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**That Place Such A Long Way From Here**

**Louise Hooley**

**A Thesis  
In  
The Department  
of  
English**

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
Concordia University  
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**CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY**

**School of Graduate Studies**

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: **Ms. Louise Hooley**

Entitled: **That Place Such a Long Way From Here**

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Arts**

complies with the regulations of this University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

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Approved \_\_\_\_\_  
Graduate Programme Director

\_\_\_\_\_ 19 \_\_\_\_\_  
Dean of Faculty

## **ABSTRACT**

### **That Place Such a Long Way From Here**

**Louise Hooley**

**This short novel is set in mid-town Toronto and details a crisis in the life of a young professional couple. Most of the important circumstances are already in place when the story opens. The novel proceeds by offering the protagonist, Elizabeth Pendleton, increasingly broad chances to recognize the nature of her relationship with her lover, Nick, as well as with larger society. Clues to Liz's extraordinary resistance may be found in the book's concern with the urban landscape. The novel treats issues of race, gender and class in its examination of what it suggests is the contemporary crisis in our understanding of civitas.**

**This book is for Jennifer.**

**"It is an old story, that men sell themselves to the Tempter, and sign a bond with their blood, because it is only to take effect at a distant day; then rush on to snatch the cup their souls thirst after with an impulse not the less savage because there is a dark shadow beside them forevermore. There is no short cut, no patent tram road to wisdom: after all the centuries of invention, the soul's path lies through the thorny wilderness which must still be trodden in solitude, with bleeding feet, with sobs for help, as it was trodden by them of olden time."**

**George Eliot**

**"Man is a political animal in a sense in which a bee is not. . . . Nature . . . has endowed man alone among the animals with the power of speech. . . . Speech . . . indicate[s] . . . what is just and what is unjust. For the real difference between man and other animals is that humans alone have perception of good and evil. . . . It is a sharing of a common view in these matters that makes . . . a state.**

**Furthermore. . . . the whole must be prior to the part. Separate hand or foot from the whole body, and they will no longer be hand or foot except in name, as one might speak of a 'hand' or 'foot' sculptured in stone. . . . That will be the condition of a spoiled hand. [Separate an individual from the state] and he will stand in the same relationship. . . .**

**Among all men, then, there is a natural impulse towards this kind of association. . . . For as man is the best of all animals when he has reached his full development, so he is worst of all when divorced from law and justice."**

**Aristotle The Politics I ii**

## FRIDAY

Elizabeth Pendleton felt a deep, though not well-understood, satisfaction as the outskirts of Toronto began to flash by the train window. Pride at having her life so well under control, she supposed--or at least more under control than her fellow passengers did. She had made this Friday afternoon voyage so many times since the summer that even when the compartment began to rustle with coats and grow noisy with conversation all she did was to fix her gaze a little more pointedly out the window. Sunlight flashed on a warehouse, a parking lot, a black man on a bicycle. As the objects outside grew closer, they appeared to pass more quickly--so quickly, finally, that she barely had time to identify one object before being confronted by the next. She was reminded of watching the initial frames of one of those old-fashioned movies the school board used to make available to teachers to show to their social studies classes. This was the moment just before the disparate images fused and presented a plausibly moving world again. A back garden heavy with laundry flickered by. Laundry? she wondered. Or a tree?

She sighed and withdrew her gaze to the pages in her lap: a student assignment she thought she'd been finished

with, weeks ago. She'd been trying to make sense of it for hours. Wanting to keep believing herself an equitable person, though, she tried again: "At the night, woman brushing her hairs, together, talke about a men she wishing on day marrys."

She wondered how many times she'd found herself halted like this since she'd received the assignment, clipped to the Coordinator's letter, yesterday morning. She flipped to the back and re-read her spidery hand. She'd spent most of an evening phrasing and re-phrasing her explanations of why she had to consider as grammatical problems the items she did. She thought she'd presented her reasoning in a way the student could follow. She gazed at the big purple letter-- she always put the grade in ink--at the very bottom. She still couldn't believe she was under investigation for racial discrimination. Racial discrimination? The idea was absurd. But that the investigation was under way was true. And if the committee agreed with the student, she would lose her job. "At the night, woman brushing her hairs, together, talke about a men she wishing on day marrys." Liz gazed out the window but didn't see anything. What if she really had been wrong?

The compartment blinked as the train rushed through the Cherry Street Underpass. Now this, she thought--a trace of earlier satisfaction returning--this, had the other passengers known it, was the cue. She slipped the paper

back in the envelope, slid the envelope back into her overnight bag and tugged the zipper shut. After a moment, she twitched her jacket over the bag, though it was hard to make the bag look much like anything else.

Outside the glass, as though the projector had finally arrived at proper speed, a single, albeit hazy, image hung: the downtown financial district, flaring in the setting October sun. Liz picked out the glitter of Mr. Martin's building, the molten glare of the bank where she'd once temped, and Nick's tower, a thin red tooth. What wealth--what power--she thought, enjoying the clutch in her throat this observation always brought. She sometimes joked to her friends that in five hundred years, people would come to look at these buildings the way, today, they went to look at the Gothic cathedrals of Europe. Her friends all laughed, of course; she laughed with them. All the same, she'd meant the remark seriously. The towers flamed a moment more outside the glass, like a latter-day Gomorrah. Then the scene's unity disintegrated. They drew into the darkness of the station.

Liz picked her route to cross the IBM plaza, the central open area in the financial district. She caught sight of a woman reflected in the base of one of the towers, a woman in her early thirties, with well-shaped legs under a pretty, flared skirt. But though the woman looked

attractive, the distorting glass made her appear as if she were being blown through space. Then Liz realized that the rhythm of those shoes against the pavement was her own. But that lovely woman couldn't be her, she thought. She was not so much astonished by her thinness--after all, she'd been without the last of those forty pounds for over a year now--as she was by the clothes in which she'd finally dared present it. A man in a suit caught her eye. She thought, here in the centre of the heart of the city, what could go wrong with admitting she might reciprocate what she saw in his eyes? But the moment after she'd returned his grin, she found herself hurrying away. Only after the corner of the building rose between them did she exult in what felt like the after-touch of his gaze, the touch of her hair across her cheek.

Liz sauntered past the atria of the Mies van der Rohe towers. Friday closing time; the weekend was beginning. Glass doors whirled with exiting people swinging attache cases and gym bags. People waved, wished each other good weekends, then turned away with swishing trenchcoats and smiles. Liz hitched her bag more prominently over her shoulder and joined the throng. She delighted in the way passing office workers included her in their glances. What delighted her even more, though, was knowing that, unlike them, she lived and worked far away. She smiled left and right as she cut through the streetcar-bound files. She

felt as special as if she really were some movie heroine, like, say, Princess Grace. She paused on the curb until she was certain she had attracted every drivers' gaze. She picked her way amongst the bumpers as if the only thing of which she was conscious was lifting that strand of hair from across her cheek.

Liz chose her route to pass the underground Loblaw's where she'd shopped for groceries this past summer and to pass the American Express office where she'd run at lunch to pay her bills. Even the little numbers still ricocheted above the American Express office door. TDK +1/4 she read. CD +1/2. What did they mean? she wondered. She still did not know. Sand and sea appeared to wait behind the door. Only when she recalled that all she would find inside was an unpaid--and unpayable--account did she turn away.

Beyond the American Express office, the financial district gave way to a tougher neighbourhood. Liz still felt as privileged as she had on the train, but now she felt as if she carried that privilege inside a bubble. Outside Eaton's, she skirted the break dancer, and the waiting hat, with barely a swivel of her eyes. At the intersection, she found herself shrinking from the slightest brush to her bag.

So many people crowded the sidewalk on the other side of the street that to pass she had to dodge among the traffic. People bobbed by in such a variety of clothes, from tie-died shirts to saris, that she felt she was in a

parody of the business district. Here, people seemed to dress as though the only way to fit in was to dress as though they did not care about fitting in at all. When she discovered that the leaflet she'd just accepted, thinking it political material, was merely advertising, she scowled and wished she could drop it and care as little about being a citizen as the litter around her suggested everyone else had.

She walked by a leather store, its windows displaying harnesses and whips, then by an arcade that flashed, "Girls! Girls! Girls!" A man slouching against the ticket-booth hissed at her, and for a while, she feared he was following. She checked behind, but there were too many faces to be sure she was safe. A taxi slowed and followed her, surmising from her body language she supposed, that she might want a lift. She couldn't help the irrational conviction that the driver was trying to humiliate her. For her empty pockets? For her timidity? She clutched her bag and kept her eyes ahead.

She was starting to feel weary, even frightened. But when she looked ahead, just bodies as far as she could see. A woman in a veil slammed into her. Not even an "Excuse me," she thought. There... was that a tug on her bag? Liz shoved at the body--whoever it was--and only afterwards did she turn to apologize to what turned out to be a worried-looking Hispanic man. Block after block of it. What was

wrong with these people? she wondered. Did none of them care enough to look one another in the eye? She tried to fight back at herself by exhorting herself to be proud of living in a multicultural society--though she'd always hated the phrase. But when the cab that had been tailing her unrolled a window and the cabbie called, "No smile at me, sexy lady?" she exploded--inwardly. Before she did, though, she made sure she'd picked out a nearby likely-looking man to whom, if necessary, she could run.

Finally the foot traffic began to thin. Two men in suits walked by talking intently, though not so intently that they did not give way when she passed. At last she was back among people whose reactions she could predict; people who, above all, could always be counted on to act with awareness of others. She paused to let a woman in a kilt revolve out a door; the woman smiled; Liz smiled, tremulously, back.

As was perhaps natural for a teacher of rhetoric, Liz thought a lot about community; how it should be; how it was. She was a follower of Aristotle. She admired his notion that the only way people could become fully human was in each other's company. And what could be a better way to transform people than the act of discussion, itself? Only by debating, contending--throwing one's weight on one side or the other of the dissension of the day--could people practise being fair. Why not assert that people's longing

for justice was the essence of the human? How far could any soul develop, left to a lifetime alone, say, on Mars?

Perhaps this view of human nature attracted her because it located the essence of the human not in something that depended on gender or age, but on something that at least as far as she could see was present in all people, no matter from what historical period, what culture, what place.

She could just imagine what her friends would think of her willingness to hold herself to such a conception--let alone to its attendant, necessary, willingness to judge. But what else could an ideal be but a yardstick? Certainly she had always included her own behaviour among that which needed to be judged. Even to make the statement that there should be no yardsticks at all was to make a normative statement. And surely, even her friends would have to admit that something was amiss in finding themselves slammed, bumped and jostled on their way down a public street. Surely even her friends couldn't think that the populace in a fine simulation of Brownian motion was all that could be expected of public life?

What would Flora Wu say if Liz asked her what she believed was the essence of the human? But that was just it, Liz thought. Liz doubted Flora would have much to say. That was why Liz felt teaching was important. After all, what else was teaching if not the awakening of her students' moral sense? Rhetoric, the subject she taught, was the most

important subject of all.

Rhetoric: public writing. Of course, back where democracy started, in ancient Greece, power was negotiated not by means of the written word, but by speech. But what was so wrong with the necessity of having to persuade others to one's views by means of writing? What did it mean to write? Writing didn't just mean being able to compose clear sentences. It meant understanding how to reduce one's opinion to a single, unambiguous statement. It meant knowing how to back up that statement with evidence. It meant understanding what constituted evidence. How best to arrange the evidence. How to foresee, and forestall, the objections a reader might present. Liz thought that learning rhetoric--because it meant accepting one's identity as a member of the community--meant learning to become a human being.

Perhaps that's what scared her the most about Flora's allegation. If Flora had understood what Liz was teaching, she couldn't possibly have accused Liz of failing her for reasons of race. Liz believed she was simply doing what Aristotle had taught: calling forth the universal yearning to help make the world more just. As far as she could see, the whole point of this enterprise undermined whatever significance might be seen to lie in the shape of a person's eyes or the colour of a person's skin.

She would have expected that her students would have

trusted her at least enough to have waited until they saw what she had to teach, before lashing out. She knew that Flora wasn't even skilled enough to have written that letter of complaint.

Liz looked around. The woman in the kilt had long passed, though the concourse door out of which she had come continued to revolve. Liz had almost reached her destination; the sky was already paling. But she was no longer in a mood to go home. She told herself that dusk did come earlier in October. She ducked into the door.

She was overcome by the timelessness of the place as soon as she'd entered. She sought out the florist's where she'd once bought roses, one Valentine's Day; the Scottish shop, still without its fall sweaters; the shoe store, still with those pretty slippers a size too small. Everything was peaceful, orderly, in its expected places. Even the air smelled of childhood; of floor-wax and Eccles cakes. She drifted along, delighting in not thinking about anything. But when she turned towards what she thought was the exit, the unfamiliar appearance of what waited before her left her dismayed. Then she saw that all that had happened was that time in here had passed, after all. Between her and what did prove, indeed, to be the exit, waited a new display.

Earrings. Millions of earrings. But these were not just any old earrings; she had once peered at work like this under museum cases. And not just one or two designs, but

thousands and thousands of them. For an instant she hesitated, remembering her worn heels and the tiny tear at the back of her skirt that people would be able to scrutinize if she bent over the display. A moment later, she'd forgotten everything, even her bag.

She stared. Winking arrows, tiny hearts, miniature sprays of flowers. She thought, some of these were replicas of originals over three thousand years old. She wiped away the smudges on the glass left by other people's hands. What beauty. What age. To even consider these in terms of money seemed wrong.

The saleswoman appeared on the other side of the counter. Liz hesitated. She was still trying to pay off her bills from last summer. By rights, her financial situation was so hopeless that she should still be in Montreal. Perhaps it was the simple recognition of the unmanageability of her financial position that changed her mind, but the next moment she found herself indicating the pair of earrings that, as it were, selected themselves. She clipped the black and white glass flowers set in gold--a modern version of cloisonne--to her ears, and replaced her credit card in her wallet. Smiling to herself, she joined the throng of shoppers revolving out the doors. She looked up. Still Friday, she thought; only a quarter to five.

Nick's apartment was cool and peaceful. The two huge

paintings faced each other across the carpet: one of a light shining into a pool, the other of an abstractly rendered dancer, in browns and blacks. The table rose against the light like a dark lily. On the table rested the crystal bowl; as usual, nothing was in it. He'd told her once that it was the only thing he'd taken with him when he'd left his marriage. She'd dreamed of him after that, running out of a burning house, holding it above him through the flames. Furthest off, stretched the wall of windows. The tip of a skyscraper floated, like a moored dirigible, outside. The place reminded her of a movie set. The room was silent. "Nick?" she called.

She turned and fastened the bolts to the three locks. Silence. Still, it was only just after five; she shouldn't expect him for a few minutes yet. She kicked off her shoes and filled the kettle for tea. But when she opened the fridge, she could see no milk. No milk--and nothing else. The interior was as blue and as sanitized as the interior of a fridge in a motel. Not a wilted green onion, not a speck of barbecue sauce. She swung on the door so long that a mist began to swirl below the crisper. Surely he couldn't be that broke, she thought, shocked. She carried her tea over to the windows, and leaned her head against the pane: such a cool pane. She closed her eyes.

The rush hour traffic sounded muted at this height. Accelerating engines rumbled below her; a streetcar's wheels

shrieked as the car braked. A siren rose; another joined it, out of synch. Distantly, so distantly the sound arrived in gusts, the bleat of a fire-engine horn.

She gave a breath and opened her eyes. The light seemed too bright, every object too sharp-edged. Beyond the nearby roofs soared the towers of the financial district. The steel and glass spires were pink in the after-light. Beyond the towers, the blue island stretched into the even bluer expanse of lake. Distant clouds, a faint line of peach, hung over the horizon. Over the edge of the world gathered the night. The city rose before her, each component clear-edged; each component distinct. Yet, paradoxically, the very comprehensibility of what lay before her suggested its opposite. Suddenly the city seemed all concealment. The clock struck five-thirty. Where, she wondered, was Nick?

She gazed downward. From her position here, thirty-seven floors above the ground, the College and Yonge intersection was so microscopic that she could block the whole thing behind the handle of her tea mug. Extending from its centre were lines of what, on inspection, proved to be tiny cars. A straggle of dots marked her old streetcar stop. She'd waited there every night the two winters she'd lived in this city. How strange to think that all the nights she had been waiting down there, Nick might have been up here looking down, just as she was doing now.

She lifted her mug as though the tea's taste might comfort her. She'd managed to forget those old nights. At least she thought she had forgotten--that is, until the moment she first peered down from here. All she'd had to keep her warm had been that old ski-jacket. She'd been ashamed of its increasingly filthy cuffs. But filthy or not, the cuffs had had to be rolled down. Not that even with them beyond her fingers she'd been anything less than numb.

Passing male bums must have thought she was a fellow-bum, an ex-psychiatric patient, perhaps. Liz had always stood as close as she could to the other women who waited on that corner: old women, immigrant women, poor women. Too often, though, no other women had stood there at all. She'd made a great play of looking down the street as though she saw the streetcar coming. She could still remember how urgently she'd willed its light to appear.

She sipped her tea and replaced the straggle of dots with the new blue cupolas of the police station. She rarely saw any policemen go in or out of this building, but gazing down at its rooftops like this always made her feel secure. Last summer, when her parents had expressed concern at her moving in with a man they'd yet to meet, she'd mocked what she'd felt was the hopelessly old-fashioned nature of their priorities by informing them that the police station was right next door. "I could lean out right now and spit

on it," she'd announced. Her parents lived three thousand kilometres away. That they had seemed reassured by this remark left her even more depressed.

Not that she really could have leaned out and spit on it. Nick's windows did not open--and a good thing too. He kept saying that if they'd opened, he would have thrown himself out of them. She'd heard of Depression bankers jumping from their towers, but despite all he'd told her, she could never quite bring herself to believe his finances were as bad as that. Then again, he did refuse to keep alcohol in the house; he said that if he kept it, he'd drink whatever was there at once. She couldn't help thinking that the real reason he didn't stock alcohol was because he couldn't afford it. But to think this was to move to thoughts of his empty fridge, and the last thing she wanted to remember was that. She found herself kneeling beside her bag, still where she'd left it, in the middle of the bedroom rug. Arranging the mickey on the kitchen counter so that it looked casually placed seemed to take even longer than it had last Friday.

Lights had begun to gleam within the office building across the street. As the night grew, these lights would intensify to reveal deserted cubicles, dark word processor screens, still phones. Liz had never seen a soul in this building. All day, it mirrored clouds and sky. She stared through the thinning walls. The place was spooky. She was

reminded of a stack of stage-sets, waiting for actors who never arrived.

The telephone's ringing jarred the room. The shrilling repeated. Where was the answering service? Again. Again. She knew she wasn't supposed to answer it when he wasn't here. Finally, though, she couldn't help herself.

"Liz?" Nick asked.

She so rarely heard him sound uncertain that she couldn't help keeping him wondering by uttering only a laugh. Then, turning to gaze at the darkening spires, she asked, "Where are you?"

"At Wisentrop." She could tell from the way he answered that he was not in a mood to be teased. He was at another of his offices, further down the waterfront. Her gaze travelled across the window, along the wall, into the nearby painting.

"Listen, I'm going to be late."

Late? She stared so hard at the painting that she forgot what it was.

"Liz?"

She did not feel angry. In fact, she felt relief. "Take your time," she said, then immediately wished she could have unsaid it. He was so unsettled these days. She never knew what he was going to interpret as a slight.

"Hang on." She heard the rumble of his voice; heard someone else's raised in a question. Then a bump as he

removed his palm. He was chuckling; far off, she could hear laughter. "I'm with Al for an emergency drink." He gave a light little laugh. A mocking laugh? she wondered. But he gave her no time to find out. "Have fun." Certainly he said the word, "good-bye," sounding contented.

She listened to the dead air for a while before she put down the phone. She was not disturbed he hadn't properly explained his delay, or why it had to happen now. She was relieved that at this short notice a first meeting with his best friend, Al, had not been suggested. What was bothering her, then? She padded into the bedroom and spent far too much energy digging out her toiletries kit from her bag.

The bulbs above the bathroom mirror cast her cheekbones in shadow. She turned sideways to admire her waist, now, no wider than a hand-span. Thirty-two years old, she thought, and only now, for the first time, looking the way she wanted. She spent a lot of time hunting for her lipstick, and even more time applying it.

She rummaged for a kleenex to adjust her lips. She halted at the sight of her eyes. What she was feeling was guilty, she thought. But why feel guilty about how much she enjoyed herself here? That view from her old Toronto rooming house had been of a shabby commercial building with a dry cleaner's sign on top; the dry-cleaner's sign, "Hotsy," had shone all night. Her wall, her dreams, had all been stained red. She'd had to stand on tip-toes just to

see the sky.

She blotted her lips, barely inspecting the heart-shaped mark before she threw the kleenex away. Yet she'd never been overawed by Nick's money. When, that first date, he'd told her the size of his inheritance, she'd just shot back that she had money coming to her, too. What she was to inherit was not sizeable--at least not by his standards--but after she had told him, she noticed he started opening doors for her. She found it hard, after that, when he spoke of family servants, not to add word of her old nanny--or when he spoke of ski chalets and yachts, to keep from dropping mention of her family's "places." Of course, the cottages and the ski-chalets had only been borrowed; the nanny, kept only six months. But what of that? She'd never seen any house equal to the one in which she'd grown up. Every room was a floor-to-ceiling vista of ocean and mountains. In truth, that view was her only inheritance. One day, another person could be counted on to pay money, an astounding amount of money she'd always thought, for a sight that she'd grown up valuing--or at least trying to keep valuing--for other reasons.

The living room stretched through the mirror behind her. The lines of the table looked particularly graceful in the dimness. What was that amount of paint, of mahogany worth? she wondered. But that was to think like someone else, she thought--like the kind of person she refused to

be. Liz had always been impressionable, confronted by beauty. She supposed the prospect of it--its immutability; its uncontestability--reassured her. Indeed, she thought, the only reason this table was even here for her to admire, today, was because other people, people stretching back through who knows how many generations, had seen the same thing to admire in it that she had.

That view out her family windows marked her more than she might have thought. What else was she supposed to conclude from her observation--that no one had ever turned from the sight with anything less than awe--than that all people were born with the same innate receptivity to beauty? Hence, the same innate receptivities to everything else? From this, she found the step short to concluding that all people were born with all the same capacities. Capacities for what, exactly? For truth, kindness, loyalty, fairness--she'd never been clear about the specifics. She supposed, the kinds of things she'd learned in her philosophy class.

Her father had talked a lot about money when she'd been little. How was she, at that age, to know he wasn't right? She'd gone to school and repeated what she'd heard him say. Her schoolmates had hated her. Only later, much later, had she discovered they'd had a point. Liz never connected her somewhat Jacobin sentiments with her feelings about her father. She couldn't believe the way the two of them could look out the family windows and see such opposite things.

She saw confirmation that all human beings were, in the important ways, alike; he saw confirmation that he was better than everyone else. As he used to point out, not many other people had the cash to buy a view like this. And the reason he, of all of them, had the cash? As he liked to put it, he had better genes than other people.

A gene for luck? A gene for being born when he did? A gene for coming to maturity after the Second World War? A gene--even--for the fact that it was electrical engineering, his profession, that had turned out to be the one in demand after the Second World War?

The more she scoffed, the greater grew his desire for her approval. He even began waiting for her to come home at night. But no matter how late she managed to persuade her date to stay out, when they parked outside the house, the kitchen windows still blazed. Sometimes she even imagined running right through the hall and up the stairs. What prevented her was not so much not knowing her father wouldn't have thought of stopping her, as the rebukes she knew she would hear from her mother the next day. Liz was selfish; Liz was inconsiderate--or, most stinging of all--Liz was not grown up. Liz had taken a long time to realize her mother had been resorting to the only tools she believed at her disposal to maintain what was, admittedly, a financially rewarding marriage. Perhaps, too, Liz felt guilty at having started to spend evenings with men--men who

were not, after all, her father. She still sometimes felt confused by the memory of her father's yearning for her.

And so, for not entirely clear motives, she'd hesitated after she'd hung up her coat. She was kept in the kitchen so long that she used to note the city lights winking out, one after the other. He'd poured out tale after tale of how his colleagues were betraying him, of how his bosses didn't appreciate him, of how his wife--"your mother," he said--of how "your mother" no longer understood him. Every evening ended the same way. The thunk of the bottle hitting the bottom of the garbage can; that final, gooey, good-night hug; his protestations that it was she who had saved him.

Bastard, Liz thought bitterly. She dropped her lip-pencil back in her case. Not until she'd come away to Toronto had she realized how angry she'd felt. Not that she'd ever told him. Someday, she thought. Someday. But not yet.

And really, she thought, she hadn't done that badly. She'd arrived wanting to do something good for the world. But she'd soon found that charities were only interested in her if she were willing to work for free. She still didn't like to recall the number of times she'd gone home to dine solely on potatoes. But then had come the temping jobs with Mr. Martin, and after that, her idea that she might teach. She must have done well enough last year in graduate school, because the Department had asked her back to teach again.

Of course, life was never without its problems. Liz was terrified of this second year of graduate school--keeping her job depended on keeping up her marks. Liz had almost failed the graduating paper she'd had to write, years before, for her undergraduate degree. She'd decided to challenge the conventional explanations for the fall of the Roman Empire. Who knows what, even then, had been troubling her subconscious, but already she knew--and with certainty--that the fall of a society wasn't anything like the physical collapse most historians described it as. Most institutions kept functioning; most people carried on. She couldn't help thinking that the historians equated "collapse" with waves, toppling masses, tidal imagery, and other fanciful tropes because the thought had never occurred to them that the world in which they found themselves living might be, similarly, at risk.

Ultimately, though, her task had come to seem useless. What was the point of presenting her opinion? She was just an undergraduate student; she couldn't expect anyone to care what she said. How could they be expected to? She knew writing a graduating essay was considered merely an exercise. But how could she find it in her to complete her essay when she knew that not merely she, but anyone reading it, wasn't supposed to care?

She knew that, eventually, if she persisted, she would, one day, have acquired enough degrees to have earned the

right to be taken seriously. But by whom? She tried to tell herself that the only people any professor had any right to expect would pay attention were other professors-- or rather, not all other professors, only the handful of those working in one's own field. She couldn't help feeling that this kind of audience was not enough. Wasn't the real point to somehow be making one's discoveries available to society? No wonder she'd had such a hard time finishing her honours paper.

Sometimes she worried that the only reason she'd come back to school was because she'd grown to value even the prospect of an audience of one. The trouble was that for this degree, too, she was expected to write papers. Her first one was due in two weeks. Of course, she still hadn't started it.

But even as she struggled with her doubts about an academic career, she found herself unexpectedly rewarded in another area. For something marvellous had happened when she'd stepped before that first room of students. She knew--who better?--what it felt to be unsure. She had looked down those rows of timid faces and had taken to the job as though she'd been born to it. She couldn't help seeing each of those faces as a light, a voice, a component in the same whole she, too, felt a part of. To teach them that each of them had an opinion, and that each of them had the responsibility to make it heard helped them all through the

weeks that followed--weeks of such seemingly little things that, taken on their own, those little things would have appeared meaningless: transitions, sentence mechanics, and, of course, syllogisms, non-sequiturs and false analogies.

She began to experiment with a new way to style her hair. And why shouldn't she think of her life as a sequence of false tries, with one thing turning up each time--like a life-rope, she thought--which led her through? Then she remembered the three pages, the staple in the corner, the memo from the Coordinator clipped to the front. She knew she was a good teacher. Her students told her, though she put less store in their remarks than in the consistently high marks they received on the university-wide final exam. And surely one part of being a good teacher--though not a very nice one--was failing papers that didn't meet the standard. Liz had meant that "F" to communicate only a message about the quality of the writing. She hadn't even thought about Flora's nationality; she would have considered such a thought unethical. "I see my students as equal," she wanted to call out. But who would hear? The letter had certainly seemed unequivocal. Then she thought, she'd gone to a lot of trouble to come here this weekend. No point beginning on that.

The apartment looked more peaceful than ever; pools of lamplight shone on the carpet. How lucky she'd been to have met Nick. Their story seemed like a fairy-tale. She'd

first seen him this past summer he'd showed up at Mr. Martin's office on one of his job-hunting visits. They'd exchanged only the most routine of office pleasantries, but she'd been so struck by his eyes--cat's eyes, she would have said then, though now she would have said that they were eyes that catalogued, eyes that remembered--that, months later, when she was given two tickets to Stratford, she'd found herself sneaking into Mr. Martin's office and stealing Nick's number from her boss's private book. It was behaviour that even at the time she'd recognized as completely unlike her.

She hadn't expected much from that day: nice weather, a pleasant companion. Little more. What with the long winter teaching and the even longer-seeming summer, typing, she'd been happy to take a single day for fun. She'd been surprised more than anything else when Nick had seemed attracted to her. When, ten days later, he'd asked her to move in here with him, she'd been completely astounded. She'd assumed the whole thing would blow over when she returned to Montreal after Labour Day. She'd been wrong, a mistake about which she felt increasingly glad.

Liz dropped her brush into her case with a click and turned from the mirror. She made herself another cup of tea and settled with it on the couch. It was dark now; the building across the street gleamed with its unnatural light. She knew that if she could see into those deserted offices,

a person over there could just as easily see in here. She seldom thought any more about how she and Nick might look, putting plates before each other or walking across the carpet. Or, to be more truthful, she did, but, for once, she didn't care.

She stretched out her legs to better recline into the cushions. The city lights sparkled in the darkness. How curious, she thought. She should feel visible in this apartment--but she didn't. Yet at school, jumbled in with everyone else, she felt more exposed than ever before in her life. Fellow graduate students seemed unfriendly. Faculty walked around her as though she wasn't there. She sometimes feared that if she forgot to wish the support staff "Good morning," no one would even remember that a "Professor Pendleton" worked there.

Really, Liz, she scolded, it's your own fault. She knew she was proud and shy. Sometimes she thought that the reason she got along so well with Nick was because he didn't seek to know much about her. Of course, she could tell him whatever she wanted. Only when left to himself did he forget to ask. She knew she should probably worry about his lack of curiosity but, considering the kind of term she was having, it was merely a relief.

She wondered again what was keeping him. What kind of emergency business could it be? Nick was the most secretive person she had ever met. At first she'd admired this

quality, calling it reticence; lately, though, it had started to worry her. What, for instance, was she supposed to make of his inability to sleep? Weekends recently, she'd woken to find the bed empty. She'd come upon him in the living room, chin on fist, gazing out at the city.

Poor Nick, she thought. He was in worse trouble even than she was. Not so long ago, he'd done things on a whim, like jet to a weekend party in Texas. Now he was selling his furniture for money. She looked around; and there wasn't much left. She wished she knew the illegal thing he'd done that had led the bank to fire him. The business community certainly seemed set against giving him any more chances. He had been looking for work for a year now. How much longer could he go on?

Last night, after she'd unlocked her door and dumped the remains of her long day on the table, she'd gone into the kitchen to heat coffee for the even longer night, marking, ahead. One minute she'd been trying to see through the front of the microwave, the next she was astonished to find herself flat on the floor. The ceiling was restful to look at, and the linoleum cool behind her neck. She continued to lie long after the microwave had beeped; after a while, though, she knew it wouldn't do. She dialled Nick's number in Toronto; she knew she was breaking their bi-weekly understanding by telling him she was coming down. But though she was all nerves while his line was ringing,

the instant she heard his voice, she was confidence itself.

Christ, she thought, what was it with them? She'd come down here this weekend because she needed him. And, though he didn't easily admit it, because she damned well knew he needed her too. This carefully careless air they kept up between them...if they did not get over it, it would destroy all they had. Yet whenever she was here, the clock ticked so loudly--this number of days, hours, minutes, until she had to return to her other life. What was their relationship to become? More to the point, what could it become? When would they have the time to find out?

She reached for the book she was planning to write the year's first essay on, Thackeray's Vanity Fair. But even after she'd found her page, the chattering voice would not go away. Sometimes she worried (to put it into her mother's words, for that was how she thought it) that she was getting away with murder. Getting away with murder? But why would she think that? She listened to the clock striking six. She tightened her lips and took the page from the top.

Perhaps an hour had passed when the three bolts rattled, one after the other. Nick came in so briskly she could hear the change rattling in his trenchcoat pockets. He was a short, dark-haired man in his early forties, handsome in such a generic way that she often mistook other men for him. "Hi!" he exclaimed, looking surprised to see

her. But even before he finished registering her smile and the speed with which she had risen to greet him, he was flipping off his coat, kicking off his shoes--each shoe giving a bang as it hit the back of the closet--and slamming the closet door in a single, practised gesture. "Guess what?" he exclaimed breezily--too breezily, she thought, for him to be quite believable--heightening the pause by clattering his pockets to the table; keys, she observed, four pennies, a package of breath-sweetening gum. He answered himself, sounding more surprised than anything else. "I just made five grand!" His shirt against her cheek smelled starchy sweet.

"It was that Maple Leaf deal," he explained, throwing himself into a chair. "Joe Gaynor, you remember, I told you, he was very nice to me when I was with the bank. He rang me this morning and told me they had a buyer. I met them for lunch, a very nice lunch. Joe paid--" he grimaced at the thought, "--of course.

"But when he named me his sum, I told him it was an insult. I told him, 'Fifty or nothing' and walked out. I mean, who does he think he is, that Dago jerk?

"Sorry Liz, but a Dago jerk is exactly what he is. He thinks he can get the better of us just because we all know he's in with the Mob. Well, today he tried it on me. I just laughed and walked out.

"To tell you the truth, I thought I had lost it," he

confessed, struggling with his tie. "But then just before five he called back to say his buyer would take it. I told him to call Al, and Al called back about six to say the deal was done.

"Five grand in less than an hour!" He tilted back his chair, hooked his thumbs in his belt and grinned.

She couldn't help taking him down a notch. And, indeed, at her observation, "You've got holes in your socks," he flashed a well-simulated look of chagrin.

Yet before her still posed, as it were, the question, for there he still sat, chair back, thumbs in belt, grinning. How much easier it would be, she thought, if she really could believe his stories. Not that his day hadn't happened just as he'd said it had. It was just that his stories always lacked some flavour she associated with reality. But how? Why?

Then she thought, why question? Already she was alive to the scent of him, to the touch of her stockings along her skin. She'd long known that her inability to get a fix on him was the root of her attraction.

And what attraction! She watched him release the top button of his shirt and collapse against the couch with a sigh. When he finally caught sight of the waiting mickey, he cried, "Scotch!" in so precisely the way she'd expected he would that she couldn't help congratulating herself a little. Really, she thought, a most fine-looking man.

He brought her a glass filled far too full. She sank into the cushions and, heroine-like, stretched out her legs. Lord knows what it was with them, but as soon as they were in the same room she could not help but invite flirtation. She felt like a girl in a movie, a movie where a tired Cary Grant, say, handed a drink to Doris Day.

She swirled the amber liquid in her glass and reflected on his story. A lot more rode on his words than he might be willing to admit. The Scotch fell back over itself in infinitesimally thin sheets. She kept her eyes on the liquid as she observed, "So you have money again, then."

She looked up at his ex-wife's name. As he always did when he mentioned Marcie, he made a sour face. "No, no, I owed Marcie...and I needed to cover Jim for a favour he did for me last month. No, it's all gone." He gave a hard little laugh. To warn her off? she wondered.

She watched him down his second drink in silence. Even more than her dismay at the money having gone, she felt shocked at his apparent unconcern. Did he really think she'd miss noticing the sleeplessness on his face? But all he did was look amused. The next moment, he stretched out, hooked his hands behind his head and shot back, "And how was your week?"

"My week?" For a few moments all she could think of was the way the material of his trousers folded around his thighs. She admired her stockings, their beautiful sheen,

as she displayed her leg this way and that. Then, with a start, she realized her body was betraying her. "My week?" she repeated. She didn't know what to say. Finally, a little irritated at herself, she resorted to ticking off items on her fingers. "In the past four days I have marked eighty papers, taught four lectures, seen twenty-two students for an hour each, dressed for and met the Director of Student Services to discuss the lecture he's asked me to give, attended four graduate seminars, read 500 pages of one of those enormous Victorian novels and slogged through a hundred more pages of holy pillaging and raping." She could hear the wail behind her words, the wail that, the more she tried to suppress it, the more audible it became.

His patent sympathy made going on even harder. All she managed was to mention that she'd run into her boss yesterday before the wail came again. Nick must have sensed far more of her distress than she'd intended because he laughed, a real laugh this time.

The holes in his socks emphasized the paleness of his skin. She wished she could accept herself as easily as Nick seemed to. As far as she was concerned, though, yesterday morning had been far from amusing. She had been standing in the Department office, just having read the Coordinator's letter which had been waiting in her box. Then the Coordinator, himself, was beside her, warbling some ancient song as he collected his mail. "She wore her little jacket

of blue. She wore her little jacket of blue. She wore--" Liz couldn't help wondering if he'd meant the song for her-- though it was more likely he'd just been reading a little too much Gerald Durrell on 1930's Corfu.

As soon as he'd swooshed the last paper into his arms-- a notice of the Annual Departmental Bake Sale, she couldn't help noticing--she found him regarding her with a look she couldn't decide whether was hurt or an amused. He peeked through his papers as though he'd forgotten what was in them. He teetered on his toes.

But all he'd said was that he'd heard she was growing some fine tomatoes.

Tomatoes?

Rarely had she seen a man become so lit up. This year, he told her, he'd planted Thompson Juicys. He was worried about them; they were late ripening. But then again, everybody else's were coming along slowly too. The Vice-Rector--who'd grown them for years--swore by a last dose of fish manure on Labour Day. Finally he'd teetered too far and, raising his stack of mail as if for balance, stared at the papers as if he were surprised to seem them there. He'd smiled at her politely. Too politely. For an instant, she had the mad conviction he'd forgotten who she was. Yet he'd clearly staged the encounter to communicate something. Thinking about it now, she blushed. Here she was teaching students to use this language she claimed they all shared,

listening to something that might as well have been gibberish.

Nick prompted her. "Well?"

"Oh, it was fine..." She trailed off.

He drew her feet into his lap. He murmured, "You work hard, you know." He began to trace a line along the arch of one foot. She watched as he touched the small hollow in the ankle; the knob above the hollow. He spoke no further, neither did he look up.

She bent forward and stroked his bowed head. His hair slipped through her fingers, fine and very soft. A tear slid down her cheek. Another tear. She cried for all she did not know how to say; she cried at finding herself crying, itself. She fought the Scotch, she fought the week's strain, but she couldn't help what she felt. But she didn't want her body to come alive like this under his hands. Blinking hard, she glared out the window.

The glass had become reflective. A man and a woman floated in a golden pool. The man sat on the couch, tie loosened, top button undone. A woman faced him; black and gold sparkled in her ears. The man looked down; the woman gazed after him. The window did not show the thing at which they gazed.

A winking light drifted through the woman's shoulder. The man and woman were no longer there. All she saw were lights: lights in lattices, lights in curves, lights random

and winking in the darkness. She thought, a thousand years from now, people will speculate about how this sight might have looked. She thought of the copper wire in the buildings, of the underground copper cable snaking out to those transformers in the suburbs. Somewhere, far off, nuclear plants hummed around the clock. Starlight. Man-made starlight. She searched beyond, but the darkness was complete.

Something about the woman's face reminded her of someone. What was it? She studied the face as though it were the face of a stranger. Suddenly she was reminded of those women she used to pass when she was still in her school uniform--those ageless, impeccably coiffed women who always seemed to be stepping out of expensive cars. They seemed sad, even damaged, though she couldn't have said why.

She used to see them at Whistler, calling after men with hearty names like "Harold" or "Will." They appeared in ski equipment she knew men half their age would have had difficulty controlling. Perhaps, since the men were buying, they really were at the mercy of whatever they were given. But why collude in the folly by wearing vision-reducing hats? Or lipstick? Or ski-suits so tight that every time they fell they would grow more cold, more wet? Liz watched them wobble from flat place to flat place with a contempt as enormous--had she only known it--as her fear.

She saw them, too, at lunch in the chalet, each

laughing and brilliant beside her man. Or arguing bitterly with one another in corners where they thought the men wouldn't see. Or stomping out of the ladies' toilets, their faces so sour with whatever they had just found out that they let the stall doors slam in the waiting women's faces. Liz used to buy her hotdog and nibble it while riding up the chair. But though she'd dressed like a tomboy and slalomed down the expert runs even more aggressively than the men, nowhere on the mountain had she turned out to be safe.

A fresh tear rolled down her cheek. She contemplated the couple in the window. She thought, her mother would not approve of the sight. Her mother had raised her for virginity, for a career, for a solitary life. Her mother always made her feel like being female was a thing to fear. She remembered the way the Coordinator had greeted her at the mailboxes. Suddenly she wondered whether his expression had been one not of amusement, but of disdain. Flora's first sentence returned to mind, "At the night, woman brushing her hairs, together, talke about a men she wishing on day marrys."

Nick's touch on her feet had ceased. He was studying her turned-aside face. She'd never seen him look at her so tenderly before. But by the time she'd turned to him, it was too late.

"Nice earrings." He spoke so casually that if she hadn't just caught his expression, she would never have

believed it had been there.

She blinked back fresh tears. "You like them?"

He dropped her feet with a bump. "Let's find dinner."

They came out to find raindrops falling. Nick clicked up his umbrella, circled one arm around her and held the umbrella to shelter them both. Liz regulated her step to keep his collar, such a fragrantly sandy-smelling collar, against her cheek. The air smelled fresh with rain.

Carleton Street was dark and velvety. Hookers, dressed improbably for the rain in crotch-high skirts, were reflected in the headlights. A slowing taxi splashed water over what even from this distance Liz could see were the most delicate of high-heeled shoes. The woman just bent to the car's window. Liz never knew what to think when she saw a prostitute. "Prostitute," she thought: her mother's word. Just now, the only thing she felt was a slightly abashed admiration. The woman must have felt her eyes because just before she got in the car she stared at her, a curiously impartial gaze.

Men loitered outside the taverns, thin men who watched the street, their hands hooked to their pockets. Liz peeked at one of these men over the safety of Nick's shoulder. His jeans hung on his hips and his once-red windbreaker was dark with dirt. She had the queer feeling she'd made him ashamed because, a moment later, he turned his back.

A voice called in their direction. Nick tightened his jaw and hurried her away. Their joined reflection skipped from piece of glass to piece of glass. Matched in height, apparel and stride, the two of them could have been an ad out of Vogue. But what were they advertising? Perfume? Credit cards? No, she thought suddenly, what they were advertising was themselves.

The eastbound College streetcar clattered by. She stared at the tired-looking faces silhouetted there. She, too, had looked out like that from behind the glass for two years. She'd never been able to decide whether she'd felt more imprisoned or more protected.

That old East End life seemed distant to her now. It shone in memory like starlight: too far off ever to go back to. But why would she want to go back to it anyway? Even when she'd lived there, she knew she didn't belong. She remembered the landlord, that sad-looking Hungarian man who had always been about the place. She came upon him, hammering at the pipes or thumbing through the mail. She thought him harmless when she rented the place. The day after she moved in, though, she found him at her door. He only accepted rent in cash, he announced. Why, then, had he let her write a cheque at all? Could he have been trying to lure her into becoming his tenant? But she'd hardly time to wonder before he had produced her cheque and ripped it in two. She tried to excuse him to herself by reminding

herself that he was Hungarian.

He was patently aware, though, that he was humiliating her. He'd seemed pleased enough by her middle-class manner when she'd been looking over the apartment. So what if this neighbourhood wasn't the sort of district people like her usually moved into? Could he really have assumed that, since she'd agreed to move in, she'd accepted she was asking for it?

"From now on, all payments will be in cash," he said. Everything about his tone suggested that he doubted her ability to keep paying. She would have found this kind of bullying laughable, had it not held just a little too much authority. After all, where else could she live? This apartment was the only place she had found she could afford.

Apparently, even for her to glare was considered insubordination. She found herself springing away from the touch of his sleeve. He seemed to believe she could be worked on for sexual favours. Because he had even more power than she recognized? Or because she was a sucker--and didn't know it? He must have been satisfied by what he saw flicker in her eyes because he added in an seemingly joking manner, "Of course, you can always make up the rent in other ways--if you find yourself short, that is." He turned away, laughing.

She cried for a while on her side of her door. Only, finally, did she settle to think. She decided to complain

to the Rental Board. But when she sat to write, she realized she was not sure what, exactly, she had to complain about. Financial tricks? Sexual intimidation? Disrespect? None of them fit. Finally, she decided to talk to the other tenants. Perhaps they would be able to show her what she was missing.

She knocked first at the upstairs back. A swarthy-skinned man--he looked Pakistani--peered at her through the chain. He may not have understood much English, but the moment he heard the landlord's name, he slid back the lock. The suite was empty of furniture except for a giant TV. Five or six more brown-skinned men tumbled out of the bedroom. The prospect of six men napping in a single room, here in Toronto, was as surprising to her as the sight of her seemed to them. When the man who'd let her in finally grasped that she was not the landlord's agent he began to back her towards the door. His man's shaking head was the last thing she saw before the door shut.

The tenant in the attic suite welcomed her. She'd met him the day she'd been moving in. He'd been lugging beer from his bundle-buggy up the four flights of stairs. He explained that he and his girlfriend, who was ironing in the kitchen, were both taxi dispatchers and that, today, they both had the day off. Liz wouldn't have talked as freely if she hadn't heard the woman's voice. When Liz had finished her story, the taxi dispatcher just laughed. Liz couldn't

tell whether he laughed because her indignation left him discomfitted or because it seemed a joke.

He and his girlfriend exchanged a glance. His girlfriend set herself to explain. Liz shouldn't feel threatened by the landlord. He was probably in worse trouble than any of them. Emory--"Emory," she called him--was in financial trouble. He'd mortgaged everything he owned to buy this second house. One bad cheque from a tenant, and the bank would give up on him. As for his "sexual harassment,"--the woman spoke the phrase with distaste--apparently Emory's wife was a cold, unfeeling woman. The female taxi-dispatcher seemed to imply that Liz was wanting--in strength? in compassion? if Liz let herself feel offended.

Liz couldn't help thinking that these two wanted her to see things their way not because they were certain they were right, but because they couldn't bear dissent. They looked hurt when she turned down their invitation to cop flicks and beer. They seemed worried about her. She avoided them after that.

Days passed before Liz could find out whether anyone was even living downstairs. The downstairs tenant turned out to be a young, moustachioed man. He explained that, since he worked nights at the local mental hospital, he didn't awaken until just before his shift.

He listened to her story with a look that changed from

surprise to reserve. When she'd finished, he regarded her with suspicion. He seemed to think that she, not the landlord, was the trouble-maker. But why should she want to cause trouble? Unlike the landlord, she was the one who had to live here. Liz wondered if the security guard had ever met a woman who spoke up for herself like this. The more reasonable she became, the more scornfully he replied. Finally, he asked her where she came from. She must think she came from somewhere to think she could get away with being so uppity. "Uppity"--his word. Liz couldn't quite believe what he was telling her: that whatever the code of values she might hold, those values were not appreciated around here.

In the end, she didn't send the letter--though she frequently wrote it in her head. What stopped her was not so much the thought that she didn't have the cash to back herself up in face of a legal counter-challenge, as the thought that no one in the house would have supported her. All that easy talk with which she'd grown up--talk over the dinner table--talk with the neighbours. How easy to talk about how every citizen should act as if his or her voice mattered when the people required to do the counting lived as nearby as the other side of the rose trellis.

She felt like she'd betrayed herself--more than herself. She knew she was a coward. But what could she do? She did not believe she had the right to try to change

anything, alone. She didn't speak another word to anyone in that house the two years she'd lived there. In the end, her only protest was leaving.

She and Nick had walked by the place last summer. They'd been on their way to some restaurant by the lake she'd always wanted to try. The place had looked more peaceful than she remembered it. Only a couple of garbage bags blocked the front porch. A power cord snaked out the front door and under a Corvette, which rested on blocks in the driveway, hood up. Out of the house came the sound of vacuuming.

A native boy, whom she recognized as the security guard's foster child, came out, tossing a catcher's mitt. Alerted by the boy's stiffening stance, the security guard came out and stationed himself by the boy's shoulder. The two stared at her. They must have recognized her. They had recognized her--she could see that they had. Finally, not certain what else to do, she'd called out a greeting. Perhaps the real reason she no longer felt afraid was because Nick was standing beside her.

She was surprised at her relief in speaking to the security guard again. They hadn't exchanged more than a glare since that first fateful conversation. But when she turned to introduce Nick, her patter failed. Nick wasn't beside her. She stared at him on the sidewalk. His wrist glinted as he checked his watch.

Warmth flushed her cheeks. For a moment, she hesitated between the two men. An instant later, she was letting Nick guide her down the street.

She and Nick had never talked about it. She didn't count his remark that the lot was too small to make it worth buying as an investment. At first, she was a little piqued by his silence. She knew, though, that all he had done was to see the place in the same way that she, in her heart, had always seen it too: a not very well kept house; an even less well kept porch. As for the people on the porch...well!

Still, she couldn't help thinking of her godmother. She remembered how her godmother had folded her hands neatly before she set herself to speak. So what if her godmother affected deafness when anyone brought up anything unpleasant? It had taken Liz years to learn what her godmother had been trying to teach.

At first, she didn't think she'd ever be able to behave the way her godmother seemed to expect. Liz could still remember how hostile she'd felt when she'd found she couldn't chat without rattling her teacup. Or how imperfect she'd felt when she found she forgot to leave the last cake for someone else.

Someone else, she thought. Her godmother's whole ethos was based on the assumption that one was always part of a community. If the purpose of social life was to conduct everything one did, from such small things as giving a

birthday present to such large things as having a love affair, so that one created as much pleasure for all the parties concerned--so that one kept the pain to a minimum--then her godmother was, indeed, a civilized person. It never occurred to Liz that she might have lost something in submitting to this process. Liz had become so skilled at avoiding certain feelings that she was no longer aware these feelings were even there.

The tail-light of the streetcar dwindled and became one of the lights of the night. No, she thought, she could never go back to that East End life now. Then she thought of the events of the past week, of Flora's allegation that Liz had failed her because of her racial background.

What happens if I lose my job?

A car splashed by them, drenching them. She let her head weigh on Nick's shoulder. He must have sensed something of her mood, because he murmured, not sounding like he expected an answer, "Not much further now." After a little, he reached up and with the back of his hand caressed her cheek: once, twice.

The restaurant was humid and stuffy. She followed Nick as he thrust through the crowd. The room turned out to be nothing but a long low-lit box extending to swinging doors through which she could see a man in a chef's hat. She

looked around. Couples. Nothing but couples. Couples flirting, couples arguing, even--she watched, fascinated--a nearby couple dropping food into one another's mouth. Table by table, each under an individual basketwork shade, a pair of heads shone. The waiting line-up watched from along the wall. Everybody seemed to be in their late thirties or early forties. The talk seemed a little too lively, the smiles a little too bright. She could just imagine her godmother's shudder at the sight.

She watched Nick's eyes quarter the restaurant. He was the most watchful man she had ever met. How odd, she reflected; the only reason they'd met was because he had misunderstood her standing vis-a-vis Mr. Martin. He'd assumed that, since she was Mr. Martin's only member of staff, she would have, as he put it so delicately, "influence." "You mean, because you thought I was his lover?" she'd asked. How she had laughed! She couldn't possibly take his assumptions about the world seriously; just laughing them off, though, left her feeling tremendously sophisticated.

Sophisticated now, she hailed the head waiter. She needed to know that, when the bill came, she would be able to take care of the evening's single practical consideration. When she returned with the bad news, Nick didn't seem to fall in with her crestfallen mood. "There's a bank machine around the corner," he suggested.

Fascinated, far too fascinated by his attitude to do anything but grin and run, she sprinted through the rain as though she really could go fast enough to remain untouched by the raindrops. She faced the cash gate aware only, now, of the Scotch hitting her stomach. She crumpled her balance sheet without looking at it. At another time, she would think about how she had just chipped into her rent. Just now, all she could think of was the restaurant; Nick's body; Nick's smell.

Nick was still in the lineup when she came back. He stationed himself directly behind her. His jacket was open, she could feel it about her shoulders. She thought of her earrings, of how, to whomever was looking, they would sparkle and flash. She rubbed her head against his shoulder; at his tremor, she began, very delicately--for nobody of any importance was looking, she thought--to nudge him with her ass.

As soon as they were seated, he sandwiched her hand between the two of his and gave her an enchanted look.

"So how are your financial 'pies'?" she teased. She felt like a woman of the world. Had this really been a movie, she would have put her feet on the table.

He told her all over again about his afternoon. Then he squeezed her hand. "Al's glad you've come down this weekend," he remarked.

So Al was glad, she thought lazily. She wasn't the

slightest bit surprised. If her business partner owed her as much as it sounded like Nick did Al, she, too, would have been glad he was seeing a woman whom, she had no doubt, he had advertised as a financial prize.

He must have misunderstood what had made her laugh. "Seriously," he insisted, "you've got an ally in Al."

"An ally?" she needled.

He gave her just the sort of grin as though he really did believe she was right to hang on to her mistrust. But he must also have caught her tiny smile. "No, really," he sparkled. "Al's on your side. And not just Al.... All my friends think I should stay with you."

He gave her such a well-simulated impression of being dazed by his good fortune that she couldn't help grin. He'd told her this kind of thing so many times that maybe even Al and his wife, Astrid, did approve. She knew from past stories that Nick had had many women; that he'd broken up with them for reasons that sounded like whims. He'd once boasted he'd broken up with one woman after hearing an unfamiliar male voice on her answering machine; with another, when he'd met her where he hadn't been expecting to, on a downtown street. He never seemed to realize he had troubles with women. No wonder his friends were on his side, she thought. If only she could be sure that his friends' encouragement was the real reason he refused to introduce her to them. His friends' encouragement? she

wondered. Or something else? If only there wasn't this damned money between them. She stared at the condensation on the side of her glass. But if he thought she would betray her ambitions that easily.... She gave him a limpid look. "That's very kind of them."

Now it was his turn to look caught out. She sometimes wondered if the real reason he admired her was that she wouldn't let him get away with anything. For a moment, they shared a grin of perfect understanding. But the next moment, she found herself asking with an unexpected rush of helplessness: "What's Astrid like?"

Not that she hadn't been told many times before.. She asked because the subject was safe; because, since none of this really mattered, she might as well ask whatever she wanted. Nick, himself, seemed to consider Astrid highly regarded.

Nick laughed, that somehow defensive laugh that had been one of the things to first warm her to him--a laugh that cracked a little at the end, that contained something high and shrill. But why would her uttering that question leave him embarrassed? she thought as she watched him dive for her cigarettes. He seemed surprised at her lack of reaction. "Astrid's got class," he announced. Then, with a look of mockery and daring, as if a little afraid of what he did, he explained--she could have sworn, with a note of invitation--"She did catch Al."

"Catch Al?" she repeated, marvelling at his complacency; he couldn't really have missed being aware he was speaking in a way that was thirty years out of date? But he must have been unaware, because even when she gave him this chance to cover himself, all he did was laugh, "Oh, yes, make no mistake about it; 'catching' him is exactly what she did." One birthday, he went on, Astrid told Al she was arranging a surprise. The day before his birthday, he received a dozen roses with a card telling him what time the next day to be downstairs. He found a stretch limo waiting, with a bucket of champagne inside. He got out in front of what turned out to be Boccione's, which he found she had rented, just for the two of them, for the evening. At midnight, in came a team of strippers with a birthday cake; after the show, Astrid gave him a gold tie clip and a Rolex. "No," Nick chuckled, "Astrid was scary to watch."

"My uncle always warned me women were ruthless. I never believed him, though--that is, until I saw Astrid on the make."

But Liz had no eyes for how ruefully he laughed, or for how, with a slight but distinct embarrassment, he banged out his cigarette. All she could think about was about what she'd just heard. Rented restaurants? Strippers? Gold tie clips? In the world in which she'd grown up, people gave each other things like Colvilles, or Boston Museum of Natural History study trips to Siberia. Not, that is, that

they'd ever tell.

She pitied him for his lack of self-confidence. She thought of the day he'd tried to impress her with his family album. Admirals, he'd waved his hand. Horse breeders. Millionaires. Heiresses. She did not look at the gingerbread mansions or the power yachts. Only the faces in front of them. He seemed surprised at her comment that none of the faces looked very happy. He seemed even more surprised when she did not react to his remark that he was from a Mayflower family (only because, until a trip to the library the next day, she hadn't known what that was). But despite her fascination at his allowing her to enter this extraordinary world of his, a world that she would not have believed existed had someone merely told her about it, his story left her feeling deflated. Why? she wondered. Then she realized that the very fact that his stories had nothing to do with her world troubled her, even bored her.

She laughed and let the conversation go. Nick, too, seemed to grow more easy because, when he saw the waiter beside him, he helped the man with the plates. He served her first, and generously. Her prawns smelled delicious but she found she couldn't eat. She took his hand and smoothed the small black hairs on its back until they all ran in one direction. "Not all women are ruthless."

Two more plates arrived, one mounded with noodles, the other with tiny rolls. She served him and then herself;

they set to eating in silence. The noodles were well prepared, garnished with egg and coconut. The food made her feel steadier, more energetic. She realized she hadn't eaten since she'd been on the train.

The room was growing noisy. Somewhere behind her, a woman jumped to her feet. Liz turned to see a woman, hands outstretched across what even from where she was sitting she could see was a daringly low-cut top. The woman smiled down indulgently, but at whom Liz could not see. Liz swung back to Nick, who was still comfortably eating. His eyes glinted with flecks of green. She stared at the lovely hollow in his throat, the bristly shadow along his jaw that meant he needed a shave. Suddenly she wondered, why me? He could have had any woman he wanted.

He'd even intimated as much on their first date. Only much later had she learned that in the three years since his marriage had ended he'd dated what he considered an embarrassing number of women--his word, "embarrassing." He still sometimes talked of his break-up with Lauren. He'd boasted that he and Lauren had made such a beautiful pair that heads had turned when they'd entered a room. Two of Lauren's paintings still hung in the apartment. Liz did not know why the two of them had broken up. She gave up. Who knows why he'd decided she was for him?

The waiter put down a platter piled with skewers of meat. "How's Mr. Martin?" she asked for lack of anyone

better. Work with anyone long enough and one became fond of them, she thought. They'd once even fought about the exact spot in the corner of the envelope to glue postage stamps.

Nick looked up. "I saw him this week. I think he misses you in there."

He turned to her with the next plate, curried eggplant. "You know, if you play your cards right, you could have a full-time job with him."

Why did he always talk as though she'd be happy with a typing career? "I already have a job."

He waved that away. "Philip Martin is an important man."

But as she served herself, she couldn't help thinking of Flora and the Dean's investigating committee. Then again, maybe she wouldn't have a job soon. She asked Nick what he had seen him about.

She didn't know Nick had gold properties. She must have looked surprised because he said, "Yeah, up in Timmins. But they're about to lapse unless we can get some drilling done on them. I suggested he might be interested in paying."

"Was he?"

He swore so fiercely, her fork paused halfway to her mouth. At least as far as she knew, that Indonesian project had been shelved years ago. How could he think Mr. Martin owed him a job? No one owed anyone a job. Besides, Mr.

Martin was already giving him whatever little work he had-- the only person still doing that in town.

Nick commented with his mouth full, "I told him I was thinking of suing."

The waiter was lifting away her empty Scotch glass. She waited until the dishes were removed. Suing? She thought, Nick must be mad. Not that she said anything. What happened if all she'd assumed about the world was wrong? Almost too afraid to speak, she asked, "What did he say?"

Nick laughed, "He said I was welcome to waste my money if I wanted to."

Liz felt what was, really, a surprisingly strong relief. She waited until the waiter had slipped a new ashtray on the table before she said, "Maybe I will go and see him one of these days."

Nick scared her, and she didn't know why; to feel so uncertain left her feeling angry. She kept feeling that she should protect herself, but the only protection she knew, writing off his words as simply the result of ignorance, didn't seem like enough.

She thought of the final photograph in the album: of a greying man, beside a pool; next to him the Prime Minister. Nick even seemed to think his uncle was against him, the man who had cared for him since his parents had been killed in a car accident, shortly after his birth. Nick complained that

the only people who'd ever talked to him were the maids. He even complained that those summer jobs his uncle had obtained for him--one on a tall ship; another at an Australian winery--were simply devices to remove him from town. Yet what about all those tales of Mr. James driving him to rugby practices, or of lending him the family chalet? Tales so familiar she could, and often did, finish them herself? Nick claimed that the real reason Mr. James had, ultimately, run him out of town was that (if Nick were to be believed) Mr. James had a guilty conscience. According to Nick, Mr. James had fiddled the inheritances; what should have been Nick's was his.

She had talked to Nick's uncle for the first time last weekend. He'd called on his way home from Las Vegas. As soon as Nick knew to whom he had been speaking, he'd begun to sketch out a life so successful she could barely recognize it. Deals. Jobs. People eager to meet him. He concluded, "...and I've got a new girlfriend."

A pause. "Pendleton." Another pause. "No, not those ones." Who knows what Nick's uncle had asked next? All she knew was that the next minute, Nick was answering--and with artificial brightness--"She's right here." He thrust the phone at her. "Here, talk to him."

Rarely had anyone addressed her as formally as Mr. James had then; so formally, in fact, that no matter how charming she was, she couldn't tell whether she was pleasing

him or not. He seemed interested in only one thing: how often she visited Toronto. She couldn't believe he could be so impertinent as to be asking about her and Nick. But he must have been, because the question, hardly even rephrased, came again. Her godmother, though, had trained her well. Only after Liz had hung up did she betray how she felt.

He grinned. "They're worried, that's all."

No matter how worried "they" might be, they had no call to be rude: she told him that. Then the implications struck her. "Why see me as a threat?"

He cocked his head. Even if he really hadn't known what to make of her, she still couldn't believe what she heard next.

They feared she might turn out to be another Marcie? She responded as though the honour of the whole female gender was at stake. Her laughter, when it finally came, was mostly at herself.

He, though, must have interpreted it differently. He added, severely, "They're worried you might be another gold-digger."

Gold-digger? Her? To even be considered in such a light was absurd--so absurd she couldn't wait to hear how it would make her friends laugh. Then the remark's significance washed over her. What was the real state of their finances? Who, if he would recollect, owed whom? She shrilled, "My father would never treat you like that!"

She mopped at the eggplant. She realized she had no idea whether Nick's uncle was okay or not. He was so unlike any of her parents' friends that might as well have been trying to evaluate someone from Mars. But Mr. Martin? What about Mr. Martin? Suddenly she thought, perhaps she did not know Mr. Martin at all. Perhaps what she'd taken as kindness was, say, some sort of complicated game, a game he and Nick had been playing since long before she came on the scene.

Nick began to talk about a job he had applied for. A job? she thought, pricking alert. A job in the film business? Not that, as far as she knew, he'd ever had a thing to do with films. Sometimes she couldn't help thinking that his inability to find work was starting to turn his mind. One week he called to tell her he was damming the St. Lawrence; the next, that he was refinancing NASA. Really, she supposed, she should be grateful that, this time, he was only imagining himself into the identity of a film impresario. One week recently, he'd talked as though he was already recruited by the CIA.

Not that she could listen without anxiety. The crazier-sounding his scheme, the more anxious she became. Anxious of what? Of guarding her face? Of keeping him from guessing her real feelings? He seemed downright insulted she couldn't remember that he'd already told her he was making a film. She said faintly, "I'm sorry. "Tell me

again."

His daughter, Beth, he explained, was on the figure skating team. "Not that she's any good, but her coach has been very nice and let her stay on."

She dropped her gaze to hide what she feared he might be able to see in her eyes. She heard the sound of a sugar package being shaken, then torn open. Curious, she thought: he never took sugar.

He went on to tell her that he'd run into his daughter's coach at a meet the other weekend. Bill had talked about needing someone to fund-raise for him. Nick had offered his services--but only if he were given a half cut.

In the shadow of her cup's rim, the coffee looked black. She heard the sound of another sugar package being shaken. "No, no," he forestalled her, though she had not thought to speak. "It's going to work out great."

"You see, I'd just contacted this film company. They're looking for a film lawyer, right? So the second conversation with Bill I suggested I film the team; at fundraisers, a film of the kids would be great."

She murmured something she hoped would sound reassuring; all she heard, though, was a third sugar being torn open. She looked up to see Nick revolving his spoon about the cup as though he'd forgotten he could stop it. "Well?" she prompted.

Without seeming to notice what he was doing, he added two more sugars. Could he really be worrying that he might fail to adequately impress her? He brightened a little at the sight of her face. "You see, I had this brain wave." He went on to tell her that the film company wanted someone to handle their legal matters--copyright, contracts, and so on. Now, he explained, he had a drawing card. The fact that he was making a film would set him apart from the other candidates.

She knew she shouldn't have spoken. "You mean Beth's coach is going to do it?"

Perspiration beaded his forehead. He said, looking away, "He said he'd think about it and let me know."

He made a play of picking up his cup and tasting it, but whether to divert his thoughts, or hers, she couldn't tell. His cup clattered back to the saucer.

Not knowing what else to do, she bent to get her coat. She reached into her pocket for the twenties from the bank machine. The Queen's faces glinted, one behind the other, on the tray.

They walked back slowly down Carleton. Whether because of the weather or some other reason far fewer hookers waited than earlier. Nick clicked open the umbrella and held it directly over her. The Carleton Theatre was dark and locked. Ragged wet stains ran down its walls. The rain

falling from the marquee made a loud pattering. She stared at the closed eyes of the man stretched out beside his box--such delicate eyelashes. How was he able to sleep? Suddenly she thought of the life--her life--which awaited her, hundreds of kilometres away in Montreal. She felt as if she was standing in a great clear space. She had a vision of a girl bent over a dictionary. But she didn't want to think about Flora. She shook the drips from her hair and caught up with Nick.

The intersection flashed with lights. Paramedics unfolded a stretcher out of an ambulance which was drawn up before their grocery store, a tiny place between the lingerie shop and the video arcade. She wondered what had happened; who was hurt.

The guard sat in Nick's lobby before the closed-circuit monitors. He rose with a smile to ask about their evening. Nick bid him a curt good-night and hurried her into the open elevator. Nick's embarrassment surprised her. Surely he still didn't consider her a "girl," like all the rest?

Nick went into the bathroom the minute they came in. She stood uncertainly a moment in the darkness; her earrings, as she placed them on the table, made two soft clicks. Then she went into the bedroom, leaving the lights off. She took off her coat and blouse and hung them on the hangers he always left empty for her. The apartment filled with the scent of his cologne. The distant tap ran; the tap

stopped. She heard the bathroom door bump open. He came in clad only in a pair of sleek underwear. He folded them, placed them on the bureau, then lay on the bed, hands behind his head, and watched her undress.

She took off her stockings first, and then, even though she knew he didn't like her to, turned away to remove her bra. She left her skirt on until the very end. She took her time hanging it up not because she was afraid of him, exactly; she was afraid of how excited being with him made her feel.

Naked now, her skin prickling in the room's chill, she came over and gazed down at his pale form. Then she took her hairbrush and went off to the wicker chair. But the chair was no longer there. Sold, she thought. He must have sold it last week and not thought to tell her. She settled for a perch on the edge of the bed. For some minutes, the room crackled with the sound of brushing hair. Finally she felt his arm tug her waist. His tan looked dark against her skin. He murmured, "Lie down."

Perhaps because she desired him so deeply, she felt moved to tease him. She still couldn't forget his uneasy confession after the first time they'd made love--some only half-intelligible admission of pleasure. To her query, he'd replied, "You know, it's not like with the others." Not that she hadn't been feeling something similar herself. Something in the way he'd spoken, though.... The others? she

wondered. She'd gone so cold, all the little hairs had risen along her skin.

She let him pour massage oil onto her back. When his hands descended to her buttocks, she laughed and rolled away. Then she teased him by raising her bottom and butting and rubbing against him like a cat. Soon, though, she found herself on her back, pinned.

Whenever she made love to him, she felt as though she were letting herself sink into dark, cold water. When she'd been a girl, she'd swum in the western fjords. That sensation was the same as she had now. No sound but her heart pounding in her ears and the bubbling as the air left her mouth. She let herself sink in the deepening greeny-black, but no matter how far she let herself sink, no sign of anything below her, no sign even of how far bottom still might be.

When a swimmer lets herself sink below a certain depth, a moment comes when she has to decide whether to start upward, or to keep sinking until she can use the rebound to surge toward air. If a swimmer decides to keep sinking, but does not soon find bottom under her feet, she can fight panic in only one way, by letting herself sink a little deeper. Who could believe that if she maintained her faith, bottom would not be there?

Those coastal fjords went down a thousand fathoms. Liz used to test her imagination as she swam. But she'd always

failed. How deep, how dark, could water be? Her naked body had glimmered, corpse-white, in the water: a mermaid; a selkie.

Her father hadn't liked to see her skinny-dipping. He'd yelled to come back from the bow of the boat. But what father could keep his daughter from that cold green water? She could never decide whether her father was personally embarrassed at the sight of her nakedness, or whether he was only affecting a precautionary embarrassment on behalf of the other few men, on the other couple of boats. She'd just laughed, shaken her hair at him and dived. She knew he couldn't catch her. He couldn't even swim.

Nick still held her pinned. His eyes were very black in the dim bedroom. So dark and heavy was the water around her that when she looked at her chest she was astonished to see it still rising and falling. His arm was warm, even his breath was warm. She lifted her arms and surrounded as much of his warm body as she could. She lay her silvery body against him.

He seemed very methodical tonight, as though he were determined to subdue her by straight sensation. He made love to her from the front, from the back, from the side, trying her on him as though she were something that simply fit over him. Her body met him, intelligent; answering world with world. She had the odd sensation he was searching for something in her. But what was he searching

for? She had no idea. What a sad man he was, what sad people the two of them, she thought. She touched his neck, his eyes, as though to reassure herself she really knew him. Then his enquiry grew too insistent. She found herself only able to keep enough consciousness to gasp between her pleasures. Then, in the dark air of the bedroom, he was making the noises of a creature who, having worked as hard as it was able, was giving up, going over. She felt him sinking and rose to meet him. She wrapped her arms around his neck, called in triumph, and went down with him. She came to herself to hear a woman in grief.

In the still bed afterwards, after he had tried to comfort her, he curled up away from her, as he always did, and fell asleep. Over the rise and fall of his shoulder she watched the soft, dead glare of the midnight city. The light did not flicker or change, brightening only slightly when the searchlights swept above her across the low ceiling. The roar of the traffic had not abated. The noise was steady; it sounded as soothing as the sea. She gave a sigh and moulded her cold body to fit around his warm one. After a moment, he shuddered and, hauling covers, rolled away.

## SATURDAY

Liz awoke the next morning from a dream of such enormous joy that she rose towards wakefulness as one might rise through water towards light. She opened her eyes. Sunlight lit the room, seemingly from within. The room was warm and quiet; the door to the rest of the apartment, closed. The fragrance of coffee hung in the air. "Toronto," she thought. "Two whole more days to go."

She looked along her body. But the man in her dream eluded her. She rolled sideways and ran her hand over the flat of her stomach. Her skin was warm and gave off the faintest exhalation of moistness. Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, she thought. Not just her body. All bodies. She smoothed her hand over that valley between hip and rib: like a valley between two mountains. She thought of Eve. She suddenly understood why God had been in such a rage to kick Eve out of the Garden. She held her hand low over her stomach. For an instant, she felt sorry for God.

Not that her graduate professor ever actually let the graduate class she was enrolled in--a class billed "The Old Testament as Literature"--discuss anything, let alone a subject introduced by a student; a subject, say, like Eve. Only when she was lying here, in Nick's bed, could she admit to herself how much school depressed her. But from atop

these clean white sheets, her life in Montreal seemed remote, like the life of some other person. The luxury of not having to think about it was so intense that she couldn't help herself. She gazed as though through the wrong end of a telescope at the woman in the tight suit over a pile of marking. She thought about what waited for her. Students. Lectures to prepare. That paper of hers she had yet to start. Then her breath caught; she remembered the terrible charge hanging over her. But even the appearance of this had changed during the night. Looked at from where she lay this morning, it no longer appeared too big to get her mind around; now it simply existed, like any other thing in time and space. The sky had a glittering quality, as though flecks of mica glinted amidst the blue. What were they? Birds? Angels? She kicked away the sheet. What was she going to do?

Trouble was, she thought dreamily, she loved her students. She understood them. Of course they were jumpy. How could they not be, having committed themselves to doing by Christmas what, right now, they didn't know how to do? The only way she knew how to teach was by mesmerizing them into believing that their desire to learn was greater than their desire to panic and set up a wall. She faced her students as she might face a roomful of tigers. If she believed they would learn rather than bite, then, by God, they would. Perhaps it was unfair to say she loved her

students. She loved and feared them, just never both at the same time. Just now, all she felt was relief that they were a long way away--far enough away they couldn't harm her.

What was she going to do? She reflected, the real irony of her situation was that she'd never considered fearing her students for their cultural backgrounds. She'd been occupied enough, simply fearing them for the dubious nature of their humanity. Whether they'd been brought up Hispanic, Arabic, or European, they were just subjects to her, subjects in a sort of colossal experiment; Liz needed to prove to herself--and over and over--that it was not hatred, but goodness that lay at the heart of human nature.

Liz had staked a great deal on her conviction that if a person were given a choice, that person would rather speak to another person than reject him or her. That, offered trust, a person would return it, rather than mock it. That was why she believed her students even needed to learn what she taught. After all, why frame an argument if one didn't have faith that someone might be out there, listening? Why throw one's weight on one side or another of the issue of the day--say, deciding whether to close a hospital--if one didn't believe the problem had to do not just with other people, but one's self. Aristotle, and that old, golden ideal of how one became human again, she thought. Liz saw practising rhetoric, a subject which, after all, had been in continual instruction for over two thousand years, as no

less than practising the art of community itself.

Flora's accusation had challenged all these beliefs. Flora seemed to think that Liz had awarded her essay an "F" not because the piece failed as a clear, unambiguous, logically developed piece of writing, but because it failed to have a European name on its top. Instead of coming to confront Liz with her anger, Flora had gone straight to the office of Student Affairs; whereupon, the Coordinator had been slugged with the complaint. Liz had been the last to be told--courtesy of the Coordinator's letter. What should have been a subject of her and Flora's mutual negotiation had been presented as a fait accompli.

Liz could count on the fingers of one hand the number of times this term Flora had opened her mouth. She felt hurt that Flora's fear had triumphed over Flora's desire to trust. Liz found it hard not to interpret Flora's silence as not merely a rejection of her own humanity, but of everything she was trying to teach.

Liz felt even more angered by the ambiguity inherent in the accusation itself. After all, what was on trial, Liz's actions or her feelings? Liz knew that it was her actions which were supposed to be under examination. Trouble was, how did one make sense of an action that could be accounted for by two different, even contradictory interpretations--hers and Flora's? What the committee was faced with, whether they realized it or not, was deciding which

interpretation of truth they would privilege.

Liz couldn't believe the conflict had even been allowed to come to committee. The two interpretations of why she had failed Flora's paper might be equally valid--but just because they were equally valid didn't mean they were neutral. No matter which interpretation the committee chose, they would find themselves having picked a way of understanding the truth. Pick Liz's, and they opted for the notion that truth could not be determined by one person alone. Truth was a commodity everyone in the community had to compete for. But everyone in the community worked on a level playing field. Anyone could be right, as long as they could produce evidence. And the reason the law defined evidence the way it did was to preserve that level playing field. A thing could only be considered to constitute evidence if lots of different people, a jury, say--could see it. Not just the plaintiff.

Pick Flora's interpretation, and one opted for the notion that truth could only be decided by the individual, alone. The truth could be anything--so long as the single individual said it was. What, then, happened to everyone else in the community? What happened if those people disagreed with what an individual said? In the end, the person who would turn out to be right was the one with the loudest voice--or the biggest gun. Liz knew that her notion of truth wasn't perfect. Still, it was better than that.

Surely the committee's object here was to opt for the most fair interpretation?

In short, the problem with Flora's claim of Liz's injustice was that, ultimately, the claim was based on something Flora felt. No one but Flora could vindicate Liz. Not even the committee could vindicate her. All the committee could do was rule that society--well, they, themselves, anyway--couldn't afford such a costly model of the real--costly because of all the other assumptions they would have to give up to allow it. Not least of which was the assumption that truth--or justice--could be decided by committee at all.

So, Liz thought, she was helpless. It felt pleasant, though a little lonely, to finally recognize there was absolutely nothing she could say or do. Nick was a lawyer, she thought, though she would never discuss the issue with him. Why? she wondered. But she did not know.

She stared up into the sky; somehow, sight of how blue it was comforted her. Her one mistake, she thought, was to have encouraged Flora. But she refused to become a person who was cruel. Now she'd stared into the sky so long she couldn't tell whether what she was looking up into was opaque or clear. She dismissed Flora.

Nick, she thought, grabbing for the alarm. She sank back into the pillows. A whole, long, free day stretched ahead of her. All she really wanted was to go out into the

city, a long way from where she'd ever been. She could never shake her subtle awareness of having a long fall to the ground from here. She sat, cradling the sheets to her chest. Sunlight warmed her shoulders. She scratched her breasts for a moment; then, dreamed man entirely forgotten, she jumped out of bed.

Nick was on the phone. "No, I can't pay her that right now--" Pay who what? She gazed at him, feeling blank, but he just scowled and kept his hand over the receiver. She tiptoed towards the bathroom feeling more guilty about her curiosity than she cared to admit. Just before she shut the door, she heard him say in that familiar bluffing tone, "Ninety gees? You must be kidding!" She slid home the lock. Sometimes his life seemed more complicated than she wanted to know.

She stood under the shower a long time, trying to think of nothing more than the spot where the hot water struck her neck. Heat spread through her shoulders; with it, a vague unease. Slowly her mind warmed up. She thought suddenly, ninety thousand dollars? How dare he even think to mention such a sum? She felt angry, more angry than she could easily accept herself as capable of feeling. What she really resented was the suspicious way he'd looked at her. Moved by an impulse she didn't understand, she tiptoed out and checked the lock.

Once back in the steamy cubicle, she felt suddenly defiant. She helped herself to his shampoo, his special razor, his soap. She even undertook to complete every tiny act of washing perfectly correctly; as if the perfection with which she washed herself was to be graded by an invisible examiner. As if--if she were perfect, she would also be safe. She whistled as she dried herself with the towels he'd left her. Even so, she couldn't help noticing the outer room's stillness. She lingered, putting on her creams, but there came no usual coffee, no usual knock.

The living room was so quiet she could hear the fridge and the tick of the clock. She could not even locate Nick for a moment. Then she saw him, upside-down, in silhouette. That he was doing yoga made her afraid. He only did yoga when she wasn't around.

Behind the shut bedroom door, she dressed in what she had planned. Jeans and a tee shirt: not much to anyone else, perhaps. But to a woman who'd spent her twenties wearing out the clothing her mother had bought to try to hide that flab, they meant an enormous amount. Today, though, even her new jeans and tee-shirt seemed to have lost their power. The contentment she'd woken up to had been replaced by a formless dread. She went over and rested her forehead against the window. But the light was too bright; it hurt her eyes. The city glittered under such an artificial-seeming shine that it could have been lit by the

shine of a giant light bulb.

Liz checked the kitchen clock. Nick had been in the bedroom doing whatever he did after yoga for almost fifteen minutes. She reminded herself that he'd always had a penchant for the dramatic. She stared at the view. How strange, she thought, she felt so distant from what were really physically nearby friends. She wondered what her students were doing right now. Writing their essays, no doubt. How strange, she thought again, that though she had enough power to override thirty other Saturday plans, she still did not have enough power to cause a man to open a door. Her telephone might be ringing this very moment. She considered checking her messages. But how could she worry about her students now? Defiantly, she opened the paper.

Finally, the bedroom door thumped open. She bade the air a pointed, "Good morning." She could hear a splash as he dumped the coffee down the sink. She waited for him to say something. But all she heard was a cupboard bang. Running water. The gurgle of the coffee-maker.

Liz was not unused to Nick's anger. Indeed, though she did not know its precise cause today, she had enough of an idea to prepare for it less with fear than with a covert indignation. Only when she'd waited so long that she was sure he would be angry at her did she lower the paper and

ask, very mildly, "What's wrong?"

The silver drawer crashed shut so loudly she had to suppress a smile. He stalked around the table until he was facing her. His gaze sent her pulse racing.

"That was Marcie's lawyer. On the phone."

And, indeed, as she knew he would, he stared at her as though she were the culprit.

He spat out, "She wants more money."

She watched him pace until he was stopped by the window. He stared out. "I've given that bitch over a quarter of a million dollars in the last four years. And she's still saying she's broke." He looked out for what became a long time. When he swung around, his face was so tight she almost didn't recognize it.

She had the feeling he expected her to say something, but she didn't know what. What did she know about hatred? She'd never even been married. She decided to say nothing; that way she couldn't be blamed. But the pause went on and on; perhaps the length of it even hooked her in the end; it was true she began to think less of him, his potential reactions, than of how much more she would rather be reading the paper. Finally, she revealed a little more of her carefully calibrated impatience. "What are you going to do?"

He might have been waiting for her. He bellowed, "Nothing!"

Affronted, she spent a few moments concentrating on the

smoothness of the cup between her palms. He lowered his face so close to hers that she could see every shaved hair on his cheek. His breath smelled of coffee and cigarettes and, very faintly, of toothpaste. "If she doesn't like it, she can sell the house."

She gazed at the corner of the ceiling where it intersected the walls. She would rather know no more about it, she thought. She disapproved of even having to witness scenes of hatred. Hatred, she thought, was wrong. She sensed, uneasily, her control of the conversation slipping. What she didn't want to admit was that his story with Marcie was starting to sound too much like his and her own. She'd always had the sense he would have allowed her other ways of handling these conversations. The trouble was, she didn't know what they were. Or, more truthfully, she could not stomach them. She refused to behave like a bitch--like Marcie.

He grinned, she supposed at her looking so prim. Warmth flushed to her cheeks. He held something up; two objects: one in each hand. He twisted them so that he displayed the price-tags on their backs. Speaking far too pleasantly, he commented, "By the way, I found these earrings."

In the same easy, goading voice, he added, "You didn't really pay a hundred and twenty dollars for these things?"

She didn't know what to think. She knew he was trying

to hurt her because he saw her as a stand-in for Marcie. Then again, he didn't even have food in his fridge. How else could she expect him to see these earrings other than as a waste?

She decided to grant him the benefit of the doubt.

"No, they were fifty percent off."

To her surprise, he didn't look like he believed her. She bounced for them. "Why the hell should it matter to you?"

He tossed them and curled a lip.

Feeling more than a little helpless now, she said, "You said you liked them last night."

He tossed them again. She could feel he was playing with her. From time to time, he did. The thought made her even angrier. But she lacked the will to keep herself from being baited.

Finally, he leaned over and poured them on the table. He spoke harshly, as if to even make the admission was more than he was willing to give out. "To be honest, they look cheap."

She stared at where he had poured them: the little glittering heap. It was true they did look different to her--though she would not give in to his way of seeing so wholly that she could articulate to herself exactly what she saw.

In the bedroom, in that corner of the bedroom he

allotted to her, she began to tremble. Not a trembling that another person could have detected, but something more terrible; something internal, as if some part of herself were shaking loose inside. She was all child now; all she could think was, how could he treat her like this? She knelt before her drawer, now stuffed with folds that, disturbed, released the scent of lily of the valley. The worst of the pain was not how the earrings might look; the worst was that she no longer cared.

She did not look at him as she stood before the coffee-maker. She felt small, as though the space she had been given to occupy was less than before. Perhaps because she felt compressed, her movements became awkward. She spilled the coffee she was trying to pour. She took a perverse satisfaction in having to kneel and swipe at it with a cloth. Truth was, where he wanted her was on her goddamned knees, she thought. Though she did not think it long enough to register, the thought--that she was behaving like her mother--occurred to her all the same. She dropped the rag into the sink with a satisfying-sounding splat.

His voice from behind her held the suggestion of laughter.

He looked astonished at the sight of her face. "You're hurt," he observed helplessly.

Oh, what was the point? Besides, at least his voice was gentle now.

He spoke quickly, "Liz, you're hurt because you know I'm right."

Suddenly she felt weary, more weary than she knew how to name. She studied the lines across his hands; the lines of his face.

"Isn't that so?" he pushed her.

He pulled out a chair for himself, and gestured to the other. Not that she sat. He looked at her standing before him a long while. His expression was one of the many she found so difficult to counter, suggesting all those reserves of unconscious confidence that came from being for so many years, home-owner, husband, father. "Listen, if what you're trying to do is look pretty for me, I'm quite happy to take you shopping."

Shopping? But that was what her mother had done. At blotting out her past she felt a curious kind of power, as though control might be discovered to be exerted even here. He crossed his legs and considered her. He gestured with a finger. "Turn around."

She turned around. When instructed, she revolved to face him. She felt not so much that she wouldn't have thought of stopping him as that a certain pleasure lay in this kind of obedience.

He pronounced his findings with a disarming sincerity. "A woman your age should be wearing at least semi-precious stones." He squinted at her. "Black pearls? Blood rubies?"

I'll have to think about it. But stick with me babe, and I'll turn you into a swan--not a white swan, maybe, but still a swan." He laughed a little at this, and at the sound of that incipient shrillness she could feel walls inside her tumbling down.

She stared, terrified--not because she didn't believe him but because she very nearly did. She heard, "Trust me. You'll see I have good taste. Very good taste."

The implication couldn't be missed: he must want her to be his wife. She had a dizzying vision of herself in the kind of dress she'd never been able to afford, at the head of a staircase. Not quite Scarlett O'Hara. Gigi? Then she couldn't help thinking, he must be playing with her. He talked as though it were within their means to buy even, say, a single pearl. Trying to cut through the increasing unreality, she blurted out, "These jewels, I presume you're paying?"

At sight of his face, which blanched, she felt fear, fear far beyond what she would have expected. But his gaze was too much for her. Then again, she thought, why couldn't she be the person he thought he was addressing? Liz was not used to reckoning with being considered a precious thing. And how could she deny she'd always adored gems? Before she knew it, out was tumbling, "Emeralds? What do you think of emeralds? Though topaz is nice, too..."

A picture of her mother had come to mind, her mother in

bra and stockings, preparing to go out. Her mother's body all squeezed and cupped made her feel separate. Liz never considered that what she'd really felt at the sight of her mother standing before that chest of drawers was fear.

Since the slot in the family for "the feminine one" was already used up, Liz had set herself to arraying herself in jean skirts and hiking boots, to cultivating the opinion that a "real" woman did not need to look good, and--to keep herself from ever really becoming a threat--to gaining weight. Liz had never seen her mother even at breakfast without lipstick and nice clothes on.

Irritated by Liz's polemics, just as Liz had meant her to be, her mother began to slam those drawers. Liz could still remember the sound: thump, thump, thump.

Liz, who had been feeling sorry for herself anyway, for she hated to see her mother in a rush--particularly if its only purpose was to make life easier for her father--at once took it into her head that the date for which she was preparing was just as important as her mother's. Not merely competing with her mother's anxiety, but increasingly infected by the assumptions about women's bodies it contained, Liz began to rip off outfit after outfit before the mirror. It never occurred to her that in a confused attempt to help her mother she was expressing a rage that was not her own; that she might shriek so that her mother wouldn't have to.

And so as Liz's father, the real one who was being protected, waited downstairs, the drama played itself out. Liz began to wander into her mother's bedroom with dismembered pieces of outfits, weeping she was ugly. Her mother, in return, cried out that Elizabeth was creasing things; that Elizabeth didn't seem to care about all those hours she'd spent ironing so her daughter could look pretty. Finally, remarking that Elizabeth had made it clear she was not yet grown up enough for clothes like this, she would snatch the crumpled things and hang them in her own closet. More often than not, she would begin to cry herself: crying as she stumbled between bedroom and bathroom. Not that Liz recognized any of this. She stared at the little picture and all she could feel was contempt.

But against the odds, Liz had got out. What would her mother have said if she could have been here, listening to Liz's lover offer to take Liz out and buy Liz jewels? What would her father say? She could see the kind of wave he'd make now. As though he really did have the power to return her to the age of three; as though he really still did possess the potential to abandon her.

Nick looked oddly disconsolate, slumped in his chair. He twisted his mug the way a small boy might. She thought of how heartbreakingly eager he'd been to please his uncle on the phone last weekend. Her heart overflowed with pity. "I'm sorry about Marcie."

"Don't." He held up his hand in a sign that she should keep away. She did not find this as surprising as she might have. Nick was nothing if not an indirect fighter.

He wet his lips. "I had a nightmare about you last night."

She wiped all trace of everything but kindness from her face. But hardly had he begun before she found herself interrupting. "...I was radioactive?"

His dark hair was as glossy as ever, but it hung over a forehead the colour of chalk. He kept twisting his cup in his hands as though he had forgotten it. Almost automatically, she tried to see the situation from his point of view. Trouble was, he denied he had a subconscious. How could she accept that in reality she was a woman who would destroy him?

He went on, "It was horrible, just horrible. My skin was peeling off me. Big blistered strips..."

With far more aggressiveness than she would have been willing to admit, she tried to embrace him again.

"Don't."

She jumped back. "Nick!"

His shoulders must have been tight because he had to twist his head to look up at her. He looked at her severely. "I warned you when we met that I would only stay in this relationship as long as it was healthy."

She did not hear the threat; at least, she thought she

hadn't. The last of the morning's sunlight angled across the rug. The thin, watery light moved, she saw it moving.

"Well, last night, I dreamed I was in love with somebody else," she said.

The fridge clicked on. He looked out the window with one of those unreadable expressions. After a while, he looked nearer to her, at her shoulders perhaps. He said in a tired voice, "Anyone I know?"

She felt an incredulous amusement. She'd said this to push him into admitting the conversation had to be a joke. Not hurt him.

He nodded once, a little nod, then gazed back at the city. They sat at odd angles to one another. Out of the rumble of traffic below them, a siren rose, almost at the building's foot.

"Lot of ambulances these days," she commented.

She went on, "Those ambulances, sometimes I wonder who's in them."

She hadn't been aware she was making a threat. He gave a little shiver. "Don't."

Then he asked, as if in an aside, "So this guy, what's going on?"

This time, she had to laugh. "Sweetheart, it's a non-issue. That dream has to do with me; it has nothing to do with what's real." She recalled her earlier reflections upon how one determined whether what one was thinking was

real. In some ways, Nick's outlook wasn't that different than Flora's. Nick, too, seemed content--when it suited him--to rely merely upon whatever "proof" he could rummage for inside his head.

Nick still waited. It cost her something to say it but finally she admitted, "Nick, he's a student."

If only it really were that simple, she thought, as she watched him nod, dismissing it. He stretched out his legs, and with hands behind his head, looked back out at the city. He wore one of those impossible to interpret expressions.

"Well, it's a nice day. Shall we do something?" he said.

They stepped out into the cloudless, early fall day. The side street was in shadow, but the sunlight struck the vapour rising above the nearby roofs so that it disappeared in twists of gold. Sunlight tipped the domes of the police station making it look more otherworldly than ever. Overhead, a tiny banner, "Labatt's Blue," rippled behind a spark so tiny that it slipped into invisibility as she watched. The air had a faint nip to it. She felt so grateful at Nick's willingness to go for one of these walks that she skipped ahead in case, in the forgetfulness of her joy, she took his hand. She'd never been to the market.

They turned onto Yonge Street. The usual Saturday throng of young women milled outside the wholesale lingerie

store. The window dangled with garments so cut-away as to be practically unidentifiable. All thongs and straps. And in the most vulgar colours, she thought. The only place she'd ever bought lingerie was at Eaton's. Each little box was selected, opened, and handed over the cubicle wall by one of those elderly ladies with tape measures. The sales-staff in each Eaton's lingerie department looked identical. Wherever did Eaton's find them? she wondered.

The video arcade rumbled with activity: explosions, rifle fire, and in the background, a crack crack crack--a sound, impossible to place. She couldn't tell whether the machines emitted this sound, unattended, or whether they only emitted it when a person had put money into them, and was playing a video game. All she could see of the interior were pinpoints of light. She thought of the ambulances and police cars she'd seen outside here the previous evening. If she hadn't been walking by here--she could still remember, she and Nick had been on their way home from the restaurant--she would never have believed it had happened.

Nick strolled along thoughtfully.

Newspapers fluttered outside their grocery store. She still felt uneasy enough about the extent of her culpability to need his attention. She halted. "BLACK SHOOTING FIFTH BY POLICE IN TWO YEARS," she read. Almost automatically, she tried to imagine a different explanation for the police's motives than the one the paper suggested, racial

bias.

Nick murmured, "Don't bother; I've already read it." The point was not whether he'd read it; the point was not even the right he seemed to feel he had to control her. The point was.... But even he couldn't really think he could control what she read? Christ, she thought, you'd think he had no idea how she spent her entire professional week.

The Pakistani man, the owner of the shop, appeared glad to see her. Though she didn't see him nearly as often as she had last summer, he still greeted her with the same smile--a smile, so broad today that she wondered if something could be wrong.

He hurried down the counter, observing, as he always seemed to be doing now, that he saw she was visiting again.

They went through the familiar exchange. Today, though, when they'd finished remarking on the weather, she felt as though something remained unsaid.

Perhaps she thought to mention the ambulances she'd seen outside the previous evening because she wanted him to know she still considered herself part of the neighbourhood. Normally, she would have avoided this kind of topic. Today, though, the reasons the people who lived around here might have for avoiding this kind of closeness seemed to have slipped her mind.

"What happened?" she asked.

Hardly had she reassured him she really did want to

know when his face creased with worry and he was pouring it out. The incident hadn't happened here, but next door at the video arcade. He checked left and right and then lowered his voice. "They had a stabbing."

The line of people shifted behind her. Someone coughed. She pressed against the counter and let the knot of waiting people file by. She was so absorbed in re-imagining the street she and Nick had just walked down that all she could do was repeat a little stupidly, "A stabbing?"

The man in front of her waited before a bottle of pop, five candy bars, and a bag of pre-popped popcorn. Junk, Liz thought almost automatically. She watched the man take his change and with barely a grunt pick up his bags and disappear out the door.

She gazed at this man she'd always considered her friend. She felt sad not just for the person who had been stabbed, but for something else as well. Finally, not knowing what to do, she reached out and awkwardly patted his hand. "At least you are okay."

He drew back a little. Liz drew back, herself. She could feel that the two of them had crossed some line. The silence was not entirely unpleasant--or rather only unpleasant in how vulnerable it left her, anyways, feeling. She would not look at him as she took her paper, though she received it with as much care as if she were receiving something alive.

The lineup was growing behind her. She wished she was better at saying what she felt. Finally, she just raised her arm in farewell. The men on the cash chorused their usual thanks. The last thing she saw was Mr. Azar rising on tiptoes to better smile at her over the crowd.

"Well," she said, coming up to Nick, her tone, had she known it, identical to her mother's. But how could she explain to him what she didn't even know herself? .

She gazed down Yonge Street. Cars and trucks stretched as far as she could see. Nearer at hand, the sign glowed over the bank. She changed the subject. "We need money."

All of Toronto seemed to have lined up for cash. Ahead of them waited two teenaged black girls, then a leather-jacketed man, his face pitted with acne. A woman in a sari and a man who looked like her son appeared to be having trouble at the machine.

Nick didn't look like he wanted to be there. Why had he come in, then? She'd suggested he wait outside. She'd always hated this financial moment with him. But barely had she found time to think when he'd given her a little nod and moved away to lean against the wall. The two teen-aged girls turned and, giggling, left. Finally she decided she couldn't tell him about what she was afraid she might find in her account. The moment she might have done so was over, she reflected. Anyway, her rent cheque might not have been cashed.

She stepped to the machine. She punched in her identification number, keeping her back very straight. She imagined the cable running out the machine, under the street--to where? Before she crumpled her balance slip, she glanced uneasily at him. But he still leaned, eyes closed, against the wall.

She dismissed as a bluff the morning's reference to ninety thousand dollars. She knew from Mr. Martin's files, though, that Nick had earned a lot of money last January, in fact, as much as she had the entire previous year. And what about yesterday's five thousand dollars? She regretted always having encouraged him to put his financial commitment to his wife and child before his financial commitment to her. She thought a little mournfully, considering how much he owed to how many other people, he probably thought a sum like fourteen hundred dollars too little to even be worth mentioning. As, she supposed, in better times, it would be. He'd earn that in half a week. That is, if she still believed he'd ever get a job.

A dim memory returned of an old room-mate clearing cheques. For a bank? Or for Visa? And had Annette actually worked weekends? Annette's physical person solidified unhelpfully before her inner eye. Blonde, curly haired, big-breasted Annette. How strange, Liz thought, to consider one's problem lay in having to fight off men. She remembered Annette, one Sunday morning in the hallway; she

had been wearing those fluffy bedroom slippers; her hands had rested on her hips. But why this memory now? Liz would have done better remembering not Annette's pronouncements on men but the banking system.

Everything would have been fine, she thought, if only she hadn't come away this weekend. She thought of the scene she'd locked her apartment door upon yesterday morning. The Bible, still opened to the graduate seminar reading she was supposed to have completed the previous week--still propped, opened at the first page, before that hardening bowl of rice. Sixteen blinks on her answering machine. Sagging laundry trailing through the hall. What was it with her? No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't seem to stick to her work. Perhaps she was being defeated by her own conscientiousness, she thought. No matter how much work she finished, there always waited more. If she hadn't had Nick, she would have given up long ago.

The machine seemed to be giving her the go-ahead. Her heart began to hammer. She typed in her request; she was going to make the request for eighty, but she changed her mind and made it for a hundred dollars. "In for a penny, in for a pound," she thought grimly, staring at Nick's still-shut eyes. She'd always assumed that if she ran out of cash, the credit card people would allow her a bus-ticket home.

A message exhorting her to borrow cash for cars, houses

and the other "good things" in life flashed on the screen. The machine gave a click; then she heard what she'd been waiting for: a "phut" and blowing air.

She counted the money, warm as if it really were alive. She turned to find Nick's eyes had popped open. She shoved the bills in her pocket and waited for the door.

He held it wide. "Everything okay?" he said cheerily. He spoke not as if he were asking a question but as if he were confirming a fact.

She stepped out without speaking. She took the time to push away the hair that had blown across her cheek. How many weeks had she been telling herself that he couldn't go on assuming that every time she ran out of cash, she could produce more? "I don't have...."

Suddenly she felt she was being uncharitable. Whatever he'd earned last January, he showed no sign of it now. And what about his wife? What about his refrigerator? Certainly she would feel terrible always having to let another person--a woman--pay. What she didn't want to admit was that she would do anything but put her suspicions about him to the test.

He prompted her. "You only have...?"

She said nothing, hoping he, himself, would suggest the idea of economy. Then she thought, why bother? She had enough cash to last them for now. Besides, she thought, trying not to remember what had happened when she'd tried

with Flora, didn't she have to act like he was trustworthy if she wanted him to be that way?

"Here," she said.

She watched him slip the bills in his billfold and tuck the billfold in his pocket. He said nothing, but he did take her hand.

They walked. One block. Two blocks. She waited for his face to show something more than that thoughtful, almost dreamy expression. Finally he said, "I always get a creepy feeling at that bank machine."

He went on, "I always get the feeling that a woman was raped in there."

Raped?

He smiled a little and put his arm around her shoulder. "It's quite possible, you know. No one can see the inside from the street."

She fixed her gaze ahead. Was this to be the sum-total of their financial conversation? She watched face after face pass her by, but never did the face turn out to be the one she'd thought.

"I don't like the idea of you going in there alone."

He must have taken her silence for assent because he gave her a squeeze.

She burst out, "I'd rather not consider things like that, especially happening in my own neighbourhood."

"Liz, be practical," he laughed. "Things like that do

happen here. Furthermore, though I know you enjoy thinking so, may I remind you that this is not your neighbourhood."

He cuddled her to him. "All I'm asking is that you don't go in there by yourself."

She glanced at his face. He did not look either angry or defensive.

She found herself swung to face him. He insisted, "Promise me?"

She thought, Mr. Azar and that stabbing, now Nick and this "rape." Who knows what really went on in this city?

Now it was his turn to look hurt.

She said nothing, but she took his hand.

They crossed the intersection along with fifty others. A well-dressed woman came out of the shopping centre where Liz had bought her earrings yesterday. Liz watched the woman's back as she preceded them down the street. Suddenly Liz wished she were back in Montreal. She would even have been happy back in the Department office. She saw herself in her pretty, short skirt, trailing students, unlocking her office door. The other professors always smiled at her. Suddenly she thought, what if all she'd ever feared at their hands lay only in her imagination?

She thought of them moving about their big houses, looking out at their big yards. They hailed each other by first name across the office--asking about each other's vacations; asking about each other's wives. No doubt their

smiles were their attempts to be kind to her. She knew as well as they did, though, that she wouldn't be around long. How could she? No one could keep making ends meet on what they paid her per term. That is, as long as they kept finding the money to keep offering her a section of the course at all. All those wearying hours she spent on make-up and pearls. For what? To make them feel sorry for her when they told her that her course had been eliminated? And they worried about their tomatoes, she thought. Tomatoes, she scorned. Wives.

Not that Liz belonged any more with her students. Who needed any further demonstration of how they could turn on her? As for that student in her dream--he presented the most perplexing problem of all. She'd never been regarded with as much admiration in her life. He was always phoning her at home--he claimed for her help with his essays. She knew as well as he did, though, that his essays didn't need help--or at least the kind of help she could give. She couldn't help thinking he told jokes on himself because he wanted to hear her laugh. Trouble was, she did laugh. How on earth could she have let herself grow to need him? He seemed to think her as virtuous as she presented herself as being. What scared her, though, was that he seemed entirely unconscious of her capacity to do him harm. He was the kind of soul who would approach her with as little thought as he'd give to approaching, say, a house cat--when, really, he

was approaching something closer to a tiger. She wouldn't admit that his trust of her was like a weapon she could heft in her hand. It was always nice to know that, had she wanted, she could have become involved. She thought, a little futilely, that the next time she taught (forgetting, for the moment, there probably would not be a next time), she should remember not to give out her phone number the first day of class.

Nick still walked beside her with lowered gaze. Suddenly she squeezed his hand. Who cared if she couldn't expect much from him? Who cared if she couldn't expect a thing? In truth, his solitude was a relief to her; it allowed her a solitude of her own.

They counted the number of buttons on the security devices for sale in the next window. They clowned before twenty versions of their image broadcast back on a wall of TVs. Once, she held her fingers upward over her head, pretending to be an animal, and pranced until she saw him laugh. When they came out of the next store, a magazine store, he swung his arm over her shoulder in a curious gesture, as if not sure whether he was protecting her or relying on her. They walked this way, perfectly in step, for some blocks. One body, she exulted; one soul.

When was the last time they'd walked this at peace? She remembered that day, soon after they'd met, when he'd taken her to the island in the harbour. They'd walked along

its far side, looking out at the lake. She'd felt protected; more than protected. The light had shimmered off the water--nothing between her and the horizon but yachts going up like flame. In the circle of his arm, she'd felt all those distances in her, driven out. Bliss; more than bliss. For the first time in her life, she felt at home. Home? she wondered now. Home? Where was that? Looking down this street, a street all purposeless movement, all she could think was: home, that place such a long way from here.

Nick's grip tightened as he steered her among the crowds. She thought, not that the flavour of today was exactly the same as it had been that earlier day. Then, the light had been summer light; now the light was paler; thinner. But what distinguished the two days lay deeper than that. What was it?

But the only answer that came was the memory of the close of another of those long, summer days, another of those days they'd spent out in the city. They'd been lying on the couch; dusk had been rising, like a veil, rising over the blurred easternmost edge of the lake. Suddenly, she'd broken the silence to say what had been on her mind for a long time, perhaps since the day she'd met him. "I feel as though your soul is in danger."

But why on earth had she admitted that to him? She couldn't really have expected he would say anything. Still, she'd waited, waited so long, in fact, that the pillars of

the downtown had turned from gold to silver. All he'd done was to stroke her hair. She'd stirred to find he was asleep.

They paused outside Eaton's, looking around. At her elbow, a man began to shout about the vengeance of God. Nick put pressure on one side of her shoulder; she and Nick caught the light. The only sight that met her eyes on the other side, though, was a man standing and chewing a bite of something from an orange and white wrapper.

What was wrong with her today? she wondered. She couldn't seem to find her usual joy in the city. But the only thing that came to mind was yet another time from just after the two of them had met. Though she couldn't recall where they'd been that day, she could remember that it had still been summer. How strange to remember everything by its season, she thought. Suddenly she remembered how, as a child, she'd sometimes awakened, having forgotten not merely what season it was, but--even more disorientingly--whether she was awakening to a day in the year's waxing, or waning. She'd not been absent this inner orientation in so long that until this moment she'd forgotten she could even forget it.

Nick's face had been in her hair. They'd just made love; they lay, listening to the drowsy sound of summer traffic. Finally she could not bear her joy any longer without telling him about it. But she felt at a loss for words. She gestured at their bodies. "I feel...humility."

Then, worried that by speaking she might have broken the spell, she hid her face in his shoulder to add, "I don't want to ruin it." It had been fitting for her to have addressed this to his skin. What she had wanted to communicate was reverence for what she sensed within their bodies. Their souls, she supposed

When he'd fallen asleep, she kissed him on his forehead: once; twice; a third time for charm. She had heard him; she would never forget how he'd said he hadn't wanted to ruin it, either.

Two taxis screeched by, honking their horns. The man who had been eating dropped his wrapper, which drifted away on the cars' exhaust. Wobbly hand-printing on a shop door advised, "Buy yor cigs heer."

Suddenly she thought, the awe was gone. Gone? Or simply so mingled now with regret that she couldn't help wondering if what she'd initially felt had ever been awe at all. Things she'd said; things she hadn't said. But what was the point of remembering any of this now? Every relationship had its shadow; Nick had been the one to say that. She kept feeling she should have remembered something. But how could she recall what she'd never, initially, thought to observe? She was gripped by the certainty that she had betrayed herself--more than herself. But how? Why?

Nick led them now through the streets of the very poor.

She knew the market lay in this direction, though she couldn't remember quite where. Sagging doorsteps lined the sidewalk. Utility wires criss-crossed the sky, a sky that looked less clear than it had, earlier. Even the windowpanes were painted over; the very telephone poles were splintering. Whether moved by her apparent disinterest or by what he saw around him, Nick began to complain. Something that, at first, she hardly heeded: something about how dull the city; how dull the day. Finally, though, even he seemed defeated. He tailed off. She walked with her hands in her pockets.

Finally came a patch of concrete, then a block-wide stretch of asphalt, grass in its tilted cracks. Above the few parked cars, a billboard advertised bottled water. They passed a renovated house; a marquee; a brass name-plate. They passed the premises of an advertising firm whose name she recognized. They passed a parked Jaguar.

Nick led their way down a little passage. A fountain trickled behind a wrought-iron fence; she could glimpse pale tablecloths. They passed between restored bricks, then, a little further on, between new bricks treated to look like restored old ones. He turned a corner, turned a corner again. They passed a Mexican restaurant, and finally, through an archway that could have been a reassembled Roman one. "Now that's worth coming for," he said.

A tiled square stretched before them, shaded by

scraggly trees. On the far side, a scatter of umbrellaed tables. Far off, beside the dark out-thrown doors at the end of the square, a neon sign read, "Vitamin Shoppe." Somewhere a clock struck, a peaceful chime. Not a soul was evident, other than distant figures on a bench. Finally two people passed, a couple, both in white, the man with a pager at his belt. The woman's heels wobbled in her high-heeled shoes. They seemed in such a hurry to get themselves inside the nearest door, Liz would almost have thought them scared.

The square lacked something, though Liz couldn't figure out what. "It's beautiful," she said, though that was not what she meant. She toyed with other words. Schematic? Orderly? Cerebral? She joked, "Actually, it looks like a set for a rock video."

Nick glanced at her sidelong. "Funny you should mention that; we were down, the other day, filming."

She thought, that's what the place reminded her of: a stage. And not just any old stage, but a stage designed for people just like Nick and her. She knew enough about architecture to recognize that the square had been designed to deliberately evoke a classical ideal of public life.

But what a curious evocation it was! The square lacked whatever caused one person to want to speak to another. A person could do nothing here: neither eat, nor converse, nor even find warmth in winter. A person couldn't even become informed--say, by reading or listening. She doubted she'd

even be able to weasel a set of directions out of anybody. The place seemed to be designed on the assumption that happiness was what was left after everything else was taken out.

The place was fake, gloriously fake. A bench that vaguely resembled those made in the Victorian era jostled a (not very well replicated) Georgian-looking planter. Fake history. A fake impression of diversity, too. The bricks of each warehouse--or seeming warehouse (she could see what appeared to be a computer retailer on one of the upper floors) had been made to look old in a different way, as if to suggest that each building had come down to the present with a different story. But how could that be? These buildings were less than ten years old. The square even conveyed false messages about safety. Though it was supposed to look like a place where people would want to congregate, video cameras scanned from everywhere.

Curiously, though, she felt more comfortable here than, say, when she'd been walking down Yonge Street. So what if the place left her feeling outside time; outside any particular geographical place? So what if the only thing she could do here was to perform? She thought, who knows what kind of human could imagine him or herself into existence, here? The place might as well have been designed in the interest of the perfectibility of humankind. No wonder film crews liked it, she thought. "Filming?"

"Yeah, a day's work as an extra." He added dolefully, "In a film called Used People."

The absurdity of anyone allowing himself to feel sorry for himself here was so close to overmastering that, without answering, she dropped his hand and ran toward the centre of the square. She uncoiled a succession of perfect pirouettes--or pirouettes as perfect as she could make them, holding her attitude.

Nick shambled up to her, "Hey, you're good!"

She thought wryly of all those after-school Tuesdays at Clara's House of Dance. She made some joke about how her mother had been so concerned that her daughter go out into the world with every necessary skill.

Nick laughed and swung his arm over her shoulder.

"How do you know about this place?" she enquired.

"Oh, Marcie and I used to come down here a lot when we were first married."

As they drew nearer the couple on the bench, she saw that, unlike what she'd first supposed, the two were not just another couple like her and Nick. The man's shirt was stained and the woman's nose was red. The man said something to the woman, a far-off mumble, as he held out the paper bag. The woman, though, seemed absorbed in other thoughts.

Her eye was on Liz.

"Bitch!" The woman was perhaps fifty feet away but her

voice--particularly its burden of hatred--carried with unnerving distinctness. "No-good, stuck-up, cheating..." Her words tailed into incomprehensibility.

Liz felt more amused than upset. After all, she felt mildly offended by the place, herself. Besides, how could the woman hurt her? The woman was a long way off and having troubles even keeping upright.

Liz looked to Nick, in expectation of a smile. All he did, though, was to tighten his lips and begin to tow her toward the distant doorway. At that, the woman rose and began to shriek. But she was shrieking the other way, Liz thought; at the trees. Nick's grip was so tight her arm hurt. She stared at the leaping muscle in his jaw. She'd often seen him angry at petty things, but she'd never seen him angry at something so clearly undeserving of it. She stared at his pale, tight lips and felt fear--fear at, more than anything else, her inability to understand what was such an important part of him.

He dropped his mood as mysteriously as he had taken it up. They stood now outside the broad doors. "Well, here we are." He grinned, though his voice was still hard.

But this emotional switch was beyond her. She touched his arm and pleaded something, perhaps his name. He gave one look and took her into his arms. She lay her head on his shoulder, and surprised herself by beginning to shake. She let herself be mesmerized by his little comforting

noises, by the touch of his hand on her hair.

Finally, he buried his face in her shoulder. He stood so long she began to wonder whether he believed that it was he, rather than she, who was the one who needed the comforting. Somehow the two of them clutching each other like this seemed sad. But why?

Finally he shifted his face toward her ear. "That woman reminded me of Marcie."

He was upset because that woman reminded him of Marcie? She'd never heard anything so absurd. Not that he was the first man she'd ever come across who appeared irrationally afraid of female anger; certainly, though, his was the most extreme case she'd ever seen. She searched his face when he stepped away but it looked as quiet as ever.

He led her into a long, low hall. Trestle tables loaded with fresh produce ran the room's length; chests for meat and cheese lined the wall. He apologized to her for how few vendors he claimed there were. Perhaps he was even right, that she and he had arrived later than he'd been expecting when they'd set out.

Whatever the room may have lacked in richness of wares, it more than made up for in richness of people. She thought she'd never seen such theatrical individualism. A stroller rolled by, tinkling with prayer ornaments. Two men in blue and white cycling outfits followed; their clothes were so tight that every muscle showed. Why dress like this? Liz

wondered. The only reason she could imagine was in order to combat the feeling of inadequacy. A man passed wearing little round glasses, making some throw-away comment about Marx. Yet his ponytail's colour job would have cost her half a month's wages.

She turned to Nick, but he was just examining the apples for sale at a nearby counter. She and the man with the ponytail read from each other's appearance that each was not a member of the other's society and, without another glance, moved on. Liz did not normally object to fashion, but what she saw around her was such an aggressive presentation of self that she couldn't help feeling as though whatever may lie inside her--inside any of these people--could not be considered to count. What should have struck her as people, young, healthy, successful, well-nourished, struck her instead as people so terrified they might quite succeed at being those things that, in order to be certain, they might as well have been deliberately presenting an illusion.

Nick was chatting with the sales clerk in a Victorian maid's costume who was loading his apples into a bag. What could they see to chat about? she wondered. All she could hear were snatches of conversation, something about film.

She looked around. Where was the hatred? she wondered. She knew from her own experience (she thought of those solitary years in the East End) that just because the

attachments that bound one individual to another were weakened didn't mean that that individual loved or hated any less. Quite the contrary. The less tangible the connection between people, the more powerful, the more irrational, the emotion. Her friends seemed to think that the bigger the city, the more equable people's emotions. Liz wasn't so sure.

Nick joined her now. They paused before a display of honey; "Country-Pure," each label read. Bottle after bottle of the most intense amber she'd ever seen. Though if she'd stopped to think about it, she would have remembered she did not particularly like honey, she could not remember ever seeing honey that struck her as more necessary or more attractive. She ran her finger over the plump purple surfaces of eggplants at the next display.

Suddenly she found herself recalling the greengrocer's her mother had visited when Liz had been a small child. A small place, really; run-down, when recalled through adult eyes. The concrete floor had always been wet; the greens, set out on old packing cases. The place smelled faintly bitter--of curry? of rotting crates? She remembered the saleswoman, a person she had loved--what was her name?--Mabel? Mavis?

Liz remembered how her mother had stood in the centre of the store and ordered Mavis around in a way that sent Liz crawling behind the boxes to hide.

Liz used to try to distract herself afterwards by repeating nonsense words under her breath. Her mother had grown fed-up, and had locked Liz in the car to wait for her. Liz sat, sometimes without even breathing, to detect sounds softer than the wind's smacks against the car: to detect, as soon as she was able, the far off pat-pat-pat of her mother's feet, as her mother came back.

Not that all her mother had been so eager to purchase had gone for grown-up parties. Her mother had gone out of her way to throw parties for Liz when Liz was a child. Birthdays, Hallowe'ens, Valentine's Days; any occasion would serve as an excuse.

What parties they had been! Parties with triple-decker angel food cakes, with scavenger hunts, with jugglers and magicians; when Liz was older, with mariachi bands and canapes and champagne and coloured lights and once--to her delight--even a butler. Everyone stopped to admire the famous Pendleton view: sparkling freighters, sparkling lift lights, sparkling skyscrapers around the head of the bay.

But all that was over now, she thought. The greengrocers had long ago been replaced by a bank. The father of a girl in Liz's class had designed the building. The greengrocer's daughter was also in Liz's class. All three of them--Liz, the girl whose father was the architect, and the greengrocer's daughter--had hated one another. But all that was later. Why was she remembering all this now?

Her eye fell on a woman whose eye colour was as artificial as that of her hair. The woman was requesting cheese at a nearby counter. Moved by a hostility she did not understand, she edged in front of the woman and interrupted with a request for another, far less common cheese. She knew the salesman would not have it. The green-eyed woman returned her a bitter look. "Gotcha," Liz thought, though Lord knows why this ridiculous little piece of theatre should have satisfied her so. Perhaps what really contented her was the woman's glance--a glance that could not have admitted any more patently that Liz had got the better of her. Having made her point, Liz settled for Brie.

Liz was just adding the package to the weight on her arm when she turned to find Nick and the woman embracing.

Nick didn't seem to have seen what had just gone on. He gestured suavely, "Liz, Carlie."

Liz tried to untangle the bags weighing her wrists. In the end, she simply bobbed. Indeed, considering Carlie probably thought she'd just been given a glimpse into Liz's true character, Liz shouldn't have expected any more than she got. Carlie's eyes gave one flick over Liz's clothes; a second, over her face. Then in a gesture of patent dismissal, Carlie turned back to Nick.

She exclaimed. "Fantastic to see you! I haven't seen you around in ages."

Liz was interested to note Nick looked mildly chagrined.

Liz couldn't help thinking that Carlie, too, had observed Nick's chagrined look. Carlie gushed, "What are you up to?"

Liz knew how Nick would answer if she'd been the one asking that question. She assumed, though, he would know not to try it on a woman who, she could already tell, was far more shrewd even than she was.

All he seemed, though, was delighted at the possibilities of the role.

"Film!" Carlie exclaimed. Her gaze didn't change at all. "You're producing, then?"

He was dithering; Liz could see he was dithering. Carlie saw Nick's uncertainty, too. Liz switched back to Carlie, fascinated at this exchange despite herself. Trouble was, Carlie kept such a poker face that Liz couldn't tell a thing.

She couldn't quite believe her eyes when she turned back to Nick. He actually looked like he was enjoying himself. Liz wished she was as good at this kind of interchange; you'd think the two of them were playing squash, not having a chat.

Just at the moment Liz's thoughts had drifted off, she found, to her dismay, Carlie's gaze trained on her.

Nick rushed in with an over long account of her

prospects with Mr. Martin. Not what she would have thought to highlight, she thought. He concluded, "He sounds very interested in having her full-time next spring."

"How interesting," said Carlie distractedly, though she did not look as if she found it interesting at all. Then, holding up her bags as if in excuse, she added, "Listen, I've got to pick up Sam from racketball at two." She touched Nick's arm.

Nick pecked Carlie's cheek. Carlie gave him an amused, even possibly contemptuous look and turned away. To her astonishment, Liz felt almost sad to see Carlie disappear into the crowd.

Nick chuckled to himself as he scrubbed the lipstick from his cheek. "Don't worry," he said, slipping his arm over her shoulder. "I have no desire to see her again." But all Liz felt was depressed, a sad flat little depression.

She stopped, distracted by a cauliflower. Less because they needed it than because there seemed nothing else to do, she pulled out a bill and bought it. As though to be companionable, Nick paused and bought some cheese. Then, before she knew it, she was hard at her shopping and the flat little mood was gone. She found herself buying coffee, figs, a strange kind of noodle and arugula--whatever that was. A little later, she caught sight of Nick handing over a ten dollar bill for bread. Feeling slightly manic, she

waved. He waved back. She hoped he wouldn't notice her at the stall that sold blackberries. They hung everywhere, free for the picking at home. She bought a chicken; she bought an attractive-looking bottle of olive oil.

Then it was over; the next time she reached into her pocket, only coins came to hand. How difficult, she reflected, to shop wisely after weeks of eating nothing but rice and porridge. She knew she chose to live that way. Nevertheless, she couldn't help feeling cheated, even depleted. She felt as licked out as a pot.

The market was crowded, extraordinarily crowded; a woman stared--seemingly right at her--then parked a stroller in her way. Someone lunged into her bags as though she had no corporeality at all. She looked around for Nick.

She spied him in a line-up, perhaps thirty feet away. He waited with what she was growing to recognize was his characteristic weariness. She thought she'd never seen anyone look so far away in spirit. She thought, all day she'd assumed he was worried. But he was not worried at all. Or rather--he'd worried so continually for so many years that he and his worry had become inseparable. He looked domesticated; she felt shocked.

But Nick was a man one could never watch unnoticed for very long. He made his way toward her through the crowd. "You look tired," he said. "Here, give me those bags. I know a nice place for coffee."

Liz sat for a long time at the outdoor table. The blue smoke from her cigarette coiled, wobbled in the thin fall sunlight, disappeared. A crow hopped onto a nearby wastebasket. Passing people crunched at the fallen leaves. She shivered. Really, it was far too late in the season to be sitting outside, she thought.

She thought of her friends. Here she had been in the city almost twenty-four hours, and she still hadn't called anyone. The air smelled of car exhaust, and faintly, of an incinerator. She felt a long way from anywhere. The cafe door jingled, but the only person to come out was an elegantly-dressed woman who strolled across the square, through the far archway, and disappeared. The dead leaves rattled. She shivered so deeply she drew up her collar.

Finally Nick came towards her, empty-handed. Instead of explaining, he reached down and drew out a parcel, which he unwrapped and pushed towards her. Bread. Why be excited about bread?

He would say nothing until she'd broken off a piece.

"Good eh?" he commented. "It's expensive, but I adore it and I haven't had it for ages."

She reflected upon how delicious something so bitter could be. Now he helped himself to a piece. The wind was cold. She shivered again. He went on hurriedly, "Actually, the coffees are waiting inside. I didn't have enough money. If you want them, you'll have to go in and pay."

She stared at the square but there was nothing to see. A little whirl of leaves rose up and brushed against her legs. She shoved away the out-held package. He didn't even have the cheek to look away. "What happened to the money I gave you?"

He looked astonished. "I spent it. What else did you expect me to do with it? After all, we did need a lot of food."

At sight of her face, he grinned. "You shouldn't talk. I saw you buying those blackberries--oh yes, don't deny it! How much were they? Six bucks a punnet?"

She stared. But that was not the point. Or was it? She felt so confused that all she found herself able to do was to subside into silence. He proffered the loaf, laughing frankly now. "Why? You look like I've done something wrong."

She scowled, clattered her chair back and lurched to her feet so abruptly that she left him open-mouthed.

"Four seventy-seven," the sales woman corrected her.

Liz counted out seven more cents into the woman's palm. She lingered, trying to slow her heart, trying to get things straight in her head. She knew he had a guilty conscience, she could have told that even before he'd admitted he had no more money simply by how friendly he'd been trying to be. Certainly, she knew he was bad with money. Indeed, back when she'd handed him that cash outside the bank machine,

what else, honestly, could she have been expecting?

The trouble was that even if he were trying to take advantage of her trust, there was not a thing she could do about it. In terms of who had spent what--and on what--she didn't have a leg to stand on--she knew it, and, dammit, she thought, he knew it too. She wondered uneasily if it were true what she sometimes thought about herself. If she really were trying to use her money to gain power over him, would this change the way she should act now? But how could she admit she might be doing that? How could she face her students? She'd be no better than Nick.

Either they were a couple, or they were not. He was always telling her she did not know how to trust--that she had a long way to go until she knew how to love. That, she thought, was the real reason he hadn't introduced her to his friends. The taste of bread was bitter in her mouth. She couldn't give up now. If she did, she might as well be admitting he was right.

She met his eyes as she sank into her chair.

He smiled and said cheerfully, "Guess what?" He tore another chunk of bread; caught himself before offering it to her. She could not tell whether the gesture was genuine or staged.

Perhaps realizing he was asking a little much, even of her, he replied, himself, "I've just become a scriptwriter."

He added, as though it explained everything--as perhaps

it did--"I just met Sarah Dennett."

"Oh?" she asked coldly, too coldly, perhaps.

That she should not respond with admiration seemed to leave him nonplussed. Then, perhaps assuming she simply needed time to recover, he added, offhandedly, "She used to go out with Dirk Bogan, a friend back in my racketball days.

"I was talking to Anne Rogers; she often comes into Michael's...you know, that cafe I've taken an interest in?

"Well, last week, we were having another of our little talks about how best to get film funding. She's given me a few tips. Anyway, she called me the other day to suggest a title we might do together." He tried to remember the title. "Mind in Darkness? Hand of Darkness?"

She concentrated on the warmth coming through the sides of her cup. The last thing she needed to do was laugh.

"Heart of Darkness," she said.

He looked confused, "Yeah, well, anyway, when I bumped into Sarah, just now, I told her all about it. Of course, we'll have to make the ending upbeat. I told her that. But she thought it was great. Really, really great."

He stretched out his feet and surveyed them contemplatively. "So now I've got it: the book, the backer. All I need is the script."

"The backer?" she interrupted.

He snapped, "Sarah, of course. She's got the biggest film budget in the country."

He munched another chunk of bread. "For a moment, I thought that I might suggest you as the best one to write that script. Then I had a better idea. Don't you think I'd make a great scriptwriter?"

Liz shifted her gaze. She knew he was trying to rebuild his career in the only way he knew how. She also knew, though, that he was as capable of writing that script as he was of spreading his arms and rising into the air. Then she thought, what was so wrong with such crazy-sounding determination? How would any project get started without it? To the extent he appeared able to run at even the most-impossible sounding of projects, to precisely that extent, he might--perversely, magnificently--succeed.

Then she recalled the self-composed way that elegantly-dressed woman had traversed the plaza. She thought of how shrewd had been Carlie's gaze. But when she looked out, all she saw was an old man feeding the pigeons and a double-decker tourist bus, "See the Sights" blazoned on its side, sliding between a gap in the buildings on the far side of the square. She turned back to Nick, expecting, she supposed, to help him toward some sort of qualification.

But she was too late.

Putting his cup down, he remarked in quite a different voice, "Well, it's worth a try."

They sat, neither of them, seemingly, with much to say. Finally Liz couldn't stand it. She hazarded, "About

dinner tomorrow night...?"

He looked at her as though he were returning from a long way away. She went on, though her heart misgave her.

"I was thinking we might invite some people."

"People? What people?" he snapped.

She knew she was not going to get what she wanted, but she couldn't see any way out of the situation other than by going on to the end.

"Al and Astrid?" he repeated. He pretended to think. But she was not in the mood for one of their puckish exchanges. He turned to her. "How long have we been going out?"

She said miserably, "Two months and sixteen days."

He searched the clouded sky. "Nope," he announced. "Not yet."

"Not yet?"

He looked amused. "If you must invite someone, why not Mohammed? He's new in Canada; I don't know what he lives on."

Nick knew she resented Mohammed, she'd resented him ever since she'd heard Nick chuckle over the way Mohammed had scammed his way into Canada. Indeed, she thought, Mohammed flushing his passport down the plane toilet so that the authorities, not knowing who he was, were not able to know where to send him back, was just the kind of story that would appeal to Nick.

Nick grinned at her face. "You could always invite your friend, June," he teased.

She gave it a minute before she told him where he could put that.

He rose without expression. "Shall we go?"

He picked a route through the less-travelled back streets. The sky was now as grey as an old woollen sock. She was recalled to the skies she'd lived under as a child. As they plodded, the rain began.

Nick was locked in silence, the kind of silence that falls in a house when a distant tap, running for hours, is suddenly turned off. Liz knew he was angry. She was angry herself. Suddenly she realized she didn't care. She gave up. It never occurred to her that he might have been resorting to silence because he didn't know anything less hurtful to do. The fact that he'd shut her out pressed so woundingly on her mind that she felt as though she'd been removed to some edge in her own, inner, geography. How dare he think he could get away with punishing her?

She tried to distract herself from the chill prickle of raindrops on her wrists by looking around. They were passing between grimy buildings built, she would guess, in the thirties. "Seaman's Mission," she read, chiselled into a wall. In the small park to her right, hydrangeas sprawled behind a rusted wrought-iron fence. The street languished,

like something the world had forgotten. Yet she couldn't help responding with what was perhaps even a false nostalgia. This world, a world founded upon the recognition of want--and with it, of self-help and charity--was the world her father had come out of. Yet what had, say, this place to do with her, or with Nick--with any of the people they'd met in the market? "The Lighthouse," she read. If it cast light, it was not the light of her faith.

The pavements were darkening. They were starting to pass through an area she knew. She'd even once visited a church near here. Here it was now. The window flapped under plastic sheeting; splintered lathing, broken stained-glass crunched under her feet. The place was being gutted. But hardly had she started thinking about those long-ago winters when the memories came flooding back. Her father, now--her father had loved her, she thought.

She still felt confused about leaving him. But what was so wrong with retreating--not that she'd thought of moving to Toronto that way, then? She knew she'd always glorified life on the edge.

But where else had she ever lived than on the edge? Even now, the memory of those first winters here remained some of the most brilliant she'd ever had. Every one of those memories included the docklands. The docklands. At first she'd gone down there simply because that's where the cut-price food outlet had turned out to be. Later, though,

she'd gone down there for no better reason than that she knew they were there. She'd spent whole days pushing her bike beside the deserted canals, gazing over the rubble at the decommissioned freighters, in the rain. The air was harsh with the discharges from the chemical factories. She'd ridden her bike down those streets of white concrete, streets that seemed more like runways than roadways, streets that ended in mud, a little trail, and the inevitable garbage-strewn clearing.

An ugly, lonely, and a possibly even unsafe place for a woman to go. She knew it, but she couldn't have kept away. She could not remember a time when she had not been seeking an edge. Even when she'd been a girl, she'd sought the mountains, or the edge of the sea. As if, putting something empty and safe behind her, she would be able to concentrate on what lay ahead.

Where did the past go? she wondered. Back then, the things that had happened seemed as close as the mountains across the bay. All she'd had to do was to keep them behind her and the future unrolled without any work on her part, before her. Now, though, when she looked back, she couldn't even tell the difference between what had happened and what she'd imagined. No wonder she couldn't make sense of the present.

She began to talk. "I've been reading a really interesting book, lately. Vanity Fair. Ever heard of it?"

She should have remembered that talking about books was not, probably, the best way to draw him out. But she was so tired--too tired to care. "It's the most tremendously moral book. Everyone in it is trying to cheat, swindle or out-face each other. I've never read a more accurate description of human nature.

"Actually, I'm writing an essay on it." She did not often lay out her ideas like this. As she listened, she even began to think she could say what she wanted to. "I'm particularly interested in the way novels look at heroines." Traditionally, she went on, heroines were supposed to be docile and accepting. Thackeray, though, seemed to be advancing another model of the heroine. A woman who displayed distrust, say. Cunning.

Nick looked at her. "You know what, you talk too much."

He gave one of his long-suffering expressions. He picked up his groceries and walked ahead.

She ran to catch up with him. She knew that, eventually, she would have to make up. In the meantime, though, she would have some fun. "I just wanted to talk about my work," she said.

All he did was to retort, bitterly, "You don't want to talk about your work. You want to make me feel bad about mine."

Could he really feel that threatened? She knew from a

lifetime of being exposed to feminist ideas that she should expect a man to talk like this. But how was this knowledge supposed to help her now?

He said, "I mean, I'm glad you like what you do and I respect you for doing it, but as far as I'm concerned, in the kind of relationship we have with each other, there's simply no place for it."

"Every woman I meet these days acts as if her work is the most important thing about her. To be frank, it's bullshit."

This was a little hard, even for her to bear. She said mildly, "Well, you talk about your work."

"That's different. My work is important."

From one point of view, she couldn't deny he had something of a point. Didn't she come down to Toronto precisely to leave her work behind? She wondered, did she even like her work? Trouble was, she was no longer even sure. She would never admit her work wasn't very important. That didn't mean, though, that the statement that it was unimportant wasn't true. Certainly the Department acted as her work didn't matter. What support had the Department given her? A single compliment--about tomatoes.

She burst out, "Have you never thought that my job might be tied to my marks? That the possibility always exists that, next term, my job might go to someone else?"

He stopped, at last interested. But this was as close

to mentioning Flora as she dared get. She couldn't put it past him to tell her something she wasn't expecting. Something that might hurt her. Something, even, that might be the truth.

He studied her a moment longer. Then, perhaps scenting her evasion, he dismissed her. "You worry 'way too much, Liz. The Department will take care of you. They hired you, didn't they? They like you. They'll make sure you'll be all right."

She looked at him, shocked. "That's all you can say?" She mimicked, "You'll be all right"?

"But Elizabeth," he protested. "What more can I say? Surely its a little unreasonable for me to know the first thing about whatever it's called you teach. Rhetoric, is it?"

They were walking up the lane that ran along the back of Yonge Street. She gazed ahead at the floor above floor of concrete balconies. "Okay," she said. She hated him now. "I will never trouble you with my work again." Really, of course, she was trying to hurt him. As it would turn out, though, all she'd done was to give him the tool that would hurt her. Lord knows why, but she began to cry.

He studied her. "You're really tired this weekend. I could tell when I came in last night." He picked up the pace. "You need to get some rest. I've never seen you like this before."

They were approaching the end of the alley. Directly in front of them rose a brick wall. Across the wall were scrawled the crudely-formed words, "No Parking."

He didn't even seem to notice her trying to swipe at her streaked face; trying to stand up a little straighter. All he did was to add, offhandedly, "I don't know what you've been angry about, but you've been angry about something all weekend. Please deal with it. It's getting on my nerves."

She kept her gaze toward the wall. She knew that she must be partly at fault. She was far too exhausted, though, to think about it now. She made some sort of preparatory, unassuming sound.

He cut her off. "Don't say you're sorry. You're not sorry at all. You're just saying what you think I want to hear." Then harking back, she supposed, to his earlier point, he added, "Take my work. You always look like you're listening--but do you really care? And what do you say if I catch you? Sorry! 'Sorry's' not good enough any more."

She trembled. She remembered what her mother always used to say. "You're cold. You're superior. You always think you know better than everyone else." Even her mother had doubts about her. What if Nick was right?

"I am sorry," she insisted.

He went on as if he hadn't heard. "The truth you won't face is that you have a really destructive streak in you."

Well I'm sick of it. That's all I've got to say."

Liz did not understand then--or now--that the real reason she'd always resisted her mother was because she resented her mother's assumption that Liz deserved to be feared. But to fear herself just made the fear, and the anger, even more explosive-feeling; just the kind of explosiveness she felt now.

He added, "That destructive streak, it really frightens me."

She felt physically weak. She stared at her neat white runners slopping through the puddles. She admitted in a low voice, "It scares me too."

They were at the end of the alley. He steered them left and in front of them appeared the bustle and traffic of Yonge Street. He did not look at her. "We'll talk about it later."

He glanced at the clock over the bank doors. "Shit!" he exclaimed, "I'm going to be late." He looked around the intersection, seemed to catch sight of what he wanted, and raced across on the yellow light; she had to sprint to keep up. "You have to go somewhere?" she asked, a little dazed. In all the weekends she'd spent down here, he'd never scheduled any time away from her. On the far corner, he headed, not toward their building, but rather, up Yonge Street. "Al and Astrid are moving this afternoon," he announced. "I said I'd help." She saw the flash of

quarters in his palm.

"Wait," he ordered. He disappeared into the crowd.

A stretch limo drove by, a Bell repair van, four cyclists, two streetcars, a taxi. She turned her back to the traffic, and then, when he still did not come, needing to do something to appear as though she were occupying herself, she bent to read the headlines in the nearest newspaper box. She could feel, though without putting the feeling into words, that to insist on her right to keep up with the latest news ran counter to the behaviour Nick expected of her.

"Police Chief Rejects Black Demands," the headline read.

Police shot and killed a black man Thursday in an attempt to apprehend a suspect for questioning on drug-related charges. When the officers observed the man approaching with a weapon, the officers fired in self-defense, police spokesperson Andrea Thompson reported, Thursday.

The words disappeared the other side of the fold. Liz pondered the photograph of the shot black man. She had no idea who, or what, was right any more.

Then Nick had rematerialized at her side; he carried a column of toilet paper in his arms. She stared at him; at his heaving chest. Somehow the prospect of him appearing so rushed over something as simple as the acquisition of toilet paper struck her as absurd. It never occurred to her he might have bought the toilet paper as a blind, to conceal

the fact that what he had really gone to do was to make a phone call. Then the other curious aspect of the situation struck her. "But I thought you had no money," she protested.

He peered over the top of the package. "I am a gentleman," he said dryly. "You don't really expect me to let you pay for toilet paper, do you?"

But she hadn't time to object before he was running, running up the back steps and into the building's back door. She had to break into a sprint in order to keep up. Her groceries were incredibly heavy. He must be a very strong man to run at this pace, she thought; bags cutting into his wrists; bags bumping at his knees. She caught at the heavy security door as he unlocked it. The false sweet scent of air-freshener met her. She ran beside him up the carpeted stairs, through the second heavy door, past the guard, into the opening elevator.

"Listen," she said as two other people pushed in after them and the mirrored doors slid shut. "About Astrid and Al. I'll just get changed and come help."

The two other people in the elevator got off at fourteen. "No," he said. "That won't be necessary." The door opened again, he was in the hall, he was unlocking the three bolts on the door, he was in the apartment. He scattered his packages, opened the closet door and pulled off his shoes.

"I'd like to come," she insisted.

"Not today."

He stood by the bedroom closet, pulled off his shirt, put on one with grey and yellow ruffles, ran a comb through his hair.

"Well, will you be long?"

"About six, I'd say."

He slipped on his brown leather shoes and his leather jacket.

She looked at him doubtfully. "You look awfully fancy to be helping somebody move."

She had not stirred from the position she'd first taken in her bewilderment, near the door. At once, the humour of the situation struck her. They were behaving like male and female stereotypes. But they were not stereotypes; they were real people and this was real life.

More laughing than wailing now, she said, "But is everything okay?"

He looked at her. "What did I say back there on the street?"

"...that...that we'd talk about it later."

He kept looking at her.

"But is everything okay? I mean, I can leave..."

He jerked his head impatiently. "It's okay. It's okay." He was checking his wallet.

"You need money?"

"No, I'm fine. Look, I'm late. I've got to run."

He had just about closed the door when he stuck his head back in. "You'll be here when I get back, then?"

She had no idea. "I might go see June."

"I'll expect you, then, when I get home."

The door opened one more time. "Lock yourself in after I go."

Elizabeth sat in the cool, still apartment. She picked up the phone and began to dial: to June, to Max, to Ben and Alex, to Sally. Answering machine after answering machine assured her that if she left her name, someone would return her call soon. She listened to the tones, the buzzes, the beeps. She did not leave her name.

She sat and looked at the office towers, glittering honey and grey in the afternoon light. Behind them stretched the colourless island, the colourless lake. A seaplane floated soundlessly above the pyramid that was Mr. Martin's office, above the canyon the other side of the tarmac roof that was the College Park shopping centre, and disappeared, a speck of soot, out over the lake. She punched her number in Montreal and listened to her own voice. She started the line of messages: one from that student who always forgot things, a long string of hang-ups and one from the Coordinator, her boss.

Liz hung up the phone and stared at the office towers.

Flora. All this because of one--or so she'd thought at the time---professional decision. Flora's opening sentence returned to mind: "At the night, woman brushing her hairs, together, talke about a men she wishing on day marrys." Liz knew that Flora had a job waiting for her when she graduated in December. If Liz failed Flora, Flora would lose that job. Objectively: what were the chances of a young woman fresh out of school landing an accounting job? What were the chances of a young woman who could barely speak English?

Liz shifted uncomfortably. So she should pass Flora for humanitarian reasons? Was that it? But how would the accounting firm react when they found that Flora could not do what they'd hired her to do? What would they think of Liz, of the standards that (she would assume, since they paid their taxes) they expected her to maintain? Then again, maybe an accounting firm would not expect Flora to write anything. Maybe they even preferred employees who knew they lacked the necessary skills. Employees like that could be counted on to be loyal. She thought of the stilted style of the letters Nick had sent Mr. Martin. Nick's letters were misspelled, fragmented and tortuously phrased. Maybe no one cared about communicating clearly any more.

The position she found herself in was entirely unfair. Nick had accused her of being superior. But how could it be wrong to hold everyone to the same standard? She supposed that Flora's real criticism would be that Liz was being

partisan. But how could learning to defend one's point result in anything but the devolution of power? If a person could defend their views on paper, that person could take on any opponent--from a bank, to a landlord, to an M.P. Liz supposed that the Floras of the world would retaliate by pointing to the seven people who lived in Flora's family's two-room cold-water flat. Could learning to debate come before giving the family a leg-up out of that? they would ask. Liz couldn't deny that her priorities sounded more appealing if she was defending them to people who were already middle-class. Liz also couldn't deny that her allegiance to this set of priorities set her on one side, rather than the other, of some invisible divide.

Liz had been brought up to think of the university as a place set aside for people to value what was most important about being human. Start thinking like Flora and one found oneself thinking that having money was wrong. But whether a person had money was to miss the point. Surely the real point was that all people should be made free enough from financial worries that they could stand back and see life in a more complex and interesting way. Why should she feel guilty that it happened to be her way?

She paced to the windows and gazed beyond the towers. Who on the faculty might help her? But that was the trouble, she thought. No one would. The truth or falsehood of her alleged "discriminatory" behaviour were so dependent

on point of view that she knew no member of faculty would dare come near her. And she'd thought that being invited to teach had been an honour. She looked at the phone. No, she thought, she could not return her boss's call today.

She sat at the table. She thought about Nick. But every time she tried to decide how she felt about how he had labelled her, she just felt weary. Then, just as she was going to lie down in bed, the phone rang.

It was June.

"I just called you," Liz said accusingly. "Where are you? I thought you were out."

"I am," came June's steady voice. "I'm at school, but I'm just on my way home now."

"Do you have time for a coffee?"

"Sure," said June. Then June added, sounding a little doubtful, "Are you all right?"

"Why?"

"You don't sound all right," June said.

"I'm fine. Perfectly fine. Twenty minutes, then?"

Liz dressed hurriedly, though with more care than she was willing to admit. Then, after locking the door, she unlocked it and ran back in to check that her lipstick really did match her sweater. She did not leave Nick a note.

June sat at a small table by the window. In the

slanting light her face looked pale. She was a massive woman, dressed in harem pants and a short-sleeved print blouse slightly too small for her, but her clothes, though faded, were pressed and neat, and her hair, though now escaping around her face had once--Liz could see from the glitter of bobby pins--been carefully pinned back. The shapeless coat June always wore was draped over the chair. Badges advocating the causes June fought for bristled on its collar. June looked up after every sip of coffee as if she was worried she would not recognize Liz. The bartender, occupying himself polishing glasses behind the bar, threw June an occasional dismissive look. Liz reached to touch her earrings, smoothed her clothes and went in.

June's face lit at the sight of her. The two women embraced with what Liz recognized on her part was exaggerated pleasure. June seemed disconcerted by the warmth of Liz's welcome. Perhaps June had grown more used to her new-found reserve than she'd thought. Just before she removed her coat, she checked her effect on the bartender. June saw her. She looked amused.

Liz covered her embarrassment by taking longer than she needed arranging her coat. Finally convincing herself that she was comfortable, she sat back, awaiting what was to come.

"Oh, Liz, you look so beautiful!"

Liz surveyed her friend. Her friend didn't look well.

But how could she have told June that? Liz knew all too well what it was like to be poor. She'd never descended to scavenging the over-ripe bananas behind the supermarket the way June had. The seating arrangements in June's apartment were unpleasantly familiar, though. If Liz sat on the bed, June had to sit on the floor. What Liz remembered most about being poor was how difficult it was to hang on to a sense of dignity. Liz would never let on she pitied her friend. If June claimed she liked her apartment not because it was cheap but because, being part of a co-op, it afforded her independence--or if she claimed that she ate over-ripe bananas not because they were free but because they were a component of a "spiritually advanced" diet, Liz would say nothing to contradict her. "You look good, too," Liz said.

June fingered Liz's shawl, the fine thick leather of her jacket. "How do you do it, Liz? Every time I see you, you look more elegant."

Liz wondered at June's tone. It seemed insincere. The only time she would ever speak like that was if she was trying to keep from admitting she felt threatened. But why would June, of all people, take appearances seriously? June had chosen to live in such a way that appearances were not important.

June was studying Liz's face with detachment. "Lipstick, eyeliner, rouge," she enumerated. Then her gaze fixed on Liz's earrings. "Oh, Liz," she breathed. "They're

beautiful!"

You'd think that if June was up to noticing something as small as jewellery, she couldn't have missed the fact that Liz was squirming, Liz thought. Maybe June simply couldn't bring herself to believe that a woman who could look so good could have so little confidence. Liz said sharply, "Nick doesn't like them."

June didn't seem to hear. "They look like jewels in a fairy-tale."

Liz struggled with her irritation. She knew that June was only trying to make her feel good. Still, she couldn't help feeling as if she was being put on a pedestal.

June had been poor a long time. Could June have gone without what she needed for so long that she'd become the kind of person who could look at nothing without seeing its price? Liz administered the short, sharp corrective which she assumed would be all that was needed. "But June, it's stuff you can buy in stores. If you wanted, you could look like this, too." Then, the thought coming as if she'd never heard it before, she said, "If you want, I'll take you shopping."

June flinched--as well she might, Liz thought.

June lashed out, "I could never look like that."

Liz's pity overcame her irritation. She swept back a particularly untidy whorl of June's hair. "June, you're so beautiful. I wish you knew it."

June's expression just fell further. "I'm not."

"Why?"

"I'm horribly fat."

To this there was no adequate answer. Who cared what June looked like? Liz had once been even larger. Surely June had to remember that her identity could be changed. After all, what had their friendship ever been about if not the shared belief that they could change their lives? Could June really have forgotten their first conversation--at the YWCA--over a city map? Liz had just arrived from her father's house; June, from a man who'd beaten her. Could June really have forgotten all those times they'd told their dreams to each other?

Why else had they bothered to be poor? Liz would never forget that poverty. They'd endured sleazy landlords, inadequate heat, leaking winter boots, cheap food. What had hurt the most were all those looks of disbelief. Unlike the other people with whom she and June had shared their respective neighbourhoods (Liz thought of her old East End housemates, the taxi dispatcher and the security guard) she and June had assumed that the only thing that could give their lives meaning was finding a way to contribute to society. And it was not only their neighbours who'd looked them askance. All those people who could have given them a job--librarians, archivists, film-makers, poverty-activists --had also seemed uneasy about them. It had taken Liz a

long time to realize that her naivete had frightened them. How else could they have reacted to a woman who assumed that, because she wanted to "do good," they would automatically find her a place, if only as a volunteer?

Now, though, she and June were on their way. She was teaching; June was enrolled in a Master's Programme in Linguistics--what June had always said she wanted. June wasn't teaching as formally as she was. Still, Liz had always assumed June regarded her occupation, as a Departmental marker, with the same pride she did.

June must be feeling discouraged. Of course it was June who was feeling discouraged. Liz could not afford to admit that June's discouragement mirrored her own.

She held her friend's gaze. "You know, the only reason I can go on is because I have my work." She leaned forward. "I mean, if you think about it, it's quite wonderful we have work at all."

June couldn't have missed what she was alluding to. All she did, though, was to look even gloomier. "So it's going well then."

Liz stared.

"Very well," Liz answered crisply. "How are you?"

Her friend responded with yet another appealing look. Liz was surprised at how grateful she felt at sight of the waiter. However, when he realized that they wished nothing beyond two small soups, he shut his order book with what was

clearly meant to be heard as a disapproving snap.

His disrespect united them. They shared one of the shamed grins they used to exchange, so often. But Liz closed her heart to the tug of the past. She prompted, with artificial brightness, "You."

June lightened a little. In fact, June didn't even seem to question her willingness to take charge. June almost seemed to welcome it. "Oh Liz, I've had the most dreadful week."

Liz couldn't help smiling.

June gave her a brief, hurt look. "No, seriously, I've been having the most terrible troubles with noise." New people had moved in upstairs and they fought in the middle of the night.

"What kind of fighting?"

"Oh, she screams. He throws things. The first time it happened, I thought they were in my apartment.

"I've left two, you know, really polite messages on the stairs." She looked bewildered. "It scares me. I mean, what do I do if he starts to beat her up?"

Liz knew that to feel this degree of impatience was over-reacting. But how could she admit how tired she was becoming of June's faith that if she only approached other people courteously enough, those people would be willing to solve problems. Even the co-op itself did not seem interested in responding to her complaint about the upstairs

tenants' noise.

June must have interpreted Liz's silence as sympathy because she went on to admit that she'd pretty well moved entirely to the library. "Still, I'm very tired," she admitted.

June's expression made Liz uneasy: such a passive, accepting expression. Liz couldn't admit to herself how terrified she felt of hearing June recount any more disasters. When would June learn that it was self-destructive to place more faith in the world than the world merited?

"Where are you sleeping?"

"Oh, at the library, mostly. I've been hiding from the security staff at closing time. Except now the library is angry at me. One of the guards found me last night. I wasn't sleeping--I was studying...." She caught sight of Liz's face. "What's wrong with that? To allow students to study is what the library is there for, isn't it? I pay my fees. I'm perfectly within my rights."

Liz couldn't help herself. "Move," she said bluntly.

June looked betrayed. "That's easy for you to say. You've got money."

Liz struggled to keep from lashing out at June's bitter tone. June had a point, she thought. What with her salary, and the occasional gift from her mother, she would have been comfortable, quite comfortable--that is, if she hadn't had

Nick.

What had happened to June? When she and June had first met, June talked as though she'd come from the same kind of background as Liz had. Neither of them had ever had much money, but they'd always had enough to keep going. Didn't June realize that, beyond a certain point, poverty was dangerous? Didn't she realize that if she fell too far, she would never climb back out? If she couldn't choose where she lived, what she wore, how she ate--how could she be expected to keep remembering that the only person with the power to change anything was herself? Of course, the poverty Liz, herself, had fallen into those two, long-ago winters had been the result of an accident. June, though-- June seemed to be letting herself sink deliberately.

"How's school?" She immediately regretted her question. In Liz's opinion, the main reason June was always so behind with her school work was because she was always charging off to protest something. Indeed, the next moment, June gave one of her predictable sighs. Liz didn't want to think about the fact that, given June's circumstances, June had every right to look hopeless. If she admitted June was helpless, how could admitting her own helplessness be far behind?

Instead of telling Liz about her school work, though, June began telling her about men. Men? One would think June really did believe that someone would be willing to

love her, precisely as she was. From the way June was presenting her life, she might have been showered with masculine attention. Surely June wasn't simply trying to copy a style of conversation--the style of conversation she imagined Liz must discuss Nick among other friends? The pity of it was that June didn't know how to carry it off.

Liz studied the flush over June's face.

June brightened, "...though there is one of my students I'm kind of interested in."

"A student?" Liz said. "A student? June, sleeping with a student is wrong!"

"Sleeping with a student is an abuse of power," she said. "Think about it. The only way a person can learn is if he gives up his usual ways of making distinctions. We, as teachers, have to honour that. To sleep with a student, even if he is willing, is taking advantage of his trust."

Liz glared. "I suppose so," June said. She did not sound convinced.

The waiter put down their soup and, not smiling, disappeared. The two women looked at each other.

"How's Nick?" June asked spitefully.

Liz surveyed her friend, her friend's uncomprehending envy. She looked down. The little flecks of clam in her soup blurred. She could see herself, settling on the Friday morning train. She would always come so early the other passengers were yet to arrive. She would settle her bags

and arrange her newspaper and coat. Then, when everything was ranged about her just as she wished, she would lean back until the padded seat held up her head.

She would turn her head to gaze past her pretty, golden-lit reflection at the low ceiling, the squat pillars, the rising wisps of steam. The train platform always seemed to her a place, miles underground.

She sat very still and gazed out--attending to nothing but the air-brakes' faint hissing, the click and slam of the carriage doors, the occasional entry of a passenger. Finally would come the moment she was waiting for. All the train lights would switch out. No more underground hall, no more pretty golden-lit reflection. Nothing but a crashing in the darkness. The flash of daylight--on sidings, on telephone poles keeping pace, not keeping pace--was always a sensation intense enough to make her throat tighten.

She looked at her friend. "To get on that train Friday mornings, I live for it the other six and three-quarter days a week."

June sat, calm, respectful, but somehow--what? Uncomprehending.

Desire, Liz thought. What that memory signified was desire. Not just sexual desire, but desire for something else. She dabbed at her eyes and blew her nose noisily. She found herself reaching out to grab June's hand.

"I'm scared, you know."

"Why?"

Liz buried her face in one hand and mutely shook her head. Lord knows what June believed Liz was keeping back, but the instant Liz loosened her grip, June wiggled her fingers and took her hand away.

June returned to what, to her, remained unanswered.

"How is Nick?"

"He's out," Liz said in a dull bitter voice.

"Out?"

"He wouldn't let me come." Provoked, she supposed, by June's lifted eyebrows, Liz began to tick off points on her fingers. "Last night he stayed late at the office. He never does that. This afternoon, he's out... Oh, some silly thing, helping someone move--at least, that's what he said. Tonight, he's working at the cafe. He says it's for the money. But I mean, would you keep someone's cafe open while your girlfriend is visiting, just for ten bucks and tips?"

"I can't help thinking he feels I've let him down. I must have done something. But I've thought and I've thought and I can't see what it is."

June stared at her as though she were being confronted with something she'd rather not swallow; as though she were amused, Liz thought suddenly.

June said, "You're so amazing, Liz. No matter what happens to you, you never stay down long. You just get up,

dust yourself off, and go on to the next thing." Her friend gazed across the table, calm, reassuring, but implacable.

Liz stared at her friend. Not at the wisps of hair or the flushed cheeks. Five years they had known each other, Perhaps five years was not as long as she'd thought.

June laced her fingers together. She looked at Liz reproachfully. "You've always told me how well you and Nick got along together."

Liz was uncomfortable admitting quite how angry she felt. She did not stop to think what topic she was introducing. All she wanted was to be talking about something different. "Hey! Have you read the headlines today?"

June looked bewildered.

"You know, about that black guy getting killed by the police?"

Perhaps June really did think that she had convinced Liz that Liz's unhappiness--such as it was--was not worth bothering about. She gave Liz a relieved look, as though she wanted to signal she was grateful for this gesture of appeasement. "Isn't it awful?" she asked, not sounding like it was awful at all. "I was down demonstrating yesterday."

June went on, "The police in this city are all completely corrupt."

Liz was already regretting her choice of topics. "Really?" she queried dryly.

June checked, looked surprised, went on. "Come on, Liz. The third black guy killed 'by accident' in six months?"

June must have realized that for Liz to have brought up politics at all was daring. Liz couldn't quite believe June would act as though, since Liz had granted this concession, she could be expected to grant more.

"Hey, are you demonstrating tomorrow?"

Liz answered stolidly, "No."

June checked again. Then, moved by who knows what hopefulness, she bent, rummaged at her feet and came up holding a clip-board. "You're lucky, I have the petition with me. We're trying to get the Police Chief fired. Hang on while I find a pen."

Fired? Liz thought. Not that she said anything. How could she? She thought she'd never seen her friend looking so beautiful before. June's eyes shone; her cheeks were pink; even her hair seemed to gleam more brightly.

But she would have to say something. June was holding out the pen. "June, I don't hold the Police Chief responsible for that man being killed. It's foolish, even pernicious, to hold any single person at fault for a situation that seems to me more simply the city falling down around its ears."

June pushed her. Liz explained, "I think the problem-- and therefore the solution--is a lot more complicated. What

we really should be fighting for is a more equitable society."

June cut her off. "Better housing, better daycare, better access to jobs.... If one more person gives me this line, I think I'm going to puke."

All of June's hair seemed to have escaped its clips at once. "Elizabeth Pendleton, I would never have expected to hear this from you. Don't you realize that what you're saying lets you feel good--yet never actually obliges you to go out and do anything. I used to believe in stuff like that myself. But what ever changes? So black people need better education? So what? So I agree? Next month, another black guy will get picked off by the cops."

June shoved crossly at her hair; it all came down at once.

When had June's political activism started? June hadn't been political when they'd first met. Over the years, though, something had happened. It was one thing to be always running off protesting something. It was quite another to be pointing a finger because one couldn't fall asleep at night without having identified someone--anyone--as the culprit. Who the culprit was almost didn't matter, as long as she bore symbols of authority. Liz caught herself thinking about Flora. But she knew all too surely who June would side with there. Liz cursed herself. Whatever had prompted her to this discussion?

Suddenly, without really reflecting on what she was doing, Liz scribbled something on a napkin. "Here, you're a linguist," she said, turning the napkin so that it faced June. "Does it make sense?"

"Sure it makes sense."

"Would you pass a student who wrote like this?"

June appeared dumbfounded Liz would even have to ask. "Sure, I would pass them. I pass everyone. No one deserves to fail."

Liz tapped the napkin with the pen. "Ah, but would you hire someone who wrote like this?"

June gave her a betrayed look.

Liz scrunched up the napkin and put it in her pocket. June just sat there, looking lost.

Suddenly, what seemed impulsively, June reached out and caught Liz's arm. "Liz, are you all right?"

Liz jumped to her feet and made a play of noticing the time on her watch. "I'll pay," Liz volunteered.

June wouldn't let her.

Liz watched June count out the five loonies to the table. After a tiny pause, she added a single one extra for a tip.

They stood outside, buttoning their coats in the rain. June still watched Liz with that new-found wondering expression. The rain falling about them made a pattering

sound. Liz felt guilty. "Don't worry about me," she said.

June reached out and touched one of Liz's earrings.

The last thing Liz saw, the far side of the intersection, was June's worried-looking face. Above it, like a kabuki mask, the waiter's scowl.

Liz set off westward, toward the centre of town. She passed the streetcar stop with barely a glance. Drizzle fell past the street lamps, which had begun to glow a dim green; past the spotlights outside the corner store, which shone brilliant on the ranked lines of wilting chrysanthemums. Rain dripped from the mournful-looking patio furniture outside the tapas place. The traffic had thickened; she was blinded by the glare of the oncoming headlights. As the each car passed, the world flashed from light to dark.

Almost as soon as she'd turned away, Liz put all thoughts of June from her. She was conscious only of the time, the hour: of precisely how many moments remained in this city. She passed the community day-care centre and the renovated Gilded Age mansion Nick had told her was a brothel. She drew up her collar and adopted a clipped walk.

She quickened her pace past the glowing iron-barred laundromats, past the 1930s three-storey apartment blocks-- now just looming shadows. Their tiny windows were so muffled with curtains that the windows' outlines hardly

showed. Across, in the park, dim figures waited under umbrellas of shadow. Liz stayed close to the curb, keeping as visible as she could to the passing cars. She kept track of the nearest lit place into which she could run. Without looking, she passed the men waiting inside phone booths. A taxi slowed at her side. She would not give it a glance.

She felt oddly disconnected from what lay around her. Though, normally, she would have felt afraid at finding herself alone on this kind of street at nightfall, she did not feel afraid now. This was not her city. At this moment, suspended on what felt like an invisible cable running between the cafe behind her and one of those high twinkling lights, ahead--moreover, with less than twenty-four hours to go here--she felt reduced to a pair of roaming, recording eyes. A beefy man with a mouth like a slit lumbered by, carrying groceries. A taxi paused, a block up; a woman--a hooker, Liz supposed--leaned to its window. Far off, over the park loomed the fairy cliffs of the downtown. Suddenly, she found herself thinking how dare June believe she could change anything? This--this was the world. Whether or not she or June might like it, this was the way things were. Cruel, narrow, ugly--and yet not that at all. For somehow, at the heart of that very ugliness, beauty lay like a pearl. How could one want to change anything? To change the world would be to ruin it.

Liz threaded her way among newspaper boxes, parking

meters, construction flashers. An artificial light came from everywhere--from the passing cars, from the lit tiers above her, even from the glass blocks set, below her, in the sidewalk. Here, the street turned a little so that she, the five lines of traffic, the glowing streetcars, all appeared in imminent danger of tilting into a blazing skyscraper. She was approaching Nick's intersection.

Three elderly Asian women surged toward the opening doors of the streetcar. She felt sad at the weariness across their faces. Suddenly, Liz found herself remembering that cove where she used to swim. Nothing but water, firs, and, far-off, a distant mountain. Of course a person needed enough money to buy the boat that would get her there. But surely one did not need to pay money to see beauty. Even those tired-looking women must be able to recall mountains and seas of their own. If she could remember, why couldn't they? If only we could believe in ourselves.... But what was she thinking of? The world could never be changed.

She waited among the other bodies at the intersection. In this pallid light, everyone really did look as if, in spirit, they were somewhere else. But on the far side of the intersection a different kind of sight met her eyes. A tall gaunt man--a pensioner, cleanly and neatly dressed--stood with his hand out to the crowd. He met her gaze with dignity. She wanted to give him something. But what did she have to give? Shoving her hands into her pockets with a

kind of violence, she fled into the crowd.

When Liz unlocked the last bolt and pushed the stiff door open, she saw Nick hunched over the table under the dull beam of the overhead light. No second place had been set.

She greeted him breezily--as much because she was relieved finally to be back inside as for anything else. She let each boot fly at the back of the closet, draped her coat over a hanger, forgot to close the closet door.

"Hello," Nick said to his plate of spaghetti.

She took it all in: his silence, the dull shine of the overhead light; the sombre mood. She tiptoed back and noiselessly shut the closet door.

He spoke without turning his head. "I didn't think you were coming home. There's spaghetti on the stove if you want it."

Liz peeked under the lids of the two pots. She looked at the sauce curiously. One couldn't even buy canned spaghetti sauce at the market.

She settled before her plate. "I didn't buy spaghetti sauce today."

Nick said, sounding tired, after taking another forkful, "I wasn't in the mood for the other stuff."

The mixture dribbled through the tines of her fork. Cheap, canned spaghetti sauce. She'd eaten it too many

times when she'd been poor.

"Salad there," he muttered.

She rarely made herself salad. Salad was too much work for a single person to prepare for a meal, alone. She studied the flecks of carrot, the bite-sized pieces of spinach, the cubes of mushroom and apple, the sunflower seeds. "This is delicious!" she exclaimed. And suddenly, it was delicious: this hot meal prepared by Nick's hands.

She enquired, "So how was the move?"

He pushed away his plate and wiped his mouth with a neatly folded piece of toilet paper. He spoke low. "Al offered me a job today, but I don't think I'm going to take it."

She couldn't tell whether he sounded offended because Al had offered him a job, or because he was telling her about it.

"It's out in Mississauga, at his company. He told me that if I showed up on Monday, he'd find me something to do."

He looked nearer at her. "I don't know how much you know about Al and me, but we've been getting into selling those commemorative coins--the NHL Hall of Fame--that sort of thing. I'm sure you've seen them, advertised at the back of Chatelaine, and so on."

She nodded. After all, that was the kind of place she would expect this kind of advertising to be.

He looked at her. "Well, it's taken off, absolutely taken off, in the last six months. Four hundred percent growth, that sort of thing. He's even been invited to sell them on the Home Shopping Network."

He smiled wryly. "I mean they're absolutely useless. Neither Al nor I can understand why anybody would ever want to buy them." He looked at her inquiringly, "I mean, would you?"

He smiled a little at her response.

"And they're expensive: seventy-five bucks a pop. Al thinks people are scared. No jobs, the economy: all that. And the coins are gold. Partly gold." His eyes twinkled, "Well, a tiny bit gold." He grinned, "We don't tell people that, though."

He considered this for a moment with an expression something between satisfaction and resignation.

He came to the point. "I mean, the work doesn't bother me. I can sell anyone anything. It's just that I'd have to be out in Mississauga every day. And I've got so much of my own going on." He began to tick off items on his fingers. "The gymnastics film. The film adaptation with Anne Rogers. The Maple Leaf deal--which is done, but there might be more."

"Besides, I don't trust Al's motives. It's one thing to be known as Al Schumacher's partner; it's quite another to let myself become known as his underling."

She couldn't help feeling as if she was being drawn into something a little too big for her. She interrupted, "I can understand your not wanting to take the job. But it's only nine days to the end of the month. How are you going to cover the rent?"

"Oh, I'll be all right. Al's father owns this building."

This hadn't sounded like the situation he'd presented last month. Suddenly she wondered whether she'd needed to pay his September rent.

He went on, "No, I'm dangerous, and Al knows it." The real question, as he was explaining now, was not whether Al would take care of him, but on what terms.

"Oh, you guys," Liz said, trying to keep from wondering why he was telling her all this. He never told her the facts about his business affairs.

He reached out and ran his fork around his plate, picking up the last of his sauce. The fork dripped on the way to his mouth. He looked down at the splot on his shirt. Then he ignored it.

As if he were continuing with the same topic, he said, "It's going to be a hard meeting with Beth tomorrow."

"I'm behind on my support payments--really, seriously, behind. It's starting to affect what Bethie's mother can afford for Bethie to do. For one thing, Bethie won't be able to tour with the figure skating team next week when

they go to Illinois." He inspected his fork for a minute. Then he put it down.

He looked at her. "Her mother has decided to take me to court."

She hardly heard him explaining that the reason he'd been delayed last night was because Al had insisted he and Al meet.

Marcie was taking him to court? A chill rose right up through her hair. Not--or so she thought--because of any effect his being taken to court could have on her. But if Marcie's action could have no impact on her, why this fear?

She reached for reason. If she could not triumph over her emotions, who could? To be taken to court was not bad, she thought. It might feel bad, but it wasn't, really. She thought of her position. Here she'd been hauled up before a tribunal. There were no written rules of procedure. She had no one to serve as her advocate. She had no way of knowing what, if anything, of all the things she could say would be accepted as "evidence." Her fate might depend entirely on how persuasively she could appeal for mercy.

Nick simply needed to think and he would see all was well. To be able to go before a Queen's justice was a privilege. He would come up against power--for what else was a court but the most concrete form of power in society? But he would only come up against power to watch where power was obliged to leave off. And backing up the Queen's

justice was the Queen's sword--a real sword, Liz had seen it once on television. The Queen carried it when she opened Parliament. It was called the Sword of State.

Despite this attempt to reassure herself, Liz couldn't help the catch in her throat--the same catch that rose at first sight of the financial district.

She was jarred back to the present by the desperate expression on Nick's face. She made some sound of sympathy.

He snapped, "You just don't get it, do you? The court will have the power to examine my financial affairs--Al's financial affairs! Al wasn't very happy about that."

He said, "A court case is the last thing I need." He propped his head in his hands. "I've just gotta get some dough. I've just gotta get some dough." He spoke in a dull, distracted voice.

Liz watched him. To sit, and say nothing, was very difficult to do. She would have offered him money, but she didn't have any more. But how could she tell him? To load him with any more problems would be cruel, she thought.

When had he ever not been short of cash? Within an hour of them embarking on their first date, she had been embroiled in his financial affairs. In order to keep what had turned out to be only a short-term job, Nick had been obliged to supply his head office with a quota of completed financial questionnaires.

She'd protested that she did not give out financial

information to anyone. He'd pestered her so long, though, that she'd given in. The questionnaire had surprised her; it requested more detail than she'd expected. When he saw how many slots she'd filled in with a zero, he'd seemed... had it been scornful? Or simply disbelieving? Who knows why he had lost that job--perhaps even her zeros had contributed. Nick had explained it away by saying that he had stood up to his boss. "Stood up"--his words. To her, it had sounded as if Nick had picked a quarrel. Nick quarrelled with a lot of people. Once he had come home from a job interview to tell her that he'd shown up an interviewer who had deliberately tried to humiliate him. "Poor Nick," she thought as she studied his bowed head. Nick was, quite simply, desperate.

Nick brightened. "Hey!" he exclaimed. "I told Al about the film adaptation project. He thinks I'd make a great scriptwriter!"

What, exactly, was Nick's relationship with Al? She knew Al was the son of a developer--an extremely wealthy developer, or so it sounded. One afternoon, several weekends ago, Nick had rushed in to tell her that Al was researching hit-men. Nick wouldn't tell her the reasons why. He'd been eager to let her know the going street-rate, though: five thousand dollars a limb. He seemed to find the modesty of the rate amusing. She rebuked him for taking Al's actions lightly, but he was too busy telling her the

story again to hear. Perhaps the best way of understanding Nick and Al was of seeing them as two overgrown boys, out playing pranks.

She and Nick sat in a different kind of silence from the one she'd come home to. Perhaps the change in mood came for no greater reason than that Nick had talked about his problems.

"How was the move?" she asked.

His voice answered, sounding lazy. "Oh, fine, fine."

"Did you tell them I offered to come and help?"

He shook his head, looking amused.

A smile touched his lips. "Boy, Astrid sure has a lot of clothes. Closets full. Two whole walk-in closets of them, to be precise." The smile deepened. "That's all we did today, move Astrid's clothes."

"She sure must have had to pop a lot of cash to land Al." He looked almost wistful.

"Oh!" he said, remembering something. "Astrid sent something for you."

"For me?"

"She was cleaning out the closets. She was going to throw these away, too. Then she asked if you might like them."

Liz was still struggling to take in what she'd heard. "She sent something for me?"

He rose, rummaged in the closet, and set before her a

rumpled-looking paper bag.

"What is it?"

"Shoes," he said. He must have wanted to get the whole scene over with--her gratitude, her elation--because he said, "C'mon, look at them."

Not that she noticed how intently he waited. She was still absorbed in thinking about what Astrid's gesture might mean. She nodded absently. "I'll look at them later."

If she'd reflected upon his expression, she would have assumed that he looked this disappointed because she hadn't shown him her gratitude. She flung herself into his arms. He held her, a little surprised. He rocked her. He took her hand to lead her into the bedroom. Just before they went in, he looked at the clock.

"Shit!" he exclaimed. He had to be at work in twenty minutes. "Work" he called it--keeping Michael's cafe open for half the take and tips.

She supposed she must have complained more bitterly than she'd expected.

"Please," he breathed. "Let's not talk about it any more." Then he was gone, the three bolts sounding loud as they slid home.

Thirty-seven floors above the ground, behind five video cameras, a security guard, a triple-locked door, and a locked, inner, bathroom door, Liz lay up to her neck in a

very hot bath. She had given a sigh at the first, warm shock about her hips. Then, as the heat swirled around her shoulder-blades, she settled backwards until all that was above water was her head. The overflow pipe gurgled. Then, other than the occasional drip, the room was silent. The vapour swirled so thickly that she could barely see the walls.

She'd expected she would find herself thinking about her teaching--or at least, about whatever was really going on with Nick. But all that came to mind was a long-ago dream.

It had been an eerie dream, and it had come to her under somewhat eerie circumstances. Last spring--had it only been last spring?--she'd been out West, visiting her parents. She'd become so sickened by the atmosphere of misery in the family house that she'd done what she used to: grabbed her tent, stuffed her pack, and headed for the mountains. But it had been a late spring. Snow lingered on the trails. By late afternoon, she'd found herself half-way up a rocky escarpment with no blazes in sight. She wasn't particularly worried; in the past, she'd often been lost. Besides, she told herself, the difference between being lost and being, well, somewhere, was only a state of mind. Nevertheless, she found herself anxious. Perhaps all those years of living in a city had robbed her of more than she'd expected. By dinner time, now kick-stepping up something

more like a cliff than an escarpment, she had to admit she was truly lost. By dusk, she hauled herself over the lip of the snow face to find herself atop a high and lonely ridge, surrounded by miles of late snowfields.

The only place to pitch the tent turned out to be a patch of rock, bordered on both sides by knife-edged drops. Not the tent-site she would have chosen. But what choice did she have? She pitched the tent and weighted it with rocks. She was shivering and exhausted. She ate her dinner, huddled in the lee of the tent. But even as she gazed around at the pink-lit peaks, the clouds that had been threatening all day began to blow in. In less than three breaths the most distant of the ice-clad peaks (twenty miles away) had been blown out. Liz studied the messages she could read in the wispy streamers, in the low and ragged clouds blowing in behind. She rose wearily, checked the rocks weighting the tent, and crawled inside.

The tent was a howling racket. Liz wriggled into her sleeping bag and stared upwards into the faint dimness that was all that would ever arrive of the dark. The wind smacked and tugged at the nylon walls, burrowed for, and even occasionally bulged up from under, the floor. She knew that the nylon would rip open before the tent would blow away. Nevertheless, each smack sounded louder than the one before.

At last, she fell into an uneasy sleep. She dreamed

she was walking through a body--her body--which was also a mountain. She walked through the rooms inside this mountain, opening door after door. But all the rooms were empty. Then she came to a little stair and finally to a tiny, topmost, door. She flung open the door, not expecting much--not expecting anything--and saw a tiny red man hanging, numb or sleeping, upside down, from a tree--a tree inside a mountain. The man swayed in the wind, blowing through the room, with a chill, terrible creaking. Beyond him, out window-like apertures hewn in the rock, she could see frozen, glacier-riven peaks. The room, the man, the solitude, the creaking: she had never been in a place that felt so suffused with suffering. But nothing happened. The man's eyes stayed shut; the wind did not ceased--neither did the creaking.

She woke the next morning to find herself in fog. All that day, as she'd picked her route downwards, the dream had stayed with her. It had stayed with her for weeks. Why was she remembering it now? Thought of it frightened her.

She gave a gurgle and slipped into the water until only her nose protruded. Those heights on a summer's day! She'd always known she was happiest on one kind of edge or another. What could be a finer edge than that ridge? The rocks reflected the sun's heat in a great lazy fragrance. In every direction the glaciers rose, their blue and white shapes so bright they made her squint. Three quarters of an

arc of white ramparts behind her; before her, the entire civilized world and the sea. The place was still, just the steady, almost inaudible hush of the streams off the glacier and the rustle of a raven's feathers as the bird rose over the ridge.

Then the season of the year came back to her. Gone was the memory of the warm rocks, the raven, the glittering ramparts. All those summer-time memories went as abruptly as if they had been blown out. The ridge was already many times her height in snow. For the next six months, even the high places were closed.

Liz felt around for the nailbrush, sat up, and scrubbed her skin until it stung. She stood under the icy shower a long time. Then she stepped back onto the floor.

Liz leaned to the bathroom mirror to better dot at her imperfections. Then, after darkening her eyes, emphasizing her lips and cheekbones, and spraying on lily of the valley perfume, she slipped on a top of antique lace, a cast-off from her godmother. The lace lay heavily against her neck. Her fingers were shaking as she did up the buttons--buttons which, since they ran up her back, really required a second pair of hands. The mirror showed her an extraordinary transformation. She knew that those fairy tales of princesses dressed for balls were untrue. Nevertheless, she gazed with growing astonishment. She fingered the scallops

of dark lace against her throat. She gave herself a small moue of disapproval. Then she clipped on her earrings and turned from the mirror.

Liz had sometimes feared she would never be able to escape her father's house. For years, she used to dream of finding herself transfixed halfway up--or perhaps halfway down--the family staircase. She'd known, in the dream, she was in terrible danger. As she had hesitated, a fat dwarf had appeared, taunting: "You'll never get out! You'll never get out!" But, in the dream, she had. Just at the moment she'd rushed out the front door, the house had extinguished itself behind her in flames.

In the last half hour, Nick had telephoned twice. The first time, he told her that no people were there and that she should come quickly. The second time, that people had arrived and that she did not have to hurry, after all. Liz listened both times, and then went on with her preparations no more or less quickly than before.

Now the phone rang a third time, but she did not pause to pick it up. As the clock began striking, a seemingly endless series of bongs, she seized her purse, locked the door behind her and, drawing her wrap about her, looked back at the doorknob. She shivered a little and set off down the hallway.

Nick was just tidying up when she came in. "Nice

timing," he said. "Though you might have come earlier." Something in his tone made her think that he held her delay against her.

She slipped onto one of the five stools; there were only five stools in the place.

"A really interesting woman was in," he said.

She hardly attended. She was taking care not to mark her shoes; not to catch her stockings.

"She's a tree woman," he explained. "She lives on a mountaintop all by herself." He eyed Liz narrowly. "She's so calm. I've never met anyone quite like her."

On the whole, Liz decided he probably wasn't trying to hurt her. She doubted he would remember that she'd spent time on mountaintops, herself. Still, she couldn't help a pang of--well, what? Disappointment? Regret? If he'd seen her as she'd looked then--muddy knees, torn shirt, fly-away hair--he wouldn't have had her if she'd paid him. Was life always like this? Did people always pass over what they could have for what they couldn't?

He went on, "She's very spiritually developed."

"I bet," she mocked.

She was still trying to decide whether she was going to ask him whether he was going to see the tree woman again when he caught sight of how she was dressed. He coloured a little, and, as if the thought that he'd given himself away struck him at the same moment it struck her, he gave her a

sheepish look.

She laughed at him.

Though his face did not grow cold, it grew perhaps a little more crafty.

She lit her cigarette and blew her smoke towards him.

He lifted his cash jar and rattled it. "Including your coffee, I will have made ten dollars and seventy-five cents tonight."

She took the hint and paid him.

He turned up the music. Immediately she, he and the four unoccupied stools were united inside a waterfall of jazz. She rose, and, turning her back to him, began to dance. The lighting, the sound-track, his gaze, her beauty-it could have been a moment from a movie. She thought she had never been so happy in her life.

After he had locked the place behind them, they stood on the steps, looking around. Rain bounced from the pavement. The night seemed very dark.

They descended the steps and proceeded a little uncertainly into the rain.

"What do you want to do?" he asked.

She told him that, frankly, she was ready to call it a night.

He looked astonished. "But you're all dressed up."

A taxi idled, wipers flashing, roof-light on. "How

about a drink?"

"You look tired," she said. "Maybe we should just go home."

"Just one drink?" He leapt forward and opened the taxi door.

She looked at him wonderingly. She couldn't remember him being so determined that they go out late, before.

He held the door open so wide that it gave a little creak. "Just one," he insisted.

She peered forward, as though her uneasiness was prompted by something about the driver's face. But he just looked back at her, bewildered.

Nick's opening the door set going another thought. She blurted out, "Nick, I can't pay. I've only got four dollars."

But at her shamefaced expression--she could feel the heat in her cheeks--her reacted in exactly the opposite way to what she'd expected.

He said, sounding irritated. "I've got ten on me; with your four it will be all right."

She looked from Nick to the driver, from the driver back to Nick. To step in would be cowardice, she thought. The trouble was, to not step in would be cowardice, too.

The bar turned out to be a dimly lit place, so dimly lit that all she could make out was wood panelling and here

and there a glint of bronze. It was almost deserted. Down the bar, a man in a suit leaned over his drink and watched silent basketball on television. Three Japanese men, also in suits, sat around a low table in the shadows. The men--all of them--looked up when she entered. Then, when they saw Nick behind her, they went back to whatever they'd been doing as if she'd never been there.

The place was luxurious, self-consciously luxurious, the mood of entitlement conveyed by how carefully each object was presented. The spot lighting separated each table from each other; a napkin separated her drink from the surface of the bar. A toe-rail separated her feet from the carpet. Even the room's air was kept separated from the walls by the red velvet drapes. The low playing elevator music also contributed to the sense of tactile solitude. As for herself--if she hadn't had Nick beside her, she wasn't sure she would have signified at all.

She couldn't help her pleasure in the place. She surveyed it from atop the bar stool beside Nick's. "A Daddy-bar!" she exclaimed. What she meant, of course, was that this was the kind of place she couldn't even have imagined entering alone.

Nick settled one elbow on the bar, rested his head on his hand and smiled at her. He seemed out, tonight, to provide her with pleasure. She might have been a lamp, the way he was basking in her delight. The more brightly she

shone, the more intently he smiled back. She was always surprised by how much power he granted her when she was dressed up.

Suddenly she thought of her students. What would they think if they could see her now? Not quite the woman they might have imagined her as: not a reasonable woman, not a rational woman, not, even, perhaps, a "good" woman at all. They suspect, she thought, they suspect this thing in her. But though they might suspect, they didn't know. Perhaps the real reason they tried so hard to be agreeable was not because they admired her but because they feared she might turn out to be something else.

"Oh ho!" she laughed like a pirate. Nick's eyes only shone more brightly.

Then the bartender was before them. Liz flipped her credit card, which she'd already been holding, onto the counter.

"But you shouldn't be paying!" Nick exclaimed.

Nick exchanged some sort of look of understanding with the bartender. She was too surfeited with contentment to bother with an answer. Besides, what was there to say?

She lifted her glass, toasted him, and downed her Scotch in a swallow. Nick, though, seemed hesitant about putting back the booze the way they usually did. One would almost think he had an agenda tonight. She teased, "You have something you want to talk to me about?"

He wasted time playing with his glass. Then he delivered her a look which, had she not known him better, she would have thought one of cunning. He seemed to summon himself. "As you know, I haven't spoken much about my business associates."

His business associates? Why would he be telling her about them now? Not that she hadn't been longing to find out about them. She knew him well enough, though, to know that he never revealed anything without having calculated the benefits beforehand. Her stomach fluttered. She gave no sign, though, of her quickening interest. Watching her, in fact, one might have thought the subject bored her.

"There's six of us," he began. Al, who you've met. Daryl, whose dad is a Supreme Court judge. Lorne, who's really a nobody, though we all put up with him. Neil, his dad gives him millions--and I mean millions--to keep him amused until it's time to take over the family fortune. Uri. Oh, and of course, myself."

He waited as if he expected questions. But she was far too fascinated at the sight of him giving away power to do anything that might disturb him. In fact, if anything, she egged him on. "And," she prompted, everything about her tone suggesting that all she wanted was for him to be finished.

He spoke with a curiously artificial brightness, "And they all have wives or girlfriends."

Now he really seemed to look as though she would know what he was talking about. Maybe, deep down, she even did. So he'd decided to include her at last? Why should this make her scared? As she actually heard him list off the women's names, she found herself so scared that she stalled for time. "What do these women do?"

"What do they do?" He looked surprised. He gave a well-simulated impression of a man struggling with a recalcitrant memory. "Let's see. Susan's an artist--she sells a few paintings around town. Astrid works for Al. A receptionist. Glorified. Maureen used to be a stewardess, but she doesn't do much now. Barb--" He spoke this name with such malice that even Liz--Liz who thought she knew him--even Liz was shocked. "Barb is a model. Now who have I missed?" He counted over on his fingers. "Oh, and Josette. She used to be a tennis player."

"And now me."

"And now you." He gazed at her fondly, so fondly she felt a chill.

Aiming even wider, she hoped, than last time, she observed with a worried-looking expression, "None of them sound like they really work. I wonder whether we'll have much to talk about."

He looked amused. "Work?" he said. "Oh, none of them need to work. I mean, they all have their 'careers,' but mostly they just run around having fun."

He seemed surprised that this remark did not draw a rise out of her. She was too fascinated by what he was telling her, though, to risk anything that might cut off the flow of information.

He went on, "We all get together every couple of weeks at someone's place. We have a few drinks, a few laughs. The girls look good. And, you know, the deals get done."

She couldn't help staring. Maybe he saw this kind of scenario as commonplace. To her, though.... She felt as though she'd been opened a door at some kind of exotic society. Part of her longed to be one of those women. She knew she'd be the prettiest, smartest, and certainly the most charming woman of them all. But another part of her simply felt hilarity. For him to even think she belonged there was absurd.

Perhaps he could read more of her feelings than she'd been reckoning on because he gave a little grin and, hitching up his trousers so he could shift closer, said, "They all want to meet you. And I want you to meet them, too."

Now he seemed the one who wanted to back off. He commented irrelevantly--or at least what she'd thought, irrelevantly--something about how it was clear that she'd come from a nice family.

A nice family? Why drag her family into it? She fixed her attention on his face. Suddenly, everything about it

seemed to reflect anxiety. His lips were tight; his gaze came from under half-lowered lids. That tell-tale muscle in his jaw thumped. What, she thought--what on earth was he preparing to ask her?

Not that she was going to make it easy for him. Far too many scores remained unsettled. She assumed an air of stupidity. "My family?" she queried.

He seemed downright embarrassed now. But all he did was, essentially, to repeat himself. "It's clear you're very well-bred.

Suddenly she thought she was what he was driving at. Surely he hadn't become so desperate that he wanted, somehow, to cash in on her past?

She couldn't resist teasing him. "Oh, yes, very well bred," she mocked. "I'm probably the last woman in the country to have been taught the court dances and the country dances. Drawing? Needlework? Deportment? French?" She nodded, as if to emphasize that what she was telling him was the truth. And it was the truth. That was the problem. "Oh yes. Perfectly well-bred."

Nick commented with what she was starting to find his maddening reasonableness, "I wouldn't be so hard on your family."

Abruptly, he set off on what seemed to be yet another tack. He certainly was being devious, she thought. What could he be up to? She couldn't help grinning.

He said, "This court case...with Marcie. I don't know whether you realize it, but things could get pretty ugly." He laughed a little bitterly, "As you might have guessed, I have a pretty black past. If she wanted to bring up some parts of it, I doubt the judge would be very impressed."

He was looking at her helplessly. Or was it helplessly? The trouble was, she'd never been able to read his face very well.

Her skin tingled. Now it's coming, she thought. Whatever happens, she told herself, I must look like it doesn't matter.

He took her hand. "Elizabeth, I guess you must know that you're everything I want in a woman. You're charming. You're funny. Certainly, you're very well bred. And let's face it, you've got beautiful manners. You could make anybody like you." He coloured and looked down. "You've got the bones, you've got the teeth..."

His grip tightened. "Actually, that's what I wanted to talk to you about." With his other hand, he smoothed the hand he was holding. "Trouble is, you're not beautiful yet."

She stared at him, at the reverent-looking pose he had assumed. He reminded her of a figure out of Gentleman's Quarterly. He was saying she didn't know how to look beautiful?

On the television, flickering stick-figures leapt and

curled back. The bar was very silent; the music was, temporarily, off.

Lord knows what he feared from her, but he must have been far more apprehensive than he was letting on. He explained, speaking very too quickly, "Every woman has her good points and her--um--not so good points. And there comes a certain moment in a woman's life when she has to realize that if she wants to get any further, she's going to have to--um--start paying attention."

Liz had the sudden queer thought that he, himself, didn't know how to proceed. How could he have known? Everything he was saying went against charity, respect, reason--against human nature, at least as she knew it. Not that, had she been told he would be launching into this topic, she wouldn't have predicted that this was exactly the sort of thing he would have said.

Christ, she thought, he might as well not even know that all the physical changes she'd already made in herself--losing weight, buying clothes--were important. Here, she couldn't help reliving that long ago Saturday morning shortly before she and he had met. She'd been enjoying one of the last of the Saturday mornings left to her at the house she'd been sitting for the summer. She'd been lingering over coffee on the back porch. Lord knows what had prompted her. Certainly, she'd never been eager to look at her body before. Whatever the reason, perhaps nothing

more complicated than the feel of the last of the summer against her skin, she jumped up, mounted the stairs and stripped off her clothes. She'd inspected her body from the front, from the side, from the back. What she had seen had astonished her. For thirty-two years, she'd thought she was ugly. Yet here she'd discovered her body didn't look ugly after all.

When she had finished trying on her clothes, she went back downstairs, slumped on the porch chair, stared out sightlessly. Then she had wept.

She looked at Nick now.

He might have read her mind. She hated the way he seemed to take enjoyment from her anger.

"I look nice now."

A smile touched his lips. "Very nice. But if you don't mind my saying so, you could look nicer."

She lifted her chin very high and blinked; blinked again. She searched his face. It looked so kindly. You'd think he believed himself to be doing her a favour.

"Listen," she snapped. "You're making a grave mistake. I don't know who you think I am, but I'm not the person you take me for."

He laughed a little. "You're upset," he said. "It's natural. But I can't let that go by without correcting you on one tiny point. You seem to think I'm the one who's pressuring you to change. I'm not. I'm simply asking you

for a little more concerted show of what I see you doing already.

She found she was shaking.

"You're already the kind of person who tries to please others. You're kind to your students; you're respectful to your boss. Lord knows, you're practised enough at displaying affection to me. None of it's real, of course. You're just doing what you need to get your way.

"And I don't mind it. I like it. I suppose what I mean is that, really, you're no different than me. I've always liked a woman with spirit. All I'm telling you is that you just need to, as it were, work on your game. That is--assuming you want to stick around with me."

Nick went on, "My mother warned me you know. She warned me Marcie was not right for me. Marcie came from an--um--underprivileged--family. I don't think she was ever really comfortable with the lifestyle we had to lead. I mean, I have to hand it to her, she did do a superb job of decorating the house. And she's been nothing but a good mother to Beth. The trouble was, she was never happy being part of a team.

He grinned at her look of concern. "Oh, she used to break dishes. She slit her wrists regularly. Once, in front of my mother, she even broke a vase we got as a wedding present. That didn't go over that well."

A smile touched his lips. "Then again, I wasn't very

good, myself."

Really, she thought, this Scotch was making her feel terribly unsteady. She placed the sides of her palms against her eyelids, blinked, took her hands away. She refused to admit she didn't have the will to keep from crying. If she could only keep from crying, she thought, she would prove she was stronger than him.

She rose in her seat. "Another round."

He laughed at her expression. "Surely, Liz," he said, "you'd have to admit you're not very good at taking care of yourself." He took up her hand, turned it over to study its back. She could just as easily have listed off what he was seeing: torn cuticles, broken nails, chapped skin.

She snatched her hand away as he was lifting it to kiss it.

"You're drunk," she said sharply.

He ignored this. "Anyway, the real point is, this time I need a wife who's good for my career."

She was too furious to even think of crying now. She slipped off her seat; she found it surprisingly difficult to stand.

The man in the suit watching basketball down the bar looked over.

Nick didn't even bother to look at her, though she could see his jaw set. He requested the bill, paid with his own credit card and flicked hers back towards her along the

bar like the worthless thing it was. The sound of the cash register seemed to come from terribly far away. He'd always told her his credit card had been cut off. Suddenly the floor tilted up so that it was the ceiling. Or was the ceiling the floor? She devoted all her attention to concentrating on simply the dimensions her eyes were reporting.

Outside, the rain was still falling. Lines of rain fell diagonally before the street lights. Drops smacked above them, on the marquee. A gust of wind drove water onto her legs.

They hesitated a moment, looking around. Then they set off eastward, palms out before their heads, into the rain. Within seconds, Liz's stockings were soaked; within minutes, water was trickling into her shoes. Nick thrust his hands deep in his pockets. Finally, to make him slow down--or was it to keep her pace up?--she hooked her arm through his.

The night reminded her of those nights she'd hesitated outside her father's house. In memory, it had always been raining. She remembered how, under the moving branches in the dark, she'd always felt safer than she had inside. The very freshness of that air was the freshness she smelled now.

They turned down Bay Street. Not a taxi. Not a single car's silhouette. The sparkling towers of the financial

district rose into the mist; the buildings' lower floors were nets of light; their upper floors, not visible at all. Down the street, as far as she could see, the green shine of the street lights bounced off sign after unilluminated sign. Below the signs, the doorways were just dark recesses. She could have been walking down a canyon, a drowned canyon. Suddenly she felt as if she was underwater, a mile underwater, walking along the bottom of the sea.

They passed the government publications outlet. Dark now. Shut. Locked. The tap tap tap of her shoes sounded loud in the silence. She kept glancing about, but here in this city of five million people--not a soul. Not a soul. Just the red and green winking intersections; the wide, deserted streets; herself; and the silent man beside her.

She stared uneasily at this creature he'd turned into, just a silent silhouette. They turned the corner around the used car lot and headed for the distant marquee that marked the entrance to Nick's building. Suddenly she realized she had no idea whether Nick were angry or not. She dared not admit how frightened she was, for if she had, she wouldn't have been able to go on. Finally, she simply matched her step to his. He lowered his hand to the small of her back. They went in.

The minute they entered the apartment, as if a switch had been flipped, she began to talk. In fact, she felt such

an urgency to keep words volleying between them that she hardly attended to what she said. She exclaimed about her shoes as she sat down on the floor. "They're ruined."

Nick came over, still towelling his hair. He bent down to take a look.

She held them up for him to see, dabbing--as though to demonstrate--at the splotches, the watermarks. Not that she gave a damn about her shoes. At least, expressing her worry about them was something she knew she was allowed to do.

"Oh, well," he remarked cheerfully, back in the bathroom. "There's plenty more in Astrid's bag." He gargled mouthwash, spat, ran the taps.

All she knew then was that she had sprung up and was careening about the apartment. The minute she admitted to herself how great her mistrust of him, all she could feel was the conviction that she should get out of there.

She picked up her book and took it to the bedroom. She gathered her sweater, her copy of Vanity Fair, her keys. In the bedroom, she knelt before the pile she'd collected. She knew she was taking a risk by making preparations before she departed; she had wasted her advantage of surprise. But her possessions were too important to her; she could not live with herself if she left them behind.

Nick stood in the bathroom door and watched her. He threw down the towel, went and sat on the couch and called, "Come here."

She straightened her wet clothes over the heater, carried her vitamin pills and her toiletries kit to the growing pile. She scrubbed at her shoes with a piece of toilet paper and added these, too, to the pile.

She could not kneel before her bag long without thinking of him perhaps stealing up behind her. She did not like not knowing where in the place he was. What was she afraid of? Finally, she prevaricated. She stuck just her head out the bedroom door.

He patted the couch beside him. "Come here."

Though she was scared of what might happen if she went along with him, she was even more scared of opposing him. She checked to be sure that her bathrobe was properly closed. Then she strolled out, trying to look at ease.

He patted again at the empty spot beside him.

She settled, not far from the place he'd indicated, but not exactly on it, either. She fussed to make sure her bathrobe tie was not merely knotted, but that the robe itself was draped so that it covered all sight of her knees. Finally, though, there was nothing left to do. She met his eyes.

He leaned back against the couch, crossed his legs, and folded his hands in his lap. "You're upset."

She took a breath, then she let it back out. She would let him have his say. Then, later, when he wasn't expecting, she would slip away.

He reached over with a lazy looking gesture, as though to comfort her was the most natural thing in the world.

But his touch was insufferable to her. She pulled away.

He seemed to draw into himself then; seemed to age, to tire, to suddenly look weary. "I think you might be over-reacting."

He smiled a little. "Listen to me. I watched you dancing when we were at the cafe tonight. Let me tell you, you are a wonderful dancer." He waited, as if expecting a reaction. She bobbed diffidently.

"Well, your dancing looks great because, while you're moving, you're no longer self-conscious. You've become yourself. You've become free."

To hear him speaking to her like this was such a relief that she forgot herself. "I let myself go."

"Exactly. And that's why you look so beautiful when you're dancing--truly beautiful.

"All I've been trying--trying--" He broke off for an agonized-sounding laugh. "All I've been trying to get you to see tonight is that the potential exists for you to do the same thing you do when you are dancing, when you are selecting clothes." He went on, "I do not mean, look like my friends' girlfriends; I do not mean, look like Astrid."

She shifted in preparation for getting up.

He held up his hand. "No, what I want you to look like

is you. I don't think you know who that woman is, yet."

"I mean--as they say--if you've got it, why not flaunt it?" He laughed nervously, "And let me tell you, you've got it."

Liz coloured and stood up. With part of herself she wanted to be in that bedroom getting ready to leave; with another part, all she could feel was regret.

He must have noticed her hesitation because he, too, looked sad.

She burst out, "How dare you tell me that you want a wife who's good for your career. Good for your career? What about my career?" She sank onto the sofa. "You make me feel like my life isn't worth anything."

"Calm down," said Nick. "Please calm down."

"Ha! Don't try that one on me!"

"Look. I'm not trying to make you do anything. I couldn't overcome your will. As I told you, that's one of the reasons I'm attracted to you. All I'm trying to suggest is that if you want to be included, you've got to play the game."

"Play the game!" she taunted. "Do you really think I haven't got anything better to do?"

He said mildly, "You don't appear to. After all, who's the one who comes down here every other weekend? Who's the one who advances the money? Who's the one who's--face it--willed this relationship into being?"

"But, I mean, it's fine. I like it. I more than like it. All I'm saying is that you should recognize the extent of your investment and play up."

Liz looked down in her lap. She picked up the bathrobe tie and began to toy with it.

His voice droned on, somewhere far away. The bathrobe was thick and furry. She would have liked a bathrobe like this, herself. But this kind of bathrobe cost a hundred dollars. If she had a hundred dollars, she would be paying for a hotel room right now.

She tried to shove one end of the tie inside the other. Finally, she gave up. She spoke to her lap. "I think maybe I should get out of this relationship."

"Maybe you should. But if we came to part over an issue as trivial as this, I would be very sad."

She yelled in frustration.

His face paled. He said wearily, "I can't conduct a conversation under these circumstances." He stood up, walked into the bathroom, closed the bathroom door. After five minutes he came out of the bathroom, switched off the light behind him, and, without even glancing in her direction, went into the bedroom.

He called out after a minute or two to ask whether she was coming in.

"Suit yourself, then," he answered. The bedroom door shut.

Liz rose and turned out the lights. She returned to the couch and sat, arms around herself. She gazed at the ceiling, at the dim light of the city she could see reflected there. She gazed at the shut door. Finally she rolled over, buried her face in the sofa pillows and began to cry. At first she cried softly; after a while, though, she was sobbing so hard she'd forgotten Nick was there to hear at all.

She was present only to flickering scenes: to the sight of Flora's face when Flora had first glanced up after receiving her paper. Liz's new earrings, in the showcase, before she'd bought them. Her father; her father's wry grin; his lifted glass. But she didn't know how to think about her father. She was the one who had failed him. She had failed with everyone. And now she had failed with Nick.

She shoved her face into the sofa pillows as though by feeling their resistance she might summon up a similar resistance in herself.

The bedroom banged open. Nick stumbled out.

One look at him and she re-buried her face in the pillow.

He sat down beside her.

She began to sob again.

"Hey, hey, hey," he said. "Talk to me."

She took a breath and tried to speak. "Oh," she finally said. "Oh." She breathed, hiccupped, swallowed.

He went into the bathroom, came back, sat back down beside her, and handed her a streamer of crumpled toilet paper.

She wiped her eyes, blew her nose.

He stretched out his arms.

She lay against his chest. His heartbeat was steady; more than steady. She thought she'd never heard anything so purposive in her life. She could have been listening to planets ticking around a star--in perfect Copernican order.

Her shoulders relaxed. He patted her.

She let herself be led to bed. He climbed in beside her. After a few minutes, she could hear his breathing slow, become soft and regular. But the longer she lay, the more awake she became.

He lay curled up away from her, as usual. But even though he was not touching her, the very smell of him revolted her.

She wriggled away, so far away that against her back she could feel the cool wall. But it was no use. She lay, staring into the darkness. Finally she rose, picked up her pillow, and stepped over him onto the rug.

She said in what she hoped was a non-confrontational tone, "I can't sleep here. I'm going into the living room."

He mumbled, "Take the quilt, then." He swiped at the sheets and flopped over on his stomach.

Liz lay on the couch, quilt over her, pillow behind her

head. The couch was too short for her, but she did not care. The air, here, was unsullied and cool.

But hardly had she closed her eyes than they fluttered open. She squinted at the clock. 4 A.M.? She thought of the deserted streets they'd walked along--how long ago now? Hours ago? She stared out at the city--not at the city before her, at its false fires--but at the city of her imagination.

She stared out for a long time. Finally, she returned her head to the pillow.

## SUNDAY

When Liz awoke the next morning, she didn't know where she was. She lay blinking and looking around Nick's bedroom. Then it came back. Nick had awakened her in the living room; he'd been running water to make coffee. She had risen and come in here. She still couldn't shake her feeling that something terrible had happened. The feeling was so visceral that she couldn't help reaching up to check her head. No blood. No bruises.

She looked around. A clean, white light lay upon the walls; the sound of traffic rose from below her. Only then, finally, did she remember. She felt very tired.

She stared at the even, grey expanse of the carpet; at Nick's suits, hanging in a long line, in the closet. She tried to imagine where else she might have awakened this morning. But she couldn't even do that. The apartment was very silent. He must be still out.

A horn blared below her. The sound made her head ache even more. Impulsively, she reared up and slammed the window shut. The room was quieter, but not by much. She searched behind the door for Nick's bathrobe, but the bathrobe was not there. She finally hunted down the alarm clock. 11:55? she thought. He usually returned from having breakfast with Beth by twelve-thirty. She stumbled, eyes

aching, into the shower and turned on the cold tap.

Twenty minutes later, she stood in the centre of the living room. Her hair was now clean, her teeth brushed; she was already halfway through the mug of black coffee. She wandered over to the window. Far below her, tiny people waited, moved, then waited again--though they didn't really look like people, she thought. They looked like dots.

She poured herself more coffee and paused before the crystal bowl on the table. Marcie, she thought. What had Nick's last marriage really been like? Just because she didn't know the stories didn't mean the stories weren't there. She tapped at the bowl. The bowl chimed. What a fool she'd been to think she and Nick could start fresh. Every object in this place--this bowl, Lauren's paintings, even the clocks--came with a story, whether she liked it or not.

She considered calling her parents. But what help could they give her? All they would do was warn her against herself.

It had been such a little thing that had started it. Her fifteenth birthday had been coming, and for once she'd wanted to arrange her party herself. She'd been rude when her mother had opposed her. Her father had sprung to her mother's defense. Such a little beginning to what had changed the three of them forever. She'd taken her milk-glass--she could still remember that it had been decorated

with little reclining gods and goddesses--and thrown it straight at her father.

Her mother had screamed at the sight of all that blood. Liz would never forget their night in the Emergency Ward lobby. They'd waited amidst the kinds of people her father had always dismissed: crazy people, poor people, visible minorities, women. Her father had kept shouting, didn't anyone realize that his injury was important?

In the end, all her father had required was three stitches on the eyelid. The three of them had been home again, in their beds, just before the dawn. But though the stitches may have healed in a couple of weeks, her father did not speak to her again for a year.

One morning, a year later, he'd asked Liz if she would pass him the marmalade. She was so surprised, she had simply passed it to him. After that, everything appeared to go on just as it had before. She and her father were soon back to their late-night chats. What changed was her relationship with her mother. Her mother flinched when Liz moved too suddenly. Her mother made a point of siding with her father, even over such trivial-seeming things as who got the last of the Corn Flakes.

Liz sipped her coffee. No, she thought, she would not call home today. She looked at the clock.

Just then the phone rang. Liz seized it on its first ring.

It was June.

"You!" Liz exclaimed. "I can't talk long, Nick might be trying to phone."

June sounded hesitant, even more hesitant than usual. "I'm just calling to see if you want to go with me to the demonstration this afternoon."

Liz could hear a quality of vulnerability in June's voice she'd never heard before. Suddenly she realized that June had called not because she was still trying to press her point from yesterday but because she wanted to let Liz know that Liz's speaking out about her political ideas was important to her.

Liz said honestly, "June, I would love to. But I can't. Not today." She burst out, "I'm in real trouble with Nick."

"I know," June said. "That's partly why I called."

But what more could they say? Arrangements. Promises. Reassurances, certainly. "Thank you for calling," Liz said, meaning it. June laughed a little.

After Liz hung up, she checked the dial tone. But the dial tone sounded just the way it always did. Surely, he wouldn't just walk out on her. She looked at the clock again. He was almost an hour late.

She gazed out the window. The day was overcast. Across the street, steam rose from a vent on the College Park roof. The wind blew at it so that it writhed, bent and

sometimes even sheared off. The towers of the financial district rose, grey and monotonous-looking in the dreary light. Atop some distant, invisible antenna, a blue light flashed. Beyond it, the colourless Toronto island stretched into the colourless lake.

1:30. Finally, crossly, she found her copy of Vanity Fair and settled with it on the couch. But she couldn't seem to concentrate. Finally, she heard the rattle and clunk of the bolts drawing back.

Without looking at her, he walked over to the closet and briskly hung up his coat. He pulled up a chair to sit in while removing his shoes.

She greeted him cautiously. "Did you have a nice morning?"

"Very nice, thank you." He placed his shoes in the precise middle of the closet. He moved to occupy the kitchen--his kitchen, all his gestures seemed to say--and began pulling out the ingredients for a sandwich.

Liz watched him. The thump of the fridge and the rattle of the drawers sounded loud in the silence. He carried the sandwich--layer upon layer of delicious-looking fillings--over to the table, sat, and began to eat.

Finally he gestured with his hand for her to sit. She sat herself down on the couch, legs together, hands in her lap.

He finished his sandwich, walked over and put his plate

in the sink. Then he returned, shifted his chair until it directly faced her. He held up his hand. "I want to start. I want to say that I misjudged the situation last night.

"When I launched into my--aha--little discussion, I was under the impression that you'd had a certain type of upbringing." He held up his hand again. "I can see now that I was mistaken."

He brooded. "I was late because I went and had coffee with Al.

"You've got so much going for you. But Al's right. I can't teach you something that you don't already know." He grinned at her unhappily. "It's just that I thought you were so perfect for me.

"So from now on, we're going to have to back off on this relationship. I'm going to have to ask you to stay with someone else when you come down to visit me. We'll just meet for a coffee or something, and see how we get along..."

But he couldn't do that, she thought. She had no one to stay with. Though who she stayed with--let alone, whether she would concede to staying with someone else--was not the point.

"But you can't do that! It won't work if you do that." Suddenly all she wanted was to be what he thought and needed her to be. She found herself speaking fluently and quickly. Indeed, she was surprised at how quickly she was able to

think up a plausible-sounding explanation for last night's behaviour. Some little flattering observation about the difference between his business training and her academic training. He was capable of making decisions quickly; she needed time to think about them.

She concluded, "For us to write off this whole relationship because of a misunderstanding over personal style would be terribly unfortunate."

He was grinning at her. "Put it like that, I can't disagree." He let air out of his lungs. "But Jesus, please don't put me through that again."

"Discussion closed?" he asked.

"Discussion closed."

Nick rose wearily and went into the kitchen. He took a look at the clock. "We've got fifteen minutes. Then I have to go."

"Go?"

"While you were still sleeping this morning, I made arrangements to go do Tai-Chi this afternoon with a friend."

She was too worn out to feel dumbfounded. She stuttered, "But I have to leave--"

"What time does your train go? Six? I can still take you down. It's two now. I'll be home about four. That will still give us a couple more hours together."

She said with great bitterness, "A couple more hours."

He either didn't understand this or else he chose to

ignore it. He smiled at her brightly. "All set then?"

Suddenly she remembered that she was supposed to cook them dinner. At his blank look, she said, "You know, I bought a fresh chicken yesterday."

He paused only fractionally. "We can still do it--if you really want to cook, that is."

She had to nod.

"We'll just eat early."

He looked at her some more.

She said nothing.

Liz sat and listened to him rummage through the bedroom closet. In a few minutes he emerged, his waga mat under his arm.

She did not ask who he was going with. She was too afraid to find out he might be going to meet the tree woman. She followed him to the door. "Have fun, then," she said with remarkable hardness. He reached out and, still holding his waga mat, hugged her, a little awkwardly.

Liz shoved her foot in the door to keep him from closing it. "You'll be back by four, then?"

"Four, four-thirty." He grinned mischievously. "I look forward to dinner when I come in."

Liz closed the door, locked all three locks, and then, in a gesture uncharacteristic of her, slid the chain upon the door. She leaned her head against the door and stood unmoving. Then, making a hasty sweep of the apartment to

gather anything she'd missed packing last night, she stuffed her overnight case. But she couldn't find her runners. Crawling around in the closet, she came across that rumpled paper bag.

She leaned back on her heels and looked at it.

The bag was dark brown, and veined with wrinkles. The bag looked years old. She touched it. The paper had a crumbly, dusty texture. She wondered how many years Astrid had left this bag to sit in the back of her closet. Liz didn't believe that what was inside it was anything specially selected with her in mind, at all.

She looked at the clock: 2:15. She shoved the bag back into the shadows at the back of the closet. Then, she jumped up, gathered her bathing suit and towel, grabbed her keys and went out.

The pool slopped in its basin, turquoise, veined with black. The water felt neither warm nor cold against her skin. She paused after she'd entered the water, watching the water droplets run down her arm. The air smelled of chlorine and old towels and, very faintly, of perfume. The walls echoed the sound of splashing and the distant cry of voices so that they came to her like bird's voices. The touch of the water made her at once stupid and very still.

Liz finished her one hundred and twentieth lap. She hauled herself wearily onto the ledge. She sat for a

moment. Then, supporting herself by an arm, she rose. She plodded back down the steps to the ladies' change room. She glanced at the clock. Five o'clock.

Nick came in so soon after she did that for a moment she wondered whether he'd been watching for her in the street. But that would mean he'd been shadowing her. Why would he do that?

She stood at the sink, running water to wash the day's dishes.

He threw his keys on the counter, and walked over and collapsed on the couch. "Did you have a nice time?"

She would not look up from the rising water.

The room went silent. He was sprawled on the couch. He watched her a while, his head cocked. Finally he said, "Come on, don't be like that."

He tried again. "You know, you're quite charming when you're angry."

She thumped a plate--still soapy--into the drainer. He chuckled and rolled his eyes at the ceiling. "Oh Lord," he said.

She rinsed a plate so vigorously that spray flew into the living room.

When the water stopped running, he said menacingly, "Elizabeth, I won't take much more of this."

She still thumped and banged, though perhaps a little

less loudly.

"Don't be so melodramatic. It was only the tree woman. Really, she's only a friend."

So he had gone to do Tai-Chi with the tree woman, she thought. She fixed him with the coldest gaze she could. It wasn't difficult. "I don't care who you went out to see this afternoon."

That seemed to stop him. Finally he protested, "You were still asleep this morning when Cathy called me. I had no idea what you were going to do when you woke up. To be honest, I thought that when I came back from breakfast you might not even be here."

She let her glance linger on him a moment. Then she looked back into the sink and began to scrub another dish.

Nick relaxed into a small smile. He said amiably, "It wasn't my fault. I couldn't help not knowing your arrangements. I tell you, she and I are just friends."

She stopped scrubbing and rolled her eyes.

He said helplessly, "I hate it when women are jealous."

"I am not jealous." She tipped the silverware into the water with a deafening clatter. "Nice to see you thinking so much about Cathy's feelings. You might have stopped to think about mine."

"I had no idea you cared this much until now. She talked as if she really needed me."

She dropped the frying pan in the sink, making such a

huge splash that water surged over the counter. "What kind of woman do you take me for? Do you think I'm really going to chase you if you start seeing someone else?" She glared at him. "You are over-estimating my affection."

He smiled briefly.

"Let's get one thing straight. I am not like Patti or Cathi or Astrid--whatever their names are. I do not belong to you. I am here because I want to be, not because I have to be."

He sat upright. She could tell he sensed insubordination, but he could not quite tell from what direction it was coming. "What do you mean?"

"I'm sick of hearing you talk about me as though you know I'll do anything for you."

He regarded her with narrowed eyes. She was making him angry, but she didn't care. It was time that he experienced a little of how he made her feel.

She slammed a wet mug into the dish drainer. "Oh, and since we're on the subject how dare you presume to discuss me with Al?"

Nick stood, breathing heavily. "I will not allow you to talk this way. I'll see you apologize before the afternoon's through."

"That's a threat," she taunted.

He seemed to rein himself in. He sat. He seemed afraid of himself. He set himself to an elaborate attempt

at calm. "I suggest we have a cup of tea."

She smiled at him with a silken threat. "There is no tea. I ran out of money." She said even more silkily, "Coffee?"

He went pale. Because she was bringing up the subject of money? Because she was speaking about it threateningly?

She said in a more kindly voice, "I'm sorry, I know Al is important to you."

He took a sip of coffee. He said in a calmer voice, "Look, I'm not making you do anything, but I still mean what I said last night."

She asked icily, "Which part of what you said?"

Her tone seemed to frustrate him so much that he seemed to give up. He watched her, she could feel him watching her. She dropped a fork into the dish drainer; it made a little clink.

She felt in the sink for what was still to wash. Then she looked up. "I just keep getting this feeling that I'm on probation in this relationship--"

"You are."

She gave a little cry.

He sat back wearily. "What you're really angry about is that I won't introduce you to my friends. But consider it from my point of view. Until we get this relationship stabilized, I can't risk letting Al and Astrid down. They expect a lot from us as a couple. Can't you see they're

just worth too much cash--"

"Listen to yourself! Cash! cash! cash! The way you talk, you would think they own you. Where's your pride? Where's your self-respect? Of all the people in the world you have what it takes to act with dignity. Yet what do you do? The only way you seem to be able to type people is in terms of how much money they have. Everybody's from a 'good family,' or 'worth a lot' or a 'nobody.' You know what? It's vulgar."

He looked at her with an unbelievably distant expression. "This is abuse. I will not stand for much more."

"You only see it as abuse because you won't tolerate disagreement. It's not abuse. It happens to be the truth!"

She went on, "What's the point of money? If having money has any point at all, it's to make life more pleasant for everyone. You've got an education. You've got brains. You've got a lot of political influence. And what do you do? All you can think about is displaying it."

"The people I really feel sorry for are your friends' girlfriends. They're not educated enough to know any better. You talk about women as if they're no more than breeding stock. And as for your daughter.... You think you're privileged? Act that way."

He looked at her with one of those paternal expressions she'd always found so hard to interpret. She didn't find it

hard to interpret now. Instinctively her hand closed around the biggest thing that came to hand--as it happened, the handle of the frying pan.

He said, "You have abused by business partner and his wife. You have abused my friends. You have abused my daughter. You have tried to destroy every single thing I have ever tried to share with you. I've told you I will not use violence in this relationship, but if I stay in this room with you another minute, I will take no responsibility for the consequences."

He shrugged on his coat. "I'm going out. You will wait here. If I come back to find you gone, all your things will go down the garbage chute." The door slammed so violently the paintings rattled on the walls.

Liz took a long time to remove the plug from the sink. She watched the water level diminish. She looked at the clock: 6:15.

6:15! Her train. She only had fifteen minutes to catch her train. She had to teach in the morning at 8:30. It was the last train tonight. She panicked. Could she catch it if she took a taxi? But how was she to pay for the taxi? What if Nick took it into his head to follow her? She did not want to think about what he might do if he caught her on the platform.

She dried her hands on her shirt and stood looking about. The living room was silent. That was curious, she

thought. The traffic noises below had utterly ceased. She held her breath. All she heard was the wail of sirens. Then she noticed the sunroom door was shut. But the extra pane of glass did not matter to her view: the lights inside the office building across the street glimmered, as usual, in the dusk.

Suddenly, all she wanted a cigarette. Not for any particular reason. She only smoked occasionally. Perhaps that's the only reason she wanted it: because the cigarettes were there. She scrabbled in her purse for the package, but she saw they were all gone.

She hardly smoked. Why need one now? She tried to talk herself out of it. She would have to go out to buy some. She only had a handful of pennies.

But the strange impulse persisted. She stared at the building across the street. Maybe if she left him a note on the table? Her mind smoothed out every difficulty. She could pay for them with her credit card. Besides, the drugstore was only a block up the street. She would hardly be gone at all.

The building gleamed with its eerie light. She stared at the word-processors, the waste-baskets, the phones. She jumped up. She jotted a note, grabbed her keys, locked the door behind her and flitted for the elevator.

A hush had fallen even over carpeted hallway. As she waited for the elevator button to go off, she realized that

her hands were damp and shaking. What if the elevator doors opened to reveal Nick inside? What if he came across her in the downstairs lobby? In the street? For a moment she hesitated, looking back: "2702" the door read. She gazed at the brass doorknob. The elevator door opened. She stepped in.

No one except Carlos, the guard, was in the downstairs lobby. She slipped out silently, and sprinted for the side-door. There. She was out of Carlos's sight. She pulled open the exit door, ran lightly through the side hall and pushed open the emergency door. She was now on the street.

She peered up and down. The street was mostly in darkness. No sign of Nick. The load she'd been carrying for who knows how long lifted. Her breath rushed in and out; she felt light and eager--even, physically taller. The parked cars, the dust bins, were mostly in darkness. Still no sign of Nick. But no sign of any other passers-by either. She walked briskly down the deserted sidewalk. She'd feel even better when she was surrounded by the crowds on Yonge. Once on Yonge she was half-way to the store.

The busy street was preternaturally silent. No sound of traffic. She peered forward; she couldn't see any cars passing, either. No cars, no nothing. What was happening? She sped up her pace. Once she had turned the corner, she fell still. Approaching her, up Yonge, as far as she could see, were marchers. She could hear the deep roar of voices.

The lead group, six people in all, held up a white banner, on which were painted in person-high letters: "Justice for All." At every corner policemen conferred into walkie-talkies. Their nightsticks were stuck into their belts.

Liz gazed at the walkers. Tears rose in her eyes. She felt a lump rise in her throat, the same lump that she felt at sight of the financial district. She wanted to run out to the six people carrying the banners and show with her body her allegiance to their cause--to what was all people's cause--her cause, Flora's cause, even Nick's cause, if he'd only known it.

Then she caught sight of one of the people in the lead group: Flora.

Or was it Flora?

That face had been haunting her for days. She wasn't sure she was quite ready to apologize, but she wanted to talk to Flora--certainly a lot more than she wanted to talk to Nick. It was hard to see in the dim light. Perhaps it wasn't Flora, after all. She peered harder.

The nearby policeman noticed her. She could see that he noticed her. Not that he did anything. He had no right to do anything to her. Suddenly, though, she remembered her errand, remembered Nick not as she wanted him to be, but as he was. She was under the safety tape and across the street before the policeman had even stirred. She ran into the crowd, up the sidewalk, outrunning the approaching marchers.

In only a minute or two she was tugging at the door of the drugstore. But the drugstore was closed. Behind the glass stood a man in what looked like an army uniform. He motioned her to step back from the door. She paused, puzzled. She smiled and held up her credit card. He looked at her as though he thought she was crazy. He reached for the walkie-talkie at his hip. She stared, understanding. At once, she turned on her heel. All she wanted was to put distance between herself and his suspicion.

She recalled a late-night drugstore on Church Street. She could be over there and back in ten minutes. She turned and sprinted into the shadows of a side street. She kept an eye out for Nick as she ran, but it wasn't likely he would be looking for her on this side of Yonge Street.

She reached the drugstore, but it, too, was dark. She remembered another place, further up Church Street. It was a jog to reach it, but she found it was open. A long line-up snaked back from the cash. Liz waited, requested her brand of cigarettes and paid with her card.

Her card. The clerk hesitated, gazed at it, gazed at her. Then the clerk turned her back on the card-checking machine, ran the plastic through the register and handed it back to Liz, along with her cigarettes. Liz signed the chit very neatly and slipped out as quickly as she could.

It was a long way back down Church Street. Halfway

back, Liz halted and dug out a cigarette. She smoked, she walked slowly. How strange, she thought. All about her, people strolled unconcernedly though the still evening. She, her life, her troubles in Nick's condominium, even the marchers passing up nearby Yonge Street, might not have existed to this peaceful looking couples. Suddenly she thought, I could just as easily not be here at all. That I was born--or not born--makes no difference to anyone. There was comfort to this, and wonder, and somewhere, too, deep fear.

Then she recalled her overnight bag in the middle of Nick's bedroom rug. She threw down her cigarette and began to run again. She ran under the trees, umbrellas of shadow below the streetlights. She ran along the lines of parked cars. She ran past the peacefully lit apartment towers Nick had visited those first summer evenings after they'd met, trying to get people to fill out financial questionnaires.

She was approaching Yonge, she had run well. But when she reached it, a scene completely different from the one she'd left met her eyes. In every direction, window frames were glassless. Inside some of the broken window frames, men stood with folded arms between the merchandise and the pavement. In the shops with no men, the stock had been emptied. People strolled in every direction, laughing and talking. Many of them carried boxes of what looked like electronic merchandise on their shoulders. A few people

still walked up the middle of the street, sober-faced and quiet. Mostly, though, the march looked to have broken up.

Liz looked up and down the street. Everywhere lay huge slivers of jagged glass. Banners lay trampled and mangled; twists of crowd tape dangled from the bent-over parking meters. A block up, two flashing ambulances were drawn up to the curb at an odd angle. Liz could not see a policeman anywhere.

This wasn't how it was supposed to be, she thought. She thought back to those extraordinarily powerful television she'd seen in childhood. She hadn't known exactly where the places were: Watts, Detroit, L.A. In fact, they'd all seemed a single place: the mirror-world to hers. A world where houses had burned, where men beat other men, where people ran. She could not remember a time when she had not known about violence.

The conversation had stopped around the dinner table as her father turned up the volume. The three of them had waited, watched, their food cooling on their forks. Before them, stores burned, men shouted, police struck and struck again--where whole cities flamed in the night. Before those scenes, her heart had stopped. For she had seen that there was no escape from violence. It lay latent, like flame, in everything. Yet, curiously, at the same time that sight of that violence had sickened her and distressed her, it had reassured her. To see those men struggling, to see those

cities burning, was for her a deep confirmation that truth and justice existed in the world.

But what did she see around her have to do with that? All she saw was glass, nothing but broken glass. She crossed the street and walked by Mr. Azar's grocery store. All its windows lay shattered. The long shelves--shelves she'd always seen loaded with food--were empty. The place was in darkness. She came across Mr. Azar standing on the street corner. A cut dripped from his forehead; he was wringing his hands. She stopped, touched his shoulder, murmured something. He nodded distantly, but she was not sure he'd even hear her, let alone recognized who she was. The bank machine was in ruins. The door had been wrenched off its hinges, the cash-dispenser, smashed. Splinters of glass crunched under her feet.

She gazed about, bewildered. Two of the very last of the marchers, two black women, met her eyes. They almost seemed to want to exchange a look of mourning. But though they might be whole, she wasn't. Or rather, all she felt of wholeness just now was not some sort of ersatz compassion, just return anger, return fear. She took shelter in a doorway and wondered at herself. She no longer understood the world, or what she believed in, or herself. She looked to catch their eyes again. But they had walked on.

She held her head high as she walked briskly back down Nick's street. She looked around but she saw no sign of

him. She walked in the front door, and rode back up the elevator. She turned the locks. She took a deep breath. Finally, heart pounding, she pushed open the door.

Nick was not there. The note still waited, propped against the bowl. Her bag still rested on the bedroom rug. The two canvases faced each other across the carpet. She went into the bedroom, picked up her bag, carried it back to the living room and paused beside the table. She looked out the wall of windows. Those many lights, so like those of their larger world, their home galaxy, shone clear and bright.

She dropped her bag and sat down to wait.

\* \* \*

Nick, of course, finally did come back. It took a long time to sort things out, but eventually, several hours later, peace was restored, the apartment, quiet.

She knew Nick would not let her off easily, and he did not. She had to apologize, admit she was indeed a violent woman, and acquiesce to the ultimatum that if she ever lost her temper again, she could expect the relationship automatically to be over. She also found herself offering to write him a post-dated cheque. She'd explained she didn't have enough for his next rent, but she gave him two hundred dollars for food--two hundred that would have to

come out of her next pay-cheque. He did not write her a receipt.

They decided she would take the midnight bus back to Montreal. But as she was carrying the triumphal cups of tea towards him at the table, she flinched--a most odd recoil--and spilled most of a cup of boiling tea on her ankle. Immediately, Nick was all solicitude. He rushed off to the third-floor sauna and stole the first aid kit. His fussing and doctoring of what turned out to be a really very nasty burn (it did not heal for almost two months, and even then left a scar) could be said to mark the formal end of hostilities--that round of hostilities, anyway.

They spent the last hour before she was to go cuddled on the couch. He insisted on walking her to the bus station. He carried her heavy bag all the way there, watched it for her while she bought her ticket (she had to talk the credit card people into letting her use her card one last time) and helped her to the bus. Then he kissed her, told her he loved her, and turned away.

Liz settled herself in her usual place, in the front seat, next to the door. She felt numb and tired, but oddly expectant. She waited. The last passengers climbed aboard. The bus door closed, locked shut. Then the bus was off, gliding silently through the dark, well-kept city streets. Liz sat, watching until they were on the 401.

The rest of the bus had the easy quiet feel of many

people asleep. She gazed over at the driver. In the reflected glow of the headlights, his profile was very beautiful. Now, as she had known she would be, she was overcome by exhaustion. She gazed ahead out the front window. The red tail-lights of three huge trailer trucks--both the trucks and the bus all moving through space at the same immense velocity--hung reassuringly steady ahead of her. She gazed out at the million little white lines. They approached out of the endless dark to swell and then, at the last minute, to flip up like the illusions they were, and disappear.

Liz settled back in her seat and drew her coat over her. For the next six hours of her life she could finally live suspended, neither here nor there. After a while it began to rain. Liz watched the drops smack against the window. After more time, the drops began to strike the window only half-melted; at their core was a heart of ice. It must be cold out there, she thought. The drops expanding against the windshield reminded her of her earrings. The huge heavy drops continued to beat against the window. For a moment, the universe was filled with slowly falling gold. Then the efficient window-wipers swished them away.