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from Gould: A Novel in Two Novels

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STEPHEN DIXON

**EXCERPTS FROM:
GOULD: A NOVEL IN TWO NOVELS**

Books Evangeline Read

Books he read and then gave her that she got more out of than him. When friends seemed to intimate to him she was pretty or beautiful but not too smart he said “She’s a much better reader than I. You should see her. Books I had trouble with, sometimes had to work hard to finish, she winged through and had insights into I never approached. Her intelligence is instinctive, natural; she’s shortchanged herself in not going past high school, but you can’t say she doesn’t speak well.” She said she couldn’t stand poetry, it wasn’t that she didn’t get it, though some of it no one could get; it was that most of it was useless and precious and made for fairies or textbooks and she was ashamed whenever he took a book of poems along with him when they went out, except the ones in both English and German or French or Spanish, because then people would think he was just trying to learn the language. “As for the others — keep them in your pocket, read them in the car in secret or when you’re alone on the bus or just at home, but don’t take them out in restaurants while we’re waiting for a table or on the movie line. If you have to read anything at those places, why not history or good fiction, though to really please me I wish you’d take to books on investing money or how to repair my house.”

Getting Evangeline Dental Things

Brons wanted a dry cereal the New York halfway house didn't provide and Evangeline said they were out of toothpaste and dental floss and while she was at it they could also all use new toothbrushes and he said he'd go out to buy them and she said "I didn't mean you had to do it tonight," and he said "Ah, I want to take a walk, this house is sometimes like a prison." At the market he got the cereal and a box of animal crackers for Brons, went to the drug section and saw that except for the floss, the dental stuff was expensive. He held three toothbrushes, put back the one he'd chosen for himself, dropped the floss into the basket with the cereal and crackers and then thought "Screw it, do it, you just don't have the cash and Evangeline will like you got everything she needed," and after quickly looking up and down the aisle and only seeing an old lady facing the other way, slipped the brushes and toothpaste into his side coat pocket. Oy, God, what'd he do? why'd he do it? and looked up and saw the woman staring at him, hand to her mouth as if horrified at what she'd just seen, or maybe not and she was only staring that way because of how he looked: messed-up hair, rather shabby clothes, face which for a few moments must have gone pale and looked sick and frenetic — but she seemed to have seen him, he was almost sure of it — now she was turned away facing shelves with cleaning and diaper things for babies and feminine hygiene — the look one has when catching someone in the act like that but one you'd never do yourself, but if she did see him he didn't think she'd tell anyone in the store while he was still there, she was old, frail-looking, very thin and short, she'd be afraid, for instance, she'd by chance bump into him on the street

one day and he'd recognize her and knock her down, something he'd never do but maybe his appearance to her said he might. Should he put the brushes and toothpaste back? — "Oh look at me," he could say to himself aloud, hoping she'd turn around so he could say it half to her too, "I'm so absentminded, I don't know where my head is today, excuse me," putting the brushes and toothpaste back in the racks, "I don't know if you saw them with me before, but if you did I hope you didn't get the wrong idea, it was just a stupid mistake," or say all this but first look befuddled and slap his pocket and say "Holy shit — excuse me," and take the things out and put them in the basket and then walk around casually for a while, get one more thing — cheap bag of chips — and pay for all of it. No — something about what she was doing now, keenly interested in a row of different shampoos on the top shelf — she didn't see him and he had an idea and said "May I help you, ma'am?" and she turned to him and looked a bit startled but didn't back away, which he should take as a good sign — it was just his appearance; he also needed a shave — and he smiled and said "Sorry, didn't mean to startle you, but I was just thinking, you need any help there . . . reaching?" and she said "No thanks, I was only comparison shopping," and he said "Prices better here? Where else do you shop? I thought this was the only large market in ten blocks," and she said "Associated on Ninth Avenue, two blocks west, but they're much more expensive on almost everything and the quality isn't as good," and he said "Oh yeah? That's good to know; I'll tell my wife," and from the way she smiled and said good-bye — neither seemed fake — he was almost sure she hadn't seen him but he'll still, just in case she did and only tells them after he leaves, not go by the front of the store for a week or in it for two or three, or he might never have to go in again, since by

then he and Evangeline will have their own place uptown. He got a bag of chips, two oranges on sale and went to the shortest checkout line, one with only one person on it. Everything seemed all right, business as usual, till he noticed the checkout man eyeing him sort of suspiciously while bagging the groceries of the customer who'd just paid, and turned around and saw a man behind him without a coat and holding two loaves of bread — what was the man doing coatless when it was so cold out? . . . snow was predicted tonight, temperatures dipping into the teens and there were already freezing winds. Maybe he worked in the cafe a few doors down, or the one on the next block and he didn't bother with a coat because he was so close and was buying the loaves because they'd run out of the bread they had delivered early each day — Gould had seen the tall bags of them lying up against the cafes' doors at seven or so when he went out for the paper or a run . . . or else they got him, and his stomach went cold. Well, shit, Jesus, too late if they did have him, for what could he do now, take the stuff out of his pocket and drop it into the basket? But wasn't he only imagining the worst again, which he often did, for he already explained the suspicious looks: his clothes, appearance, and he wasn't a regular here — had only been in the store three times in two weeks and always for just a couple of small items, and in this city, or just this kind of poorer neighborhood, if they don't know you they don't trust you, or something like that, but nobody's going to jump him just because he might fit the profile of what they think's a potential thief. He was fine, so long as nothing dropped out of his pocket or the pocket flap didn't open and someone could see right inside, and once out of here and around the corner he'll stick the stuff into his supermarket bag and go home, maybe even run with the bag he'd be so relieved, and in

the room have a glass of wine or shot of scotch, even if Evangeline complained about him drinking late at night — said it did something to his stomach, made him toss around in bed, keeping her up. “Next,” the checkout man said, and he put the things in the basket onto that rubber runway, man rang everything up, wasn’t looking suspiciously at him anymore, guy behind him was looking at the clock above the front window, the old woman was now on the next checkout line, three customers away from being taken — his would have been the best line to get on: just he and the guy with his two identical loaves, and he was almost done, and one of the people on her line had a shopping cart of maybe fifteen items. She didn’t look at him when he looked her way, maybe that was why she didn’t get on his line: didn’t want to talk to him anymore, felt their conversation — attention he gave her in the health-care aisle — was too much or had gone far enough or else she didn’t want to be on his line because of the trouble she expected on it . . . but then she wouldn’t have gone on any line, right? She would have stayed away from the checkout area, wouldn’t have wanted to be seen and eventually blamed by him. The checkout man said what Gould owed, he paid, his stuff was bagged and handed to him, he said “Thanks,” man said nothing and looked hard at the guy behind Gould in a way that suggested “What do we do next?” and Gould thought “Oh shit, get out of here,” and started for the door and just as he had his hand on it to push it open, someone grabbed him from behind — the coatless man — the checkout guy ran around the counter and shoved his hands down both Gould’s coat pockets and Gould said “Hey, what the hell you doing? — get off me, get off,” and tried slapping the man’s hand away from the pocket with the things in it but his arms were held tight, tried wriggling out of the grip and got one arm loose,

checkout man yelled “Cliff . . . Hugo,” and two young men with store aprons on ran to help the coatless man hold him, and he started dragging them all through the front door, wanted to get outside, once on the street they couldn’t touch him, or was it the other way around, they couldn’t grab you inside? — but he wrenched and tugged and grunted and lunged them along with him till he was past the door, on the street, still holding the bag, he suddenly realized, and dropped it and got his other arm free and slashed his hands in the air, whirling round and round as he did till there was nobody within fifteen feet of him, then felt his pocket — wait, the guy already took the stuff, but one of the brushes was still in it — and the checkout man said “You bum, you thief, these what you looking for?” and held up a toothbrush and the toothpaste. “You’re lucky we don’t hold you for the cops. Don’t ever come back here, you creep, and take what you paid for,” pushing the bag of groceries toward Gould with his foot, “that’s the last you’ll ever get from us,” and Gould kicked the bag and said “Stick it up you know where,” and the coatless man said “Up our asses? Up yours, you dope. Feel good we didn’t bash the bejesus out of you, which we could have — we’d the legal right to — defending ourselves against a bona fide thief. You’re worse than a fucking street hooker,” and Gould said “That so? I am? Well you forgot this, mister,” and took out the other toothbrush and threw it on the ground to them and the checkout man said “Oh, bravado, or bravo — whatever they call those heroics — but just what we needed from the jerk. Forget him. We got work to do,” and picked up the brush: “Every little bit appreciated,” and laughed and they all went in, the two young men laying dirty looks on Gould before they went through the door. People on the street had stopped and were looking at him but keeping their distance and he said to

a group of them “It was for my kids . . . I didn’t hardly have the money for everything,” in an Irish brogue and what he thought were the words and the way the Irish would use them, though why he went into it he didn’t know. “The big store’s gotta make its inordinate profit, that it? So what’s a poor father to do? And three kids, not two, and I wanted them to have clean teeth after they finished their overpriced store cereal, they’d have to be sharing a single toothbrush between them anyway, but have you seen what even the cheapest toothbrush and toothpaste cost today? An arm and a leg it is, an arm and a leg.” By now everyone but what looked like a bum had walked away, some shaking their heads at him and giving him that expression and he yelled “Where you going? Why you running? It’s the godawful truth that I’ve been telling ya, but what am I wasting my breath on you for?” and started down the street to the house — maybe so they’d have more trouble pointing him out some day later: “No, couldn’t be the shoplifter; that one was dressed like a beggar and was loony as they come and had this thick Irish accent” — a few large flat snowflakes were now slowly falling and he thought “Perfect, just what the scene called for,” and slapped at the flakes and said “Fuck it, I don’t care if any of the store people are there, what’s mine’s mine and like they said I paid good money for,” and ran back for the bag. The bum was standing over it and he said “That’s mine, sorry,” and picked it up. It was wet and torn, an orange had rolled out of it to the curb and he stuck it into his side coat pocket, put the other orange into the other pocket, folded up the bag best he could with the rest of the things he bought, had to hold it from the bottom so it wouldn’t split apart. When he got back to the room Brons was asleep in his cot, Evangeline was sitting up in bed drinking tea and reading, he wasn’t going to say anything about what had hap-

pened but she said "My goodness, look at you, you're a mess," and he said "It's beginning to snow, flakes falling so lazily, but sort of a cross between snow and rain — more like floating slush, if that's possible — so I suppose my hair got a little wet," and she said "It's not that. The collar of your coat's torn, you have a scratch on your forehead that's still bleeding, you look roughed up — what did you do, get mugged, fall?" and he said "No," patting his forehead with a tissue, "but do I have those?" and looked at the tissue and said "Ah, it's more slush than blood. I didn't even know. Though I actually got close to being mugged, but didn't want to say anything," and told her what happened, didn't embellish or hold back, right down to the Irish brogue: "Don't ask me why; maybe to get them off my trail and so they wouldn't think the thief was Jewish," and she said "Oh stop. And the whole thing's horrible. Why'd you ever do it?" and he said "I could make up a lot of excuses but I just didn't think I could afford all the things you wanted or that I'd get caught, even if I knew how dumb it was," and she said "Was it ever. Suppose they had reported you or held you for the cops? You'd have gone to jail, it would have disrupted our lives so much that I'm sure I would have had to quit school for a few weeks, and we would have been thrown out of here, since the landlady has this rule about that kind of behavior — it's written right up there on the common dining room wall — and then where would we have lived till we get our place? I couldn't have slunked back to your parents; and also think what it would have done to them and to Brons," and put her finger over her lips. "If we needed toothpaste that bad," she whispered, "we could have borrowed someone's here, though we still have enough in the tube to roll it up and get a couple more brushings from it. And I only said we needed new toothbrushes, not that we were out of them," and he

said "This will sound stupid too, and I'm not saying it to elicit any sympathy, but I thought you'd like that I brought everything back that you asked for," and she said "I would have if you had paid for it. And a brogue. You're not an actor. You can't even tell a story in two different voices. Let me hear it," and he whispered in what he thought was close to the same brogue "For my poor kids I did it, my three little dear ones and their sweet mother, whose teeth are rotting to the quick because they've no toothpaste to use and I can't afford a proper dentist," and she said "It stinks. You were probably as bad at fooling them with it as you were at taking their goods. Please, I beg of you, for Brons and me and yourself too, and because shoplifting's wrong, all wrong, no matter how bad the situation gets — don't ever do it again," and he said "I hate this life — here, this freaking craphole and so little money. But you're right; I'm a flop at everything I do — I know you didn't say that — and I never want to be forgiven for it. And whatever you do don't tell Brons till he's all grown up, and then only if you have to, for some reason," and Brons said from the cot "I already know, Gould. That was real dumb what you did. It's the only good store around here. Now I won't be let in because of you," and he said "Yes you will. I'll just have to stay outside."

Evangeline Peaks

She had orgasms where she said she saw heaven. In one she said she met up with her dead brother on a cloud and there was a great light all around them and he put out his hand and she looked surprised at it at first but then shook it and he grinned as if he was in total bliss

and then the scene ended and Gould said "Was his arm straight out when you shook it?" and she said "Yes, the way people shake," and he said "What could it mean then, except for the immediate obvious? Anyway, I'd be suspicious of it," and she said "How, suspicious? And what do you mean 'the immediate obvious?'" and he said "I don't want to talk about your brother in regard to it. He's dead, and that, if what I'm saying about the dream's right — 'dream is right,' I mean —" and she said "It wasn't a dream. I wasn't asleep. I was in ecstasy here, mentally removed, yes, but not unconscious," and he said "Well, it was like a dream — you were put into this almost other-worldly or immaterial state — so I'm looking at it as one. And to me it was just typical dreamlike projection, innocent because you were in this state, of what any sibling, same sex or different, but especially the opposite sex, would dream of if it was a dream or have images of if you're in this ecstatic displaced condition," and she said "What, though, what? You started it, so say, and not just that I-don't-want-to-go-into-it gibberishness and then more unintelligibleness piled onto it," and he said "Okay. Did your brother — you know — do certain things physical to you when you were a girl, like get you to masturbate him or try to or fingerfuck you or hint at one of those or both with the hope you'd do it or allow him to or even just expose his erect dick to you or just expose himself, erect or not, but where you knew it was just for exposing?" and she said "I'm sure he didn't on most of those. The hints, naturally, I wouldn't remember, but I don't think any of what you said happened. Though he was two years older he was sickly almost from birth, so always, once I was seven or so, around six inches shorter than me and then, when I was twelve and he was fourteen, which is when he died, almost a foot shorter. And he was always very immature for his age, not only phys-

ically but emotionally — that's what my folks have said and sort of what I recall — my younger brother, I used to think of him as, starting when I was around eight — that he might have died long before he was old enough to get erections he was conscious of or know what to do with one to get relief, though I could be wrong. Maybe in the secret of his room, it was his only pleasure; I'd like to think he at least had that, but I doubt it because I don't even know if he was strong enough to do it. No, I guess anyone could, if the hands aren't paralyzed and the genitals are developed and the nervous system's working, but what I'm saying is I don't think the last two were for him. He barely had hair under his arms and no little sprouts on his chest and face. And once I saw him getting out of this special sitz bath installed for him in the bathroom and when he was . . . well, this might have been a few months before he died and there was only the littlest of mustaches there and his penis, if it hadn't been tremendously shrunk by the heat of the bath, was more like a boy's half his age," and he said "That bathroom scene —" and she said "Don't make anything more out of it. I walked in by mistake. He was as embarrassed as I was and quickly covered himself up with his hands. Do me a favor and don't refer to him in that way again or try to analyze my orgasm-making something like mystical experiences right after we've had sex. Your judgment's impaired because your mind's still fixed on the sex subject. Also because he was the dearest person there ever was to me, always so sweet and mild-mannered and shy and self-insulting and so on. But the most loving of boys — he used to clean up my room for me when I was at school and he was home getting special ed, take my dinner dishes to the sink, follow me around whenever he could — so the person I miss most and feel worst about and appreciate meeting up with any way I can. And if

you put too unseemly a meaning to my encounters with him it might do something to my head where I never see him again, not even in my dreams,” and he said “Okay, will do, but one more thing, if you don’t mind, and this may be way off . . . in fact, maybe I shouldn’t say it,” and she said “Better you don’t then, if it concerns him,” and he said “It’s mostly about you. Did you, maybe, ever try to fool around with him? . . . oh that was dumb, wasn’t it, as you already said how embarrassed you both were at that sitz bath scene. But you’ve also said you’ve been sexually aware since you were eight and active since you were thirteen, so I thought there might be a slight possibility — is this really too off the mark?” and she said “Yes, though it’s not one of your worst questions, given what I’ve said about myself and the reasonableness of looking at this sex thing from both sides. But I told you: after awhile he was like my younger brother, to be protected and not taken advantage of, besides that I’d never do anything that perverse, even then when my morality code wasn’t quite formed. All right? But enough,” and he nodded and after about a minute she said “So what do you think, you’re rested yet? Because I feel I could reach that plateau again, or come near. I’d like to at least try to and then who can say what I’ll see if I get there. Maybe my brother again who I can apologize to for our little chat before,” and he said “Honestly, I must have turned some irrecoverable corner in my sex life, if that makes any sense, but I’ve been feeling the last few weeks I need more time between them and now with this one that maybe what we did could be my limit for the day,” and she said “Don’t tell me; all any girl has to do is wait half an hour and then play with you,” and he said “I don’t know, but that’s how I feel now.” She screamed during some orgasms, even when Brons was home though asleep, and cried after about every fourth one of them

and then usually clung to him, sometimes all night, face burrowed into his neck or armpit till he had to force it out if he wanted to get some sleep. "I don't know what it is with sex and us," she once said, "but it's certainly a major plus in our arrangement and it could be the thing that keeps us together most along with your love for Brons. I don't like that but I'll take it for the time being. I got off with lots of other guys, of course, or did till you moved in and will no doubt do again once you're gone from here. But with you, I don't know what it is but like with no one else I actually see things like the birth of the universe or a disconnected star field forming into a constellation I can recognize like a dog or a crab and other phenomenal or historical occurrences. Whole Mayan or Aztec villages — I forget which culture was the one in Mexico and which not — with ceremonial dances and drum-beatings and men in spooky headdresses and cod-pieces and women with their big boobs showing and kids at their teats and huge beautiful buildings and entrance gates and those things they call ziggurats, I think, but no one on top of them getting their heads chopped off. Sea creatures, for instance, one time, a pair of them slithering out of the sea and in quick time developing teeny legs to walk on land with. And a couple of times — all right, once — I touched but just barely the hand of what seemed like a gentle God, though He had a twinkle in his eye, the old geezer, knew what we'd just done and what I was still in the midst of and that He might even be interested in having a turn with me Himself, so maybe he was only one of God's more trusted helpers — I was going to say 'advisors,' but God wouldn't have that — a couple of seats down from the ones who sit on either side of God's throne. It could be that our genitals are a perfect match, in spite of the differences in your length and my depth. And maybe also

something about our respective ages and health and the area we live in and this great California air and that my house sits next to an enormous church and the feelings we have for each other at the time, like the last one — I felt very good about you before and during it. And where we both are in our general all-around sexual development, or just I am, since you never seem to have these incredible comes and highs after, unless you mute them and control the body quakes. It's possible I'm at my absolute peak in all this, that the last one or one of the near future ones will be the highest I'll ever reach and then they'll slowly start peaking lower, though I'd hate to believe it. But I'm even worse at figuring these things out than you are, my dear dummy, so why should we try?"

Evangeline & His Friend

Years later he was standing at a bar with a friend who said "You know, you might not want to hear this. But since you brought her name up before . . . or maybe you do, now, or wouldn't mind, when it's so long after the fact, but I never knew what you saw in that California broad — Angel, or Evangel, or Angelina. She wasn't —" and he said "Evangeline. She never liked it shortened or would tolerate any nickname," and his friend said "Evangeline, then. But just that, that she wouldn't, with such a mouthful of an uncommon name. But she wasn't smart or sharp or good-looking. Her body was like a board. She didn't like one person you knew, me most especially, I think because I was your closest friend. She in fact looked on everyone we knew as if she wanted to spit great wads on top of their heads. She hated the city, was afraid of everything, and treated you like shit. She wouldn't even cook part of the dinner

when Beverly and I came over — you had to do it all because we were your friends, not hers. What possibly could have possessed you? Usually your taste in women was pretty good,” and he said “You sound like my dad there, may his soul, etcetera, and the rest of him . . .” and his friend said “Then your dad was right. He knew a looker; look at your mother. He also knew — I could tell, even sick as he was the last times I saw him and with not much use for talking because of his paralysis problem — what was up and who was phooey and what in life was hype or gauze or fake.” “There was something between her and me that can’t be explained. But I’ll try, right? That’s what I usually do. If you don’t think she was good-looking or smart or anything like that . . . Wait, did you say anything about her not being smart?” and his friend said “She wasn’t, was she? — not too much.” “Anyway, nothing I can do about that. Eyes, taste, your own handicaps or prejudices or just that you never engaged her in a deep conversation, or that she didn’t fill your bill in the bones and flesh categories . . . But we had lots of fun together. I mean, where I really went hysterical with laughing, both of us together, and not from pot. And she had a very good mind. Would read a difficult novel, poetry, or as much as she hated the subjects, an article on philosophy or some literary criticism I handed her — unlearned, you see, never got through high school — but would understand it more incisively than I most times and more than lots of scholars could. Why? Intuitive knowledge, instinctive, common sense, saw through things and could read between the lines and so on — incisiveness, as I said, all easy and natural. So we discussed things like that — long discussions, no fancy words or references or quotes from literary bigshots or other books — and movies and plays we went into too. And we both adored her son. Another plus. You don’t

have a kid or want one so you're shaking your head it's nothing, it's nothing, but you don't know what you're missing," and his friend said "The art bullshit sessions don't interest me either," and he said "I know, it's not what you appreciate — movies, you do, even talking about them at length. She also made a nice home for us. Very nice things; she had great taste, picked up treasures in Goodwill and St. Vincent de Paul; I felt very comfortable there. You're a slob so this doesn't mean anything to you, stinky jockey briefs in the kitchen sink, greasy pots piled high in the toilet bowl," and his friend said "Thanks a lot; you really know me." "I like things neat and attractive and a house in order and uncluttered, with serious paintings or prints on the wall, nice light fixtures, and that's what she did, with a little help from me. In ways our tastes in many things were almost identical; that doesn't hurt a relationship. And she was good in bed. Now your eyes light up. 'Good, bed, fuck, ug,'" and his friend said "Looking at her, I wouldn't've thought it; but knowing how much you like sex, it sort of makes sense." "She always put out for me when I wanted — not something every woman did — or most of the time. Handed me her body almost, or turned around with her backside to me, as if saying 'Here, I'm sleepy, not even up to performing, do what you want with it' — but with restrictions of course. Though I think I have her mixed up with someone else. Sorry. She, actually, couldn't be persuaded to do anything she didn't want to. And sure, she was a tremendous ballbreaker too and we wouldn't do it for weeks at a time sometimes because we loathed each other and wanted to live any way but together and even did the separate rooms bit," and his friend said "So why didn't you leave? Something like that happened to me with some girl, I'd say 'Man overboard,' and jump," and he said "Good question. I never understood why, several

times, I didn't leave absolutely and indisputably and unreturnably for good. It was during my needy way-down-on-myself period, maybe. Maybe I got too comfortable in her house and with her kid and in being to other people a much admired pretend father. The pleasures of predictably recurrent sex once the enmity ends. That I was a poor lonely schmuck but at least had a nice house and some family life. Also, I was going nowhere so at least for the time being was somewhere, and so on — you need more reasons? When it was good it was almost okay, blah-blah. She needed me lots of times too and when I was out of her life no one missed me more, till the last time when she was giddy about my being gone and stayed that way. 'Aren't we better off now?' she'd say on the phone — I forget who called, probably me with some lame excuse for calling. 'Isn't life really better for you now that we're split?' If I said 'Well, I guess so but still . . .' she'd say 'No, it is for me and if it isn't for you yet it will be. Wait, my new beau wants to talk to you.' But sometimes, before that, I thought we broke up just so we could get back together again in a month and for a few days, or a day or two, have the wildest most uninhibited and saddest — cries, tears, whoopees — time a couple could. In other words — well, in other words what? I can't think; Elephant beer we had to order. But I found her beautiful — I shouldn't forget that as a reason for staying. I'd look at her nose, eyes, the lips, everything. *Tout la face*. The most gorgeous I'd ever seen in a woman I was close to," and his friend said "That's nuts," and reeled off names. "And they had tits, these women, gigantic to big to medium to only a little bit small, but something there you could squeeze or push your face into," and he said "*Tits*. Why's it matter so much? You need them to feed off of? But I'll never win on that with you. Some guys are like that and some — a few — could care

less. None could care nothing, I suppose, but you have to understand there are many other things in a woman, physical and emotional and so on, to supersede if not go way way beyond them. Just as if one guy has an enormous dick and the others don't, big deal, there are so many other things in those men that should be important to a woman, or one would hope they'd be there. Believe me, after the first few days with Evangeline, they didn't —" and his friend said "Bullshit."

Evangeline Escapes

For the first month after they left his parents' apartment they couldn't find any other place to live in New York but a single room in a halfway house. To pay for their room and board he did odd jobs for the woman who owned it: washed dishes, bussed tables, painted rooms, applied some sulfuric acid solution to the five flights of marble steps to take out the stains in them from about fifty years. Then they got an apartment and the woman claimed they owed her eighty dollars in back rent and he said he'd worked off the entire four weeks' room and board and she even owed him some dough for all the hours he put in at minimum wage and the woman said she'd take him to small claims court if he didn't pay and he said "Okay, I don't want any trouble or bad feelings between us, I think you're wrong, but I'll come up with the money some way," and back in the room Evangeline said "Like Hell we'll pay. What do I have to do, teach you how to talk back and get what's due you? Your father, for all his ugliness to Brons and me and his cheap picayune ways, would have known what to say: 'Eat pig meat, you bloodsucking bastard, and all the junk carts you rolled in on.' Because she's cheating you blind.

You worked hard, at slave wages, scarred your fingers through the gloves on that lethal acid and maybe your lungs too, when she could have got a much safer but more expensive cleanser. She knew a jellyfish when she caught one but she's not going to bulldoze me," and he said "Better we go along with it than risk a court case and have to pay double, is what I heard those judgments against you can be," and she said "Horsecrap. This is what we do," and they told the woman they'd pay the day they left, "Say around eleven or noon we should be all finished," he said, and Evangeline asked an actor friend to drive by at six that morning, there was a blizzard going, ten or so inches already and the actor was an hour and a half late and could barely get his car down the street through the snow, the woman was shoveling a path on the sidewalk and she said "Mr. Bookbinder?" when she saw him carrying some things to the car and he said "Just loading up for the first trip, Mrs. M. I'll see you when I get back if I can make it in this snow," and she said "No funny business now. I've seen all kinds, you know," and he said "Don't worry, I'm leaving my family behind as collateral," and after the car was packed and the actor was at the wheel and motor was running he went back to the room and said "This is terrible and really bad for the kid to see, let's just pay her," and Evangeline said "No, we're going. Just keep walking and I swear, if she tries stopping us I'm going to push that woman, I don't care if she slips and breaks a leg," and he said "No pushing," and they left the building and started down the long stoop, which Mrs. M. had cleared but it already had what seemed like a half-inch on it, she was at the second story window and threw it open and yelled "You come back here, Bookbinders; I'll have the police after you by the time you get there," and as they drove away he said "Let's go back; I'll write her a check. It'll be my money, not yours.

She'll find us through our new phone number and we can be thrown in jail for beating out on the rent. Or I can — you, they'll say you've got to take care of your boy," and she said "She'll never chase after us for eighty smelly bucks. And serves the greedy Yid right — I wish she had come at me and broken a leg," and he said "She isn't Jewish; what is it always with you? This is New York; you're not in the foothills. And she's Irish or something, maybe Welsh or Scottish, judging by her name. What's Macreeedy?" he asked the actor and the actor said "Could be anything like you said but Italian," and she said "Jewish, don't tell me. Maybe not the name, but she is. Macreeedy's probably her husband who ran away from her like us, and in a hateful snowstorm also, but thirty years ago. Or she took the name out of a phone book so she wouldn't be known as Jewish. But who can't see what she is by that big flabby nose and the Shylock way she treats people, pound of your foreskin or half pound of your balls," and he said "I don't know who I dislike more now, you or her . . . I'm sorry, Brons, and I'm sorry, whatever your name is, driver, actor," and the actor said "Go ahead, say your spiel, don't mind me. What I'm doing today's a favor I owe Ev; so what's between you's between you," and he said "Why, what'd she do for you?" and the actor said "Another favor, friend to friend, but enough for me to stick my car's neck out in this blitz . . . Gray," and shook Gould's hand and Gould said "Gould," and to Evangeline in back "Anyway, you're going to have to tell me you know how wrong it is what you said about Mrs. M. and that particular religious thing in general," and she said "You don't know what you're talking about now, so why should I?" and he said "You mean you're saying you don't know what I'm talking about," and she said "Yes, subject closed."