight-backed chair with her historical romance. I hear her Bic lighter scrape out a flame — the small sound echoes down the dim, quiet hall.

I guess I never imagined it would be like this. Makes me think of the early explorers, loading up their ships at the docks while all the flat

earth believers jeered and laughed. They were afraid, I'd bet, but they went just the same. And weren't the flat earthers surprised when those sailors came back and told them they never went over the edge, that the world was really round! I'd like to have seen the faces of those ninnies who thought that the world was flat. Couldn't see past their own noses, flapping about too scared to let anybody think any different from them. Well, old Christopher Columbus sure showed them.

When I first went over the falls I was pretty scared. I kept expecting to hit the bottom, but I never did. I just sort of hung there, sitting on top of the water, except that the water was going down, not across. Once I got over feeling funny about hanging on top of the water like that I took a good look around. Oh, things looked different, but I recognized everything. It was sort of like those artsy photographs you see sometimes in magazines, where the photographer turns his camera sideways and takes a picture of a building so that it looks like it's tilting on its side like the Leaning Tower of Pisa, only worse. You get used to it after a while; you start liking the trees poking out sideways like that. But the nicest thing is the quiet.

Mountains Once Again As Mountains

"Drew here has broken his finger. You have to kiss it better," the short blond one says when Sally gets to the table.

She pretends she hasn't heard him, a logical possibility with the surrounding din. "Are you ready to order?" she asks, trying to sound cheerful the way waitresses do on American sit-coms. It's 2:30 a.m. and the place is thronged with the usual bar-closing mob.

Spiro is supposed to keep order at the door, only letting people in as tables become available, but every night it's the same thing. A couple of people convince him to let them through to join friends who are sitting "just over there". And then, the flood comes. People can barely move. It's a mass of humanity, all elbows and hands that sneak out and pinch the waitresses' bums as they try to push through the crowd, yelling, "Coming through. Excuse me."

Inevitably, some drunk calls out, "Did'ya say squeeze me? Okay, honey," and lunges at the waitresses as they try to push past.

"Look out. Would you move, please!" By the time they manage to unload the pizzas their hands are smarting with the heat from the metal pans. No matter how often they ask Spiro to keep better control at the door, it's always the same.

Drew holds up his hand pathetically. The baby finger on his left hand is swollen to twice its size. "It really hurts," he says and screws up his face in mock agony.

"That's too bad," Sally says matter-of-factly. "What can I get you guys?"

"Ice?" Drew ventures.

"Listen fellas, I'd really like to stay and chat, but we're kind of busy. I'll come back in a couple minutes, okay?"

Table 4 and table 11 want their bills, table 9 wants more coffee, and table 15 has just been vacated. The busboy hadn't shown up for work, and with two new girls on, she and Carol are having a heck of a time keeping up. She writes out the bills for 4 and 11, hands the coffee pot to Mimi, one of the new girls who is wandering around empty-handed. As she's bending over wiping table 15 she gets the distinct feeling she's being watched. She turns, and there's broken-fingered Drew peering at her through the telescope of his rolled-up placemat.

After dumping the dirty dishes in the kitchen she returns to Drew's table, a no-nonsense expression on her face. They are busy debating the relative merits of the vegetarian versus the neptune delight pizzas. She looks them over. Drew, the one with the broken finger, is tall and thin, with an almost gaunt face, fringed with sandy hair. He's wearing jeans that are dangerously close to the bell-bottomed variety. The other two are younger, muscular, one very blond with high colour, the other dark-complexioned with short dark hair. They too are wearing

jeans, but have tight white t-shirts on, which show off their muscles. She's never seen any of them here before.

"Don't you want to know how Drew broke his finger?" the dark one asks.

"Sure," Sally says.

"Laurie got him with a spinning back kick."

The blond one grins. "It was an accident."

"Sure it was," Drew says with a grin. "You see too many kung fu movies."

Sally's sixteen years old and she's never seen a kung fu movie, although she knows who Bruce Lee is. She shifts from one foot to the other, her order pad poised. She's tired. It's Friday, and it's been a stream of real drunks all evening. She wonders if there's a full moon tonight. You can usually tell by how crazy people are when they come in to the restaurant. How many people have jumped off the University Bridge tonight? Every full moon people jump off the bridge. They say most of them never get reported. If you go down to the dam, about half a mile below the bridge, sometimes you'd swear that there were bodies just under the surface of the water, an arm or a foot poking up from the froth every once in a while.

"She's not even listening. Hey, what's your name? We don't want to have to call you Hey You."

"Sally."

"Banna fanna fo fally, Sally." Laurie, the blond one sings.

Come on, you guys, let's order." Drew says, all business suddenly. "What's it going to be, the aphrodisiac or revenge of the killer vegetables?"

At three o'clock Spiro goes around to all the tables and gently apologizes for having to close the restaurant. By three-thirty the place is empty. Sally is clearing tables and she finds that table 7 has left a measly tip, and someone, Drew she suspects, has doodled all over the grease-spotted placemats. There are strange black and white symbols, and quickly sketched figures doing impossible kicks and contortions. She folds up the placemats and pockets them.

When she finishes clearing tables, she puts two quarters in the juke box and punches in L7, *You Are The Sunshine of My Life*, by Stevie Wonder. She reaches around the back of the machine and turns the volume up, singing with Stevie as she roars through the empty restaurant with the vacuum cleaner. She flicks the switch on the vacuum cleaner and strikes a pose with the nozzle, beginning right on cue with Stevie, "You are the sunshine of my life, that's why I'll always stay around mmm mmm yeah yeah." As she reaches through the legs of the tables to suck up the fallen crusts of pizza she belts out, "I feel like this is the beginning, though I've loved you for a million years..." She shoves the chairs into the tables and croons, "You must have felt that I was lonely, because you came to my rescue ooh ooh ooooh ooh."

She hasn't finished vacuuming when Stevie stops, and George The Cook comes out from the back and puts another quarter in the jukebox. He winks at her and disappears back into the kitchen as Stevie

begins, "You are the sunshine of my life, that's why I'll always be around..."

Sundays are family days and unpredictable. Sally comes in at quarter to four in the afternoon instead of eight in the evening the way she does from Monday to Saturday and starts setting up with Carol. By 6:30 there are only two tables.

"Got a hot date tonight, Sally?" Carol says, practically sitting in the green peppers as she leans against the counter squinting her eyes against the smoke of her *Matinée Extra Light*.

"Pretty dead, eh? Why don't you go on home? I'll call you if it gets busy."

"You sure?"

"Hell, yeah."

Half an hour after Carol leaves, the families start pouring in, babes in arms, little girls sulking in their frilly dresses, mothers dollied up for their one night a week out. They're all Greek.

On Saturday afternoons, it's the Greek men, ordering coffee after coffee, Nino descending from his garish office upstairs to spike their coffees with a little hard stuff. Most of them own other "genuine Italian pizza" places in town, and the waitresses like to call them the Greek Mafia. They hold conferences, and sit and look the girls up and down when they come around with the coffee pot, saying things in their foreign language and laughing like pigs. Sally hates Saturday afternoons. She's not wild about Sundays either, but what the hell, it's a

job. She's not intending to be a waitress in a pizza joint for the rest of her life.

Sally figures she's pretty much got everything under control finally. She's coming out of the kitchen with hot plates of rigatoni and spaghetti and lasagna lined up one arm and a piece of baklava, a Brutus sandwich and a Caesar salad fanned in the fingers of the other hand, when she sees the tall thin man sitting right in front of the waitress station at table 1. She almost drops her plates, but doesn't, hangs on to them, carries on and delivers them safely to their destinations. Then she goes around the restaurant checking on tables—the way good waitresses are supposed to—to see if everything is fine everywhere, hoping there will be a major complaint at some table that will take all of her attention. Unfortunately, everyone is happy. Finally she picks her way back to the front of the restaurant where Drew is sitting. She goes to the waitress station at the entrance to the kitchen and plucks a menu from the pile. She goes to his table armed with it and lays it down in front of him. She doesn't look him in the eye. She asks him coolly, politely, "Can I get you something to drink?"

He glances over the menu and then looks up at her. "Do you think I could just have tea?" he asks pleasantly.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Tea. All I'd like is tea."

She looks around the restaurant, wondering if she can tell him that this is the supper hour and no he cannot just have tea. But she can't really refuse him. It isn't that busy. "Sure," she says and picks

up the menu, takes it to the waitress station and drops it back on the pile. Then she goes into the kitchen, gets a cup and saucer with a spoon, takes a little metal creamer out of the fridge and puts it on another saucer which she places on top of the cup. She pours boiling water into a metal teapot and puts it on a third saucer. She takes the cup and saucer and creamer in one hand, and picks up the other saucer with the teapot garnished by a teabag. She's halfway across the space that divides table one from the waitress station, and can feel Drew's eyes burning into her before she realizes the racket she's making. She sounds like a one-woman band, heavy on the percussion. Her hands are shaking so badly she thinks she's going to lose the teapot or the cup or the spoon or the whole shebang. As she puts them down on his table she sees that Drew is trying, unsuccessfully, to hold back a grin.

"I don't make you nervous, do I?" he asks, still working on suppressing his grin.

That's it. Sally isn't going to take this. She doesn't know who this Drew guy takes himself for, but she doesn't need this kind of aggravation.

"Listen," she says, "Did you come here for tea or to just make my day? 'Cause I've got a lot of customers today, and I don't need this sort of thing, okay? So I'd really appreciate it if you'd just, like, leave me alone, okay?"

Drew puts his hands up in front of his face. "Whoa. Hey, don't get mad. I actually came in to apologize for our behavior last night, not to make your life miserable. I'm sorry, okay?"

"Yeah, okay, fine. Did you want anything else?"

"No, this is fine. Great tea. Thanks."

Sally wheels around, knowing that one of those sophisticated waitresses in an American sit-com wouldn't do this. But she doesn't care. She stomps through the kitchen and goes into the big cooler in the back, on the pretense of covering up the salad properly with the damp teatowels and getting more butter. She hears George The Cook shouting, "Orders up, orders up," but she doesn't move. He calls again, "Sally, orders up."

She comes out of the cooler and is glad the only way to shut its door is by slamming it really hard. She whisks the orders off the counter and loads up, as if girding herself for battle.

When she enters the dining room, Drew has left. She wonders if he's in the washroom, or at the cigarette machine, if he's going to ambush her when she least expects it. But after dropping off the plates and taking the coffee pot around to all the tables, she decides he really is gone. She casually stops by table 1 and sees a two dollar bill tucked under the teacup saucer. Two dollars for a fifty-cent cup of tea that he's barely even touched. She feels an involuntary twinge of guilt, scoops up the dishes and deposits them in the kitchen. She hadn't even asked him how his finger was.

For the next week she's on the *qui vive*, but Drew doesn't come in. She doesn't want to ask Carol about him. She decides that he must be from out of town. But then, one night when she and Carol are across the street at Yip's on their break, she sees him. Spiro lets them go over to

the bar together for their break provided that they don't drink alcohol. Sally doesn't mind. She's been sneaking into the bars since she was fourteen, but it isn't the drinking that attracts her, it's the music, the people, and the excitement of being there illegally. And going to Yip's for a twenty-minute break beats being stuck in Nino's Pizza for eight straight hours. The doormen always let them in right away, even if there's a long line-up; they know Sally and Carol don't have much time, and they also know that they'll get in past the line-up at Nino's later and have their cups filled with endless free coffee. Yip's is a lively place, one of the few bars in town with good, live bands. Drew is with the two younger guys that Sally had seen him with the first night at Nino's. She spots him just as she and Carol are making their way to the exit and wonders if she should go and say hello, but doesn't have the courage. She thinks he probably wouldn't be very happy to see her anyway.

The next night, he comes in to Nino's, early in the evening, alone. Her heart turns into a cliché, thumping wildly. He sits in her section. She leaves him for a few minutes and then goes out.

"Hi," she says. "What can I get you? Tea?"

"No, I can't stay," he says. "I just wanted to come in and see how you were doing."

"What?" she blurts. She looks around. Carol is at the back of her section, one of the new girls is eating a Brutus sandwich at the waitresses' table and Spiro is leaning on the cash register smiling and talking to one of the regulars.

"Yeah. Wondered if you were still pissed off at me."

"Listen, I'm not pissed off at you."

"Then will you go out for tea with me?"

"What?" She wishes she could think of something more intelligent to say, but all she can manage is a choked, "I'm working."

He smiles and she thinks, so that's what an indulgent smile looks like. She's read about them in books. "I mean tomorrow," he says.

"Three o'clock."

She hears a voice, which she knows cannot be her own, say, "Um, uh, yeah, I guess so. Where?"

"At Yip's," he says.

"Yip's across the street?" she snorts. "They're not open during the day."

"Sure they are. Trust me."

"Well...okay."

"Three o'clock then." He stands and she realizes how tall he is. She's five feet five inches and he towers above her.

"How tall are you anyway?"

"Six three," he says. "Three o'clock."

"Six three, three o'clock," she repeats.

She watches him leave and then spends the rest of the evening trying not to think about him.

She's standing in the hot sun outside the door of Yip's, afraid to pull the handle, convinced she's about to be had. But when she pulls it, the door swings open easily and she is hit by a shock of freezing air. She

enters the vestibule and pushes open the second set of doors. It seems pitch black, but after a few minutes her eyes adjust to the darkness and she sees Drew, his back to her, sitting in a pale pool of light in a corner. She comes up quietly behind him, slips between him and the next table and squeaks onto the cold naugahyde wall bench behind the table.

Immediately, an ancient Chinese woman Sally has never seen before pads up silently to their table and places a little bowl and a miniature ceramic pot of green tea in front of Sally. She doesn't look at Sally, but she gives Drew a toothless grin. He smiles back, as if they are old friends who don't need words to communicate.

"So, you came after all," Drew says to Sally, bending to put his book in his packsack. He straightens and looks in her eyes. "I wondered if you would."

Sally looks down at her bowl. "Well, I think this is pretty weird, you know. I never knew this place was open during the day. Funny, how you can walk past a place over and over and never see it, hunh?" She pulls her cigarettes out of her purse and lights one. "Do you come here all the time? How'd you know it was open anyway?" The words are spilling out in a jumble and Sally can't slow them down.

"I used to work here," Drew says.

"You? I mean, I thought only Chinese people worked here. What did you do?"

"I was a bouncer."

"Is that why they let you come in here for tea?"

"No," Drew says with a laugh. "Anyone can come in. They have a businessman's lunch. A smorgasbord."

Of course. She knows that. Well, her brain knows it, but her mouth seems to have a life of its own. Drew is listening, watching her quietly, almost as if he is reading smoke signals. She listens to herself nattering on, filling up the air and begins to feel like the real Sally is floating up around the ceiling, smirking at her, as she makes an ass of herself. Finally Sally on the ceiling makes contact with Sally on the sweaty naugahyde, and she shuts up. She waits for Drew to take up the conversational slack, but he doesn't. He sits silently, watching her. She gets the feeling that he is waiting to see what she is going to do, that he is gauging her by some standard she doesn't understand. She pours some tea into her bowl, forces herself to sit quietly. She lights another cigarette and puffs on it with forced casualness. At first the silence feels strange, but as the minutes pass it starts to feel right. Sally finds herself listening to the cooks talking in the kitchen. She can't understand their language and it's like listening to a kind of music, a sing-song chant punctuated with the percussive of pots and pans. The old Chinese woman appears every once in a while and silently refills the small teapot. The tea is good.

She has no idea how much time has passed when Drew says, "Well, I've got to get going. I've got a class to teach."

"I didn't know you were a teacher. What do you teach?"

"Karate." He stands.

"Where?" It doesn't matter where, but Sally can't think of any other way to keep him there except by asking questions, any questions.

"Kim San Dojo. Thank you for having tea with me." He looks like he might bow or something, but he just inclines his head and touches her on the wrist before he turns away. He doesn't say anything about getting together again.

Sally sits alone in the small pool of light, fighting the urge to cry. At school she's always been on the honour roll, but for the first time she thinks she understands how other kids feel when they fail an exam.

Sally was going to quit on her seventeenth birthday, but has decided to keep working part-time at Nino's while she does her final year of high school. But it isn't the same. Spiro is in the hospital, recovering from a heart attack, and Nino has appointed a new manager, Kostas, who doesn't know anything about running a restaurant. Spiro always trusted them; he often said they didn't need him at all, they could run the restaurant on their own. The first week, Kostas posted a sheet of rules in the kitchen, which everyone ignores. But Kostas will not be taken lightly. He says the girls can no longer leave the building for their breaks. They must sit at the staff table and they cannot take their breaks together. When they protest his beady eyes almost pop out of his head, and he says, "You want work here or no?"

When Sally brings a book to work, Kostas makes a scene. "No reading in the restaurant," he yells. "What will customers think?" "Maybe they'll think we're not all illiterate like you," Sally thinks, but

she holds her tongue. The only comfort is that Drew sometimes comes in and spends Sally's break with her. But most of the time she sits and smokes, waiting for her break to be over.

Kostas struts around the restaurant like he's wearing an oversize chicken suit. His pants are always sliding down beneath his paunch and he has a bizarre way of putting his arms akimbo while he grips the front and back of his pants simultaneously and hitches them up. He struts a couple of feet, hitches the pants, takes another few steps and then does it again. Sometimes Sally marches behind him and mimics him. But Kostas isn't a funny man.

The regulars notice the change too. Kostas believes in a high turnover rate. He wants the customers to eat and get out, make room for more. If he thinks people are taking too long, he simply goes over to their table and begins taking the dishes away, even if they still have half a pizza left. The waitresses can do nothing to stop him and the angry customers leave tips that are an insult.

Sally is on her break, and she and Drew are sitting talking quietly when a drunk sitting all by himself a few tables away starts yelling slurred nonsense. When she turns around, the drunk staggers from his chair and sways up to their table. He snarls at Drew to get up and fight like a man. Drew stands up, and the man starts swinging at him. He easily dodges the punches, and talking quietly, he quickly steps behind the man and spins him around. He walks him to the door, still talking in that same low, soothing voice. When Drew comes back Sally

says maybe she should go and call the police, but Drew says it's unnecessary. He's put the man in a taxi and sent him home.

"Do you know that guy?" Sally asks.

"Never seen him before."

"Neat work," Sally says, thinking of the fights the boys in her high school get into at every party she's ever been to. She doesn't see Kostas coming up behind her and jumps when he practically shrieks in her ear, "No sitting with customers, Sally." He points at Drew. "You. This is staff table."

Drew gets up and moves to the next table. Kostas glares at Sally, and says, "Why you sit here?"

"I'm on my break. I've got another fifteen minutes."

He stalks off and Sally moves to the other side of the table, closer to Drew than she had been when they were both sitting at the same table.

Kostas is back in a flash. "Sally! No talking to customers."

"Listen, Kostas, why don't you give it a rest? I'm on my break, okay?"

"You want work here, you follow rules!"

"Well, maybe I don't want to work here. I quit. Come on, Drew. Let's go."

As she's swooping her cape on over her ridiculous waitress uniform, Kostas is yelling, "You fired."

She turns dramatically and says, "You lose, Kostas. I quit."

Sally is standing in the doorway of the "Alice's Restaurant", the industrial-style kitchen which is the only place women are allowed in the all-male Presbyterian residence where Drew lives. Drew has just told her that she has a very Zen mind. She doesn't know what that means, and doesn't want to ask, so she is silently watching Drew make tea and wondering where women go to the bathroom here. When he has made the tea and arranged it on a tray, she squeezes her knees together and puts an agonized expression on her face. On tiptoe he leads her down the hall and stands guard at the door of the men's washroom. Sitting on the toilet, she looks around and thinks what a strange evening it has been. They have walked for hours in the snow and she thinks they must make a striking pair. His impressive height aside, Drew has taken to wearing a black toque to cover his recently shaved head and she thinks she cuts quite a figure herself in the long black cape she has only lately found the courage to wear. Sally giggles thinking about her exit from Nino's Pizza. The expression on Kostas' face! She feels bad, though, about leaving Carol to deal with the two a.m. rush. It hits her that no one knows where she is. Her parents think she's at work and won't be expecting her for hours. She wonders suddenly if Drew can hear her peeing.

Drew spirits her into his room and closes and locks the door. She looks at him questioningly. "I could get kicked out of here if anyone found out that you were here," he says by way of explanation, "and I can't afford anything else." He pours them each a cup of tea and then

goes to the stack of records beside the stereo system and pulls one out. "I want you to hear this," he says. "I think you'll like it."

Sally looks around the room. It is simple and uncluttered, which doesn't really surprise her. There is a double bed, the stereo system and a couple of boxes of records, a tightly-packed bookshelf, the divan she is sitting on and a steamer trunk with a hurricane lamp on it. Drew lights the lamp and shuts off the overhead light. Sally takes her cup of tea and leans back against the wall, wondering what is going to happen next. Drew crosses to the bed and stretches out on it. "Listen," he says.

A man's voice starts talking about the exciting new beat writers and says "Tonight we're going to hear one of the best..."

Sally is stretched out on the divan, watching the shadows leap in time to the flame. The recording is finished and the room is silent. Drew's warm hand is caressing her own, his fingers entwining and stroking hers. When he says in a low, husky voice, "Why don't you come over here?" she is both excited and disappointed. She wants to go to him, but she cannot. She is seventeen, afraid, and in love.

"I can't move," she whispers.

His hand continues to stroke hers and they remain, hands reaching across the space in the flickering light for a long time.

Sally is sitting behind the steering wheel in her father's Chrysler, frantic. She has to get the car home before anyone starts to wonder where she is. But she doesn't want to have to go home. The snow is swirling on a shifting wind, stinging her eyes as she leans out the window and looks up at Drew. She is convinced that he will never want

to see her again. But Drew hands her a piece of paper with a phone number on it. "Call me if you need to talk to someone," he says and kisses her lightly, his lips barely grazing hers. She drives home, happy and confused.

Sally is sitting in the Sheraton Hotel coffee shop which looks out over the river, waiting for Drew. He is late and she is beginning to think that he will not show up. People she knows have been stopping at the table to say hello, but she does not invite them to sit down. Finally, he arrives and she watches him walk toward her with his long, easy strides. She loves the way his body moves. As usual, he is finding time for her between classes he is taking at the university and classes he is giving at the karate school. The waitress brings him a tea without asking, and Sally feels suddenly, unreasonably, jealous.

"Someone stole my negatives," she says. She knows who did it, and knows she will never see the film again. Darin, the girl who'd stolen them from the school darkroom, had a darkroom of her own at home and Sally knew she'd make prints there.

"Why would anyone want to steal your negatives?"

"I wish I knew." Of all the films that she'd developed at school, only the roll of Drew had been taken. She had been ecstatic when she had seen what she had managed to capture on the film. Drew had been relaxed in front of the camera, and the shots were natural and powerful. Darin had looked at the negatives, and said, "Hmm, not bad."

"So what about your assignment?" Luckily, she had been able to make some prints before the negatives were taken, but now they are gone. It wasn't the graphic arts assignment that was important, she'd known that even before she asked Drew to pose for her. She wanted him on film, plain and simple.

"Oh, I got one print for the assignment and the ones I promised you. But that's it. They're gone. It really pisses me off though, you know?"

Drew reaches into his packsack and takes out a slender book. He reads aloud, "Ryokan, a Zen master, lived the simplest kind of life in a little hut at the foot of a mountain. One evening a thief visited the hut only to discover there was nothing in it to steal. Ryokan returned and caught him. 'You must have come a long way to visit me,' he told the prowler, 'and you should not return empty-handed. Please take my clothes as a gift.' The thief was bewildered. He took the clothes and slunk away. Ryokan sat naked, watching the moon. 'Poor fellow,' he mused, 'I wish I could have given him this beautiful moon.'"

She looks out the window and then back at him, wondering if she's supposed to understand that she's the one with the moon. What is he offering her? He's watching her, focussing all his attention on her in that way that makes her feel so special, and she can't help but smile.

She slides out of the booth and hands him the envelope with the prints she has made for him. "I've got to go," she says, feeling awkward all of a sudden, "but here are the photos I promised you. And some other stuff." She puts her coat on. She doesn't want him to open the

envelope while she is there, doesn't want to be there when he reads the poems that she has written for him.

Sally hasn't seen Drew since the afternoon at the Sheraton, and she's been too embarrassed to call. But her mother, school, everything is driving her crazy. Her mother wants to kick her out of the house, accusing her of being a dope addict, a nymphomaniac and a vegetarian. Sure, Sally smokes dope, but she's no addict. Every time her mother sees someone with long hair on the street she caustically says to Sally, "Friend of yours, I imagine?" as if drugs turned you into a werewolf and made your hair grow long or something. Once, when her parents were away at the lake for the weekend, Sally burnt the electric kettle which was sitting on one of the back burners of the stove. She'd turned on the wrong burner and when she realized where all the smoke was coming from the kettle was a fried mess. As soon as her mother walked into the house, she'd started walking around sniffing and saying, "What's that funny smell?" Even after Sally had shown her the damage to the kettle, her mother was suspicious. She was pretty sure her mother had gone through all her drawers and her closet as soon as she left for school the next day. She knows her mother is over-reacting. After all, there were no drugs in the olden days, and her mother just doesn't know what to think.

Sally really resents, however, her mother's insinuations that she is sleeping around. She's no slut. In fact, she's still a virgin, although she'd rather not publicize the fact. She doesn't know any other girls who

still are. She keeps quiet when all the other girls are describing their first times. She's waiting. She's had her fair share of offers, but she doesn't want to give her virginity to just anyone.

And then there's the whole issue of vegetarianism. When Sally went to the family doctor for her last check-up, he'd flipped out. She was suffering from anemia, and he began to grill her to find out why. When she innocently told him that she'd stopped eating meat, he immediately called her mother. That night the war started. And the upshot of it was that as long as Sally was living under her parents' roof, she would live by their rules and eat everything that was put in front of her. What do they think she is, anyway, a ten year old child?

School is no better. She hates it with a passion. She has already dropped as many courses as she possibly can, and is skipping classes in all the rest. Her English teacher hates her (and she hates him), her art teacher is trying to have her kicked out of school for smoking, and her algebra teacher is threatening to fail her if she doesn't start coming to classes. The guidance counsellor won't let her drop down to easier levels because, apparently, her I.Q. is too high. Yeah, right. She wants out, now. Nobody understands her. Nobody cares.

"Sally! Where're you been?" He sounds glad to hear from her and Sally feels better already.

"Hey, I wanted to tell you what a nice job you did on the photos," he says.

"Well, I had a pretty good subject."

His voice drops. "I don't know how to thank you for the poems. I'm really...touched. You know, you see things in me that no one else has ever seen before."

Sally is glad no one can see her. Her face is bright red and her eyes are brimming with tears.

"I showed them to a friend of mine—he's an English professor. He was pretty impressed too."

Sally doesn't trust her voice. Showed them to an English professor? They were private, they were a gift! Finally she finds enough voice to say thanks.

Drew catches her odd tone. "Are you okay?" he asks.

The concern in his voice lets loose all the chaos she has been feeling and she pours out her troubles.

Sally and Melissa are having their housewarming party. The gang of people crowded into the living room is getting pretty silly. Somebody asks Sally and Melissa to sing *I Don't Know How To Love Him*, and they do. They're in the middle of the floor belting out, "He's a man, he's just a man, and I've had so many men—" when the door opens and Drew walks in. Sally had bumped into him in the afternoon and invited him but hadn't believed he'd actually come. She stops dead while Melissa sings on "—before, in very many ways. He's just one more." Then she stops too. There is applause from the crowd and then an awkward silence. Drew's presence seems to quell the party noise.

He stands out from the rest of the people there as if he's from another age.

Sally weaves through the crowd to him and says, "What a surprise. I guess you don't know most of these people. Want me to introduce you around?"

"No. I really came to say good-bye to you."

"Good-bye?"

"I got a job in Prince Albert. I'm moving up there this weekend."

Sally feels like someone has just kicked her in the stomach. She takes Drew by the hand and leads him down the hall to the spare room, which is set off from the rest of the apartment. It isn't even in the apartment actually. Their apartment is the main floor of a three story house, but the second bedroom is right off the main door. Melissa had taken it as her bedroom at first, but it is small, only large enough for a single bed and a bureau, and the traffic in the common entrance kept her awake. Melissa was afraid at night too because it is so cut off. So it has become a spare room, a place to go when one of them wants privacy.

"Why didn't you tell me you were going away?" Sally asks in a small voice.

Drew sits on the bed and pulls her down to sit beside him. "I am telling you. I just found out."

She stands up, and says, "Wait. I'll be right back."

When she comes back into the room, he is under the covers, his coat over the end of the bed, his boots on the floor. She hands him a small hardcovered book. "I wanted to give this to you before, but I didn't

have the jam. But I don't want you to go away without—" Her voice cracks and she can't go on.

Drew takes the book, studies the cover and opens it. She has collected almost fifty poems, written them out with a fountain pen on watercolour paper and bound them together into a book. She has dedicated it to him, the only way she thinks she will ever be able to tell him what he really means to her. When he sees the dedication, he says gently, "Why don't you come under the covers with me? It's freezing in here."

She gives him a lopsided grin, holding back the tears. Then quickly, before she loses her courage, she sheds her clothes and joins him under the covers. His wool sweater is prickly, but his body gives off welcome heat. She lies quietly against him as he reads. He turns the pages slowly, and she waits.

When he has turned the last page, he closes the book softly and turns to look at her. There is wonder in his eyes. "These are really good, Sally. I think you're going to be a famous writer one day. And I'm going to be really proud of you."

Sally is stunned. No, no. She watches the moonlight arcing through the window and tries to put the words together. "Do you remember, that night you took me to your place?" she says finally. "I was afraid, and I wanted to be sure that you weren't just...well, I was a virgin. And I still am. But I'm sure now."

Drew is silent for a long time. Finally he says, "A long time ago I made it a policy not to sleep with virgins, Sally." She can see that he is

having difficulty with this. She waits. "No, I don't think it would be a good idea."

When Drew has gone, Sally lies in the moonlight, naked and virginal, listening to the last of the party guests troop through the front hall and out into the night. She is listening to the night sounds, waiting to hear a soft tread on the front steps, hoping he will come back.

Sally is staring at the piece of paper in front of her. She is supposed to be writing a story for her prose workshop the next day, but she doesn't know where to begin. "Write about what you know," her writing instructor commands. She feels out of place in the workshop. The other students talk about the novels they have in drawers, the poems they have published. Sally has no novels in drawers, no published poems. She has not written for years. She sifts through those years, the careers started and abandoned, the people known and left behind. And finally, she writes: "Drew here has broken his finger."