THESIS

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PATTERNS: A COLLECTION

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Douglas Lawder

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PATTERNS:

A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES

By

Pamela J. Ditchoff

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ABSTRACT

PATTERNS:
A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES

by

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This collection of short stories involves the people and places of my home, Michigan. These people are bound together by their particular methods of coping with the differences that have placed them outside of society's mainstream. J.T. is an elderly bag man whose home is in an elevator enclosure of a Lansing parking ramp. In "Patterns," two divorced female cousins spend a night on the town at a local bar. A dying man goes hunting in the suburbs for his last deer in "This Year's Venison." A thirtyish female student's pre-occupation with teeth leads her to grapple with the problems of aging in "Preserves." Salima is a Mexican American woman confronting the cultural and emotional stress of living in Michigan. In "The Nineteenth Hole" a Canadian Michiganian goes home to Missisauga at Christmas holidays and returns to the country club where he caddied as a boy.

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P.J.D.

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J.T. POTTER AND THE MUD BROWN CAT IN RAMP #3

J. T. Potter was bending over the parking ramp's public washroom sink, rinsing his mouth with water from a paper coffee cup. He tapped his toothbrush four times against the sink rim, careful not to allow the bristles contact with the rust and grime encrusted porcelain. As he spit, a glimmer from the concrete floor caught his eye. A nickel--a beacon of light winking amidst a sea of cigarette butts and phlegm. One arthritic hand gripped the sink edge, steadying his frail figure, while the other reached slowly down and plucked the coin with crab-like tenacity. Straightening his body, an ancient blue heron, he pulled two paper towels from the wall dispenser. In one towel he wrapped his toothbrush. With the other he wiped his cup, the coin, then placed the objects in the grocery sack at his feet. He nudged the paper with his toe, closer to the wall, rescuing his brown bag inheritance from the seepage sweating off the urinal's base.

He won't stay long, just long enough to comb the white wisps crowning his noble skull. The room is three feet by three feet and retains the condensed scent of the hundreds who stop here daily to deposit their waste before entering cars and office buildings. The city's CETA workers are supposed to clean the washrooms once a week; J.T.'s been here two months and hasn't seen a worker yet.

He pulled a black plastic "McGovern for President" comb from his inside coat pocket and leaned toward his reflection. The bare single bulb suspended from the ceiling's center is gravity's disciple, preaching to J.T. its effects from the looking glass. The tide has gone out from the shoreline of his brow, leaving elongated letter M's, apostrophied by the ends of bushy, steel-grey eyebrows, stiffened with seventy-two ebbing seasons. Sandpipers have left tracks around the outer edges of the dark, watery pools. J.T. closed his eyes; eyelids pouring dunes of fleshy sand to fill the pools, meshing with the ripples beneath his eyes--red-black driftwood just below the surface.

Satisfied with the lay of his hair, he pressed his thumb against the locking button on the door knob, releasing the lock on the metal door. He rolled down the top of his grocery bag, tucking it under one arm and stepped outside, shoving both hands into his pockets. The metal door snapped like a frozen twig underfoot. J.T.'s breath clouded blue against the early morning January sky as he plodded upward one-half level of the top of the ramp. That's where the elevator enclosure is which has been J.T.'s home since the November 22nd cold wave slapped the city.

J.T.'s thoughts were not on the weather as he approached his makeshift dwelling. His eyes squinted checking the area surrounding the enclosure, seeking out the invader of his territory. Before yesterday, he'd enjoyed the solitude afforded by the top level of city ramp #3. Only occasionally did a police car patrol the ramp past midnight; and since the enclosure's glass had been broken out too many times by city juveniles drinking beer on hot, summer vacation nights, the city put up solid walls last September. So the cops couldn't see J.T. curled under a green army blanket donated by the City Rescue Mission. He never bedded down until midnight and was up by 6:00 a.m. It was J.T.'s experience that if folks came to town winter evenings, they'd park on the streets. On the top level of the ramp, in the time you'd take for a steak dinner, coctails and a few dances, your car could be a giant white wave in the moonlight when you returned. Not enough sleep for a man J.T.'s age, but he usually managed an afternoon nap at the Greyhound Bus Station.

Last night when he returned to the ramp after his nightly cup of coffee at Dunkin Donuts, he discovered the intruder. J.T. had walked up the center of the winding ramp's six levels--the stairs exhausted his spirit. He had just taken his hands out of the pockets, reaching for the door, when a shrill "yeeow" shook J.T.'s pourous bones. The mostly mud-brown cat trotted to the quaking figure and began scraping its head against J.T.'s prominent shins.

J.T. shook an angry foot, "Shoo, go on, git!"

The cat turned up yellow eyes, a white smudge of fur across its nose gave an expression of sneering contempt. "Meow, yeeowl."

J.T. reached down to push the animal away from the door. The cat was sitting firmly, blocking the entrance with a look J.T. knew was defiant. At the sight of J.T.'s unpocketed hand, the cat widened the topaz spheres, laid flat the notched ears and thrust its spine arching, the rigid tail an exclamation point.

"A real tiger," snickered J.T. He was reminded of the hog-nose snakes he'd seen as a boy on Grandpa's farm. Bluffing in the straw, shaking tails, imitating their fearsome cousins. Hissing and growling, the cat backed away from the entrance.

J.T. had just begun feeling a bit warm and sleepy when the crying began. For half an hour that animal yeowled and scratched and clawed outside the door.

This morning J.T. fretted, looking at pawprints in the snow.

"Hope that critter stays away," he mutters. He got to thinking what if that cat belongs to somebody around here and they come looking, following it some night and it leads them right to me. Then I'd have to find another place and where would I go? Not the Rescue Mission, once was enough for me to know I don't belong there. Too many people, somebody always wanting to talk, asking questions--they're all bums and fly-by-night thieves. J.T. shudders recalling the imposed closeness of the mission. They got curfew there and make you go to chapel.

J.T. hasn't been inside a church since he was seven years old, that doesn't mean he doesn't believe in God. He remembers the vows he made that night. Grandma used to make him go to church every Sunday and taught him to be a God-fearing boy; but that

Sunday morning, he recalls the sky was as blue as the ribbons in Macey Carter's braids, the air was so still the June bugs chorus echoed off the lake, and J.T. knew, the fish were biting. And he was right; four hours slipped by while J.T. pulled in sunfish, bluegills and even two fat catfish. Walking home with a full creel, he imagined Grandma's delight, she was partial to the sweet meat of catfish, and Grandpa slapping his back, saying that was one of the best catches he'd ever seen in all his borne days--what a fine Sunday supper he was carting home.

But Grandma met him on the porch with the long handled wooden spoon, grabbed him by the ear, yanked his knickers around his knees and beat his behind. All those beautiful fish, laying in the dirt, all the cats scurrying out from under the porch to rip up the rainbow scales that J.T. had held up to the sun just a few hours before.

To drive the devil from J.T. before it was too late, Grandma took him to the church, tied him in a chair in front of the altar, and after saying several prayers to save his tainted soul, left him to spend the night in prayer and deliberation. Even now, J.T. feels the ropes on his wrists, rubs the thin white scars. He thinks it must have been about 10:00 p.m. when he finally got loose of those ropes and ran to the front door to peek through the cracks. The guard dogs the pastor had kept since the church was robbed of its only truly gold vessel, had heard J.T. wrestling about inside and lunged, snapping at the door when they saw J.T.'s eye pressed to the wood. He stumbled down the aisle, got down on his knees and talked to God.

Raged and cryed and questioned, why, why did you take my parents, they'd never do this to me, they would have loved me, treated me with kindness, why did you make me a burden? And J.T. vowed he'd never do hurt to a single living thing, and the best way of doing that was to stay away, keep distance, don't depend on anyone or anything.

I got no need for religion, no need for people, animals neither--yep, I walk alone, but by golly, I walk tall, I'm an honest man. J.T. juts out his chin, pulling wings in his aged neck. If it were summer, he thinks, it'd be easy. You can sleep in the park under the bridges along the river bank. One time he'd seen a little A-frame some guy had down by the river. He'd made it out of stuff hauled out of dumpsters and riverbank sticks.

J.T. opens the enclosure door to stash his bag before making his daily rounds. Hands comfortably stuffed in his coat pockets, he begins his descent. One level, the green one--five more to go. The parking meter heads, silent sentinels, stare with expressionless faces from their posts on concrete half-walls. Watching from between two metallic blue heads are two topaz eyes. J.T. is about to pass by unnoticing. The cat leaps from his perch in pursuit.

"Oh, no," groans J.T. "Go away now, shoo!" His voice echoes in the enclosed bare concrete. So unaccustomed to hearing his own voice, especially in reverberation, is J.T. Potter, that he hobbles in quick, stiff steps to the stairwell.

It takes twenty-two minutes for J.T. to arrive at the white street level exit door. There are no railings on the stairwell walls

so J.T. had to unpocket his hands and press them against the cold concrete blocks to aid his bowed and scrawny legs down all those menacing steps. He is fit to be tied, stepping out on Capitol Avenue, and to top it off--there it is, right under the street lamp in front of Mini-Mart. J.T. thinks, now I know what it means when people say, "You look like the cat that's swallowed the canary."

One block south of ramp #3 at the intersection of Capitol and Michigan is the State Capitol building, the first stop on J.T.'s daily rounds. He checks the green metal trash can in front of Mini-Mart; the red, white and blue aluminum of Pepsi-Cola and Coca-Cola glitter through waxed cookie bags and discarded cellophane from micro-waved burritoes. J.T. unbuttons his coat, tucking the cans into the large inside pockets.

He loves this coat. He bought it for $1.00 at Saint Vincent De Pauls. They told him it had been donated by a parishoner who used to give magic shows. The coat hangs almost to J.T.'s kneecaps and he can fit anything he wants in all those pockets.

He casts a backward glance, making his way down Capitol Avenue, followed by his furry shadow. He stops, throws a scowl over his shoulder and the cat sits on the pavement, waiting until J.T. resumes his crab walk before catching up the distance.

J.T. pauses before the statue of Austin Blair, "War Governor of Michigan, 1861-1864." He notes the resemblance to himself in the lean form, risen above the street, solitary. Time has crept into the crevices depositing a blackened moss on the aqua-green surface; it spreads like algae under the eyes, filling the stoney nostrils,

surrounding the four, round vest buttons and clinging to the dress coat tails. The corners of Blair's mouth turn downward. "Serious man," J.T. addresses the cat at his feet. "You see those words there, you dumb cat? The true glory of the republic must consist--bah, what do you care?"

The cat sticks out his pink tongue, blinking one eye to J.T.'s question, then proceeds up the Capitol's front walk, favoring his left front leg. He sits at the base of the twenty-five steps leading to the massive oak double doors. J.T.'s still at the statue; the sun's up now, washing the Capitol's ivory dome, a sight he savors. When he arrives at the stairs, the cat's curled on the cement, licking a gashing wound on its leg.

"You been down at the river, cat? Don't have sense enough to leave them rats alone? No rabies shot, probably never been near a vet." J.T. has never been to a doctor himself, never even seen one. His grandpa delivered him four months after J.T.'s daddy's legs got caught in the hay cutter. Delivered on that bed with four carved faces that whispered secrets to J.T. the ten years he lived on the farm. One face told him how beautiful his mother had been. How her hair smelled of rosewater and her eyes were like a newborn calf's. She was sweet tempered and sang "The Bluetail Fly" while she kneaded bread in the kitchen. Every young man in Jackson County wanted to court her . . . "But it was your Daddy," whispered another head, "that won her heart . . . when he came down from Detroit in his seersucker suit for the fair . . . took one taste of your mama's orange cake and said he was going to marry the girl

that baked it . . . he was tall and strong as Thunder, your grandpa's Belgian geld . . . and he won your mama a kewpee doll and took her high up on the ferris wheel and she loved him from that first day to her last" . . . "Yes," hissed another head, "her last . . . she wouldn't have died if not for love of him . . . your grandma and grandpa knew better, warned her not to marry that city slicker . . . lost his job at the plant, had to move in on the farm . . . didn't know a hay baler from a hog's hind end . . . your grandparents loved her more" . . . "But you'll show them, J.T.," said the fourth head, "when you get older, you'll leave the farm and make lots of money somewhere far away and drive back here in a shiney new coupe, pulling a cart full of presents, a brass bed with a goose down mattress for grandma and a phonograph with hundreds of discs for grandpa and lots and lots of everything they've always wanted. Then they'll say, oh, J.T., if only your parents could be around to see this day . . . ." Never did go back, did I, J.T. shakes his head to dispel the voices.

The cat flipped on all fours, looking expectantly at J.T. "Well, I sure ain't going in that way. Think you could make it up them stairs with that gamey leg of yours? 'Sides, they don't allow no critters in there. Go on now."

J.T. always enters the building at the north side; there's a parking lot and winter's a profitable season. Nobody, especially politicians will go after nickels, dimes and quarters in the snow hugging the parking meter's legs. Today, after half an hour salvage operation, J.T. has $1.05. He opens his hand to count the booty.

The back of his hand is an arctic map, raised ice-blue lines on a white, ragged surface. He nods to the cat, "Good start, fine start," then shoves the coins and hands into pockets before entering the north entrance without looking back.

At 8:05 J.T. stands in front of the ground level glass case displaying six rows of Michigan license plates--1905-1979. At the bottom of the sixth row are two small squares stuck to the wall--'81 and '82. Twenty-five minutes until that woman will be here to turn on the lights in her case: little Michigan flags, Michigan teaspoons. State Capitol postcards and candy bars. So J.T. doesn't dawdle. He passes the souvenir case and walks to the line of vending machines against the wall. Pushing the coin return level on each, probing a finger in the metal cubicles, he pockets 15¢.

J.T. moves to the center, circular room, the one with the glass ceiling. A Michigan State Police Security Guard will take his post behind the octagon desk at 8:55 to watch over the twelve display cases housing relics donated by the Michigan Historical Commission. J.T. remembers the museum that was here before they relocated to the south side. His favorite exhibit was a picture in the "Civil War Days" display. It was a vase of flowers, the blossoms were curls of human hair, lovely golden and honey-brown. Many times J.T.'s fingers ached in his pockets to touch those silky strands.

The Capitol tours begin at 10:00, by which time J.T. is out of the building. On the first floor, J.T. positions himself smack in the middle of the grid work glass floor, directly under the apex of the dome. He knows this building intimately. If he were the

sociable type, he could direct the tours himself. J.T. is flooded with pleasure, gazing up, centered in the web, his eyes circle each level: the third level's portraits of the governors, the fourth level's balcony surrounded by conference rooms, then the fifth level--eight larger-than-life Grecian maidens, smiling serenely, offering symbols of art, commerce, industry and transportation. Up to the next level, each smaller than its predecessor--the sixth, baby-pink walls, room for only one small balcony and six round windows. Level seven, the last, panels of blue, trimmed in gold, triangling to the glorious circle at the tip-top, lips of gold circling the mouth, throat of dark blue, and the receded crown, sprinkled with stars of silver and gold.

J.T.'s head wobbles against his shoulders, still in awe after all these years. When the sun shines in those sixth level windows, shafts shoot out, bouncing about the inner dome and J.T. knows the most inspirational hours of daylight.

Light glows up through the floor under J.T.'s feet, the guides will be taking their posts. "This floor," J.T. shakes his head, "curiosity, could've broken my neck easy." A few years back he had heard a guide tell his flock of tourists that this floor was designed to create an optical illusion; the higher up in the dome you go, the more the center of the floor seems to sink. From the tip of the dome, the floor looks like a complete upside-down dome. This was told from the third level which is all the higher the public's allowed to go since 1951 when fire codes were enforced. This was something J.T. just had to see.

J.T. loves high places, quiet, removed places. His grandma used to holler, "Dog bite it, J.T., get offen that roof," when he'd creep out above the lofty barn beams. The Capitol's elevator went only to the fourth level, but he knew where the stairs were located. What he couldn't figure was how anyone could get to that seventh level. There was no visible door, just the blue and gold panels and four white columns.

J.T. remembers the incident well. His legs had been better then. He had climbed to the fifth level and crept out in the balcony to see close up the eight beautiful maidens. He didn't look down though, not until he'd reached the top. On the sixth level he could see from the entryway through one of the round windows, Michigan Avenue in miniature. But here, the stairway ended. He risked entering the pink-walled dome, quickly searching the walls--a small pink doorway between two round windows--no knob, a niche. He opened the door and leapt inside, fearing someone might glance up and start a raucous. Before him was a black, iron winding staircase. While the other stairs had been exterior to the dome, these were lodged between two curving walls. "Of course!" J.T. remembered the architect's drawings downstairs, an inner dome and an outer dome. This stairway curved to the contours of the apex. J.T. felt squeezed and confined, the stairs bent beneath his weight, but he had to see the top, all the way to the stars!

The last step--light seeped through in rectangular, outside the exit. "But how," wondered J.T., "you can't see no door, no how." Slowly, tentatively he pushed against the frame--and there he

was, immersed in the deep-blue sea, shores of gold. His hand remained on the now opened front face of the white column. "Amazing," whispered J.T. and "dang, if he wasn't right." Below him was the inverted black and grey dome--a replica in negative.

"Yep," J.T. rocks back on his heels, "that was some sight, worth the risk, I'd take it again, but I know these legs wouldn't."

J.T. exits the Capitol Building, his next stop is the post office, northeast on Allegan Street. He'd clean forgotten about the cat, and there he was, sitting in the snow with that sneer on his puss. The cat follows J.T. over the Capitol Complex bridge and waits by the post office's main entrance. After J.T. collects 25¢ from stamp machines and dusty corners, he exist by way of the south entrance, this time remembering his pursuer.

The Lansing Public Library is on the corner of Capitol and Kalamazoo. J.T. rarely adds to his pocket money here. He takes his time viewing the current displays and loans from the Lansing Art Gallery. Sometimes there are paintings by children of Lansing's elementary schools. He likes poster-paint colors.

He chooses a book from the art section on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and from the travel section on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The Turner books are always his first choice; he lingers over the wild, misty pages. He'd read under one photograph that Turner had been on a ship during a terrible storm. All the crew went below, but before they did, Turner asked to be tied to the mast, so intent was he on capturing this storm to place

on canvas--four hours he spent strapped, alone in the storm. J.T. could feel these pages.

Lots of bums come in here, especially in the winter, thinks J.T., referring to the gathering in the main lounge. They sit in the sun on them couches and never even pick up a book. J.T. sits on the wooden chairs at round reading tables. If he sat in the sun, he might fall asleep, then the librarian would come over and touch him and ask him to leave.

At one o'clock J.T. goes to the men's room, closes the stall door and counts his coins--$1.55, enough for a cheese sandwich and a cup of coffee. That leaves 45¢ which he retains for his nightly cup of Dunkin Donuts coffee. Today he'll go to Walgreen's Drugstore on South Washington. It's the only drugstore in Lansing that still has a soda fountain; they'll take his cans, too.

J.T. turns his head east and west at each corner, certain that feline intruder is lurking about. Seated at counter, he waits for his order. A woman in a green wool coat sits on the stool next to him. Around the coat's collar is a fur piece. J.T. looks at the small, mean, black glass orbs on the dark-brown head, the teeth of the pointed mouth clamped firmly on the tail of a twin. J.T. imagines the topaz eyes, staring--blank, the mud-brown body stiff, left front leg swollen like a sausage, the sneer removed by parted lips.

A full stomach begs sleep and J.T. exist for his next stop.

No one bothers you when you sleep in the bus station. Who know, you could always be waiting to go somewhere and your bus got

delayed. But J.T. always sleeps with his hands in his pockets. He has seen quick-fingered juveniles lift wallets from sleepers, or run off with duffle bags.

J.T. returns to ramp #3 at 6:30 nightly. The downtown employees have left by then and he begins his floor search on the first level. Some guys are just lazy, he thinks, walk up to strangers on the street with their hands out. Or they go crying to the government or mooch off friends. His mind returns to the cat. "Now, that old cat don't ask nothing from nobody." J.T. thinks it might be okay having the cat around. He finds a quarter and pockets his hands. "But, it's better not to get too close to anything or gather up too much, then you don't stand around feeling empty-handed when it's gone."

The sky is dusky, purple-brown when J.T. reaches the top level. No stars; he feels a snow storm coming up. "Hope it holds off a while." Dunkin Donuts is a good mile east on Michigan Avenue. But the trip's worth it, they stay open twenty-four hours so J.T. can stay until 11:30 when it's safe to start for the ramp. As long as you buy a cup of coffee, they won't bother you.

J.T. opens the elevator enclosure door, checks on his stashed brown bag, and assured of his bed roll, exits for his evening trek. The cat's waiting outside the door. J.T. frowns, but doesn't attempt to shoo him away.

Past the Rescue Mission, the adult book stores, the bars, across the railroad tracks; the cat limps along behind J.T.'s bowed legs. His eyes water and his nose runs with the sudden enveloping

of warm, sweet coffee and sugar air. The counter is a long U-shape and J.T. takes a seat across from the coffee maker so he won't have to face some stranger who might get friendly and want to chat. He likes the look of the brown beans pressed against the glass of the "fresh-ground machine." A piece of paper is tacked above it tonight. "Due to penny shortage, please give exact change if possible." The waitress tosses a dish rag in the sink, wipes her hands on her apron, "Hi, Pockets, ready fer yer coffee?" J.T. nods and she reaches under the counter for a tan Dunkin Donuts mug. He doesn't look at her face, but at the orange, pink and brown donut trees on the sleeves of her blouse.

"There ya are, 45¢ please." J.T. removes one quarter and two dimes and lays them on the woodgrain counter. He knows it's really plastic, imitation wood, the grain doesn't match at the seams.

He visits the men's room, checking the pay telephone; today's winning lottery numbers posted on the side. Empty. He peers out the front glass window. Boy, he thinks, the snow's falling like chicken feathers.

How the feathers would fly when grandma would decide she needed another pillow. She'd prop them up around her body in the large rocker while she crocheted the cover for her next pillow. J.T. remembers the rocker as a huge thing with Grandma's pink flesh popping between the slats, pouring through the sides, how she'd rock slow and breathe heavy.

When it was finished, she'd say to J.T., "Come on, rascal, it's time for a new pillow," and she'd make him run around the barnyard

to catch her chosen victim. J.T. remembers how she'd stand with her arms crossed, butcher knife in hand; then when J.T. brought the squawking hen, she'd roll up the sleeves of her dress, take the bird by the neck and give a quick clockwise whip, breaking its neck, then hand it back to J.T. while they walked to the chopping block.

J.T. shudders remembering how he dreaded that walk more than anything, because of the blood, and the tears. Grandma would chop off the head and the bright red blood would flow and then Grandma would start:

"Just like your mama's blood, so thin. After you came out, it wouldn't stop, covered the bed, soaked right through the feather mattress onto the floor. Blood everywhere." Her pitch would rise and the tears would fall.

"Ah, I loved her so, she just never got over your daddy dying the way he did, you on the way, she was so weak, poor little thing, my beautiful girl . . . ." And she'd scream and shake the knife at J.T.:

"That's what fornication gets you, J.T., blood and tears, blood and death!"

J.T. wipes his eyes, turns his gaze away from the window and walks down the hall.

When he returns to his orange stool, two city policemen are seated at the counter. Some folks call this the cop shop--cops and gas station attendants after closing time.

"Hey, Julie, hear a weather report for tonight?"

"Ya guys got radios in them squad cars, doncha?"

"Yeah, but I like hearing your sweet voice."

"Ah, gaw on. Weatherman sez two ta four inches tonight." The other officer speaks up, "That's what they said on a night like this back in '67 and we got twenty-four inches, remember that, Chuck?"

"Sure do. Julie doesn't though, she was just a baby then."

"Oh, youse two are a real pair. Ya want yer regular, Chuck, honey and raisin?"

"Yeah. Hey, Julie, you see that old cat out there?"

"What cat?"

"Old brown thing, hanging around the front door, nearly took my hand off when I tried to give it a pat."

"No kiddin', well, we git a lotta strays round here," she winks, inclining her head in J.T.'s direction. J.T. feels the corners of his mouth turn up at the thought of that cop jumping back, scared of that old faker.

"Julie, give us both a fill on the travel mugs, will you."

"Youse guys like them things, huh?"

"Oh, yeah, they're real nice, stick right on the console, never spill a drop."

J.T. watches with longing as Julie fills the bright orange and brown plastic mugs. He's wanted one ever since the poster went up on the front window three weeks ago advertising Dunkin Donut's Travel Mug.

"DETACHABLE, SPILL-PROOF, DRIPLESS LID. HOLDS UP TO 10 OUNCES HOT OR COLD BEVERAGE. TIP-PROOF ADHESIVE BASE STICKS FIRMLY TO DASHBOARDS AND CONSOLES. ONLY 99¢!"

Of course, J.T. has neither a dashboard nor a console, but how nice it would be to carry that hot mug of coffee in his pockets on that long walk back to the ramp and he could take a sip every now and then and change it from pocket to pocket. He's been saving 5¢ a day towards a mug of his own--70¢ he's saved, a week more and he'll have enough.

J.T. has one warmer on his coffee, checks the clock above the register--11:30. He turns up his collar before stepping into the flurries swirling under the street light. He squints his eyes, unpockets one hand to shield the flakes and checks the lot. There he is, crouched beside an orange and brown trash bin.

"Okay, cat, come along." The cat doesn't move. "It's okay, I said." The mud-brown feet push forward small piles in the snow, but can't raise the cat's body. The topaz eyes turn up to J.T. and a crackled cry rises from between clenched jaws.

J.T. knows that look. It was down in the holler in the south pasture, at the edge of the apple orchard. The mama coon had been shot, body bloated, three dead babies rigid on her teats. One baby survived, bawling as J.T. came up on them. Grandpa had told him never to touch a wild animal, but the way it looked up at him was just like that cat's looking now. J.T. had taken the coon up to the house and Grandpa built a cage for him and J.T. kept that coon for two years; until Grandpa died and Grandma sold the

farm and sent J.T. to a cousin in Detroit. She told him that she'd take good care of the coon, but the last thing J.T. heard when he was riding away in Luke's pickup for the train station was a shotgun blast from Grandpa's gun. That was the last time he'd held a living thing, when he'd said goodbye to that coon. He reaches down to the cat, murmuring and cooing soft words.

"Hey, Pockets, you caint bring that animal in here!" Julie points to the sneering face popping out of the top of J.T.'s coat.

"Just be a minute, only want to look at the phone book." J.T. thumbs to the V's in the yellow pages. "Benson Animal Hospital, 721 North Larch."

Outside he unbuttons the coat and slips the cat's hind quarters neatly into his right inside pocket, then rebuttons the coat. The cat pokes his head out between the fifth and sixth buttons.

"Larch ain't too far away," J.T. mumbles as the pair head off down Michigan Avenue. "Say, cat, look at that dome, will you? So pure white and clean, all lit up in the night, you can see it from the ramp, you know." The cat draws his head inside, wiggles up and shoves against the coat's neckline. J.T. unbuttons the top button and the furry head nuzzles J.T.'s throat, purrs in his ear and it quickens J.T.'s step. He fingers the 70¢ mug money in his pocket.

"Drink too much coffee anyways."

PATTERNS

Somethings bring us up rather rudely to the reality of our own mortality. I for one, am acutely aware of this fact whenever visiting the offices of Dr. Porter D.D.S. The two doctor Porters offices are jigsawed into three insignificant corners on the eleventh floor of the tallest and second oldest building in town. If you take the plastic tooth washroom keyring off the corkboard to its destination, you'll pass a catwalk that affords a clean view of the State Capitol's white dome. I admire from the threshold; I tried the catwalk once, rushing back inside, bottoms of my feet aching from the impression of empty space.

The two Dr. Richard Porters, senior-father and junior-son, don't fit the corners well. Dr. Porter senior walks to the office door with his clients, all as gray as the bank building. He nods and smiles broadly at their stories of grandchildren's lives and

pre-retirement days. Dr. Porter junior rarely speaks, spending his office hours in a nepotismic sulk, purposefully, I'm certain, avoiding eye contact with senior. Richard junior, I've been informed repeatedly by my mother, is the spitting image of his father at that age.

The two doctors Porter schedule their appointments fifteen minutes apart and as it nearly always takes at least half an hour per patient, per drill, I try to take along reading material. This morning was rushed. The children squeezed out the door for the 8:30 bus, rigid in their piles of protection from the winter weather. I needed to stop by my mother's house to pick up grandpa's dentures (Dr. Porters are dentists to me, my mother and my mother's father), and make downtown by 9:00. Mom had given me two magazines with over 100 Christmas gifts to make at home for under $10.00, but I left the shivering pages in my pale blue Chevette in haste to arrive before the next fifteen minute scheduled patient.

I return the keyring and leave grandpa's upper plate with the receptionist. As always, the cobalt blue aroma fills my head, fine tuned by the muzack, accompanied by a stainless steel whistling chorus. Before the blue travels to my stomach, I pick up an August issue of National Geographic and seat myself as comfortably as possible. My attention is arrested by the entrance of two of senior's patients. He brushes the few flakes that survived the elevator ride from her camel hair coat and hangs it on the oversized steel hooks. Then removes his pheasant feathered brown fez and unwraps the twice-wrapped mohair muffler. He helps her ease down into a chair, seating himself

beside her. I'm curious about their teeth, I wish they'd smile, but they don't speak. I imagine their teeth to be yellowish and curving. They are Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head from my childhood when I'd stick the eyes, nose, ears and mouth into the firm white flesh of Michigan potatoes. But these two are old potatoes, buried in their potato sack skins, after death those teeth become potato eyes, breaking through the potato skin and curling upward to root in the damp cemetery earth. I happen to know, because I frequent museums, that when ancient skulls are unearthed, they may be stripped of flesh, hair and bacteria--but the teeth remain. Of course, these teeth never bit into Twinkies or sloshed Coca Cola over their enamel.

Miss Walker, the dental assistant, has opened the waiting room door to inform the Mr. and Mrs. that "Doctor Porter will see you now."

"Do you want to go first," the mister asks.

"Whichever he calls," she replies.

"You mean you're going to let him decide. You won't control your own destiny will you, ha-ha."

How can she? How can I? His statement reminds me of my singular lack of control, the pieces of my life scattered by the divorce, the children, university classes, part-time jobs . . . and I'm getting older. I hear my mother's voice nitter in my ear, "You don't want to be old and alone do you? You've got to get serious, one of these days it's going to be too late." Too late for what?

I know it's too late to back out of this, Miss Walker is calling. I'm through the waiting room door and walking down the

carpeted hall to sit in that chair, wishing I'd come up with some excuse . . . like, "I have the flu, wouldn't want to expose the doctor now, would we?" But somehow I can never muster whatever it takes not to keep my dental appointments. More than likely it's the amount of money my parents spent having my teeth repaired and kept in perfect working order; coupled with my mother's horror stories of when she was young and a toothache meant a trip to the corner barber to have the bugger unceremoniously yanked out. Between the births of my sister and myself, my mother had all her remaining teeth pulled and was fitted for dentures, reminding us every year thereafter, "No matter what I may have to sacrifice, you children will have your teeth fixed."

Once the novocaine has taken effect, I know the worst is over and I can unclench my right hand from its grip on my left thumb, the gearshift that drives me safely through the injection. Now the small room becomes Pentwater beach . . . the warm sun of the dental lamp . . . the murmur of circular waves in the spit basin. A pleasurable retreat now--a necessity in my youth. Our parents led us down a sugar plum path from the day we lost that first tooth, educating us with shining eyes on the myth of the tooth fairy. How she would tiptoe to our bedsides, slipping silver coins beneath our slumbering heads in exchange for the little pearls we left there. I personally was horrified at the thought of some unhuman creature stringing a necklace of blood-dried baby teeth--a bunch of voodoo. I kept my outgrown teeth in a Jewel Tea can behind the garage where it grew thick with morning glories. My mother hated the scent of

that flower, so I was reasonably sure she would not trespass there as she would in my bureau drawers.

My first visit to Dr. Clevitt confirmed my black magic suspicions. Being what he considered a progressive dentist in the early '50's, Dr. Clevitt decided he would do without anesthetics of any kind and effectively perform his work through hypnosis. What I remember most is the silver band he wore on his forehead from which extended a long piece of metal with two square magnifying glasses on the end. His attempt at hypnosis was, to say the least, unsuccessful. As he leaned over my face and began his mutterings, his breath smelled sweet and sour, like my father's the morning after a party. And, from my vantage point, the glasses magnified the inside of Dr. Clevitt's nose, which was not a pretty sight. When he stopped talking and believed I assume, that I was under his spell judging from my pinpoint pupils, he touched the drill to my decaying molar. A white crystal of pain shot through my cheekbone, into my eyeball and straight to the top of my head. What's a six-year-old to do when some witchdoctor is breathing horrific odors over her, chanting incantations and sticking her with pins?--Bite. I did and he promptly slapped me soundly. Grandpa Perkins, I'm certain, drove Dr. Clevitt to his brown bottles when, informed of my incident, marched up and down in front of this very same building carrying a sign that read,

"DOCTOR CLEVITT, DENTIST, HITS LITTLE CHILDREN."

Well, Grandpa never needs to visit the dentist anymore. The nursing home does not provide dental care, so mother or myself

bring his dentures in for cleaning or repair when we make our visits to see how much closer we are to Grandpa's fate. Even though they assured me that because of the tortures I went through as a child, I would be chewing steak at age seventy.

Doctor Porter has eaten an orange while waiting for the novocaine to take effect and scrubs the juice from his hands while telling me precisely what atrocity he is about to perform on my mouth. He turns on his new high speed drill and it whines with anticipation. They seem so much more efficient, however, the squirting water necessitates yet another appendage hanging from my gaping mouth, sucking up the saliva swelling my inner mouth in preparation of pain. The white and gray dust of my teeth spraying forth under his drill is the dust of my ashes after cremation--I will not have potato head eyes shooting from the ground for some grave robbing tooth fairy to swipe.

Doctor Porter junior has finished . . . had his way with me, and I walk to the receptionist flushed, hair toussled, wobbly legs and make my next appointment for June, which I mean to extend to August, maybe September.

I place Grandpa's cleaned, blue plastic wrapped denture on the car seat beside me. I'll need to drop them off at Moms before heading to Sociology 204. At a red light, I check out my freshly capped incisor--$120.00, and notice my forehead in the rearview mirror.

"It's simply the aging process and the price your mouth pays for bearing children," Dr. Porter junior replied to my questioning the

increasing deterioration of my teeth. God, look at those lines, I'm scowling in the sunlight bouncing off the snow heaps lining the sides of the road, thinking about the eighteen and twenty-year-old nubiles in my class with fresh faces and firm breasts. I'm starting to look more like my mother, the way her face looked last Thursday when she told me about Grandpa's latest escapade.

My heart felt genuinely heavy, watching her face contort with tears, betraying every year of gravity's ravages. So unlike the portrait hanging in the den, painted by some slick entrepreneur who years ago lost his vision, blinded by the glitter of cash and enraptured country club matrons.

"I don't know what I'm going to do, I feel so bad. He was pathetic," her chin quivered, stuttering out her words. "I don't know where he got all those boxes. When I went to his room, he had everything--I mean everything: clothes, shoes, razor, packed in cardboard boxes. He thought he was coming home for good. I told him it was just for the Thanksgiving weekend . . . he forgets. They should have stopped him, he had to get those boxes from the staff. Don't you think they would have asked him what he wanted with all those boxes?"

I could see the crisp, white, hurried pace of the attendants, obvious impatience with the laconic requests, anxious to resume outside lives.

"I know he hates it there, he likes his privacy and independence. He still thinks he can go back to River Street."

The last time I visited Grandpa at the old house was to present him with his first great grandson. Sitting in an overstuffed pink chair, magnifying glass in hand, Bible in his lap, his gaze never left the stairwell. I talked too loud, forcing gaiety,

"Grandpa, would you like to hold him? Grandpa, what do you think of him? Grandpa?"

"Our first passed on you know, croup. Mother had such a bad time of it. Sometimes when I sleep, I hear her call me and I get up to see what she needs and then I remember . . . well, she's with the Lord now."

He removed his glasses to wipe the tears and I wanted to embrace and comfort him. But my arms were filled with new life and patterns of patriarchal respect held me in my place.

Mother's mouth purses in pique, "I wish he had more visitors. Those people from the Salvation Army should visit him. When I think of all the money he's given them. He always tithed one-third of his salary, all the years he worked at Motor Wheel, to that church. He lived by their motto, "serve others" and where are they now?"

It's hard for me to imagine Grandpa in his younger days, when his eyes filled with righteousness, handing out "Warcries" in neighborhood bars. That was my favorite Army story. On Friday and Saturday nights, Grandpa would lift Mom and Uncle Paul into the back of the pickup and park on Washington Avenue. While he made the bar circuit, the kids would sit in the flat bed and eat chicken feed (a 5¢ day-old bag of bread and cookie crumbs) and watch people.

Or when times were good, a dimestore bag of chocolate-covered vanilla nougat. (Uncle Paul has dentures now too.)

"You know what he said to me when I told him we'd have to unpack those boxes? He said it wasn't safe there, that Loren was trying to get rid of him, you know, his roommate that swears all the time? He said, 'Loren and that boy were there in Laingsburg, they left me without a bed to sleep in, but I found a matress on the floor and slept on that. I got real hungry but I found a woman with a basket of sandwiches and she gave me one. I asked her what I owed and she said it was her pleasure. I think she knew I was in the army.'"

"I said to him, Dad, you must have been dreaming, but he said he was not, and knew how good that cheese tasted when he bit into it. God, it makes me sad."

My mother took care of Grandpa at home for two years before Uncle Paul insisted they place him in Sunnyknoll. I reminded her of this fact and that Grandpa is no longer in control of his body or his mind.

"Oh, I know that, but he doesn't, he blames me for his being there."

My mother answers the door in pink rubber gloves and I hand her the blue-wrapped denture. "I hope they cleaned them properly this time."

"Mom, they always do."

"No, they don't get into the cracks, just bring them in the washroom, will you please?"

The sink is filled with muddy brown water. My mother brings home all the pants and baggy boxer shorts Grandpa defecates in twice weekly. When I ask why she doesn't let the laundry at the home do them, she replies, "They use too much starch and bleach."

I set the dentures on a shelf and watch her hands plunge into the water, scrubbing the stains, the heavier the load, the greater satisfaction. Wringing hands squeeze out the excess guilt in attempt to balance the scales. And I leave to attend Sociology 204.

Stacey Bennington had asked me to take notes for her last class period because she had an interview set up with Austin's Modeling Agency. She sits in front of me in class, she is a sophomore, she is nineteen and she is gorgeous. She is also absent from class a lot, but always manages to get the class assignments. Stacey missed a week's worth of classes by taking an extended Thanksgiving holiday in Florida. "I need to beef up my tan--it's almost faded completely from summer," she simpered, eyes wide with concern. I can see her down the hall now, her tight jeans swishing into room 116. Her browned skin blowing an obscene bubble between waistband and the skimmer t-shirt she's chosen to wear. I stop at the trash can next to the Coke machine and drop my xeroxed copy of the last class discussion inside, and prepare to discuss Chapter 16: "The Effects of Aging on Family and Relationships." Today I will take notes, and try not to grind my teeth.

THIS YEAR'S VENISON

He removes his gloves and lights the hand warmer. The kerosine heater would have been warmer but then the deer might smell it and this is the last chance. The sun will be up in about twenty minutes. He pushes the orange crate through the few inches of snow, rubbing it into the semi-frozen ground. His mother-in-law had been right about the deer. She'd called him at the hospital and said while she and her friend were talking in the car in her driveway, they saw a deer come down the hill. She said it ate the crabapples on the ground and wasn't it funny that all the men had gone up north to hunt and here was a deer right in her own backyard. He saw the tracks this morning when he came up the hill and got down real close to the ground to see if there were tracks under the tree.

He puts the red plastic hot seat on the crate and settles in, styrofoam squishing under his weight. There is some light now

coming through the naked tree tops. Enough to see a cardinal in the bush a few yards away. He knows it's a male, his red is brilliant against the snow.

He pulls his stocking hat a bit farther down over his ear muffs. His head gets so cold outdoors. Inside the hospital room it doesn't matter. Ted Brooks had used an ice cap when he had the chemo and it had saved his hair. But it doesn't really matter, it's all a matter of time anyway.

He raises his Winchester 32 Special to his shoulder, sighting. Then lowers it across his knees, running his hand down the custom-made mahogany stock. This is a fine gun. This gun has brought down four buck. He remembers each one well.

The sun is beginning to swell pale yellows. He notices the breeze is slight, just teasing the few clinging, shakey leaves. His position is good, he is down-wind from the crest of the hill.

He begins to shudder, then thinks of the words to a song. This technique works, a practiced technique, mind over matter, he gets cold so quickly, so easily now. His wife gave him hell for coming out, but not too much. She knows this is the last deer. And it feels so good to be outside. It's clean and crisp and open, far away from transfusions and needles and uncomfortable friends shifting in bedside chairs with empty faces.

It's quiet too, except for some traffic noise rising from the highway down in front of the house. This is a hell of a place to hunt, but then it's the last chance and he wants to taste venison this year. Not someone else's venison--his, from the deer <u>he</u> brings down. When

his father-in-law called yesterday, he said Bob had got an eight-point, but none of the other guys had any luck. They were all up there. That's where he'd gotten his four. He hopes they'll call tonight. After they eat dinner at the camp, they all go into town and have beers and retell hunting stories of today and seasons before. He'll tell them tonight about the buck, twelve or fourteen points, how it was bending its neck to munch crabapples when he fired the shot.

The sun's up now. The birds are calling. They'll settle in the crabapples to feed and he'll watch for them. For them all to rise at once in a wave when the buck comes. He releases the safety and gets set, still. What is that call--a mourning dove--no, it's an owl, an owl on the hunt for rabbits or field mice. It's closer now. That story, they made it into a song a few years ago, the story from Boy Scouts, Indian folklore. The owl has called my name. He'll tell his son tonight that when he was out hunting, he heard an owl and it called out his name and when he's old enough to be a scout, he'll hear that story about the Indian who heard the owl call his name, and then he'll remember the night his dad brought home a buck and promised him the antlers and told him the story about the owl calling his dad's name, before he went back to the hospital and he hopes his son doesn't cry and he can't cry now, the buck is approaching.

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PRESERVES

"You're not taking that camera tonight?"

"I want to take a picture of you singing."

"No, Trish, please . . . it's a small club--I'd be embarrassed," I plead with my cousin who since her encampment at my home three days ago, has been snapping shots like sweetpea pods in August.

"But I want to show these to my friends in Mapleview."

Trisha, after five years of marriage, two toddlers, and twenty-five pounds lighter, is freshly separated--in a slavering panic to catch up. She came here because we were close as children, emotionally as well as chronologically. She was the proud maid-of-honor at my dishonorable teenage wedding. And I cried when I sang for her wedding. She came to me for advice, focusing on a script she could process. I had made it, seemingly unscarred through four

years of single status; managing three years of university, three children and three days a week working on campus.

"You're an inspiration to me, Abbey, I don't know how you manage. Sometimes I wonder if I'll hold together for even one more day."

"I know, I felt that way, too. Just wait, a year from now, this will seem like five years ago."

Five years ago I too took pictures. They were justification, the rationale on those nights when Michael didn't come home again and I would say to myself, "This is it, this time I'm going to leave." I'd pull out those four photo albums (one for each child and one to catch the overflow), to find some good in my marriage: children blowing out birthday candles, ferreting out Easter eggs, ripping paper from Christmas packages, and those all important impromptu visits to the zoo. Even though Michael was conspicuously missing from most of the shots, anyone could see why I should stay, anyone could see what a happy family this is.

Trisha's going out the front door. "At least let me get one of you with your guitar before we leave. I'll have to take it outside, I'm out of cubes."

"Where do you want me?"

"Right in front of the door. Okay, no, wait, the guitar's hiding that great outfit." I grab the neck of my guitar, resting the base on the ground, tri-podding for Trisha's scrapbook.

I invited my cousin here, in fact I insisted the day I received her phone call. "Please come out, I need to talk to you." The agent

in her husband's brain machinery, acquired in the Viet Nam jungles back in '69--incubating, came to full term last winter. He asked her to leave, but wouldn't let her go. She could stay if she behaved properly. She must not protest when he tied her hands and feet to the bedpost, not spend or request money, and drop out of community college immediately.

Trish continued school and he burned her books and clothes. She refused sado-masochism and he poured hot water on her each time she shut her eyes. She filed for divorce, he slashed her tires and took a sledge hammer to the engine of her car.

She kept her eyes on the neighbor's elm all through her monotone disclosure, my eyes might reflect her inner horror, and I must not upset the balance. She has lived with it long enough, become so familiar with it, that she can now present it with the numbness which attempts to lessen the severity.

Trisha needs to know that she's not permanently anesthetized. En route to "Dillon's Saloon," she asks,

"What kind of guys hang out at this place?"

"Jocks mostly, a lot of ball players come in after their games now that summer's here."

"What about this guy you're singing with tonight?"

"Bob? He's alright, definitely not a jock, he's into money."

"I mean what does he look like, is he a hunk?"

"I guess he's pretty nice looking."

"Oh, that reminds me, I've got a picture of Tim in my wallet. You know, he's the one I told you about. He's really great, helped

me through these past few months, a real friend, you know? Here, isn't he cute?"

I cast a brief glance off the pavement to check out the real friend, "It's hard to tell from that picture."

What pictures do I carry in my wallet? Only three--school pictures of my children. They seem a necessity. I never know when I may run into someone from high-school years who will ask, "Well, Abbey, what have you been doing since graduation?" And by God, I can show them.

In high-school, Trisha had double wallet fillers. She'd flip through the plasticine faces of classmates, coined with words cut from Teen magazine: "BOSS" "FOXY LADY" "THE RAPPER." Almost everyone did. My kids do, but now it's Tiger Beat and: "SWEET" "BITCH" "HEAVY METAL" "AWESOME." And I have my albums and shoe box. Mom has her wooden purse with grandchildren decoupaged on the sides.

What is this obsession we have with picture taking and collecting? We press our treasures between sheets of plastic or glass and wood frames. We share them with intensity--"Would you like to see positive proof that I exist and do so in a wonderful manner?"

We don't photograph surgeries, funerals, divorces, angry faces, weeping faces; they are not suitable for framing, for some unexposed person to lift from the desktop and inquire, "The family?" No, it has become a religious rite, recorded chronology of: births, baptisms, bar mitzvahs, confirmations, first-days-of-school, holidays,

vacations, graduations, weddings, retirements and anniversaries. All preserved with fading labeled dates.

When we become parents, we seek out proof of genetic heritage, hauling out mother's electric blanket box full of photographs to see if our new offspring bear our image, peering out of grey and white swaddlings. Or scrutinize faces of uncles waving from atop farm machinery and aunts smiling with arms around the waists of schoolmates, to see if our children truly have the "Boughner nose" or "Thomas brow."

In her pre-puberty adolescence my sister was convinced that she had been adopted, despite my mother's assurances to the contrary, "I should know, I was there!" The basis for my sister's belief was the absence of her baby pictures. When my brother was born, their first child, my parents were living with my grandparents who made a baby gift of a camera and large supply of film. It seemed the proper gift for the only male child to carry on the Boughner name. My birth, six years later, came at a time of financial security and I was loved with the intensity given to the final baby. However, my sister was born in between, just after my father purchased the business; a restaurant, take-out with two gas pumps out front. Dad pumped gas and fried chicken. Mom waited tables and covered the counter, peeling potatoes at night while my sister banged a spoon on the high-chair and ate soda crackers.

Trisha pulls down the visor, checking her hair and refreshing the lipstick which had been removed by the two cigarettes required to get from my house to Dillon's.

"Does this top look alright?"

I park my Chevette behind the club and Trisha bends into the open hatch-back, grabbing my dulcimer bag.

"It's been a long time since I've worn a tube top. I would have made people nauseated with my bare midriff before."

"Trish, stop fussing, you look great," and she really does. Tonight she has all the grace of a lioness on the prowl, and, I'm beginning to realize, the equal hunger.

By the end of the second set, Trisha's wearing the green felt cowboy hat of the third baseman for "Quickie Cleaners." On my third set break, Joey, the bartender announces a special on "Watermelon Shooters." He won't give away his recipe, I can detect some rum with the fresh watermelon in the blender, but he guarantees that four will put you under the table. Past experience prompts me to urge that Trish drink no more than the second shot she's already downed, purchased by the grinning cowboy.

Bob joins us at the table and picks up the scent of the hunt.

"Can I buy you a drink? He slides his chair closer to mine.

"You know I never drink until . . . ."

"I know, one glass of wine during the last set, see, I remembered," he pouts, I guess I should be impressed. "Let me get it for you."

"Thanks anyway, Bob, Joey's already set it on the amp, let's get to work."

The fourth and final set is country/western. I'm doing my best to belt out, "When Will I Be Loved," when I notice Trish standing

on her chair, joining in the chorus, "Yeah, damnit, when will I be loved?"

We finish up with "Mama's Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowboys," and Bob puts the sound track from "Urban Cowboy" on the audio system. His brother and roommate clear the tables from the center floor as they always do on Friday and Saturday night, making room for the Cotton-Eyed Joe and Texas Two-Step. The three of them kick and hop across the floor, stomping to the beat of the circling clapping hands.

Trisha's on her chair again and Bob lifts her on his shoulder, lugging her like a side of beef to the clearing. God, is she happy, boy, is she drunk.

I'm amazed at her ability to two-step. Where could she have learned? I know--Saturdays, watching American Bandstand after the kids have wiggled loose the anesthetizing effects of morning cartoons and run upstairs to smash their teddy bears.

We used to watch Bandstand together in '63, turning up the volume--pensive, following Carmen and Danny, her bee-hive hairdo bouncing, white lipstick glimmering. Standing in front of the set we'd imitate Carmen's steps, anticipating our cool next Friday at the sock-hop after school.

On Saturdays in '64 we were doing the Twist with Chubby Checker; the same year my father bought his movie camera. Trish and I are preserved, forever fourteen and twistin' the night away in our matching outfits: candy-stripped red and white blouses, black ski pants (loops under the foot and zippers up the ankle), and black

flats. Our eyes are downcast, not from embarrassment, from the camera's four mounted lights my father directed from behind. He took a lot of movies that year, the year we moved to the country, the year he put in the pool. Poolside shots were his favorite. Trisha and I, bikinied bottoms stuck into truck tire inner tubes, jumping backwards off the diving board.

Trisha's bottom is now on the cowboy's lap. She falls into it, basking in the sweat and applause for her two-step style, arms around his neck, she plants a smacking kiss on his mouth.

Bob's really excited now, "A few of us guys are getting together at MacLean's house, we'll have some beers and a swim. Why don't you and your cousin come along."

"Hey, baby, you were great! Have you been to Gilley's?" The cowboy's bouncing Trish on his knee, but she's not listening, she wears a blank, drawn look.

"I was there in March, I even rode the bull, you'd be great on the bull, baby," the cowboy hoots and begins bucking Trish. He circles his arms around her waist, pulling her hips down into his groin. "Ride me, baby, ride me!"

Trisha's limp, she reaches up to remove the Stetson, wiping her bangs from her forehead, she slaps the hat down on the table.

"Stop it, shit, it's hot in here, stop bouncing me, please." But the cowboy's rigid now, caught up in the rhythm.

I can see it coming, I can't stop it. I watch my hand attempting to dart out, save the rich forest green felt, bounded with bands of silver and the breast feathers from some fierce bird of prey.

The rhythm is broken, all movement stops, cowered by Trisha's watermelon crescendo. The cowboy is gaping at the pinkish slush and corn hulls swilling in the inverted crown, spattering and clinging to the brim. The surrounding tables have gone so quiet, I can hear Andy Williams on the bar tv, singing the praises of Kodak film: "Remember . . . do you remember the times of your life . . . ." Trisha's feet are trying to locate the floor. I grab the soggy Stetson and Trisha's hand, hustling them both to the restroom. While I empty the hat in one bowl, Trisha's on her knees emptying her stomach into another. I'm afraid to wet the felt, the green's already bleeding onto the proud white feathers. I dampen a paper towel and salvage what I can. I'm trying to recall the location of the back kitchen door when Trish gets to her feet. I brace myself to console her, save her, preparing my apologies and explanations to the cowboy, "I'll pay for the cleaning, she's been through a very difficult time, she needed to get drunk tonight." She's probably going to cry. I did the last time I got so drunk that I puked.

I wouldn't have cried if not for Michael. I thought it was quite funny, of course I guess it really wasn't, but in the elevator it seemed hilarious. I laughed all the way to the car. Once we were safely in the car, Michael turned on me, then I cried all the way home. But I still laugh each time I think of it or come across a photo of the "Red Stocking Ball," a holiday dance for all the State of Michigan employees. The print is dated, "1972, Paul and Sandra Langley and us," in Michael's handwriting. Paul Langley was the head of bridge design, Michael's immediate supervisor. Sandra was

a twit; wrapped like cellophane in silver lamé, she spent the evening trying to recapture the spirit of Christmases past, leaning her breast on the arms of the young male employees, asking the wives, "Dear, may I borrow your husband for a dance?" And when the evening was ending and the young husbands began squeezing the bottoms of their young wives in anticipation of the warm beds waiting at home, Sandra's wrappings held her together; the accumulated wealth in jewels of twenty years with one rising executive, and this year's Christmas bonus, a mink-tail jacket.

I hated those parties, the undercurrents of coveting, besting, placating and patronizing. That night I discovered Singapore Slings, a wonderous concoction of sloe gin and frivolity. At 2:00 a.m. I gathered the five cute little umbrellas propped around my clutch bag and followed Michael who was following Paul and escorting the clinging Sandra to the elevator. There were eight of us packed in--I stayed to the back. Sandra stood in front of me, leaning on Michael, telling him about her upcoming cruise to Barbados. Between the fourth and third floors, I began to feel the slings rising in my throat. Hold on just a bit further, I told myself, placing my hand to my lips, hoping to restrain my stomach. As we hit the ground floor, liquid sprayed from between my silencing, fanned fingers depositing a holiday design on Sandra's exiting mink. I tried to catch her, to tell her. I thought it looked rather festive, I said to Michael, but he held my arm back. It was watching her walk through the door out into the snow that I started laughing. "Wait until they turn on

the car heater." But as I said, Michael didn't think it was funny and I cried all the way home.

Trisha's not crying, her eyes are bright, "Now I've got room for more booze." I can't believe it, maybe her tear reserve has gone dry.

"Trish, it's 2:00, they're closing now, time to go home."

"Oh, I've embarrassed you, haven't I, damn it."

"No, Trish, no, I'm glad you've had a good time."

"Oh, God, look what I did to his hat. Well, he works for a cleaners, he can get it cleaned free."

The cowboy's removed himself to the bar, so engrossed with the barmaid he doesn't notice us heading for the door, or can't. I interrupt Bob's conversation with two sorority sisters to ask if he'll tell the cowboy I'll return his hat here, next Friday, cleaned.

"Don't worry about it, Abbey, he's a good friend of mine, here, I'll take care of it. It's okay, really." I hand over the smelly Stetson, Bob doesn't mention his earlier invitation.

Trish is quiet on the way home. As we pull in the drive and I look at her slumbering face, I think of Doris Day in "Calamity Jane."

"Come on tootsie, it's time for all good little cowgirls to head for the bunkhouse."

"Home already? I could have danced all night."

Once inside, Trisha flops on the couch, "Oh, Abbey, I had such a great time. I wish I would've taken my camera though, so I can remember. What are you doing?"

"Don't do that, I invited Sam and his friend over."

"Well, if they show, you can entertain them both. I'm going to bed."

"You're no fun."

I brush my teeth, remove the make-up, slip on a chemise and go into the living room to say goodnight. Her camera is sitting on the end table, poised, ready. I lift it, pull open the drawer and locating my reserve of cubes, take the last shot of Friday, August 14, 1980. She can label this one, "Sleeping Shooter."

ROSEY'S RIVER RACE

Sandford Maxwell flicks his cigarette to the pavement, grinding out the glowing ash with his heel. Selective perception picks up a high whine, "Better get back inside, the meatwagon will be here any minute." Heading for the red emergency room door, he pauses, "No--it's the fireworks." Leaning against the brown brick of Saint Lawrence Hospital, he thinks of the six months more of residency he's required to serve. Once that's finished, he won't get stuck with the holidays and these damn graveyard shifts. He visualizes his name on the gold plate hanging above his father's practice in Westport.

"Hey, Max, come in here, you gotta see this one," Dennis Tate yells, sticking his head out in the night air. Max believes Tate is crass and crude, but he's also a crackerjack nurse. Inside

he's high-tech mechanization--no errors. His professionalism just tends to catch between the swinging ER doors.

"Max, look in number four. You know that old wino-flasher, Earl Taylor? Some chick beat the shit out of him over at the park." Sandford follows Tate to the green curtains of treatment room four, pushing aside the metal rings that click on the overhead bar to reveal a prone figure.

"Can you believe it, Max? I wonder what she hit him with," Tate grins, sponging Taylor's face. "I tell you, I want to meet this woman." Sandford puts one hand to his mouth. Repulsed yet intrigued, he leans closer to the bloody face.

"Don't touch him without gloves, Max! Dirty old bastard, had to cut him out of those slimy clothes. Get me a shot of penicillin out of the cabinet will you? Got the most scab infested pecker I . . . "

"Shut up, Tate!"

"What's the matter with you, Max? Cool out. You aren't feeling sorry over this old rummy, are you? He's been asking for this for a long time, brother. I'm glad some chick finally had the balls to do it. He'll think twice before he raises old glory again. Hey, I can handle this. There's a cop out there, needs you to sign something, and the girl's in two. Much as I want to give her my personal care, Rooney said she thinks there's a break.

Lansing's Fourth of July celebration covers Riverfront Park. Friday evening, the setting up begins. Red and white canvases are

pulleyed into tent tops, framing a United Nations of culture and cuisine. Raised platforms are jigsawed into the Muscular Dystrophy tent for the weekend dance-a-thon. Racks of folding chairs are wheeled alongside the Sunbowl's geodisic dome to be filled by the musicians of Lansing's Concert Band. Record players and speaker systems are taken from the backs of vans by lithe, leotarded members of the Performing and Creative Arts Dance Company. White lines are powdered on the riverside field, marking the boundaries for the three-legged race and obstacle course. Over the Shiawasee Street Bridge, on the river's west side, the carnies are unhitching trailers, peeling back their side to release the whirling, twirling innards that will flash and blink tomorrow night.

The firemen at stations eleven, two, eight and five, are kicked back on two legs of their steel chairs, discussing the strategy for tomorrow's water ball contest, calculating the velocity on the hoses and capacity of the holding tanks.

The members of various chapters of the Lansing Jaycees and their wives, the Jaycettes, are gathered in chapter president's garages, tossing empty beer cans in garbage pails, painting and hammering and chicken wiring their prospective entries in the River Raft Competition.

Gus Davis is tuning the pipe organ on his steamboat, "The Spirit of Lansing," he'll play tomorrow as he guides passengers down the Grand River. Figures dance in his head with each note: "Load twenty-five at the dock, down to the bridge, around the viaduct and back again. A buck a head, I should turn a nice profit."

At City Hall, Lansing's mayor is making his last phone call of the day to the Connor's Fireworks Company. He's dropping a wad this year--the primary is on October second.

Jane steps from the shower stall, shaking water from her fingertips. She didn't bring down a towel; the temperature has already reached 75° and she runs naked upstairs to the bedroom. She's alone in the house, the children left last Tuesday to summer with their father in North Carolina.

Jane opens the closet door to select an appropriate Independence Day costume. She's ready to play. Yes, this blouse is just the thing: peasant style, white cotton with blue embroidery dashing the yoke and threading down, stemming large navy-blue flowers on the bodice. She leaves the ties unknotted, letting the dark blue beads dangle. Now, the pegged jeans with a slit up the ankle and blue, high-heeled sandals. There. She checks her reflection in the mirror. Not the blow dryer--she'll sit on the picnic table and dry her hair in the sun.

Combing through the tangles, she watches the cars go by on the highway. Jane thinks the cars are all headed for Riverfront Park. She's stayed in too long, today she'll have some fun. She'll go to the city market first and buy some green grapes and some of the chocolate cheese they make at the university. She'll leave her car parked in the market lot and walk over the wooden bridge by the "Windlord." It's a nice piece of sculpture, disregarded for the most part by adults, but the city kids climb on the bronzed feathers, soaring away from Lansing on extended wings.

And it's possible she might meet someone nice. It's Saturday; single fathers with the weekend kids, the park's a good place for them to run after being cooped up Friday night in Dad's efficiency apartment.

Jane knows how to deal with men. When she expects that a man is getting too close, she says, "I've got three kids at home." She feels if they're not truly interested in her as a person, they'll leave, and they usually do.

She returns to the mirror. One more thing, the hair comb with a white rose in full bloom, half opened rosebud peeking from the bottom petal. Jane brushes her hair up and back, away from the left temple, securing the comb. Waves are stylish now. She remembers how in high-school during the sixties, hair was worn long and pin-straight. She used to place sections of her long, dark hair on a towel, cover with brown paper cut from a grocery bag, and press with the iron on "SILK" to straighten out her unstylish Botticelli waves.

It's grown out now, almost to her waist; three years growth after the Sunday November afternoon when she stood in front of the bathroom mirror, brushed the hair in to cover her reflection, then scissored a circle beginning at the brows, completed at the nape of her neck. She was desperate. She had boiled a pot of water, but finding herself unable to immerse her hands, had cut off her hair instead. John would bring the children home at 6:00. If her hands were wrapped in gauze, John would change that look he always had on his face when he came into Jane's house. Though her classwork

would be courteously and concernedly postponed, the hands would draw attention, so cutting the hair was really better. She did not want attention. She had lost 16 pounds since the term began in September and she was achieving her goal; no make-up, skin and bones, now chopped off hair, her male classmates didn't bother her anymore--she was getting smaller.

Three years later on this July 4th, 1980, Jane smiles unlocking her car door. She'll take the grapes and cheese with her to the park and leave the peaches locked inside the car. She was lucky to get this parking place. The market's lot is already full and it's only 2:00.

"Hey, lady, lady." Jane turns to the unsteady figure approaching her car.

Earl Taylor is forty-two and looks sixty-five. He forgot his brown felt hat today and the sun's getting mighty hot. He needs a drink--bad. He reaches his hand up to finger the scap crusting over his nose. He fell last night. Goddamn thing hurts--he needs a drink, so bad it ain't even swellin' proper in his pants. A piece like this one here should make it swell.

"Lady, could ya help me out? I got robbed last night, took my food stamps and everything."

Jane jumps inside the car, locking the doors.

"Just a little somethin', lady, you look real sweet and pretty with that rosey in your hair."

Jane sets her elbows on the steering wheel, putting both hands to her forehead, cupping blinders. Earl Taylor walks away,

scanning the crowd for another mark, regretting he can't get it up to shove against the car window.

Jane waits in the car for ten minutes after she's seen Earl Taylor's shiny green pants weave through the crowd and disappear. "Damned old rummy, they crawl out of the woodwork on holidays," Jane mumbles, grabbing her white paper bags. She won't let this ruin her day. She checks both doors and back windows--locked, and takes the State Journal's schedule of events from her purse.

Jane watches the preparation for the foot races from under a willow tree on the west bank of the Grand River, not ready to mingle with the friends and relatives pressing the sidelines. At 3:05 a megaphoned voice rallies couples for the three-legged race.

"Okay, folks, make sure you're wearing your numbers. You must be registered and wearing a number to be eligible for the prize. Move to the starting line, please."

Pairs of tee-shirts and running shorts line up, matching numbers on their backs, while officials move down the line with white cotton strips, stilling the rhythm of pizzicato knees. Jane rises to the decrescendo, awaiting the conductor's, "On your mark--get set--go!"

The runners counter the 3/4 feet time with an arm wound tightly about the other's waist, but still, it's a struggle. That's what happens, Jane thinks, when a man and a woman are bound together. They try to function as one smoothly running unit, but even those few instances when they seem to strike an initial balance,

they eventually falter. Or if they don't, it's because one strains twice as hard while the other leans.

The dwindling racetrack crowd makes space for music to filter through, beckoning Jane to the red and white Muscular Dystrophy tent. Jane enters as the band's drummer is addressing the crowd.

"Hey, people, the bowl's looking good outside so let's liven things up in here. There's only one couple on this dance floor. Now come on, we'll kick it out for ya. Everybody get up and dance!"

Jane selects a folding chair close to the dance floor and Freddie the Muscular Dystrophy Clown starts hopping through the aisles, attempting to persuade fortyish housewives and gum-snapping fourteen-year-olds onto the floor.

"Hey, Freddie, MD--mad-dog--there's a pretty little flower right up here tapping her toes," the lead guitarist purrs into the foam encased microphone--it takes the "pa" out of pretty. Jane looks at her sandaled toes, surprised that her feet truly are keeping the beat.

Mad-dog Freddie about faces, strutting up the aisle to Jane's chair, "How about shakin' your bacon with Freddie?"

Jane searches his face. She wants to take Kleenex from her purse and wipe away the paint so the intent is clear--it may be a disguise. But he's absurd, a harmless Clarabell; baggy suit, ruffles to the chin, only the long, flat shoes are missing, he wears sneaks. Jane allows him to take her hand.

"All right, mad-dog, MD 20/20. Come on people, we're gonna roll you on the river . . . spent a lot of time in Memphis . . . ," shouts the drummer.

Oh, God, Jane thinks, will they never let that song die? Well, Freddie's enjoying it, shake loose Jane. She centers the beat low between her hips, shifts the weight from thigh to thigh. In highschool, all the boys wanted to dance with Janie. She transformed them, made them shine. She'd absorb the rhythm, guide it to that primal place in her brain that connects with the low-between-her-hips place. The connection complete, she'd close her eyes, flood her body with the pulsating radiation from the center, sending emissions mating in the air with the drum's steady back beat, high up in the twisted ropes of gymnasium ceilings.

Then she'd let them go, back to their steady girls glaring from bleacher seats. When the music stopped, the connection broke and Jane would draw in again. The boys would dance with her, she was dangerous, but she was safe.

Jane opens her eyes, something is interfering with her love-making. Several people have moved in to observe, voyeurs, clapping their hands, grinning, "Go, Freddie, go!"

Jane accepts the applause, placing her hands one on top of the other at the waist and bends in a curt bow. Jumping from the platform, she grabs her purse and exits the tent, preserving her good graces. A man steps from the canopy, blocking her path.

"Hey, baby, wanna go cop a buzz?" He flips his shoulder-length hair away from his face, leaning close into Jane's.

"No, thank you."

"You sure know how to shake that thing. Gave me a real sweet shot bending over up there. Come on, we'll go over in the willows and do a jay or two."

Jane panics, stepping backwards, catching her heel on a supporting wire; she grabs the draping canvas, drops to her haunches and slips under the suspended rope. Her head whips back in the hippie's direction, checking out pursuit. But he's in the same spot, wagging a slow finger. "You're a prick-teaser, baby. You shouldn't advertise if you haven't got the goods to deliver."

On the hillside of Glenn Arena, Jane watches the first PCA member prance to center park; a young girl, multi-colored ribbons tied into blonde tresses, white stockings and black slippers. Her dress is a Snow White replica--a virgin, thinks Jane. Is that how I have to dress, toss daisies from a wicker basket and leap across the park? Damn! Jane drops her head, hugging her knees to her chin. The music slows, ominous tones; three hags are moving in, draped and hooded in black robes, face half-white, half-black. They circle the dancing virgin, miming her delicate steps with gross, heavy movements. They move in closer and closer, snaking out white arms to snatch her beauty. One hag carries a metal vessel. The others pounce, wrapping black-tipped fingers around the virgin's ankles and dainty wrists, raising her over their heads. The virgin's neck goes limp, head tilted back to the approaching vessel-bearing hag.

Jane starts to cry, getting to her feet, fleeing; she misses the entrance of the white prince . . . and of Earl Taylor who's staggered out from under an elm and headed off towards the river.

Jane crosses over the Shiawasee Street Bridge, avoiding the throngs below, moving from tent to tent, enchiladas to knackwurst. She'll go watch the faces of the children on the rides. Squeals reach her ears and a light spray falls on her exposed arm--the wind is carrying a fine mist from the firemen's hoses. She can't see them, but her eyes follow the spray lines up to the two driving gushes, meeting in mid-air, the apex juggling a bright-red, plastic ball.

She enters the midway between the Ferris Wheel and the Himalaya. On every fourth space stands a converted Winnebago from which red-faced women lean out the sliding window screen, hawking:

"Carmelcorn--candy apples--cotton candy--Coca-Cola!"

Jane observes little fingers pulled off wisps of pink and blue spun sugar, poked deftly into eager mouths. She thinks about her children, hoping John will respect her request not to give them a dollar each time they get bored and send them walking to Maisey's Corner to fill their pockets and faces with crap that she'll end up paying for at their sixth-month dental check.

She leans against a railing next to the Tilt-a-Whirl. Fixing her eyes on one spot, she watches the faces pass by; heads plastered to the cushioned backs, laughing mouths agape. Or tucked in the armpits of Mommy or Daddy. Clinging to the flexed muscles of boy-friends, a kiss on the forehead.

"Ain't they something?"

"This here's my summer job, doin' the circuit. I wish I could do it all year long. I love the kids, I love the way they light right up and laugh and holler sometimes, ah geez, it makes me feel good."

"They are a joy to watch."

"Pure joy, ma'am. You got some on the ride?"

"No, I just like to watch."

"That's nice. That's what I like about kids, you know. They ain't made up all those supposed-tos yet. They let their faces show just what they're feelin' inside. How about yourself, gonna take a whirl?"

"No, my stomach doesn't agree with carnival rides."

Reminded of her stomach, Jane decides this is a good time to sample the food tents. As she crosses the bridge, her olfactory senses are flooded with an ethnic potpourri. The German tent is the first on the river's east side. Members of the Liederkrantz Club stand behind long tables covered with aluminum trays, alcohol burners keeping hot the knackwurst, bratwurst,and potato salad. Being a vegetarian, Jane samples only the German beer, seating herself in the shaded tent to listen to the Salisbury trio; one standing bass, one snare drum and one oom-pa-pa accordian. As the band strikes up the "She's Too Fat For Me Polka," whoops rise as couples squeeze into the roped-off band arena and one-two-three circle the enclosure. A liederhozened grandpa removes his white apron, steps from behind the pony-kegs and taps the shoulder of his wife. She too removes her apron, leaving the Stollen, Springerle and Strudel to kick up her heels.

Finishing her beer and feeling hungry, Jane passes by the Italian tent and cuts a diagonal through the Soul Food Tent. The cooking's done outside; great racks of ribs, flipped sizzling and smoking on blackened grills. The sisterhood of the First Baptist Church serves sweet potato pie while the youths gather around Old Furry's ghetto buster. They are club members, no street gangs but lean, mean dancing machines. Black trousers with pleated waists, criss-crossed black suspenders on light-blue cotton shirts, black velour letters bearing the club's name across their chests. Jane observes several curious white faces peering through the circle of admirers, but as soon as the music stops, the dominoes fall.

Arriving at the Mexican tent, Jane orders a bean tostada, cheese enchilada and a Carta Blanca cerveza. This is possibly the best food I've ever tasted, thinks Jane, smiling her satisfaction with the food and the music. A mariache band is playing on a small platform under the bridge. The strumming of guitars and shaking marachas ripple the cylindrical rainbows running up the players arms and bounce the black balls strung on wide-brimmed hats.

The six entries in the river raft competition stretch across the Grand River under one-hundred, helium-filled balloons formed in an arch constructed by the Parks Department. The district president of the Lansing Jaycees announces the entries and so duly christened, the rafts pole off the shoreline to the cheers of local chapter members.

The first raft, "Barrels on Barrels of Fun," supports a family: a father Jaycee, a mother Jaycette and baby Jay. They

crowd-wave from inside the shoulder-strapped barrels over seemingly naked bodies. Papa bites a corn-cob pipe between his teeth--unlit. Jaycees are conscientious, the sparks could ignite his acrylic red beard. Mama has a smudge on her upper lip from smiling too much over the black-out applied to her two front teeth. Painted across the back of baby's barrel is, "DESTEENASHION POOR HOUSE."

Raft number two is a traditional float. Jane notices how George Washington's neck keeps craning to the rear to catch glimpses of the number three raft where this year's winner of Lansing's wet tee-shirt contest giggles and jumps in a four-legged tub under the spray of two seltzer-bottled clowns.

Following close is a blinking nautilus. The "Star Wars Theme" escapes from silver glo-painted portholes, fades and mixes with "The Mississippi Mud," speakered from raft number five. A Jaycee, dressed out as an enormous river rat, rummages through a giant trash can, plucking out a choice watermelon rind to chew to the music while he twirls his tail like a flapper dancing the Charleston rage.

The sixth and final raft floats a twelve-year-old, freckled faced boy in straw hat, red and white checked shirt, cut-off overalls and bare feet. The red bobber drags behind, straining the nylon thread of his cane pole.

The sun crops rosie hues on the river as Thad Williams, executive assistant to the mayor, tacks the first-place ribbon on the nautilus. By the time Jane reaches the Sunbowl, the sky is dusty grey and the Lansing Concert Band is tuning up under the lights.

Earl Taylor snorts with glee, it ain't good luck, it's a good eye. He'd been watching that bunch of smart-assed college kids, sittin' on them blankets, all afternoon, drinkin' and eatin' outta big hampers. They musta had maybe ten, twelve six packs. But ole Earl knows that ain't enough for 'em, they can't wait to get feelin' good so they usually has a flask or dope on 'em. That tall, skinny blonde one thought he was real foxy, sneakin' over by the river and tucking that Old Grand Dad between some rocks under the water, sweet as you please. It was nice and cool for ole Earl by sunset.

Jane zigzags through the maze of lawn chairs and blankets of families, friends and lovers gathered on the park's lawn. She finds a few feet of unoccupied space and sits on the dry stubble, wishing for a security blanket.

The orchestra begins with a Sousa march. A toddler from the blanket to Jane's right stamps about, arms mimicking the conductor. His baby sister howls and is quickly silenced with mother's breast. Jane's breasts ache in sympathetic remembering. She turns her head away to the left--a woman's closed-eyed, smiling face, suspended over her lover's shoulder. She's got to move--where? The band booms "The Stars and Stripes Forever." Everywhere Jane turns, she sees pairs, units; anticipation in the eyes of children, adult's contentment knowing the delights to come. She gets to her feet--she doesn't belong here.

As the first cannon shot resounds over the river and red streaks cascade the riverfront night sky, Jane stumbles onto the foot bridge. She grasps the railing with both hands, leaning over the

side, shoulders heaving up and down; the white rose losses its grip and falls, drifting with the current under the bridge.

"Who's that trip-trapping on my bridge?" Earl Taylor laughs to himself. He can't remember the last time he felt this good. It'd take five goddamn bottles of sauce to get me where this old grand-daddy's got me. What's this? A pretty flower. He shoves his bulk off the bridge pylon to retrieve the washed-up rose. It's not for real, it's got teeth on it. Hey, I seen this before, somethin' today . . . a little blue car . . . .

Earl Taylor tosses the empty bottle into the Grand, unzips his pants and starts up the planks of the wooden bridge.

"Scuse me, I think you dropped somethin.'" Jane brushes off the tears with the back of her hand, then reaches up to feel for the missing rose now floating at the end of the outstretched arm in front of her.

"Yes, yes I did, thank you." Head bent, embarrassed at being caught, she reaches for the rose, but it's hurled to the ground as fingers grip her wrist, jerking down her hand against hard, upright flesh.

"Member me, Rosey? Slammed your door on poor ole Earl." Jane's body burns with adrenaline, heart racing, recognizing the sneering face from this morning. She struggles to free her wrist, whimpering.

"Go ahead, scream, Rosey, nobody's gonna hear you with all that boomin' and bangin.'"

With his free hand, Earl Taylor grabs Jane's left breast, twisting and pinching her nipple. The pain increases with her wrenching and she screams, driving her stacked heel into Taylor's shin. He's anesthetized, but groans, hopping backward, and Jane runs.

The car . . . no . . . open field to cover too easy to see . . . back to the crowd safety in numbers . . . no he's on the bridge can't cross . . . run run along the river bank . . . distance get away . . . steps up the Shiawasee Bridge not that far . . . ahhh!

Jane's right foot slams into a pile of rocks, sending her flying, face down on the muddy bank.

"I hears ya, Rosey. I'm comin', think yer too good for Earl?"

Oh God he's coming he's getting closer . . . hide got to find a place to hide God help me . . . no place no trees no cover . . . the water.

The Barrels on Barrels of Fun raft is moored to a dock, half submerged, one barrel free floating. Jane slithers on her stomach into the water and strokes to the barrel. She maneuvers her body into the barrel, hooking her arms over the leather straps, and waits, stock still.

"Come out, come out, wherever you are. Hope you ain't in that water, they's leeches and river rats waiting to chew ya! Ya better come out. Earl ain't gonna hurt ya, just wancha to see what I got."

Leeches keep your shoes on river rats jaycees jaycettes baby jays there's no word for baby rats there are puppies and kittens and colts and calfs but no rattlings ratlets . . . Janie, where are you? I can't get out of the closet Mommy but I don't want to either Frankie said not to tell or he's kill me I started to cry when he stuck his fingers in there it hurt and he got mad when I wouldn't touch that thing so he shut the door and took off the knob and I had to pee and Daddy will know why I wet myself Frankie's older and Daddy always believes him and he'll get real mad if I did tell like he did when that man at the playground came up to me and Judy after dinner and asked if we had any hair between our legs and was it the same color as on our heads Daddy said later he wasn't mad at me after the police caught that man in the Red Cross Building across from the school in the ladies room all dressed up in ladies clothes because I remembered the ring it was on his hand that was holding on to a big pink thing sticking out of his pants and I told Daddy how it was gold and black square and he told the policeman in our living room he said he wasn't mad just scared . . . I'm scared now Mama!

"Oh, hell, I cain't wait all night, she musta swam across that river. Damn you, Rosey!" Earl Taylor bellows over the Grand River.

He's leaving oh God he's really leaving . . . footsteps . . . so cold got to wait . . . how much . . . enough now? Out of the straps but stay out of sight! Look, look around . . . nobody . . . move arms stroke . . . the bank safe . . . I want to cry just lay

here and cry . . . it's not safe where . . . the crowds . . . too far too many wet blouse clinging . . . the car get home get safe shower . . . ridiculous shoes bloodsuckers rats take them off . . . oh, ouch! the other shoe can't stand on this foot God it hurts sit down take it off . . . now walk car home safe . . .

how much further just over this little rise should see the lot oh God my legs hurts my chest hurts my head hurts squeeze keep squeezing the shoe with your hand . . . there it is!

damn where did I park God let me remember I know oh I know over by the produce scale . . . the keys! . . . oh, Jesus my purse by the bridge dropped when he grabbed my no in my pocket hurried away from the lot morning please please let them be in my pocket I know they're on the river bottom I just know it check your pocket . . . clink, clink . . . *I've got them I've got them don't cry now stupid red car brown car another brown car yellow car blue light blue Chevette shit no it's not mine stickers . . . oh there it is my car my car round key not the square one get it in the lock stop shaking . . . click handle open inside . . . turn around back in easy careful down easy oh safe home breathe slow relief you're safe now . . .* "Ah! No! Oh, God, no!"

Shrieks pierce the air as Earl Taylor pulls Jane from the seat by her right foot.

"Fooled ya, fooled ya, didn't think dumb ole Earl'd 'member yer little blue car. Gotcha now, Rosey."

Jane grabs the steering wheel, yanks, causing Taylor to lose his hold, falling forward on all fours--and Jane strikes. The heel of

the sandal arches high in Jane's clenched hand, swings down meeting Taylor's rising skull.

"Aargh," he goes down flat on the pavement. Now is her chance to get away. Jane does not shut the car door. She plants both feet on the ground while Taylor tries to rise. She drops her arm backward, as if holding a bowling ball and steps into the strike, thrusting the spike to Taylor's chin.

"Christ, Jesus, stop it! Ooh, stop, please." But Jane's swinging again, now hammering his face and head. He attempts to cover his face, getting to his knees, crossing arms over his bleeding cheek. Jane drives the spike into his ear and he falls, crumpled on his side. Jane kicks his body over, face-up. His lip is split, blood from his nose running down both sides of his neck.

Between set, tight teeth, lips drawn back in a snarl, comes a low, gutteral growl and Jane attacks anew. Dropping to her knees, she plummets the still body with her fists over and over.

Dennis Tates whistles to the waitress, "Hey, bring us a beer will ya, honey?" He sets his elbows on the table, crossing his arms.

"Some night, huh, Max. So what did the girl look like, they took her up to five before I could get a look."

"She was pretty."

"Was there a break?"

"Yeah, her right ankle."

"What did she say about ole Earl? Come on, I want all the good stuff."

"She said she wanted a shower."

"What?"

"She said she wanted a shower, that's all she said and I won't discuss it further."

Sandford Maxwell shook his head, he didn't need to say anything, he'd remember. The way her hands picked at the blood-smattered blouse before coming together on her lap, rubbing one red hand against the other . . . the circular, dark purple bruise on her left breast . . but most of all, when he lifted the blouse away and her eyes settled on his--that face! As bad as Taylor's was--<u>that</u> face, he'd remember, even in Westport.

SALIMA

Salima runs her tongue around the glass rim for the last sticky drops of Grand Marnier and switches off the radio, grunting her contempt for the eleven o'clock news forecast of a snow storm for mid-Michigan. Steven should be home by now, the computer center closes at ten.

After reciting her final "Ave Maria," she prays to the spirit of her maternal grandmother.

"Grandmadre, make Steven love me like he used to." Salima remembers how well they loved each other in Tempe. She'd already filed for divorce and was waiting out the six-month mandatory waiting period for parents with children under the age of eighteen, when she met Steven. He was finishing up his undergraduate work in Communications and she was a senior in the School of Journalism. They both wore jeans and tee-shirts, sandals too. Her hair was long and

straight, jet black and parted down the middle. His curls were the honeyist blond Salima had ever seen and his eyes were as vast blue as the horizon that never touched the ground.

Salima's toes curl inward now as she remembers how Steven would take each one into his mouth, then lay his head on her belly. And how he'd laugh at the moment of climax because he'd start to stumble and she was so small that he could lift her in the air and make love to her with her legs wrapped loosely about his waist.

"Aye, Steven, mi hombre, cómo te quiero."

She tucks the rosary into the toe of her slipper, under the pillow is no longer safe. Salima worries about Jesse, poor Jesse, mi hijo, he doesn't understand. Steven shouldn't tell him that people who believe in God are idiots. What will he think about his Mommy? And Steven gets so angry when Jesse speaks Spanish. Aye, Dios, well, we'll have fun with the beans in the morning, it takes all day for the beans.

Salima wakes slowly, she likes to sleep and she has been dreaming of the wild horses again. It is the same dream each time; she opens the back door off the kitchen and it is snowing hard in the backyard, but through the storm she can make out a group of figures and the closer she gets to them the less the snow falls and the warmer the air is and then she sees that it is a group of wild horses and she kicks off her boots and throws off her coat and begins running toward the horses. She turns her head back to the door and sees Jesse standing in the doorway through the curtain of snow and he sees the

horses too and becomes very excited and runs to Salima. She catches two swift looking animals and she and Jesse mount up and they begin to ride; they do not need saddles, even Jesse; they ride safely. As they leap the backyard fence, Salima turns round again and Steven is closing the back door and Salima sees a woman's pale face in the window.

There is an ache between Salima's hip bones; she is alone in bed. This is the first time. It will be the last.

Salima calls from the kitchen, "Mi hijo, get up sleepy cabesa, it's time to sort the beans." She smooths a white cotten towel across the butcher block, a virgin blanket for her family of Pintos, and waits for Jesse.

"Look, Jesse, see how wrinkly their skin is from the soaking, just like yours when you were born. Now we have to pick out the bad ones." Salima and Jesse spread the wet beans with their hands. She watches Jesse's still-dimpled fingers examine the surface. She likes how his tan skin looks against the red-brown beans.

"What color is this, Mommy?"

"What color do you see?"

"Brown . . . and maybe some black spots."

"I wish there was some sun for you to hold the bean inside. Then you would know color, not just see it. I had a horse when I was a little nina, it was brown with white spots, but in the late afternoon, he was a different color and after the rain he was different, and later in the early evening he was chestnut brown. I used to worry when he would stand in the hot sun all day, that he would get

sick. But he did not want the help of the shed, there were flies in the shed and the sun would drive the flies away. He liked the air and his feet liked the ground, and his coat would be full of the day's sun."

Salima remembers a rainstorm at her Grandpadre's farm. He was the richest man in town, before the government men came and took all the shepards' and farmers' land away from them, and they moved to Arizona. On the farm was an adobe house with four rooms, a large kitchen and a big corral. He grew corn, cumin, spices, barley, chick peas, frijoles, peanuts and Salima's favorites, watermelon and cantaloupe. On market days, Salima and her three brothers would ride with Grandpadre into town, seeing who could spit seeds farthest behind the cart. But on the day of the storm, Salima remembers the colors. The storm came fast and was very hard, but left quickly. Everywhere she looked, the sky seemed like the inside of a kiln, and the flowers broke out from the cacti and the side of the farmhouse where they stood seemed to Salima to be breathing, palpitating orange and red and yellow and brown. And she asked Grandpadre,

"Will the sun burn us up?"

"Why are we making nachos today, Mommy, is it special?" Jesse startles Salima from her reverie.

"Yes, Jesse, today is a special day in our homeland . . . it is February 2nd, and at home there will be a big fiesta."

"At Grandma Jordan's?"

"Jordan, say that with a hor sound, Jesse, Jordan is a Spaniard's name; yes, they will celebrate in Arizona, but not like in Mexico. There the Virgin of Candelaria will be carried to all nearby towns, and people will light candles and set off firecrackers so everyone can see the lovely virgin's face. And each home will build a shrine to her on this day."

"That sounds like fun, I wish we could go, but I don't like firecrackers, they make too much noise, they can scare me."

"Oh, I know, they do make a lot of noise, but there wasn't enough noise one festival night to drown out the noise of your Uncle Pablo's screaming."

"What happened to him, Mom?"

"Oh, we were playing this silly game with make believe guns and your Uncle Pablo was running so fast in the dark, he did not see a bucket and he tripped over it, flew into the air, and when he hit the ground, he broke his arm."

Salima remembers that all the family was inside the house after dinner getting ready for the fiesta. Pablo was the youngest child then, Theresa had not yet been born. That night he had taken up his piece of wood and aiming it at no one in particular began his noises: "Bang, bang." He drew no attention from the family, so repeated his noises in rapid succession. Their mother said sharply, "Basta." And he did stop for a few moments, but make up for lost time and the excitement of the evening, his next outburst was machine gun firing. Salima knew it was her turn now, Pablo was her baby. She knelt on the floor and said,

"Hold your fire, Pablo. Don't keep shooting, it makes people nervous." And Pablo was out the door, onto the courtyard, shooting and shooting. When Salima joined him, he waved his stick triumphantly, "We killed them."

Salima replied, "Yes, Pablo, but there will be more and more; when you get older you will know some have guns and some don't, guns cost money and Mexicans can't get guns anyway."

"When I grow up I will have a gun, and I'll shoot the bad-eyed sheriff and the bad Anglos and I'll run faster than horses and I'll hide where nobody can find me," and he ran off toward the corral, head high looking for the horses, so that he did not see the bucket in the late hours of dusk. It was that night that Salima decided she would be a nurse. Pablo howled with that arm most of the night before Salima's father took him to the foreman and then to the hospital and then home with a white cast on his arm. Salima asked her teacher the next day to help her with courses that would make her a good nurse, but the teacher said no, that Salima would drop out of school soon enough anyway.

"Did his arm turn out okay?" Jesse has stopped picking out bad beans.

"Yes, you know Uncle Pablo went to seminary school, that he is a priest now." Salima thinks that was the only way for him to quiet his soul, his dreams. When he left Arizona, he was only fourteen, he already had his gun. He was leaving in the night because mama would cry and papa would slam his fist on the table, so he woke Salima and gave her the gun, he said many times he'd dreamed of

revenge, but out there was not a world of dreams, it was a world filled with Anglos and bad-eyed sheriffs, and surely he would kill someone with so many about in New York. Salima has offered to return the pistol to Pablo, but he would say in his letters that the church is no place for an instrument of death. Salima would write back and say, "If you ever need to shoot the devil, let me know." She was very happy for Pablo.

Pablo was not happy for Salima. Her letters distressed him, this love for Steven was not a healthy, Christian love. Salima had always been in love with the state of being in love. And this would be a wonderful thing for service in the church. Pablo had always believed that Salima would be suited to the sisterhood, in her marriage to Christ she could pour fourth freely her limitless love in holy adoration. As a nun, among her own people, she could give and receive the love she seemed to need in larger amounts than most. But in the north with pale, cold Anglos, Salima's love was bottled up, kept inside, simmering, quaking her small frame. Still, she professed to Pablo that each year was better than the last. Pablo knew she believed this to be true as she believed she was becoming Anglo.

"Hey, Mama, this one looks like Great Grandma Carlotta, don't throw her away, she gives me good stuff." Jesse holds up a disfigured bean.

"Ooh, she spoils you, chiquito," Salima replies, but her mind is still on the devil. She wishes the devil would rise up from hell and take that woman away. She knows it's her on the phone; the calls that started in late September, the female voice saying that she was

a friend and thought Selima should know that Steve was seeing another woman. Salima got a permanent; and the calls kept coming, each time the same voice and more information; where she'd seen them, what she looked like, long blonde hair, long legs, painted nails. Salima always knew she should hang up the phone, but couldn't bring herself to do it, she had to listen to every detail. Then she would say it was just some frustrated Anglo bitch, probably somebody from the Com. department, jealous of Steven's ability and his comradeship with the faculty members. Even though Steven hadn't spoken of marriage, except to say that it was an opiate for the uneducated masses, she knew they belonged together for life, their commitment was one from the soul, hadn't they lived together for two years now?

Sure, things were a bit rough, it's this time of year and once he's sure that she won't leave, that she's here to stay, he'll probably suggest that they marry. When Steven had decided on Michigan State University for his doctoral work back in Tempe, he had insisted that Salima come along. She did not. Jesse's father had been in a car accident; hospitalized and badly hurt, he needed the familiarity of Salima and Jesse. Now Steven says that's the reason thing have gone bad between them, because she didn't come right away and he needed her here. And Salima knows that is true, yes, that's the reason, she should have come right away. But she's here now and she and Steven will be together forever.

It's not true what Grandma Carlotta said, that the devil was behind Steven's eyes. She only met him once, she and Salima's mother had come to Lansing for a visit on Jesse's third birthday. In

private they pleaded with Salima to come home, that the light was going out from her eyes, and to make things worse they would speak only in Spanish whenever Steven was in the room, and he would leave, slamming the door behind him. Then the mewing and whining and shrieking began. Grandma called him a devil man and Mama cried out for Jesse's sake. Salima stood squarely and told them that she and Steven belong together and they were superstitious old women. Carlotta shrieked that Salima had no place criticizing others when she was living like a puta, eating his food, living in his house, spreading her legs for him outside of holy matrimony--she was a disgrace to the family and Grandma would have to hide her face in shame if Salima came home.

Grandma Carlotta saw the devil in everyone, even in Salima, she remembers, when she was younger, when she began at the university. Grandmadre would tell Salima and her sister that when she was young and their mother was a little niña, the Anglos wouldn't let them walk on the sidewalk. She has a lot of bad memories, but Salima would tell her that they should stand up to the Anglos and call ourselves Chicanos. And Grandmadre would tell Salima's mother that she had the devil in her and there would be a lot of trouble if they didn't get the devil out; that a priest should come and stand over Salima and ask God to drive the devil out. Salima and Theresa would go upstairs and laugh, but always looked serious when Grandmadre was nearby.

"Aw, Mommy, here's a baby bean," Jesse whines, "just like my new baby cousin in Arizona, what's her name again, I forget."

"Yolanda." Salima hates that name. She phoned her mother upon receiving the birth announcement and asked her, why someone didn't remind her sister-in-law that all the putas in Senora are named Yolanda. Salima's mother said it was a lovely name for a lovely baby, born to a loving mother and father who had been married for ten months. Salima said a quick good-bye.

Salima remembers dusty summer roads, Saturday nights driving into town down the main street with her high-school pals and six-packs. Leaning out the windows, they'd shout "hey-heys" at the putas parading in red silk and black lace and then make sanctioned love in the cushioned back seats of antiquated Chevys with home-town gringos. They liked Salima because she talked like them and dressed like Anglo girls. Salima would spend one day looking in the mirror and the next avoiding it totally. She would watch for the way Anglo and Chicano women did their hair, walk, talk and act and she would pretend in the mirror of the day she would be a wife and mother. In school there was a girl who was half and half, she looked Anglo and the teachers treated her better and said in front of the class all the time how smart this girl was and one day after school a bunch of Mexican girls beat her up. Salima was not one of them.

"All done," Jesse sighs with great accomplishment, wiping pruned fingertips on his jeans. "What'll we do with 'em now?"

"We give them a bath in some good-smelling stuff."

"Mommy, garlic doesn't smell good."

"It sure tastes good though, and when the skins are soft, we'll mash them and fry them with milk and cheese for the nachos."

Salima pulls the stool over to the stove in order to reach the cupboard that keeps the dark blue, white-flecked pot for bean cooking.

"Mommy, will Steven be home for supper?"

"I don't know, mi hijo, no le h'ace."

"Mommy?"

"Yes, Jesse?"

"Does Steven want us to leave?"

"No, hijo, he's just busy with his work now, that's all."

"He's not very nice sometimes."

"I know. Let's listen to some music while our beans cook, okay? Why don't you put on the yellow record from home."

As Jesse leaves the kitchen the phone rings. Salima hurries to the kitchen vestibule where the phone hangs beside the corkboard and mirror with keys and messages covering the surface; she is sure Steven is calling to say he's finished up his work, he worked all night but it was worth it and he'll be home soon. The phone call was not from Steven.

Salima opens the refrigerator door, "Ah, cerveza." She sits by the kitchen's sliding glass doors, watching the snow. She and Steven built the deck last summer. They put up the screen door after scrubbing off redwood stains and July sweat. It's still on, sucking up snowflakes to the staccato Mariache beat. Mexican beer is sweet and Salima is back at the plaza.

On Sunday afternoon all the men sit in the middle of the square and smoke and play guitarras and watch the women promenade

in their Sunday dresses. Salima and Theresa would hold hands and smile with their eyes, pretending indifference. And Sunday nights, oh, Sunday nights everyone danced and drank cerveza with the abandonment of another week's absolved sins behind them. Only the mantillaed great-grandmadres would retire at dusk, warmed by the sweet breath of grandchildren on their necks. Salima's great grandmadre used to rock her in a squeaky wicker-woven rocker that had been part of her dowry, carved by Louis Jordan, the Spaniard who came to Mexico and conquered the harsh ground. She would lull Salima to sleep with memories. Grandma Carlotta had tried to hold Jesse still and tell him of the honor his blood bestowed upon him. But Jesse fidgeted, screwed up his face and said, "I want down, it's time for Spiderman." Carlotta sneered, "Anglo." Salima had been relieved when Grandma and Mama cut their visit short. But now she longed for Jesse to be connected to her memories.

"I'm hungry, Mommy, when do we eat," Jesse's voice pulls at Salima.

"Soon."

"Can I go outside until it's ready?"

"No, Jesse, hace mucho frio, besides it will be dark in a bit." It gets dark so early. Salima thinks that's why people here are so pale and stunted. When they walk down the street, they pull in--hunch in, searching for a light to respond to. The Sargoya grow so straight and tall.

"Today, Jesse, you are the tailor, you must make the clothes for our beans: bright yellow coats and green hats." Salima finds

the grater and unwraps a square of Cheddar. She fills a small bowl with jalepena halves.

"Despacio, por favor, you'll scrape your little fingers." Salima knows tradition makes the best nachos. She brought the black iron frying pan from home, she knows it has soaked up generations of expertise. Steven objects to lard, he says she should use vegetable oil, but Mama always uses lard--lard and corn tortillas, never flour.

"Now, Jesse, after I spread on the beans, you sprinkle the cheese."

"You mean put on their coats."

"Si, and then we put them in the oven, the cheese melts and covers them up and then I'll take them out . . . ."

"And I put on the green hats, right!"

"Right, mi hijo!" Salima lifts Jesse and twirls him about in her arms.

"Mommy, look at outside!"

"Dios, there'll be two feet by morning." Salima sets Jesse down, requesting the flip side of her yellow record. She opens another beer and watches the snow unwrap like bolts of Mexican lace. Salima's baby sister is getting married in the Spring. She wants to go to Tempe for the wedding. She knows she cannot, and she would not ruin this day for Theresa. But oh, if she could, she would sneak into the church by way of the small basement side door and sit quietly in the farthest back pew, on her knees where the sisters sent her so many times for being headstrong and skipping catechism.

The nuns would wait outside the entrance to Vesta Public School to gather their sheep at 3:00 and shepard the good catholic children across the road and around the corner to afternoon catechism. Salima, always the black sheep, found ways to slip by the sisters and run to the fields to dream away the next two hours. But if she goes, Steven will bring that voice on the phone into Salima's home. And she knows Steven won't go, he says everyone either cries or fights at Mexican celebrations.

Salima again walks to the refrigerator, takes the jar of salsa from inside and buries it in the bottom of the trash can. Jesse has run back to the kitchen, ready to play tailor.

"Jesse, would you like to go outside for just a little walk?" Jesse squeals his approval. "I've run out of salsa for our nachos, I'll take you down to Jane's house while I go to the store, I won't be too long."

"But, Mommy, you just bought a jar, it's in the frigerator, I saw it there this morning," Jesse swings open the door.

"Go get your coat, hat and boots on, Jesse, I want to go now." Salima is standing by the corkboard when Jesse comes downstairs; she has removed the car keys and the slip of paper with the address the woman had given her over the phone. She had once more pulled the stool over to the cupboards, specifically the one high up over the refrigerator, the one that kept Pablo's pistol. She avoided the mirror when she phoned Tempe. Her mother was delighted . . . yes, yes, she had come to her senses, yes, home to

stay . . . of course she could send Jesse along now . . . and Salima would come as soon as winter term classes were finished . . . she would send an airline ticket right away . . . it's best for everyone . . . poor little Jesse . . . and when you get home, with your own, you'll wish you'd left that bastard sooner . . . .

As Salima stops at the light on Maple and Grand River, she notices the slowing up of the flakes and a few stars dimly pulsing behind thin clouds. In Tempe, you can see for miles and miles, even on hot days, even after a rainfall, it becomes bright, almost harsh. She remembers how it feels to look at the world with new eyes, air so transparent, so translucent--Salima knows the scientific explanation for this. In the university natural science class they said the air has lost one-fourth it's weight and is high in hydrogen but low in oxygen and carbon dioxide. That the air has lost it's capacity to refract or diffuse the light; it is an air that brings objects almost too close; they assert themselves. But when Salima would stand on a hill, looking at the countryside many miles away, the air was mysterious, especially at night when the stars would glow before her, as if against all the laws of nature, hundreds of miles were deprived of meaning and she only needed to reach out and touch something in the sky.

And how Salima could sleep there--so well that she would wake with the pillow case damp from the spittle that oozed from her mouth. She has not slept well in a long time and how she loves to sleep.

She stops the car about four houses down from the address she's taken from her purse. She will walk to the door and ring the bell, and there, under the porch lamp she will wait for an answer with her lips wrapped around the barrel.

There is a letter in her purse, too, from Theresa. She will marry Oscar in April, he'll be off probation in March. Salima remembers how much money she made at the campus, before Steven, before Jesse; how free and reckless they were. She spent maybe two hours, across the border and back, and Oscar would pay her a grand each time. She could fit three, four trash bags full in Papa's pickup. Then she and Theresa and Oscar and her brother, Miguel and Jesse would go up to the river and eat peyote buttons and laugh at the faces they made because the taste was so bitter but the colors so bright and laugh and laugh until nothing was funny anymore, nada, nada Steven, nada.

THE NINETEENTH HOLE

Here I am back at Missisauga Golf Club. Today was boxing day and Mum put all the presents for her grandchildren in one large cardboard box from Hy & Zels with a list on top describing each item so I won't be held up at Customs. Even though I've been a resident alien of the States for some years now, the agents get nervous at holidays.

It's been a long few days, filled with remembering, my two brothers telling stories of our caddying days at the club. I had to come back and have a look. The three-inch layer of snow on the course doesn't hide the landmarks of tales to tell, they are as fresh as they were sixteen years ago. And here, inside, the polish and shine have preserved the monied atmosphere. There are few couples dining tonight, they are very old and the bartender looks very young. The snow is falling fast.

"Care for another draft, sir, or are you going to head out, too?"

"Yes, thanks, I'll have another draft; just because this bunch can't stand the thought of being caught away from the comforts of the castle, doesn't mean I'll risk being killed on the highway tonight."

"I don't think I've ever seen a blizzard come on this fast."

"Look at old Bogey Armstead go for the door."

"You know Mr. Armstead? I don't remember seeing you here before."

"Oh, yeah, I know him, one of the first guys I caddied for, right here at Missasauga Golf Club, about '61 I guess. Geez, he must be close to seventy-five now. My name's Paul, Missasauga's my home town, moved to Michigan a few years ago, I'm up visiting my family for the holidays."

"Good to meet you, I'm Wes, been bartending the club for about two years now."

"Yeah, old Bogey Block Armstead was in one of the first foursomes I caddied for. Mr. Smith was caddymaster then, don't suppose you know him?"

"Never met him, heard of him though."

"I must of been about eight or nine years old and Bogey was around fifty, all the guys in the foursome were. And the other caddies with me were Lakeview rifraff. Anyway, along about the ninth hole, Bogey starts walking real funny and the other players start laughing and saying things like, 'Jesus Christ, Bogey, what the

hell's the matter with you?' So Bogey says back, 'I'll show you guys what's the matter.' And he starts unfastening his pants and drops them right there on the spot. Now a fifty-year-old man's wang is scary enough to an eight-year-old kid when all you've got is a pecker the size of a baby finger and a shriveled up little sack, and then Bogey lowers his underwear real slow and careful and reaches his hand down there and brings out his balls in both hands--I mean they're the size of a grapefruit. All the Lakeview boys start laughing like hell, so I thought I'd seen my first case of the dose. It didn't occur to me at the time, he'd just married a much younger woman and probably had a vasectomy. Gave me a tip though, didn't just sign my card, gave me a buck too. Maybe he could see I was pretty freaked out by the whole thing. The old guys usually tipped better than the rest."

"You're kidding, aren't you? The only tip I ever get from them is to go easy on the water."

"This one time, all these Americans show up only it's an old timers' tournament, you have to be over sixty-five and a good golfer. There were guys, no kidding, they'd hit the ball thirty yards, they'd wind up, whango, and it'd only go the length, maybe from the bar here to the end of the dining room. Straight as an arrow. They'd never hit it far but they'd never miss a shot and as soon as they got within range of the green, I mean, they could put it right up to the hole like any pro, these guys were good. There was one old skinny fucker they had to help in and out of the golf cart. This guy was so old, you had to scream at him to talk to him,

right? He had clubs, like old-fashioned clubs had names, they didn't have numbers, there was a Mashey, a Niblick, and a whole bunch of other wierd names for these things and this old guy had them all. Well, there's this guy and another old guy and they're just frail and ultra-rich, in bermuda shorts, all of them in bermuda shorts and white hats, and sweaters tied up, fuck, if a wind came up they'd all just fall off their carts. And the two guys that could at least walk and see a little bit would drive the carts. Well, they sent me along with them to be what's called a fore caddy. They'd go to the golf tee and I'd give them all a club, I had four golfers there, two pairs, they were driving these carts. I'd get these guys a club each and then I'd run up a bit and they'd smack their balls and yell, 'Where'd it go, caddy?' And I'd scream back, 'I got it sir.' It'd just land right in front of me, but they couldn't find them. And then I'd run around and look at the names on the balls, I had to know who's was who's cause they couldn't bend over and roll the balls to see. When you're a fore caddy for the pros you go 250-75 yards up the fairway and you stand there with the flag and you run out and put the flag next to the ball and the pro'll see where he's hitting the ball to. So I'm fore-caddying for these guys, Buntz sent me out with them, you know Buntz? He still here?"

"Yeah, I know Wayne, he's still around."

"Still a son-of-a-bitch?"

"Yeah, you know it."

"Well, Buntz tells me before I go out with these old guys, 'Don't you drive those carts, you let them drive.' So we get out on

the second hole, Buntz isn't around and I've been running beside these guys, yelling, 'Over here, over here,' and waving my arms. We get up to the green and this one old guy says, 'Should have got you a cart too, caddy, you drive this one.' So I'm driving the cart and there's bucket seats in this thing, and these two old buzzards are sitting in the other seat, kinda scrunched in there, they were both so thin, it's just like a couple of little kids and they had their arms around each other so they wouldn't fall out of the seat that didn't have any sides on it or anything. So I started gumbootin' it and these old fuckers are yelling, 'You-who.' They just loved it."

"No."

"Yeah, they had a great time. Americans, this one old guy told me, and I don't know if it's true, that he was the president of Alcoa Aluminum, ever heard of Alcoa Aluminum?"

"Sure."

"He had this little putter that was aluminum and it said 'Alcoa' right on the thing. So at the ninth hole we go down to the halfway house, like, they don't know anything, they don't have a halfway house where they come from I guess, cause they're all excited and saying, 'Oh, boy, a snack stand.' And I say, 'Oh, yes sir,' and I drag them all right up to the front and they start ordering stuff. You know how everything kind of piles up right at the ninth hole, there might be four sets of people sitting there, it's a kind of social thing you know. I walk right up to the front counter with them and this guy, Andy, he's pissed off, he's going, 'In the back.' And I say, 'No way, I'm taking care of these guys.' And they're yelling

and excited, wanting to know what they can get, and two of the old peckers got an ice cream float."

"Did they tip good?"

"Well, this is the thing. We got to the eighteenth and they say, 'How do we pay you?' And I pulled the old no-card routine and say, 'Well, let's see, ah, four of you--five bucks.' One old guy goes, 'Each?' And I say, 'Yup.' So they give me twenty bones and the old Alcoa guy comes up and says, 'Did pretty good today?' And I said, 'Yeah, pretty good.' He said, 'A lot better than normal, right?' Well, anyway he told me I'd done a fantastic job and deserved every penny."

"Another beer?"

"Yeah, have one with me, Wes."

"Can't do that, against the club rules."

"Oh, yeah? Who's gonna rat?"

"I guess it wouldn't hurt." Wes turns his back to pull out two mugs, "Hey, Paul, how'd you get your start caddying here?" He fills the glasses from the tap right up to the top and the foam rolls over the side.

"My dad. My dad took me up here. He'd been the caddy-master here in the thirties, for doctors and lawyers, ass-outta-the-pants kid, seeing all that money around him. He went on to university, became a dentist, well, anyway, he took my brother Tim and me up here when I was about eight years old and introduced us to old Mr. Smith. And Mr. Smith took care of us. See, my dad caddied in the thirties, was caddymaster in the forties, then after he became a

dentist, he came back and tried to join the club. And he got in because everybody here knew him, including the pros who really liked him and they got him in even though his name was Ditchoff. He was the first, eh? So when he got in, and us boys were old enough, brought us over cause we wanted to make some money. Then after my dad got in, he got Buffy Valentini, the first Italian, in. Then it was easier, not real easy of course, but easier and Buffy got other Italians in and they had the big bread, they supported the place, blew a lot of money."

"I've heard he's mafia."

"You heard right."

"How'd your father get mixed up with him?"

"Never got mixed up with him, they're friends, real friends, met as kids down in front of the Royal York Hotel. Buffy used to shine shoes down there and my dad used to ride with my deido down to St. Lawrence Market on Saturdays. See after my dad helped unload and set up the benches and junk, Deido . . ."

"What's Deido?"

"Grandfather, well, Deido would give my dad some money for helping out and then he'd go stand in front of the Royal York and talk to all the other kids that were hanging out and Buffy Valentini was one of them. Buffy would always say, 'I'm gonna own this god-damn hotel one day,' and he ended up, he didn't own the Royal York Hotel because it wasn't for sale, but he bought the second biggest hotel in Toronto, The King Edward, which was an old English style thing and he took the whole lobby and made it marble.

"Leave it to a wop."

"Nah, it was Italian, but first-rate European. Buffy ended up selling it, the mob made him sell it cause he got the money from the mob in the first place. So that's how Buffy Valentini got into the club and all the rest of the Italians."

"Wasn't there some big stink about the parking lot and Valentini? They still call it the wop lot, I don't know why."

"Ha, yeah, all these idiots at the club are trying to figure out how to raise money to pave the parking lot and they're going through all the dumb shit and all the women's groups, they're gonna do this and they're gonna do that, and Buffy finds out they're all fucked up and can't figure out how to raise the money and he's pissed off, and just comes in one weekend, early Saturday morning he's got about fifteen graders and dump trucks, asphalt and a whole mob of wops, eh? And they pave the whole goddamn parking lot right down to the stripes and everything. And then all the old bags were fucking furious because they were having bake sales and shit and ole Buffy just kicked the ass out of all their come-together stuff. He just paved it and said that's how you do it."

"And he didn't charge em nothing, eh?"

"Didn't charge, no, but he was damn near ostracized, nobody would have anything to do with him cause he could buy and sell all those wasps, just boom--buy em, sell em, and trade em . . . Ferrari's and shit, you know, this guy had everything. He's the kind of . . . he came over to the house one day and said, 'John, I'm going away for ten days, ya want me to leave the Ferrari here?'

What a car, he'd flown over to Italy and had the car seat made just right for his fat ass and his beer belly and everything . . . that's the kind of guy he was."

"Speaking of beer, you ready for another?"

"Just keep filling em up, Wes. The way that storm's going, I'm not going anywhere . . . ah, I guess I didn't think about you might be wanting to go . . . ."

"Hey, no, this is great, tell me some more."

What I really remember most, but can't put into words this guy would understand, is that the caddies, the caddies were Missisauga Golf Club. They spent more time with the members than the members spent with their wives. They knew about financial statements, mistresses, payoffs to get children out of tight spots. They knew every employee and how much each was being paid, on and off the record. And they knew every square inch of the course, and don't think for a minute they did not use their great wealth of knowledge. The real big shots were the caddies, they knew it and everybody else knew it, but nobody said it.

"I was down in the Bahamas with my parents once and Buffy was there and he'd known my dad since they were this big. And Buffy used to take ten, fifteen people from the golf club, 'Come on down, stay in my hotel,' he'd fly everybody down and put em up in his hotel, let em play on his golf course, go out all over town, and Buffy'd be right out front, short fat, nine-hundred dollar suit, diamonds hanging everywhere and he'd just be walking along with all his doctors and lawyers and noveau riche entourage, all the

educated people he'd just bankroll forward. And the time we saw him down there, we were walking by and I saw him wink over at us, and I said, 'Dad, isn't that Buffy Valentini? Aren't you gonna talk to him?' And the old man said he wasn't gonna have anything to do with him, he said, 'Buffy and I are friends, those are just hangers-on, he's just having fun with all the doctors and lawyers, Buffy and I will have a talk tomorrow if I see him on the beach.'"

"And nobody ever said thank you to Buffy for the parking lot?"

"Hell, no, I told ya, Wes, they were furious, he'd shown them how to do something, what he was really doing was showing them that he had more money than all those stupid fuckers put together. They thought he was an uppity bastard, trying to show off . . . well, I guess you know Buffy didn't need to show off."

"Man, I would have liked to seen that, all the old ladies with their bake sales--wait--they had a raffle too, eh? Right, am I right . . . old Annabelle Adams made a quilt, right?"

"That old crow, wasn't she a hoot?"

"Was? Still is."

"No, no come on, she was eighty years old when I used to caddy."

"No shit, man."

"She still comes out on Wednesday morning?"

"Yup, yeah, for ladies day--<u>old</u> ladies day. I'm a tad thirsty, Paul, how about you?"

"Fine, I'll join you, my throat's a mite dry, and I need to tell you about Wednesday mornings when I was caddying. Buntz always called caddy lessons for 7:15 every Wednesday morning. All fifty of us had to be there, and if you didn't show up, you couldn't caddy for a week. It wasn't out of the goodness of Wayne's heart that he was giving us lessons or even that he wanted to have better caddies. It's just like you said, Wednesday was ladies day. So most of us were pissed off at having to be there and we wouldn't listen much to Wayne, we'd be watching to see which of the old ladies were arriving and trying to spot any of them that might tip at all so we could be the first one to offer our services. And Wayne would yell for us to pay attention, then Walker, who was a wise ass, would say, 'Go on, Buntz, you don't know nothing about golf, all you know is shovin your face up to money's ass end.' And Wayne would always say, 'I was shagging clubs in Bagdad before you were in your dad's bag.'

"Oh, God."

"So the lesson's almost over and all the old birds are coming out of the club and Buntz had been calling us off one by one to make sure he could mark down who didn't show up so he could kick them out next time they showed up, and seeing as my name is near the front of the alphabet, I got stuck with the gruesome foursome. And if that wasn't bad enough, the other three caddies were Ramo the Italian and two Lakeview boys. Buntz would always send me out on ladies day with the Lakeview rifraff cause they were sassy to the old gals; see we'd always get rate on ladies day, no tips, except maybe

if you got Annabelle who tipped with the "Lumberjack special"--a glass of water, a Chicklet and a toothpick. These old birds would send us tromping around in the woods for half an hour, or diving into the river to retrieve their balls. And the Lakeview boys would yell at them or wouldn't take the pin out on the green while they were putting, they'd stand around smoking cigs and laughing, so Buntz sent me along and said, 'Take care of the rifraff.'"

"Did you?"

"I did what I could if it didn't endanger my life. So sure enough this Wednesday morning I get stuck with Annabelle Adams and the Lakeview boys. I go to the caddyshack and fill up my pockets with range balls, which I would do every Wednesday morning and I'll tell you why. The old gals steal those range balls with the red stripe around the middle, cause they're too cheap to spend a buck fifty for new ones. Then when they'd whack them out in the woods, I'd tromp around for a while, pull one of those range balls out of my pocket and yell, 'I found it.' I walk up to the gruesome foursome and by the time it took Buntz holding me up to tell me to take care of things, the Lakeview boys have chosen up and left me with Annabelle, and she's standing there scowling with those horsey teeth hanging out, wobbling her head and hissing, 'Hurry up there.' I don't know for sure how old she is, but you know that tree over by the ninth hole, biggest sucker on the whole damn course, it's dedicated to her, eh?"

"Yeah, I know the one. Buntz says it's a Dutch Elm, and its *got the* Dutch Elm disease just like Annabelle, withering limbs and rotten crotch."

"The pig . . . so we're out on the twelfth hole when Ramo says to one of the Lakeview boys that he's going for a shit in the woods and tells this kid that the old buzzard is going to be asking for her driver, and just to give it to her, he'll be back in a minute. Well, as soon as Ramo's out of sight, the other kid steals the driver out of her bag and now it's her turn up. This old bird is craning her neck around saying, 'Where's my caddy, where's my driver?' And all of us don't say anything, and old Annabelle is up after her, so she starts screaming, 'Caddy--cad-dee.' Then the Lakeview riff-raff are saying, 'I think he took off lady, there's some rustling over in the woods, maybe he's just havin a smoke.' Old Annabelle starts shaking and goes teetering off toward the woods. And we can hardly stand it. Poor Ramo comes running out of the woods with his pants around his ankles and Annabelle comes out with one hand grabbing at her sweater."

"Oh, stop, you're killing me."

"The gruesome foursome didn't finish their game, so we didn't get tipped, even a Lumberjack special. And when we got back to the shack, Ramo was sitting on the bench, taking his punishment from Buntz, he was there for the rest of the day calling out: 'Red Oldsmobile . . . blue Cadillac . . . black Mercedes . . . "

"Calling cars, eh? Wayne still does that, you know."

"Well, I'll tell you for certain, Ramo isn't calling cars anymore, he's driving them, the best too. See, Ramo was a brown-noser, *real* bad brown-noser. The very first day I was caddying, Ramo was there and Mr. Smith was caddymaster. Well, Mr. Smith comes driving

in and he's over at the club house and Ramo goes scooting over, and Mr. Smith, he had this bag, like a gym bag full of stuff, and Ramo would scoot over and carry this gym bag full of stuff for old Mr. Smith. So Ramo's walking along carrying this bag in one hand and he's got his lunch in the other, which is a huge wop lunch, under his arm in a bag, not a normal brown bag, those wops bring picnic lunches. So he's walking along and one of the Lakeview rifraff, one of the little white-boy white trash, goes up behind Ramo with a lighter and sets his lunch on fire. Ramo's walking along, eh, with a great big fucking fire coming up under his arm and it finally burned through his jacket, went whoosh, like this, and blew half the hair off his head. And everyone was killing themselves laughing and I couldn't fucking believe it, this was my first day, and I thought, whoo, boy, these guys are tough."

"Where's Ramo now?"

"Let me tell you . . . after he caddied for a few years, he started a shoe shine business at the club, you know how the golfers would come in and throw their shoes down at the entrance? Well, Ramo knew every pair of shoes on the course. He'd shine your shoes and have them back upstairs, nice and shined for the next time you'd want to go golfing. And the guys would leave fifty cents in their shoes for Ramo. So ya see, if Ramo was doing one-hundred pair of shoes a day, he'd make fifty bucks. And he started that business himself. At the same time as that, he started as a busboy, then got to be a waiter, and then started thinking of himself as a maitre de. Some rich asshole dragged him downtown and set him up in some

restaurant, now he just stands there at the door taking twenty bones to get you seated and everybody goes, 'Hey, Ramo,' and he knows every rich fucker in the whole of Toronto . . . who they were, what their wives did, their finances, he knew all the scuttle-butt from the locker rooms. So he had something on everybody."

"The caddies too?"

"He might have something on the caddies, but he never says anything, cause the caddies have something on him."

"Yeah? What?"

"It's doubtful that any of the Lakeview boys would be in that restaurant, but the rest of us guys that are still around get VIP treatment in that place. Not that we'd ever say anything . . . ."

"Come on tell me."

"See when Ramo was ten, he looked about twenty, no kidding, head big for his body, black hair all over his arms and legs, by the time he was thirteen he was shaving every day and by fifteen, the club wives were starting to notice Ramo. Not that he'd do anything, cause he knew which side his bread was buttered on, but he sure would look. See, Ramo had lots of time inside after he stopped caddying. He'd shine the shoes in the men's locker room, that's where he started picking up his tid-bits, but he was in there alone most of the time. And the women's locker room shared a wall with the men's and everybody thought it was so bright of Ramo to install towel hooks along that wall, the kind that screw in, are you getting the picture, Wes?"

"Oh, yeah."

"Well, one day, this little Lakeview scuz, Bucky, goes sneaking into the men's locker room, cause he was always stealing shit, usually from the caddies, and he hears somebody, like wanting to yell but holding it back through his teeth?"

"Yeah, yeah."

"So Bucky tip-toes in, peeks around the lockers and there's Ramo, looking through a hole in the wall where he's unscrewed a hook, pants around his ankles, pumping his wang, grunting, 'She's a gonna blow, she's a gonna blow!' And ole Bucky just slides out, and through the week, keeps checking on the locker room and Ramo, and one day, it's real slow on the course and a bunch of us are hanging around the caddyshack, when Bucky runs up and tells us we've got to come down to the men's locker room. Well, we tell Bucky to fuck off, cause we all hate him, and would get into big trouble if we get caught inside. Bucky says it's a joke we gotta plan on Ramo and he'd just come from there and there was no way we'd get caught. So we decided to go since Ramo had gotten snotty to us caddys since he got his inside job. And before we sneak in, Bucky tells us we all have to say at once, 'She's a gonna blow,' and we don't know what the hell he's talking about, but when we got inside, we could hardly contain ourselves, looking at Ramo with his face pressed against the wall, sorta bent over with his hairy ole ass pointed right at us, choking that chicken like there was no tomorrow. Then just when he's really sweating and shaking Bucky says, 'Now.' And there was a chorus of 'She's a gonna blow.' And we all ran out after taking a good look at Ramo's face, so he wasn't so snotty anymore, and swore he'd get Bucky."

"Did he?"

"Hell, Ramo wouldn't have done anything to upset his gravy train, and I'm sure no good ever came of that little prick, Bucky. Believe it or not, he was a worse brown-noser than Ramo."

"Just a minute, I'll get us another brew."

"I guess you know why they called him Bucky, he had a set of choppers that wouldn't quit . . . real skinny and lots of freckles, long, kind of greasy hair, Lakeview low-life, really after money. The difference between Bucky and Ramo was that Bucky didn't brown-nose the caddymaster, he brown-nosed the golfers. And he was always, always getting the American bags. If those Americans would roll in, soon as you'd see that U.S. license plate, you'd be in the parking lot. 'Welcome to Missisauga Golf Course, sir--can I take your bags, madam.' Bucky would wait for the Cadillacs, he wouldn't take a group of four assholes from Buffalo who drove up in a Fairmont which they obviously rented. Old fucking Bucky went straight for the Cadi's, he knew who had the bread. I only caddied with him once, we were at the fifteenth hole and there's a pond there, eh?"

"Ya, the swamp they call it."

"That's it, well some lady smacks her ball in there and Bucky, he's in there with his arms, fishing around, but he can't get it so he takes his shirt off, his shoes, gets all the way down to his shorts and goes in the water, and sticks his fucking head right under the water, feeling round for the golf ball, ya know he can't see it, it's like mud in there and it stinks. And this woman is going, 'Oh, my God,' she's not even sure if Bucky isn't going to drown in there.

Then Bucky springs up with the golf ball and this woman is saying, 'It wasn't worth it,' but he gets fifty cents out of it. You name it, Bucky would do it for money and everybody hated him. He looked like something fourteen years old and running a carney ride, one of those kinds of kids, always spitting, really wormy after money, and would steal anything."

"What would he steal?"

"A knife, if you set your knife down for a second, he'd steal a pop, a can of pop out of your lunch, sell it to somebody, all kinds of stuff, a real little pack rat, mean little bastard."

"How did people know it was him stealing shit."

"They'd see him. He'd sell the pop. Somebody would go, 'Rat fuck, where's my pop? And somebody else would say, 'Hey, I saw you drinking an Orange Crush, and that guy would say, 'Bucky sold me this for a dime.' Then you go grab Bucky by the neck and ask him where the fuck he stole that pop. And Bucky would say, 'Oh, I brought it with me.' Then somebody else would yell, 'I came with him today, he didn't have anything.' And then you'd find out Orange Crush isn't for sale at the golf course and you walked in from the street without one, now this guy bought it from Bucky and this guy's missing his, eh? Bucky sells it for a dime and it costs fifteen, twenty cents, so something's going on."

"Did he go on stealing, even after he got caught?"

"Oh, hell yes, but Bucky got his one day. See, he turned into a worse prick, just to protect himself I guess. Well, one day everybody's playing knife games, you know, baseball?"

"Where they flip for bases, like two flips is a double . . . "

"Yeah, you'd sit facing each other on the caddy bench, but the overall contest was called "Chew the peg." You take a golf tee, each guy, before you start the game and you drive it into the ground and you're allowed to set it up and stomp it into the ground with the flat of your foot, just once, and it goes, maybe a quarter inch under the grass. Cause if you stomp with your heel, it goes way in, and that's what this guy did to Bucky. Bucky could've said something right then, we said it wasn't fair, but that little asshole says it didn't matter cause he was the best and couldn't lose, especially to this cocksucker, that's what he called the other guy, right in front of everybody. See, if Bucky would've won, the other guy would have to chew Bucky's peg out of the ground."

"But Bucky lost, eh?"

"Oh, yeah, and that peg was a good two inches under the ground. Then everybody crowded around and started chanting, and there were about fifty of us cause there was a big tournament going on that day, and we were pissed off anyway, getting ready to have a caddy strike. So everybody's mumbling real low, 'Chew the peg, chew the peg,' and we're all in a big circle around Bucky. He gets down there, and you're not allowed to use your hands, you gotta chew the grass away and spit out the dirt . . . and Bucky starts in and he gets a couple of mouths full and he starts, like gagging, he just can't handle it, you're really not supposed to be excavating dirt, but with those teeth, eh? And they all start chanting louder, 'Chew the peg, chew the peg.' And Bucky starts to get up, if you do that and

don't have the tee in your mouth, people start kicking at you, and they did, 'Get back there, Bucky.' Then somebody put their foot on the back of his head and held his head down and they're all screaming, all going fucking crazy, nobody cares. And Bucky's freaking out, crying, snot running down his face. He really looked disgusting."

"How did it end up?"

"The golfers were all over waiting for the caddies about eighty of them for a shotgun tournament. Then they started to hear the chanting and screaming and a couple of them start over and then a bunch of golfers were coming, they could see they were practically murdering this kid, and they just all kept screaming, 'Chew the peg, chew the peg,' they wouldn't let the golfers break the circle. So one of them goes and calls the fucking pigs . . . but management got there first, and slimy Bucky got the peg."

"He got it!?"

"Oh, yeah, he pretty much had to."

"Did the cops come in with the sticks?"

"Nah, Buntz was waiting at the gate, gave the cop a free pass and a handshake, cream puffs the cops up here."

"Are they different in the states? Like on tv? Ever been in Detroit?"

"Course I've been in Detroit, not at night, not downtown, you better not either. Caddied once for a Detroit cop . . . a detective, came up to the club here all by himself one day, maybe a relative or friend of some member. You know how most of the

members ignore a guy by himself . . . especially this guy, big, hulking guy with a cucumber nose, pitted face, and dark, sorta sunk in eyes. My dad was playing and nobody else was around to caddy for, so I was walking around carrying the bags for him and he walked right up to this guy and asked if he'd like to join him. The guy said thanks and puts out this great big hand, says his name is Tony LaMacchia, and they teed off. We're walking down the fairway and the guy said he was a cop from Detroit and he walked funny and sort of slow. He said he hoped he wasn't slowing us up, that a few years back he and another detective went on this drug raid and that you never know what to expect. He said, 'It's usually late and dark with shotgun barrels sticking outta corners, closets, hell, even drawers.' And then he said, 'You'd be surprised the places where a skinny nigger junkie can hide.' They busted into this room with pistols ready, but the junkie, Tony said, had gone through a window, down the fire escape and into the apartment below. As Tony was casing the room, muscles tensed I'm sure, the junkie fired a volley up through the floor, making a mess of Tony's ass."

"Did they get him?"

"Yeah, the two of them ran downstairs and grabbed the junkie who was hunched on his knees laughing like a man possessed and Tony said he shot the bastard twenty times."

"God, killed him, eh?"

"No, that's what Tony said, 'Didn't kill him though.' My dad stopped walking and stared at Tony while Tony kept talking, 'Got him in the arms and legs.' Then my dad says, 'God, man, how

could you shoot a man twenty times?' and stood there waiting for Tony's answer. Tony looked confused, then he moves his shoulders and says, 'Well, I had to reload.'"

"Oh, fuck, man, you're serious, aren't you, Jesus Christ . . . there's the phone, who'd be calling at this hour. Missisauga Golf Club, Wesley speaking . . . yes, oh, hello Mr. Lathrop . . . uh-huh, yes, sir, Fred is still here, he's asleep in the men's lounge . . . no, don't drive down, Mr. Lathrop I'll drive him home when the storm lets up . . . no, no trouble at all . . . you're welcome Mr. Lathrop . . . goodnight."

"Was that Freddie you were talking about, Freddie the retarded kid?"

"Yeah, his father, you know him? . . . I guess you would, he's been around for a long time."

"Sure I know Fred, what a great guy. Does he still look like Ichabod Crane?"

"Yep, real tall, big nose, pointed, long skinny neck, giant Adam's apple."

"And those nice, soft eyes, set in that horse face, gaps between all his teeth, spoke real low, soft like."

"Still does."

"When I was here, I guess he was about thirty when I left, he used to caddy and worked at the pro shop washing off golf clubs. Always took care of him here, Mr. Smith and then Buntz, Freddie was always hanging around and they took care of him. Does he still come up at six in the morning and stay until six at night?"

"Yep, fell asleep tonight before the dinner crowd, I'll wake him up when the storm clears. Everybody likes him . . . you know, his parents are nice people too, from Port Credit."

"Yeah, this was always home to Freddie when I was here, Freddie'd hang around, that's where his friends were and it was everything that Freddie had, no fucking retard homes, they used to let him drive the golf carts around and he had lots to do, and did it damn good, he's no moron or nothing. One time my parents came up for dinner around six and there's a big party going on, the mayor was going to show up . . . Hazel, the mayor's name was Hazel something. So my parents are walking through this mob of people on their way to dinner, and Freddie is sitting there, in this electric golf cart. Well, Fred's dressed to the teeth, he's got a tie on, real nice pair of pants, white shirt and he's smiling, got his hair all slicked down and everything. He sees my parents and called them over, they like each other, Fred always talks to them, especially my mum, all the old whores up here think they're too good to talk to Fred, and mum thinks Fred's wonderful. So Fred says, 'I'm just waiting for Hazel.' And mum says, 'Are you going to the parking lot to meet her?' And Fred says, 'Oh, yeah, oh yeah, she told me she'd be here about eight o'clock,' and he looks at his watch. Of course you know the mayor didn't make arrangements with Fred, but he knew he had something important to take care of. So my parents go in for dinner and Fred goes driving off somewhere. After dinner, my parents are having a drink and they hear all this commotion outside, so they go

to the entrance, and here comes this great big carriage, with horses, like the Queen rides in, eh?"

"Yeah, I know the kind."

"Four horses out front, a guy all dressed up like a footman, this is how the mayor is riding into the golf course. And it goes clopping by the course down to the entrance of the hall and Freddie comes riding up behind in this little red golf cart. And he's got a golf bag in the back, but instead of golf clubs hanging out of it, he's got a broom and a shovel. Everybody's cheering for the mayor and Freddie's right behind waving at everybody, smiling, right, he knew they weren't cheering for him, but he was happy to see everyone else so happy. And mum had to sit down she was laughing so hard."

"Did they cheer for Fred too?"

"They cheered for the mayor, but Mum said when Freddie passed by, you could hear the pitch of cheering raise, and some people whistled."

"That's nice, real nice."

It was nice and it is nice to know that something good remains. Wes has moved from behind the bar and taken a seat two over from mine, he lifts his feet and crosses them on the stool next to me and says,

"I think Fred's the oldest caddy in North America."

"That means the racing bum and blind Mike left, they were both older than Freddie."

"They had an old bum caddy--here?"

"Well, he wasn't really a bum, that's what us kids called him cause we never knew what his name was and the first time I ever saw him, he was about fifty years old, wearing blue jeans, cowboy boots, and kind of a tough shirt. He's kinda short and he's got a racing form sticking out his back pocket and a cigar sticking out of his mouth that's only a couple of inches long. And he's writing on the wall and I go up there, he's writing on the caddyshack wall, and he's writing.

'Buntz is a friend of mine
for a nickel or a dime
he will blow you anytime.'

"Have you ever heard that?"

"Yeah, you sing it, kids used to sing it."

"Well, that was the first time I'd ever seen it. There wasn't anything too peculiar about him other than being a boozer and a real ruffian, a real tough guy rubbey, been around the tracks for years. I think he'd come up here just to make five bucks to go to the track.

"Did he say anything to you when you walked up?"

"No, never talked to anybody, a real disgusto, he was continually pulling on his knob. Right, like he'd go down there and he wasn't scratching his balls or anything, he was definitely gripping his pants to get through there and you could tell that he had his wanger right by the knob, he'd go twisting it around and pull on it and everybody was grossed out, but he'd always do that."

"Where?"

"While he was caddying. You'd be standing there talking to him and he'd just tweak his balls, like somebody scratches their nuts

and you don't think anything about it, but this guy would grab his wang by the knob and give it a yank, yank it, not scratch it, just yank on it. Could never figure out what the fuck that guy was doing."

"Maybe he had a disease, maybe his dick was rotting off, v.d."

"He'd only show up maybe once a week, make five bucks and hitch-hike down to the track, make fifteen or better, maybe lose it and have to come back the next day. But this guy was a real good horse picker."

"How do you know?"

"Cause he was only here once in a blue moon." Not like blind Mike, he was there almost every day. He was about forty or so and he was real wierd looking too, to kids anyway, you wonder what's this guy in a suit doing here, cause Mike always wore a grey suit, white shirt and a black tie, black shoes. And he was tall, a bit bald on the top of his head and he had long brown hair that went straight back and was greasy. He had coke-bottle lenses on his glasses and that's why they called him blind Mike cause he couldn't see more than ten feet in front of him. He used to caddy for certain old guys. See Mike, Freddie and the racing bum were all basically, not welfare, but they were on government assistance for their defects and they'd do this for extra money. The racing bum, of course, would put it on the track, blind Mike for booze and Freddie, just for the fun of it. But blind Mike could carry two doubles, when normal caddies, like us guys would take one double, two golfers, put one bag

on a push cart and carry the other one. But blind Mike would take both bags, didn't matter how big they were, and put them both on the same shoulder. He'd march along, was real strong, took giant steps, kind of swung his shoulders. And these pants he wore were ultra-baggey and he was very skinny, but you knew he was strong, nobody ever fucked with him. One day I saw him standing on the first tee and he was headed into the wind, and like, his tie had gone back over his shoulder and his coat was flapping straight back and the wind was blowing hard and he was leaning into it, remember doing that when you were a kid."

"Yeah."

"And these super baggey pants were stretched out so far behind him, that you would see his knobby knees and these huge feet in white socks, and he looked real strange to me standing there with the wind blowing like a bastard."

A noise comes up outside just as I get the words out of my mouth, like when you're telling scary stories at night when you're a kid and you hear thunder.

"Geez, what's that? The wind?"

"I'll take a look out the windows . . . nah, it's the snow plows, it's stopped snowing. So that's all I remember about blind Mike."

"Speaking of blind, I think I'll make up a pot of coffee in the kitchen before I wake up Freddie and try to drive. Come on back to the kitchen with me, we'll grab a bite too."

So Wes and I go back to the kitchen and he starts a fresh pot, then yanks all kinds of stuff out of the fridge--fruit salads, tossed salads, brown rice, cornish hens, cakes and pies, and we sit down and Wes says he's hungry as a horse and this reminds me of someone else.

"There was one other thing about blind Mike, he would always caddy for Nipper Cliff."

"Hey, I know that name, died just about a year ago."

"You know, I still have the ceramic horse he gave me in '65."

"You knew him pretty well?"

"He knew my dad, and he brought me this horse, mostly brown, except for the green mane and tail that looked like seaweed under water, when I had appendicitis and he came to see me at the hospital. When Nipper first joined the club, all the caddies used to laugh at him because of the way he looked. I don't know if he was bald, we never saw his head, he wore a white golf hat with about a dozen or so tees in it. He wasn't fat, but his stomach bulged out in front like a woman nine months and two weeks gone. And white bermuda shorts that came down almost to his knees, and knee socks up to the bottoms of his knee caps. Those knees, purple grapes bumps of veins all over them. And he'd always wear one of those skinny little belts around that great big belly, with a shiny buckle right out in front. Couldn't describe the shirts he wore other than to say you could always see him coming.

It's not like Nipper would visit just any caddy who happened to be in the hospital, you see, Nipper knew my mother, sort of. One

time my dad was playing the course, and I was caddying for him, and Nipper got paired up with him. He introduces himself and they started talking about Toronto in the old days and finding out who they both knew and when it got around to asking about wives, my dad said he was married to Gay McCauley. Then Nipper said that he knew a Gay McCauley, the one he knew was one of Canada's top fashion models and then of course my dad said, 'Well, that's my wife.' So Nipper reaches into his pocket, brings out his wallet and takes out a picture. Yeah, it was my mum, smiling and towering over Nipper, with her arm around his shoulders and she's in this kind of skimpy costume and Nipper said how she had jumped out of a cake at his bachelor party.

"No kidding?"

"Nope. And then Nipper started talking a little about his wife. It was hard for me to believe Nipper had a wife. I mean he was old and should've been showing off pictures of his grandchildren, but he looked the same in the picture as he did right then on the course. Poor old Nipper's wife was drunk at the wedding and never sobered up."

"And he brought you the horse at the hospital?"

"Yeah, and he'd sit around and tell me stories and make me laugh. I guess one reason he came to see me was because his wife was in hospital too. I asked what kind of operation she had and he changed the subject. He started talking about this new car that had come out that year and how teriffic it was, what a beauty it was, a

real bomb. He said he wanted one real bad but the wife would never let him get by with that."

"Did he get it, what kind was it?"

"The next day, Nipper came in again and he was smiling and excited. He said for me to come to the window, but I told him I wasn't supposed to get out of bed. He said it would be okay for a minute. So he helped me over to the window and said, 'Look at that, Paul, there's the bomb, my new Buick Wildcat. And there it was, long and white with a black landau roof, parking in the ambulance zone. He said, 'When they spring ya, kid, I'll take you for a ride, we'll go fishing, would you like that?' I told him I sure would, but doubted that he'd really show up. I figured he just felt better spending time with me than with his wife upstairs and he couldn't show off the bomb to her anyway."

"Did you ever get to ride in it?"

"About six o'clock one Saturday morning, about four weeks after they sprang me, Nipper drove up in the bomb. We headed up toward Barrie, that's where his fishing lodge was. I have to admit the fishing was fine up there, but the best thing about the trip was the ride in the bomb. Once we got out of the city and off the main highways running north from Toronto, Nipper leaned way back in the seat, even so, his bulge nearly touched the wheel, and he looked over at me from the sides of his eyes and just pointed a finger at the speedometer. Then he said, '110, Paul, that's how fast we're going--come on lean over and try to see--a ha--can't see it can you, that's what I like about this car, Frannie'd never be able to lean over and

and see the speedometer, she'd ask how fast I was going, and I'd just say, oh, 65 dear.'

Nipper was never so much fun again after Frannie died. He came home one day and she was on the kitchen floor, and he went to pick her up and carry her upstairs to the bedroom like he'd always done, and she was dead. And old Nipper started drinking more himself and my dad says that people would avoid him at the club, and never ask him to join them at their tables and my dad said too, that when Nipper died only a few people came to his funeral and that nobody likes a goodtime Charlie when he's down."

"About ready to hit the road, Paul?"

"Jesus, it's four a.m., you should have stopped my flapping jaws."

"Hey, Paul, I can't think of a better way to spend time waiting out a blizzard. Usually people just give me orders, you know? I've gotten to be a professional listener. But I'll guarantee you, I've never heard anything like I've heard tonight, never laughed so hard, come back tomorrow night, will you?"

"I don't know, Wes . . . ."

"You've got more caddy stories?"

"No, after caddying I started working at Busy Bee Car Wash, but that's another story."