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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ  
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Hospitals And Night

A Novella and Two Stories

Beth Harvor

Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts (English) at  
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## ABSTRACT

### Hospitals and Night

Beth Harvor

The novella and two stories which make up this collection deal with the struggles of three young people to become adults in households where the parents appear to be abdicating, through depression or neurosis, their own holds on the territory of adulthood. This abdication is coupled with subtle abuses of power. However, it is in the parent who is still in ostensible command (in both "A Sweetheart" and "Hospitals and Night") that we witness the most destructive consequences of the misuses of power within the family. In the final story, "Sun and Rain," questions of power, control and escape, although they are certainly among the central character's preoccupations, are eclipsed not only by his close connection with his mother but also by the fact that she may be dying. That the young characters in these fictions resolutely—and even hopefully—refuse to see the consequences of the choices they make works to establish the extent to which they have been hobbled by the pasts of their parents.



For Terence Byrnes

There are more spells than your commonplace  
magicians ever dreamed of.

--Joseph Conrad, Victory

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### A SWEETHEART

On the way over on the ferry, Kathryn wondered if she should warn Alec about her mother. They were sitting in the old black Plymouth Alec had bought for himself two weeks after coming out to Canada from England. They were the front car in a row of farmers' battered cars and trucks and so had a ringside view out over the water. The only barrier between them and the river was a long low-slung length of rusty old chain threaded through arched openings in the squat posts that had been nailed to the splintered front deck of the boat. Probably better not to warn him, she decided; once when she'd tried to warn a girlfriend about her mother, the girlfriend had reproached her later and called her mother a sweetheart and a living doll. So she only said, "My mother is English too."

When he didn't respond she added, "She loves to sing." Has a lousy voice though, she longed to tell him. But she did not. Instead she cleared her throat and said in an uneasy low voice, "She's crazy about the songs from My Fair Lady, so tonight we'll probably have a sing-song."

Alec said that that sounded like fun.

She threw him a distrustful, appraising look. She said warningly, "She'll probably make quite a fuss over you."

Alec said he never objected to having a woman make a fuss over him.

"Too right," said Kathryn, giving him a light punch in the arm.

It ended with their getting into a mock-wrestle; they didn't stop until Kathryn, sneezing violently, collapsed against his shoulder.

Then, as if they were tired, they gazed out over the dark autumn river.

Kathryn said, "I think I might be coming down with the flu."

Alec said he knew a good cure for the flu.

"What's that?"

"Get you drunk. Get you plastered."

"Is that what they recommend back in the mother country?"

The mother country--he smiled to hear it called that.

Kathryn said that when she was small she'd thought the mother country was a country where only mothers lived. Mothers manned the streetcars. Mothers delivered the mail.

Alec smiled down at her with an expression of almost sappy affection. It made her want to squirm away from him in embarrassment. He stroked back her hair; said he wished he'd known her back then.

Kathryn had quickly to list some things--about herself, to herself--that she didn't approve of, in order to keep from feeling guilty for being so critical of him. She was too shy; she was sexually inexperienced; she was too critical; the top part of her body was too matronly but her legs were too short and too fat, like a fat toddler's legs. Sometimes when she stood naked in front of her full-length mirror she felt like the top part of her body was mother to her legs.

Alec, still smoothing down her hair, drew her head to his shoulder. She ordered herself to calm down, and after a few minutes of listening to him talk about his work she was able to relax and even to feel

somewhat bored. It was because of his voice; he had a knack for making it go incredibly dead. Which in a way was appropriate, since "dead" was a favourite word of his. But then with the British, everything was dead this and dead that. There were a lot of things he was dead keen on; for example he was dead keen on going out to see her parents' reclaimed nineteenth century house. And then there were some things he found dead boring. Just so long as she didn't turn into one of them, she thought, feeling some embarrassment about her job at the bank. She stole a covert look at this profile--the hooked nose; the lank dark hair; the way he was staring out over the water as if it was making him angry. He was really incredibly handsome although some of the other tellers at the bank found him too stocky and short. It was true that when he came in at lunchtimes to visit her, and she was wearing her high-heeled sandals, she did seem to tower above him, but today, since they were both wearing sneakers, they were the same height.

Alec was saying he didn't think he always wanted to be an engineer and build bridges. He was considering going back to school to study architecture, he said. In his soothing drone, he told her that his great interest was in the restoration of old houses.

Kathryn said she didn't always plan to work at the bank either. She referred to it as the boring old bank. She said she might go on to university someday herself. Last year, the year she had graduated from high school, she told him. was the year her parents had bought their old house. The renovations had eaten up all their cash. "Any-

way," she continued, in a voice she did not entirely recognize as her own, "I don't mind working at the bank all that much. And I guess the boredom won't kill me." Only make me very tired, she thought; and she was feeling very drowsy by the time the ferry rounded the bluff at Cape Stedman. The smell of the Plymouth's upholstery brought back memories of trips in the family car, years ago; the smell of hardboiled eggs and bananas. But the sight of her parents' house high up in the trees made her sit up. "There's the house," she said. "But you can only see the top part of it."

Above a high bluff of maple and cedar trees they could glimpse the four chimneys and the black roof with its four gables and the top storey with its eight tall casement windows set in stone. There was the first touch of fall on the bluff's foliage and the deep river, near the island's rocky cliffs and small shale beaches, was a clear polar green. The house's top windows, blank and bright with the afternoon light, seemed to be sending signals back out to the people on the boat. We rule this wood, we rule this water.

Alec and Kathryn got out of the car. The sun was shining down on the small distant house up in its high bluff of trees. They walked to the railing and then stood pressed tight up against it, looking southeast and up, toward the house. The sun burned their faces but the wind was cold--nipped their noses, fingers. Kathryn, who'd drawn her sun-streaked fine hair up into an untidy windblown bun, was feeling small and pleased and desirable. She felt held in the excitement of living in a cold clear-aired northern country. She felt in love with the little islands with the spruce and birch trees on them. She loved the wind-bitten headlands. Her short legs were hidden by her black corduroy trousers. Her big breasts looked smaller beneath her navy nylon windbreaker. She was glad Alec was so handsome, she was glad

he was standing with his arm tight around her, she hoped the men who ran the ferry were looking down on them, from their glassed-in wheelhouse, up above the cars and trucks and roped-on lifeboats. She breathed in deeply, and, breathing in, was sure she could smell the golden decay of autumn in the trees of some of the nearby little islands that bobbed by the ferry. Out here in the middle of the bay the water was darker, an intense dark blue—almost black—in its windblown central channel. The ferry's engines sounded different too, in the fall—more heavily chugging, more insistent, a deep mechanical throbbing behind a sound like the constant flushing of six toilets on both sides of the boat.

"Your house is disappearing," said Alec. And it was; now only its chimneys were visible above the big bluff of trees.

"Going, going, gone," said Kathryn, and by the time the house had disappeared completely—the bluff seemed to have bobbed up and down until it had bobbed itself up to cover the house utterly—it had lost all its power. It seemed like a summer house then, lost up in the woods—a place belonging to people who lived somewhere like Massachusetts; old people; old crippled rich people; people who hadn't come north for ten, fifteen years; an abandoned house, forgotten, gone to seed in the woods. From here you couldn't believe that there was a road in to it or that it was only a six-minute drive from the village of Point Castile.

Ten minutes later, the ferry was starting to swing in a wide arc, starting to churn and tread water, preparing for its advance between the weathered grey breakwaters of the Cape Stedman landing.



The breakwaters looked spectral, like two halves of a burnt-out flooded church. Between their windward and leeward grey walls they were piled high with grey boulders. Their nave was an aisle of still water. The ferry came flushing and churning in between the breakwaters, shaking up the wharf-images and creating a commotion among the gulls. The deck-hand—a freckled, complaisant boy Kathryn recognized from weekend crossings on the ferry—sprang forward to throw a heavy rope out to lasso the nearest post of the pier; then, looking obsessed, began his impressive high-speed spooling of the rope around its sister-post on the prow of the boat. There were the little squeaks and adjustments of a water-craft being berthed at a pier. The deck-hand spiked the ramp of the wharf with a long, finned spear that looked to Kathryn like a harpoon, to guide it into a better alignment with the ferry.

Alec's car was the first car up over the ramp. Being a passenger in the first car made Kathryn feel awkward. She waved a shy wave to the perspiring deck-hand as the car eased past him but he only stared back at her as if he had never laid eyes on her before in his life.

Then they were on the road to Bellwood Beach, a road that climbed and clung to the wooded coast for nearly a mile. From the plateau of the first long hill they glanced back and saw the ferry, small down in the bay below them, a little white sled with a glass box on top of it, already starting to sled its way back to Port Charlotte across the cobalt-blue water.

As they got closer to the house Kathryn started to feel the old familiar knot in her stomach. It was the old coming-home knot; it

made her feel restless and apprehensive, as if she might need to throw up. She could feel her legs getting damp inside her black corduroy pants. A briney female odour was coming up to her from between her corduroyed sun-warmed thighs.

Coniferous trees—dark pines and spruces—were growing close up to the south side of the highway. They were part of the bluff they'd looked up to from back down in the bay. But to the north of the road there were long sunlit pastures, sloping far back to small low-lying farms and grazing cattle. After ten minutes of driving they had to swing south, into the woods, sharp right onto a private gravel road for the final tree-shaded part of the journey to the stone house.

And then it came into view, looking like a manor house in some country where a chilled aristocratic northness was distilled in the air—Sweden, say, or Scotland. Alec swung the car up the gravel crescent of driveway, brought it to a stop just west of the formal front entrance. As he and Kathryn disembarked in the strong fall sunlight, Kathryn found herself feeling a little groggy and disoriented, like a tourist about to pay her respects at a shrine. The air, even this far inland, smelled of the fine invigorating salt sting of the Bay of Fundy, seemed to carry some memory of the foggy morning still in it—into the sad clear-aired afternoon.

The house was flanked on both sides by small groves of pines and blue spruces, and by formal mounds of blue lupines and delphiniums. The sun was giving a haze of importance to all of it—above all to the speared flowers and spruces.

As she opened the front door to them, Kathryn's mother seemed to be totally caught in the grip of the painful brightness of welcome. She clasped Alec's offered hand in both her hands. Kathryn, hanging back, felt embarrassed by the intensity of her mother's greeting of Alec; thought, He will think I've never brought a man home before in my life. This was the case, but it caused her some pain to have it so clearly announced. It seemed to her that she was forever vowing to act womanly when she was with her mother, but that it only took two seconds for her mother to do something that would make her start to act resentful. At the same time she was feeling oddly proud of her mother—of her petite, freckled fairness; of the pearls in her pierced ears; of the way she was immaculately dressed—tailored white shirt tucked into new-looking tan dirndl skirt. Only her white ballet slippers looked grubby. Her feet looked veined and blue from the cold in them.

In the sunny living-room Kathryn's mother linked arms with Alec and squired him over to the glass doors at the back so he could look down over the long lawns and gardens. Kathryn, tucking her shirt into her black trousers, followed behind.

It was a different sunlight back here; it felt like a different season. There was a breeze spinning the round yellow leaves of the young leafy trees; the air seemed more balmy. Kathryn's father was down on his knees in the garden, pulling weeds from one of the flowerbeds. When he looked up and saw them he rose, wiping his hands on his canvas gardening pants. Then he came walking up the garden path, a greeting that was more like a question than a greeting in his

thoughtful grey eyes. He stepped inside. Shook hands with Alec; affectionately embraced his daughter.

Kathryn asked him if he'd been out working down on the boats; she said she'd seen one of the dories pulled up on the beach when the ferry had sailed by the bluff.

He said no, he'd been working up on the roof. "Come out to the front and I'll show you what I've been up to." And leaving Alec and Kathryn's mother still standing looking out over the back garden, Kathryn and her father crossed the sun-blocked front hallway and walked down the shaded stone steps and out into the bracing sunlight at the front of the house. They turned and peered up at the patched part of the roof. While they were studying his morning's work, Kathryn's father asked her if she'd known Alec long.

"A couple of weeks. He keeps his money at the bank. He always stands in the line for my cage. That's how we got to know each other." Remembering how she'd first seen Alec, hesitating beyond the roped-off section of the bank's lobby and then picking her out from a whole row of tellers, made Kathryn throw her father a quick anxious look. She loved her father and wanted him to like Alec, and so it puzzled her that she should at the same time be longing for him to say something disapproving.

They had their tea out in the back garden. Kathryn's mother fixed all her attention on Alec; asked him endless questions about England and his work. Alec said he'd been talking to some of the engineers down in Port Charlotte and that they'd told him there were big expansion plans for the land beyond the townships west of the

harbour. "Shopping malls," he said. "A new hospital. But most of that won't be built for years down the road yet. For some of the developments they're projecting as far ahead as the nineteen-eighties."

Kathryn sat gazing out over the garden, trying to imagine what life would be like in the nineteen-eighties. In 1983 she would be the same age as her mother was now. It was hard for her to picture it. She could imagine herself in the future easily enough, but she could not imagine herself being older in it. She saw herself sitting out on a bleak modern terrace. She was seated on a streamlined white modern chair while she entertained a circle of people at a futuristic round white table; a robot holding a square metal tray was pouring tea for her blank-faced modern guests from a pot with a short utilitarian spout.

The garden, meanwhile, had cooled down. The afternoon was casting long shadows across the long lawn and grave-like mounds of the flower-beds. Presently they had to go into the house to fetch jackets and sweaters. "We're nearly three miles in from the ocean," Kathryn's mother said to Alec, and she linked her arm through his. "But we still get our share of chilly sea breezes."

When the supper was over, Kathryn's mother announced the sing-song. Sitting on the white-painted piano bench, Kathryn's father sorrowfully, skillfully played; Kathryn's mother, a pearl-buttoned cardigan caped over her shoulders, sang "The Rain In Spain" and "All I Want Is A Room Somewhere." Kathryn, her fair hair combed

and still darkly damp from a pre-supper dip in the river, sang a quavering low version of "The Skye Boat Song" and then, in a surer voice, "The Red River Valley"; Alec sang a sexy slow Cockney version of "The Ballad Of Mack The Knife" in the professionally wistful voice Kathryn associated with British popular singers. Together they all sang marching songs and sea shanties.

When it was over, Kathryn's mother laid a tanned hand on Kathryn's bare arm and said in a poised low voice, "Come out to the kitchen and help me get the coffee."

But out in the kitchen her mother's eyes scanned Kathryn's face with a perplexed diagnostic sorrow, apparently very disturbed by what they were finding there. Her mother could be an intensely earnest person but it was earnestness in the service of false things, in Kathryn's opinion. Etiquette, for example. About the real disasters, although she could publicly be as horrified as the next person, Kathryn suspected she was secretly cavalier. But she was not cavalier about the disaster she apparently hoped to avert at this moment and so Kathryn understood that it must be a disaster of etiquette. At the same time, there was something so stern and, in the weirdest way, so heartfelt about her mother's earnestness, that Kathryn could not stand within the range of its searching gaze long without feeling that she might soon be obliged—and very much against her own better judgement—to totally alter her concept of good and evil.

Her mother was saying to her, "He's a lovely man, your Alec. A real darling."

Kathryn did not want to respond to this and so she only stared moodily out at her mother. She feared that almost anything her mother might say to her now might make her start to cry—that the only thing protecting her from it was the fact that she was keeping herself alert with distrust.

She watched her mother turn on both the hot and cold taps and then rinse her hands under the mixed blast of water. She watched her shake the droplets of water from her fingers and then dry her hands, finger by ringed finger, on an embroidered white cloth. She watched her turn to look at her. Her pale blue eyes seemed to have absorbed some of the cold of the September evening. "You wouldn't want to lose a man like that. Not a man of that calibre," she said.

Kathryn felt distaste for the calibre—for the calibre of this conversation too—but, cornered, answered, "I guess not."

"I should think not," said her mother. "But you will, if you act vulgar. The way you were swinging your hips when you were singing! You have to try to be worthy of a man like Alec. You wouldn't want him to have to be ashamed of you."

"I don't believe he's ashamed of me."

"Believe me; dear little Kathryn, I only want to help you." Her mother was still staring at her with her terrible, earnest gaze. "Men are more fastidious than woman, you have to understand that. Now that you have...a sweetheart...you will have to take care not to act crude."

Kathryn despised the word sweetheart. Having had it said to her, she felt the need to be alone and ran up the stairs to the bathroom. In the company of tall glass flasks stocked with eggs of beige soap and stacks of snowy towels that smelled like they'd been laundered in a subtle French scent, she peered at herself in the mirror, used the toilet. After she'd flushed it she could hear an echoing flushing down in the bay—the ferry making its final trip across the river for the evening. She crossed the hall to her bedroom window to look out.

Down in the black bay the ferry was making an odd spectacle in the night. No part of it seemed to be connected to any other. The wheelhouse was a lighted guardhouse looking down over a darkened fast-moving prison; below it the lifeboats, illuminated by powerful hooded lights, were white wooden hammocks hung from chains; below the lifeboats the paddlewheel, also lit up by a visored light, was a water-washed antique mill wheel for tourists. She stood watching the whole show sail past the point where she and Alec had got out of the car to look back up at the house. She recalled herself looking up—small and happy in the bright light. It made her feel spooky, as if back down on the boat she'd also looked puzzled, trying to catch sight of herself up here at her own bedroom window.

Running back down the stairs she met Alec, on his way up. They swung hands, kissed lightly. "We better make plans to get away from here tomorrow night, or we'll end up spending the evening playing Scrabble."

Alec, squeezing her hand tight, whispered, "Too right."

All the way through the clam chowder the next night at supper Kathryn kept waiting for Alec to make his announcement that they'd have to go out for the evening. But he didn't. Judiciously breaking his French bread into careful chunks, he talked about former wars—World War I, Korea; said World War I was a farce.



Kathryn's mother looked startled. But she was quickly able to convert her shock into awe. "You know a ~~few~~ about politics, don't you?"

Now, thought Kathryn, He'd better say it now. But her mother was leaving the table to go fetch the dessert. When she came back into the dining-room with it—a heaving hot apple-pie on a china tray—Alec said, "That looks sensational—doesn't it, Kath?"

Kathryn glanced at it and then quickly up at her mother. "Alec and I have to go out tonight. We've been invited to visit some friends of his over at Brewer Creek."

Her mother sat down. She was holding her silver pie-trowel upright in her right hand, like a bibbed King Henry the Eighth holding his meat-knife clenched in his fist. Her eyes were as blank and sun-struck as a gardener's. "Friends?" she asked. "What friends?"

"Friends from his office," said Kathryn.

The rest of the meal, under the constraint of Kathryn's mother's unhappiness, they talked about music. Kathryn said that her favourite song was the Bobby Darin song "The Ballad Of Mack The Knife."

Alec smiled at her. "That's not really a Bobby Darin song, you know. In point of fact, Bobby Darin stole that song. From Bertolt Brecht." The way he pronounced Bertolt Brecht sounded exaggeratedly German. "From The Threepenny Opera," he said. "From Dreigroschenoper."

It seemed to Kathryn that it restored her mother, to see her daughter being put in her place. She won't mind my going out so much now, she thought.

But now Alec was looking impassive—not there, almost—and Kathryn started to feel frightened that he wouldn't be able to get up and leave, once the supper was over. She was worried that if they didn't make their getaway fast, her mother would invite herself along for the ride. Or that she would detain them for so long with coffee and conversation that there'd finally be no point in going.

Her mother did suggest coffee. They took it out on the terrace. Alec and Kathryn stayed standing, drained their cups in a minute. But then Kathryn's mother asked Alec for some professional advice about an extension she was hoping to build on the back of the house. She guided him by an elbow to the western part of the garden. Kathryn followed behind. Her mother was still wearing her tan dirndl skirt but had changed her shirt for a pale-blue nylon blouse with a scoop neck. Kathryn could see the back of her white lace-edged slip through it and when her mother turned to Alec, to point out one of the mouldings on the west side of the house and then stood hugging herself against the cool of the evening, her breasts were very evident as well—hugged as they were into a high freckled fullness. Kathryn, sensing Alec was making an effort not to stare at her mother's breasts, hung a hand on the back of his shoulder, like a girl supporting herself while hopping on one foot to shake a stone out of the toe of her shoe. Then she started to tell her

mother about how Alec was always making the other tellers down at the bank laugh, with his wild Cockney talk. She mocked him, in a flirty way; entertained him with an imitation of his own accent. But the fact that she had some success at this and was even able to provoke him into turning to smile into her eyes and say to her, "You're a daft one, you are," only seemed to make her feel more depressed, as if they'd had something together but lost it.

After Alec had helped her with the dishes, Kathryn slipped out into the pantry for her blazer. It was starting to rain. She could hear it drumming on the tin roof of the old shed out at the back. On the panelled east wall, where a pair of deer's antlers had been nailed up for windbreakers and jackets, a transparent plastic raincoat was hooked on one of the antler's horned twigs of bone. Next to it a forgotten sleeveless dress was hanging by an armhole from a porcelain peg. The dress was jade green with a mandarin collar. She had worn it in high school. She remembered standing out in the foggy May mornings in it, waiting for the school bus to come. Her books pressed tight to her breasts. Her nipples tightened and stiff from the chilled morning mist. Shaved bare legs and bare feet freezing in her high-heeled sandals. She wondered whatever had happened to the green dress's bolero. She could picture it all balled up in a corner, smelling of turpentine or Varsol. Or maybe it had been used as a rag to clean out cupboards and toilets. Above her, she could hear her mother traipsing around up in her bedroom. She could hear her creak back and forth between her bed and her dresser. What was she doing up there? She could imagine her twisting her hair up so she could spray the nape of her neck with her Tigress cologne, then leaning in low

toward her mirror and applying her make-up with severe skillful strokes. On her way back into the living-room she didn't even stop off in the bathroom, she was so terrified that her mother, by now dressed in her cream-coloured slacks and black rain poncho, would come running down the stairs calling out, "Darlings! I've decided to come along with you!"

"Let's go, let's go," she hissed to Alec when she came back into the living-room in her blazer. She gripped the suede-backed lapels of his grey tweed jacket and, walking backwards, tried to pull him after her.

But he batted her down sharply from his lapels. "Will you for Christ's sake stop behaving like a child?"

She obediently dropped her hands and looked away from him, her eyes gleaming. She could feel a pin-prick of tearful resentment in her throat. She thought, All I want is to be alone with him. And what do I get? I get punished for wanting it.

Out in the wallpapered gloom of the high-ceilinged Victorian kitchen the phone started to ring. Kathryn's father went out to answer it. "It's for you, Peg!" Kathryn could hear him calling up the stairs. "Can you take it up there?"

Oh God, she thought, it'll be some old crony of Mother's, inviting us over for the evening, and Mother will say we all have to go. In the hallway above her, she could hear her mother pick up the phone and say hello. She could hear her father out in the kitchen, running a long blast of water. She seized Alec by the wrist—now he was willing to go, now when no one was looking!—

and they slipped out the side door and together pounded their way across the driveway's crescent of gravel to his car. It was raining very hard by this time, and as the car took off, the rain beat its comforting enclosing tattoo on the windshield. Kathryn could picture her mother, stunned by the ripping sound of Alec's tires spitting gravel, facing down the stairs to try to stop them. The front door flung open to the rainy night; the car's dying drone. The scent of tire-gashed earth. The immense post-drone silence.

They seemed to carry the echo of that silence along in the car with them. They drove past stands of sapling birches and alders and long groves of quaking aspens whose round leaves were being needled and jiggled by the rain. Kathryn flicked something non-existent off Alec's tweed collar as a pretext for letting her hand rest there, on his shoulder. His eyes on the rain-attacked road, he ducked to give her a quick kiss on her fingers. She blushed, and a moment later slipped off her blazer and moved in close beside him.

They passed through Wolf River, Bellwood Beach, Bramley. They drove through North Dover, with its shack-like grocery store and romantic graveyard. On the outskirts of North Dover, they caught sight, in the distance, of a long rain-damp grey covered bridge. Someone had painted the last third of it blue. They emerged into farming country and passed by a white horse, thoughtfully appraising them over its barn-grey Dutch door. There were daggers of damp in the door's dried grey wood. The half-door made Kathryn think of the bank, and especially of her supervisor, whose office was behind a teak Dutch door. She could often be seen there, a slim pale-eyed woman in a sleeveless blouse and straight black skirt with metallic

threads in it, halved and huddled, talking in a conspiratorial way into the phone.

West of Point Keenleyside they drove along a high ridge that looked down into a deep valley whose orchards and grey farms were brooding greenly in the rain. Then straight ahead for long but pleasantly tedious miles into a plain of dark pine trees. When they dipped again into leafy wet woods Kathryn whispered, "Could we stop somewhere soon? I have to go to the bathroom." Right away she hated herself for the childish way she had asked this question but she couldn't think of how else to put it. In this part of the country there were no gas stations; no human habitations or even shacks; no farms for miles and miles. The terrain had changed absolutely; now the road was up and down, up and down, making her feel seasick. Leafy banks of alders were crowding it like hedges. Then came a gap; a small field of tall grass. In it sat an abandoned country school house, once-white and peeling, a squat Tudor steeple at its front. It looked unspeakably forlorn--lost in time, lost in the woods. Lupine flowers were overrunning its grounds; their regal-looking pouched spears could blurrily be seen through the fogged, runnelly windows: pink on one side, blue on the other, flanking the steps of the deck-like front porch, which had a raw look--as if a quick-witted carpenter, only a half hour before, had slipped out of the woods to hammer it into place when no one was looking. The jolt of Alec's stopping the car seemed to bring back a memory of something unpleasant. Getting blamed for something. Kathryn got out, feeling car-sticky, disoriented; started to wade through the high faded grass that never got green, not even in this country that turned into a jungle in the rain, made

her way round to the back. Then squatted there, in the old school's eerie shelter, the trees crying their creaky tree-cries in the dark woods behind her. She got such an old sad sense of long-ago feuds and secrets here. School! The foolish old word almost thrilled her. She dumped her lipstick and compact out on a flat wet rock behind her. Her lipstick was called Pretty Pink. She drew some of it on and wet her lips. She combed her hair. She pulled out her bottle of Ambush Cologne and sprayed some of it between her thighs and behind her knees. Then she aimed the atomizer at each nipple and sprayed her dress with it. Her dress was spotted with rain anyway: you couldn't tell what spots were Ambush and what spots were rain. But then she thought, What have I done? What if he kisses me there? What if he tastes the perfume? What if he wants to suck them? Last night, after her parents were asleep, he had sucked one of her nipples through the nose-cone of her bra and her peach nylon blouse. In the lamplight of her bedroom his eyes had had a sated milky look that had almost repelled her. She wanted him to do it though. She loved it. It made her feel so abundant. And so she unbuttoned her dress and shook herself out of the top part of it and unhooked her bra and pulled it off and stuffed it into her shoulder-bag, bedding it down carefully under sunglasses and Kleenex. Then she buttoned it up again, but not quite all the way, and finally started her self-conscious trek back to the car.

As she edged along the side of the schoolhouse she gathered her dress into a high bunch at the front to keep it free of the

timothy grass that had a pollen of mist on it. She shivered a little too, the grass's wetness making her think of pee, not rain. She passed by the school's side door. A faded red, it was dried-out and hairy with age but this evening had a haze of mist on it. She shoved it open and cautiously stepped inside, glancing quickly to right and left. The desks looked very small to her, very small and obedient, all facing front. Everything else had been carted away--blackboards; globe; teacher's desk. She had been a good student; the lingering fragrance of pencil shavings reminded her. But she had an unsettling memory of herself back then, having to take her turn standing at the front of the class to recite "The Lord Is My Shepherd" in French. She remembered standing with her head bowed--out of shyness, not piety. She recalled her childish fear of making a mistake.

She walked back to the door, stepped out again into the rainy twilight.

When she climbed back into the car, she smiled up at Alec, her eyes anxious. "I went into the schoolhouse."

Alec said he'd been thinking of going in to have a look too, but had decided not to get himself wet. "You got yourself wet," he said. "Your nose is wet." He kissed the tip of it.

"Nothing left in there now but the desks."

"No beds?" he asked her.

The question made her feel as shy as she had felt as a child when she was the butt of some adult's affectionate teasing.

"No beds," she said.



Alec drew her head to his shoulder and sang with a Cockney accent into her hair:

All we want is a room somewhere  
Far away from the cold night air...

Kathryn, looking up at him with nervous affection, pulled a cigarette out of her package of Player's and asked in a small voice, "Could you give me a light?"

"Sure thing." And he got out a packet of matches and struck a light for her. But he held the flame far from her, down between his slightly parted thighs, so that she had to lean in close against him, and over and down, to get at it. One of her freed breasts was squashed against him, just above his belt. She rested one hand high up on his closest thigh, breathing life into her cigarette. Then feeling for once in her life totally grown-up, she huskily whispered, "Oh God, I'm afraid I'm starting to spill ashes on you."

And Alec, his voice sounding as if he had just caught an instant bad cold in the rain, answered, "Feel free. Go ahead, spill some more. Just don't set me on fire."

Kathryn sat up and nervously bore down on her cigarette. Alec dived for her left nipple, was starting to suck it through her dress. Remembering the Ambush, Kathryn whispered "Wait," then laid her cigarette down in the aluminum drawer of the ashtray under the dashboard. She whispered "Wait" again, then, like a mother struggling with fastenings in order to feed a ravenous child, unbuttoned her dress, let out a breast.

As they began the little settlings and hitchings of making themselves more comfortable, Kathryn experienced a moment of powerful doubt. But Alec was already starting to suck her exposed

nipple and unbutton the rest of her dress. As he sucked and unbuttoned, she could feel her body changing its mind for her.

She could feel it making a claim for itself, wanting what it wanted. She rubbed her nose back and forth under his jaw while he tried to work her shoulder free of her perfumed dress. "Let's get into the back," he urged her hoarsely. "We can lie down better there."

Kathryn gripped his hair in her fists and rhythmically massaged his skull with her thumbs while he dipped down to kiss her—her eyelids, her nose. Trying to decide, she stared up at the top of the gully through the fan of cleared glass being made and re-made by the windshield wipers. She could see how the wind was moving like a whip through the trees up there and how all the trees were nodding their heads as if in agreement.

## HOSPITALS AND NIGHT

Toward morning they would roll off the stretchers that were as high and narrow as ironing boards on wheels and stumble into the Scrub Room to scrub their arms and hands with bristle brushes and cold emerald-green liquid soap. They would scrub until their arms and hands were raw and freezing and tingling to their fingertips--it was odd; to have hands and arms that were awake, alive, when legs and eyes and thoughts were still all half-asleep--then it was back to the Operating Room to be gowned and gloved for the ritual of setting up the first of that night's strange banquets. Rows of scissors, blades, clamps. Sterile surgical cutlery laid out on dull green tablecloths. And when they had finished setting up every table, every room, they would make themselves coffee, using the Pyrex pot in the supervisors' kitchen. If they wanted a glass of milk as well, or a glass of orange juice, they could walk down the hall to Blood Bank. There was always a quart of milk and a bottle of orange juice there, in with the bottles of blood. But usually they didn't. Coffee was the drink of hospitals and night. They would carry it into one of the stretcher rooms and sit on old office swivel chairs, their feet up on the blistered window sill, and drink cup after cup of it, black. Then the sun would rise and they would hear the kitchen help yelling out to each other, far below them in the hospital courtyard, in Estonian and Italian and Portugese.

At the end of her night on duty in the OR, Ingrid Hessellund had two days off and so she decided to skip sleeping and take a bus home. But in the nurses' residence there was a message for her: she was to go over to Male Surgery to see Miss Killeen. She packed her night-

gown and jeans in a suitcase and got into a skirt and blouse. I can't have done anything wrong, she thought. And besides, Killeen was her friend. (The year before, when Killeen had still been a student, she'd been the senior on a night duty they'd shared on Female Surgery and from working with her then Ingrid liked her a lot.) But it wasn't true that she hadn't done wrong. She had. They both had. The only two nurses for forty patients, they had faked graphs on temperature charts, skipped dressings, left comatose patients unwashed.

Ingrid walked over to the hospital. A glassed-in catwalk joined it to the nurses' residence, but she walked below it, on pavement. She crossed to the ambulance breezeway and entered through the Emergency wing; took the service elevator up to the seventh floor. When the doors parted she saw Killeen, standing with her back to her, over at the medicine cupboard, pouring pills into the kind of paper cups cafeterias serve marmalade and jam in. In spite of her fondness for Killeen, in spite of the soft summer morning, she felt a surge of terror. Killeen turned around. "Oh, Hessie," she called out to her. "Did I scare you, ordering you over here like this? I'm sorry, but they said you were coming off nights and I wanted to catch you before you took off." She came back to her desk. "I've got a little problem here and I wondered if you could help me out."

"What is it?"

"They brought in this sailor a couple of nights ago, from a boat docked in the harbour. A Danish boat. He doesn't speak any English. We know what's wrong with him because we've been in contact with the doctor out there. But this morning I suddenly remembered—you come from a Danish family. I wondered if you'd go and talk to him a little."

"I don't speak much Danish," said Ingrid. All she knew were songs and jingles and silly things. Her parents had assimilated completely and spoke perfect English. They even made jokes about the Danish language. Said it was not a language at all, but a disease of the throat. Said it sounded like the baaing of sick sheep.

"Don't worry," said Killeen. "All we need is for you to say a few words to him in his native tongue, to cheer him up. And if you could find out if he had any problems or complaints."

Ingrid walked down the hall and into the sailor's room. There were three men in there, sitting cranked up in their beds, eating their breakfasts in the bright morning light.

"The Danish man?"

"Behind the curtain, Miss."

She parted the curtains and let herself in. He was about thirty-five, dark and taciturn-looking. She wished him good morning in Danish. The dark face broke into a slight but hopeful smile. You speak Danish, he said to her in Danish. In Danish she answered no. Yes you do, he said. He thought it was some kind of game. So she decided to make a joke of it, to show him that all she could do was count to ten, wish him a Merry Christmas, ask him how he felt (but not understand too fulsome an answer), and thank him a thousand times for the lovely evening. She hoped he would laugh but he did not. Then she remembered that the way to say "good luck" in Danish was til lykke, but after this she didn't dare to say it to him; she just put her hand on his shoulder as a way of saying goodbye. But it wasn't to be so simple as that. He gripped her hand hard by the wrist and guided it down from his shoulder. The moment she guessed

where they were going, her hand started to resist, so that his hand, feeling the fight in hers, caused the flight down to his genitals to be forced and rapid. Held to holding her hand down there, Ingrid stood motionless and with a bowed head. She silently vowed: I will never tell this to anyone, ever, and right after her silent vow the sailor released her.

Killeen was at her desk. "Were you able to communicate with each other?"

"I think he's just lonely." It made her feel wonderfully grown-up, to reveal only this.

"Oh well, there's not all that much wrong with him anyway. We'll have him back on his boat in a couple of days."

"I don't really speak Danish at all," Ingrid said. "We never spoke it at home."

"Well, it seems you did okay, at least you were able to understand he was lonely. So thanks a million for coming over."

The person Ingrid sat next to on the New Sharon bus was a woman in her sixties. Her hands were covered with liver spots and freckles and three of her fingers were fitted out with diamond rings. She had a smoker's cough and an American accent. It turned out that she was a nurse too and had been born and raised in Canada, not far from the countryside they were at that moment travelling through. She had trained in Halifax. As a

young woman she had moved to the States, had married there, and had ended up in Florida, where she was now the owner of a nursing home. "When I was thirty-eight years old I was left a widow. Thank God for my training. I took a job in Tampa—private nursing—and I started to save my pennies. Ten years later I bought the establishment I'm running now. I'm very successful. I'm not telling this to boast but only to show how it pays to stick to your training." She pinched Ingrid's sleeve as if she could read her mind. "Oh, honey!" she cried, her shrewd old Florida eyes on Ingrid's. "I can see you have doubts!"

Ingrid confessed she'd been considering giving it up.

"Oh no!" the old nurse cried. "Oh, don't do that!"  
Don't ever do that. Remember, it's always something to fall back on."

The odd thing was, the year before, she had been even closer to leaving than she was now. She had sat in her parents' car and cried and said, "I want to leave here, I want to leave here now." They had persuaded her to stay until her third year. Then you will have tried everything, they said. You will have been in the Case Room and the Operating Room and Emergency. If you still want to leave then, after you've tried everything, then we won't argue with you.

When Ingrid got out of the bus in New Sharon, her hoarse and freckled Florida friend touched her arm again and said, "Remember what I told you, honey," and Ingrid told her she would.

She made a good connection with the bus to Athens, and had plenty of time to think about her life at the hospital on the long trip there. The first birth; the first death; the first post-mortem. The first post-mortem had been easy, coming over a year after the first death. Six student nurses walked over to the morgue together. On their way there they met three interns. It was a hot afternoon and there was the smell of tar in the ocean air. The morgue sat behind the hospital and looked like a garage; it was made of concrete blocks, painted white, and it had a big garage-like door. The moment they got inside they saw the body, lying on a marble-topped table. It was a woman, past middle-age, with faded orange hair and, even in death, a look of authority about her. Ingrid imagined that she had once been head of something-- the purse section of a department store, say, or maybe a business office. Maybe she had even been a nurse. She was glad she wasn't young.

One of the interns stretched. "Cooler in here, anyway," he said, and then the door opened and the chief pathologist came in. He was a Scotsman and very small and quick, in a clean white lab coat. "Good day," he said in his Scots voice and he strode to the table and at once picked up a scalpel and made a long vertical incision. There was something flamboyant about the way he did this, as if he wanted to give them all a bit of theater. His next move was to lay down



the scalpel and pick up a pair of rubber gloves and draw them on in the swift, fastidious manner of a thief about to plunder something small and precious. Then he parted (by strenuous unfastidious shoving) the walls of the dead woman's flesh. To Ingrid the walls were like curtains being parted, curtains thick as thick carpets, plush with blood, and in order to keep herself from fainting at both the parted curtains and at what they were revealing she made herself recall the definition of anatomy that they'd been given at the beginning of Anatomy and Physiology:

Anatomy is the science which deals with the structure of the bodies of men and animals. It is studied by the dissection of the bodies of those who die in hospitals and other institutions, unclaimed by relatives.

This woman had no one who cared for her then.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the chief pathologist. "Look at the lady's lungs."

They all looked. They were very flecked with black. "A lifetime resident of this city," the chief pathologist said, and they all nervously laughed. Then he started asking people to show him things. The Falciform ligament. The seventh costal cartilage. The interns did all the showing: they were good at it. And after a while the pathologist forgot about the nurses entirely and addressed all his remarks to the interns. He exposed a small globe of flesh deep within the abdominal cavity. "Which of you good gentlemen knows what this is?" he asked them. And he allowed his eyes to shine. He was sure, this time,

he had them stumped. And in fact they seemed to be. But Ingrid was not. At the time they had studied it she had been infatuated with one of the orderlies on Male Surgery, a dark solid boy named Douglas MacKinnon.

"The Pouch of Douglas?" she whispered.

The pathologist gave her a quick sharp look.

"Dead right," he said.

As for the first birth, when she saw her first birth she had a sense she'd never had before of the connection between tension and bringing forth, and at the same time a feeling, however contradicted it was by the events of everyday life, of being in good hands; every death she witnessed after that first birth was easier to take, except for the deaths of a few children. But then she'd hated the children's ward anyway; it had almost done her in. The sunniest place in the whole hospital, skylit with a great dome of frosted glass and walled with glass bricks that gave it the architectural serenity of a giant city igloo, everything else about it was desperate: the noise, the smell, the overcrowding--it was as noisy and smelly as a zoo set up in a greenhouse but without the blessing of green plants. But the crazy thing was, the odd silent wards were no better. Here a great many small children were in a state of shock from having been separated from their parents and sat, hardly moving, in pyjamas sporting pink lambs or pink poodles, their eyes as un-seeing as black pools. And in the chronic wards there was a deceptive lightness--here the children smiled and joked and knew all the routines and all the nurses'

names; but they were the worst of all--it was as if the bewitched monstrous children of German fables had been given medical verity. Here were children who had got puffed up into strangers overnight; their eyes turned into slits by the held-in fluid; here were children with enormous circus heads; here were children whose legs and arms had grown to different lengths, there were medical names for all of it. Ingrid got sick on the children's ward--diarrhea, bronchitis, high child-style fevers--even though normally, like the others, she was immune to everything. The problem was, courage in very young children was a frightening thing. So pure, so absolute, so detached from the very experience that could give it meaning; she knew they would give up life as easily and naturally as they would take their medicine.

And the children's ward wasn't all; there had been other places as well; places where they hadn't just been overworked, they'd been humiliated too--some of the older supervisors, especially, had taken pleasure in humiliating them. On certain night duties, where the supervisors coming on duty in the morning had made them stay late doing things they said they'd left undone and threatened to take their free time away from them until, in their exhaustion, it seemed these supervisors held their freedom and self-respect, even their whole lives, in their hands, Ingrid had given up eating almost entirely, preferring to sleep instead. The new wing of the nurses' residence

was under construction then and every morning before she went off duty she'd fill up her pockets with phenobarbitol pills, to blot out the sound of the jack-hammers. She couldn't open her window either. Her best friend, Joan Cosman, would come up to her room at suppertime and snap up the blind and open the window to show a part of the hospital's brick wall going pinkly light from the last of the sun. Or was it the sunrise? Rising out of a drugged sleep, it was scary not to know which. "What time is it?" Ingrid would moan, and she'd scrabble around on her dressing table, looking for her watch. "Six o'clock," Joan would say. But the words "six o'clock" wouldn't have any meaning for her; until she could figure out where she was working, where she was supposed to be, she couldn't figure them out.

Smelling of the day's smells, Joan would plunk so heavily down on the bed it would bob like a boat on rough waters. She was working in the Case Room then, there was the sweet-sick blend of ether, Dettol, coffee. She'd fish the food she'd brought Ingrid out of a paper bag; peanut butter sandwiches she'd made up herself in the nurses' kitchen; bananas and cookies left over from supper in the cafeteria.

Eat, Hessie, she would say.

I'm not hungry.

You've got to eat.

Maybe they'll notice how thin I'm getting and give me time off to rest up.

Do you think they give a good goddam?

They make us weigh ourselves every month, don't they?

You're a dreamer. Eat.

Ingrid knew she was slated to go back on duty in the OR as soon as she got back to the hospital; she knew she'd be put in with Tiny Baxter, the holy terror of the OR; she was the only one in her class who hadn't worked with him. Maybe I should just leave now, she thought, I've tried everything but Emergency, I've seen it all now, and at that moment the May River delta came into view, far below them, down to the left of the highway. Elm trees grew on lush tracts of grass that stretched, in the way she remembered, out into the river, but in the still August morning it all looked majestically altered; in the hazy pre-noon air it had turned bridal, sensual, oriental. It made her know what she wanted: she wanted to have a baby. This was what she had liked best at the hospital --birth and babies. In fact, the first birth had marked the beginning of a kind of Golden Age. She'd moved from the Case Room to the Maternity Ward and from there to the Nursery and had felt happy all the time, especially in the Nursery, giving the babies their baths in the generous big-blocked light of windy sunlit mornings that seemed always on the promising edge of spring; or sitting with three or four other students in the little windowless feeding room at night, feeding the babies their night bottles in a world so comfortably cut off from the rest of the hospital that they might have been under the ocean or out in space.

Through the starboard windows of the bus she could see the far-off green and yellow meadows of the most easterly tip of Kingsmere Island. She knew the east end of that island from a camping trip she'd taken there with her parents and brother and sister years ago. She could even see the old field they'd pitched their tent in—a wedge of green held in the long V of what looked like two dark green hedges but which up close was really a V of majestic old oak and beech trees. She could recall pulling away from the island at last, in their overloaded rowboat, and then half-turning to glance back—the morning sun and wind in their eyes like a message of good health, the cupped cluck and squeak of the oars just before they were held in a waiting V of dripping white wooden blades, in the pause to look back.

This was the summer her mother had decided she wanted her children to call her Klara. At first this had brought out a lot of bratty behaviour in them but after a week or two it had seemed normal. Their father they had decided to call Pup—short for Papa. It had begun as a joke and Pup had answered woof woof when they hailed him and when they were walking through the woods he would now and then hitch a leg up by a bush or small spruce tree, to keep the joke going, but the changed names had carried on after this—they still all called him Pup or Puppie. And Klara they still all called Klara. They'd had their real pup, Digger, along with them as well. The whole time they were on the island Digger's hind quarters were matted with dried mud and straw, and bits of straw and pendants of dried mud had swung from the dirty stained white wool fleece of his coat.

The mildew in that horrible tent! The mildew in their sodden straw mattresses. It was almost pleasant to look back at it all—it was awful but it was also so far back in the past. Terrible rainstorms the whole two weeks they were there. Sickneses too—colds, boils, sore throats, styes. She got a stye. Pup got a boil on the back of his neck. The old man who owned the field they'd pitched up their tent in was named—what? A name close to the name of the island. Kingsclear? Kingsqueer? No, something more ordinary. Kingston? Yes, Mr. Kingston. Mr. Kingston, the self-appointed local historian. Klara was crazy about him. She was crazy about the history of this whole area in general. It was only personal family history she didn't want to know about. It's wrong to talk about the past, she would say when one of them would be so foolish as to bring up some old grievance. Mr. Kingston would invite Pup and Klara to his place after dark and Ingrid and her brother Arnie and their little sister Tina would be left to their own devices down in the tent. A lot of giggly talk about sex and trying to scare each other with stories about graves in the woods just behind the grove of poplars where they peed; Arnie pretending to be the Green Hornet. The tent the colour of the pumpkin-filling in a pumpkin pie and spotted as an old pear with mildew. Digger's black dog-freckles looking like mildew too. All the tent smells: sardines, straw, Jergen's Lotion, Ozonol. Digger smelling a little skunky and also of Jergen's Lotion because that's what Klara had rubbed his belly with after she'd shampooed his skunky fleece out in the river. A bad thunderstorm and Tina crying

because the flashing and fearful cracks across the back of the sky scared her. Pup and Klara still up at Mr. Kingston's. Arnie saying that if they started down to the tent and on their way got struck by lightning they would disappear in a blue flash of phosphorescence. The lightning gradually getting weaker, like a giant walking away from them through the woods and lackadaisically swinging his giant's flashlight so that it flicked on and off in the trees. Then the giant changing his mind and lashing back at them again, thrashing through the windy swish and crack of the forest, brighter and fiercer than ever. Then a smaller, more human-sized flashlight, bobbing hurriedly down toward them in the dark. "Robbers!" Arnie had hissed and Ingrid and Tina had whimpered and hooded their sheets up over their heads and played dead although they knew it was really the drenched Klara and Pup, accompanied by the old drenched historian, coming down to tell them it was only a bad storm and they were not to be frightened.

Trying to be friendly, old Mr. Kingston squatted down beside their straw pallets and told them tales of the storms of his youth. Farmhands struck down and turned into idiots by lightning. Horses turned into galloping mad beasts and even driven insane. Babies born in fierce blizzards, in sleighs, on the frozen river. Parents skating off to the city to buy Christmas gifts for their little children and never being heard from or seen by human eyes again. The old man looked ghoulish, crouched on the straw-strewn hard dirt floor of the tent in the flashlight's sinister, churchy light. He stank as well—his shoes of manure, his shirt-front of cooked



mutton, his pants as if he had peed in them (but years ago), his pockets of raisins but with a cool burning breath in the smell, like peppermints. Also of old damp mattress and raincoat smells that were close to the tent's overpowering aroma of mildewed canvas and straw. "Those were the days," he cackled, and his laughter sounded broken and spooky. Pup and Klara looked a little alarmed--they did not approve of adults telling frightening stories to children. Possibly it was to distract him from more tall tales that Klara crouched down beside Ingrid and smoothed her hair back from her forehead as if she had a fever--Ingrid wanted to twist away and viciously cry out No--and said to the old man, "This poor little lady has got herself a bad sty." Old Mr. Kingston made a joke about that--pretended he thought Klara meant a sty for the pigs. "So you've got yourself a sty there, have you, young lady? So you're living with the pigs?"

A moment of terrible embarrassment followed. The night before, Klara, singing Mr. Kingston's praises while she ladled out hot brown beans for their supper around the campfire, had tempered her praise with a judgement. "But it's a crying shame the way he lives. That kitchen is a sty. He lets the chickens in there. He probably even lets in the pigs."

With Mr. Kingston now crouched down among them, they felt wary and ashamed. Was it possible he'd been lurking nearby, eavesdropping in the poplars? It was possible. But then again, maybe not. Maybe not necessary for him to eavesdrop; it was said he had second-sight. It was said that if he had a vision of you riding in a stage

coach and dressed to the hilt in old-fashioned clothes it meant you would die before sundown. They had all watched him divining for water. He had let them all have a try with his divining rod but only Pup was able to do it.

Like a surgeon, Mr. Kingston held out his hand for Pup's flashlight and then shone it into Ingrid's swollen pink eye. In the tent-pole mirror before bedtime it had looked like the pink swell of skin protecting the nostril of a person with a bad cold. The old man's pale blue eyes were more ancient and watery than ever in that unearthly light. Diagnostic, ruined, afraid of nothing. In his broken voice, but still peering with clinical ~~fer~~cereness into the eye, he said to Klara, "Are you wearing a wedding ring, Missus?"

Klara slipped off her gold wedding band and placed it on his palm.

"This is what we recommend for the sty,," said the old historian. "We rub the eye with this ring and in the morning the patient will be cured."

But Ingrid flounced away from him, crying, "I don't want a wedding ring rubbed on my eye, I don't, I don't!", and it ended with Mr. Kingston going off looking a little bewildered, and Klara telling Ingrid that she was ashamed of her.

"But I don't like him."

"Nonsense, darling, of course you like him. He's a fascinating old local character."

"He stinks."

"No need to be rude now."

In the deep of the night a whispered argument between Pup and

Klara. More about a sty, and pigs too. Pup saying "But you can't use the child as a guinea pig" and Klara saying the child was spoiled. Pup saying, "I suggest we leave here tomorrow morning. We're all getting sick anyway. If we aren't all sick already."

"I'm not sick."

"No, no, of course not, but the children are. Arnie's got his sore throat, Tina coughs half the night, Ingrid has her sty."

Klara saying she'd told Mr. Kingston they'd be staying for the weekend so they could go with him to the Kirkmeyer fair. "If we leave tomorrow we'll hurt his feelings."

Pup saying something about boil. Makes my blood boil? There's also my boil? Whatever it was, he got his way, because in the morning they did break camp, douse the fire (the sun had come out brilliantly while they were taking down the tent before breakfast and with it a big wind that billowed and thudded at its canvas, making them feel like they were already out on the water) and then, shivering in their thin shorts and dew-dampened sandals, they'd shoved the boat, by now loaded up like an explorer's toboggan, down the sand that was the same cooked pumpkin colour as their tent, until the dory's nose was out in the powerful slow swing of the icy green water.

Klara, giving the boat its final shove from the shore--bare-foot, sandals stuck into her raincoat pockets--lost her balance and slipped on the slimey stones near the shore, dipping a corner of her grey poplin raincoat into the river. Then she'd lunged

aboard, making the boat dip and wallow. As she'd made her way out to the prow—supporting herself with a brief but heavy plunge on each child's shoulder—Ingrid, with fastidious swiftness, had jerked her knees away from the creepy cold greeting of the raincoat's dunked triangle.

On the far shore there'd been the movement of fleets of small clouds down over Cape Duncannon. Thumbprints of shadow, thumbprints of light. And then, with a racing speed for its size, an immense dark cloud moving down over the whole massive treed bluff so that all of the Cape and even the coastal part of the river was suddenly steeped in day-dark. And right on the heels of this shadow, the sun. Moving down with cloudspeed, hellbent for the river, bringing its melancholy bounty of light.

Everything had changed so, since then. Tina grown from little sister to sophisticated woman (when did this happen?); Klara and Tina thick as thieves; Digger dead. Probably by now even old Mr. Kingston was dead.

But although Tina was now the sophisticated lady she was also the one who lived a young life—going to college in the town of Stettler, starring in plays put on by the Stettler Drama Guild, full of stories about her life away from home. One night last winter a gang of her friends from the Drama Guild had come to call on her at her dorm while she was washing her hair in the women's showers. She had come out to greet them wrapped in a short white terry robe,

a white towel turbaning her wet hair, and in no time at all they had talked her into driving out to the Stettler airport with them, just as she was, to meet a friend of theirs who was flying in from Boston for the weekend. Out at the airport one of the men in the group had wrapped Tina up in a car blanket and then carried her, bride-style, across the dark snow-swept tarmac to the terminal. Inside, he had set her down and unwrapped her and she had fished a pair of dark glasses out of her shoulder bag and then proceeded to parade barefoot—nothing at all on under her terry robe—up and down the little airport, her phalanx of admirers jostling around her. Ingrid could not try to picture this scene without feeling an envy so intense it made her almost ill. Yet at the same time she was fascinated—by both Klara and Tina—and actually enjoyed thinking of them at home, busy with their exciting, irresponsible non-hospital lives. And now that Ingrid's and Tina's Danish cousin Kamille was visiting the family, the duo of Klara and Tina had become a trio, with Kamille being towed along as the silent partner—to evening meetings of the Ladies' Morning Musical Club in Port Charlotte; to university parties held by the Drama Guild people in Stettler—bringing her shyness and her scrubbed Danish glow to the late-night campus and club suppers of cold cuts and Brie and Algerian wine.

Kamille was helping out with the housework and with the music camp that Klara ran in the early summers. Pup and Klara had invited her out from Copenhagen—they had sponsored her and paid her a small salary—but after she'd been in Canada for a year she planned to leave for the States. She was twenty-two and came from Klara's side of the family. She always dressed in black. Black pants, black T-shirts, black aprons, black umbrella. "Elegant,"

people said. "You can certainly tell she doesn't come from around here." This was a compliment, a supreme one. Kamille was the most practical person her Canadian relatives had ever seen--she had sewn all her own black clothes with the exception of the umbrella, she could make men's jackets and coats, she could even upholster chairs and sofas.

When Ingrid got out of the bus on Burton Street and started walking up the hill towards her house, she could see Kamille in the distance, up on the front steps in her black clothes, shelling or peeling something. She looked classic, forebodingly right, against the grand white backdrop of Pup and Klara's Greek Revival house. Pup and Klara had bought the Athens place after she started her training. When they got it it was a hovel, but a hovel with grandeur--all partitioned and warped and cracked inside, but with a good foundation and a beautifully proportioned shell. They spent several thousand dollars fixing it up. They asked Ingrid if it would be okay if they took the two thousand dollars they'd kept in a fund for her education and used it for renovations for the house. "Klara figured you wouldn't be needing it since you won't be going to college," Pup said. This was true. She approached the point where the driveway split, sweeping up on either side of a great heart of green grass.

"Hello, Ingrid," called Kamille. "We are having a party tonight! Tina has gone off to the liquor store. She has with her two missionaries."

Ingrid sat down on the steps beside her cousin. "Are there still missionaries in these parts?"

"These boys are Mormons," said Kamille. She spoke an emphatic British English. "They come from America." Her voice sounded very tender when she said America.

"You should call it the States, Kamille."

"The States," Kamille said, tender again. "Utah. Wyoming."

"Wyoming," Ingrid said. "I read a book about Wyoming when I was little. My Friend Flicka. About a horse." She would have to remember to ask the Wyoming Mormon if he knew Cheyenne.

Tina came back with the boys and the liquor. Getting out of the car she looked very svelte: slim white skirt; sleeveless rayon blouse. She had done her pale hair up into a chignon and stuck ivory chopsticks into it. She brought the two Mormons--two lanky Americans with mouse-coloured crew-cuts and attired in formal dark blue suits--over to the front of the house to introduce them to Ingrid. Ingrid hoped she

wouldn't introduce her as her little sister, as she sometimes did. The terrible part about this was that whenever she did it people always believed her. But she didn't. She just said, "My sister, the nurse. Ingrid, this is Elder Rodale. And this is Elder Clayton."

The lanky elders both shook hands with Ingrid.

"Sometimes also known as Al and Gary," Tina said. "I'm trying to talk them into staying for the party tonight. I've even promised them apple juice instead of punch in their paper cups. And they have to promise not to try to convert people." She smiled. They both smiled back at her although the one called Al looked a little uneasy. But Gary gave Tina a serious look. "We know how to behave," he said.

"Help me take this stuff inside," Tina said to him then, and they went into the house together. Al stood on the porch a moment, looking unhappy, then—devout enough to spy on his friend—followed them in.

"God, that Gary guy really seems to like Tina."

"I guess so," said Kamille. "The trouble is, Tina has invited an older man to this party. Someone she really likes. A Norwegian. She met him somewhere at someone's house. He's twenty-seven."

"What's his name?"

"Karl something."

"Oh him," Ingrid said, in the despairing voice people will sometimes use for someone they covet. "I thought that's who



it would be." And she told Kamille everything she knew about this Karl. How he had come to Canada right after the war and learned English in no time at all. How he had done so brilliantly in high school and on the junior matriculation exams that the Port Charlotte Herald had written a special editorial about him. How his father was a veterinarian and had once saved the life of their late dog Digger. How the first time Digger was almost dying, she and Klara had driven him all the way to the vet's place and how, going back home in the car, she'd said to her mother, "That's the man I'm going to marry."

"Tina is very nervous," said Kamille.

At supper that night Tina put all her energy into telling funny stories to Gary. Al continued to look unhappy. Ingrid asked him if he was the one who came from Wyoming. He said he was. She asked him if he'd read My Friend Flicka and he said he had. She told him she'd read it when she was young, that she'd thought it was a very beautiful book. Al asked her if she'd read The Book of Mormon. She said no. "The Book of Mormon is a very beautiful book too," he said. "It's an even more beautiful book than My Friend Flicka." They all laughed. Except Kamille. She was banging lids on counters and slapping plates on the table. She said to the Mormons, "These girls! They are not very domestic!" This was true but it hadn't always been that way. At fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, Ingrid had worked as a cook in her mother's music camp, cooking meals for the campers. She'd made pails of

puddings and basins of macaroni salad and jugs of custard sauce to pour over Lemon Snow. In her spare time she read Fanny Farmer's Boston Cooking School Cookbook. On Sundays she made Maryland Chicken and in the middle of the week she made something the mother of one of her campers had taught her to do: ham and pineapple slices fried together, then simmered in Coca Cola. In the winters it was the same but then she would cook in smaller quantities. She would come home from school right after the last class and concoct pies, soufflés, casseroles, layer-cakes, cookies. But then she went into training in Port Charlotte and learned what real work was. Real work wasn't anything like cooking for thirty children, real work was something that made you too tired to read, or even eat. They usually did have some time off in the middle of the day though, but only if they weren't too far behind in their work, and even then it was tied in with lunch hour or a class they had to go to. These classes were presided over by the doctors in a classroom in the basement of the nurses' residence. One of these doctors, in a class on obstetrics and gynecology, had distinguished himself by defining menstruation as "the weeping of the disappointed uterus." They had a lot of fun with that afterwards. They would go around saying to each other, "Is your uterus disappointed? Has it wept yet?" Or they would say, "Well, my dears, my uterus may be disappointed, but I sure as hell am not." After she'd started her nurses' training though, Ingrid lost all interest in

cooking—had lost interest, in fact; in any work she did not strictly have to do. She would come home on days off and sit and smoke or stare into space. Sometimes she would go out for walks, interrupted by frequent stops so she could lie down in the grass and rest. Sometimes, even long past the season for it, she would go down to the river and languidly swim. Sometimes she would haul an old mattress out of the shed (this would be at their old place, out at Gully Bay) and drag it over to the apple orchard and lie there and watch the yellow leaves delicately detach themselves from the trees to sail to the grass all around her mattress. And she couldn't be on any mattress long—either indoors or out in the orchard—before she would fall asleep.

Tina was describing Ingrid to Gary. "Ingrid is a sweet person," she said. "A thoughtful person. Always kind to everyone." There was something about this that made Ingrid uneasy but she wasn't sure what it was. After they'd done up the dishes she went into Tina's room. "What are you wearing tonight?" she asked her.

Tina lifted her red taffeta dress out of her closet and laid it down on her bed. A dress Ingrid liked, but it was too tight for her across the breasts.

"Can I wear the green one, then?"

Tina took the green dress out and laid it down on the bed beside the red one. Ingrid coveted the green dress; it was al-

most exactly the colour of the gowns they used in the OR, but a little softer, embossed with little flowers that were also green but slightly lighter, almost silver. She held it up to herself in front of the mirror. It was a colour that went well with tanned skin.

"On second thought," said Tina, drawing the green dress away from Ingrid, "I think I'll wear this one myself."

"What'll I wear then?"

"Borrow something from Klara."

Ingrid went into their mother's dressing room. Everything in there was in zippered bags. Rich formal things, for winter and recitals. She lifted out a pleated black cocktail dress and pulled it on. Black went well with tanned skin. She searched the shoe-bags and found a pair of gold sandals. She strapped them on and went over to her mother's dressing table in them. She unstopped her perfumes and sniffed them. She dabbed Tigress on her wrists and Fleurs des Rocailles between her breasts. She felt uneasy with Klara, but not with Klara's clothes. Klara never minded lending her daughters things; she had more clothes than either of them; not just clothes for concert tours but young clothes—plaid dresses, square dance skirts. Sometimes she would even give Ingrid and Tina clothes, things she'd simply got tired of wearing. There was a certain innocence about their mother—she was in so many ways innocent of the dull and thankless responsibilities of parenthood; when they were little children and she embraced them, her embraces were almost never to celebrate them, her

children, they were rather entreaties to her children to endorse some fine quality in herself. She used to hug them and say, "Do you know how lucky you are to have a mother who doesn't smell? I never smell, do you realize that? I always smell sweet." They would wriggle away from her as soon as seemed decent. Or at least Ingrid would; she really could not bear it, being caught in a hug and forced to admit things.

Downstairs the doorbell rang and Ingrid ran down to answer it. A lot of people she didn't know were standing there, a shy group, wondering who she was.

"Come in," she urged them. "I'll call Tina."

Tina came down then, and Kamille and the Mormons came down behind her.

Next came the parents. They had two friends with them, Dorie and Kay, two older women who had been friends of the family for years and who worked as photographers in Port Fairweather. Kay, the more delicate one, did the indoor work-- portrait, wedding; Dorie did scenic and industrial. When Ingrid was fourteen, Dorie had a meal with them once, without Kay, and just before she was due to leave she came out to the kitchen where Ingrid was alone, washing the dishes, set her knapsack down on a chair, took Ingrid into her arms and for a moment held her hard against her. Then she hitched the strap of her knapsack up over a shoulder and, in her blunt-toed men's work-boots, took off. Ingrid had stood watching her after this, through the kitchen window, saying goodbye to her parents; she'd gazed

lovingly at the lean body in jeans and canvas boy's wind-breaker, and at the long curly brown hair starting to go grey, and she'd thought, I hope I someday meet a man as nice as Dorie. But now, at twenty, she was made uneasy by the memory of that dry but not unwarm breastless embrace, and by the memory of her own naiveté and tender feelings as well, and as a consequence of these memories felt irritated by the sight of Dorie--by the sight of both of them, really, Dorie and Kay, who were by now sitting together on the down-at-the-heel old sofa, locked in their old sad love affair, all mohaired and sad and silvery, like two fine and faithful old family dogs, pathetically waiting for Kamille to come and bring them a drink. And how was it possible for two people to look so placid and at the same time so hunted? To punish herself for her thoughts about them she went and got their drinks herself.

Pup walked through the party like a man who's given himself, on pain of death, orders not to flee. Ingrid felt affection for him--for his fine grey eyes, his Napoleon forehead, his shyness. He was very dark for a Dane--had olive skin and dry dark hair that was mismatched to his moustache which was stained yellow under the nostrils from years of clear salty discharge from his sinuses. He made his way awkwardly among the party guests and then beat a retreat to the kitchen, but Klara, looking very pretty in a red dirndl skirt and a white-embroidered white blouse with a white cardigan caped over it, walked about greeting people. And as she greeted she sparkled. But there was something strict and tight in her sparkle. She said to Ingrid, "I met your old friend Ian Carmichael and told him to come join in the

fun."

Ingrid stared at her mother. "We don't even see each other any more."

But Klara was already gazing across the room at a group of people she wanted to say hello to. She said, "It doesn't matter. There'll be plenty of other people for him to talk to."

Hearing that Ian Carmichael was coming, Ingrid thought with alarm of his British shyness. His shyness and her shyness had together added up to two such explosive shynesses that when she was with him she sometimes feared the silent high whine of tension would kill them both. Tina and Kamille had laughed at him, and Tina had said, "How can you go out with someone like that? He's so falsely whimsical. And he has B.O." And one of the girls at the nurses' residence had laughed at him too, after she'd seen him coming to fetch Ingrid one rainy green spring evening, wearing a black suit and flapping black raincoat and carrying a high-hoisted black umbrella. "Is your boyfriend a priest or an absent-minded professor or what?" was the question she had pretended to want the answer to. "Anyways, I'll say this much for the two of you—you suit each other."

How like Klara not to listen, thought Ingrid bitterly, and for a few moments she was gripped by her old intense dislike for her mother. When she was a kid Klara used to get her to read aloud to her, was forever calling out to her (from her bath, from her bed), "Darling! Come and read to me!" She remembered

how she had felt: both honoured and interfered with. But of course as she had got older, less and less honoured, more and more interfered with. Still, it had taken her some time to discover how intensely Klara desired attention. Even when she had been, technically speaking, "audience," she had renounced the role; in her bath and as she slept, always and everywhere, she was center-stage. So it must have been only the act that mattered. Being read to. The words had been mere background music to the performance of Klara "listening." Ingrid was sure she hadn't heard more than a key phrase or two a page, the words seemed to have washed over her like ocean water and with that kind of attention--span her tastes had naturally been catholic--Gogol, A.J. Cronin, it was all the same to her...

Ian Carmichael arrived then, speak of the devil, but was such a wounded-eyed devil--tonight in a hairy dark brown tweed jacket and with an unhappy hand thrust into the pocket of a pair of new-looking flannels--that Ingrid couldn't bear to look at him, and so the next time the doorbell rang and Tina ran for it, Ingrid, in order to have something to do, ran for it too.

Karl, the Norwegian, stood on the doorstep. He was Ingrid's height with hair that was a faded kinky orange. His v-shaped smile and light mocking eyes gave the impression of being more in cahoots with each other than most people's eyes and smiles did. He bowed, and there was an air of parody (of them? of himself?) in his bow. Tina, with a surprising tremor in her voice, said, "This is my sister Ingrid, the nurse, I don't think you've met?" and he stared at Ingrid as if to say, Definitely not--I'd remember if we had.



Karl asked Ingrid for the first dance. After this, he went off to look for Tina. Then one of the officers from the nearby army camp asked her to join in a Virginia Reel. Next the boy who delivered the family's eggs from a farm in New Sharon asked her. Then Karl again, then the officer from the camp. She was hardly ever not dancing. She didn't know how to account for this. She didn't know if it was her mother's sexy, low-cut black cocktail dress or if it was the fact that she hadn't slept for a night, a day, plus half of another night and so carried a fast girl's longing for bed in her eyes. Would it ever happen again? Had she undergone a personality change and was she now a bitch? The thought was not as unappealing as she felt it ought to have been. But although it was true she felt attracted to Karl, she felt even more attracted to the officer from the army camp who she'd danced with the most. She even, from a distance, was feeling attracted to Ian; he was looking so manly and lonely, huddled by himself into a corner and darkly nursing a drink. In fact, popularity had made her feel grown-up and fond toward the whole world. She even felt tender toward Gary, who she overheard saying seriously, but with quiet missionary triumph, to a girl with too-lipsticked lips, "It's not our name, it's a form of address. You see, we are Mormon missionaries..." She thought, So this is what it's like to be in demand. And she was able to understand for the first time how popular girls could get to be so kind, so good-natured. Why not, after all? The world made way for you.

After the party, Ingrid stepped out of her clothes, fell into bed, immediately fell into sleep. But all night she kept dreaming that she had insomnia, that she had to get up early to work a middle-of-the-night shift at the hospital. She had no alarm clock. Her bedroom was in a little room off the Emergency wing. At one point, Ian Carmichael, wearing a flapping white doctor's coat, hurried by her. But not so fast she couldn't see the betrayed look he cast down upon her. But then he said something odd to someone nearby: "This room smells like magazines."

The next morning while Tina and Ingrid were still in their bedroom, combing out their hair before breakfast, Tina said to Ingrid, "Do you know what Gary said last night, about you?"

"You mean Gary the Mormon?"

"You don't have to keep calling him Gary the Mormon like that."

"I'm sorry. What did he say?"

"He said, 'Do you still think Ingrid is a sweet person and a thoughtful person and kind to everyone now?'"

Ingrid didn't dare to meet Tina's eyes in the mirror. She busied herself with sliding her comb and brush away in a drawer, and then with rubbing scented cream on the pulse parts of her wrists. Behind her she could hear Tina say in a voice low with knowledge and bitterness, "I knew right away he was falling in love with you. Right when you met each other at the door. He had such a dumb, enthralled look."

Everyone was at the table when Tina and Ingrid came out to the kitchen. All the people who'd stayed the night--Karl; Gary and Al; Dorie and Kay. Karl fetched a chair for Ingrid and fitted it in beside his own. A picnic was being planned. They were all supposed to drive down to Booth River Cove in Dorie's car. Kamille had already made the sandwiches.

Gary and Al said they'd have to stay in town, calling on people. Kay said she had a headache. This was the excuse Ingrid had planned to use and so she said, "That's funny, I have a headache too," and everyone laughed. Karl leaned over and whispered, "But you're coming anyway, aren't you?" She whispered, "No." A few minutes later Klara excused herself from the table and a moment after this she called down to Ingrid from her room.

When Ingrid got up there Klara was in the little bathroom adjoining her bedroom, running a glass of water. She shook two aspirins out of a bottle and handed them and the drink to Ingrid. "Tina has had lots of boyfriends," she said. The terrible corollary to this hung unspoken between them. "Take these," she said. Ingrid took them. Why not? She wanted to go. She wanted to be ordered to go.

Tina came into the room then and closed the door tightly behind her. "It's not fair if Ingrid comes," she said.

"Tina, darling," Klara cried tenderly to her. "Don't take this too hard! You've had lots of boyfriends, and you'll have many more." She threw her an imploring look.

"But facts are facts, darling. Karl seems to care for Ingrid."

Tina started to cry. And because Tina had always been their mother's little darling, Ingrid stood rubbing the flat of her hand along the warm windowsill, amazed and uneasy.

Tina talked a great deal on the way to the cove. And after they'd found a place to eat and had finished eating and had taken shelter in an old covered bridge to wait out the rain that they'd feared and predicted all the way there she started to sing. Songs from South Pacific, Oklahoma, Singing In The Rain, An American in Paris. She sang well, in a light, sad, chanteusey voice, but Ingrid could tell that Karl didn't care for that kind of thing and after Tina had been singing for a while Ingrid leaned back against the wall of the bridge and closed her eyes.

The following morning she was back on another planet--in the Ear, Nose and Throat room, setting up a tray for a tonsillectomy. In the room with her were an intern--an emotional-eyed anorexic East Indian, Dr. Rupert Advani--and a circulating nurse, Mrs. Shirley Jenkins. Jenkins was newly graduated, newly married. She was the whitest person Ingrid had ever seen; she had the whitest face and big greyish-white false teeth. A sour face, a doughy face, out for blood. She was chewing gum--how could she do that, with her clackety teeth?--and picking at a scab on her elbow.

Ingrid was threading the little crescent-shaped suture needles—some with catgut, some with black silk. There was also a glass ampoule of a noxious-looking mauve-tinged liquid; she would be needing to have it open. She scanned the tray for a file to file its neck with. There wasn't any.

"I'll be needing a file," she said to Jenkins.

Jenkins tied on her mask and came into the sterile area.

"For what?"

"This." Holding it up.

"Haven't you got a pair of scissors there?"

"Scissors?"

"That's what I said, lady. Hit it at the neck with the scissors."

Ingrid didn't move; she was finding it difficult to breathe.

"You heard me, lady. Hit it."

"But in class they told us we must never use scissors to break—"

Jenkins had a staff nurse's contempt for anything learned in class. "That was in class," she said. "You're here now, lady, remember?"

Ingrid picked up the scissors and struck the ampoule at the neck. Disaster—as Miss Plowright had warned them in class. Tiny shreds of glass, like a rain of crystal fingernail slivers, lay over everything: the piles of gauze squares, the pyramids of cotton balls, the pristine, once-bare blades of the instruments. "Now you've done it," said Jenkins, and the tears in Ingrid's eyes gave her double the number of knife-blades.

Then another nurse came in and held the door open for

Dr. Baxter, who with his scrubbed hands raised, was coming in to be gloved.

"Mother of God, what's been going on in here?" he howled when he saw the carnage on the tray. Above his white mask, his eyes were burning, enraged.

"Bring a new tray," he barked at Jenkins, and a new tray was brought over and, with speed—but also with the proper medical ceremony—unwrapped of its beige linen wrappings. Jenkins (dead-eyed, giving away nothing) tore the gloves off Ingrid, in case they'd been powdered or cut by bits of glass. Being torn off, they made two sucking slaps. Ingrid was sent out to scrub again. A humiliated scrubbing that seemed less connected to hygiene than to transgression. When she came back in she had to be re-gloved and then she had to start threading suture needles again. Advani and Jenkins and Baxter talked a little, about a fishing trip that Baxter had just come back from, but there were terrible tracts of silence too, when she imagined that they were all just standing there with their eyes riveted on the tray. This time when she looked for a file to file the ampoule with it was there, where it should be, to the right of the ampoule. She filed the neck and it broke off clean.

"There," said Tiny Baxter, in a voice that sounded both patronizing and spookily gentle and coming over to peer at the set-up. "It's always best to do things right in the first place. Saves time."

Advani's East Indian eyes--their whites white, their darks liquid with recognition of the irony of Baxter's words--sent an emotional beam of sympathy to Ingrid. And the next morning, when Tiny Baxter walked in, Ingrid understood that Advani had told him about the ampoule incident, it was the only explanation, because both Advani and Baxter were openly kind to her, and Baxter's voice, when he spoke to Jenkins, had a fine thrilling edge of contempt to it. So after this it was very pleasant, really, working there. Baxter was very patient, if patience was required, and it hardly seemed to be since it seemed she could do no wrong. And in the middle of that week there was a letter from Karl. He was coming to Port Charlotte two days later and wondered if he could see her. Maybe they could go to a beach, he wrote. He signed the letter Love.

On the beach at Cape Bonner--they had to drive out to it along a shantytown road that had been named, at war's end, the Burma Road--Karl told Ingrid about growing up in Norway during the war and about coming to Canada in 1945, when he was sixteen, and about how people had laughed at him when he went out skating because he wore britches and knee-socks. He told her about going to school in Oslo in '42, '43, and about trying to get in the back end of the soup line so he could get more of the meat that sank to the soup pot's bottom. Ingrid found she liked him even better for the romance and deprivations of his past. He told her that a Norwegian Nazi had been shot by

someone from the Underground in the street right in front of his school. He said that at the end of the war the Americans had wanted to make a goodwill gesture to the Norwegians (who had suffered too much) and had hit on the idea of sending over a freighter filled with peanut butter, but that the Norwegians had found it, when it arrived, to be revolting stuff--they thought the goodwill boat was filled with...excrement. "The Norwegians were hungry," said Karl. "But they were not that hungry."

Ingrid smiled. "Speaking of...excrement," she said, "I should tell you about my life at the hospital." His turn to smile. But she only told him the funny things, she didn't want him to know she was thinking of leaving there. It was her secret. She would move when she was ready. She saw it happening on a clear fall day. She saw herself decently, adultly concealing her pleasure at getting free. She saw herself walking out of the nurses' residence carrying a little red overnight case, her camelhair coat folded neatly over her arm; she saw how her eyes would give the impression of being nobly infatuated with a far horizon, like the eyes of a Red Cross nurse in one of the wartime posters of her childhood.

Reclining on an elbow, she told him stories of hospital life. She told him about Crazy Jake, the head orderly in the OR; she told him about the chief anesthetist in Emergency, Dr. Wyse, with his bedroom eyes; she told him about the grim frog-faced supervisor everyone called Napoleon because she patrolled the hallways



of the nurses' residence with one hand thrust into the slit of her nurses' cape.

Karl said, "I've been having some trouble with abdominal pain." And he told Ingrid that a surgeon in Hoyt, the city where he was living with his parents for the summer, had booked him for an exploratory abdominal operation in three weeks' time.

"Well, don't worry," she said. "It's a common operation. People come into the OR for it every day." In fact she felt positive there wouldn't be anything terribly wrong with him. She had never had a patient his age with anything terminal or even serious. Chronic appendicitis, she thought, that's all it'll be. She dug up a handful of damp sand and breathed in its dry peaty smell; dug into the hot dry sand behind her and picked up a handful of that, sieved it down on his knuckles.

He was looking extremely depressed. "He says he'll be taking my appendix out too."

"They usually do do that," she said, smiling and sieving. "Makes sense. While they're in there."

On Ingrid's next day off, Karl couldn't get down to Port Charlotte and so she decided to go out to the Gully Bay house, now used by Pup and Klara as a weekend retreat. Pup and Tina and Kamille were supposed to be out there. After she finished her three-thirty shift, Ingrid took a bus out to the closest ferry. This was a paddlewheel boat, bigger than either of the cable ferries, and with a longer run. Two miles over

the water, among little islands, across a bay. The boat made a wake of beery black water. She sat on the wake-end and gazed at the left hand side of the sky ahead. It had been washed almost clear by an earlier rain and had produced, with a kind of celestial sportiveness, a whole flock of little clouds, golden gulls, low over Gamblers' Island. But after fifteen minutes the ferry veered south and left the view of Gamblers' behind. All the south shore islands were much smaller than Gamblers'—small groves of cedar trees riding the darkening water. How strange life was! Three weeks ago she was without hope and now she had a lover. It came to her then that everything had come to her late, and acknowledging this, she believed what she supposed all romantics must need to believe: that the abundance of choices a person would get from promiscuity, say, would rule out the possibility of the right choice. And that lateness guaranteed perfection. As the ferry came flushing and churning up to the Gully Bay dock, she remembered that Tiny Baxter liked to fish. And then the dock's drawbridge came down and they were there, they had crossed it, a two-mile moat of water. She decided not to hitch a ride home. She wanted to be by herself a little longer. She wanted to walk and to carry the feeling of being loved with her, into the country night.

The first part of the road ran through a thick wood. Then there was a long grove of birch trees with the occasional summer cottage in it, then the start of the farming country. But after the cottages there were no paint jobs at all, only old grey barns and old Victorian farm houses, all gone grey

too, even the porch columns and gingerbread trim were grey; and no flower gardens either, only the most undemanding shrubbery—bushes that carried, in spring, lilacs and cinnamon roses, and all without flowers now, in simple clear-aired September. These farms already stood in shadow. Only the high pastures, still held in the sun, burned green. She felt like someone in a Russian novel. As if many years had passed since she had last seen her village. As if, by the time she got there, everyone would be dead, or moved away, or married to someone else.

As she approached the Hessellund house, also grey except for the west wall which had long ago been painted a pale yellow, she could smell fish frying. She walked into the kitchen. Kamille was at the stove, carefully laying leaf-shapes of white fish down in flour before she consigned them to the frying pan. She was wearing one of her black skirts and a black cotton T-shirt. There was a thunderhead of white flour-clouds above the horizon of her skirtband.

"Hello, Kamille."

Kamille didn't answer.

"I walked here from the ferry."

Kamille lifted a floury leaf-shape up from the flour plate and laid it down in the pan.

"Smells good."

Kamille turned her back to her and opened a window.

Ingrid walked down the hallway. Kamille and Tina were going

to gang up on her then, because the way they'd see it, she was the flirt who'd stolen Karl from Tina. This made her start to feel fearful of seeing Tina; Tina could be so vicious and witty. Then she did see her, through the parlour window, out on the terrace, standing very erect in a high-necked flowered dress, the ivory chopsticks stuck into her chignon. Pup was off to her right, talking to two solid men who could have been insurance agents. Or more Mormons? No; Tina, a cool-looking hostess, was holding a tray of drinks.

Ingrid took a deep breath and stepped out onto the terrace.

"You're just in time for supper!" Pup called out to her.

Tina made a wide berth around her with the drink tray. "Oh, it's her," she remarked in a clear bored voice.

Ingrid called out to Pup that she had already eaten. Then she walked down to the shed by the barn and got out a pail and shovel and went over to the potato garden to dig up some worms for Tiny Baxter. After this, she went for a walk to the beach and thought about Karl. Also, because it couldn't be helped, about Tina and Kamille. But to hell with them, she thought, They can't shame me into giving him up. And they can't shame me into not thinking about him either. I'll think about him just as much as I damn well please. And she ducked into the woods and found places where they could lie down together.

When she got back to the house the kitchen was in darkness so she went in there and made herself a supper of jam sandwiches and tea and transferred the worms from the pail to a jelly jar. From Kamille's room she could hear dance music on the radio and Tina and Kamille's bursts and snorts of excluding laughter. She

felt stung by it. A while back she'd come home for a day off and had been puzzled by some reference Tina had made to "Grace and the prince." What prince, she had wanted to know. And in what sense did Tina mean "grace"? Kamille and Tina had stared at her, smiling and astounded. Didn't she even know who Prince Rainier was? Or Grace Kelly? "Grace Kelly, Grace Kelly," she had intoned to herself. "I don't know--maybe she's a movie star." In one afternoon her response had leapt up to the status of family joke: Maybe she's a movie star. After this, a lot of things or people were suddenly maybe a movie star. Maybe Suez was a movie star. Maybe Andrea Doria was a movie star.

She stepped outside again. The yard was dark. She carried the tea and her cigarettes over to the shed where she'd heard Pup sawing wood earlier, when she'd come back from the beach.

In the old days, while Klara was away on tour, giving piano recitals in small towns all over the Maritimes (under the auspices of the Ladies' Morning Musical Club) Pup used to look after the children. In her absence, they were all very peaceful and lazy together. When she came back, to remind them of the sloth they had lived in while she was away, Klara used to make them clean house. And as they cleaned she would change their jobs around. If a child was in the middle of washing the dinner dishes she would send her off to wash the bathroom floor; if a child was arranging a bouquet of flowers she'd picked--there

were always flowers on the table when their mother was at home, she was always sending people out to pick them--she'd tell the child to let her do that and she'd send her off to fold the laundry. She was filled with a violent nervous energy, she was restless, she shifted furniture around--sometimes juggled whole rooms, so that bedrooms would move downstairs and sitting-rooms upstairs; she cooked impulsively and well; made magnificent potluck evening buffets; used her own herbs; founded and ran a summer music camp; gave piano lessons; gave lectures and recitals to the Ladies' Morning Musical Club in Port Charlotte; went to all the local auctions (recklessly driving a pick-up truck); bought carloads of ten-cent chairs and two-dollar chests of drawers; didn't have the patience to sand these pieces down but was so wild to see what they looked like under their chipped cream paint that she would take nine or ten pails of lye-water out to the back of the house and slash them over the chests and chairs. That part of the lawn was always a livid chemical yellow. And sometimes, after having done too much, she would lie on the floor in her bedroom and scream and beat her heels onto the floor. And sometimes, after the heel-beating, she wouldn't speak for days. When she went off again they wouldn't move a thing. Not a picture, not an ornament. They wouldn't even bother to pick flowers. They were all around them anyway, in the fields. Instead of the flowers being the table's centerpiece, the children became the flowers'. They lay out in fields of them and read --The Wind in the Willows, The King of the Wind, The Ship that Flew-- their bare legs cross-hatched, engraved by grass.

The next day was Ingrid's last day in the OR. She brought the jelly jar of worms for Tiny Baxter over there in the morning, hidden under her cape, and stowed them above the coffee cup shelf in the stretcher room. After lunch she transferred them to the doctors' and staff nurses' room. When they'd finished the last case she went into the doctors' room and stood there a while, looking across the sand flats to the suburbs of Port Fairweather. Port Looneyville, some of the nurses called it, because the Provincial Asylum for the Mentally Ill was over there. She could see bits of its whitewashed back wing, which was here and there partly shielded by tall dark fir trees, perched grimly above the rooftops of the lower town. She had only brought a present to the hospital once before, to a patient she'd got attached to. A woman who was dying of cancer of the bladder. She had been on her way back to the residence after a day off and had seen some children selling bunches of mayflowers outside the bus depot east of Bucksfield. She saw that someone had moved the jelly jar of worms. Maybe he had. Maybe he'd thought, Worms! How pathetic.

Presently the door opened. "So you have brought me some worms," he said.

"Yes."

"Well, I'd like to thank you very much."

"I hope you enjoy them," she said, horribly embarrassed.

"Oh I will, I will. I'll be going up to the cottage this weekend again so I'll be making good use of them." But he was studying her while pretending not to. He asked her if she would like some coffee.

Really no. But she said yes.

He went over to the coffee urn by the sink and filled up two paper cups, then carried them over to the window and handed one of them to her. They both sipped, looking out the window, until Baxter broke the silence by saying, "You're an intelligent girl—I wonder that you didn't study to be a doctor."

"I never thought of being a doctor."

"In fact," she said, surprising herself, and for some reason on the edge of tears, "I've been thinking of giving all of this up." He turned and gave her a quick worried look. "The nursing, I mean," she said. At this he seemed to feel free to look away from her. He gazed out the window. He squinted. He communed with the view of the flats.

After a time (an age, it felt like) he said, "You know, that might not be such a bad idea at that." And then he was paged on the PA, wanted in the Recovery Room. He tossed his cup into the garbage pail and grabbed up his cap from one of the stretchers. "Be good," he said, fitting it on.

After he'd gone she started to cry. It was the attention, she was sure of it; she couldn't bear it when people paid attention to her.

She was transferred to Emergency, days. She liked it there. It was the first place she'd worked where they weren't short-staffed. And she liked the people she was working with—Smitty Cooper, Ginny Hilliard, McBride, Becky Fullerton. Her first day off, Karl was able to get his father's car and drive down from Hoyt. He could stay overnight so they drove out to the ferry at Point Jerusalem and rode across the water to Gully Bay. Klara was at the Gully



Bay house and was expecting them and seemed overjoyed to see them. She was wearing a pink towel hung boxer-style around her neck; she had just washed her hair. When she gave formal parties she always did her hair up into a dignified confection of braids and buns--using her own young braids, kept in a hat box--but now it hung fair and fluffy down to her shoulders. She was barefoot, perfumed. She gave them each a hard, theatrical hug. She had hot drinks already fixed for them and a fire in the fire-place. Ingrid got the impression that Klara thought she'd dreamed them up, that they were her production. She wanted to say to her, Listen: this would have happened anyway--he's already told me that my coming on that picnic didn't make any difference, we would have seen each other again; he's crazy about me. And he never was interested in Tina--not seriously; he thinks she likes herself too much.

Klara took Karl on a tour of the house and showed him the paintings and the things from Europe and her "country piano." She said, "Later, if you'd like, I'll play for you." Karl said that would be marvellous. And when Karl and Ingrid went out for a walk after they'd done the dishes Klara came with them. By then there were big clouds--nicotine-stained at their edges, thin as cigarette smoke--racing darkly across the sky. It was the first night that summer seemed conclusively over. Even the river had got more wild and fall-like, they could hear the waves coming in harder against the beach. Karl held hands with Klara. They swung their hands back and forth like two children. Ingrid's hand he lifted into his pocket with

with his own. He made love to her between all her fingers with his thumb. "Isn't this inspiring?" cried Klara, sniffing the wind, inhaling the view of the sky and the river.

On the way down the pasture hill, making their way back to the house--how unwelcoming it looked! All the windows were dark and only the porch light was turned on, illuminating the dark mounds of the lilac bushes that stood guard at each side of the door and were now being bowed back and then down by the wind--Ingrid could feel how intensely both she and Karl were conspiring to ditch Klara. She could feel it in her desire for him, and in the reassuringly insistent way his thumb kept rubbing her between her two middle fingers. But they were approaching the house and the deed still had not been done. And looked in danger of not being done, for Karl was still swinging hands with Klara, and Klara was still looking flushed with pleasure, as if she had plans for them (cocoa maybe, or a marshmallow roast on the beach). Ingrid inwardly moaned, Oh Lord, we'll never get away from her now, but a few moments later Karl lifted her hand out of his pocket and then drew her to him with his free arm and said firmly to Klara, "Now Ingrid and I will just be going off for a walk by ourselves."

Klara, startled, said, "Oh," but then quickly rallied with a "Fine!"

In the weakening light, Karl and Ingrid walked across a field of tall grass to the cedar grove at the south boundary of the farm. But at the logging-road gateway into the woods

they turned to look back. They could tell Klara was out in the kitchen; the only lights that were on were in the converted shed that was attached to the west (kitchen) wing of the house. Are her feelings hurt? Ingrid wondered. If they are, there'll be hell to pay tomorrow. Don't think about it. She took Karl's hand and they ducked into the scratchy bower of the woods.

"She's awfully demanding to be with, isn't she?"

She felt grateful to him; said, "Yes she is."

"You take more after your father, I think. You have his eyes."

She was pleased, glanced warmly up at him in the dark.

"But why do you call him Pup? It makes him sound like a runty little fox terrier or something."

"I don't know." She leaned back against a birch tree and placed her hands on his shoulders, imagining herself the heroine of a novel set in wartime, saying a heroic farewell to her lover. "I always think of it being short for Papa. I always hear the 'Ah.'"

He cupped her breasts, then started to knead them; worked his knee in between her thighs. He could make her feel excited so fast.

He said, "I am the doctor, you are the patient—say 'Ah.'"

They laughed, then quickly stopped; kissed. When they emerged from the kiss, Ingrid, smiling, said, "Ah," and then they laughed again and quickly stopped laughing again and kissed again.

When they walked deeper into the woods they found a little clearing with tall dark spruce and cedar trees ringed around it. It had a spooky holy look. "We used to have picnics here sometimes--on Sundays." Were we a happy family in those days? she wondered. She remembered worshipping her mother. She remembered how they used to carry their lunch out to the dandelioned slope at

the back of the house. Ingrid always sat in the shade of the crab apple tree with her father because she was his honey and because she didn't like the taste of her milk once the sun had got on it. But it was her mother she dreamed of as she sat beside her father. She dreamed of having a long closet filled with silky and darkly glittery dresses like hers; she dreamed of getting the kind of applause she got when she and her students gave their annual violin and piano recital in the auditorium of the May River high school. She dreamed of growing up to have breasts like hers.

The next morning Ingrid woke up to the sound of Bach on the record player. Also, the smells of coffee; breakfast cooking. She went downstairs in her nightgown. Klara was standing at the stove, frowning. Her fair hair had been harshly brushed, tied back; she was wearing a sky-blue sundress. She was frying French toast in one pan and scrambling eggs with chives in another. In the big black skillet bacon was spitting. On the counter beside the stove there was a plate of tomato slices waiting to be added to the bacon. She had also made muffins, put peach jam in a blue bowl and strawberry jam (wild) in a clear glass dish. And she had picked fresh field flowers for the table, poured orange juice into wine goblets, made up pots of both coffee and tea.

"My God," Ingrid said. "This is fantastic." In truth she thought it weird, excessive, showing-off. Klara didn't even make breakfasts ordinarily, except on Sundays. On weekdays she always

took her breakfast in bed, brought in to her by Pup, on a tray. Soft-boiled egg; thin slice of rye bread toast smeared with honey; pot of green tea.

"I suppose I better put all this in the oven to keep it warm," said Klara. She seemed to be feeling bitter about something.

"I'll go wake him,"

"But fix yourself up first," Klara said.

Ingrid went up to her room and pulled off her nightgown. She inspected her tan, then washed and dressed. She rubbed cologne on her arms and neck and hand lotion on her hands and legs. She fastened on a pair of high-heeled sandals and put on two rings and a bracelet. Then she went down the hall to Karl's door and scratched on it with one of her rings so Klara wouldn't hear. Karl called to her to come in. She went in, closing his door behind her with exquisite stealth. The whole house smelled of sleeping breath and sun on rugs and coffee. Karl yawned and stretched, then pulled her down on the bed.

Lying beside him, she posed one leg in its sandal. "My mother's made a big breakfast," she whispered.

With one of his fingers he traced the outline of her sandaled heel, calf, thigh. It was like a phrase he was writing. When he got to her panties he put a period between her legs. With a low whimper she spread them a little.

"Children!" Klara was musically calling, in the voice she used for company.

Karl slipped his finger out from under Ingrid's dress and slid it up over her belly and then up over her left breast. At the nipple he pressed in another period. Ingrid caught his hand to her, cupped it over her breast. He let it rest there a moment, then worked it free and proceeded up to her throat and around her chin. He outlined her mouth. She parted her lips. He put a period in her mouth. She licked, then bit, his finger.

"Everything's going to get cold!" called Klara. Less music in the voice now.

"Coming!" yelled Karl.

Now the finger was outlining Ingrid's nose. She hated that. Her nose was too big and had a bump in it; she sometimes believed it had ruined her life.

"If we got married..." Karl was saying. The finger was coming down over her nose again, "...do you think our children would have big noses?"

She sat up. Her sinuses and eyes felt waterlogged, as if she'd been swimming too long under water. She tucked her hair back behind her ears and swimmily blinked. Her throat hurt her. "We better get down there," she said. "Or she's going to start to get angry."

She left him alone to get dressed and walked down the sunlit carpeted stairs that looked as if they ought to be the stairs

of a happier household. Her arms were aching, along with her throat and eyes.

In the kitchen she asked Klara if there was anything she could help her with but Klara wasn't speaking to her. She looked at the table to see if there was anything missing. Maple syrup for the French toast. She got a bottle of it out of the pantry and poured it into a small silver jug.

This drove Klara to speech. "That jug's for the cream."

"What do you want me to do then? Pour the syrup back in the bottle and wash this out and put cream in it?"

Klara didn't answer.

"Or what?"

"Oh it doesn't matter," said Klara--not in an exasperated voice but in a voice as dead as dammed-up water. Ingrid tried to help her ladle the food onto serving dishes but Klara wouldn't let her--with a face tight with hurt she elbowed her out of her way.

Two days before Karl was to be operated on he phoned Ingrid from Hoyt. She was on night duty and so was asleep; the switchboard had to page her in her room. It was lunchtime. "It's the middle of the night for me," she told him. But two days later he phoned her at lunchtime again. This time she couldn't get back to sleep. She moaned and twisted in her bed and when the intercom buzzed again she flounced up in a fury. It was Klara this time--offering to drive her up to

Hoyt to see Karl the morning she came off night duty. She said, "I don't know if I can. When would I sleep?"

"Don't worry about sleeping. You can sleep in the car."

The night of Karl's operation Ingrid, putting her own patients to bed down in Port Charlotte, imagined Karl lying on the operating table. She saw the masked surgeon receiving the scalpel from a masked nurse and making a careful incision. But when they opened Karl up they found a woman inside. I must be either perverted or insane to be thinking like this, she thought. And yet she couldn't cast the fantasy out of her mind.

Two nights after the surgery he phoned her. The operation was a success; they hadn't found anything and so they'd just taken his appendix out. He was feeling rotten.

Ingrid said, "Klara is driving me up to see you tomorrow. She's going to pick me up tomorrow morning at ten-thirty."

But when she came off duty the next morning she thought that she would have only two hours to sleep before she would have to get up again was so enraging to her that she couldn't get to sleep at all. After half an hour of flouncing and flopping around her bed she hauled the top blanket off it and dragged it down to the second floor west wing and found herself an empty room down there. Hide-and-go-sleep, she said to herself as she climbed in between the new bed's coarse cool sheets. Old chants from childhood came back to her:

Back, back, wherever you're at  
Don't show the peak of your great big hat

She was wakened a little over two hours later by someone from the downstairs office. "We've been looking high and low for you. Your mother's been waiting for over half an hour down in the parlour —fit to be tied."



The trip was not an enjoyable one but Ingrid knew that she could hardly have expected it to be. She couldn't argue with Klara either—not after trying to hide from her. But to feel so scornful and at the same time so frightened! There was something humiliating about that.

Klara was saying that Ingrid did not amuse her. She liked to be amused. Tina is amusing, she said. You're young, she said. You're in love, I do everything for you, I've made all this possible, why don't you act happy? A wonderful young man like that, she said. Ingrid looked out at the landscape as if she believed it could help her. Her stomach winced and it seemed to her the light in the fields did too. She stared out at grey houses, at white houses, at clothes-lines strung with faded plaid laundry and white sheets, at everything flapping and beating in the wind—laundry, shed doors, faded flags (Union Jack country), at all the harsh fresh colours—royal blue hills, orange and flag-red leaves. She thought, But does anyone ever get away from here? I wish I could sleep.

The Fowler Memorial Hospital in Hoyt was a smaller hospital than the General in Port Charlotte and the nurses looked more sloppy and tolerant. On Karl's floor the superintendant and her sleepy deputy were both wearing cardigans over their uniforms and they were both, wonder of wonders, smoking. The sleepy one looked up Karl's room number on a chart, then gave Ingrid a heavy-eyed once-over.

It was a heady feeling, walking along the halls of an unknown hospital, knowing no one could make any claims on her.

She found his room, the last one on Corridor B. He was sitting

up in a chair with a blanket tucked in around him, reading. He was even whiter than the bloodless Mrs. Jenkins. And the other patient, a lanky man who had his radio on, had a disease that was turning him yellow. Cancer or hepatitis. Cancer, surely, because there was, along with the Oriental colouring, a falling away of hardy, drink-pocked flesh from the coarse-featured Occidental face.

But what shocked her was her own nurse-like lack of sympathy for Karl. He was looking so woebegone. She wanted to hiss at him, Buck up, man, for God's sake! When she bent to kiss him he signaled with his eyes in the direction of the radio of the dying yellow man. "He plays it all the time," he whispered, and he looked sadder than ever.

She thought, Oh God, now he's going to start to whine as well, and to stave it off she whispered, "What are you reading?"

It was a book on economics. He knew so much more than she did. She hadn't read a book in over two years. Would she understand this one?

That night Ingrid and Klara stayed with some family friends —music festival organizers. They shared a bed that belonged to a daughter who was away at college. It was a three-quarter-sized bed and was covered with a pale-blue bedspread that had a pattern of grey and white ferns on it. Ingrid surprised herself by not being able to sleep. She lay there all night thinking, Is it the coffee? Am I going crazy? What's the matter with me?

The next afternoon she went back to the Fowler to visit Karl. He looked even sadder than he had the day before. She asked him if anything was wrong. He said it was the state of the world. The world made him sad. He did not see much hope for it, he said. He mentioned Eisenhower, Suez. Ingrid sat on his bed and absently stroked his hand; again she was shocked at the depth of her lack of feeling for him. And again she felt a nurse-like disapproval of his whiney voice, his self-pity. But after a time she started to feel very sad herself. Or simply to allow an old sadness to acknowledge itself inside her. Her sadness didn't seem to be because the world couldn't come up to her standards but rather the opposite: she saw no hope of herself measuring up to the world's.

Three weeks after Karl's operation he was ready to leave for Toronto where he'd had a job waiting for him since the beginning of September. He stretched the time out a little longer to coincide with Ingrid's coming off day duty in Emergency so they could spend a day together in Athens.

His bus came in two hours after Ingrid's and when he arrived at the Athens house, pale as a dying prince, they all went into the living room for cakes and tea. Kamille had left for the States by this time but Arnie, thin and sunburned from having worked up north in a logging camp, and Tina, all in black and with a small gold scarf tied cowboy-style at her throat, were both at home. It was a cold cloudy fall day

and the house seemed very drafty and polished. Klara told Karl that the family cleaning woman, Vi, had asked her if Karl was a doctor and when she had said, No, Vi—why?, Vi had said: Because he is so pale. They all laughed at this and then Karl talked in a very informed way about the Royal Danish Ballet and Tina asked him a lot of questions.

After they'd brought the tea things out to the kitchen Arnie took Ingrid aside and said, "Are you going to marry this Karl, with his clipped English?" She said, Maybe I will, I don't know yet.

When Arnie had gone back to the living-room, Tina said, "Everything Karl said about the ballet was very interesting, I thought."

Ingrid said she thought so too.

After a silence that seemed to indicate a short battle with doubt, Tina said in a low light voice, "He got it all out of Time magazine. All of it. I read the whole review when I came down here on the bus. Not a single one of those opinions was his own."

"That can't be true. He doesn't even read Time. He's a socialist."

"I have it in my suitcase, I can show it to you."

"I have better things to do," said Ingrid, but her heart had whipped up into a pounding rhythm at what she was sure was the truth.

Karl left for Toronto and Ingrid went back to the hospital. She was transferred to Male Surgery, and with the fair-minded

Killeen in charge she didn't mind it too much there. A whole month went by. She was now into the third month of her third year. "What a pity you're leaving," she imagined people saying, "When you've only nine months left to go." And then she imagined the way their eyes would drop, quite understandably, down to her belly.

The first snow came. Karl wrote to her every day. His letters made her ache, they were so sweet, full of quotes from Andrew Marvell, full of missing her body. More snow came. The supervisors got out boxes of Christmas decorations and for part of one peaceful hospital afternoon they all unrolled bandage-sized rolls of red and green crepe paper and decorated the nursing stations. People started talking about Christmas and New Year's and on some wards they started making trades. The patients' radios played Christmas carols. Then suddenly (and inexplicably: she'd already worked a long stretch there before) Ingrid was transferred to 6E, the worst ward in the whole hospital, run by a supervisor who was considered, even by the other supervisors, to be a sadist. Her name was M.J. Howard. There was a rumour the M stood for Mary. Sometimes, in fact, she was called the Virgin Mary. (Hear you're spending Christmas with the Virgin Mary, you poor bastard," a girl named Connors said to Ingrid one day in the cafeteria.) At the end of a week with Howard, Ingrid felt she was in hell. And in the middle of hell she got a letter from Karl. He'd been at a party where he had met a lot of new people. He had dropped ice-cubes down a

girl's back. She was an amusing girl, he wrote, very dark and lively. You would like her, he wrote. He said he thought it would be a good idea if they occasionally went out with other people.

After this Ingrid started having trouble sleeping. Her skin itched; she lay awake parts of every night, scratching, panicked. What if the lack of sleep made her make a mistake with the medicines? What if she gave someone someone else's injection? And during the days she felt herself in the grip of a secret rage. The patients' radios played the same carols over and over—bouncy barbershop renditions of songs about roasting chestnuts and Christmastime in the city.

Trying not to hear, Ingrid dreamed of Christmastime in the country—up in the woods that looked down on the fields north of the May River Delta. She wanted to be out in that countryside, walking up the miles of white fields toward the spruce wood that came into its own at Christmas, with balsam like candle drippings hardened on the cold bark of the trees and the strange high creak of the old branches in the wind. (Even the wind in those old branches seemed ancient, living up there from winter to winter.) And she wanted to hear the carols of her childhood—"Bring a Torch, Jeanette Isabella" and "Oh Come Oh Come Emmanuel"...

That mourns in lonely exile here...

And the carols that came from England and France, the ones Tina had learned when she'd gone to the boarding school she'd begged Klara to send her to, when she was fourteen. Glenwood.

Arnie had called it Shitwood. Tina pierced her ears there (using a darning needle and a cake of Camay soap—and then had to have penicillin for the ensuing infection) and plucked her eyebrows and painted her nails with a clear polish and learned to sing the sweet foreign carols. And went out with rich boys from the neighbouring boys' school. But that was the one Arnie called Shitwood; Titwood was his name for Tina's school.

Ingrid didn't hear from Karl again and she didn't write to him, but sometimes, in the middle of passing out pills or giving injections, her eyes would fill up with tears. Four nights after his letter came she didn't sleep at all, but she made up her mind. She would phone home in the morning and tell them that she had broken up with Karl and that she was sick and wanted to come home. She knew her mother would be alarmed enough to come and get her; her mother wouldn't want Karl to escape.

When she came off duty the night of her last day Ingrid found her room filled up with people. People from her own class; people from other years, other classes. They were everywhere: on her bed, on her desk, on chairs, on suitcases. It wasn't a popular move, leaving; it inspired envy. And it left yet another ward short-staffed. The traditional way to leave was to tell one or two friends, swear them to secrecy, leave when the night and day staffs were safely at work or at supper in the

hospital cafeteria. And pregnancy was the traditional reason.

Someone asked her if she was pregnant. She said no. "As a matter of fact, I'm menstruating."

"The weeping of the disappointed uterus," someone said, and there was a patch of uneasy laughter.

Connors said, "Let's undress her and see if she's lying," and Ingrid felt really scared then because technically, at least, she was lying. She had had cramps all day but nothing had happened yet.

"Ingrid's been wanting to leave here for more than a year," said Joan Cosman, her friend. And no move was made against her.

She started to pack. She gave away her cape, caps, textbooks, uniforms. Also her late-leave card, to be forged later.

A delegation came with her to the elevator. Smitty and Becky Fullerton kissed her goodbye. Jackson and Devine told her to write. Connors punched her lightly in the shoulder and said, "No hard feelings, I hope."

She said no.

Joan and Devine loaded her bags into the elevator.

The delegation wanted to know: "Are you really going to go down and say goodbye to old Fatface?"

Yes, she was.

The delegation marvelled. And more people gathered around.

"Tell old Fatface I wanna go home for Christmas," someone said.



"Tell her I've been on night duty for six weeks," said Devine.

"Tell her I've had it," said Connors. "Enough, enough, enough, enough."

The doors closed and the elevator started to sink. As it sank Ingrid could hear a voice--it sounded like Cosman's--wistfully call out, "Give her shit for me, Hessie."

She had never been down on the supervisors' floor before--none of them had. The doors were twice as far apart as on the other floors. There was Persian carpet in the hallway. She knocked on the superintendent's door.

"Come in," called a distant voice.

She went in. Two steps into the room. More Persian carpets and two tall glass-faced cabinets. She told one of the glass-faced cabinets that she was leaving, that she wasn't suited to nursing.

The superintendent stayed at her end of the room too, an elephantine figure in a white nylon uniform. Deeper in the apartment Ingrid could smell pork chops discreetly cooking.

The superintendent said that if ever she should change her mind and want to come back she would be welcome. Ingrid thanked her and walked (it seemed to her later that she had walked backwards) out of the room. That was all.

Outside, it was snowing again and Klara's coat was turned into a fat fur ball by the wind. Ingrid hurried behind it down the wide concrete steps. She never expected Klara to refuse to speak to her and yet it often happened; it was happening now.

In silence they fitted the suitcases into the back seat and in silence they

climbed into the front and closed themselves in. In silence they drove down Dearborn Street and then Beeker Street and in silence they left the lights of Port Fairweather and Port Charlotte and the ocean behind. At Black Bay the river had frozen and been snowed on but a channel had been kept open for the ferry. They drove in silence onto it, bumping hard over its wooden flap, and in silence watched the snow falling onto its road of dark water. On the far side of the river, after swinging right, away from the road to Gully Bay, they drove up and down hills that seemed a little steeper with the new snow on them. But by then the snow had stopped; east of Bucksfield there was even some fog. Cedar trees stood in fog on white fields. ~~Counrty~~ Country schools and country churches appeared, ghostly close to the highway. Klara drove slowly after this, through settlements and small towns named to hold the wilderness at bay—Richmond, Cambridge, Port Oxford, Sutherland—and as they took the turn-off to New Sharon she even spoke.

"I think you should know what Jack Kincaid said when he heard you were giving up," she said. (Jack Kincaid owned the menswear store in East Athens. When he was trying to persuade someone to buy from his range of fur-lined suede gloves he would say, "Feel that. Softer than a mouse's titty.")

"What did he say?" asked Ingrid. For some mad reason she found herself expecting good news.

"He said, 'What that girl needs is a good whipping.'"

Ingrid laughed a harsh, light laugh. "Oh, I would not put great stock in anything Jack Kincaid might say," she said. "I would not greatly respect any opinion Jack Kincaid might have."

"Someone who's done what you've done is hardly entitled to sit in judgment on other people," Klara said. "You turned your back on the sick," she said.

Ingrid turned and looked out the window and would not condescend to reply. But what was she getting at now? When she thought she knew she turned to Klara and sullenly said, "If you're trying to imply I'm pregnant, I would just like you to know that I am most definitely not."

"If people think you are, then you might as well be."

Why, in the name of God, can't you have more character? she wanted to shriek at her. But what would have been the point? She shrieked nothing.

White highway posts marking the approach to Skelton Canyon started to come at them in a curve to their right. Next came the primeval boom of the water down in the boulder-bed of the canyon's distant bottom. Then five minutes past the canyon, like the response of a mountain trickle to the far-off boom of the sea, a warm stickiness between Ingrid's thighs. Pleased, but very wary of letting any relief seep into her voice she said, "I'll have to pick up some sanitary napkins at the pharmacy in New Sharon."

But if keeping relief out of the voice was a strategy for herself, putting it into the voice was a strategy for Klara. For she responded in a tone of grimmest parental reverence, "Thank God for that."

At home Pup seemed lost to her—lost to the world, even. At meal-times he looked exhausted, a man marmalading his bread in a dream. But Klara seemed not to notice; there were jaunts to go on, she said. Grim jaunts, as it turned out; Klara and Ingrid couldn't go anywhere in the car without ending up screaming at each other or trying to freeze each other out. They drove to New Sharon for eggs, and then on to Duncannon for a Christmas tree. The tree was a Scotch pine; they stood it on the floor of the back seat so that its top rested between them on the front seat, seemed to peer between their shoulders like an eavesdropping child. But there was nothing to eavesdrop on—only frosty silence.

After she'd been home for ten days Ingrid got a letter from Karl. "Why haven't you written?" he wrote. That night she sat up in bed with a notebook pressed to her knees. She briefly considered writing, "How's your new friend? Is she still very dark? Is she still very lively?", but decided not to, being in dire need of a friend herself. And so instead wrote, "Are you coming down for Christmas?" Following this with what she told herself was a necessary lie: "We are busy making dozens of cheerful preparations."

"I can't come down till the spring," Karl wrote in his reply. He added that he was missing her like hell though. "I'm sorry you left the hospital," he also wrote. "When you were so close to graduation."

At night she was back in the hospital; was wrong or had been wronged; had made, or had been accused of making a mistake with pills or injections, had forgotten (with the never-to-be-remedied dream's forgetting) to perform the simple but vital task that would have saved

someone's (a young girl's?) life. Even in her waking life the hospital was with her more than she would have guessed it could ever be back in the days when she'd been obsessively plotting to leave it: a hot turkey sandwich she was served in the diner across the highway from the East Athens high school (where she'd gone to sign up for courses in typing and shorthand; it was a cold December day just after sundown with a sky clear enough, turquoise enough, to have been imported from Arizona) brought back the taste of the midnight meals an orderly used to carry down to her—through the wind and the rain and windy cold moonlit nights—along the precarious ramps on stilts and down the rickety stairs to the Contagious Diseases Annex when she was serving out her solitary night duty there: turkey croquettes baked in a cream sauce tasting of chemicals, or hard dry white fish baked down to gluey sauce and bone, and either an ice-cream scoop of mashed potato that tasted as if it had been mashed with butter and dry-cleaning fluid, or a prehistoric baked potato (stone cold) with its dry papery skin blistered from the high heat of the hospital's stainless-steel ovens and its insides rimmed by an overcooked part that was like a rind of rust you had to cut through before you could get down to the dried-out part you could eat; a salad that was a crisp bleached shell of iceberg lettuce with nothing more than half a canned pear dumped down on it; piping hot hospital coffee, consoling in its lovely warmth but with a flavour bitter as hemlock. And yet she had taken pleasure in these terrible midnight meals because midnight was the time she could pick up the phone and put in a call to Cosman (also on a solitary night duty, on Workmen's Compensation) and they would eat and drink together by phone, gossiping about friends and patients and complaining companionably about the bad food.

On the last Sunday before Christmas, Ingrid went to church with Klara—to the eleven o'clock Sunday morning service at the East Athens All Saints' Anglican Cathedral. It was an intensely cold day with glaring winter sunlight pouring beneficently in through the purple robes of the saints in the stained glass windows. There was a stained glass window in the student lab on the ground floor of the old nurses' residence too. A purple-robed saint had gazed down on the people there as well, and on the double row of stainless steel sinks sunk in a long knife-scarred oak table. It was under this stained glass window (the lab had once been in the old wing's library) that Ingrid had got her first sight of the skinned rats the students had to dissect. They were white as ivory, white as bone, and suspended in formaldehyde in big clear Mason jars—a rat to a bottle—embryonic, humanoid, half-rat, half-baby. It was awful working there, the Tuesdays and Thursdays they'd had Biology and Dissection, and while she and Klara were joining with the other members of the congregation in shouting out "Oh God Our Help in Ages Past," Ingrid, watching the two dark-coated old Anglicans who were making their way up and down the aisles with the brass collection plates—they were both completely bald and one of them quite definitely resembled one of the bottled rats—recalled the heat and the smell and the pulsing live spots of bluish-white churchy light that had been sent to skitter across the pale-green wall by the laboratory's

door, spots of light made by the wind raking its leaf shadows across that part of the window where the saint's gothically limp white duck's feet were amphibiously suspended in a lead-bordered band of water-blue glass. Eating the white meat of her chicken an hour later at lunchtime she tried not to think of that window; tried instead to think of night duty in the Annex and the awful hospital potatoes and salads. But hints of death hounded her; that orderly who used to bring her her midnight dinners for example: he was a moonlighter, he worked daytimes in the morgue.

During Christmas, Pup got the flu. It stretched on into the new year. Day after day went by with his being in bed—white pillow; white bedspread; white snow outside the window. An invalid smell in the room—medicated grease: Vaseline, Ozonal, Vicks. Also Johnson's Baby Powder: a light sprinkling over the smeared ointments that gave dimension to his pain—sore chest, cramps in the legs, and what Ingrid suspected was inflamed groin. A light snow over the ice of country roads in winter.

He'd started crying, Klara told Ingrid and Tina. Crying in the night. During the day he didn't cry. He lay in his bed and gazed out the window as if waiting for someone. But then one day he got up, dressed, wandered through the house. It must have been on a weekend, because Tina was home from her classes in Stettler. It was very cold and clear, and now and then the wind would drive cold clouds of snow-smoke from the hills around the house.

Ingrid was out in the kitchen, she was having menstrual cramps and trying to distract herself from them by reading novel; she was under the spell of a bewitched inertia. She was also cutting up pieces of meat for a stew. The raw blood smell of the meat masked her own blood smell, also partly hidden by a recent generous dredging of Red Roses talcum powder. As for the book, it was a lascivious story dressed up as a historical novel and was propped up against a stack of Royal Copenhagen dinner plates. And she had an opened cookbook she could use as a cover for the eighteenth century Danish queen and her lover if her mother should come down the stairs. It was opened at Lemon Meringue Pie. She planned to say she was reading up on how to make pies while she was making the stew.

But on this particular afternoon Klara, as she came down the stairs, was talking to Tina. He got up out of bed, Ingrid heard her say. And then Klara came into the room where Ingrid had so recently and so energetically began to chop meat. Anxiety had made her look more human. Tina came in after her, looking pale and a little offended, as if she had just been fed a spoonful of some vile tonic. "Maybe he went up to the attic," Tina said. And then they all must have thought the same thing: the place of rope and rafters. "Go after him, Ingrid," Tina said then. "Otherwise maybe he'll try something." And Klara quickly added, "Yes, darling--go after him and bring him back down here."

Ingrid, feeling frightened but nobly competent, started to climb the narrow stairway to the attic. Even before she'd reached the level of the attic floor she could tell that someone had left a window open. And then she could begin to see the effects of that



open window: snow, fine as sifted flour, had been sieved by the window screen. It lay on the tops of dark-blue metal trunks; it lay in the reed bowls of baskets. As for the attic itself, it was piled high with tables and old chairs. The tables had white paint in their scars. Ingrid's heart started to pound. She couldn't see Pup. The window? Frightened, she stared at it, but it hadn't been shoved up more than two inches. She peered far down into the dusty gloom of the cold winter attic. There was old paint too--salmon-coloured, slate-blue--on the spokes of the chairs and on their inverted bibs of wood. Was he hanging somewhere up here? She was afraid to look. "Daddy?" she called in a voice that came out in such an anxious bleat that it sounded, even in her own ears, frail with terror, and then she saw him, standing desperately still, out of the range of the light of one of the windows at the far end of the long room. With his back to her, as if he had hoped not to be seen. She went cold with fear. When he turned around would he have the face of a madman or the face of her father? He turned around. He didn't look crazy to her, only sad. As he always had. She made her way down to him, among tables and chairs, took his hand; said, "Come down into the house." And then, feeling like the greatest liar who'd ever lived: "Come down to where it's warm."

His fate must have been decided on between Klara and some of her Port Charlotte friends that night on the phone because the next day an old family friend named Louise Buchanan came and got

him and drove him down to stay with her in Port Charlotte. Then contact must have been made with some doctors at the mental hospital over in Port Fairweather, because that same night he was committed. The next morning at breakfast Klara told Ingrid and Tina that if anyone asked them anything about where he was or what he was sick with they were to tell them that he was in the General Hospital in Port Charlotte because of trouble with his heart.

In the asylum in Port Fairweather he was given shock treatments. After he had been there for three weeks they were to be allowed to drive down to see him. They were to drive down on a Friday so Tina could come with them. On Thursday night Tina phoned and said she would take the Athens bus from Stettler right after her History class the next morning. She arrived in Athens on Friday at lunchtime. It was a mild snow-muffled day in the second week of February. She brought a whiff of the twentieth century into the house with her. Also a whiff of Ma Griffe—the grey paisley shawl wound round her head reeked with it. She undid the shawl and shook out her fragrant hair but before she'd pulled off her coat she said to Klara, "For you, sweetie, a wee giftie," and she ceremoniously presented Klara with the Vogue magazine she'd bought for herself, to read on the bus. But while Klara was up in her room, getting ready for the trip to Port Fairweather, Tina also spoke with sympathy to Ingrid: "Has it been awful, sweetie? Has it been one great melodramatic scene after another?" So she was the same as ever: duplicitous something-for-everyone-Tina.

Still, Ingrid felt grateful to her—she was human at least; she was young; she was someone her own age; she might be two-faced but her two faces were human faces, and on a wave of gratitude she said to her, "Last night when she was brushing her hair before she went to bed she said to me, 'It's your fault he had this breakdown. You're a failure and he was ashamed of you. When you left the hospital he was ashamed of you. You made him sad.'"

Tina didn't seem surprised. She had shucked off her coat by this time and was standing peeling long dry ribbons of white meat from the half-eaten roast chicken on the kitchen table. She wiped off her lipstick with the back of her hand and then shoved a wide ribbon of chicken into her mouth. After she'd finished chewing it—"Too dry," she croaked, and she scooped a greasy handful of Danish stuffing (moist ballooned prunes and sweet wet grey slivers of cooked apple) from deep inside the bird's bone-cage—she told Ingrid that Klara had said the same thing to Arnie. "Because he didn't do all that wonderfully on his finals. He got drunk after her phone call. You remember Mike? Mike Hiltz from the Drama Guild? Here's what happened: Mike and I decided to go out for a nightcap one night after rehearsal and we were too tired to drive out to The Harvest Moon Grille so we went to this place all the engineering and pre-med students go to—it's called the Lincoln Club, which sounds sort of posh but it's a real dive—and I was sitting at a table near the door while Mike went to the john and when he came back he said to me, 'I've just seen your big brother and he's feeling no pain so

maybe we better give him a lift home.' So Mike had to lug poor old Arn out to the car and stuff him in. And we'd no sooner got the door closed on him than he threw up all over the back seat of Mike's car. He kept saying, 'Holy Jesus, Mike, I'm sorry, I'm sorry,' and then it came out about the phone call. The problem is, you and Arnie talk back to her and she doesn't like it. You should flatter her, that's what she wants. Don't talk back. I remember the summer you were sixteen and you were always having these great screaming fights. You were such a spit-fire. But it doesn't pay, you should know that by now. Because ever since then she's acted like she hates you. I believe she really does hate you." Her voice was almost complacent, almost amused. "The thing you have to understand is that all she cares about is praise. That's why she likes me, kiddo, I feed her a steady diet of praise." She really is on my side, thought Ingrid, she must be, because look how she's putting her hand on my arm, as if to warn me Here she comes although there hadn't been any sound from above that she could hear. But then there was: Klara's high heels starting to hit their way down the stairs.

The moment she stepped into the kitchen, Tina greeted her with a "Hello, gorgeous!"

Klara's face lit up. The look she threw Tina was the imploring, on-the-edge-of-happiness look a woman might throw a lover. "Is it really okay, darling?"

"Stupendous," said Tina. "Really. Fantabulous. I kid you not."

"And the skirt--is it subtle enough? Subdued?"

"Perfect," said Tina. "The perfect thing."

Klara brought her splayed fingers to the string of pearls at her throat, like a hostess who's just harvested a compliment on her cooking. She did a slow pirouette so they could see the way her gored grey skirt opened out when she twirled. "And the pearls? Are they the right touch, do you think?"

This wasn't for Pup, Ingrid understood, and she knew Tina did too. All this concern was for the doctors, the nurses. What Pup thought wouldn't matter. What would matter was that whatever he'd told them down there was proved wrong. All this talk about how terrible it is to speak of the past, she thought. But it isn't the past Klara objects to, she thought, it's the fact that other people should presume (should dare!) to have their own versions of it.

Tina sat in the middle on the trip down to Port Fairweather. She put herself out to be diverting--told them stories of college life. Wedged in between the two of them, she must have felt transfusions of gratitude pouring into both her sweater-clad arms. She was wearing her small gold cowboy scarf tied around her throat and her breath still smelled of chicken and prunes. She brought a spirit of ease, of entertainment into the car, but while she talked, Ingrid was sure she could feel her storing up impressions of mother and sister for her friends back in Stettler. ("I have this big-little sister who lives this terribly bleak medieval existence.") Ingrid's stomach felt swoopy with anxiety. She wanted to see Pup but was afraid to see him too. She felt pity for him but also some detachment--the slightly disdainful aloofness pity brings. Also she was wishing they wouldn't have to drive through Port Charlotte to get to Port Fairweather and especially that the highway that became one of the

main streets of Port Charlotte didn't run by her old hospital. But the city could hardly be expected to rearrange itself just to oblige her, and soon enough--too soon--they got their first sight of the town, dominated like a Middle Ages town by its imposing castle up on the hill. Or more like a mosque, really--a yellow brick medical mosque with its great dome of frosted glass and its glass-bricked top storey walling in all the shrieking sick children. That it should look so remote, so silent! The cold Bay of Fundy fog was doing its fine winter job of protecting the frost; even now, in the early afternoon, the cars whose tops could be seen above the yellow brick battlements of the doctors' parking-lot were furred with it. And below the parking-lot the steep little hospital park--so sooty in spring and summer--was also whitened, embalmed by frost. The hospital seemed to have gained back some of the austere power it had had when Ingrid was a child. That people she knew--people her own age--were moving about behind those walls--dashing, cussing, gasping, fetching--was now almost incomprehensible to her. Klara had to stop for a traffic light just in front of the Dearborn Street entrance of the nurses' residence, and Ingrid experienced a moment of awful terror that someone she knew would come running down the steps and so happen to glimpse her. She hunched her back up to the window so as not to be seen. Her heart pounded. Tina was telling a story about a tantrum the director had thrown at one of the rehearsals for A View From The Bridge. She made Klara laugh. Ingrid's feet urged the car on against the red light. At last the light changed and they shot forward. They flew past the Golden Ball garage and then swung hard right to take the exit for the bridge to Port Fairweather.

The main red brick building of the asylum had the grim appearance of a correctional facility, but its two new pink brick wings, stretching to east and west, had a ranch-style suburban look. Klara parked the car in front of the west parking-lot. When they disembarked they could see that the west wing had a solarium at its far end and that outside it there was a small brick-floored courtyard, swept clean of snow, with a stone fountain in its middle. Snow-caked low cedar hedges fenced it in. "Really quite attractive," said Klara and Ingrid and Tina agreed with her and then, almost with reluctance, the three women turned away from it, to the right, to walk up the hilly bricked path to the old part of the building.

Three nurses came out of the main building's front entrance as Klara and Ingrid and Tina were climbing up the hill; they were laughing and hugging themselves against the cold as they came running down the shallow stone steps. One of them cast a quick glance in the Hessellund women's direction. How do we look to her? Ingrid wondered. She imagined the nurse would take them for three sisters, with their tense Nordic faces and their tow hair—making their way single-file up the brick pathway in their well-cut dark winter coats, trying to look like they knew where they were going.

At the top of the stairway there was a sign saying VISITORS' BELL. Klara pressed it in. The hefty middle-aged orderly who opened the door to them greeted them with an "Aha! Three pretty ladies!" Only Klara gave him a smile. He was not unkind-looking but Ingrid was sure his eyes were alcoholic's eyes. A big ring of keys bobbed and jingled from a hook on his brown leather belt.

Each tall dark green door they came to he had to unlock.

Pup rose from his chair the moment they stepped into the visitors' foyer. His face bore a tender shocked expression, was the temporarily stricken face of a priest or a doctor whose job it is to break the news of a calamity to the unfortunate family. To their nervous chatter he had little to contribute although he was clearly following what they were saying. He looked like he was hoping not to depress them but was no longer sure he remembered how not to.

Ingrid stared obsessively at Klara's hands as Klara talked to Pup—imagined them chilled to the bone in their short grey leather driving gloves that gave the appearance of being a slippery cold grey second skin, and when she now and then glanced furtively up at Pup she tried to read from his expression if there was any truth in what Klara had said about her making him sad. She decided there wasn't, but the accusation, once having been given voice, made some doubt linger. It was partly pride, along with the pain of guilt, that made her partly believe it: she knew she was his favourite.

Ingrid didn't feel safe in the house with Pup gone. She had trouble sleeping. She was sleeping in the back wing. Klara was out at the front. What Ingrid knew about the hardness of nurses and the coldness of doctors made her feel frightened for her father. He was incarcerated—incarcerated in an asylum. The word "incarcerated" had unpleasant associations with carcasses, incinerators. Institutional incinerators—burning bloody bandages,



carcasses. Human ones. She recalled the definition of anatomy she'd learned at the beginning of Anatomy and Physiology—that anatomy was the science which dealt with the structures of the bodies of men and animals; that it was studied by the dissection of those who died in hospitals and other institutions, unclaimed by relatives. But when she'd learned this definition she'd never considered the possibility of its having any direct application to anyone she was close to. And how spooky that other phrase was now—that "other institutions." She had a nightmare vision of Pup being destroyed there. Weakened, ill, drugged, dead. Swung away on a morgue stretcher bound for one of the asylum incinerators and a high-speed institutional cremation. There wasn't any Psychiatry wing at the General in Port Charlotte and so she didn't know what shock treatments would be like. But from bits and pieces she'd overheard she could imagine them—the body stripped and strapped to a table; the head jammed into some sort of padded vise; the temples smeared with a Vaseline-coloured medical jelly. Whatever was someone like her father, who'd never hurt anyone, doing in a place like that? But maybe in a place like that the nurses were kinder than at other hospitals. A lot of people liked Pup anyway. People (even nurses—even nurses at an overworked understaffed provincial facility) might want to be kind to him. Unless they were actually worse there. Unless they were sadists. There would be electrodes too. She imagined the electrodes as a black belt of bullets taped around the skull. And for thrusting between the teeth, a tongue-depressor—bandaged in gauze like a newly-cut finger. Everything would be brutal, calibrated, scientific, exact. The nurses she had seen running down the stairs had looked decent though. Not that that proved anything. The most corrupt people in the world could look decent. She prayed for Pup to

come back and not have all his memories wiped out. The problem with interns and nurses and resident doctors was that they didn't get enough sleep. Every second night at the General, the interns were on call all night long. If there was a rash of accidents and emergencies they could go forty hours without sleep. Even the most attractive ones would soon lose their appeal. They were young but they were zombies. She had a moment of feeling a little hardhearted toward Pup. Why had he allowed himself to fall into the hands of such people? But he had seemed at ease there. Maybe he was happier there than he'd ever been here. It's wrong to talk about the past. Klara was always saying—she especially said this if any of them brought up a grievance. Had Pup brought up a grievance? Now he would not. But what if he came back a zombie?

The hallway outside her bedroom started making her nervous. There was a row of prints and paintings hanging out there. A landscape of a white winter field pricked by stubble beneath a cold mauve winter sky—a birdcage of wind-bowed bare trees in the distance. A painting of Pup's mother in a long white dress, in her shiny-leaved dark green summer garden, in Copenhagen, at the turn of the century. Before Pup was born, even, this must have been. The first woman in Denmark to get a divorce. This meant she came from a rich iconoclastic family. A sadly smiling pretty woman in her garden. Her thoughtful dark eyes were bright, as if she had been on the point of crying but then had switched directions and started to smile. Her husband took off with a young cousin of hers who was a guest in their house. She was left alone with her little boy—Pup. But this painting must have been commissioned years before.

that. Next to her was a print of a naked woman, seen from behind, standing up to her knees in an inky black lake and using her long white Nordic hair as a sling for her big white buttocks. Then a painting Ingrid had done herself, years ago, of herself and Tina in blue shortie coats, the foggy wind blowing their hair into their eyes, their mouths. Their hands, which she recalled having trouble with, she'd finally been obliged to paint into their pockets. Next there was a watercolour of a dead bird, some kind of storky bird, a kind of crane—an Audubon-like dead white crane hung by its tied-together feet from heavy red twine and in whose expressive belly Pup had once seen the torso of a woman in a white dress, her face a beseeching smudge in the tail feathers, her raised arms tied over her head, swinging pitifully from a red rope. And last there was a daguerreotype of the old mother-in-law of the man who'd built the house, a grim Victorian frog in black bombazine. Or a toad. Like Toad of Toad Hall in The Wind in the Willows—got up in the bribed washerwoman's print dress and rusty black bonnet to make his escape from the terrible dungeon.

People in Athens believed the old woman had put a curse on her extravagant son-in-law; when the house was finally finished and he was plunged deep in debt he hanged himself in one of the back bedrooms. No one knew which bedroom. Ingrid prayed it wasn't hers. Sometimes she was positive it was. At night she would lie awake for hours, listening to the house (or the old bombazined lady) creaking about. The weather turned bitterly cold and sometimes at night the house, settling, would boom like a cannon in the cold snap. Ingrid was using the one article of clothing she'd brought home with her from Port Charlotte—a stolen washed-out green surgeon's suit—

as pyjamas. At night she would twist and turn in her stolen surgeon's suit, trying to make herself comfortable. And although she would try not to, she would often think about Dr. Wyse of the bedroom eyes. He'd been on nights in Emergency the first stint she'd worked there. He even left there at the same time she did, but she was only moved on to another ward--he moved on to another hospital, another town. One night not long after he took off, his name came up in a conversation in the nurses' kitchen up on the top floor of the dormitory. Several of Ingrid's classmates confessed to having been smitten by him. Now it can be told, they said. Someone mentioned his notorious eyes and someone else said, "A guy like that would insult a woman right out of bed." For her part, Ingrid had offered up a little poem in tribute to him:

Dr. Wyse  
Has bedroom eyes  
Orgasmic cries  
Thrill Dr. Wyse

This was very well received, and a few months later was even quoted back to her by someone who told her that one of the seniors working down in the Annex had written it.

In the best fantasy she had about him, they were working together late at night in Emergency, just as they had worked there late at night in real life. When they'd finished their last case Dr. Wyse said to her, "Step into my office a moment when you've finished cleaning up here, Miss Hesselund." It was in the summer, so she was conveniently tanned and was attired in the sexy white dress the students wore when they worked on Emergency or in

the OR. A slim white cotton with a V-neck, it was belted with a white tie-belt. She put herself in her black stockings because she was still a junior in this fantasy.

She walked down the Emergency hallway to his office. As she closed his door behind her he came quickly to her. No words were spoken between them. They pressed and rubbed against each other, moving hard. They then moved slightly apart and he plunged a hand downward; drew it, with a swift little draw, between her thighs. This made her thrust herself toward his hand, nosing after it. But when they embraced again—although she could feel how hard he was—she wasn't really all that aware of touching him, she was really only aware of all the urgent desiring things he was doing to her; the only part of him she was really conscious of was his breathing—all those hushed harsh breaths. Which were also her own. Joined, anguished, she could feel how strenuously they were both labouring toward their ultimate bearing-down pleasure, she could feel them achieving, in unison, the perfect hardhearted sweetness that precedes utter happy weakness and lassitude.

In this way she was able, night after night, to forget the old bombazined lady. As for the intense winter cold, it seemed to approve, absolutely; on more than one night, at the very moment of her coming hotly over the top—into bliss, into the forbidden glow of good health—the cold in the upstairs halls saluted her with the powerful royal boom of one of its cannons.

In the daytime, she helped out in the house. Washed the floors with a little vinegar in the floor-water to bring up the shine in the wood. Also added vinegar to the purple cabbage she cooked with caraway seeds and cloves. She also ironed--pillowslips, nightgowns, blouses. One of Klara's peignoirs was a cream-coloured silk with a pattern of rosebuds on it. The rosebuds were linked by a thread of red, like a thread of blood. There were maps of perspiration in the armpits.

She loved cooking and ironing, hating washing floors or any kind of cleaning. Hated to organize things. Klara loved to. Or loved to order other people to. Loved to link arms with Ingrid and say, "Let's organize the office. Then when we're finished with that we should organize the kitchen." Now and then Ingrid went to her typing classes at the East Athens High School, but not often. She started falling behind. Klara said, "You can learn as much typing here at home anyway, typing up letters for me in my office. But first we should organize the files, the correspondence." She had let her cleaning woman, Vi, go and work for a friend of hers. "I bequeathed her to Mitzi," she told Ingrid with a self-congratulatory little smile. As if this was good news.

In the afternoons, while Klara was taking her nap, Ingrid would do the ironing. Just before Klara dropped off to sleep, she would

sometimes call down to her to come up to her room to cover her with an extra blanket. After this, the house would be wonderfully, almost frighteningly, peaceful. Ingrid—ordinarily so exhausted these days that she felt she could barely lift an arm, a hand—would snap into action. Set up the ironing board, sprinkle the laundry, set out the book to be read. The first half hour would be spent reading at top speed, her heart pounding. In the last week of February she finished A Farewell to Arms. She made little notes from it in a spiral notebook. One of the quotes had made her nearly weep for Pup: "Doctors did things to you and then it wasn't your body anymore." Klara was a bibliophile, she revered books; at auctions and sales she bought old books by the carton, but she didn't read herself and she didn't like to see anyone else reading either (unless she was in need of someone to read her to sleep). But if she saw any of them reading for their own pleasure she would give them a chore. She was like the nursing supervisors down in Port Charlotte. They couldn't bear to see a student stop and exchange a few words with another student, or gaze out a window, or even glance at a chart. If they spotted you engaged in any of these clandestine activities they would present you with a cannister of liquid ether—surely the coldest liquid in all of Christendom—and tell you to go swab down the stainless steel shelves in the Utility Room with it. Fingers numbed from the cold, brain numbed and woozy from the ether fumes—that's what you got for being caught looking unobsessed or thoughtful. Ingrid read fast, wholesale, like a person ravenous with hunger, pawing food into her

mouth. In early March—but it was still winter, with cold glaring days of cold sun on ice and snow—she started reading an ancient-looking copy of The House Of Seven Gables. Its spine was bleached with age, its pages dusty with what she imagined was 1939 dust. She breathed in the fragrance of age from the opened book. It was mouse-eaten too; there were little mouse-eaten half-moon caves stepping down the pages when the book was closed, like the indentations for the letters of the alphabet in The Oxford English Dictionary. Because the book was so old she didn't expect to be much affected by it, but on a Friday afternoon in early March, close to finishing the book, she came on a passage that shook her: "'I want my happiness!' at last he murmured, hoarsely and indistinctly, hardly shaping the words. 'Many, many years have I waited for it! It is late! It is late! I want my happiness!'"

It was so modern! So close to her own feelings! And if a man in a book that was written over a hundred years ago (and an old man at that) could feel this, then maybe almost anybody could. Maybe even Klara could. Maybe half the horrible things Klara did only came from wanting happiness. She could even remember when Klara had actually seemed happy. When she was a young wife, during the war. One Christmas during the war Klara made a last-minute dash across the river to buy everyone presents. As if in sympathy with the dangerous heaving black seas of the torpedoed Atlantic, the river hadn't frozen and so the ferry was still running. Klara had come home loaded down with gifts for everyone and had seemed blissful. The perfumed collar of her fur coat had had snowflakes caught in it. Ingrid



had thought her mother terribly beautiful and had fawned at the fur collar of her coat. Later that Christmas (or maybe it was another Christmas) Klara had made up a mock marzipan out of pabulum and almond flavouring and used cornstarch to stiffen it with. But then, thought Ingrid (thinking of Klara) she's always been ingenious with her mocking: turning pabulum into marzipan; making unhappiness look like happiness; making fear look like happiness; making hatred, and disunity and chaos look like united family love. She changed, that was the thing. She got older, but not wiser. It was dangerous, the charmed life she lived in the public eye. She even seemed to like the phrase, its menacing singular—possibly liked the way it sounded magic, like the evil eye. She would say, but dreamily, as if it conferred power rather than taking power away, "When one lives, as I do, in the public eye..." She seemed to feel its insatiable demands as pleasurable. It was cannibalistic but it could dispense grace. And although Pup was a shy man, he must have got to long for it too; in public he could pretend (with Klara) to be part of the happy couple and in this way gain a few hours' peace. But Klara (thought Ingrid) has the kind of scornful mad integrity tyrants have; she despises her victim for telling the lies she makes him tell. Each time she solicits a Devoted Look and he brings it up, he passes the test. And each time he passes the test, he fails it.

The ironing. The iron steaming upstream, up cloth, nosing into pockets, up pleats. The marvellous smell of it. Peppery

silk, peppery cotton, sending their essences up with the steam.

A fragrant summery mist in the brilliant glare of the winter afternoon. The salt of perspiration alchemized (by soap and water and steam) into pepper.

Then the peacefulness over. Sound of Klara getting up. A cough. Sound of flush. Creaking back and forth. Report of one of the shallow scarf drawers being slammed shut. Ingrid's blood not so much freezing as leaping back. What now, dear God? Klara starting to come down the stairs. Ingrid quickly standing the iron back on its heel so that whatever was coming wouldn't shock her to the point where she would forget to shove the iron back and forth and so leave a Gothic window burn on the seat of her mother's stone-grey denim skirt.

But even prepared for Klara's appearance she was shocked by it. An iron-burn in Klara's skirt would have made the perfect window for her to stare out of. She looked remote, ruined—a dead-eyed ruined queen. Except that she was not dressed for the part—the part being historic, her clothes being modern. She had tied her hair back with a pale blue silk scarf that had a border of white sailboats on it. She had tucked a fresh white shirt into her tan slacks. "You made me dream I was dead," she said, standing with a terrible queenly pallor in the kitchen doorway in her tan slacks, her sporty tan Oxfords. "You covered me with that heavy heavy blanket and made me dream I was dead."

Pup was scheduled to come home from Port Fairweather in the early spring. Tina was still up in Stettler, writing her finals, so Klara and Ingrid drove down to Port Charlotte on their own, planning to combine errands in the one city with the quick trip to the other to fetch Pup.

Port Charlotte, as they entered its industrial suburbs, was full of fog and bustle. The pavements of Clam Hill were wet from an early morning rain. A tall man in a black suit with a black raincoat caped over his head was walking down the middle of Gilford Street. There was the smell of soot in the mist. Klara was waiting for the light to change at the intersection of Dearborn and Digby Boulevard, and for an alerted moment Ingrid was sure the hooded man was making straight for them. Not only that--it was Ian Carmichael in his flapping black coat. But it wasn't; it was an older man--eyes set deep in their sockets; skin blue from drink and the cold. His black jacket was really a black sports windbreaker with a curler's emblem of crossed brooms and sweep's stone sewn on its front. An old sportsman's skull-and-crossbones in yolk-yellow felt. Now that she could see him up close, Ingrid was sure she knew the blue man--he was one of the Emergency regulars.

Now they were on Dearborn Street, approaching the General. Ingrid's stomach contracted. She knew they'd hit a red light just before they got to the intersection in front of the nurses' residence, they always did. And they did. Two girls came tripping down the main steps and crossed in front of the car while Klara was waiting for the light to turn. They were in new opened raincoats--one a pale butter yellow, the other canopy green--and they were wearing slim dark skirts and white blouses with

with machine embroidery on them. They were so young, so fresh-faced. So scornful but still so soft. She didn't know them, thank God. They were from the new wave that had come up behind the students who'd been probationers at the time she took off. These two were by now probably already juniors. The one in the pale-yellow was talking a mile a minute and holding the flat of her hand out in front of her as if testing for rain. Ingrid could guess the sort of cheerful lament she must be making: "And here's me, going insane, with the pre-op enemas still to do, and the trays still not out yet, and the stupid bloody dressings not done..."

Klara said, "Let's go eat at Van Houtte's--the view's so lovely from up there." She seemed tense, white at the gills, she was wearing a new perfume that smelled powerfully of lilacs. Still, it did not quite mask the sour anxious scent of her perspiration.

The sun tried to come out while they were eating their strawberry junket. While she was waiting for Klara to finish her dessert, Ingrid composed an imaginary diary entry (or letter--but who to?) that described Klara eating:

K was eating with her usual bizarre decorum, as if she believed the waiters were only pretending to write down the orders of the other diners and were in reality awarding her marks on how she picked up her fork, how she laid down her spoon.

By the time they came back out into the bracing Fundy air, the day had turned colder. It was sunnier though--brilliant--but with such a bullying wind they had to tie on their kerchiefs.

They took in the grand view of the harbour, coming down into the port. Klara turned down Besshugh Street and then swung onto Museum Boulevard with its grim fieldstone villas--their big windows looking out on the briney cold sheen of the bay. A Russian freighter was anchored at the east end of the harbour, its looming hull painted the oil-based yellow of gas stations (did

they have gas stations in Russia?), its long Russian name—all those backwards R's and N's reminding them it was foreign. The foghorn at Cape Hood seemed to be presiding over the Russian boat with its mournful-cheerful magnified moo. Suppose she had stayed here? Suppose she had got her R.N. Maybe now she'd be working in some doctor's office. Have her own little place. Maybe she'd be going out with Ian Carmichael, walking less shyly with him than formerly, in fog and rain.

Pup seemed different. He seemed more cheerful, but at the same time not quite someone they knew. When they were all sitting at the table the first weekend, having supper, he started to talk about the hospital like a little boy talking about summer camp. "Now it's six-thirty," he said. "It's the time we would put on our workclothes and go down to Occupational Therapy. And then when we were finished down there we would fold up our smocks and have a sing-song." Klara's face stayed smooth, expressionless. Having seen this, Ingrid and Tina sat with their eyes riveted miserably on their plates. Pup said no more about it.

Years ago, when Klara was away on tour, Pup had held sway at the supper table, had shoved his dishes to one side, piling them into a precarious pagoda of flowered china; had opened out The New World Atlas and taught them things: where Madagascar was, and the Khybur Pass. Had read aloud to them about Corsica, about how seaweed was added to the wine there, giving it the taste of violets. And after supper had let them help feed and groom the horses, Wolfie and Legs (real names Wolfgang and Allegro); had let them try to milk the oldest and calmest of the old cows, squirting the fine pings of milk into one of the big graniteware pails. They had crouched tensely on the milking stool, trying—like milkmaids—to hold the pail steady between the pinch of their knees.

A few weeks after Easter, Karl flew down for a three-day visit. Klara decided she would drive him and Ingrid down to the Gully Bay house--air it out; light up the fires. She invited a group of friends from Port Charlotte out there too, to make up a party.

The first night at supper, Klara, in slim new ribbed red sweater and with her hands in quilted grey oven mitts, came rushing a white china soup tureen out to the dining-table, crying out, "Make way! Make way!" The guests shoved aside crockery and glassware. Karl, hiding his irritation from Klara, rose and located a tile on the bookcase behind the table. Klara set the tureen down on this tile, then made a big production out of shaking the heat out of her oven mitts. Next came the ceremonious lifting of the lid. But no steam came wafting up; no sweet savoury smells of bay leaf or onion. The guests craned their necks; was this just another of Klara's little pranks? But then Klara, dipping the silver sugar-tongs deep down into the tureen, fished out a letter. It was a stamped, postmarked letter, addressed to Ingrid, in Karl's European-looking handwriting. Klara must have picked it up at the post office in Athens before they left home. Now she handed it to the guest next to her and it passed hands down to Ingrid. With a tender smile for Karl, Klara said, "You flew down here faster than your letter did." A flushed Ingrid slid the letter into her pants pocket. Even with her head bowed with embarrassment she could feel how all the guests were eyeing her smilingly, as if it was only a matter of time till the announcement of a wedding would be made.

When Klara and the guests had at last gone to bed, Ingrid and Karl lay in front of the downstairs fireplace, listening to a radio station in Port Charlotte play love songs—"Malaguena," "The Song from Moulin Rouge," "I Only Have Eyes for You," "Don't Be Cruel." How sad the love songs of our time are! thought Ingrid. She couldn't believe the love songs of the future would have this tormented melodious ache in them. There probably wouldn't even be any love songs in the future. Probably there wouldn't even be any love. There will be no deep feeling then, she thought. Deep feeling will go the way of the dodo.

"How's your father? Is he better?"

"He is, I guess, but he doesn't talk that much anymore." Talking about Pup depressed her. Who knew what he was really feeling? Who, when it came right down to it, really wanted to know? They were all scared to hear.

They talked about Karl's mother who was away on a trip to Norway. Ingrid recalled, but did not mention, a postcard she had seen in Karl's hospital room. "Mother's dearest boy," it had begun, in Norwegian.

"Are you close to your mother?"

He said he was. "Too close, in some people's opinion."

That he should be aware of it reassured her.

He worked an old snapshot out of his wallet. A pretty laughing woman in the clothing and skates of the nineteen-twenties was standing on a blade-scarred frozen pond. She was wearing a longish tweed skirt and a low-belted tweed jacket. Her arms were hanging down at her sides, weak, rag-dolled by laughter. I can't skate, for Heaven's sake! she seemed to be crying at the camera. Her speed-skates were limp-necked; she was knock-kneed at the ankles.

Ingrid said, with some anxiety, "She looks like she has a good sense of humour."

"She ~~Mikes~~ a good laugh," said Karl and something about the way he said this made Ingrid uneasy. But then, as if the subject of his own mother was making him uncomfortable, he started talking about Klara; how she'd acted at suppertime. "Always trying to focus attention on herself," he said. "But do you know what really irritates me about her more than anything else?"

"What?" said Ingrid dreamily. "What." Whatever it was, she was sure she would love to hear it.

"The way she comes up to me and looks at me with those big innocent blue eyes of hers and says, 'Do you love little Ingrid? Do you love her very much?'"

Ingrid snorted,

"The way she calls you little Ingrid," he said.

She laughed. "Little Orphan Ingrid," she said.

"Do you know what I feel like answering her?" he asked her.

"When she asks me if I love you?"

Ingrid felt delicious. Her whole belly was jelly, ready to laugh. She felt weakened and lulled by the coming laughter, by that and the uneven heat—half of her face and half of one thigh were all hot from the fire. "What?"

"I feel like saying no. I feel like saying No, I don't love her."

She sat up at once and stroking a lock of hair back behind an ear, drew herself a little away from him. "Whatever would you want to say that for?"

"To shut her up," he said.



She didn't respond to this but after a moment she stood up.  
"I'm going to go get myself a drink of water."

When she came out to the kitchen she didn't need to turn on the light, the field leading up to the bluff was so bright with moonlight and frost. She found herself a wineglass on a tray on the table by the window and started over to the tap with it, to run herself a glass of water. But changed her mind midstream and went back to the table and poured herself some wine in the dark. She could see the cedar tree her father had planted in her honour the day she was born—it stood black as a cyprus on the moonlit white field. The tree he had planted for Tina was at the front of the house and the tree for Arnie was at the head of the grove of poplars that led down to the river. When she and Arnie had walked across the river ice in the winter, coming home from school for the weekend, they had sometimes been caught in blizzards. Sometimes they'd had to huddle in a cave in the rock face of the western end of Kingsmere Island. From their rock enclosure they'd watched the stinging cold veils of snow coming toward them from a great distance across the frozen white plain of the river. A waving, wafting battalion of ghosts and their outriders. Once she had sat down on the ice, too cold and tired to go on, and Arnie had harangued her and nagged her until he had forced her to her feet.

She could hear Karl's feet come walking toward the dark kitchen. She could hear them stop in the doorway. After a moment she could hear his uncertain voice say, "I'm sorry—apparently I've hurt your feelings."

U He came up behind her and pressed himself close up against her. She could feel his warm winey breath on her skin. He cupped her breasts, kissed the bent back of her neck.

She tried to pry his fingers out from under her breasts.

"Don't be cruel," he whispered into her hair.

She didn't want to answer him, she didn't want to speak, she wanted to freeze him out so he'd know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, how much he'd hurt her. But then this deep freeze treatment made her think of Klara and in a rush of fear that if she wasn't careful she would turn into her mother, she turned to him and flung her arms around his neck and kissed his eyes and then his mouth—a long deep kiss during which he got her backed up against the sink—ordinarily she loved this, being backed up against something; even now, in her confusion, she could feel a dark rose of sweat and desire budding between the thighs of her black velvet Toreador pants and she slid her hands up inside the sleeves of his short-sleeved shirt—it made her feel calm and womanly to do this—but at the same time something was ticking, the kiss was a bomb, there was going to be an explosion, she was still so angry with him. But for some reason she didn't want him to know, she wanted to keep her anger a secret from him; she wanted to observe him in his naive belief he'd been forgiven. And so she said in a normal voice, "Hey! Maybe what we need is something to eat," which allowed them to break away from each other and start to pull bowls of leftovers out of the ice-box—a plate of cold cuts; a cold fogged bowl of black olives; a bowl of mayonnaise with dill in it; a Norwegian loaf of pale cheese embedded with cloves and caraway seeds and coated with a wax red as royal sealing wax; a bottle of red wine; a shallow bowl of pork tenderloin medallions in their cold sweet congealed sauce of onion rings and basil and mushrooms and brandy. And all this

assembling of food was done in a spirit of the greatest friendliness, or so it seemed. No, it did not; she was after all still cunningly watching him, to see how he would behave when he imagined he was putting something over on her. She would never marry him. It was a pity he was looking so attractive, so appealing, had rolled up the sleeves of his blue-striped white shirt and loosened his tie. He took up the tray and carried it into the fireplace room and they both squatted to it and spread the bowls of food and the wine out on the cold flagstones in front of the fire. She liked to look at him, she did, she loved it, but it was a pleasure she would have to give up. I can give it up, she thought. I can, if I have to.

Not that much dark was left before sunrise. The long snout of wood that had been burning all through the night was being transformed, by a burning zigzag of flame, into a long wolfish grey jaw. And when a fiery hinge in this jaw gave way, Karl walked on his knees over to the fire and broke open the fallen part of it with the poker, sending up a startled flock of sparks. "It is better to marry than to burn," he said, and Ingrid knew then that he would ask her to marry him, he would ask her tonight, but what he said, half-turning toward her, was, "What are your plans for the summer?"

"Working for Klara. In the music camp."

"Do your parents pay you for that?"

"No."

"And then what?"

She didn't know but was embarrassed to admit it. She said, "Oh, there are various possibilities."

He wanted to know what these possibilities might be.

"I might go to school."

"And study what?"

Her voice broke a little. "Painting," she said.

"Painting!" It was as if she had said she planned to do her degree in Murder. But then he quickly rallied with a "Sorry—I know you draw well," and she was struck by how much the words "draw well" seemed to leech the power out of her gift for drawing. Such as it was.

"And what about the typing?" he asked in a more reasonable voice. "What happened there?"

"Gave it up."

"Like you gave up the nursing," he said, and his voice had changed again, had become spiteful with disappointment.

She said nothing.

"Do you regret giving up the nursing?"

"No, Your Honour, I do not."

He laughed, a little self-consciously. "I know I must sound like the Grand Inquisitor," he said. And there, wonder of wonders, he seemed willing to let the matter of her failure, her future, lie.

About an hour before sunrise they went for a walk on the beach. They walked to the point where the bluff met the water in a prow of high black rock. A wind-deformed fir tree was mounted on top of

the rock, a tattered flag of drooping, low-winged black branches. They walked into what looked like a cave in the leaves, found the old lumber road and started to make their way along its soft mane of grass that was scattered with pale pebbles, as if the beach had tried to migrate up into the woods. There was the smell of resin and decay but also of mist and the river. It was unearthly still. Ingrid shivered from the cold. She had not even taken time to fetch a sweater to pull on over her blouse, and the section of exposed leg between the end of her treader pants and the tops of her old rubber boots ached from the cold. When Karl felt her trembling, he pulled off his tweed jacket and caped it over her shoulders. She was grateful to him; they stood and kissed awkwardly, formally, beneath the scratchy dark trees. Karl was warmly dressed, even without his jacket; he had on one of his Norwegian sweaters and as he and Ingrid embraced, Ingrid could smell mothballs, fogged wool. She thought, If I don't go with him, what will become of me? She felt the whole world was closed off to her now. I have failed at everything, she thought.

They came out of the cathedral-like dark of the conifer woods and into leafier country. More and more rattling; more and more light. Slender birch trees, so white and motionless in their trunks, were all hustle and rustle high up in their leaves.

Karl was saying, "If we got married, could you work as a typist?"

Ingrid looked up at him, feeling the doomed cunning of a woman being proposed to. "I could, but I'd need to practice a bit first."

"Could you start to practice soon?"

Flattered but feeling it was only wisdom to also be doubtful, she asked, "But should we marry, do you think? We disagree on so many things."

He said that if she wanted to know the truth, he had mixed feelings about it himself.

On this they were agreed then. But knowing that he had doubts too hurt her feelings a little. Which was childish, of course. Also, his doubt seemed to make her more keen. Which was mad, really. She tried to imagine herself married. She pictured Toronto looking as modern Moscow must look—all windy and glaring and grey and concrete; all flattened by windy glaring grey light. She saw herself working as a typist there. Far from home and glad of it. She saw herself wearing a trim little dove-grey suit. But would there be woods like this in Ontario? Or a river as lovely as the May River? It seemed to her it was unlikely there would be. Her whole childhood seemed to have been spent in this wood, on this river. In the early spring she and Arnie and Tina had played on the river when it was no longer safe, finally fleeing home, pursued by treacherous maps of cracks in the ice. And in winter they had played at the foot of the Elf Temple, deep in the woods, building forts and caves in the snowbanks. The Elf Temple was a frozen bluff of water with curdled pale yellow braids in the white—as if a bird, flying above it in the frozen air, had urinated on it while it was freezing. They had come home from the woods with their fingers freezing inside their ice-beaded mittens, their toes paining like bullets in their boots, the need to go pee sharply in each of them, and although sometimes they had found their parents not speaking to each other, at other times they had found them strangely

peaceful together (a post-coital peace? but they wouldn't have considered such a possibility then)—Klara playing the piano, slowly, thoughtfully, the notes seeming liquidly to stalk reserves of memory, feeling; Pup sitting at the kitchen mending a section of harness or bridle. Ingrid could not imagine such a warm scene taking place between them now. But maybe we'd do better than they did, she thought, picturing herself as Karl's wife. She was lying on the floor in front of a fire, reading a book. Their children were playing near her, two small fair children in corduroy overalls, talking and singing to themselves and making motorboat noises with the toy trucks they were driving along the slope of one of her thighs, along the hill of a hip. It thrilled her, the way they trusted her. They trusted her so much they didn't even see her. She was just part of the landscape to them, and the thought of being so trusted made her feel happy almost beyond belief, so that when she, their future mother, came with their future father out into a morning whose mist was obscuring the hills that ran behind the Gully Bay house and Karl said, "Do you think we should marry then?" she said yes, she thought they had a chance to be happy.

The house, at the end of its long foggy field, was looking blank—empty dead—with sleep. It was hard to believe that the people who were sleeping in it would ever open their eyes, yawn, sit up. Just before seven, the two who were to marry came in among them like thieves, leaving wet mist-tracks on the kitchen linoleum. Then they kissed each other quickly goodnight and went at once to their beds, not

wanting to be obliged to answer any questions put to them by those who would soon enough be stumbling out of their beds to splash their faces with cold water to wake themselves up.



## SUN AND RAIN

When he woke up it was dark and the rain had stopped. It was unearthly quiet, the way it sometimes was after a late-day rainstorm, as if the rain had rained all the noise out of the city. He didn't think his mother could have come back yet—he had a sense of the dark apartment spookily lying beyond his bedroom door. He wondered if it was true, what Margo had said, that their mother had a new lover. He himself had seen no signs of it. He couldn't even remember when it was that she'd last been involved with someone. He did recall that she was in love with one of her patients, a Frenchman from Morocco, all one winter and spring, and that for three or four months after it was all over between them there had been an uneasy stillness in the apartment, like a held breath.

He stepped out of his room, expecting darkness, but then saw from the brightness of the hallway that all the lamps in the living room were blazing. When he got down to it he found his mother sitting curled up on the low sofa in her good dark suit, warming her chilled fingers around a mug of hot tea. She called out, "Hello, Arthur," in a calm enough voice, but it seemed to him that her grey eyes, above the grey-glazed mug, were guarded, over-bright. He thought, Let's all just hope and pray it isn't another Moroccan.

He walked over to the armchair in front of the windows, dropped into it. "I fell asleep. Didn't even hear you get back."

"Just got here about fifteen minutes ago."

It seemed to Arthur that the rain had rained not only all the noise out of the city, it had rained all the energy out of their voices. He looked out the window. It wasn't quite night. The sky was a sky-after-rain colour--a high pale green. Here and there lights were coming out on the lakefront. He felt too tired to yawn. A fashion magazine with a vacant-faced girl on its cover was lying on the coffee table to his right. He picked it up and displayed it in front of his chest. "I ask you: Is this, or is it not, the dumbest face you've ever seen?"

"She doesn't look burdened by worries, or even thoughts, I would have to agree."

"She doesn't look like she's been burdened by a thought ever," said Arthur. "All the lights on but nobody home." He dropped the magazine to the floor, picked up his copy of Shakespeare Survey 33, opened it to the article on King Lear. And after a moment said, "Hey, listen to this-- it's talking about how in King Lear everything's all screwed up; people going to supper in the morning and to bed at noon. Sounds like your life, when you're on night duty. Supper at breakfast, to bed at noon."

"Yeh." But her smile seemed sad. She asked him how he was enjoying the play.

"It's okay. The evil slutty sisters are sort of neat, but Lear is a real self-pitying old windbag. Basically, he's just such a shit. The storm on the heath scene was pretty good though. But Miss Morrissey was saying she doesn't really approve of using the weather the way the writers of Shakespeare's time did, to support what's going on with the characters emotionally. And I agree with

that. I mean, something really sad can happen on a sunny day, after all. I'm not that wild about sun in the first place," he said, looking peacefully out at the after-rain dark. "Give me a storm. Give me rain."

His mother said that she was crazy about rain herself and Arthur had a memory of her and the Moroccan charging into the apartment, laughing like fools, at the start of a downpour. The pathetic fallacy, that was what it was called, where the weather supported the emotional mood like it did in King Lear. After class a guy who was sort of a friend of his had come up to him out by the lockers and referred to Morrissey as the pathetic Morrissey but Arthur didn't mind her all that much. She wasn't as much of a disaster as some. And then the new girl had come over to ask him which of Shakespeare's poems they were supposed to read for next class and this had led to their talking for a while. So this was his second conversation with her. He closed his book and said to his mother, "You remember that girl I was talking about at breakfasttime? The new girl? The one who sits down at the back with me in English?"

His mother nodded, her eyes on his. "The Scots lass," she said.

"Yeah, but her dad is Norwegian. I know this because we got into a conversation after school today. Isn't that weird though? That we both have mothers who come from Scotland? Her name is Pippa. She told me she used to see me last year sometimes, before she even decided to change schools, walking along Spadina Avenue. She told me she decided then that I must be a very enigmatic person."

"If she thinks you're enigmatic, it means she's crazy about you," said his mother. But now her eyes were filled up with a distracted look. He thought of asking her--if he asked, he would ask sharply--

"Is something the matter?" but instead said, "Yeah? I thought it might mean that."

His mother lifted her straight fair hair (which had recently started to go white at the temples) over the collar of her suit jacket. "What does she look like?"

"Blond hair to about here." He pointed two fingers at his throat. "Glasses. She looks good in them though. Very nice eyes, not too big. Why do people think big eyes are beautiful anyway? They give me the creeps." He didn't wait for her to reply. He said, "Anyway—about Pippa. This is going to sound superficial, but it's her best quality—along with her eyes and her personality and her smile—absolutely sensational legs."

His mother's smile was fleeting, then there was a rasp as she crossed one hefty black-nyloned leg over the other. She extended this leg straight out and bounced it up and down a little, lightly, sadly, from the rounded plump fulcrum of her bent knee; studied it with a small wistful smile. "Unlike my own, which are—colossal."

Arthur shot an uncomfortable glance at his mother's legs. He tried to look judicious. "Not colossal," he said quickly. "Just a little on the heavy side."

"Mr. Tact," said his mother. She set her tea mug down on the floor beside the sofa and then worked her feet out of her high-heeled sandals and lifted them up to the sofa where she drew both feet and legs in under the dark protection of her skirt. She said, "Listen, I'm going to have ask you for a favour. I want you to stay home from school tomorrow morning."

"This is a favour?" But then he remembered that his class with Pippa was in the morning. "What for, though?"

"I have to go to the hospital for an examination. An intestinal thing. They're going to have to sedate me and so they want me to bring somebody with me."

He stared at her. "When did you find all this out?" He felt like a jerk when he heard how mean and suspicious his voice was coming out, but it seemed to him that what always happened whenever things started to go really well was that one of his parents would spring something on him.

"This afternoon. I had an appointment with Hopwood."

"But what's the big rush though? I thought it took a long time to get something set up at a hospital."

"It's Mike Hopwood's day at the G.I. clinic tomorrow; I just turned out to be lucky."

"What's this thing called that you're going to get done?" (He couldn't seem to squeeze the cold dubiousness out of his voice. He thought, Jesus, I'm starting to sound like Dad.)

"Colonoscopy. They go in with a long flexible tube and look everything over." She coughed drily. "All made possible by the wonder of fibre optics," she readily whispered.

He relented a little. "Are you worried about it?"

She rose with a powerful spring, took off for the kitchen. The effect was startling to Arthur, like seeing a white-faced, golden-haired ship's figurehead pop up out of a jack-in-the-box.

But it was too quiet out there--as of course he had known it would be--and after a minute or two he got up and followed her. She was standing with her back to him, her hands gripping the wing handles of the faucets, pretending to look out the window. He came up behind

her and hung a cautious arm around her shoulder. As she let her head fall against him he could feel the tumult inside her, like hundreds of little pistons pumping up and down deep in her shoulders. Usually he kept things formal between them (to this end he always made a point of calling her "Mother") but now, out of anxiety, he went back to one of the endearments of childhood: "Aw, Mumsie—don't worry, okay? Everything'll probably turn out to be fine. And then you'll laugh at yourself for having got all bothered and anxious."

The hospital was an older more elegant hospital than the one where his mother worked and its basement hallways smelled of disinfectant and baked linen. Orderlies and sleepy-looking women with raincoats caped over their uniforms were yelling things out to each other.

"Sweetheart," a big orderly with evil sideburns was yelling at a pert little nurse with horn-rimmed glasses. "I told you you shoulda come to the Bahamas with me." Early morning camaraderie, Arthur guessed it must be. Every member of the staff in rude and heartless good health. He, on the other hand, was feeling jittery. His stomach threatened to heave. He could feel his chest getting constricted from the cheerful horror of the place.

On Dr. Hopwood's floor they had to walk down a long corridor to reach the Gastro-Intestinal clinic at the far end. As they hurried toward it Arthur caught a glimpse, in a small bright room, of a wizened little nurse sitting filing her nails beside a tray of syringes. Then they passed two women wearing lab coats over their slim skirts and blouses. Doctors? Lab techs? The taller one, whose legs were too

skinny and who had a horsey but nevertheless beautiful face with deep-set angry eyes was saying, "Yeah, well. But that, in effect, was what I did say. I said, 'Listen, buster, if you want to get your jollies out of hurting me..." Everything about her accent and delivery was old Tory Toronto. Doctors, he decided.

He had to wait in a little alcove off the G-I clinic. Twenty minutes, his mother had said. After twenty-eight minutes had jumped by on a hospital clock that looked like a school clock, he could feel his unease converting to dread. Was she really going to be okay? What if she wasn't? What if she was going to die? He decided he couldn't sit still one second longer, and he rose and took off in the direction of the little nurse filing her nails. But when he got to her office, it was empty. On a white enamel table sat a clear plastic tray of syringes. Beside it there was a small tin tray that looked like a tray from a cafeteria for dwarfs; it had some swabs on it, and also a couple of bottles—one of them a bottle of nail polish, dark and viscous as blood. The room smelled sickeningly of polish-remover.

He turned back, came to a door he pushed open in time to be greeted by the the sound, far below him, of the impersonal crash of institutional cutlery. It sounded like whenever they got too big a pile of dirty dishes down in the kitchen they would dump them onto a conveyor belt that would rush them off some place to be smashed so they wouldn't have to be washed. Cooking smells came up to him: potato scallop, what smelled like codfish cooked in milk. He drew back into his own quiet hallway at the same moment that he saw, down at the clinic end, the door his mother had been ushered through being shoved open. An East Indian nurse emerged, peeked round into the alcove, then turned to gaze down the hallway. "Mr. Blakely?" she called out to him.

He hurried towards her.

She waited till he reached her, then spoke in a mournful, soft British voice: "Your mother is ready to go home now."

"Fine," he replied. His voice, he wildly noted, had come out sounding truly ridiculous—a sort of hushed croak.

"Did you come to the hospital by taxi or by private car?"

"We brought our car."

"Will you be doing the driving, Mr. Blakely?"

When he nodded she looked worriedly reproachful, as if she had known him for years and therefore knew him to be unreliable. She said, "I was just wondering, because your mother is certainly in no condition to be doing any driving herself."

Arthur didn't like the "in no condition"; it made his mother sound senile. And so he replied in a dead formal voice, "That's why I came along with her. It was my understanding that she would be receiving a certain amount of sedation." He was standing miserably hunched up, his fists rammed into the pockets of his lightweight windbreaker, and his jaw felt painfully stiff, as if any future smile he might smile would come off looking tight and false to the point of lunacy.

"We had to give her more than the usual medication," the nurse told him. "Some of the colonoscopy areas were fairly inflamed."

What did she mean by inflamed? Was it a euphemism for cancer? And what did she mean by fairly? Did she mean very? Her words made him recall being a little boy and screaming—it seemed to him now that he'd screamed it hundreds of times—"I wish you would die!" Sometimes he'd screamed it at his father, sometimes at his mother. (But most often at his mother.) "What sort of medication?" he hoarsely inquired.



The nurse looked startled. "Valium for relaxing the muscles. Demerol for the pain."

This gave Arthur the fear that when his mother was wheeled out she'd be sitting pigeon-toed in her wheelchair, her head lolling idiotically off to one side, but she came out looking normal, just a bit sleepy. The athletic-looking nurse who was pushing her chair had a deep tan and superb classical features—she was the perfect plastic type he hated himself for tending to go for—and short, sun-bleached hair. She must have just got back from a holiday somewhere. Spring skiing in the Rockies, maybe; she had the narrowed, measuring eyes a skier gets from squinting against sprays of snow-mist. She flashed a quick cold smile at Arthur, then pouted at the clouding-up sky beyond the hospital's small-paned tall windows. "We'd better put your hood up," she said to his mother. "It looks like it might rain out there." And she shot up the zipper on his mother's slate nylon parka, then yanked up the hood and tied its drawstrings into a tight, skin-pinching bow under her chin.

It struck Arthur then—and not for the first time either—that hospitals were humiliating places, much more humiliating than school even. In fact, driving home in the car and re-hearing the sound of the nurse's snappy manhandling of the nylon parka (a sound that had grated on his nerves as much as any screech of chalk on a blackboard) it occurred to him that a lot of hospital words were interchangeable with school words—"examination," "tests," "a good report." He thought of asking his mother, "Did the doctor give you a good report?" but instead asked her a more careful question: "Did Hopwood say anything to you—after the examination?"

"Wasn't there."

"Wasn't there? What's that supposed to mean?"

"Called in sick. Lorca did it."

"Who's Lorca?"

"His partner."

"Okay, then. So what did his partner say?"

"That his partner would be getting in touch with me."

"Hopwood will be getting in touch with you," said Arthur.

"Right." She had turned her face away from him. He couldn't tell whether she was looking out the window or crying. After a while he thought she might be asleep, but he wasn't sure. He cleared his throat. "I'll be having a real easy day at school today. Only two classes—Art and Frog."

No answer. He hated French; it was the only subject he regularly failed in. Which was weird, because Margo was the exact opposite—the world's most ardent francophile. Frogophile. He had nothing against the French personally, apart from—but was this personal?—their devious gushy language, but Margo and his parents were all such gung ho frogophiles that the prospect of joining them in their passion for speaking the language made him feel worn out before he could even open the first page of his French grammar.

His mother heaved an emotional-sounding sigh.

"Are you awake?"

Still no answer, and so they drove on in more silence. Street after grim residential street in the fitful late morning sunshine. Feeling lonely, he wound down the window so he could smell the lake.

He remembered that until he was four or five years old he had believed Lake Ontario was the ocean. He could still recall the amazed sadness he'd felt the day he had learned it was not. And since then, more bad news: the lake was polluted, dying. He quoted to himself: "Nero is an angler in the lake of darkness." It was one of the lines he liked in King Lear. But it wasn't a lake of darkness today. Quite the contrary: it was hurting his eyes with its fish-sheen glare of light.

At their apartment tower he parked at the front entrance, then reached over and gave his mother's shoulder a shake. "We're home!" he called in the low but hectoring sing-song he remembered his parents using with him when he was a kid and asleep in the car at the end of a long family trip home in the dark.

With a sound somewhere between a grunt and a cry she twisted away from him.

Arthur was assailed by a feeling of exasperation tinged with a sensation that hovered between tenderness and amusement. This must be what it would be like to be the parent of a whiney little kid. He shook her shoulder again. "Time to get out, Mother."

"No," she moaned and she curled away from him into a deeper commitment to sleep. "I don't want to."

"Hey, come on now. You've got to come up to the apartment. The nurse said you had to go straight to bed."

Sitting on the edge of her bed, his mother sleepily drew off her parka, then crawled between her sheets still dressed in her shirt and jeans. Her nurse's cape was lying over the seat of the chair by the

window. Arthur picked it up and caped it over the back of the chair. He wondered if there was anything he was supposed to do for her. "Do you want me to pull the curtains or anything?"

She made what sounded like a moan of assent and so he went over and pulled them. Then he went out to the kitchen and poured himself a glass of milk to have with his salami sandwich. Dessert was a bottle of beer and a muffin. He agitated the beer in his mouth like toothpaste-water—something he used to be fascinated watching his father do, long ago.

As he turned into his school street—feeling the exaggerated shyness he always felt after he'd missed a morning of school—Arthur was confronted by a noisy crowd scene: fifteen or twenty people finishing their lunch in the cold sunlight, out on the balustraded main stone stairway. Right away he saw that Pippa was among them, leaning back on her elbows, the sun transforming her spun-looking fair hair into the brainless big mop of a girl in a comic strip. She was laughing in what looked like a very admiring way up at a jock named Del Maloney who was crouching sleekly towards her, his hair slicked back, and her feet were shod in flat grey suede ankle-boots, the kind that looked like they'd been copied from the ones the fool always wore, in Shakespeare's plays. Arthur made a wide arc to the left of the stairway and then ran down the steps to the west wing's basement entrance. Once inside this utilitarian cavern he made straight for the hissing, steam-heated boys' toilet, located in the cavern's north end between the tunnel to the boys' gym and the janitors' office. His relief at finding it empty

was so great that for a moment he mistook it for happiness. But his hand trembled as he drew his comb out of his pocket and started to comb his too-long brown hair. As he combed he cursed Maloney, but he wasn't exactly overjoyed with himself either. You should get your hair cut, he told his reflection. You look like a goddamn hippie. He wished he'd worn another shirt too, he could have wept when he saw what a putz he looked like in this one. But no more time for regrets: the bell for first class was going off.

His school had recently adopted a class-rotation system called the tumbling timetable and as a consequence of it Arthur was forever having to stop and ask himself, What week is this? Which way has the timetable tumbled? It was what he had to ask himself now, standing blankly in front of his locker. Then he remembered it was Art. He grabbed out his spattered lab coat and plastic bag of paint tubes and took off at a run for the studio on the third floor.

Art passed, then a spare. In French, Mrs. Eva Fischer (who, although she taught French, was actually German) handed back the corrected French tests. A lonely-eyed good-looking blonde in her thirties, she was not a popular teacher. She was a test-freak, that was why. Every day Arthur's class had to spend the first twenty minutes of the period scribbling answers to test-questions while Frau Fischer sat and stared out toward the bare park, deep in her lonely Teutonic thoughts.

He had failed, by a fairly wide margin. Not a surprise.

Across the bottom of the second page Fischer had written, "Disappointing work, Arthur. I know you can do much better than this." Maybe so, but he couldn't bring himself to care one way or the other; the image of Pippa laughing up at Maloney had sucked all the breath out from under his heart. If only his mother hadn't asked him to drive her to the hospital. Because Maloney (though a dumb jock) was nobody's fool.

When the period was over Arthur went out into the clear air (no sign of the rain the cold nurse had predicted) and sat on a stone wall to the west of the school's main entrance to watch for Pippa. He had some bad moments, fantasizing her walking toward him with Maloney, but at last she came dawdling along with another girl in the shadow of the arched stone portico of the school's northwest wing. They had their heads bowed over a letter Pippa was holding. They kept bumping into each other as they walked and because of this he was sure their legs were weak from the shrieky pleasure of laughing. He couldn't bear it when two girls got together to snicker over a letter some unsuspecting person—probably a guy—had, in hope and innocence, written. But supposing the guy was Maloney? Even so, he decided. Even Maloney deserves better than this. And he was suddenly finished with Pippa. She was too young, she smiled too much, she was too easily impressed, she was a giggler. He stood up, pulled on his coat, picked up his books. He only turned back for one sorrowing farewell look at her. But as she stepped out into the

cold sunlight she looked up and saw him and turned and said something to her friend—a short girl in a navy coat who immediately took off in a run across the frozen grass of the playing-field—then came walking on toward him alone, the letter clasped to her breast. Was she going to show it to him too? He would refuse to read it.

But she greeted Arthur shyly, with her unsure eyes, as she approached him. She wasn't biting her lip, but her eyes had that look girls' eyes get when they are biting a lip, and her hair seemed to carry a silvery glow and crackle within it, like a pale bonfire; it seemed to electrically brush the shoulders of the grey and white ski-cardigan she was wearing over her thin blouse and jeans. The cardigan's buttons were engraved acorns, made out of silver. By way of saying hello to her, Arthur reached out and pulled on one of these cold silver acorns with a finger and thumb. Shyly, he jiggled it a little. "Hello, Pippa," he said.

She looked up at him with her light grateful eyes. "I bring you news of homework in English," she said, and she handed him the letter.

He stared at her in amazement. He let go of the silver acorn and opened the paper out. He saw a numbered series of questions. He studied them without seeing them. He was looking at her name. PIPPA FJELDAHL she had printed in three different scripts at the top of the page. "Well," he remarked in a voice barely above a

whisper. "Thanks a lot." He refolded the paper and slid it into his shirt pocket.

"You weren't sick, were you?"

"No. I had to take my mother to the hospital."

"Oh," she said, and although her voice dipped with concern, something that looked like an uneasy pleasure seemed to stand, sharply withdrawn and watchful, far back in her eyes. Maybe she didn't get along with her own mother. "Is your mother sick?"

"They don't know yet. They had to do some tests."

"I hate hospitals." She spoke with passion. "Hate them."

Arthur said he hated them too, and as they started walking together up the cracked sidewalk bordering the playing-field he found that his attention, which was ordinarily completely engaged by the female portion of the student population, had shifted and fixed itself on the faces of his own gender and was methodically searching them out for expressions of admiration and envy. He noticed that it didn't seem to upset him at all to discover that his happiness was contaminated with triumph. Why not? Triumph was sweet. He also didn't seem to be feeling overly upset by the fact that his laughter was too ready and false-sounding. In fact when a not-completely spontaneous laugh caused him to take in a great lungful of mud and ice smell, the smell became instantly dear to him, in spite of his nervous false laughter; it gripped him in the entrails and announced itself as a future trigger of memory—as a smell he would associate forever with this first day of walking with Pippa,



in the open air.

Arthur's mother was lying propped up on one elbow in her bed, reading the paper and eating from a green glass bowl of yogurt. Sunlight—lakelight—flooded her room. She lifted her spoon in greeting.

"Hi, honey."

"Hello." He sat down on her bed in his coat. "How ya doing?"

"Not too bad. Sore though. But at least they didn't put a hole in my gut."

"You really don't trust hospitals very much, do you?"

"I just hope you and Margo never have to go into one."

"That'll be the day. I don't plan to get sick, ever—

I'm such a healthy young dude. And Margo wouldn't have the time."

But mention of Margo made Arthur feel he ought to try to be a bit more entertaining. He said, "You should have heard yourself this morning when you were all drugged-out in the car." To demonstrate, he threw himself down on the end of her bed and jacked his knees up into fetal position—with his big blade of a nose and last year's too-short black coat he was hopeful he cut a reasonably comic figure—and theatrically moaned out,

"No! I don't want to!" And was rewarded by her half-amused, half-uneasy laughter. He got to his feet and stretched, then gazed with a certain hesitant longing, at the phone. "Are you planning on using the phone in the near future?"

When she shook her head he went over to her bureau and unplugged the phone. An armload of bright summer skirts and a pair of grey pantyhose had been dumped over the back of the chair by her window but her bureau was unusually tidy. Her silver-backed hairbrushes and a matching hand-mirror were lined up on a silver tray. The initials J. J. (for Jean Johnson, her name when she was a girl back in Scotland) were engraved on the back of the mirror. He said, "I'll turn on the news for you if you want."

"Thank you, Arturo."

He turned on her radio and then securely closed her door behind him and went down the hall to his own room, the phone book and the phone hugged to his chest. He also securely closed his own door. He even went back to it and locked it. Ordinarily she wouldn't come into his room without knocking first, but you never knew: she might decide that undergoing a medical procedure gave her special privileges.

He plugged in the phone and sat down on his bed with it held in his lap, still in his coat. Then he pulled the home-work-sheet Pippa had given him out of his pocket. Fjeldahl. He looked it up in the phone book. There were only two Fjeldahls listed and one of them was way out in the beaches. Quickly, before he had time to change his mind, he dialed the downtown number.

When Pippa came on the line there was a kind of bored fall in her voice that made him feel tense. He said, "I was wondering

if maybe we could go out somewhere tonight, maybe to a movie or something." He told her the name of the repertory house he had in mind, which happened to be in her neighbourhood.

She said she couldn't. But now it seemed to him that he could hear disappointment in her voice. She said her mother's younger sister was visiting from Scotland with her two little nieces, and that she'd promised to babysit for her the next two nights. "I'd be free on Sunday night though."

"The one I was thinking of is one you've probably already seen—'Being There.'"

"Oh, I'd love to see that. I never did get to see it when it first came out. It was on in Glasgow, just before we left for Canada, isn't that crazy? I've been wanting to see it for years."

"Great," said Arthur, and his voice—in his ears but he prayed not in hers—sounded truly feeble with surprise and pleasure.

"And listen, you don't have to come get me, I'll meet you there."

"Okay. How much ahead of the movie do you think we should meet?"

"Fifteen minutes."

How easy all this was! He could have been asking girls out for years! He was wondering if he regretted that he hadn't when Pippa said, "I wish it was Sunday night right now."

His heart took a leap. Before the conversation, imagining it going well, he had only pictured himself feeling relieved at the end of it, not inspired. He ran a hand through his hair and dropped his voice commandingly low. "Be there," he said.

At a party Arthur finally located well after midnight (he was obsessive about finding parties on Friday and Saturday nights) there was an older girl who smiled at him and patted a place beside herself on a brown plaid sofa. But after he'd sat down next to her she just kept smoking in a weirdly private satisfied way that made him regret having burdened her with his presence. He had to content himself with pretending to feel much more curiosity about his surroundings than he was really feeling. There was the sound of conversation and occasional low laughter coming from a room he took to be the kitchen. Someone had tacked up a length of sand-coloured fabric with little greenish and black tribal figures woven into it. Not much of a party, but he was willing to give almost anything a chance for an hour or two. He couldn't decide whether this proved he was an optimist or desperate.

Before she had even finished her cigarette the older girl stood up, stroked her hair back behind an ear with the fingers of one hand, massaged her midriff with the heel of the other. "Gas attack," she said, smiling a brief but sweet smile down at Arthur. He returned her smile, thinking to himself, What a flake, and then must have looked like he was planning to get up too because she held the long-fingered hand with the cigarette

in it out toward him in the hostess' gesture that says, "Don't get up—stay there..." and then padded over to the African curtain and drawing it back with the same graceful motion she'd used to draw back her hair, stepped through to the other side.

Arthur roused himself and made his solitary way down a dark hallway to look for a toilet. He passed by a bedroom with burlap curtains at its small-paned dark windows. There was a phone on the bedside table. Maybe on the weekend he would phone Margo and talk to her about taking their mother to the hospital. Or maybe there wouldn't be any need to. Maybe she'd get a good report back from Hopwood. This wasn't the first time she'd had a cancer scare, after all. He recalled the time she'd had to get a lump taken out of her breast, long ago, back when he was starting grade nine.

Sometime later—but it was still dark out—he found himself walking up an ice-blistered alleyway, behind some people who'd been at the uneventful party. They were strangers to him and the moon was low at the wrong end of the sky. Their dark coats and one booted, regal girl's street-length black cape (was she a holdover from hippie days?) were swaying slightly with the motion of brisk walking and the pre-dawn wind. There weren't any leaves on the trees yet but Arthur was reminded of the big surfy sound in the leaves of the trees near a summer cottage his parents used to rent down on the east coast, near Cape Tormentine,

when he was a boy. He remembered the whole family swimming in the wide warm river after dark, a river made even warmer for Arthur by the fact that he'd peed in the part of it that he'd kept dog-paddling short, gasping laps back and forth in.

Margo, at fourteen, hadn't swum half as much as the rest of them; she only took quick groaning little dips and then flashed w up out of the black water, hoisting herself with a shimmy up onto the wharf where she then affectedly reclined, waving away the mosquitoes with the tip of one of their mother's cigarettes. With her childish ruffled bikini and a bathing cap that looked like a white rubber bonnet, she had made Arthur think of a self-centered little baby waving its pacifier. But afterwards, when they had all started climbing up the cold sandy path to bed, Arthur had held tight onto his mother's hand because Margo had been transformed from a ridiculous smoking baby into a majestic evil alien, striding ahead of them up the sand hill in the moonlight, their father's navy trenchcoat swingingly caped like a king's cape over her shoulders, her head eerily small in her shining moonlit white cap.

He ran down into the subway in the pre-dawn dark but when he climbed up, only half an hour later and hatching a sneeze, it was into a world that looked like it had been exposed for hours to windy morning sunlight. It was a light that sobered him up quicker than a cold shower would have done because he was

at once struck by the realization that he ought to have phoned home to tell his mother he'd be late. An image of her sitting smoking and crying at the kitchen table rose before him with such clarity that he took off at a run, whimpering curses under his breath.

At six-thirty in the morning, the grey-tiled plaza was deserted. Only the gulls were awake, wheeling and mewing in from the lake, hoping for nourishment from Shopping Centre garbage. But there was none of it; it had all been blown away by the wind or swept up. The venetian blinds of the pharmacy and the metal blinds of a store called Folklore were pulled down and the curtains of the café were drawn shut. A store called May-Hee-Ko, Folklore's rival, had a row of squat figurines on display in its window. With their swollen grim mouths and their tubular clay arms folded tight across their baked clay chests they had, in the glaring light of this ice-glazed April morning, a primitive-competitive look. Every locked-up restaurant and blank-faced store had its newspaper-doormat.

Inside the polished lobby of his own building--also deserted--Arthur tore past the elevator and lunged through the swinging door to the stairwell. He had an incantatory speech at the ready, and taking the six flights of stairs two steps at a time, he rehearsed it: I'm a jerk, I'm a rat, I deserve to be shot. He burst into the apartment with it, his head already turned toward the kitchen table. But his mother wasn't at the kitchen table, and in fact the whole apartment was steeped in

silence. The end of the short hallway that led to the bedrooms, which at this time of day was ordinarily dim, stood in bright morning light. An image of his panicky mother, driving up and down the streets of the parents of people he barely knew, blubberingly making a spectacle of herself as she desperately searched for him, took possession of him and made him feel wild with rage and humiliation. She had done this one night when he was eleven or twelve, and he had lived all these years in dread of her doing it again. He slammed the door to the hall closet shut and swung into the living room. Her white-striped grey dressing-gown had been flung inside-out over the back of the sofa. A corner of the fashion magazine with the idiot model on the cover was pinning down a corner of the dressing-gown. All the lights on but nobody home, he remembered saying to her. He was almost seventeen, for Christ's sake! But when was she going to grow up? He snatched the magazine up from the sofa and pelted it at the rocking-chair, causing it to immediately set the chair to rocking back and forth like a rocking-chair in a haunted house movie. Then he took off down the hall to look into her room.

And saw that she was still at home after all, sound asleep. A band of sunlight the width of a folded-up blanket was lying across the bottom of her bed; the light blue curtains were still open, showing the morning sky. The drugs must still be having an effect then; ordinarily she couldn't sleep unless her room was totally dark. He couldn't see her face, because like every-



one else in his family, she always twisted toward the wall and hauled her top sheet up over the top of her head and slept hooded like a Bedouin, but he stood in her doorway a moment, listening to her slightly snorey breathing, then crossed into his own room and lay down on his bed.

When he was younger and coming into the apartment after school the word that would sing in his head would be "Home!" He would make himself toast from cornbread with raisins in it and this toast, buttered, would taste so succulent he wouldn't have to smear any jam on it. Those days seemed like heaven. Even now he felt basically good about coming into this place although now he was more alert to the dangers. The other day when he'd come out to the living room to find his mother just back from the doctor's and they'd both sat staring at the sky, he had felt too relaxed—had felt that his mother was quagmire, quicksand, that he would have to get out of here fast, before he became paralysed by the heavy burden of her tolerance. Still, when all was said and done, she was the only adult he knew who he really trusted. Mr. Tact, she'd said to him when he'd said something or other. Something about her legs? But she really did only want to be his mother; she must—she didn't even approve of his calling her Jean. The only time she didn't mind it was when she'd done something dumb and he kidded her by quoting her quoting one of her patients saying to her, "You're a genius, Jean." She was nosy as they come, though; "Get out of my life!" he'd had to yell at her on more than one occasion. "Get a life of your own!" Margo was more indirect and, in Arthur's opinion,

a lot meaner. "Poor old Jean--looks like she's past her prime," Margo had once remarked to the air while their mother, in good tan suit and black nylons, was tensely peering back over her shoulder to get a gander at how her dark-nyloned legs and the kick-pleat of her suit-skirt looked from behind. The way her stung face had flushed up! It had flushed up that time it came out he'd been doing acid too--which had turned out to be the last time, the trip was so weird and scary. The two friends he'd done it with had decided to give it up too. Never again. They had all got so sick they had felt paranoid, crazy. His mother had kept saying it could have been rat poison. He hadn't exactly calmed her down when he'd said he wasn't sure that it wasn't. But when she'd said they'd better get him to a de-tox center, he'd put his foot down. "No way!" He'd forced her to swear she wouldn't tell a soul. She'd above all had to swear not to tell his father. He hadn't even allowed her to phone the Alcohol and Drug Addiction people. He wasn't positive she hadn't talked to some of the doctors at her hospital though. Or phoned the Addiction place on the sly. But officially she'd had to settle for giving him massive doses of Vitamin C and keeping his room dark. When he was better he'd had to put up with her giving him a hard time over it: "And so this is the gentleman with the famous wheat allergy! The misery you've put me through! When I get back from the supermarket, aren't you the one who always grabs the packages out of my arms and then peers at them"--here she'd reached a package of cereal down from one of the kitchen shelves--"and then starts to interrogate me: 'Are you sure this doesn't have any wheat in it?' Well, I'd just like to ask you about that acid, my friend," and here she'd tossed the package onto the kitchen table crying, "It could have been rat poison! It also could have contained that deadly ingredient, wheat."

Wheat made him think of bread and bread made him think of toast and toast made him decide to go down to the kitchen to make himself some. But when he opened the bread-box it was empty. After a consultation with the kitchen clock, he decided to walk to the store. It would be eight o'clock by the time he got out on the street; the Korean grocery should be open by eight. Pram was how Margo had pronounced prime when she'd said their mother looked past it. Hoping that if she said it with a southern accent she could pass it off as a joke. If he walked far far enough west he might even run into Pippa. (Out walking her dog. Out walking her neices.) He wrote a note which he taped to the door of the fridge:

7:45 a.m. Went  
out for a walk.  
Also to buy bread.

Three little guys of about seven or eight were playing a game of catch with a football out on the plaza when Arthur returned from the store, a loaf of rye bread tucked under his arm. The smallest one was jumping up and down like a maniac, screaming at one of the older ones, "Sock it to me, Brucie baby! Sock it to me!" And when Bruce pelted it to him he caught it in a knock-kneed catch and then, hugging it gleefully to himself, started to jump up and down again yelling, "Ah love ya, Brucie baby! Ah loves ya!"

Arthur smiled to himself. Where did they learn to talk like that?

From listening to over-the-hill Hollywood actors pretending to be friendly to each other on TV talk shows? They were too young and innocent to know how corny they sounded. Will I ever have a kid? he wondered. He remembered being a little kid himself-- playing Superman with his mother's nurse's cape. He remembered lying on his mother's and father's bed and playing with his mother's hairbrushes; playing they were silver Volkswagens; playing they were buffalos in the moonlight.

As he was passing, by the door just before his own door he heard a phone start to ring. It was picked up on the ping of the second ring. It made him wonder if his mother had heard back from Hopwood. Wondering this, he felt an intense fear of talking to her. He hoped she wasn't still asleep though. He wanted her to be awake but he didn't want to talk to her. How could that work? She could be on the phone. But not talking to Hopwood.

But the first sound he heard, stepping inside, was the sound of the shower. It was a sound that speeded everything up for him; it was like a flash rain moving in over a forest where every stealthy step forward on dry twigs might, up till the moment of the rain, have alerted a pursuer. He hauled off his boots and stowed them swiftly in the hall closet, then raced sock-footed down the hall to his room. He was already throwing himself into the business of tearing off his clothes before he even reached his bed. He was breathing like a runner. He plunged

into his bed still dressed in his socks and undershorts.

But his room felt too hot. He beat his heels up and down on his mattress to bounce the blankets off the end of his bed, then hauled his sheet up over his head.

He heard the shower stop. His heart jumped to his throat. Then silence. Then the bathroom opening and closing. Then a tap on his door.

"What is it?" he moaned out. "I'm almost asleep!"

His door was pushed open but not, by the sound of it, all the way. "Just thought I'd say hello."

His answering hello came out in a morose-sounding croak.

"I guess you just got home."

"Right."

"I saw your note."

He said sternly, "Good."

"Thanks for getting the bread."

"You're welcome." But then he took pity on her. "Listen, Mom, I'm really beat. I'll talk to you later, okay?"

"Okay."

Was her voice too light? Too hurt? His body felt stiff with the strain of trying to hear if she sounded like she'd been crying. "Goodnight, then," he said, and already he seemed to be holding his breath, primed to listen again.

"Goodnight."

He couldn't tell how she was feeling at all, but a little.

while after she'd padded off, clinky breakfast sounds started coming from the kitchen. Faucets being turned on and off; the sound of cutlery; the radio, turned low, playing dance music.

Now I'll be able to sleep, he told himself. But for a long time he couldn't. There was too much commotion outside. It sounded like all the little children in the neighbourhood were now playing out there down in the plaza—at least a dozen of them right under his window—yelling out to each other the shrill happy commands of one of the games of a holiday morning.