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## The Next Worst Thing

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## THE NEXT WORST THING

THE WORST THING ABOUT FIGHTS and I when I say *fight*s I don't mean disagreements I mean someone slamming a crowbar against your windshield because you've got the doors locked you keep trying to start the car dropping the keys scrabbling for them on the floorboards this heavy feeling in your bones it's hard to move your hands arms tongue fingers gone spasm meanwhile this happening in a heartbeat the diplomat outside is still swinging that crowbar *Who do you think you're fucking with?* he screams you wince at the bashing sound as the windshield spiderwebs & starts to sag he keeps shouting *I told you to get out of the fucking car! I told you! Get out of the fucking car!*

I don't mean disagreements like maybe you like salted pretzels and someone else doesn't not that at all you know what I'm saying. What I'm saying is . . . the worst thing about fights is that moment when it begins or it's about to begin and there's someone standing in your face right in front of you he wants to hurt you badly fuck you up mangle your face break your nose or put one of your eyes out maybe cause you serious pain reduce you to drooling bloody on your hands and knees in gravel.

Have you ever had a fist or a boot slam into your belly? It crushes you to the ground where they'll kick your teeth out I swear it happens people will kick you in the *mouth*. In Yucca City I once saw a bar fight where some boozy, purple-nosed cowboy grabbed this wasted longhair by his ponytail yanked dragged his entire body by the hair outside, pulling him backward into the parking lot, put the guy's face against a concrete curb and kicked the back of it. I was in the crowd watching. We shouted for him to cut it out but we didn't step in to stop it. We weren't stupid. We didn't want a taste of the same medicine. We had our own teeth to keep an eye on. Keep your mouth shut and you won't get hurt. But still it made me sick to see it hear it. The sound when boot smacked head. I mean it could have been me, you know what I'm saying? It was a wet, muffled crunch, like a stepping on a raw egg in your socks.

But the last fight I was in was my fault sort of at least partially he'd been screwing my wife and humiliated me at a party I didn't find out about the wife-screwing part of it until later but everyone at the party probably knew it sure they knew it and all thought me = chump.

But it's not like I was a saint or anything we were separated at the time me and my wife that is and I suspected she was seeing someone so was I and oh well you know I asked for it I moved out on her but this genius made a point of rubbing my nose in it I would never have known but he wanted me to know I mean I'm sure he was saying to people I work with people I have lunch with eat pizza with, "Guess whose wife I'm poking?"

He said that I knew he did it got back to me but that wasn't the worst part the worst part was when I learned about it the next day after the party that he'd been mouthing off about me I ask my wife.

"So what was all that between you and Sigmund last night?"

I know I know Sigmund as in Freud a lot of people didn't like him he was the kind of guy who seemed okay at first good-looking but short quiet and moody brooding I think they call it you might have liked him the first few times you saw him until you got to know him and learned what an asshole he was so I ask what was his problem at the party and my wife Dianne's her name says, "Never mind. He's just hot air. Don't pay any attention to him."

But I could tell something was up by the way she said it and we were getting back together I mean the next week I was moving back in with her I loved this woman like you love your hands your eyeballs your teeth for that matter something you can't live without. We keep hashing it over & when I finally put two and two together I ask, "What? Did you sleep with him?"

"Don't ask me any questions unless you want to hear the truth. I'm not going to lie."

"Okay so I'm asking you."

"Gary. Don't start anything."

"I'm asking if you slept with him. If you did I should know right?"

"We've been separated for a year, Gary. You asked for it."

And I was thinking *Jesus*, not *him*, anyone but *him*, Sigmund that little squirmy shit but what I said was, "Did you or didn't you? Let's get this straight."

"I don't like your tone of voice. Who moved out on who, tell me that?"

"Either you did or you didn't. Yes or no."

It took a while but I pulled it out of her ripped it from her like that monster in *Alien* you know that slimy worm thing with huge teeth that erupts out of the guy's chest at breakfast and splatters goo and disgusting shit all over everybody so I pulled it out of her and that was bad enough suddenly it was like playing on video monitors in my mind. But the worst thing was then she told me she didn't really want to do it he was so *pusby* she said he kind of forced her he lifted weights he was short but worked out classic Napoleon complex he was so strong she said and I know Dianne believe me she wasn't lying I never doubted her one minute she's a straight shooter the real thing she's got her flaws sure don't we all but she doesn't lie she doesn't make things up I mean she's just not the lying type so I ask, "Did he rape you?"

"No, not really. I gave in, I guess. But he was so *pusby*. He just wouldn't take no for an answer."

"How many times?"

"Gary. No."

"It's important. Was this months or what?"

"Just twice or three times I think. Three I guess. Something like that. I hadn't heard from him for months, but lately he's been calling and has become so *pusby* again. I told him I can't see him anymore that we're getting back together and everything but he says you're no good for me that we shouldn't move back in together and I'm afraid of him, Gary. I really am. He's violent. He's a violent person and he drinks a lot. I don't think he'd really hurt me but I don't know, he's a scary guy. I shouldn't have done it, I know, but you left me and he's the only one who asked me out so what was I supposed to do stay home all the time he seemed so nice at first."

And that was it. When she told me she was scared of him that the woman I love and not only that but who happens to be without a doubt one of the best people I know in the world kind & sweet & gentle so when I learned this beautiful gentle & tender human being was scared of this little fuck I went nuts it threw me over the edge and it was like, "Where does he live?"

"Gary it's over and done with and—"

"Where does he live?"

"I'm not going to tell you that. I don't want to see you get hurt he's got guns knives he's that kind of guy it's over I'm telling you I love you."

"It is not over. What about last night? What was that all about?"

"He was just trying to mess with you he hates you Gary. You wouldn't believe the things he says about you. He said if you loved me you wouldn't let him go near me. He was talking to me all last night and you didn't do a thing about it."

"He told you this last night?"

"If you'd just told him to leave me alone he probably would have—"

"He wanted me to start something with him at a party full of people friends of mine?"

"He's just a pest."

"Why didn't you just walk away from him?"

"I did, but you were talking to that Betty woman. What was I supposed to do, huh? He followed me everywhere. He was so drunk he made me miserable and you were no help."

"You could have—"

"I'm afraid of him Gary and I don't want him to hurt you."

"I'm gonna give that little shit something to be afraid of. I'm going to teach that little shit to squirm."

"He could hurt you."

"I don't care!"

I slammed my fist in the bedroom door hooked my hand into it and jerked back ripping my skin trying to slam it only I'd yanked it bent from the hinges on the wall so it wouldn't slam I go to the phone & start calling people trying to sound calm try-

ing to keep my shit together. I had to leave my stupid voice on answering machines, dial another number, pace back and forth in Dianne's living room, waiting for people to return the calls. It was afternoon by this time, a Sunday, and since Dianne lived near a softball field, there were kids walking by in groups of twos and threes carrying bats and gloves, tossing balls into the air and catching them as they passed her house. It was a gorgeous day – blue sky, leaves falling, the country at peace. They laughed and jostled each other, carried the bats over their shoulders like clubs. Inside my head were bloodstains splattered on wall paper. It was hard to reach people on the phone, and once I got them, hard to get any information from them. They didn't want to deal with me. They didn't want to get involved. They'd say stuff like, "Listen, man, this has nothing to do with me, okay? So I can't tell you anything." I'd usually start yelling at them about that point, which worked so well they hung up. But finally someone gave me his number. "You don't tell him where you got this, okay?"

When I get Sigmund on the phone he says, "Listen man, sorry about last night. I was out of line, I know that. I was drunk, man. I just had too much and I didn't know what—"

"You were out of line. Is that it?"

"You don't have to shout, okay? I mean, I know I made an ass of myself."

"You fucked my wife you motherfucker and you say you were out of line?"

He hung up I called right back and he said, "Don't yell at me."

"I'll do whatever the fuck I want asshole."

"Would you stop screaming? Listen, I'm sorry."

"Sorry's not good enough. You humiliate me, you hassle my wife at a party full of my friends, then say you're sorry? Fuck sorry! You want to fight, is that it? Okay motherfucker, you got your wish. Let's meet somewhere right now and get this over with."

"I don't want to fight you."

"You scare my wife and talk shit about me you don't have a choice, asshole."

“Listen.”

“What are you, chicken?”

“Don’t call me—”

“You’re a coward is what you are a miserable little drunken fuck coward.”

“I’m not going to fight you—”

“Now or later asshole let’s get this thing over with I’m getting ready to move back with my wife and you make sure I find out how you fucked her well you better.”

After that he hangs up I quit screaming realizing that my psycho drug dealer neighbors must surely be overhearing it all slam the phone against the coffee table grab the cord and swing the mouth-piece in the air smash it against the floor then pull it apart with my hands until it’s ripped to pieces. After I rip the cord from the wall and fling the pieces of plastic and wiring across the room I pace back and forth, aware that now I can’t call him back from home. I have to use the pay phone at the 7-Eleven down the block, like every other deadbeat in the ‘hood.

I stomp over there passing poor ladies at the bus stop who look scared of me and I stand in the parking lot full of oil stains & broken glass call him on the scuzzy pay phone and hiss into it. He hangs up again so I call his friends and threaten them too. I keep calling I don’t give up and finally get him pissed off and he says, “Okay motherfucker you asked for it.”

Like I said I was no saint I mean I never thought I was *evil* or anything I’ve always considered myself an honest person well for the most part basically a good person I think but I’ve done some crummy things. Right about that same time I was seeing a married woman myself *having an affair* they call it sounds like a dinner gala fund raiser for homeless opera singers caviar & champagne *Don’t spill the Swedish meatballs on your tux, Nigel!*

But no our affair wasn’t like that more like raw hot serious dizzy intense blush-about-it-later screwing whenever & wherever we got a chance in public mostly but the woman let’s call her Beth I did like When can I see you again Beth? as we sat in weird

bars on the outskirts of Phoenix drinking margaritas salt on her lips wrought iron bullshit on the walls getting looped & horny we would fuck like anywhere semi-alone & dark the Planetarium was a good one all the stars the stars above and my pants unzipped.

Most of the time we did it in her car a Camry, Car of the Year. We'd hunker down in deserted parking lots, those huge saguaro cactus outside looking like big green men watching us. If you drove by all you'd see was a car, a '91 Toyota, parked in an empty lot, in the desert. You wouldn't see that I had my pants yanked down to my ankles.

By the time this happened with Sigmund, I was feeling pretty bad about it, had decided to end it, move back with Dianne. I mean Beth was quote unquote fun odd word to describe adultery, yes? But her being married made the whole thing major sordid. I mean, we'd tell each other next time we're just having lunch, okay? No touching, no fooling around. We like each other, we can be just friends, can't we? But then we'd meet at Gordo's or Los Huerfanos and by the second margarita or halfway through the third I'd be watching her lips on the glass I'd be staring at her face so lovely young twenty-three she was a school teacher fifth grade & fresh and even the way her teeth were funky these weird dingy streaks on them & overlapping a bit even that was sexy because she was real who wants perfection anyway & her eyes were green with gold flecks in them like topaz yeah that's it.

Topaz eyes she had hair in ringlets blond and fine like sewing thread she got it permed regularly and for all the world looked like one of the local anchorwomen on Eyewitness News so that when we'd be doing it sometimes I imagined the anchor lady like smorgasbord on the table of her news desk I never thought all that perming was good for her but what was I to do I couldn't very well tell her how to dress or wear her hair now could I?

Blonde permed hair and pantyhose stiff as chainmail that's what I remember about Beth. But she was a beautiful person, too. I mean when you say *adultery* people tend to think of vicious oversexed bored hausfrau cuckolding their workaday hubbies but she wasn't like that at all. She was sweet & good &

we never meant it to happen. It just did. We'd known & lusted after each other a year before we fell. We all make mistakes don't we? We always felt guilty afterwards we'd swear *never again* but we'd miss each other within hours call on the phone and say, "We'll just have lunch, okay? Nothing more than that."

"Just lunch."

After the drinks I'd touch her wrist or her pantyhose or hold her hand beneath the tablecloth & we'd fall again we'd see each other falling but like a telephone we'd take our consciences off the hook ignore the buzzer and after paying cash for the drinks no Visa or Mastercard like normal no cash so they couldn't trace us I'd go to the men's room before we left the cafe and stuff a handful of paper towels or maybe a sheaf of paper napkins grabbed from an empty table in my pocket to clean up after I came later in the car. But sometimes still it got on the upholstery. Beth's Car of the Year had sex stains on the seat. Did her husband ever notice them? He liked to take the bus he did he was civic minded he took the bus to work every day meanwhile Beth and I are sweating and pink in their car. Not something to be proud of. I thought about that. What if my wife did that? Then I didn't think about it anymore too creepy to imagine, a guilt surge shorting out my conscience.

It bothered Beth, too. Beth I called her, as in, "Beth, you make me feel so alive." But really everyone else in her life called her *Betty*. She was Betty at school in the teacher's lounge Betty to her husband Dick I kid you not. She was Betty to her father dying of pancreatic cancer. She was Betty teaching ten year olds in Tempe, with a yellow bow in her hair, wearing an impossibly long dress looking like a schoolmarm from *Little House on the Prairie*. But when I was with her, when we were alone, she was Beth. She was Beth when she undid my pants in the parking lot of La Casa Escondida and stroked me. She was Beth when she kissed it. She was Betty full of guilt when she scrubbed her Car of the Year, trying to erase the stains.

At the time to make matters worse she was newly married lived in this suburban house in the desert. Green cactus garden and white concrete drive in her front yard. The place was so

new you could still smell the shower curtains. And no furniture. I mean I'm not Martha Stewart or anything but this house was *bare*. The living room was *completely* empty, not a stick the walls bare & white the carpeting green as frozen margaritas. There were curtains yes there were curtains, but as we squirmed naked on the bare green carpeting of the living room I stared at walls of nothing. No posters, no photos, no seascapes. Nothing. Only, near the baseboard, two electrical outlets, like eyes.

I'd sneak over in the afternoons. We'd meet there with the blinds drawn. Her neighbors were space aliens for all we knew. And we'd do it in the empty living room on that green shag carpeting. She'd lay out a blanket to keep me from getting knee burns. That way, doing it on the living room floor, we didn't mess up her marriage bed, where she slept with Dick every night. Nothing would stop us, though, nothing. I hope god forgives me for that. I really do.

Beth didn't like the idea of me moving back with Dianne.

"How do you think that makes me feel?" she asked me. "You're breaking my heart."

She wanted us to divorce both and get together but I wasn't sure. Sometimes I thought she was too silly and dim and that after all that trouble we'd get together and I'd just end up cheating on her. I know something about myself. I know I can never get enough. I never said I loved her I never said it. That means something, doesn't it? So we were calling it quits at least supposedly when I moved back in a deadline of sorts though I saw her the day before that party parking lot fellatio oh well the flesh is weak but later after everything I never told her about what happened I didn't know how it would make her feel I didn't know.

Talking on the pay phone at 7-Eleven standing in a shatter of broken beer bottles I listen as Sigmund agrees to meet me at a city park telling me, "Don't bring a gun."

I spit back that I don't *own* one I knew he did though he'd told me about the shotgun he'd bought only two days before I didn't care I didn't *care*.

I arrived early at the park and scoped out a clump of oak trees that were away from the parked cars, the crowds of children, the picnic tables. I was waiting by a statue of a cowboy hero some wrangler armed with Bowie knife and Winchester when he pulled into the parking got out of the car stiff as the weight lifter he was and walked toward me wearing jeans a tight white t-shirt a cap. He was a lot stockier, beefier, stronger than me.

I told him to follow me to the trees & he did lagging several yards behind till we reached the trees & I turned around and told him, "Go ahead, c'mon, let's do it."

He'd said I was a coward for not being willing to fight him. He'd told this to a woman I loved. He'd said this at a party peopled with my friends and co-workers everyone had known what he'd done his pointing out what a weakling I was what a wimp I was so here I am go ahead you sonofabitch you want to fight let's do it you humiliate me in front of a room full of people well it's just the two of us now *fucker* let's go for it.

He told me he was sorry.

Sorry!

He didn't mean it he was sorry he told me he didn't want to fight.

"Really, man. I was drunk. I didn't mean it. I don't even remember what I said."

The sun was hot the air was dry and I screamed at him I didn't *care* and raised my fists coming close to him and he raised his arms & flinched to keep away from me that's when I started swinging he ducked and turned away from me I didn't seem to connect to anything but air then I hit him several times quickly. He made a squeaky, pained sound with each blow. He ducked to the ground where I beat my fists against his back, then I kicked him as hard as I could in his ribs. He squirmed on the ground, coughing. He wasn't fighting back. He would not get up and would not defend himself even when I told him to. His cap was knocked off his head into the sandy dirt. I remember thinking that I wanted to grab it and rip it in two. He hugged his ribs in pain on his knees before me and for a moment I thought to kick him in the teeth. I was wearing heavy leather boots I almost did it. Almost.

I circled him, screaming, as he struggled to his feet, picked up his cap & limped away toward the parking lot.

I walked around in a circle, cussing and panting, out of breath from anger and raw *adreeno*. For the first time I noticed all the litter around us, red and white Coke cups and corn dog sticks, buzzing flies. Three men at a picnic table about thirty yards away were watching me. I started to sob, still punching the air. After circling the trees near our clearing for several minutes, I walked away and headed deeper into the park.

It was spring, and had rained recently, so as I walked through the thicket of oaks and pines I stared down at the clay mud, the criss-cross hatching of fallen reddish brown pine needles, the puddles burnt orange with muddy clay water. In the shadows. a dark red. The air was full of dragonflies. I walked blindly, not caring where I was going, feeling as if something inside me had changed, realizing something serious had happened. Perhaps I walked into the park to get away from myself. I felt dirty and ugly. I wondered if the police would be coming after me. I walked and walked. My boots became caked with red mud. I somehow managed to reach a nature trail, which had numbered plaques identifying the different trees in the park: the white pine, the live oak, the hackberry. Yucca, saguaro, century plant. All around zinged dragonflies.

After a while I emerged from the pine forest nature trail and onto a jogging path. A few of the passing joggers gave me looks. Maybe because I was a walker on the running trail, maybe because I looked like a lunatic. I had the feeling that everyone *knew*. I certainly didn't look like I belonged there. I wore an old flannel shirt and blue jeans, the heavy boots caked with mud. I felt like an ax murderer, as if I were covered with splatters of blood like I'd just dumped a body raped bruised strangled beaten in a shallow grave two tree-huggers would find later & they'd have to identify by dental records young Caucasian female last seen in a convenience store eleven o'clock at night talking to a man in a red pickup. It always goes something like that.

He took it like a man.

As I wound my slow and clumsy way down the three mile jogging path, passed by runners in Nikes, singlets, and fluorescent pink running shorts, I was haunted by what I'd just done, how I had just pounded on a person who had not even tried to defend himself. That was the kicker. I couldn't say I had won anything. Some fight. Knowing he probably could have hurt me fucked me up seriously made it even worse, like I was so insignificant he would let me pound him and walk away no big deal. No scarier than the dragonflies buzzing air around my face.

The jogging path brought me back full circle to the center of the park, and to reach my car, I had to cross the saddest zoo in the world. A squad of prickly pear bloomed brightly, red and yellow, in a row as I rounded a turn, crossed a wooden bridge over a muddy duck stream to enter the zoo. It was small and low budget. The kind of zoo that can only afford one of everything, where baboons masturbate behind bars like juvenile delinquents on display. A great target for grade school field trips. After I passed through the teeth of the metal turnstiles, I had to pause as a dwarf train chugged by on its narrow tracks. It was crammed with kids, and the few parents aboard looked like clumsy giants – the whole thing done to resemble a circus caravan – crude lions, giraffes, and elephants painted on the sides of each tiny car. The children waved to me, and I waved back. The kid's laughter rang through the air of the small zoo, and the train's conductor gave the weak whistle a blast as it neared the pedestrian pathway.

I bought a Coke in a red and white paper cup, drank it as I stood beside the sea lion pool, trying to wedge my way between the eight year olds to catch a glimpse of the lions tossing beach balls into the air with their noses, their whiskered faces. A security guard strolled by.

Through all this – the zoo, the sea lions, the next few weeks – my mind involuntarily instant-replayed visions of the fight. Swinging wildly at him. Pummeling his back. The high-pitched, squeaking sound he made when I hit him. His cap in the mud. My reaction went through stages. A few days later, I learned Sigmund

had a black eye and cracked sternum. *Good*, I thought, *but that isn't enough*. I worried that he'd sue me. I felt guilty again. Because of his sternum, he had trouble breathing. It hurt each time he drew a breath. It would take several months to heal. *Good. Good.*

And inside me swelled disgust.

After the fight I went home and sat in the living room of my rented apartment. Low ceilings squeezed me like a vise. Pigeons cooed and humped in the eaves of the windows. Dust clouds drifted across the hardwood floors. The mentholatum smell of my landlord rose from his apartment below. Pieces of the phone were still scattered across the floor: wires, mouthpiece, a circular metal plate with holes drilled in it. If Sigmund wanted to get back at me, to get revenge, this was not a good place to wait. Alone there I was a sitting duck. I threw some things in a duffel, stopped at the 7-Eleven to use the phone again, called a friend in Flagstaff and drove there. It became cooler as I drove into the mountains, the woods became thick with trees, and I slowed to keep from hitting a mule deer. At my friend's place, I stayed a week, watching TV and trying to joke about it. Over the phone I'd told him the basics. When I arrived he said, "Well if it isn't Mohammed Ali."

He made me feel better, my friend did, human again, and after a few days it seemed okay. I called Dianne and we had a long talk. I would move back in anyway. We wouldn't let this stupid crap ruin everything. But when I returned to Phoenix I learned that while I was out of town Sigmund kept calling her at five and six o'clock in the morning, after he'd been drinking all night and she was getting up to go to work. He'd be calling, wanting to talk.

"All I want to do is talk. How you doing? I miss you."

She told me he said that and she was scared. He told her he was fixing some pay-back and I better buy some eyes to put in the back of my head if I wanted to see it coming. So with him still messing with me & her when I got back in town and moved back home with her I came up with a plan. I knew what I'd do if he messed with me any more. I couldn't just take it, could I?

I bought a gun from an ex-con I knew, a .45 caliber military looking thing. It set me back five hundred dollars but I figured it was worth it. Peace of mind.

“Nobody fuck with you if you point this thing at ‘em,” said the guy I bought it from. “They know who the boss is.”

At first I really didn't like the idea but it felt surprisingly good in my hand it felt hard a real confidence builder it was and we all need that don't we confidence I mean I wouldn't want anyone thinking I'm some loser they can just push around but I got this piece clean, no papers no serial number no nothing. I thought about this a lot.

I decided that, if he kept it up, one night I'd go over to his apartment complex some maximum security type thing off Richmond Avenue you know near the singles bar strip. I'd wait till someone opens the outer gates and follow after them my face hidden hooded sweatshirt sweatpants on like I'm a jogger just coming back forgot my keys thanks a lot. I know he's home so I wait in the parking lot till he goes out to his car to leave I scoped out the lot beforehand and there was a perfect place behind the dumpster in the shadows of it smelled bad though gag me but it had a perfect angle to scope out Sigmund's car always parked in the same assigned place.

I wear a ski mask under the sweatshirt hood gloves even wrap my shoes in duct tape so they can't trace any prints & then he comes out.

I let him open the car door before I move, .45 in my right hand, loose but firm, homemade silencer over the barrel three condoms how appropriate, it takes seven steps to reach him his car door and he's already in has his right hand on the key in the ignition his left hand cranking the window down as I sneak up silent-like and point the gun at his ear squeeze the trigger.

His head jerks to the side hard to see for a moment his body in shadows but he lifts his head back up he's not dead & then I see the bullet hit below his ear and bones and blood are there open on the side of his face this jagged thing sticking out which I realize is his jawbone smashed but he's still alive he's

trying to breathe turns his face toward me blood coming out his nose it blows a fat red bubble then pops I point & shoot him again this time in the eye his head popping back and this time he doesn't lift back up but I go ahead and put three more bullets into his chest to make sure he'll never squawk about my wife again who the fuck does he think he is anyway?

I decided that's what I'd do, if he kept pressing me. And it came to pass that Sigmund ended up dead. Found in the front seat of his car, bullet holes and all. The cops came to the house and asked me questions. They took notes about my answers. And left.

They never returned. About two million people hated Sigmund. He owed money to drug dealers and the police probably figured Why bother?

That wasn't the end of everything. I still lost Dianne over my stupidity. And goddammit, I loved her so much! I really did. The best thing that ever happened to me. She was. She found out about it, of course, they always do. *It* as in Beth and what we did in her Car of the Year. But about Sigmund she wondered of course. One of the last times I saw her we had lunch at our favorite diner. I remember almost crying when the waitress put the tuna melt dead on a white plate in front of me, like I could hear some countdown to missing Dianne already, when out of the blue she asks, "So. Was it you?"

"Was it me what?"

"You know."

"What? You think I'm that stupid?"

"If it was you I should know, right? I have a right. So just tell me. Yes or no."

I asked how was her chicken salad. She just stares at me finally she goes, "Okay. Okay. If you had anything to do with that I don't want to know I don't *even* want to know."

I didn't end it with Beth till she quit answering my calls. Once she asked me, "Can't you get the picture?" I think she's back to being Betty. I think she's Betty full time now. And I hope she's happy. I really do.

But truth be told, it's not that hard to kill a guy. Really

it's not. You can get away with murder. You drive home, lock your door and put your keys and coins on the dresser, home again home again jiggedy jig. You cope. After a while, you move on to some new fuck-up in your life. The next worst thing. You forget, until something reminds you. The laughter of children. Image of kids on a tiny train. The smell of elephant dung at a crummy zoo. The cry of a peacock. You try to forget, to tell yourself that it didn't happen to you, that it's in the past now. Spilled milk. Until one day you see someone glaring at you with vengeance in his eyes.