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WAITING FOR EVE

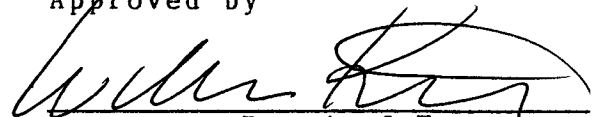
by

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B. S., Oregon State University, 1983

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
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WAITING FOR EVE:  
Poetry, Translations, and Fiction  
By Robert Brown

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### POETRY

<u>The Archer</u>	"At the Beach."
<u>Green Mountains Review</u>	"Moving Pictures," "Sculpture."
<u>Kansas Quarterly</u>	"Shadows on the Brain," "Stockman's Bar," "Without Pleasure."
<u>Puerto del Sol</u>	"New Moon."
<u>Rio Grande Review</u>	"Charmistress."
<u>Samisdat</u>	"Walking on Water."
<u>Suisun Valley Review</u>	"In Search of a Lost Son," "Last Flight."

### FICTION

<u>Oregon East</u>	"I Know Your Secrets."
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For Julie

## I. POETRY

Each one of us, in his timidity, has a limit beyond which he is outraged. It is inevitable that he who by concentrated application has extended this limit for himself, should arouse the resentment of those who have accepted conventions which, since accepted by all, require no initiative of application. And this resentment generally takes the form of meaningless laughter or of criticism, if not persecution. But this apparent violation is preferable to the monstrous habits condoned by etiquette and estheticism.

Man Ray, "The Age of Light"

Divine Roulette

(For Antonin Artaud)

God stands hunched over, his close-chambered heart  
jumps at each toss of the ball and his clotted lungs  
wheeze at the sight of suicide--but his greedy hands  
reach for another toss, ignoring the wails of oboes,  
ignoring the pleas of angels to cease, to raise  
his eyes and look down at the havoc his game creates.

He will always reach for one more spin  
of the wheel, unwilling to hear the sirens  
screaming in his ears, unwilling to see  
men's faces begging for attention, unwilling  
to smell the sour odor of rotting flesh.

How long can he play this madcap game?  
Standing over Pascal's wheel  
with chips in hand, he watches the ball  
pogo over red and black, oblivious  
to the faces of the men he created, not willing  
to stomach the result of his foolish play.

An Unscientific Approach to Transcendence  
Via Discriptive Wave Phenomena

Transcendence, though usually invisible  
and quite unpredictable, tonight sleeps  
outside under mathematical charts  
covered by the sinuous slide  
of unconscious cosines that imitate  
the scraping motion snakes make  
slipping undetected through grass  
just beyond lawmakers who govern  
the actions of wandering wavelengths  
of light that break out each night  
like the hypnotic pulse  
emitted by a lighthouse  
overlooking the roughest outcrop  
of rock in the Pacific  
where bloated sailor boys  
find death both casual  
and elegant on the ocean floor  
undisturbed by tidal cycles  
that fall under the mystical control  
of dogma created by the co-existence  
of sun and moon rotating shifts  
in day and night sky blown clear  
and breathless by autumn wind  
in the auburn hair of sycamores  
whose leaves whisper at the pull  
of unseen strings  
the puppeteer holds  
in a calloused hand  
tired of childrens' plays  
and the inflexibility  
of inhuman flesh.

Charmistress

The woodpecker's  
chisel beak  
taps BB holes  
in the 12 panes  
of your lead glass window

This has replaced  
your electric alarm clock  
ringing

At the drop  
of holy water  
you come running

The marble floors  
must be washed  
with a human mop

Eunuch priests  
white-collared  
beyond temptation  
hold you by ankles  
to swab  
the rough gray stone

Your long auburn hair  
soapy dirty wet  
streaks down  
from your goosebumped skin

The priest's stone pink hands  
approximate the curve  
of your swaying breasts  
as they revel  
in this divine madness

## New Moon

Sent out to die by family, Kiaso  
blown by the wind  
wanders the Arctic night.  
He looks up to the moon  
and finds the sliver  
left yesterday, gone.  
All that stares down  
from the oil dark sky  
are a million icy eyes.

After hours of walking  
he sits on frozen ground.  
He knew the day would come--  
he had been the one  
to tell his father,  
and in the spring, hunting caribou  
he and a brother discovered  
what the wolves had done.

Kiaso is surprised to be awakened  
by the warm hand  
of his first wife  
tearing him  
from his marble pink body  
and into the afterlife.

At the Beach

watch the moon  
grind sand from rock  
and try to forget  
that you're dying too.





## In Defense of Blue

Monday, like the unconscious Sunday  
before it, lies drunk on wind  
and blinding sun. It rusts in memories  
of wet city streets and gutters  
flooded by the thick flow  
of blood and barefoot children  
chasing down cracked sidewalks  
lofting burnt out light bulbs  
onto rough asphalt, relishing  
the explosiveness of thin glass.  
The children's ears, numbed by shouts,  
feign deafness, ignore cries  
of why, why can't you be quiet,  
don't you know your father  
is asleep, don't you know  
he'll whip you if you wake him?

Patriarchal distance blurs in the mirror  
as the blade, dull-edged, scrapes  
graying whiskers from chin and neck,  
each shaky stroke tempts a repentance  
in blood for days gone unremembered.

Little boys bored with Sunday rip pages  
by the handful from handout Bibles, curse  
the New Testament and don't believe  
in anything that can't be seen. They laugh  
at abstractions like a good family life  
and love. They've seen what's real:  
a father passed out each morning  
naked on the couch, violent at the rise  
of sound. On these sunny Mondays that lie  
unconscious of past Sundays, children run  
berserk through city streets, drunk  
on wind and sunshine, destroying anything  
that isn't blue.

## Without Pleasure

Again he slumps into his reclining chair  
forgetting to remove oil-stained overalls.  
Another day on the line, welding forged iron  
to steel, hiding eyes behind the tinted glass  
of his safety mask. It's difficult to decide  
between whiskey and beer. There's a certain poverty

in his lack of emotion. The Boss's words (next time  
you come in here shit-faced I'll...) ring  
like hammers pounding anvils. Midweek: the weight  
of hours deadens even the simplest pleasures  
like fucking his wife and eating his dinner.  
And his wife (she doesn't try to hide it anymore)  
should he re-blacken her eyes

for her latest indiscretion? He's slipping--  
hitting and screaming no longer hold  
any attraction. In his hand a tumbler  
replaces the acetylene torch. What sense

is there in morality and motion  
when gravity bears down so heavily?

## Sculpture

the deft hands of a sculptor  
skillfully chip off flakes of marble

his tools he handles like a surgeon  
the hammers, chisels, rasps, and files

slowly from the square block  
a woman's face emerges

it is the face  
of his dead mother

he has made her this  
smooth handsome bust  
to serve as her headstone

## The Whip Driver

Where do you drive whip driver  
with that wild-eyed smile on your lips?  
Where do you drive whip driver  
with a rose and wine at your hip?

## Making Sense

Frozen ground crunches under foot.  
The greenness of grass is muted  
by a thin coat of ice. My boots,  
worn through in the soles, slide  
with each risky step. Ahead,  
I see Jim, offer him a hello  
and a drink. I can't believe  
it's this cold in October, he says,  
scratching first his head, then  
his beard, pretending not to notice  
the lice dropping like snowflakes  
onto the shoulders of his coat.

The wind swirls hard, cruelly  
grabbing inside our shirts.  
And the wine is especially bad.  
I can't drink another drop, I think,  
grimacing at the swallow  
of my medicine. We sit together  
on a bench and watch the wind  
blow dead leaves, brown waves  
that break across the park, first  
moving left and then returning right.  
Not even the wind makes sense today.

To Dream of Sleep

In the alcoholic bliss  
of absinthe green boughs  
I sleep softly blanketed  
by moist petalled flesh;  
perfumed flowers which kiss  
with a thousand red lips.

## The Jungle

Plant-like constructions  
tower above, constitute  
a new variation on jungle.  
Your awareness magnifies  
in the thickening underbrush:  
the future becomes speculation,  
the present consists  
of giant ferns arching  
thirty feet above your head  
and tree-thick vines  
lacing enormous evergreens.  
Chameleons chide you for losing  
your way, mantis laughs  
at your declining mental condition  
while poker-faced iguanas  
wait silently to ambush you  
at nightfall.

Desperate, you try to imagine  
uninhabited space: lifeless  
stretches of sand and sea,  
broken shells strewn along  
a gentle surf, the calm  
ocean beckoning, an empty bed.  
But these images  
will not come back to you.  
In the distance, kettle drums  
crash in a dissonant chant  
signalling the onset  
of a religious feast. You realize  
everything becomes darker--  
the jungle will soon close off  
all light and you  
will end up the rotting  
dead leaves  
that caress your feet.

## Stockman's Bar

Tending bar, the Chinese man in Yankee cap  
dispenses drinks with ancient precision.  
The men here appreciate his efforts, understand  
difficult steps and fear of falling.  
They drink with the bartender's attention  
for detail, and don't grudge  
his slow, deliberate motions.

My brother died three days ago.  
Morticians failed to reshape  
his face to hide horror. Bravery died  
weeks before the body. He cried  
so much his wife stopped  
visiting him. Cowardice  
shamed his sons at bedside.  
They couldn't understand why  
the old standbys, Come on Dad,  
you'll feel better in the morning,  
wouldn't work anymore,  
that he died with nothing  
left to believe.

Today I try to blunt memory in a bar  
for dying men. Each man knows and respects  
time's tightening grip. Alcohol refuses  
to blur the dead--two wives, a brother,  
a son at war, a young woman run over  
by a bread truck. Each face still lucid,  
unwilling to be blemished by years.

The faces men die with stare up  
from open caskets, beds, and graves--  
all remind, none are serene. That myth  
was coined to con the grieving.  
The Chinese man continues to work  
at the same deliberate pace.  
He knows when haunting faces die.



## In Search of a Lost Son

### I.

If the journey was physical--fording  
an icy river, climbing a snow-capped  
mountain, tracking an escaped  
killer--it would be easier:  
the obstacles would be known, the challenge  
laid out before me. But my journey  
is not physical, it is not easy.

### II.

The plains states roll by field  
after field, humid air sticks  
to the earth like the damp shirt  
to my back. Ohio, Indiana, Illinois,  
Iowa, Nebraska pass like years  
I have missed, memories I have not  
been a part of. Driving through  
the Rockies in Wyoming I imagine her  
funeral, imagine him blaming me  
for the hearse and coffin, blaming  
me for the pills. What do I say tomorrow  
in Idaho, in the desert, to a son  
not seen for seven years?

### III.

The wind blows hard outside Pocatello, raising  
dust into the air. I drive slow, trying  
to compose perfect lines to woo him  
just as I wooed his mother ten years ago.  
His aunt greets me at the front door,  
a sarcastic--long time no see--  
before she invites me in.

### IV.

In the living room we sit as statues:  
rigid bodies issuing statements  
instead of conversation, words bounce  
like super balls off living room walls,  
infinitely rebounding, never to be caught.  
In the end I pack his bags in the trunk,  
tell him we'll sleep in Cheyenne tonight, reach  
New York in four days. As we drive  
I try to calculate the time  
it takes to locate a lost son.

## Last Flight

May I've waited  
all winter and most of spring  
for sun and green Today's  
no disappointment New leaves  
shimmer in bright sunlight  
and lazy eastern breeze

I sit on porch steps  
watch frisky squirrels  
scurry along branches  
in maples Sparrows dart  
from tree to bush to fence  
chittering in mock anger  
until one drops, dead  
in flight as though shot  
from the sky It lands  
stiff on the sidewalk

Silence I lift  
the sparrow's still warm body  
in my hands, take it  
around back, intent  
on putting it in the trash  
but bury it behind  
a row of lavender  
instead

If there's such a thing  
as a good way to die,  
it would be on a day  
like today, in flight,  
painless and unexpected

## Walking on Water

I stood high, fifty feet above  
the nearly frozen Clark Fork  
and leaned over the steel rail,  
watching black water rush past  
in a narrow stream  
bordered on both sides  
by thick snowy banks.

On the left bank footprints  
led to the water;  
regular, measured footprints,  
the footprints of a man going out  
for his morning newspaper and coffee.

...Left. Right. Left. Water.

The next left must have been  
into the water where he fell  
like a sleepwalker,  
his stunned body submerged  
in swirling, breathless water.

Thirty feet farther down  
where the river was solid ice  
he must have gone under--  
sucking in water until the cold  
and lack of oxygen  
locked him to an endless sleep.

I shook my head, not believing anyone  
could be so deliberate, so sure  
his life was less bearable  
than an icy trip down a frozen river.

Then I looked to the other side.  
Exactly opposite, the footprints  
started up again--regularly measured,  
those same footprints of a man going out  
for his morning newspaper and coffee.

Water. Right. Left. Right.....

I stood transfixed, eyes searching  
from bank to bank for some gimmick,  
for some explanation of the miraculous.

## Sleeping in Ice

Today we walk, lock-jawed,  
our feet crunch through  
re-frozen snow, our white breath  
dissolves in air. The trail  
shadows the creek's path, winds  
through miles of wilderness.  
Pine branches, hands  
reaching for the sun--bend, sag  
towards earth under the weight  
of winter. Wind, light  
as a woman's breath, touches off  
small avalanches that cascade  
like waterfalls down pine boughs.  
This morning you said  
we never talk anymore.

I brought you here  
where there are no excuses  
for silence. We walk out  
onto a small frozen lake, each step  
cautious, fearing a weakness  
in ice. At the lake's center  
we embrace and your cold hands  
reach inside my shirt, shock  
warm skin from hibernation  
while your mouth speaks a language  
any man can understand.  
Wide-eyed beneath our feet  
lies a rainbow trout  
frozen in the thick ice  
waiting, waiting  
for the sun's tentative kiss.

## Shadows on the Brain

Awake again before dawn  
I sit on my front porch  
watching sagebrush struggle  
against autumn wind and tumbleweeds fly  
over dry earth. My eyes burn red  
from dusty air and lack of sleep.  
For four nights running my mind  
has not relaxed, not trusted  
the night enough to journey into dream.

Insomnia is not my natural state.  
Like an addict unable to get a fix  
I don't wear these nights well, writhing  
hour after hour in sweat-soaked sheets.  
I try to lie still, try  
to gather confidence from my wife's  
sleeping body. But I do not sleep  
and she does not wake--she's unaware  
of my hand that cups her breast,  
unaware of the vise grip  
night has put on sleep.

The sun rises. Its light clears  
my mind, chases away any ghosts  
still lingering. In daylight, the menace  
of night seems foolish, all fears  
disappear with darkness, shadows  
lift from the brain. The rising sun  
restores trust--reaffirming  
my faith in awakenings.

## The Attraction of Night

lies in your white flesh and moonlight,  
in the silhouette of a crooked oak  
stripped naked by winter, in my soft bite  
that marks your skin. Tonight, I woke

behind you, my right hand on your breast  
badly needing to drag you from sleep,  
to wrap myself around you and press  
into your dreams, to force my way deep

beneath your eyes. I want to hear  
your ragged breath and feel muscles go tight  
before your head has begun to clear  
and your body reacts from instinct. Tonight,

frozen branches scrape against our windows  
as we make love beneath their vibrant shadows.

## Waiting for Eve

Remember what has been foretold and forgotten.  
Remember that I shake, see the future  
captured in lakes of color that flash  
at the back of my brain: faces, young ones  
playing in the street, empty graves waiting  
knee-deep in rainwater, women's profiles  
framed by coffins. I could choose this  
to be my future. Tonight, I don't finger pages  
of ear-marked erotica or sip whiskey on ice,  
instead I sit and deliberate through glass,  
staring into darkness.

This is what I observe--that my cat's frostbitten claws  
streak against the window, its bleeding paws  
beg in from the cold. That across the street  
the cemetery sleeps and headstones decay,  
that dry rot works hard on bones and wind gusts  
drop orange and red leaves which bury  
the ground; and Eve, she's there in white,  
stooped over, glowing, a flower blooming  
out of blackness. Her beautiful hands, her magic  
hands check the pulse of old Mr. Blakemore  
who spends each night sleeping with his face  
flat against his wife's marble gravestone.  
I can see Eve smile to herself and laugh,  
then reach inside his heart in search of life  
and extract a blood-sticky cluster  
of throbbing peach pits. She's never understood  
why he's bothered to stay alive, living only  
to mourn a wife five years dead. Tonight, instead  
of returning life to his chest, she deposits it  
into her pocket. I can see all this from my window.

Remember that I have told you this. Eve came  
to me late one night from the center  
of a magazine. She's young and warm  
and each night she allows me only one  
short kiss. She says there'll be nothing more  
until I give in. Remember that nothing  
is simple: Eve likes the way children scream  
when they're cut and she likes the way tears  
taste when licked from cheeks. On some nights  
her hands are stiff and cold. Remember that  
she frightens me. Yet tonight I must decide...

This is what I know--that Eve is lovely  
and all I've ever wanted. That she likes  
the way flowers smell when burned  
with gasoline, and she likes to lie

(no stanza break)

in brown grass and breathe in the smoke  
and smile. She likes to watch rats  
scavenge meat from the carcasses of runover dogs  
and cats. She likes to talk about hurling  
a sledgehammer at the moon, watch it shatter  
into a million pinpricks of light  
that will define a new galaxy. She talks  
a lot that way. Sometimes she recites  
the list of deaths that would result  
from our marriage. Children, grandchildren,  
great-grandchildren...The weight of guilt  
grows infinite but tonight I must decide.  
Remember that it has been 40 cold  
and lonely years, 40 years with nothing,  
not even a gravestone to sleep by.

Remember that this is what  
the cards say. This is fate  
determined by stars. This is  
what has been foretold  
but forgotten--that tonight  
she'll come, take me  
warmly by the hand into sharp  
autumn air, lead me past  
the slumbering graveyard, past  
dead Mr. Blakemore sprawled  
next to the forgotten memory  
of his wife. We'll cut a path  
through a field of waist-high  
golden wheat that borders  
a laboring orchard. Tonight  
she'll sit me in a wicker chair,  
then kneel on frosty blond grass.  
Her eyes will be round and cold  
as the harvest moon, and we'll talk  
in the shadow of apple trees  
that weep for dead children.

Tonight, she'll hand me the blood-sticky  
peach pits from her pocket, promise  
that this is the way it will always be  
and ask if I can hear our young, unborn  
ones dying. And tonight, Eve will stand,  
the silhouetted curves of breast and hip  
demanding an answer. My knotted veins  
will clutch and start and my heart  
will grimace at the sputter  
of words. And tonight, despite  
it all, I'll shudder--Yes. Yes.



## II. TRANSLATIONS

Whitman once wrote that anyone wishing to learn to write poetry would do well to study the dynamics of a wave before setting pen to paper. For the translator, that difficulty is compounded by the need to remove that wave from its living ocean of language and to cart it in a bucket to a foreign shore where one is expected to resurrect it, glistening arc and spindrift mantle intact.

William Pitt Root,  
"Trying to Catch a Wave in a Bucket"

Black Stone over White Stone

(from the Spanish of Cesar Vallejo)

I will die in Paris with pelting rain,  
this is a day I have already remembered.  
I will die in Paris--on a day I do not fear--  
possibly a Thursday, a day like today, in autumn.

Thursday, certainly a Thursday, because today  
I write these lines with a hand tired of pen,  
and never before on my journey, my long journey,  
have I felt so tired and alone.

Cesar Vallejo is dead, they beat him  
the innocent, for no reason but their pleasure;  
they beat him badly with billy clubs and hard

with wet ropes; his testimony, his witnesses  
are the Thursdays, the tired hands and aching bones;  
the isolation, the rain, the journey. . .

The Angel of Numbers

(from the Spanish of Rafael Alberti)

Virgins with T-squares  
and compasses watch over  
the heavenly blackboards.

And the angel of numbers,  
pensive, flies  
from 1 to 2, from 2  
to 3, from 3 to 4.

Cold chalks and sponges  
streak and erase  
the light of spaces.

Neither sun, moon, nor stars,  
not even the sudden green  
bolt of lightning,  
not even the air. Only mist.

Virgins without T-squares,  
without compasses, are weeping.

And on dead blackboards,  
the angel of numbers,  
without life, shrouded  
over the 1 and the 2,  
over the 3, over the 4. . .

The High School Angels

(from the Spanish of Rafael Alberti)

None of us knew the dark secrets of blackboards  
or why the heavenly sphere stood so exalted.  
We only knew that circumference isn't always round  
and that an eclipse of the moon confuses flowers  
and disrupts the clocks of birds.

None of us knew anything:  
not even why our fingers became stained with India ink  
or why afternoon closed compasses and dawn unlocked books.  
We only knew that straight lines sometimes break or curve  
and that errant stars are children ignorant of arithmetic.

## The Sleepwalking Angels

(from the Spanish of Rafael Alberti)

1

Consider that hour:  
when in darkness, the invisible eyes  
of bedrooms rebelled against the king.

You know, you know. Leave me be!  
If along my way cravasses open in snow,  
graves of still water,  
nebulae of rusted dream,  
then lock your eyelids with a key.  
What more do you want?

Large, invisible eyes attack.  
Incandescent prongs sink into partition walls.  
Dead pupils rolled back  
like bed sheets.

A king is a porcupine of eyelashes.

2

Also,  
also in darkness, the invisible ears  
of bedrooms rebel against the king.  
You know that my mouth is a well of names,  
of dead names and dead letters.  
The echoes become disgusted without my words  
and what I never said despises and hates the wind.  
There's nothing for you to hear.  
Leave me alone!

But ears grow large against the chest.  
Plaster ears, cold,  
fall to the throat,  
to blood's slow cellars,  
to the tubes of bones.

A king is a porcupine without secrets.

The Surviving Angel

(from the Spanish of Rafael Alberti)

Remember.

The snow brought drops of sealing wax, of molten lead  
and a cunning young girl that killed a swan.  
A gloved hand scattered light and slow death.  
Heaven's defeat, a friend's.

Remember that day, remember  
and don't forget that surprise paralyzed the pulse and color  
of stars.

In the cold, two ghosts died.  
For a bird, three gold rings  
were found and buried in frost.  
A man's last voice bloodied the wind  
and all the angels lost their lives  
except one, wounded, unable to fly.

The Greedy Angel

(from the Spanish of Rafael Alberti)

People stood on street corners  
of towns and nations that aren't on maps,  
talking.

That man is dead  
and he doesn't know it.  
He wants to hold-up the bank,  
steal clouds, stars, and comets of gold  
to buy himself more difficulties:  
the heavens.  
And that man is dead.

Earthquakes shake behind his forehead.  
Earth tumbles loose,  
echoes madness,  
confused sounds of hoes and pick axes  
in his ears.  
In his eyes,  
the brilliance of acetylene,  
humidity, the golden gallery.  
In his heart,  
explosions of stone, joy, and dynamite.

He dreams of mines.

To the Cart Driver's Daughter

(from the Italian of Rocco Scotellaro)

I can't be near you any longer  
someone stifles the voice in my breast;  
you, the cart driver's sixth daughter  
who takes the breath away from my chest.  
Because beneath us in the stable  
the mules rustle in their sleep,  
because your father snores nearby,  
he hasn't left yet, high on his cart  
scaring away stars with the flick of his whip.



And This Portrait All Feet

(from the Italian of Rocco Scotellaro)

In a cavern at the alley's end  
queer faces peer round the old woman's corpse--  
the toes of her worn shoes are fastened  
with the shreds of their oilcloth soles.  
You see her distant face propped on a pillow,  
her belly swollen full with camomile.  
And this portrait all feet you see  
from the doorway where you dance.

## The Magician

(from the French of Jean Tardieu)

I do not believe in anything in any person  
except for the long gone magician of children's balls  
the shabby, pale magician  
with the wrinkled face beneath the paint.

His top hat was laid upside down the table  
he covers it with a red silk scarf  
and suddenly  
he removes it and watch what emerges from the hat:  
an egg a rabbit a flag  
a bird my life and yours and the dead  
he hides them behind the scenes  
for a wretched  
PAYMENT.

## The King's Meal

(from the French of Jean Tardieu)

The profile's beak, the world's terror  
eye stupid and cruel  
the strong shoulder, elegant  
breast bone in medallion, cloak of feathers  
and the evening fan,  
close to the top, Saturn  
at the center of the feast.

On his knees  
he tears apart a heifer's naked breasts,  
beneath his obstinate feet  
a fish, cormorant prepares.

God of gods, king of kings  
he himself operates  
his sacrifices,  
simultaneous  
metamorphoses.

Cassandra Leaves the Stage

(from the French of Jean Tardieu)

If life's vigilance  
slackens, if suddenly  
you turn around,  
beware of the horror  
the tragedy in the bedroom.

A moment of silence,  
the floor rises.  
She is blind Cassandra  
three mouths in flame  
a robe of leaves  
female commander.

Her two wooden hands  
at the end of the corridor  
point to Destiny.

Widow in a Violin Coat

(from the French of Jean Tardieu)

Crow's wings  
instead of a head  
the wick of a bomb  
close to exploding.  
Pretty dancer's feet.  
Slippers bought at the Samar',  
Samaritans, who haggle  
cobras and camels.  
(Within this hollow box  
a violin coat  
a chicken's eye an anxious eye  
a vulture hides).

On the wall the portrait  
of your late husband,  
headless.  
Well-dressed, he hanged himself  
to leave you, a widow  
with your problems.

## Ogre Turned into Thorns

(from the French of Jean Tardieu)

His anger without cause  
old age avenges itself  
unjust suspicion  
I watch him, he observes me:  
his chieftain's nose  
his sharp cold eye  
make me afraid, I am his prey.

But if I tilt my head,  
through this fury  
thorn and leaf show themselves:  
transparent, he changes  
into a thorn bush  
(This is no less menacing  
the eye is always dangerous).

Immense ogres, concealed  
in the sketch of the things,  
rosebushes, a riddle of ferociousness  
to be feared, to be deciphered.

Lord Vulture Lady Pelican

(from the French of Jean Tardieu)

The race of vultures  
in evening cape  
is lost and if Madame  
(born Pelican)  
beneath a long skirt  
displays her breast half nude,  
I see a scarf of flames  
undulating on her hips.

Already the forked foot  
of the Enemy of men  
points perilously.

The skiff which carries them  
(an upside down head)  
rises with smoke.

Cicada of Space

(from the French of Jean Tardieu)

Web, funeral wheel,  
eye sun spider,  
you turn in your ash  
time has taken away.

Between your lonely snare  
and the reflection of the other dead  
a beautiful woman, abandoned,  
crawls on the sand.

For shade she has her hair  
invisible face

but I hear the cicada of space  
crying to her

Useless torture  
she will burn.



### III. FICTION

The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe in it willingly.

Wallace Stevens

Worms

--Where are my children--you ask, rising from the piano stool upon the completion of a Beethoven sonata. You seem to take offense at my presence, notice me only if I happen to enter your field of vision. This distance I have grown accustomed to. You act as though it is your natural right.

--Outside, playing quietly in the side yard--I answer obediently, not wishing to upset you, though I have never seen you upset. I smile and smooth a few wrinkles from the cotton fabric of my skirt.

--On which side are they playing: the north or the south--you ask, surprising me since you usually take no interest in the play of your children. I am a little taken aback, faltering in my attempt to form an answer.

--They're on the north side, sir--my voice cracks slightly mid-sentence. Your eyes rise up into mine, their blue

dullness cuts off any attempt to finish the sentence. I planned to explain what the children are doing, but your eyes dictate silence.

--Near my rosebushes--you ask calmly, turning to face the mantel above the spotless fireplace, reaching for a finely carved meerschaum pipe, running your thumb and forefinger over the pipe's bearded face before taking it from its wooden holder.

--Yes--I say, shocked at the intensity of your interest. In the few weeks I have worked for you, you have never said more than a sentence concerning the children. It has never been more than--The children must not leave the table until they've cleaned their plates--or--Their lights must be out by nine o'clock, no exceptions--Your peculiar behavior has thrown me completely off balance.

--What are they doing--you ask, facing me again, extracting a small pouch of pipe tobacco from your silk smoking jacket. You meticulously load your pipe, packing it with the precision you give to all matters.

--They're digging worms, sir--I say, pleased that the children are occupied and causing no harm. I smile at you and run my hands over the width of my hips.

--With my spade and trowel from the shed--you ask, distressing me in your attention to detail. You sit in a red leather chair and signal for me to slide the ottoman beneath your slippered feet.

--Yes--I say, lifting your feet gently onto the leather ottoman, being especially careful not to jar you.

--I'm sure I've mentioned before that the spade and trowel are only to be used by me--you say firmly, looking away at a large portrait of your father hanging on the wall.

--No--I say, frightened by my contradiction of you.

--Then I'm sure the children mentioned it to you--you say, stroking your bearded chin.

--No, sir--I say, locking my eyes on your feet.

--The children are being very bad today. They know they should never use my gardening tools. And--you stop, shake your head--they are never to play near my rosebushes--you cross your feet on the ottoman and take a long draw from your pipe. You shake your head and frown faintly, almost indetectably.

--I'm sorry sir. If I only would have known I would have

forbid them from your tools and the rose garden--your frown has been replaced by a look of puzzlement.

--Why are they digging worms. I don't recall any of them being avid anglers, though it might be a healthy hobby for them to take up. I could stock the lake with bass or catfish. But they don't have any poles, they're not outfitted for fishing. They weren't planning on a spur of the moment fishing expedition, were they--you ask, eyebrows raised in seemingly genuine interest.

--No, no, sir. I assure you it wasn't that--I step back from the ottoman, trying to increase the distance between us. The pressure of your questions thickens the air. It is all I can do not to fan myself with my hand.

--Well, next week I will stock the lake and buy them rods and instruct them how to fish properly. Fishing is a sport which must be taught properly if it is to bring the correct amount of pleasure. My father taught me--you say looking again at the stern-faced man glaring down on us--If the worms aren't for fishing, what are they for--you ask, your head cocked barely to one side and eyes focussed somewhere near the piano as you attempt to logically determine the purpose of the worms.

--The children wanted pets, sir. Remember last week--I say,

again faltering, knowing very well that you will remember it word for word.

--Worms as pets--you ask incredulously, your eyebrows raised in horror.

I cross my arms under my breasts and continue--Last week the children asked you if they could each get a kitten. When you said no they were heartbroken, they were so set on getting kittens. They wouldn't come out of their room for two days and only played with their food. Today, they brought up the subject of pets again and I suggested worms. I got them each a glass bowl to put the worms in. I told them before they brought the worms inside, they would have to wash them thoroughly so no dirt would come into the house--

--You told them they could bring worms into my house--you ask, shaking your head.

--I thought worms would make such nice house pets. They're so much easier to care for than kittens and much less messy--

--Your point concerning worms as pets is well-taken. They are easy to care for and relatively clean if washed before being brought in. But--you say, removing your glasses, wiping them with your monogrammed handkerchief--the choice of worms as pets is highly irregular--

--I'm sorry sir. Worms were the only thing I could think of.  
And the children were so unhappy--

--There were two reasons I did not allow the children to have kittens. Kittens' propensity to make messes was only the secondary reason why I forbade the children from having them. The primary reason concerns a cat's tendency to dig in gardens. As you know, cats always dig holes when they are in need of relieving themselves. As you probably don't know, not being a dedicated rose gardener, rose roots are quite near the surface and are very susceptible to damage from digging cat claws--

--I didn't know that, sir--I say, worried about the fate of your rosebushes.

You continue--Broken roots can hinder a rose's growth for years. I didn't feel the tradeoff was worth it: cats for damaged roses. Especially four cats. Imagine what sort of damage they could do. But I wasn't aware that the children were so intent on kittens. Maybe I need to re-evaluate their request--you put your glasses carefully back on.

--I didn't know cats destroyed roses--

--No, I suppose you wouldn't--

--Should I have the children stop digging in the garden, sir--I ask, experiencing a sense of urgency to stop them from doing anymore damage to the roses' sensitive roots.

--Yes. Tell them to wash up and put on clean nightshirts. Then have them report to my study for their spankings--you push away the ottoman with your feet and stand.

--Please sir, don't spank them. It's my fault, I told them it was all right--I blush, knowing I should never contradict you.

--Whether you told them it was all right or not is totally irrelevant. The children know the rules of the house. They were established long before you arrived. Now tell them they should be in my study within an hour. And remind them not to wear underclothes. For spankings they never wear underclothes--You walk over and seat yourself on the piano stool and flip through a few pages in your music book.

--Sir, it's my fault. I just felt sorry for them. They wanted pets so badly. Spank me instead of them if you must spank someone--You turn your head and stare at me with an incredulous look. I feel weak under your eyes.

--Don't be melodramatic. We don't spank adults here. It's



too late for adults to learn by that method--You turn again to your music book--After you summon the children, phone the employment agency and request a new nanny to be sent out tomorrow. You are definitely not the right person for this job--You begin to play the first few notes of a piano transcription of "Eine Kleine Nacht Musik." You act as if I had vanished from your presence.

--Sir, why are you dismissing me? Please don't dismiss me, I have no where else to go--I walk towards you. I am crying and I can not control the tears.

--Because, like their mother, you take the children's side against me. I need someone who will help train them correctly. They don't need sympathy. Their lives are simple and duty free. Their only task is to learn how to follow a few simple rules. I can't have an adult working for me who spoils them. That would be counterproductive to everything I'm trying to achieve--Your eyes are on me, enforcing the even beat of your words. Your voice has remained steady without a trace of anger.

--Please don't fire me, I'll obey you--I'm on my knees at your feet, begging--I'll do whatever you want. Just tell me what you want--my hands clutch tightly to your thigh.

--All right, I'll give you one more chance. After you call

in the children, go outside to the shed. Inside it you will find a three-foot bamboo pole. Take the small hatchet and split the bamboo pole in half. Bring the two switches to my study. When the children arrive you will discipline the boys and I the girls. You will follow my actions exactly. Each will get 20 strokes, 10 on each buttock. If you can do a convincing job of it, you won't have to call the employment agency--I smile up at you and wipe away my tears.

--Thank you sir for giving me another chance. I'll do whatever you want--I tremble as you stroke my hair with a firm hand.

--I hope you make good use of your second chance. Perhaps you can learn from your mistakes. Perhaps tomorrow I'll go pick up four kittens. I don't wish for anyone to be unhappy. All I want is for everyone to obey the rules--you run your hands down my shoulders--We'll just have to train the kittens to stay out of the rose gardens. If the kittens go into the gardens, they'll just have to be punished with the switches. Kittens should be easier to train than children--

--Yes sir. Kittens should be easier to train than children, no doubt about it--I smile warmly up into your eyes.

--If you can overcome your weakness maybe I'll teach you about rose gardening. Maybe then you'll understand about the

roots. Maybe if you can properly discipline the children I'll be able to make your job permanent--I drop my head onto your leg and put my arm around your back--The children have been needing a new mother for a long time but I haven't been able to find a suitable replacement as of yet. . . .--

\* \* \*

--Where are my children--you ask, not looking up from the leather-bound book resting on your lap. You seem to take offense at my presence, noticing me only if I happen to enter your field of vision.

--Outside, waiting quietly in the hall--I answer obediently, not wishing to upset you, though I have never seen you upset.

--Good. I suppose you have them properly dressed for spankings--I nod my head yes. You smile and rub your bearded jaw with thumb and forefinger--Do you have the switches--

--Yes--I hand you two evenly split bamboo switches. You examine them thoroughly and smile your faint, almost joyless smile.

--Excellent work--you say, swishing each switch in turn through the air--When you let the children in I will discuss their disobedience and punishment with them. While I am

doing so, you will dispense with their worms. Tomorrow they will have kittens. Don't you think kittens will make better pets than worms--

--Yes sir--I answer eagerly, happy that you would consult me.

--I believe flushing the worms down the toilet will be the easiest way to dispose of them--You look up to the painting of your father and nod your head yes. He seems to take part in much of your decision making--Return to this room in ten minutes and we will get on with their spankings--You stand and gently kiss me on the forehead--Now let the children in--

I usher the children into your study and shut the dark-stained walnut door. I go upstairs to the children's rooms and collect the worms. In the bathroom, I take a worm from its glass bowl and feel its soft, pink flesh writhe helplessly in my hand. The spineless, segmented body expands and contracts trying to escape my intense inspection. I am about to toss the unsuspecting worm into the toilet but the worm's warm and clean skin feels almost human. I bring the worm's squirming body to my mouth, lick its damp flesh gently with my tongue. Flushing the worms down the toilet would not be the proper thing to do. I am surprised that you suggested it. No, I will not put them down the toilet. I will return them to the rose garden where they will resume their slow tunnelling into your carefully tended soil.

## The Man in the Pine

There is a man in a black silk top hat climbing a pine. A trail of blood is frozen to his face and down the front of his coat. He doesn't know that his wife of one day will soon betray him. As he climbs, night falls like a gray tablecloth over the valley, draping slowly over stoney peaks. The man in the pine finds tree climbing very rough going. The branches are thin and slick and covered with snow: he can't push the fear of falling from his mind. Tired, he stops, wraps his arms and legs around the slender trunk, and braces himself in a nest of slick branches. He thinks of how his wife looked last night lying back in her half-unbuttoned wedding gown: her small breasts warm in the fire light, her light brown skin radiant against white silk. Tiny unwanted tears freeze in his eyelashes.

In the beginning, everything seemed easy. The Catholic wedding posed the only difficulty. He feared the mysterious intricacies of the ceremony. But he mastered the motions,

and could have convinced even the most devout of his knowledge of the Catholic rituals. Monica made it possible. He would have done anything to have her. And after the wedding, everything was simple. As they walked from the church, rice rained from the clear sky and some of the grains slipped down their clothes and stuck to their bodies. At the reception, they cut cake and drank champagne, and finally Monica tossed her bouquet out to a throng of eager sorority sisters. And then it was over. They walked out from the reception and smiled as they got into their car and waved to family and friends. And finally they drove off with cans bouncing on asphalt, cans that slowly dispersed along the highway during the hundred-mile drive to the mountains.

At dusk they arrived. The log cabin that they had rented for a week bordered a large national forest. Monica had gone there often when she was a girl. Last summer they had driven there and picnicked at nearby Placid Lake. The small green lake had been deserted and cold but they still went swimming. Monica wanted to try out her new two-piece swimsuit. In the water he came up behind her and held her around the waist, pulled her tightly against him, felt her smooth cold skin against his. He ran his hands up and down her sides, felt the soft curves of breast and hip, kissed her neck until finally she wriggled away. Not till after the wedding, she said smoothly swimming towards the center of the lake, not until after the wedding. And so he waited.

Last night he brought their bags into the cabin and

started a fire. He opened a bottle of champagne and shot the cork at the ceiling. The sticky liquid foamed over onto his hands and the floor. Then they sat together and drank out of plastic cups, talking awkwardly about the wedding, about skiing tomorrow. The alcohol helped to evaporate their anxiety. After drinking the first bottle, they moved the couch in front of the fire. They set their feet on the raised brick hearth and opened a second bottle. Half-way through their third bottle they began undressing each other with sloppy kisses and clumsy hands. He was surprised by her need. Before she had always seemed elusive, almost distant when he touched her. But now she pulled him towards her, directing his body to hers. And later, much later, drunk, Monica told him about her past loves. He had asked expecting there to be none. He was surprised at the list. The first had been during her sophomore year in high school. He couldn't understand why she had made him wait so long.

Monica didn't know why she hadn't told him earlier that she had changed. For years she'd had too many one night stands, too many men she didn't really like. And then one night, dancing in a bar with a man she'd slept with before, he asked her to spend the night with him. She said no, she just felt like dancing. He bought her more drinks and kissed her on the neck and ear when they danced slow. He kept asking her and she kept saying no. About midnight he disappeared; she ended up walking home alone. That night she decided to wait, no more screwing around in bars, no more men

she hardly knew. She would wait until she knew a man for a few months, wait for someone who cared about her. When she met her husband she made him wait, and the months stretched into a year. He proposed and she thought why not wait for the wedding. It would be more special. And so she never told him anything about her past; she never said anything about her lovers. At the time, she didn't know how to go about telling him. So last night, after making love and drinking champagne, she told him everything. She was glad to be free of the guilt but she could see she was hurting him. When she finished telling him, she was crying and he held her head against his chest. She fell asleep loving him more than ever before.

The next morning he woke Monica and asked her to go for a walk with him in the woods. She said she was tired and her head still hurt from the champagne. He told her he needed to talk. She told him to go without her, they could talk later. He said he'd be back in an hour. She kissed him on the cheek and smiled, her eyes bribing him with promise. Before leaving he saw his black silk top hat sitting on a table near the door. He decided to wear it. It seemed like the correct thing to do.

The morning was beautiful and a light snow fell. The air was crisp and it felt good in his lungs. As he walked, he noticed abandoned bird nests and thought of the birds returning in spring. He started up a gentle slope, wandering through lodgepole pines and replaying last night in his mind.



He imagined Monica's past lovers, saw her swimming naked in the river, saw her boyfriend's hands greedily exploring her body. How could he trust her? Of course he had others before her, but not so many. And he had never kept it secret. She had held back this information for over a year, never telling him anything about this part of her past. She had pretended all along to be a virgin. As he walked, he paid no attention to the snow and wind and lodgepole pines or to where he was going. He simply wasn't aware of how easy it was to get carried away by gusts of swirling snow and thoughts of jealousy.

So he made his way through the hedge-thick forest paying no attention to where he was going. He passed a weathered tarp hanging from a tree at the edge of a clearing and wondered why the campers had left it. Inspecting the tarp he found no holes in it--had the campers simply forgotten it? Strange, he thought, heading back into the forest. He liked the feel of the pines' feathery boughs against his face and he thought of his wife's long blond hair. He remembered the way it felt last night when she was on top of him, kissing him, tickling him, teasing him with the tips of her curly hair. He could not imagine anything better.

As he walked he lost track of time and his mind went someplace else: lying cozily in bed with his wife, wrapped inside her arms and legs, dreaming in the scent of her body. He imagined returning to the cabin and crawling into her bed and licking the faint saltiness of her skin. He would tell

her never to talk about her past again, and he would never talk about his. It was better that way, it was something to forget. But why had she always made him wait? Even the one night they'd spent together camping, alone, drinking whiskey by the campfire. She had let him kiss her, touch her. But when they had gotten into their tent, she climbed into her sleeping bag and zipped it up. He had known there was no use trying to convince her. But even then he couldn't understand. No other woman had ever been like this. Maybe a week or a month, but they'd gone out for over a year and she kept saying no, no I want to wait.

He never knew what finally jarred him back to where he should have been. Maybe it was a branch cracking underfoot or the sonic boom of an air force jet. But whatever it was, it brought him back to the forest, the snow, and the lodgepole pines. He started thinking about what time it was, but he couldn't see the sun which was hidden behind the clouds. He guessed it was about noon. He knew that he was late and that he'd better get back.

After he left his wife he thought he'd just walk in the snowy woods for an hour and think about his wife's warm body. He would remember kissing her beneath layers of blankets last night and remember the way her perfume smelled and the way champagne tasted on her breath. Then he would follow his tracks back to the cabin. They would talk about last night and forget. But when he woke from his dream, he found snow falling hard and wind starting white waterfalls that fell

from the trees, sometimes falling onto his head and shoulders, sometimes slipping down the collar of his coat, chilling his back and chest.

Soon he realized that he'd lost his way. His path dissolved like the dream, slowly fading into drifting snow, and then there was nothing left but the cold. He imagined his wife warm in bed, her hands pulling him in towards her. But now there was nothing but wind and snow and lodgepole pines. He was lost in a forest so thick he couldn't see for more than thirty feet in any direction. He noticed his hands and feet were cold.

That was when his wife started to think about calling for help. It was already past noon and he'd been gone for at least two hours. She'd twice dialed the police but hung up. She was worried--where could he be? She was sure he'd be back soon. He was always late. He had been an hour late last week when he was supposed to take her to the health club after work. She'd waited in the lobby thinking he'd been in a car wreck until finally he'd shown. So she decided to wait a little longer, imagining him wandering through the woods, paying no attention to the time. But she was worried for him. She'd heard of people getting lost in these woods and was starting to snow hard outside. But what if they started the search and he walked through the door? What would she say? What would he say?

He continued on his way, not remembering whether he walked up this hill or down that one, or whether he just

walked parallel to the slope. He couldn't remember if he'd crossed any streams. For a while he followed deer tracks but they seemed to double back on themselves. But he kept moving, trudging through snow drifts, tripping over unseen rocks and fallen branches, feeling his legs start to chill. Occassionally he would stop and try to find his bearings, until he realized that in this forest in falling snow there were no bearings to find.

Monica finally called the police. She imagined her husband going in circles in the forest. She was afraid her husband had fallen, slipped and possibly broken a leg. The sheriff sent over an off-duty officer who lived nearby. The young officer did not want to scare her. He could see she was worried so he didn't tell her they seldom found people lost in lodgepole pines in winter. He didn't tell her how close the pines grew together, so close in some places that a man had to walk sideways just to make his way. He never said her husband had no chance of surviving the night the way he was dressed. He never told her an arctic storm was coming down from Canada, that the winds were picking up, and that the temperature was quickly dropping. He didn't want to make the beautiful young woman cry.

The man in the top hat was sure he was headed in the right direction. He thought he'd see the cabin any minute, or at least the chimney spilling gray smoke warm as his wife's breath. He could picture his wife looking out the window, her naked body pressed against the glass. He still

didn't know that this is what snow and wind and cold and lodgepole pines did to people. He had learned nothing yet. He still didn't know that these are the things that turn lost men in circles until hope is wrung from the mind.

Search and Rescue began to comb the forest. They couldn't follow his tracks which appeared and disappeared as though he'd magically hopped from one spot to another. They knew their was only three more hours of light. One of the rescuers said, this is like trying to find a needle in a haystack. They didn't know it would be harder than that. The man with the tall hat was over five miles away and headed in the wrong direction.

The man in the top hat had not dressed for cold. When he left the cabin it had been just below freezing. There had been no wind and he was only going for a short walk in the woods. Now his feet, he couldn't feel his feet, and his fingers would hardly move. He was sure he was right next to his cabin. It was only that he couldn't see very far. Maybe he'd already passed it, missed it by a few hundred feet. Maybe he should turn back, or turn right, maybe he'd find the road. Maybe if he climbed a tree he could see his cabin or at least the gray smoke curling gently from the chimney. Maybe from the top of a tree he would see his wife waving to him from the front window of the cabin.

The off-duty officer sat down and had coffee with Monica. They talked about a subject they had in common--skiing. They had both raced in high school, both made it to

the state championships seven years ago. That was the reason the officer took the job in the mountains, so he could ski year round. The man and his wife took their honeymoon in the mountains so they could ski for a week. She said it was funny she didn't recognize the officer. She always recognized attractive men. The officer thought the same thing. He couldn't understand how he'd forgotten a woman pretty as her.

It was now after three. Monica was worried and asked the officer when they would find her husband. He lied. He said he was sure they'd find him by dark. Monica was pacing around the room, looking out the window into the snow. The officer told her to sit back down and try to relax. He started a fire and imagined taking her back to his cabin. He thought about how nice it would be to have a wife. It was so lonely to live alone in the mountains. He hoped they wouldn't find her husband.

The man in the top hat decided to climb a pine. He found tree climbing in the snow very difficult indeed. If only he could get to the top, he knew he could see his cabin. But he had trouble gripping branches with stiff hands and he couldn't tell whether his numb feet were firmly planted on the thin boughs. He would never know that if he reached the top of the pine, he would have only seen the tops of thousands of other snow-laced trees. Lost and tired of climbing, all he could think of was his wife lying in bed waiting for him. She was telling him about a boyfriend she

had her first year in college. He was shaking his head, plugging his ears: no, no, no, he didn't want to hear. Why couldn't she please shut up. He didn't want to know anything.

The searchers were disheartened. It was getting dark and they had completely lost his trail. Nothing to go on. They knew they'd have to quit for the day. One of them blew his nose in a bandana and said, we'll probably find the stiff tomorrow, I hate finding them that way.

The man in the top hat still tried to make his way up the pine. It was his only hope. The boughs got thinner-- already one had cracked off beneath the weight of his boot. He had caught himself but banged his nose against the rough bark. Blood ran down from his nose, warm on his lips and chin, freezing on his face and coat. He tipped his head back and looked into the darkening sky while he wiped away blood with a numb hand. How could she have done this to him. What was she doing now, thinking about some man she'd met in a bar who'd taken her to his houseboat for the night. Or was it some other one she'd conveniently forgotten to tell him about. Finally his nose stopped bleeding. He started climbing again, trying to keep his mind on climbing, pretending not to notice the tree swaying in the wind. He felt cold, very cold, as if the warm glow of his wife had been sucked out of him and he stood naked in the snow. He found himself thinking about his wife with her hot breath on his neck, her tongue warm in his ear. He thought about the

wedding and the champagne and the warm drive in their car to the mountains.

The off-duty officer sips whiskey on ice with the wife. There is a fire in the fireplace and the cabin glows with the heat of burning pine. The wife puts her feet on the officer's lap. She asks him to massage them, because they have grown cold on the cabin's plank floor. As the officer rubs her cold feet, she remembers how tightly her husband held her hand coming out of the church. His face had been so happy walking with her through the falling rice. Monica starts to cry. She thinks of last night and how she hurt him. The off-duty officer moves beside her, puts his arm around her shoulder and kisses her on the cheek. Your husband will be all right, he says, lying. He pulls her closer to him and rest a hand on her hip.

The man in the pine stops climbing. He is tired and feels like sleeping. He wraps himself tightly around the pine's trunk, bracing himself on a cluster of branches, and thinks about lying naked with his wife, kissing the warm flesh of her thighs. He thinks of her hands on his face, her hands in his hair. He thinks about lying in front of the fire with her arms and legs wrapped tightly around him. His tears freeze in his eyelashes.

Never before had he thought dying could be such a simple thing. And he never had never really thought about spring when the birds return to the forest and the squirrels, fresh



from hibernation, jump wildly from limb to limb in search of seed. He never thought what they would think seeing a man locked to the trunk of a lodgepole pine. He never thought what they would think when they saw his decaying body--or would they smell him first? Would they see him as a scarecrow, or merely a curio to nip at and peck out of boredom?

The off-duty officer and the wife finish their third drink. They have pulled the couch in front of the fire. She says, there's champagne in the refrigerator. And some leftover wedding cake, too. Monica has stopped crying. The officer goes into the kitchen. He considers himself a lucky man. He has not made love for three months. Monica feels a little drunk and is beginning to have a hard time distinguishing the officer from her husband of one day. She needs a man to hold on to.

The man in the tree never had a chance to think of the future. He never thought about the searchers who had started and given up, who would try again tomorrow and the next day, but would never guess that he climbed a tree, that he was locked forty feet above the earth. All he knows is that he's cold and the sky has gone dark and that he's finally stopped crying.

The man in the black top hat thought everything was simple. He was married and the snow and lodgepole pines were beautiful. He would take a walk in the woods to help forget, then return to make love with his wife in front of the

crackling fire. Now, near death, he has no way to see through the dark, even from his high perch in the pine, that his wife will soon be beneath the off-duty officer, that in three months she will be happily remarried--her light brown skin will be radiant against the white silk of her gown, her long blond hair will tickle the officer's face, her arms and legs will wrap tightly each night around the officer's body. Just before he dies, soon after the sun falls behind the mountains, he thinks of nothing but her. He can see her in the kitchen on a Saturday morning, she would be in a flannel night gown and slippers and her hair would be messy. She would be cooking fried eggs and he would make coffee and sneak behind her, kissing her on the neck and ears. In sweat pants they'd eat together on the front porch, faces in the eastern sun, reading the morning newspaper and watching their dog run along the lawn. He thinks of his wife's blond hair shimmering in the sharp morning sunlight as he dies.

The man in the pine never imagined the officer's cabin in late spring, Monica lying naked in the officer's arms. They will be in front of the fire on a bear skin rug, unaware that the man with the black silk top hat rots near the top of a lodge pole pine only a few miles away. She will not imagine the effect spring has on a frozen corpse. Sometimes she will try to remember him and she'll remember playing tennis the summer before. She'll remember him patiently helping her with her serve, placing her hand carefully on the

racket, showing her how to grip it like a hammer to get the proper spin. He had been so nice. But when she tries to remember his face or picture the spot where he died, her mind will go blank. She will never be able to see him frozen in the snow, buried in a winter grave in the shadow of mountain peaks. Often she will think he really didn't die, that it's just a game, a trick of time. Lying next to the officer, she won't be able to distinguish him from the man in the black top hat. And when she looks through her pictures from the two weddings, she still won't be able to tell the difference between her two husbands. They'll have the same dark brown hair and strong jaw, the same hard brown eyes, the same firm body with black hair on legs and chest, the same eager young hands. And at night, she'll have the same wonderful feeling of having a warm body to share the bed with, someone to help block out her loneliness, the emptiness she feels in the dark . At night, with the officer curled behind her, his damp hand cupping her breast, his warm breath on her neck, they will all seem the same, at night, making love or waiting for sleep, nothing will seem horribly different.

## I Know Your Secrets

He looked at his watch. 4:35, just about time to finish up. In his swivel chair he sat with elbows on his desk, his upper body tilted towards her. She was sitting in a straight-backed chair with body and head leaning back as if to escape his interrogation. Her brown eyes looked down at the ground and she scratched her right ear with the middle finger of her right-hand. He opened his middle desk drawer and took a breath mint from one of his many half-eaten rolls.

He put the mint over to the right side of his mouth and began to speak. "Oh, Mrs. McCrudden, so you thought you didn't have to pay taxes on money earned babysitting in your home? Why is that, Mrs. McCrudden? Maybe I have missed something in the tax laws. Is that possible, Mrs. McCrudden? Have I missed something?"

She was in her mid-thirties, just as he was. She wore bell-bottomed jeans and a flannel shirt; her hair was short and straight and she had bright blue eyeshadow above her eyes. "I don't know. I guess I just wasn't thinking." She

resettled herself in the uncomfortable straight back chair and rubbed at the inside of her left eye.

He switched the mint to the left side of his mouth. His eyes turned hard and he began to smile as he started to speak. "You weren't thinking, Mrs. McCrudden? I would daresay you were cheating, Mrs. McCrudden. Wouldn't you describe your actions better as cheating? Who do you think you're fooling, Mrs. McCrudden? I wasn't born yesterday. I interview eight tax cheats a day, five days a week, fifty weeks a year. I have worked here twelve years Mrs. McCrudden, ever since I graduated from college. And do you know what, Mrs. McCrudden? I can spot a tax cheat the minute they walk in through my door. From the second you walked in my door, I knew. Guilt's that easy to spot."

Mr. Roland Andrew Townsend III leaned back in his government gray swivel chair, folded his white hands in his lap and stared intensely at Mrs. McCrudden. She sat looking uncomfortable, her eyes averting his stare, her hands first in her lap, then at her side. She had nowhere to put her hands. She sniffled and ran her hand under her nose. "Do you need a kleenex, Mrs. McCrudden?" He pulled a box that he kept just for clients from his bottom left-hand drawer.

"Well Mrs. McCrudden, what do you think we do with tax cheats?" No answer. "You know, you're lucky, Mrs. McCrudden. This is your first time, or at least the first time you've been caught. This time, and I'll repeat, this time, you'll get off easy. You'll receive your adjusted tax

returns for the past five years in the mail and a bill for your back taxes and the corresponding interest penalties."

Still leaning back in his chair, he sat watching her. She did not look up at him. She was squirming, he could tell she wanted to leave. She wiped her nose with the wadded kleenex. Roland sat back up in his chair, leaned on the desk, and got as close to her as he could. "Are there any questions? No. Of course not. Good. Sign here if you agree with the audit, then you can go." He passed her the papers to sign. "Well, that's it, Mrs. McCrudden. We've gotten everything straightened out. Thank you for your cooperation. Make sure you're more careful in the future. Next time the penalty will be much more severe. Good day, Mrs. McCrudden."

Mrs. McCrudden left. Roland hated people these days. They didn't even look remorseful when they were caught. They had no respect for the law. That Mrs. McCrudden. She was just waiting to find out how much she owed. Now she's on her way home worrying only about the money. Won't even feel bad.

Roland mentally reviewed the day. Eight successful audits, eight guilty taxpayers. He smiled. Just another day at the office. He took off his black framed glasses and got out his bleached white handkerchief. First he wiped his glasses, then he wiped the bridge of his nose where the glasses rested. Roland was a fifties man--dark suits, usually black, well-cut and fairly expensive. Black shoes and socks. A white shirt with a starched collar. Short,

very dark hair, almost black--enough gel to keep each comb stroke in place. His build was good, square shouldered and firm. If he had worked for a company, he would have been the company's man. He was the government's man. He affectionately thought of himself as a modern day G-man, busting tax criminals and collecting back taxes.

As Roland sat back in his chair temporarily revelling in thoughts of his day, two fellow workers walked by with coats in hand. "Good night, Rolly." They continued on down the hall.

"So long, guys," he said with a grimace on his face. He hated it when they called him Rolly and they knew it. Roland looked at his watch. 4:45. They leave early almost every night. Someone should report them. They are wasting the government's money. He got out his memo pad and made note of this fact.

Roland busied himself with preparing for tomorrow's audits. He reviewed the cases so he would be ready for each one when they came in the door tomorrow. At 5:05 he got his black raincoat, umbrella, and briefcase. He took a quick look around his office which was really just a cubicle made of government-issue portable tan walls. Everything was in order. Desk calculator in gray plastic cover. Papers all put away. Pens and pencils in drawers. He popped in a breath mint. It was time to go.

Roland walked down the dirty gold carpeted hall out to the reception area. "Good night, Roland," Miss Peters said

to him. She was a big woman, nearly as tall as Roland and a little overweight. Her bleached-blond hair was worn high in a beehive and she had bright red lips. She smiled at him and batted her eyes behind lavender-framed oval glasses. "Good night, Miss Peters."

"Another wild night on the town, Roland? Why don't you take me for a walk on the wild side?" This was her little joke with him. Every few nights she did this. They were usually the last two to leave. "Are you going to stop by tonight? Around midnight, for a nightcap?"

"Maybe next week, Miss Peters." He started for the door.

"Come on, Roland. We could do something together. Maybe this weekend. Why don't you bring me some flowers tomorrow? Then I could take you home and we could have dinner together." She smiled at him.

"I'll see you tomorrow, Miss Peters. Good-bye." He walked out the door. Bring some flowers, come over for a drink, take a walk on the wild side. You don't need me for that, Betty. I know all about you. Those magazines you read, or should I say look at. Playgirl. Forum. Animal Antics. Big Guys. Enema Digest. Swedish Erotica. I know what you do with those magazines. Do you think I was born yesterday, Betty? You don't need me, Miss Peters. Pretending to be so stuffy, so prissy. I know what you're like. I know how you spend your nights. Roland smiled to himself. He knew about them all. Every one of them had



something to hide and he had something on everyone. The knowledge and the power felt good. Someday one of them would push him too far, and then, he'd hit them where it hurt.

Roland lived for the night. He would dress himself all in black: black boots, black gloves, black shirt, and black pants. He wandered the streets, usually around apartment complexes, sometimes checking in on co-workers. He carried a big black plastic garbage sack to haul the night's take in.

But it had not always been this way. He started out buying everything new, like his parents had done. Then he began to buy used items, going to the Goodwill and junk stores. He loved to get things cheaply--it didn't matter what--just as long as it was at a good price. He bought sets of antique china and silverware, power tools he would never use, and a multitude of clocks. Eventually, he graduated to garage sales, buying other people's junk, things they didn't know the value of. At these sales he would buy old clothes, electric train sets, ionizers, canteens, and more clocks. Roland really had a thing for clocks; there were at least two in each room of his house. At these garage sales he learned a lot about families. He could tell their habits and hobbies. He could tell whether the people were fastidious or whether they were slob. Learning about the people was nearly as enjoyable as buying their junk.

And then it happened. One day Roland was sitting in a cafe having a cup of black coffee and he overheard two

garbage men talking about things they had found on their route. A litter of puppies, a pearl necklace, a handgun, and many others. Roland was amazed, his mind filled with possibilities. He knew that garbage was a bargain hunter's dream.

Soon after, he started on his nightly outings. Never on Fridays, Saturdays, or holidays. On those nights people were out too late, and often they were drunk and would harrass him. It took him only a short time to learn the ropes. Now he knew. As soon as he got home from work he would go to sleep, waking up at midnight, and by one he would be out on his beat. He had organized a regular route, stopping by each can once a week. Some nights he would have to quit early, his bag would be full in an hour or two. Other nights he would stay out till dawn and hardly find a thing. It was an unpredictable hobby, an unpredictable life.

At first he had been rather indiscriminate, taking anything that looked at all interesting: Stuffed animals, children's toys, magazines, books, records and tapes. Now he only took things that were in good condition or repairable-- things of value. He started a collection of electric gadgets: electric can openers, electric pencil sharpeners, electric staplers, electric toothbrushes, electric vibrators, and electric carving knives.

Soon he realized how much he could tell about people from their garbage. He could tell slobs and wastrels (which he hated) from uneaten food and the dirty condition of their

cans. He could deduce people's hobbies and secrets: bowling score sheets, cut golf balls, hair dye, or half-used tubes of Preparation-H. That's when he started checking up on his co-workers' garbage, digging out their secret lives. His naturally investigative mind helped him figure out how they spent their spare time, what they ate, what they drank, what magazines they read. Eventually he could build a whole scenario for their lives. But what he liked best was to uncover their secrets. Some it took only a short time to uncover incriminating evidence, a matter of weeks or months. But others took years.

Now he had something on everybody at work and whenever someone new was hired in the office, he would get right to work on their case. He never really used the information directly against them--no--but sometimes he would apply a little pressure, suggest things and watch the guilt make them uncomfortable.

The night was a little chilly. An early spring wind was gusting occasionally from the East, sending icy drafts up Roland's back. He parked his car three blocks from Miss Peters' house. That would be his first stop tonight. 12:48. He walked down Miss Peters' street, a middle-class suburban street, scanning the houses, looking for excess garbage out by the cans. The houses were mostly ranch style with double garages. Roland usually avoided houses unless he could see something of interest from the street or it was a co-worker's

house. Individual residences were just too risky otherwise. He had had some close calls with them, owners chasing him away, one had threatened to shoot him. A few home owners had mistaken him for a robber; once a naked man with a baseball bat chased him for three blocks. Roland had been glad when the man finally gave up and shouted a string of obscenities; these were much less harmful than a bat.

Roland spotted Miss Peters' house on the right side of the street. It was yellow and looked like the rest except that it had a single garage and a tidy yard. He liked a tidy yard. The garbage can was on the left side of her house, next to the garage. He looked carefully over the house, checking for lights. Miss Peters sometimes stayed up late, so he had to be careful. The lights were all out, so Roland sneaked across her front yard to her shiny steel garbage can. He carefully removed the lid and was surprised to find a red rose wrapped in plastic at the top of the can. He picked up the rose, removed the wrapper and smelled it, then set it on the ground. He fished silently through her garbage with his gloved hands. Nothing but garbage. A few women's magazines, an old pair of pantyhose, the week's accumulation of newspaper, bottles, cans, cardboard, and food scraps. Nothing of value. No new interesting information. She was a very orderly lady, seldom throwing away anything of value. He admired her for that. He hated to see waste at any level.

Roland picked up the rose and debated whether or not to

put it in his sack. He decided not to take the rose, so he gently put it back in Miss Peter's garbage can, set the lid back on, and continued on his way. He started thinking about the rose and looked around for a strange car parked in the street or driveway. He didn't see one. Did she have a boyfriend? Throughout the night he thought about her, surprised to find himself a little jealous of whoever had sent her the rose.

The rest of the night he would spend going to suburban apartment complexes. They were his best hunting grounds for valuable items. The apartments' dumpsters were huge, each usually holding twenty tenants' garbage. People didn't seem to mind, either. The dumpsters usually were in parking lots, nobody thought he was trying to break in.

Apartments were good for another reason, too. The tenants were always moving in or out. He had read once in a magazine that the average person lives in an apartment for only about a year before moving. Usually these tenants left things behind when they moved, things they didn't have room for or time to pack, or things they thought they no longer needed. Bamboo shades that wouldn't fit their new apartment's window, an occasional lamp they had grown tired of. And when tenants moved in, they invariably had to throw some things out. Maybe the apartment was not big enough for all their things so they would have to get rid of their exercycle; or possibly an old dish drainer that didn't match the color of their new kitchen.

His nightly wanderings left him in a quandary. He despised wastrels who threw away valuable items, but he loved finding these same objects. He also understood the American economy, he knew that the industries turn out disposable items so the consumer can dispose of them and buy a new item a few years later. He understood if consumers did not waste goods many of the factories would close and many workers would lose jobs. It was a vicious cycle that he was breaking in his own infinitesimal way.

The first apartment house he stopped at after Miss Peters house was a four-plex. It had a small dark blue dumpster that was very beaten up. Roland opened the right side and peered in. Lots of broken down cardboard boxes. Good. It looked like someone had just moved in. He started rummaging through the trash. He found some clothes, though he never took clothes unless they were of exceptional quality. Near the bottom he found a few odd plates and saucers, some broken, none real nice. Then he saw an electric cord and pulled out an electric coffee grinder. It looked nearly new and even if it didn't work he figured he could fix it. He had taught himself to fix virtually any electric appliance. He shut the lid and looked in the left side of the dumpster. Nothing there. And so he went from apartment house to apartment house, filling his bag with goodies to take home.

It was a slow night, not much happening. Hardly anyone was out. Roland got a shock when he opened a dumpster and a

huge gray possum hissed at him, baring its teeth.

"Goddammit!" he yelled as he dropped the lid and almost lost his black-framed glasses. Things like that happened every once in a while; he should have been used to them.

It was before dawn when he saw a paperboy working his way through an apartment complex. Time to quit. Besides the coffee grinder he had found a leather wallet, a basketball, a 35mm camera, some tire chains, a hearing aid, and a jigsaw. All of these he had in his plastic bag which was now slung over his shoulder as he walked back to his car. Not a good night, but it had been quiet, relaxing except for the possum. He always liked suburbia better than the city. There were fewer wierdos in the suburbs, no bums going through garbage, spilling it all over the ground looking for glass and aluminum to recycle. A few weeks before a bum followed Roland, and asked him if he wanted a partner. Roland liked to work alone and didn't like the mess the bum made. Roland lost him after about twenty minutes and was glad that he hadn't seen him since. He was always very careful never to spill people's garbage.

It was 5:15 when he climbed into his car to go home and deposit his new possessions, and to get himself ready for work. He drove slowly home through the still sleeping city.

Roland parked his car in the driveway and walked over to his basement door. His house was two stories, painted gray with white trim. It was a large house built in the

early 1900's, with a big porch that stretched all the way across the front. Once inside the basement Roland removed all the items from his sack and put them on a counter which led to an old cement laundry sink. Then he proceeded to wash out his sack and clean off all of his new possessions. He put these new things in a stack with all the new things he had found this week. Over the weekend he would fix anything that was broken, then file all in their respective bins or boxes. He had these scattered throughout the basement, attic, and garage. He kept each item grouped, toasters with toasters, dishes with dishes. Each new item already had a place waiting for it. Except for the hearing aid. He'd have to start a new box for hearing aids.

Roland worried that some day he would have to find another house. Already his storerooms were full and beginning to get cluttered. He refused to let his collection spill into the living areas of his house. None of his collection could ever be seen on the first or second floors of his house. Not that it would matter, he seldom had guests over to his house, and those guests who did come over were never shown the garage or basement.

He took a quick look around the basement, admiring all of his possessions. Then he went up two flights of stairs to the second floor where he would shower and change into his auditing clothes. His house was immaculate. No one would ever guess about his hobby, that his basement, attic, and garage were filled with accumulations. By the time he got



downstairs to the kitchen it was 6:30. He made his breakfast and packed a lunch, read the paper and finally at 7:30 left for work. This was his schedule, invariable, Sunday through Thursday.

Roland sat basking in the light emitted from the two fluorescent rods which hung down from the tiled ceiling. He was in his tan burlap covered cubicle, reclining a bit in his swivel chair, nibbling at his lunch as he read from a Reader's Digest Condensed Book which he had found the week before. He almost always spent his lunch hour at his desk, reading a book or magazine, making his brown bag lunch last for the whole hour. He never ate in the employee's lunchroom, there was too much smoking (even though it was prohibited).

It had been a bad day. First of all it was Friday. No work for the next two days. He really enjoyed his work. And then there was his hobby. He never went out on Friday or Saturday night because he often got harrassed. His hobby was his passion, and this he missed even more than work. Secondly, this morning had been the worst he had encountered at work in months. Two of his four scheduled audits failed to show up. Didn't even bother to call. That really infuriated Roland, when they didn't cancel their appointments. At least he had the pleasure of denying many of their deductions and raising their taxes significantly. Of the remaining two morning appointments, one was a slight

accidental mistake by a taxpayer, a premature IRA dispersement that was placed on the wrong line. It affected the taxes only by twenty dollars. Not that Roland wasn't happy to get it straightened out; he didn't care for inaccuracy of any kind. But it seemed rather trivial, not very interesting.

The fourth and last appointment had proved to be the most distressing of all. A Mr. Wolff, a tall, bearded man with graying hair, had business expenses which seemed dubious at best. Roland suspected massive tax fraud, possibly he would recommend prosecution, but this was not to be the case. Mr. Wolff stalked into Roland's cubicle equipped with the most copious set of records that Roland had ever seen. Roland admired the man for his meticulousness. But after the audit (during which the man never sat down) was concluded with everything decided in Mr. Wolff's favor, Mr. Wolff launched a verbal assault on Roland's person and on the Internal Revenue Service in general. He seemed more than perturbed with the fact that he had been audited every one of the last seven years, each time with no irregularities found in his taxes. Roland ended up apologizing for the Internal Revenue Service and for himself, something he seldom had occasion to do. By the end of the interview Roland had gone through four breath mints. Still the episode left a bitter taste in his mouth.

"How's it goin' Rolly?" Roland jumped, jerked from his thoughts, from his book. It was Larry Tripp who worked down

the hall. He was dressed in a trench coat and a thin black leather tie. "Don't you ever get out from behind your desk, Rolly? Why don't you ever come out for lunch?"

"I just like sitting and reading during lunch. It's more relaxing than running around."

"Rolly, you need to stop being such an old maid. You never do anything. You never go out to lunch with us, never go to happy hour. You need to loosen up. Why don't you come to happy hour with us tonight? I'll buy."

Roland sat searching for something to say. He felt like he was being attacked, interrogated for his way of life. How could he get rid of Larry? He felt trapped. He thought about what he knew about Larry, what he had found out about him from his garbage. Roland sniffed a few times. He turned his head towards Larry and sniffed twice more, each time moving his head slightly closer to Larry.

"What is it, Rolly?"

Roland moved closer to Larry and sniffed again. "I just thought I smelled marijuana." Roland saw it in Larry's eyes. A little guilt, a little panic.

"I'll see you later, Rolly. I've got some work to finish before lunch is over. If you change your mind about happy hour, just give me a yell." Larry's last words were said as he turned into his cubicle.

Loudly Roland said, "If I figure out where that smell's coming from, I'll tell you, Larry." Roland laughed a little to himself. He enjoyed the power.

The afternoon went only a little better than the morning. Another absentee and three trivial readjustments which could have been done in five minutes each over the phone. Roland now faced a long weekend, a solitary weekend that always seemed longer after a bad Friday at work. It was 5:10 when he gathered up his things and left his dingy cubicle. As he walked down the hall towards the reception desk he noticed everyone had gone home, the weekends they waited all week for had finally begun. He felt so different from them all.

As he passed through the reception area Miss Peters was just leaving too. They were last out of the office again. "Well, Roland, is tonight going to be the night? My place or yours?" She was in a lavender raincoat which was nearly the same shade as her over-sized glasses.

"I'm sorry, Miss Peters, I'm going to be busy this weekend."

"Come on, Roland. I can cook you a nice dinner. We could watch TV together if nothing else." She had never been quite this forward before. She had never seemed serious before. Roland's face tensed with nervousness and fear.

Miss Peters came up to him and put her arm inside of his. "Roland, I know you're lonely." She smiled into his frightened eyes and touched her hair. Roland was trying to figure out an escape. He was afraid. "Come on, Roland. I know you never do anything on the weekends. You just sit at

home and read or watch TV. We could do that together." She looked him in the eye.

"No, I'm sorry, maybe another time." He looked around the room, everywhere except at her.

"Do you like roses, Roland?"

"As much as the next guy," he said, popping in a breath mint.

"How about red roses, do you like them?"

Roland squirmed away, feeling frightened and trapped. He had never been with a woman before and he felt his face turn pink. "I'm busy tonight, Miss Peters." Roland's face hardened and eyes turned cold and determined. He looked her in the eye. "Anyway, you don't need me. You can just stay home and read your magazines. They'll keep you company." He smiled at her.

"What are you talking about, Roland? I don't think I understand." She smiled at him and looked into his eyes.

"You know what I'm talking about Miss Peters. You don't need me. I know the sort of magazines you read."

"How do you know what sort of magazines I read, Roland?" She spoke gently, almost jokingly.

Roland tried to get past her, but she held on to him. "I really must go," he said.

In a soothing voice she said, "We all have secrets, don't we Roland? What's yours? I know you're not busy tonight. You're free every weekend. You came by my house last night, didn't you?" She paused waiting for an answer

but receiving none she continued. "I left the rose for you, Roland. Since you would never bring me one, I bought one for you. It was rude of you not to take it." Roland's body tensed as if he had been caught in the act. "You come by every Thursday night. You've even looked in my windows before and I've pretended not to see you. You thought you were sneaky. But you didn't know that I followed you and spied on you. I know your secrets too. I know all about your collection and your spying on everyone in the office. I know everything about you."

Roland stood shocked, red-faced in his black suit. Miss Peters put her arm back inside his. "Come on, Roland. You don't go out until Sunday night. You'll come home with me tonight. It won't be so bad." She led him out of the Internal Revenue Service Regional Auditing Office, turning off the lights and locking the door.

## The Persistence of Memory

The last loan applicant had just left. Andrew leaned back in his chair. He had some paper work to finish and would not get home for nearly an hour.

"You must be Greg." Christine's words are more of a statement than a question. Greg watches her face, watches her eyes lock on his.

"And you must be Christine." As he reaches down to pick up his travel bag, his eyes move down her body.

"Andy's not home yet. We weren't expecting you until after six." Christine runs her hand through her hair, smiles at Greg; her red lips part slightly, barely show the glint of white teeth. "I guess you'd better come in, you must be tired." Christine puts her right hand on her hip and stands aside. She watches him walk through the door, eyes riveted to his strong frame which is a foot taller than hers.

"It feels good to get out of the heat," Greg says, his face damp with sweat and his clothes stuck to his back.

There are wet rings under each arm of his navy Addidas t-shirt.

"Let me show you your room so you can put away your things." Greg follows Christine up the stairs, staying two steps behind her. His eyes move up and down her back: her Levis wide at the hips, her pink cotton tanktop, her milky white skin, and the long ringlets of thick black hair.

Christine walks down the hall, her body sways easily with each step. She shows Greg the guest bedroom. "I'm sorry about the room, we still haven't gotten enough furniture for it."

Greg sets his bag down by the bed. "This is great," he says, looking around the room. "I really appreciate a place to stay until I can find an apartment." Christine stares at him, her eyes dropping from his short black hair down to his strong chest and arms, then to his dark, hairy legs. He turns and their eyes meet.

Christine looks away. "How was your drive?"

He raises his eyebrows and smiles. "It was great except for the heat. It never cooled down last night. When I got up at seven, it was over 70."

"Do you want to take a shower before Andy gets home? We were planning to take you out for dinner."

"Sure." He follows her into the bathroom where she hands him a large red bath towel. The room faces south and the sun streams through the window striking Christine's body. Greg looks over the room, smiles when he sees the transparent



shower curtain. "Does Andrew peek in on you when you're in the shower?" He laughs and Christine blushes, then she smiles. "I'd better keep the door locked while I'm showering," he says, laughing again.

Christine folds her arms under her full breasts. "I don't think you'll have to worry about that," she says, looking away. "Do you need soap or anything?"

"No, I've got everything I need," Greg says, his eyes never leaving hers.

Christine looks uncomfortable, wipes her forehead. The hot sun is still on her back. "Well, after your shower we can have a beer until Andy gets home." She puts her hands in her back pockets and rocks on her heels. "You like beer, don't you? Andy said you used to drink a lot together." She starts toward the door.

Greg moves aside, letting her pass. "Beer sounds great," he says to her back, "I wouldn't mind one now."

"OK," she says, continuing down the stairs. He follows her into the living room. She brings in two bottled beers from the kitchen and sits opposite him in a turquoise chair. She reaches to the stereo and and puts in a Grace Jones tape.

"Andrew's a lucky man. He's always had good luck with women." Greg takes a long drink from his beer.

"So you think Andy made a good choice?" Christine says, sipping from her bottle.

"I didn't say that," Greg says, winking.

Half an hour later Christine says, "It's already 5:30.

Andy will be home by six."

Greg stands and walks over to her. "I guess I better get in the shower," he says, looking down at her. Then he turns and starts up the stairs, stopping halfway up. "Don't sneak up on me in the shower. I'm not locking the door." He laughs and continues up the stairs.

Christine smiles to herself. Five minutes later she climbs the stairs.

Inside the doorway of the crowded Mexican restaurant Christine, Andrew, and Greg stood last in a group of ten people bunched tightly together near the door, sticky bodies almost touching, waiting for one of the restaurant's few tables. A man on a stool serenaded them with classical Spanish guitar, stopping between songs to drink beer. It was stifling hot: the heat from the kitchen intensified the already searing day. The air smelled of hot sauce, beans, and corn tortillas.

"We could go somewhere else," Andrew suggested, his voice not hiding the fact he did not want to leave. "But this place has the best Mexican food in town." He looked to Greg.

"I don't mind waiting," Greg said, wiping sweat from his brow. "How about you, Christine?"

"I don't care one way or another," she said, looking away, not making eye contact with either of them. Her face had turned pink from the heat and glistened with a damp glow.

"Since we're already here," she said, "we might as well stay. This is Andy's favorite place." She ran her hand along Andrew's face, smiling up at him.

A young, dark-skinned waiter approached from the bar, holding a tray filled with beer glasses. Only he seemed cool in the oppressive heat. "Free beer for everyone waiting in line," he said. "It's too hot to stand around without anything to drink." He passed out the glasses of beer, stopping at Christine to say, "For the pretty Senorita," and gave a slight bow when he handed her a beer.

"Gracias," Christine said, turning to Andrew and kissing him on the cheek. They stood drinking quickly, the cold liquid sliding easily down their throats.

"Ah, this sure tastes good," Andrew said, finishing his glass.

Greg said, "There's nothing like a cold beer when it's this hot." He took a drink. "I thought I'd get to cool off here, but it's hotter today than it's been in San Diego all year."

"It's been over 90 for two weeks," Christine said. The waiter returned from the kitchen and put a fan in the door which blew hot air over their bodies, drying the salty sweat to their skin and blowing Christine's long brown hair and red t-shirt dress in the breeze. She let her dress flutter, baring her white legs to mid-thigh. "The air feels good," she said. The waiter quickly refilled their empty glasses, pouring beer after beer from an orange plastic pitcher.

"Where'd you stay last night?" Andrew asked.

"In Ashland," Greg said. "I spent the night with Smitty. You knew he's coaching at SOC, didn't you? He's got defensive backs and kickoff returns."

Andrew said to Christine, "He was at Lakeridge High School for two years. His team lost in State semis the first year and the finals the next. He took the Southern Oregon job right after the loss in finals."

Fifteen minutes later they were seated at a torn, green vinyl booth with a chipped formica table top. "It may look like a dive, but the food's great," Andrew said, noticing Greg's expression. "Even you won't be able to finish your dinner. You'll be eating the leftovers tomorrow for breakfast." Greg sat opposite Andrew and Christine. The waiter came and Andrew ordered a pitcher of beer and nachos grande.

"So how does it feel to be moving back to Portland?" Andrew asked.

"It's strange," Greg said, "but I never thought of coming back until Edwards called me about the job."

"I guess I can understand that," Andrew said. He remembered when he'd driven Greg down to Berkeley, gotten him settled in his dorm room. It had been a lonely drive back to Portland.

"I don't know why I didn't think of coming back sooner. Getting offered a job made it an easy decision."

"It's great you're going to be at our old high school,"

Andrew said. "They really need some help to get back to where they were when we were there."

"It shouldn't be too hard to get the program back on its feet," Greg said. "Their biggest problem is they've had five coaches in seven years. Just as soon as the kids get used to one coach another one comes in telling them to do something different."

"Well, it'll be great having you back in town. I need someone besides Christine to thrash on the tennis courts."

"Andy makes me go out and play and gets mad because I'm not very good," Christine said. "I'd much rather watch than play." She ruffled Andrew's hair and kissed his neck.

"It may be a little closer now, I played a lot in San Diego," Greg said. "And even if you can beat me, I can always take my aggressions out on the basketball court." Andrew thought of all the time they'd spent playing basketball. It'd been their year round sport, the sport they'd play for recreation during other seasons. And he had never been able to beat Greg. At 6'6, Greg had been too tall and too strong. Even though Andrew had been good, he could never compete.

A pitcher arrived and they drained their glasses. "Where's the food?" Greg asked, staring at the waiter. "I'm starved."

"The nachos will be up in a minute," the waiter said. "Do you need any more chips and salsa?"

"What does it look like?" Andrew said, pointing at the

empty basket and bowl. He picked up the pitcher and poured another round of beer.

"What are you doing with a woman like Christine?" Greg asked. "Isn't she too smart for you?"

"No, she's not, asshole," Andrew said. Then he laughed and put his arm around Christine's shoulder, pulling her against him. "You're one to talk, Mr. P.E. Teacher." Andrew thought of his mother crying when he'd told her about dropping out of engineering. She was an engineer herself and couldn't understand how anyone could get D's in calculus. Especially at Portland State. She said he just didn't try hard enough. But he did nothing but study. Business suited him much better.

"I never said I was a genius," Greg said. "Christine, What the hell does a computer analyst do?"

"Mostly I design programs and help programmers debug when they have problems. Right now my group's building an ADA compiler."

"What's that?" Greg asked, crinkling his nose.

"It's a program that makes it easier for other people to write programs. It takes English-like commands and translates them into machine-readable ones. It's hard to explain if you don't know anything about how computers work."

"Do you know what she's talking about?" Greg asked Andrew.

"Sort of," Andrew said. "I've learned a little bit at the bank."

"Like what," Greg laughed, "punching in deposits and withdrawals?"

"No, I don't do that. What do you think I am, a fucking teller?"

A mountain of nachos came followed by their dinners. The hot burritos felt good in their stomachs which growled from hunger and alcohol. Andrew and Greg talked about old friends, teams, and parents. "That was terrible about your mother," Greg said. "I wish I could have come up to the funeral, but I didn't find out until it was already over. Why didn't you tell me? I would have come."

"I guess I wasn't thinking." Andrew could picture his mother, her white face sleeping in the open coffin. She'd died just a few months before he'd finished college.

I walk through the front door of my old house, heading for the kitchen to look for a Coke. I'm full grown and look as I do today. I'm a man ten years out of place in time. My mother comes in just as I shut the refrigerator; she begins to wash the dishes. She's about 40 and slender, still pretty for her age. Her sandy blond hair is spattered with gray and falls loosely down her back. I'm about to speak when Greg, also full grown, joins us in the kitchen.

"Did you hear the news?" my mother asks.

"No," I say.

"Greg's decided on Cal."

"Great," I say. "Where were you two? I didn't see you

when I came in."

"In my bedroom," she says. "I was just showing Greg my UC diploma. I'm so glad he's going there. I wish you could go there too."

"You know they wouldn't let me into their engineering program. I don't know why you keep bringing it up. There's nothing I can do about it." I don't say it's a lot easier to get in if you're getting a basketball scholarship. Academics don't matter then.

Later we go out and play one-on-one in my driveway. I'm not bad, but I'm not 6'6" and I didn't play four years of college basketball. With quickness I can get off hurried shots, pull-up jumpers and fade-aways. But I can't win with those. No one wins with those. On defense I am nothing: he spins, fakes, and double pumps. In high school it would have been closer, but now it is easy for him. I get angry but he only laughs. His good-nature drives me crazy and I try harder, spinning around him for an open left-handed lay-up. I release the ball, feeling his body sealed behind me, and then watch his hand rise above mine, swatting the ball hard against the backboard.

I see my mother watching from the kitchen window. There are tears in her eyes.

"Have you seen Marie lately?" Greg asked, his voice slightly slurred, eyes beginning to glass over.

"No." Andrew tried to block her image from his mind.



"You never did forgive me, did you?"

"No, I just try to forget about it."

"You know, it wasn't my fault. She was the one who suggested taking off together. And I was drunk, it's not fair to blame me. Jesus Christ Andrew, it was almost ten years ago."

Andrew turned and faced Greg. "There are some things you just can't forgive people for. That's one of them." Andrew got up and went to the bathroom, a dirty unisex room about four feet square.

Greg and Marie are lying together in the grass. They are propped up on elbows, facing each other and drinking beer. There is no light except for the moon and stars. Their bodies are close, almost touching. Marie is in a short summer dress, her tan legs curled slightly behind her. "We have to get back to the party, Greg," Marie says, sitting up.

Greg sets his beer down, puts his arm on her shoulder, then strokes her face. "Don't worry about it, he's so drunk he'll never miss us."

He rolls her onto her back, holding her by her shoulders, then moves over and kisses her neck and chest. She touches his face, then puts a hand on his back guiding him on top of her body. "We've really got to go. It's been almost an hour," she says. "Someone will tell him."

Greg cradles her head in his hand. Her light brown hair dangles down to the grass. She wraps her arms around his

back, massaging the muscles, then wraps her legs around his hips as they kiss.

When Andrew returned to the table Christine massaged his thigh and asked, "Are you all right?" He didn't answer. They finished a final round of beer and got up to leave. Andrew insisted on paying, but allowed Greg to tip.

They walked through the dark neighborhood to their car. People sat out on their porches watching, trying to stay cool. A dog barked and somewhere a child screamed and then cried. They were happy to get into Andrew's car, locking the doors quickly behind them. Christine drove. "Are you tired from your drive, Greg?" Christine asked, looking at him in the rear view mirror.

"No, I'm fine. Why don't you stop, and I'll pick up some beer?"

"We'll get it," Andrew said, pushing R.E.M. into the cassette deck.

Back at Andrew and Christine's house, Andrew carried the beer, Greg handled the doggie bags, and Christine got all the doors. Inside, Andrew pulled three beers out of a short case, then went around opening the windows. When he returned to the living room Christine and Greg were on the loveseat talking. Andrew sat opposite them in an overstuffed chair.

"Well, Andrew, you never told me how you two met. Christine started to tell me back at the restaurant, but stopped when she saw you coming back. Something about you

offering to buy her a dress?"

"Sounds like you got most of the story," Andrew said.

"Come on, you can tell me."

"I'll finish the story," Christine said, smoothing the front of her dress.

"No, no. I'll tell it." Andrew paused, as if to catch his breath, then began. "Well, I was just walking through Meier and Frank at Lloyd Center and I saw her looking at dresses. She was so pretty I wanted to ask her out. I didn't really know a good way to approach someone in a clothes store. So I just asked her if I could buy her a dress or something. She wouldn't let me buy her a dress but she did let me take her out to dinner."

"That's a great line," Greg said. "I'll have to try that one myself. Can I buy you a dress. Great."

"I like it myself, but I haven't had a chance to use it since then."

Christine said, "I met this jerk right after I graduated from Oregon State. I'd just gotten a job at Tektronics and I was spending my first paycheck on clothes."

"That was two years ago?" Greg asked.

"Yeah." She paused. "And we're getting married this September." She smiled at Andrew. "Did Andrew tell you that?"

Greg said, "No. We haven't kept in touch that well the past few years."

"That's too bad," Christine said. "You know, he doesn't

have any close friends. You'll be good for him. He needs some male friends." She aired out the front of her dress and a cunning smile crossed her face. "Now tell me Greg, who's this Marie? Andy's told me about some of the others, but he's never mentioned her before."

"Maybe we'd better not talk about it. Andrew can tell you later if he wants to."

"Go ahead, I don't care. Does anybody want more beer?" Andrew got up and took his empty bottle to the kitchen.

Marie lies between Greg's legs, kissing her way down his stomach, unbuttoning his pants. She stops and pulls away. "I'm sorry, we're going to have to go. I can't go through with this."

"He'll never find out if we don't tell him. Come on." Greg rolls her over onto her back, unbuttoning her dress and unsnapping the front of her bra. He kisses in between the mounds of her breasts, then uses his tongue on her nipples. Marie's eyes are shut and she smiles. Greg moves down, starts to pull off her panties. She lifts her hips and squeezes her legs together as he slides the underwear down her legs. He pulls his jeans around his knees and pushes apart her thighs.

Andrew stood in the dining room listening to Greg and Christine talk. "And he's still mad about that?" Christine asked. Greg nodded his head. "Well, it was a pretty shitty

thing to do. How long had they been going out?"

"Six months or so."

Andrew walked back into the living room. "Are you two finished yet?" His face was tight. "Here's some more beer." He stiffly handed them both another bottle. "Well, now that you've spilled my love life out all over the floor, let's hear about yours, Superstar."

"Don't call me that." Greg looked at Christine. "He used to always call me that when he got pissed off."

"Come on," Andrew said, "tell what you've been up to in California with all those pretty California girls."

Greg said, "Not that much. Just the normal. I lived with a girl a few years ago but it didn't work out. The right person just hasn't come along yet."

"Just fuck them and leave them like Marie? Take them from somebody else and give them back spoiled?"

"Andrew, that's enough," Christine said. "You've had too much to drink."

"No, let him finish," Greg said, spilling a little beer down his shirt.

"I've said everything I've got to say."

"I know I've said this before, but I'm going to say it again. Marie was the one who asked me to go to the store with her to get more beer. I didn't ask to come along. And it was her idea to go to that park, not mine. She started the whole thing. If I wouldn't have been drunk I wouldn't have gone along. It wasn't totally my fault. How many times

do I have to say I'm sorry?"

"I guess that's enough, Superstar."

"Quit calling me that, asshole. I don't have to take that from you. It's not my fault she liked me better than you." Andrew knocked over his beer with his foot. They all watched the beer soaking into the rug but no one wiped it up. Andrew went to the kitchen for another beer.

When Andrew came back Christine was speaking to Greg. "Andy's been considering your offer to be an assistant coach."

"Well, I'd love to have him," Greg said facing Andrew. "It's nice to have someone working with you that you can trust."

Greg and I are on the court warming up. The women are watching. Christine, Marie, and my mother sit in the grass behind the basket. Greg says, "You can have it out."

The game is to 50 by ones. It is not even close. The women start out cheering for me but I can do nothing against Greg. Halfway through the game it's 25-7. I've scored only when he doesn't play defense.

"Come on, Andrew, you've got to play harder," my mother screams. "You never put out enough effort."

"Don't let him treat you like that Andrew," Marie says. "Don't you have any pride?"

Greg runs off ten buckets in a row and the women begin to cheer for him. I hear Christine say, "Greg sure has a

nice ass."

"I know," my mother says, "and he's great in bed."

"I can't say that for Andrew," Marie whispers. The final point: Greg has the ball. He shakes left then goes right driving towards the basket. I fall back, set myself between Greg and the basket. Greg takes off, his body arching high over mine, slamming the ball down hard with two hands, through the rim, through the net and into my face.

I wipe my nose and see blood on my hand. "That was an offensive foul."

"You weren't set," Greg says. "Your feet have to be planted. Just ask them."

"Great game, Greg," my mother says.

"Quit being such a baby, Andrew," Marie says, kissing Greg on the cheek and squeezing his butt.

Hearing their voices in the kitchen, Andrew forced himself from his chair. He walked silently into the kitchen, stopping, listening at the door. There he saw Greg standing over Christine, his left arm extended, holding onto the refrigerator door. Christine saw Andrew and walked towards him, cutting Greg off mid-sentence. "I'm getting tired. I think I'll go up to bed. You and Greg probably have a lot to talk about."

She kissed Andrew on the cheek and said "Good night," then walked through the living room to the stairs. Greg and Andrew followed and watched her disappear upstairs.

They sat back down, Andrew in his chair and Greg on the loveseat. "What do you feel like doing now?" Greg asked, taking a drink from his beer.

"I don't know, do you have any ideas?"

"Let's go out and get some Guinness and get really fucked up. Do you know any place around here that sells it?"

"Yeah, there's a little market about a mile away that has import beer. Maybe we could a six of Guinness and a six of Bass. We can do Black and Tans."

"You ready to go?" Greg asked.

They went outside, the relative coolness of the night air feeling good on their skin. "You drive," Andrew said, "you're probably less drunk than I am." They got into Greg's Saab and took off with Laurie Anderson echoing in their ears.

"At least Saabs are one of the safest cars in the world," Greg said, laughing, accelerating around a corner, tires squealing. Andrew shut his eyes and let his mind sway to the motion of the car.

At the store Greg said, "Why don't you just stay in the car. I'll get this one." Andrew sat, his mind wandering back to his high school prom. Why had he gone with Marie after what she'd done? He'd told himself it was too late to find another date, but that wasn't true. He could've easily found someone from another school to go with him. He went with her even though everyone knew. Why had he gone with her? He still didn't know.

Back in the car Greg handed the beer to Andrew. "I



can't believe it, I stood in there waiting five minutes to pay. The guy was in the back smoking dope. He reeked of it when he finally came out. I should have just left without paying."

"Yeah," Andrew said, picturing himself getting high in the back of the store.

Christine is showing Greg the bathroom. The sun is streaming in through the window against her back. "I hope you don't peek while I'm in the shower," Greg says, standing in front of her, looking into her eyes. He puts his hands on her shoulders and kisses her forehead, then down to her eyes, nose, and lips.

"Please stop," Christine says, trying to wriggle away. "I don't think I want to do this."

Greg puts his arms around her back, drawing her body against his. "Why did you take so long to come up?" He kisses her deeply and she sags into him.

"I had to call to make sure Andy was still at work." Greg starts the shower and takes off his shirt. He kisses Christine again, then pulls her tanktop over her head. He runs his hands along her sides, feeling her heavy breasts. He picks her off her feet and she wraps her arms around his head as he sucks on each large pink nipple.

"We're back," Greg said. Andrew was damp with sweat. The darkness shocked him as he looked around, finally

recognizing the front of his house. "Are you going to be all right?"

"Sure. I just dozed off."

Inside the house Andrew found two beer steins. "This stuff is too good to drink out of a bottle," he said, opening two bottles of Guinness with an opener.

"What about Black and Tans?" Greg asked.

"Oh, yeah," Andrew said, opening two bottles of Bass and mixing the beers in their steins.

"Do you have any Led Zeppelin or Black Sabbath?" Greg asked. "I really feel like I could get into some old music." Andrew got up and found a worn copy of Paranoid and soon Ozzie Osbourne's wails filled the room. "This is just like old times," Greg said. "Think of how many nights we spent like this in high school."

"God, remember after basketball games when we'd go to the ghetto to buy beer? And then we'd go for all you can eat fish and chips?"

"Yeah, and then go around shooting bottle rockets at people out of your car. They'd freak out when they'd see it coming. Some of them would even hit the ground when the rocket exploded."

Marie and Greg are on the grass making love. They are grinding together in a slow, deliberate rhythm. Marie's face transforms into Christine's. Greg and Christine are on my bed. Christine's legs are up around Greg's shoulders and he

is on his knees. She groans with each stroke, her nails digging into his ass. "God, you have a great ass." And then Greg is with my mother. She is bent over her dresser, her skirt up and nylons down. He is behind her, his hands grasping her hips.

"I was just showing Greg my diploma from Cal," my mother says. "Did you hear he decided on going there?"

"We just went out to talk," Marie says. "You were so drunk. We didn't do anything."

"I wasn't anywhere near the bathroom when he took a shower," Christine says. "We're going to get married in a few months. Don't accuse me of that."

Greg sits in a chair laughing.

Marie says, "So what if I did fuck him. He was a hell of a lot better than you ever were."

"You went to Portland State and couldn't even get through their engineering program. At least Greg went to Berkeley."

"You don't own me Andrew. We're not married yet."

"And if I was you Christine, I'd never marry him," Marie says. "He's a little short. It makes it difficult sometimes."

"His father had that problem too. That's the main reason I kicked him out."

"His stamina too," Christine said. "One pop's about all he's good for. And he can't even make that last."

The women follow Greg out of the room.

Andrew looked through the medicine cabinet and found the No-Doze. He swallowed two and returned to the living room. "I thought I might have lost you in the bathroom," Greg said.

"No, I'm all right," Andrew said. "I was just thinking. About that girl you lived with, what happened between you and her?"

"Do you really want to know?" Greg asked. Andrew nodded. "Well, I worked Saturday afternoons at a sporting goods store for extra money. Every Saturday Lisa would do our shopping while I worked. When I got home at night, we'd go out to dinner. Well, one Saturday I came home and she wasn't there. I waited around for a few hours and then sort of freaked out. I started calling the police and hospitals. I thought she'd been in a car wreck, or had been raped or murdered."

"You must have worried like hell," Andrew said. "She just disappeared?"

"No. Lisa finally came home about two o'clock in the morning. She had been seeing her ex-husband every Saturday while I was working. She said she didn't really love him, but that she missed him and he'd been really lonely. She said he'd been thinking about suicide. That afternoon he'd been really down and she stayed too late, and then she was afraid to come home."

"She should've been afraid to come home after doing

something like that," Andrew said.

"I'd been thinking about marrying her. Lisa said she was sorry. She said she'd made a mistake and would never do it again. I thought I was going to kill her. I threw her out of the apartment so I wouldn't hurt her. She kept calling me, apologizing, saying she was really sorry. I couldn't ever talk to her after that."

"That really sucks," Andrew said. "It would kill me if Christine ever did something like that."

Greg said, "The worst thing is you can never tell. I never thought she would have done something like that. Sometimes you can sort of tell, but you can't prove it unless you catch them in the act or they admit it. And sometimes it's just your imagination. Then it seems like you don't trust them, like you're just the typical jealous husband."

"I know what you mean, you never can tell."

"Lisa tried to apologize for weeks. She said we could move away, go anywhere I wanted to. She said she'd never see him again and I wanted to take her back, but there are some things you just can't live with."

"Like someone fucking around with your woman?" Andrew said, taking another swallow of beer, staring at Greg directly in the eye.

"Yeah," Greg said, pausing, then seeing Andrew's expression, "What's that supposed to mean? I haven't done anything to you. You're just drunk."

"Sure, that's an easy way out," Andrew said, his voice

loud. "Get the Andrew drunk. He won't notice anything. It's hard to tell. You never can tell. You can't prove it unless you catch them in the act or they admit to it."

Greg got up and walked over to Andrew. "I can't believe you're saying this. I would never do anything like that to you. I do have some morals. I'm not guilty forever for something I did in high school."

Andrew stood up facing him, his fists clenched. "You bastard. You just can't come into my house and do this to me. You can't just fuck around with every woman I love."

"Andrew." He heard Christine's voice but did not turn or answer.

"You dirty motherfucker, who the hell do you think you are?"

"Andrew!" Christine yelled, her voice firm. He turned. "It's time to go to bed." She walked over to him and took his arm. It was shaking. "Come on, relax. You'll feel better in the morning." She looked at Greg. "He'll be all right in the morning. Try not to let what he said bother you. He's just had too much to drink."

"Come on, Andrew. Let's go to bed." Christine led him by the arm up the stairs and into their bedroom.

Greg and Christine are in the shower. Greg is kissing her neck and shoulders. "I'm sorry I took so long," Christine says, kissing Greg's chest. "I had to call to make sure Andy was still at work." Marie rolls on top of Greg and

they roll in the grass. She straddles him, raising her skirt to her hips. "Come on, Greg," she says, "Andrew will never find out." My mother pulls down her nylons and says, "Please, hurry up. Andrew will be home in a few minutes." She lowers his jeans then bends over her dresser, watching his face in the mirror, reaching her hands back and pulling him inside. Greg kneels at my mother's casket and pins a corsage to her dress. She is crying and stretches her arms out to him. "Kiss me before they close the lid. Please kiss me." She holds Greg tightly, trying to pull him into the coffin. "I wish you were my son. Why couldn't you have been my son?" Her voice shrieks as her nails tear into his skin. I stand watching helplessly in the doorway.