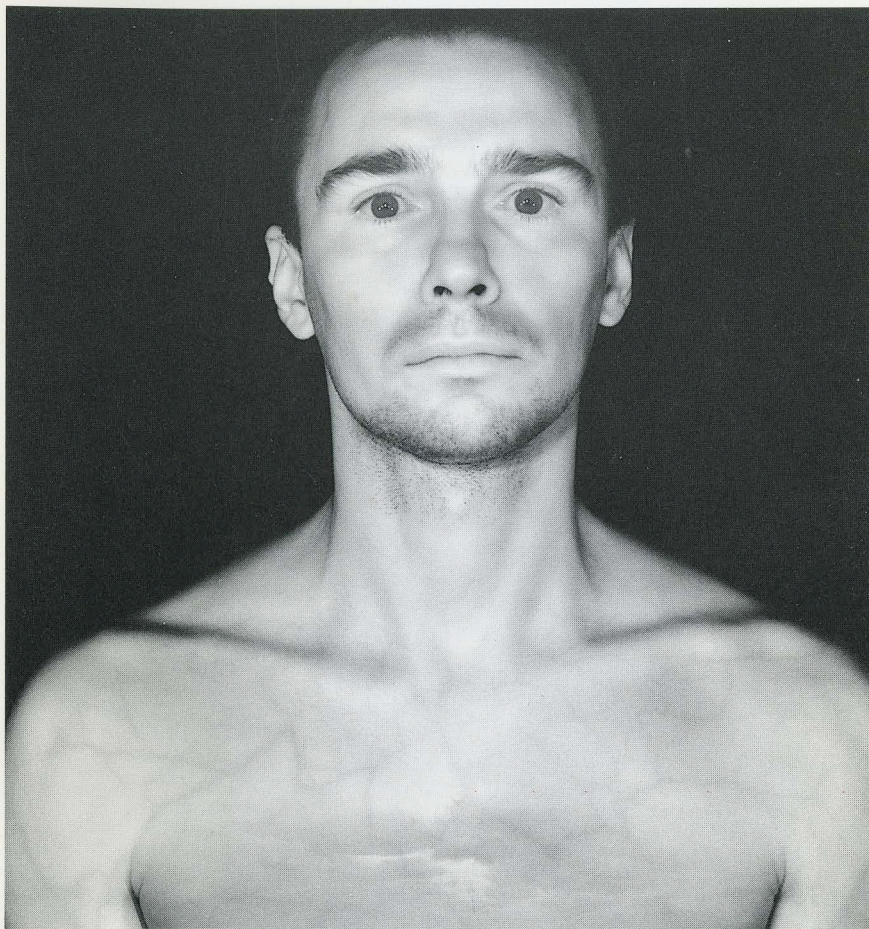


THE CAPILANO REVIEW



The unknown answer is dangerous and unpredictable. In the art of cross-examination, it is the questions that matter, more than the answers.

— Darlene Madott

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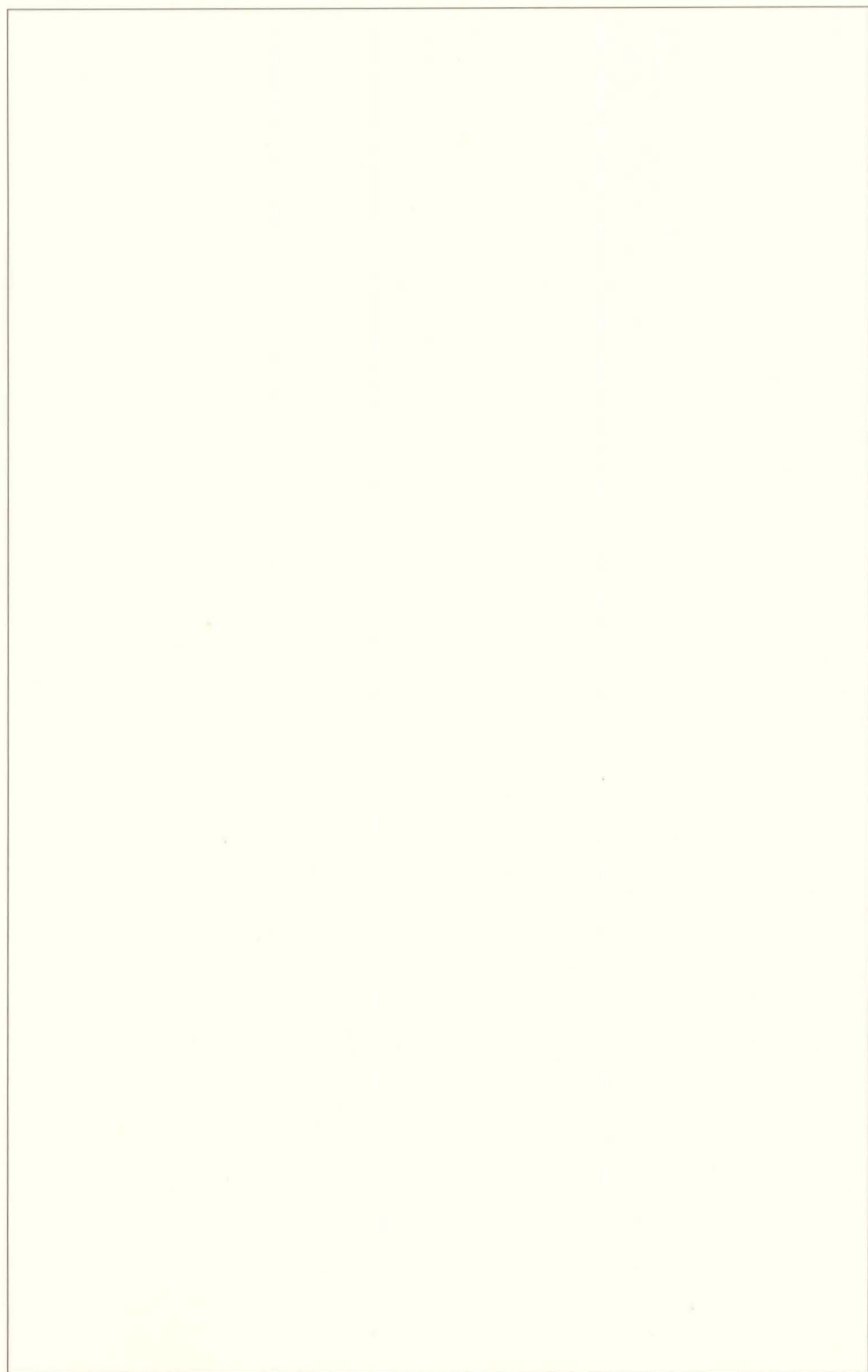
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Evelyn Lau / IF WISHES WERE HORSES

She does not know her lover's home phone number, and when she calls his office Alice uses another name. "This is Iris Clear," she says in a detached, business-like voice. "Yes, he'll know what it's regarding." Sometimes the secretary puts her through as soon as she gives this name which is not her own, so that suddenly David is no longer in a meeting or away from the building, but just as often she is added to his list of messages. The walls which keep out his business enemies have the added effect of excluding the woman with whom he says he feels completely vulnerable.

Alice thinks she will put up with any conditions just to be near David, the first man for whom she has felt this confusion of desire. To kneel in front of him, to take him in her mouth and glimpse between her lowered lashes his head flung back against the back of the couch in her apartment, his face and throat silver in the glow of the streetlight through the window, his expression concentrated inward upon pleasure.

"Why am I doing this?" she had said at first, her cheek against his thigh.

"Don't do it then, if you don't know," he said softly, motionless, and she shook her head and continued, because it was what she wanted to do.

Now she seeks his body as though it is a source of sustenance. His skin is as white as marble yet warm and full of scent. When she drowns with her arms clasped around him and her hair tumbled across his stomach, she matches the rhythm of her breathing to his until she feels there is no longer anything separating them.

They have been seeing each other for half a year; in the seventh month David goes on holiday with his wife to celebrate their fifteenth wedding anniversary. "I'll think of you," he says; she does not ask him to say anything more. But it is during this time that Alice starts waking at four in the morning, always after the dream where David is standing

at the end of a corridor that slopes downwards; behind him is the opening that leads into the belly of an airplane. She is running towards him from the other end of the corridor, shouting his name and some words too — it seems he has forgotten to give her something important. Upon hearing her he turns and opens his hands without lifting them; he raises the palms to show that they are empty. Already the wind outside the terminal is tugging at his hair, lifting it in lustrous waves so that it blows like a flag. He is wearing colours she has never seen on him before, not his usual black suits and gray cashmere sweaters, but browns and greens, the colours of the earth. A stewardess appears behind him to guide him into the plane. When Alice wakes, always at the same instant, always just before he turns and walks on board — she can see him starting to turn, the twist in his shoulders, there is never any question he is going to leave — it is with the feeling that everything alive in the world is leaving with him.

She grows used to the way the city sounds at four in the morning — the settling of the leaves in the trees in the neighbourhood, a breeze like an exhalation, nearby the thin, scratchy singing of a solitary bird. She lies in bed until this is no longer bearable, then she paces the moonlit living room floor. She feels as if her body is on fire, as if she is burning up without him. Four a.m. is a suspended hour, full of darkness yet with a detectable glow that lies waiting inside it, ready to bloom the way electric lights soon will in bedrooms and kitchens while husbands and wives wake and prepare for the day's work. It takes a while for the sky to lighten, and Alice is exhausted by the time it does.

She does not know how other people have affairs and manage simultaneously to go on with their lives. Often by mid-morning she feels as if she has already completed her work in the battleground of sleep and the effort of rising. From the office she goes directly to the gym where, with her hair tied back and sweat spreading between her breasts, she races on stationary bikes and climbs digital hills on Lifecycles. The beat of the music is obsessive, and around her women's limbs pump through one set of exercises after another. "Four! Three! Two! One!" the aerobics instructor shouts between clenched teeth, lips stretched in perpetual grin. There Alice thinks about David and recalls how he smiles at her, slightly more with one corner of his

mouth than the other, and how it feels when he holds her hand and laces their fingers together as if they are teenagers and in love. She also thinks of the one time he cried when he was with her, the tight sobs forced up past his throat like water travelling a long way up through a crack in layers of stone.

"I can't," he said in the darkness that had entered her apartment. His face was chalky, his agitated fingers stroked her own damp cheeks. "Do you think I haven't thought about it? I think about it everyday. Every day. But I love her. I could never hurt her like that. I made her a promise a long time ago: till death do us part."

Till death do us part. In the evenings Alice sits in her study, bags of junk food and photographs of his wife Helen spread out on the desk in front of her. She clips the photos out of business magazines and newspapers where profiles of David appear; most are publicity shots, but some were taken at receptions and dinners where Helen was at her husband's side. One after another, Alice tears open packages of cream-filled cookies and sugared donuts, conveying the contents almost robotically to her mouth; she studies the photos until her neck tightens and a throbbing starts in her temples.

She thinks she knows what it is like to live inside Helen's body, wearing her clothes, that designer sweater with the gold buttons, that white suit. She can feel against her own skin the barbed caress of the cashmere sweater, the cooler liquid sensation of the suit. There is no doubt that her lover's wife, approaching middle age, is still an attractive woman. She wears plum lipstick and has straight light brown hair that frames her heart-shaped face. Her eyes are slightly downcast in the outer corners, lending her an air of sadness and introspection.

Alice lingers longest over a recent photograph in which David and Helen are standing at the head table in a hotel ballroom, either about to sit down or to applaud the evening's speaker. Their faces are tilted back a little, suggesting to Alice that they are looking up at someone at a podium. This photograph was taken only hours after David had come to see Alice in her apartment. Yet there is nothing about his face or the way he stands that indicates he has recently been intimate with anyone other than his wife. They stand easily beside each other, and Alice thinks she sees between them a comfort and a love that will last.

There is nothing awkward about their pairing, nothing staged. She recognizes in their faces and bodies the looks of two people who will remain attractive into their retirement, who will grow to resemble the couples in life insurance commercials, with crisp silver hair and laugh lines radiating from their eyes.

Alice stares at this photograph until it dissolves into black and white particles, the grain of the newsprint exposed. Nausea rises in a sour wave inside her as she searches David's face for some evidence of their affair, not knowing exactly what she is looking for but expecting it to be there — a small bruise, a wisp of lipstick, the crescent shapes of her fingernails on the backs of his hands. But his body betrays nothing; he is smiling quite cheerfully, and his wife is smiling too, her burgundy lips parted over her teeth. Yet hours before Alice had bit his mouth while they were kissing, her shoulder blades pushed back against the bedroom wall and his hands on her upper arms, bit him hard enough that he released her and leapt back, exclaiming. She laughed and drew her finger gently along his hurt lip; he approached her again, cautiously, and she kissed him softly then, holding his lower lip between hers as if it might burst if she exerted more pressure.

"Sometimes you hurt me," he told her once, gravely. What he does not know is that any pain she gives him is not out of her rising excitement, but because she is trying to leave a mark upon him. That is why she bites his mouth as if to draw blood, to break the skin's elastic surface and taste his opened flesh. That is why she buries her face, her breasts in his hair, leaving it scented and unruly. She wants only to leave some mark of her passing on his body, so she can point to it later in a photograph and say, I did that, I was a part of this man's life. Because David has been careful from the beginning, leaving her not so much as a handwritten note in the time they have been together; she has nothing to prove he loves anyone other than the woman at his side, whose smooth hair and gold jewelry reflect the light.

Alice can no longer trust anything in the media, not even the photographs, not when David can smile out from the pages of a newspaper without even a shadow across his face. It makes her dizzy to think of all the private lives teeming behind those who are in the public eye — the real lives of the men with their wives, their families,

their mistresses, and also their interior lives that not even someone close to them can fathom.

When the dizziness and the nausea overwhelm her, she goes to the bathroom and kneels in front of the toilet, bringing up in sweet, doughy lumps the forbidden foods she has consumed. Her head swims when she straightens, but as she splashes water on her face and brushes her teeth she feels cleansed, some of the pressure inside her released. She feels ready to return to the photographs and, her stomach empty again, what remains of the food.

Back in the study Alice touches the image of David's face with her fingertip, traces the line of his tuxedo. He looks perfectly in the moment, as if he has already forgotten the afternoon, as if he is only listening to the words issuing from the podium, the clatter of glasses, and feeling his wife's presence at his side. Alice wishes she had bit him so hard his lip had split and blood had trickled spongily into her own mouth. She wishes that in the photograph he winces as he smiles, a gash in his lower lip attracting the reader's eye — is it just a smudge on the newspaper, a spill of ink? — and that his wife stands stiffly and is also finding it hard to smile. She wants them to look pained, valiant, disrupted like people desperately straightening themselves out to face the public after a private battle. But to look at them as they are in the papers makes Alice feel as if she does not exist; in the public's perception of what is real, she does not.

On weekends when Alice goes running she passes couples on the street going about their Saturday afternoon business. Sometimes the husbands remind her of David — their hair rumpled the way his becomes when she runs her fingers through it, or their strong cheekbones which stand out almost painfully in their faces. Some of them have an air of vulnerability that shows they might yet be blown off course, seduced by another woman. They look as if some time in their lives they will lie awake in bed staring at the ceiling, torn apart by different impulses, and for this weakness Alice feels a rush of empathy for these strangers.

Once she saw a woman across the street who looked like Helen. The woman was standing on the porch of a newly renovated house, fumbling in her purse for sunglasses; she wore a white blazer over silk

trousers, and her straight, shoulder-length hair separated where it brushed her collarbone. It was a very light brown, like Helen's hair. Alice stopped and stood for a while, panting, rotating her ankles, watching her from behind a parked car. She waited while the woman crossed the lawn to the sidewalk, her heels tapping neatly, and slid into the passenger seat of a waiting Jaguar. Alice knelt when the driver glanced in her direction; she pretended to re-tie her shoelaces while he started the car.

She thinks that at any given moment, somewhere in the world, an affair is beginning or ending. Yet she cannot see beyond her situation with David and Helen. She has fantasized a hundred times about phoning Helen at her office, making her cry out with a few words about her husband's soft kisses on Alice's face and hands and belly, how he bites her nipples until they are red and sore. She realizes she is obsessed with Helen, who has David's commitment while she does not; she knows he will always return to his wife in the end, no matter who he meets or where he goes. She wishes all the complexity of this devotion could be solidified into a tangible object she could squeeze out of his wife. She wishes this in the hours she spends at the gym, seated on a bench in front of the rack of free weights, watching her biceps curve in hard tanned ridges in the mirror. She thinks of her strong hands around Helen's fine, wifely neck not yet ruined by lines and wrinkles, choking her until she moans and spits up David's love. Then at last she can relinquish, let her head snap back, her body limp as a doll's that has been played with plenty and can now be retired, passed on to some less fortunate child, thrown out.

A year after the beginning of the affair, Alice shows up at a black-tie dinner to which her lover and his wife have been invited. Alice has chosen for the occasion a simple white dress with a round collar and lacy cap sleeves. In the shop that afternoon the saleslady said it made her look like a teenager, with her long hair and her slight, wiry figure.

She has thrown up ten times today and Alice feels almost ethereal as she makes her way towards her lover's table near the front of the ballroom.

"Hello David," she says, extending her hand.

The muscles in his face stiffen in shock. He begins to blink rapidly, as though trying to rid his vision of a speck of dust or a loose eyelash.

He touches her hand and releases it so quickly she closes her fingers upon the air.

Helen turns towards her with a polite smile, waiting to be introduced. For Alice, knowing what the next moment holds makes this one all the more poignant, so that she wants to take a picture of his wife this way — her carefully made-up eyes shining, her body expensively dressed and perfumed. Up close she can see the soft sagging skin under her eyes, the faint lines and enlarged pores that no amount of foundation can conceal. She feels a genuine sorrow for Helen, the Helen that is at this moment and can never be duplicated again, the Helen whose world is stable and whose husband trustworthy. This will not be the Helen in a little while, and Alice wants to embrace her there in the sea of tables, among the discreet caterers, in the purity of the moment before she is lost.

The future that is about to open between them makes Helen's face dazzling in its present painlessness. Alice takes a deep breath of the air that seems to be visibly flowing and weaving around her. When she opens her mouth she finds she has nothing to say, no words to illustrate the past year of her life. Instead she reaches out, trembling slightly, and strokes the other woman's hair with her fingertips.

Helen pulls away in alarm, staggering back against her chair as if she has been struck by this stranger whose hand remains suspended in the air. Both women turn then towards the man they love, each expecting him to do something to make things right.

Darlene Madott / THE QUESTION

"When I burned in desire to question them further, they made themselves into air, into which they vanished." — Lady Macbeth

I was a young woman, then — single and without child — green in the practice of my profession, when I had this dream: A great litigator gave me a powerful secret — the one question that when asked would unlock all the secrets of another's soul, heave truth to lip, would compel any witness to tell everything. There is a cardinal rule among litigators hard to reconcile with the purpose of the question in my dream: never ask a question in cross-examination for which the answer is unknown. A litigator must never let a personal curiosity impair his control of the case. The unknown answer is dangerous and unpredictable. In the art of cross-examination, it is the questions that matter, more than the answers.

The Toronto apartment building where Edna Hamilton lived was old and dingy. As we climbed the stairs to Edna Hamilton's apartment, my winded boss said how he hated "these airless hallways." His secretary had told me to meet him down at the Y.M.C.A. at 8:00 o'clock in the morning after his exercise class. He had a file for me that "wanted a woman lawyer." We went to a door, knocked, and an old woman answered. She could have been anyone's grandmother.

There was no air conditioning, and although it was early morning, Edna Hamilton already had the venetian blinds closed and the burgundy and green floral curtains drawn across the blinds to keep out the summer's heat. Everything was meticulously neat, exactly what one would expect of an old woman's apartment. It was as if Edna Hamilton had moved in thirty years ago when the building was new and everything within her four walls had stayed still, while the building had run down around her.

My boss reviewed the statement of claim with which Edna Hamil-

ton had been served.

She was being sued by a dead man's estate for the return of some \$82,000, plus interest. The claim alleged that the money had belonged to Frank Duvaliers, Edna's dead brother-in-law. The executor was one of the many sons the dead man had collected through his many marriages. The executor wanted this money back for the benefit of the dead man's heirs, of course, of which he was one.

"The money wasn't Frank's. Frank never had two nickels to scratch. It was Jeannette Bell's. My dead sister's child. She gave it to me seven years ago — to keep it out of her father's clutches, no doubt."

"Do you have the cheque?" My boss asked the old woman.

Edna produced a copy of a cheque she had obtained from the Jefferson Bank, Louisiana. It was dated seven years earlier, was in the amount of \$82,672.35 and clearly stated that it was to the order of our client by the remitter, Jeannette Bell.

"There's your defence," the great litigator told me. "Gift from the niece. Never Frank's money. Estate has no greater claim to it than Frank would, if alive. You draft the defence," he said to me before he left, "Get the whole story."

Throughout the balance of that day, I listened to what I thought was Edna's story:

"He murdered my sister. Over my dead body will any of that crowd get one cent. Dead or alive, he was nothing but trouble...

"She was eighteen when she married him. We lived on the same street, in Perth, Ontario. Thick as thieves, we were, my sister and I. Jeannette was her first. There was a baby every year after that. I was pregnant, myself, when Frank brought me the news. 'If you ever want to see your sister alive again,' he says, 'come with me now.' I didn't know what he was talking about. I grabbed my coat. I had to run to keep up with him as we climbed the hill to the hospital. Then I saw her. A tube from every hole. Just the day before, she'd opened her front door to me, a baby on her hip. She dropped the diaper she held and we both went down to pick it up together. She smelled of milk and powder, my sister. I remember it like yesterday. A mother with three babes, and yet a babe herself. There was still breast milk on

some of the blouses I washed after the funeral. That wasn't her in that hospital bed — hair pasted to her face, eyes sunken in like she was already dead. 'Bring me my babies,' she says to me, 'one at a time.' I had time just to kiss her, no time to ask a question. I ran down the hill to the house again. I called for Jeannette to hurry now quickly and put on her coat. Jeannette was just over three.

"Jeannette came running to her at first, but when she saw the hand, she drew back. It had a needle taped to it. 'It's all right,' my sister says to Jeanette, 'Mommy's just going to sleep now,' and for the longest time, it seemed as if she had just gone to sleep. I had to take Jeannette away, finally. Just as we were leaving the room, my sister spoke to me again. 'Take care of my babies.' Those were the last words she ever spoke. She died while I was bringing her boy up the hill.

"I never knew it would kill her,' was all Frank Duvaliers ever had to say about it. That was years later. Thirty years, when I finally caught up with him. He took off, day after the funeral. He took off with my sister's kids. I paid for the funeral. I paid for her plot. I paid for the rent that was overdue on their ramshackle of a house. I washed and ironed and sold or gave away my dead sister's clothes. I paid for the debts Frank Duvaliers left behind. He got away with murder, he did. Because that's what it was. She was only twenty-one at the time."

There was a long bitter silence. Then I asked, "Why did he leave?"

"Why do you think?" Edna blinked at me through indignant eyes, as if to say, how could I be a lawyer and a woman, yet not know this?

"Abortion was illegal at the time. The hospital knew what had been done. The police were probably just waiting 'till after she'd been buried."

"How did you find him?"

"Now there's a story. New Orleans. Thirty years later. I had time to kill between bus connections. I was looking through the phone book. I used to look for his name, whenever I went to a strange city. Sure enough, there it was. I called the number. Frank was curious enough to invite me over. He had them all over at the house by the time I got there. Of course, they weren't babies anymore.

"They all wanted to hear about their mother. Frank had told them she died in childbirth. But Jeannette couldn't remember any baby. Wouldn't she have at least seen the baby? She was sharp as nails, that

one. She even remembered asking at the graveside, 'What happens when she wakes up? How will she get out?' She remembered the question, but not what anyone answered. Can you imagine asking such a thing? She even remembered the hospital and the trip up the hill. She told me she had cried the first time it rained. That made two of us, I said, but by then, they'd have been somewhere in the eastern United States. It must have rained a different day.

"We were doing dishes in Frank's kitchen, me and Jeannette, when I told her the truth. Just then Frank came in the kitchen. 'I didn't think it would kill her,' he says. And I knew, then, for sure, what I'd only suspected for years."

"What did you do?"

"What do you mean, what did I do?"

"Well, did you confront him?"

"We finished the dishes. Me and Jeannette."

But what about the lives in between, the lives of the babes over which Edna was to have taken such care? Had been charged to do so by her dying sister? A deathbed request.

At fifteen, Jeannette's father made her strip in the bathroom and beat her with his belt until she passed out. Frank stopped, thinking he had killed her. The beating caused the injury that caused the plastic-vein replacement operation that ultimately killed Jeannette in later years.

Jeannette's brother ran away from home at fourteen and worked on a farm, until Frank found him and pulled him back. He left again at the legal age of sixteen.

"The boy is dead now, too," Edna tells me — "committed suicide at sixty. They found him swinging from the rafters of the barn Jeannette helped him buy."

For Jeannette made a financial success of her life — buying convenience store operations, trading in real estate. "She was sharp as nails, that one."

And then there were Frank's marriages: After Edna's sister, Frank married a diabetic widow with three children of her own, who in the end wouldn't trust Frank to give her the insulin needle. When Frank's

second wife died, Frank married her sister, who also happened to be his dead brother's wife, becoming father to more step-children. They all called him "uncle."

"Imagine marrying your brother's wife, your wife's sister? It's like incest. There wasn't a crime Frank Duvaliers didn't commit."

Thirty years of catch-up. Another twenty go by. And in the twenty, Edna takes the place of Jeannette's mother. Jeannette visits Edna in Canada, and Edna comes south. Jeannette sends Mother's Day cards on Mother's Day — becoming more of a daughter to Edna than Edna's own.

Jeannette is fifty-three years of age, Edna over seventy, when Jeanette sends the certified cheque to Canada in the amount of \$82,672.35, drawn on the Jefferson Bank. No letter. No explanation. Just the cheque. Edna goes across the hallway and shows it to a neighbour. "Do you think it's real?" Then she telephones Jeannette.

"Do what you want with it," Jeannette tells her. "Invest it, buy a house — it's yours."

A few months later, Jeannette goes into hospital for routine surgery on her leg, to have the plastic vein replaced. She dies of a haemorrhage on the operating table.

And now Frank's heirs are suing for the money. They say it was Frank's — all because of a receipt found in Frank Duvalier's safe after his death.

"How did Frank come by the receipt?"

"He stole it," Edna tells me, without hesitation. "He stole it from Jeannette. He was always stealing from his rich daughter."

"But why a receipt?"

"How should I know how Frank's mind worked? The foolish man probably thought to take some action on it during his life," she tells me.

"Where is the money now?"

Edna sits in her chair, her hands neatly folded on her lap. She gives me a level stare, looking amazingly pink and determined for someone over eighty.

"It's gone. As far as Frank Duvaliers and his crowd are concerned, there isn't a cent of it left. I'll fight this until there isn't a cent. He murdered my sister. He should have hung fifty years ago."

I am thrilled by the story, buoyed up by it all day. I return to the office in a froth of indignation — that anyone could sue Edna Hamilton, after all these years, after all she has been through. My boss listens to me speak with that cheshire smile he wears on his face for a case well matched to its counsel, and then asks the simple question that stops me in my tracks: "You believe her?"

"Of course I do, don't you?"

"Take some advice: Never believe what your own client tells you. That way, you may be pleasantly surprised, but you'll never be disappointed."

But the case is mine. I write an outraged letter to opposing counsel and tell him that if the estate of Frank Duvaliers goes away now, we'll let them off lightly; pursue this spurious litigation, we'll be looking for costs. Opposing counsel writes back demanding dates for the discovery. He encloses documents. Among the estate's documents are two inexplicable letters:

"Dear Jeannette and Frank,

"Here it is 3 p.m. & I've just gotten home from the Bank.

Jeannette, I have good news for you, the interest rate went up $1\frac{1}{2}$ a per cent today so you are getting $15\frac{1}{2}$ % interest on your money. I can't understand your Dad. If left in the Jefferson Bank, the money would only have lain there at about 9% at most. I think you are better off with it here. You could have had it in your name if you had sent the money directly from the Jefferson Bank to my Bank here, but you would have had to pay American income tax and also the Bank would have had to deduct 15% of the interest every six months for the Canadian income tax because you live outside Canada and are drawing interest from Canadian sources. I will explain it better when I come down.

"If your Dad wants to drop in, tell him by all means to come. I am

alone and he has no need to worry about Mr. Hamilton. I am still classed as single and I don't care who he lives with or if he goes through a form of marriage. He can have a harem, if he is man enough.

Aunt Edna”

“Dear Jeannette,

“Just a hasty note asking you to send back to me the receipt I sent you. I must have it to return to the bank at the end of the term deposit. It is wise you have no papers where Frank's money has gone. Also, destroy any bank numbers regarding the book. It is only good to me, seeing it has my name only on any transactions. If these people are bent on trouble, there's no use giving them any opportunity to find out where Frank's money went. It is Frank's money. I will not give any part to anyone, only Frank, at the end of five years. He trusted this amount to me and I will honour that trust to the end.

“Did not see my grand-daughter. It was a strange thing for her to phone me, seeing I did not know her and really have no desire to be involved with any of these people. I have gotten along all these years without them. Now out of the blue they appear on the horizon. My desire for all my grandchildren is for them to retire back into the sunset and continue to forget me, as have their parents.

“Tell your Dad to drop in when he comes to Canada.

Aunt Edna”

The day before the scheduled examinations, I go again to Edna's apartment to prepare her for discovery. I show her the letters. Edna sits in her chair and reads them silently. After she has finished reading them, she looks at me calmly. Her eyes above the line that separates her bifocals are small and sharp, below the line, swollen and unfocused, like two blobs of runny jelly.

These letters, I tell her, are a problem.

You think they are a problem?

Clearly, I tell her. For example, what did you mean by “Frank's

money”? Why are you accounting to Frank and Jeannette for the interest rate? Why did you send Jeannette a receipt? What’s all this concern about the tax implications of the transfer, if the money was a gift? I rattle off a whole series of questions relevant to the lawsuit, and then I tell Edna these are the kinds of questions she will be asked on the morrow. But in my mind, there is another question that I have no excuse for asking. Why did you invite Frank to come to you? Your sister’s murderer ...

... I am alone ... I am still single ...

“Do you know what I think?” Edna tells me that day, “I think Frank stole the money from his second wife. He was involved in litigation for years, you know, with her kids. They finally got a court order to kick him out of her house. But when they went looking for her money, it was gone.”

Only afterwards do I realize I left that day without any answers. But my questions accomplished what they were meant to accomplish professionally: They prepared Edna Hamilton for discovery.

THE DISCOVERIES

- Q. Mrs. Hamilton, I am showing you a letter dated May 12, 1981. It is addressed to “Dear Jeannette and Frank.” Can you identify this, please, as your letter?
- A. I have no recollection of writing this letter.
- Q. Could you take a moment to look at the handwriting and tell me whether or not you recognize it as your own handwriting?
- A. I have no recollection of writing this at all, I am sorry.
- Q. I am not asking you whether you recollect writing it. My question to you is, do you recognize the handwriting?
- A. The handwriting can’t be mine if I can’t recollect writing it.
- Q. Do you deny that this is your handwriting?
- A. I have no recollection of writing this.
- Q. I can write a letter and not remember writing it but that does not mean it is not my writing. I am asking you if that is your handwriting?

- A. I don't think so.
- Q. Are you not sure?
- A. I have no idea of ever writing it so therefore I couldn't have written it.
- Q. Mrs. Hamilton, I am going to show you another document. Is that in your handwriting?
- A. I can't honestly say.
- Q. You neither deny nor confirm it?
- [Me] You have her answer, she cannot honestly say. She cannot identify it one way or the other as her handwriting.
- Q. Okay. Well, then, I will have to live with that for now.

But I cannot live with it. I could not live with it then. I cannot live with it now.

•

- Q. Mrs. Hamilton, do you recall telling Jeannette that if her father wanted to drop in and visit that by all means he was welcome to do that?
- A. No.
- Q. Did Frank Duvaliers visit you in 1981?
- A. No, he did not.
- Q. Did Frank Duvaliers ever visit you for the purpose of collecting money?
- A. No.
- Q. He never did.
- A. Never.
- [Me] Did he ever visit you?
- A. No, never.

•

- Q. Were you provided with some sort of paper from the bank at the time you bought the term deposit to show that you had a term deposit with the bank?
- A. You mean a receipt?
- Q. Yes. Were you given a receipt?

- A. Yes.
- Q. And do you have that here with you today?
- A. No.
- Q. What became of that?
- A. I sent it to Jeannette.
- Q. Yes?
- A. And that was the last I saw of it.
- Q. Why would you send a receipt to Jeannette?
- A. Just to show her what I had done with the money, that's all. No purpose other than that.
- Q. Did you, sometime before the term deposit matured, attempt to recover from Jeannette the receipt you had sent her?
- A. I asked her for it, yes, on the phone.
- Q. Did you also send her a letter asking for it?
- A. I don't remember sending her a letter. I phoned her all the time.
- Q. Why did you want the return of the receipt?
- A. Well, a receipt's a receipt, isn't it? No particular reason.
- Q. When the term deposit matured, did you not need that receipt?
- A. No. I went to the bank and they gave me another one, but I can't tell you where that is either.
- Q. Why would you find it necessary to send Jeannette the receipt when you had already told her on the phone what you had done with the money?
- A. Well, just to, I mean, she was like a daughter to me, we didn't keep any secrets or anything from each other, she was actually like my daughter. Her mother was my sister.
- [Me] Counsel, you might want to ask what reason Jeannette gave for not sending the receipt back to Edna Hamilton.

— DISCUSSION OFF THE RECORD

- Q. Do you recall, Mrs. Hamilton, being visited or attempted to be visited by a granddaughter?
- A. No. Granddaughter of whom? My own?
- Q. Yes. Do you have grandchildren?

- A. I have grandchildren, I don't see them.
Q. How many grandchildren do you have?
A. I would imagine ten or twelve.
Q. And you don't see any of them?
A. No. In fact, I haven't seen them, not even when they were born. I have never seen them. You may find it odd but it's true.
Q. Yes, it is strange.
A. It is strange, but —
Q. Would you like to see them?
A. No, I have no desire, not now. They're grown up and married.

•

- Q. You are aware that Frank Duvaliers remarried again subsequent to May of 1981, a person by the name of Margaret Duvaliers.
A. Yes.
Q. And Margaret Duvaliers, she had been previously married to Frank's brother, is that true?
A. That's right. I don't know her, mind you.
Q. And Frank had previously been married to her sister?
A. Yes.
Q. Do you deny that she, subsequent to being married to Frank, in about 1981 or 1982, visited you here in Toronto?
A. Visited me?
Q. Yes.
A. I've never seen the lady. I don't know her, never set eyes on her, never in my life.
[Me] Let the record reflect my client's surprise.
A. I have never seen her. She was the third wife, you know. The second wife was her sister. And the third wife was married to Frank's brother before Frank. They're all dead now. Everybody's dead. Except me. [Laughter]. Aren't I awful?

•

- Q. Is there any reason you know of why Jeannette would give this

- money to you by way of gift?
- A. I told you, she was like a daughter to me.
- Q. And for what period of time had you carried on a relationship with Jeannette that she was like a daughter?
- A. About twenty years.
- Q. Had she ever given you money before?
- A. No.
- Q. And did she ever subsequently?
- A. No.
- Q. Had she ever given you anything else, anything other than money?
- A. No, just, you know, cards, Christmas cards, birthday cards, things such as that. She never missed an occasion for cards. I have two or three albums here full of them if you want to see.
- Q. I would, yes, actually, if your counsel doesn't mind.
- [Me] Go ahead.
-

- Q. Did you have any conversation with Frank Duvaliers after receiving these funds?
- A. No.
- Q. Any conversation at all?
- A. No.
- Q. Either by phone, any correspondence or contact?
- A. No.
- Q. None?
- A. None.
- Q. Mrs. Hamilton, you have indicated in your Statement of Defence that there is a family history here that might have bearing on the issues, arising out of the fact that Frank was married to your sister. Your sister died?
- A. Yes.
- Q. What did your sister die of?
- A. An illegal abortion.
- Q. An illegal abortion?
- A. Yes.

- Q. Did she not undergo an abortion in the hospital?
- A. No. Wasn't allowed then, young man.
- Q. Do you have any knowledge of where it was that she underwent an abortion?
- A. At home.
- Q. And where was that at the time?
- A. Northern Ontario.
- Q. And how do you know that?
- A. I lived there.
- Q. You lived with them?
- A. No. I lived with my husband up the street.
- Q. And were you present during the abortion?
- A. No. I saw her in the hospital, afterward.
- Q. And do you know who performed the illegal abortion?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Who?
- A. Frank Duvaliers.
- Q. How do you know that?
- A. He told me himself.
- Q. He told you himself?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Now, you have got here that your sister had asked you to take care of her children?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Do you have any indication that Frank was not prepared to take care of his own children at the time?
- A. I don't know. My sister asked me if I'd go down and look after her babies. He took them off to Mexico, to the States, to Mexico.
- Q. Did you ever report Frank Duvaliers to any authorities?
- A. No, because at the time I didn't know that he was the one who did the abortion.
-

- Q. Now, in your Defence, you say, "It was generally known by the family that Jeannette had given this money to the Defendant."

What family are you referring to?

A. Jeannette's.

Q. You are referring to her two children?

A. I think they all knew. I would imagine they would know.

Q. What evidence do you have that it was generally known?

A. Well, I would imagine they did a lot of talking. I don't know. I wasn't there.

•

Q. Did you touch any part of the principal monies before the maturity date on the term deposit?

A. No.

Q. What did you do with the interest earned on the term deposit?

A. Spent it.

Q. You spent all of it?

A. Yes.

Q. Pardon me?

A. Yes.

Q. What did you do with the principal after the term deposit matured?

A. Spent it.

Q. You spent it?

A. Yes. It was given to me. It was given to me, you know. I didn't steal that money. Understand that, young man.

Q. How did you spend it?

A. Good heavens, I couldn't tell you every place I spent it.

Q. Have you made any gifts to anybody since the beginning of this legal proceeding?

A. I really don't think that is any of your concern. I can do what I like with my money, you know.

Q. Is any of the principal or interest left on the money you say was given to you by Jeannette?

A. Not one cent.

RE-EXAMINATION

[Me] You recall being asked about a receipt. What was the reason Jeannette gave you for not having the receipt available to send back to you?

A. Her father had it. He stole it out of her papers.

Q. Thank you. No further questions.

[Counsel]

Let the record show that during the period of time we were off the record, counsel had the opportunity to refresh her witness on that very evidence.

[Me] No, let the record reflect that while off the record I indicated to counsel there might be a question he would want to ask, and when he asked the question and got the same response I have just obtained from my client, he said he did not want it on the record and I told him I would ask that question in reply.

[Counsel]

We can argue this until the cows come home.

[Me] In any event, I will have my opportunity to examine Mrs. Hamilton in chief and **we will get the whole story at the trial.**

Frank's funeral must have been an animated event. It took place in Moncton, New Brunswick. After the burial, everyone returned to the house which had belonged to his third wife before her death. Those present included the sole surviving daughter of his first marriage, and the children of Frank's second and third wives. Walter, son of the third wife and executor of Frank's estate, was also there. Imagine everyone's excitement when he went down into the basement and opened the safe. There was a shoe box inside. In the shoe box, he found the letters. Upstairs, around the table, Walter read the letters aloud to the assembly. Walter took them to a lawyer the very next day. They all wanted to see what should be done about it. They all figured it was Frank's money; it should be put back. They all wanted their fair share, this greedy little bunch.

Now it is my turn to question Frank's executor, the representative of his estate:

Q. You'll agree with me, sir, that the Last Will and Testament of Frank Duvaliers appears to have been made some three years after the gift of money to Edna Hamilton.

A. Yes.

Q. Now, I note from the will that Frank was quite specific as to bequeathing certain things. For instance, his tools.

A. Yes.

Q. And he has also bequeathed a gold watch and ring to a great grandson.

A. Yes.

Q. And a truck to someone else.

A. Yes.

Q. Now, from the Statement of Receipts and Disbursements, you'll agree with me that the total funds in the estate appear to be about \$114,000.

A. Yes.

Q. And you'll agree with me that nowhere in the will is there mentioned a sum of approximately 80,000 United States dollars which Frank believed he had as part of his property.

A. No, it wasn't mentioned in the will.

Q. Don't you think that was odd?

A. Well, a little bit, yes.

Q. Why does that strike you as odd, sir, now upon reflection? Is it because it's a large sum of money?

A. Yes, right.

Q. Relative to what was in his estate at the time of his death?

A. Yes.

Q. In fact, it's larger than the sum of money that was available at the time of his death? You'll agree with me?

A. Larger?

Q. Yes. \$80,000 U.S. funds at the time he allegedly sent it to Edna Hamilton would be worth a lot more seven years later at the time of his death.

A. Yes.

Q. And yet no mention of it at all in the will.

- A. No.
- Q. Now, I'm told that at the time Frank married your mother, your mother had cancer and was, in fact, dying.
- A. Not to my knowledge.
- Q. But she died, in fact, within a year of the marriage.
- A. Yes, that's correct.
- Q. What did you think of him?
- A. Who, of Frank? You mean personally? I found him a real nice man.
- Q. So, you approved of his marriage to your mother?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Did you trust him?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Did you generally find him a trustworthy person?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Did you think he was a rich man?
- A. No.
- Q. Did you think he was a man of means?
- A. I never really thought about it.
- Q. Did you assume he had enough money to support your mother?
- A. Well, my mother could have supported herself.
- Q. At your mother's funeral, did you ever say to Frank Duvaliers, "Where's my mother's money?" or words to that effect?
- A. No. I never said that. I didn't care.
- Q. Did your mother have an estate?
- A. Yes.
- Q. What did that consist of?
- A. Her home and her car.
- Q. What about bank deposits?
- A. As far as I know, she and Frank had joint bank accounts. All the money went to Frank.
- Q. You never said to him, "What became of my Mom's money?"
- A. No.
- Q. Is it true that your family, you and your brothers and sisters, made Frank sign his pension over to your mother at the time of their marriage?

- A. No.
- Q. So, you deny that.
- A. Yes.
- Q. In fact, the children of Frank's third wife did quite well by Frank's will.
- A. Not really, because a lot of that money was my mother's.
- Q. When you say a lot of the money was your mother's, what percentage would you have in mind?
- A. I'm not really sure, but when Frank came to Canada, he didn't have that much.
- Q. How much did he bring?
- A. About \$11,000.
- Q. \$11,000. So, if we've got about \$100,000 in bank deposits at the time of his death, only about 10% of that would have been his. The rest was your mother's? Is that a fair statement?
- A. Yes.
- Q. So, this is a man who comes to Moncton with about \$11,000 to his name. And a few years later he's making a will. And according to your theory of the case, he believes that there's a woman holding \$80,000 U.S. of monies that belong to him. And he doesn't say a thing about it in his will. Would you agree with me that's a pretty significant omission?

[Counsel]

I object to that. It's not omitted from the will. Specific reference is not made, but it's not omitted and that's a question of law, which my client is not going to answer.

- Q. Do you have any explanation, sir, for Frank's delay — no, it's more than delay — for his *failure* to ever institute legal proceedings to get this money back during his lifetime, during his remaining seven years?
- A. No, I don't.
- Q. No explanation whatsoever.
- A. No.
- Q. Let me put this proposition to you: If those monies were dirty monies, if those monies were stolen, or if those monies would

have attracted a criminal charge if the late Frank Duvaliers instituted proceedings to get them back, is there any reason why the estate should be able to prosecute this action with impunity?

[Counsel]

That calls for speculation on the part of my client, and I refuse to let him answer that question.

Q. I would like to know why Frank Duvaliers did not institute proceedings for this money during his lifetime.

A. The man to answer that question is not here on the earth today.

Q. The man to answer that question is not here on earth, but he apparently has quite a number of spokespersons, judging by the number of people talking after his funeral.

[Counsel]

We'll undertake to provide you with any information we can obtain as to whether the monies were dirty monies. This is the first we've heard of it.

[Me] Well, no, the first you heard of it was from your own client's mouth, that he was told by Jeannette's sister that Frank was worried about criminal charges.

A. No, I didn't say that. Edna told him that. Jeannette's sister told me that when Frank come to get the money from Edna, Edna threatened him that she would lay charges against him for smuggling his money or taking it out of the States or something.

Q. The fact remains, sir, that for seven years, to the best of your knowledge, no steps whatsoever of a legal nature were taken by Frank to obtain the return of those monies.

A. Not that I know of.

Q. And you think you can come to court behind the smoke screen of an estate, where Frank couldn't come in his lifetime?

[Counsel]

Don't answer that.

Q. I have information that there was a bank pass book of Frank's second wife among the papers in Frank's shoe box, and that pass book unlocked the mystery that had been tormenting her

kids for years and which was probative of the sum of \$80,000 having been, in effect, stolen from his second wife's bank account prior to her death. This bank pass book of the second wife shows the withdrawal of \$80,000 just prior to her death in hospital. Did such a pass book, to your knowledge, show up in the shoe box?

A. Not to my knowledge.

Q. Now, there is a statement which is attributed to Frank's only surviving daughter of his first marriage, regarding the tone after the funeral of Frank Duvaliers — and I quote this roughly: "You should have seen them all arguing like cats and dogs." Would you describe the tone following Frank's funeral as analogous to the arguments of cats and dogs?

A. That's all news to me. I couldn't have been there. I must have been asleep.

Q. How would you describe the tone after the funeral?

A. No different than after any funeral — everybody just sitting around the table talking and drinking tea.

Q. So, there was no dismay about the will? There were no hard feelings?

A. Well, I wouldn't say no hard feelings. Somebody's **always** bound to be **disappointed**.

•

Q. You indicated that your wife received the will from Frank at the time she took him to hospital.

A. Yes.

Q. When he gave it to her, did he tell her that, in addition to this will, there's also the money Edna Hamilton is holding for me?

A. I don't think he did, because I never heard her mention anything like that.

Q. Did he ever, in the time he was in hospital — how long was he in hospital?

A. Three or four days.

Q. Did he, at any time he was in hospital, mention Edna Hamilton?

A. Not to my knowledge.

•

Q. You indicated that there were some photographs that you came across when you went through the papers. Is that right?

A. Yes.

Q. Were any of those photographs of Edna Hamilton?

A. No.

Q. Or Frank Duvaliers?

A. No.

Q. If you come across any photographs of Edna Hamilton, will you produce them for me?

A. Yes.

[Counsel]

How is this relevant?

As if a picture could tell: Who was Edna Hamilton? Who was Frank Duvaliers? What power did he have over women? Such a power that his first wife had not accused him of her death. Was she like that lady in the newspaper I read about, so in love with her murderer that when her own dying daughter asked her "Why did you let him do it Momma, why did you let him douse us in kerosene and light a match?" she answered, "I don't think he knew it was kerosene." Such a power that a dying woman signed a cheque to Frank Duvaliers in preference to her own flesh and blood? Such a power that the dead woman's sister took him in when her sister's children got a court order kicking him out of her dead sister's house? Such a power that the daughter he had stripped and beaten in a bathroom at the age of fifteen helped him get the money out of Jefferson, away from people "bent on making trouble?" Such a power that Edna invited him, her sister's murderer, to herself. "... tell him by all means to come. I am alone and he has no need to worry about Mr. Hamilton. I am still classed as single ..."

Why had Edna Hamilton not reported Frank Duvaliers to the authorities? Why had she searched for him for thirty years? Why had she written those words in her letter — "I am alone ... I am single ..."

— words meant for a man she believed had murdered her sister? Was it love? Was it hate? Was it revenge? Was it anything one question could illuminate?

Here's what I think must have happened: Edna Hamilton did not take Frank's money. It wasn't Frank's money. It wasn't Jeannette's. It was the money of the dead second wife. Edna was right about that. Because she knew Frank. She knew how Frank lived off women. He'd got his sickly diabetic wife, the wife who didn't trust him to give her the insulin needle in the end, to sign a cheque to him while in hospital. He had to get the money out of Jefferson, using the only people he could trust. He sent it to Edna, using Jeannette. *He sent it to Edna. Edna was someone he could trust.* How did he know that? Why did he think he could trust Edna Hamilton? Why did Edna take the money? Why did she write Jeannette, "tell him by all means to come"?

•

The afternoon after her sister's death, Edna went to meet him. No one ever knew. She went to him to ask him a question, but all the way there, all the way to that ramshackle of a rented house her dead sister had scrubbed and curtained and filled with the smells of babies and milk, all she could think of was the two of them, Frank and her sister, how they had looked at each other their first summer in love, what their love had done to her, how it had tormented her in bed at night through a whole summer of restlessness, uncovered on the creased sheets, tossing for loneliness until the sound of geese going south released her, a season dead, the earth cooling and only beginning to hunger. She married Mr. Hamilton the next spring.

Edna is sitting on the couch; Frank is at the window. It is the first day after her sister's death. Frank pauses with his hand holding back the curtain, watching something in the street. His lengthy body with its thick thighs and low sex, weight poised on one hip, arms crossed on his sloping chest with the sleeves rolled up; his presence, so physical, with its unaroused sensuality. They are both young. He pours them a drink. Edna is three months pregnant and knows she shouldn't take it.

But she does. As he hands the glass to her, their hands touch.

He stands with one hand in the pocket of his pleated pants, his face in profile as he stares out the window at something in the street. Suddenly, he tugs on the chord of the venetian blinds, sending them crashing. For no reason at all, Edna gives Frank a memory. It isn't even real:

— When I was a little girl, I used to imagine this dark man who'd come to the house while my father was at work. I'd feel him in the house like a shadow — someone who had always just gone, who had waited for me, who I always missed by staying out a minute longer.

— Was there?

— Was there what?

— A man.

— No ... I don't think so.

Frank stares now at the floor as if he can see through it, or is listening intently to something in the next room. Edna listens too. They hear only the kitchen clock. A neighbour is taking care of the kids.

— I don't know what I'm talking about. She sounds drunk.

— There's a lot you don't know.

— Look, I didn't come here to —

— Why did you come?

— Because my sister is dead.

Frank laughs. She listens to his laugh, the sharp cynicism of it driving furrows through the silence, turning her words over like clods of freshly exposed earth.

— You came because you're guilty.

— Why should I feel guilty? What did I have to do with this?

— You tell me.

Edna has risen, looks around the room for her coat. The suddenness of her rising throws her off balance.

Frank puts his hands on her shoulders and pushes her back into her seat.

— Sit down, for Christ's sake. Besides, you don't want to go yet, and I don't want to be alone.

Edna accepts his hands on her shoulders, feels herself grow pink.

— What did you do to my sister, Frank?

All of a sudden, the risk she has taken in coming occurs to her, makes her want to vomit. Trapped, by this dark front room with its empty traces of her sister still lying about, by the possibility of Frank's violence, by his maleness.

As if he knows why she's frightened, Frank automatically softens. He puts down his glass, and when he looks at her again, the expression in his eyes is completely different, gentler, reassuring, as if he wants her to stay, as if the moment before hasn't happened. She can't believe it.

— Why don't you stay?

— I can't ...

But she doesn't go. She rises again and stands in the middle of the room, staring at the slates of light in the covered window, waiting, her mind unsettled, as if to go now would leave everything unfinished, as if somehow this isn't enough.

— I feel, I don't know ...

— I know, I feel the same.

For a moment they stand together, not talking.

— Oh God, he says.

Edna believes she can feel him trembling. The weight of his pain draws her to him.

And then the most unexpected thing begins to happen. Standing together in that room, the absurdity of their standing together, after what has happened, suddenly breaks in on them. Frank and Edna begin to laugh. Caught by each other, laughing almost to tears, avoiding eyes at first and then, the one bitter glance through each other that sobers them both.

The next instant exists in outline, like the cartoon of an inspiration which waits only its execution. For a moment they face each other in silence. The alternative is boredom. The alternative is the years with Mr. Hamilton and five small children, and the long years that follow Hamilton's desertion, of working at three jobs around the clock just to feed and clothe them — the ungrateful kids who will grow up anyway, who will grow up on their own and leave her too, not knowing who Edna Hamilton was, until it almost doesn't matter that she was ever their mother. The alternative is boredom. But Frank and Edna are not bored. They both know it.

She had known then. And wasn't horrified. Intrigued, rather, that such a thing could happen, might even still happen; so fascinated, that standing at the door, they are lost in possibility.

He might close the door again ... He might take her coat and sling it over the chair; and take her, not scooped under as you'd hold out an offering, but one arm wrapped over her legs, closing her in so that her whole body was turned and hidden from itself against him, molded around each rhythmic movement of his body toward the bedroom; the first cold contact of sheets, his unfamiliar nakedness, undressed clumsily against her, mouth finding her breasts, her stomach, not leaving her a moment; Edna closing her eyes as he undressed her, and then seized by a sudden panic, struggling underneath him, wanting to hurt, to bite hard, unable to go with his fierce increase of pleasure, finding herself parted — Frank, groaning, lowering the whole force of his weight into her, thrusting up into her stomach. She rises and wraps her legs around his back, her mouth open over his shoulder; his arms curled under her back, hands tugging down on her shoulders; she curves like a cup bent under his frightening strokes coming down into her until they both reach what she has come for

Running, running back up the hill, three months pregnant with Hamilton's child, running back to her own safe life. For this is Frank's power — not the body's seduction, not just that for the few years he was married to her sister, Edna had touched him over and over again without really touching, not just sex, the need for which would die eventually, which would have made such a moment, had it really happened, seem ridiculous in retrospect to one as intelligent as Edna, such a waste of time, but that he, Frank, knew her. How had he known he could trust her? He — not bound to Edna's fantasies, the dreams she summoned for herself, the tricks she pulled to get herself privately through the years — Frank showed her, in his eyes, what she was up to all along. He was prepared to be whatever she wanted. He is the knower, Frank Duvaliers, one of her kind — devastating the mask in one instant of mutual recognition. Who is this Frank Duvaliers? Who, but herself, the mirror of her own possibility?

Until he brought another sister to Canada. Until he chose another sister as his third and last bride. Until she lost the power to self-deceive.

She had never forgiven him that. He ought to have hung fifty years ago.

"The money's safe with me. I will not give any part of it to no one. Only to Frank at the end of five years." Edna took the money because she knew that Frank would follow it to Canada, that eventually he would come. And he did come. He came to her en route to Moncton. Only he came with a bride, the sister of his dead second wife. It was that — not the murder of her own sister, not the beating of the sister's child, not anything but that — his choice of a different sister when **this time she was free**, that dissipated his power over her. ... *I am alone ... I am single.*

That must have been some moment, when he asked for his money. When she told him he wasn't going to get any of it, not one red cent. And if he tried to make trouble for her, she'd make trouble for him. She'd report him to the authorities, for trying to defraud Internal Revenue. So Edna Hamilton had settled for Frank's money. She had let Frank trust her and, in one way anyway, the trust had paid off.

Did any of it happen? Did it happen that way?

I thought I would get the whole story at trial. But there never was a trial. The out-of-province estate failed to post security for Edna Hamilton's costs and the claim was struck out against her. A strictly procedural conclusion. A perfect result, from a professional perspective. The ones who would ask questions of Edna Hamilton vanished into air.

But had they been permitted to ask, would truth have been the result? In cross-examination, it is the questions that matter, more than the answers. To control the witness, to advance one's own theory of the case, that is the purpose of cross-examination which cannot be reconciled with the purpose of the question of my dream. Was there a single question which would have unlocked Edna's truth?

The last I ever heard from Edna Hamilton was her response to a letter I sent to her niece when I had gone looking for Edna Hamilton and learned she had moved:

"I am at a loss to hear from my niece that you were looking for me." (As if my very curiosity were an impertinence.) "I moved to Regina, having heard that my apartment was going to be taken down and there being no reason to stay in Toronto anyway.

"I would very much appreciate it if the balance of funds in trust were sent to me direct, since I have no need to go to Toronto at the present time. Thanking you for your kindness to me and trusting to hear from you soon about the money, yours truly, Edna Hamilton."

At eight-five years of age, alone and single, Edna had packed up and left.

The hand that wrote to me was rounded and firm. The proportions and shape of the letters appeared to my eye what the handwriting expert had said of exhibits "A" and "B" when examined against the sample of handwriting given at Edna's discovery: "significantly similar ... consistent with the conclusion that the sample was written by the same person years earlier."

But who was that person? Who do my questions of her reveal but her questioner — possibilities of self only I have been able to conceive?

Jen Lam / FREAK STEW

LEMON CAKE

Mrs. Tam answered my knocks.

"Maxine! So good to see you. Come in, come in. I just finish making cake, lemon cake. You like? Of course you like. Sit down and visit. Tea?"

"No, I don't intend to stay. Actually, I just want to return this book to Jimmy."

"But it so long since you come. You don't visit anymore. You and Jimmy have fight? I sure he very, very sorry. He don't tell me there fight. My own son and he tell me nothing. Here, sit here." She removed a stack of newspapers from a chair. I sat down. I expected Jimmy to come stomping into the room. It was all too quiet. I watched Mrs. Tam waddle from one side of the kitchen to the other. She placed before me a cup of tea and a brick of yellow cake suffocating in white icing.

"Eat! Eat!"

"Really Mrs. Tam, I can't stay."

"You eat. You like ghost. Now, tell me why you not visit no more, hmm? Jimmy stay in his room for weeks. Do nothing. Even stop work. I ask, 'Jimmy, tell Ma why you this way, why you no work? You need work to be strong.' All he do is yell and call me ugly names. He think his Ma is dumb because English not as good. You think I stupid? Not know what ugly words mean!" She gave the table an indignant smack.

"No. You're not stupid." I placed my cold hand over her flour covered pudgy one. The harsh lines on her face softened.

"You good girl. You tell parents. But you don't eat enough. Jimmy say you eat no meat. No good, no good. You need to eat so you have many, many children." A deep laugh gushed from her tightly aproned

belly and bounced about the grim, green walls. She wiped away a tear and sighed.

"All I have is Jimmy. I want many, many children when young but Jimmy's baba say all he need is one son to carry his blood. Jimmy don't mean those ugly words. He hold all his baba in him. All yang. Not Jimmy say the word. Yang make him say them. He like his baba."

I could not listen to her any more. The words twisted me with frustration, anger and fear. Fear that one day I would be making excuses to the rest of the world for a jerk like Jimmy.

"Could you give this to him, please?" I held out the book. I wanted no reminder of Jimmy in my apartment. I could have thrown it away or burned it, but the book had done nothing wrong to me. The words, *The Sun Also Rises* in bold letters across the dog-eared cover, had been of some comfort to me the past few days. Mrs. Tam looked at the book then at me.

"You give to him. Nobody visit him. He lonely."

"I don't think that it would be a good idea."

"Jimmy want to see you. He do, really. I know. He miss you, that why he so sad. You talk to him and make him happy. Come, he upstairs. I make dinner, you stay and eat with us. No meat, just for you."

She pushed me towards the stairs. I climbed up and her wheezing 250-pound body followed right behind.

I stopped in front of his door. "He be very happy, you see." She smiled and her eyes disappeared behind her cheeks. I had never seen it closed, not from this side. I knocked softly. There was no answer. Then Mrs. Tam knocked.

"Jimmy. Jimmy." There was a groan of bedsprings from behind the door.

"What the fuck do you want?" With a smile plastered on her face, she opened the door. Jimmy was on the bed sucking on a beer bottle. There were several empties on the floor beside him. Nothing had changed. The blinds were still crooked, books in their usual chaotic non-system. "Maxine is here."

"Well, I ain't fuckin' blind."

"Don't say those ugly words." Her face tensed and ate away her smile. "Maxine come just to see you, don't be mean."

"I'll be any way I damn well please, bitch." He tossed the empty

bottle onto the floor. I stood as Mrs. Tam gathered the bottles and tried to straighten the blinds.

"Damn it! Leave my room alone, you fat cunt. Get out. I want to talk to Max." She shuffled past me, carrying away the empty bottles with a shame slapped face. Jimmy closed the door behind her.

"What the fuck do you want?" He reached into his shirt pocket for a pack of smokes. He took one and threw the pack at me. I caught it and threw it back.

"Can't remember you ever passing up a smoke." He lit his cigarette. "I do remember getting a phone call from you a few weeks ago. Something about it being over between us. But here you are." He stood up in front of me, took a drag, and exhaled into my face. "I say when it's over, not you, bitch."

"I came to return this." I shoved the Hemingway into his dirty under-shirted chest. He smacked the book out of my hand.

"Don't you be playing games with me. Not after the way you've treated me. Nobody walks out on me, especially a junkie tramp like you."

"Bye, Jimmy." I turned to leave. He slammed me against the door. His unwashed body shook against mine. Our breaths fell into sync. I felt his voice through his chest.

"I'm not finished."

"I don't care. I'm going."

He stepped away. "You have someone waiting for you? Some shit kissing loser? One of your artsy fag friends? You think you're too good for me, you slut? You're just another screwed up chink, just like the rest of them." He backed away and took another drag.

"I've got a life. That's better than being a fucked up asshole like you."

"Who the hell are you trying to fool? A life. What do you do now? Give head in limos instead of back alleys? Do you give the chauffeur a tip? Ha ... a life. You're probably fucking some rich old fart, just like your mother. Freud would've had a field day with you."

I imagined my fists pounding his face in.

"I'm a writer." The words didn't seem as powerful as I hoped they would be.

"You're a what?" He put out his cigarette and lit up another.

"I'm a writer." The words marched off my tongue this time.

"A writer? Exposing yourself on paper. That's what it all is, literary exhibitionism. You're one perverted bitch." He stumbled and waved his cigarette. The beer was taking its toll.

"You think that I'm a drunk? You're fucking wrong. I don't need you or any of your pity. I've got everything I want. Can get a skirt, just like that, got a phone book filled with 'em. Got a roof over my head and a pathetic cow who'll do anything I say. What do you have? A milquetoast loser who probably can't get it up. He ... he probably has to stick his dick in the freezer for a couple of hours just to get a hard-on." He chuckled. "Quite appropriate since he's fucking the Ice Queen." His boozy eyes searched my face for a reaction. He slapped me and fell back onto his bed, arms spread open as if the gods had bestowed him with immortal powers. My hands trembled and my jaws were clenched so tightly that my teeth began to hurt. It was all too familiar.

"I know why you came back, Max. You know too. If you beg a little I might give ya a little."

"A little is all you could give."

"You can't fight it, Max. You're dying for a real man."

There was an unopened bottle of beer on the dresser next to the door. I grabbed it, popped the cap, and drained half of it in one, long swallow.

"Fuck it, bitch. I ain't got all day."

I hurled the bottle at him. It smashed into the wall a few inches above his head. I left. A string of obscenities followed me out. Mrs. Tam was in the hall pretending to dust. I squeezed past her and ran down the stairs. She followed.

"Maxine, Maxine," she grabbed my arm. "Don't go. You have dinner here. Yes?"

"No." I tried to pry my arm free of her doughy grasp.

"Please, don't go, don't leave." Her whole body seemed to be pulling down at her eyes, making them sadder, more desperate. She began crying. "I ... don't know ... don't know what to ... d-do." Her sobs followed me into the kitchen.

"I can't help you."

"He just like his baba, too much yang. Other day, I make him

hamburger, good hamburger with lots of onions and mushroom. His favourite. He take hamburger and throw at me. Yell, 'This is crap! This is crap!' Then he pull my hair and take pan and hit me. Just like his father." Tears stopped and her eyes stared off into the far corner. "I very sad when Jimmy's baba die, but also very happy. I think that I now live without being scared. Jimmy good boy maybe if he not see us fight so much. He learn to hit and say ugly word from his baba. I let him see his baba that way."

"Bullshit." The word leapt out of my mouth. The ugliness didn't seem to affect her now.

"Please," she pleaded. "I do everything, but no good, not good enough for Jimmy or his baba."

The more she tried to make me understand the less I wanted to hear.

"Jimmy is me, my body, my blood. I not perfect, make Jimmy this way. I see Donahue, he call it ..."

"Screw Donahue! He ain't the one living in this hellhole! He don't give a damn about any of us!" I searched for something deeper to say, something that would kick Donahue's butt. She was waiting for the same words. I realized that I was no stronger than she was. I was fooling myself, believing I would be fine, that it would not take long before I forgot about him. It's amazing how a jerk like Jimmy could've sucked so much life out of the two of us. Furniture banged and breaking glass erupted above us. Her frantic eyes sank into mine.

"Find a way out and go."



The Aztec was practically empty when we arrived. Neal was in the back booth waiting for us, as usual, hunched over a book, hidden under a haystack of hair. Denise slid in beside him and began reading over his shoulder.

"Screw off." He swatted her away.

"Burroughs. Never would have taken you for a Burroughs kinda guy," she teased.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

She shrugged her bare shoulders and signalled to Todd to bring coffee. He placed a cup before me and one half full before Denise.

"Anything else?" He directed the question at Denise.

"You got any angel food cake?"

"What, for you? That would be considered blasphemy." He chuckled to himself all the way to the front of the coffee shop and repeated his witticism to the only other table of customers.

Neal tossed his book into his knapsack, and I noticed a bruise on his cheek.

"What happened to your face, pretty boy?"

"Nothing."

"Let's see." Denise twisted his face around so she could inspect it.

"Let go! It's nothing. Just got into a fight. Forget it."

"With Simon?" Denise stirred six packets of sugar into her coffee. Neal gave her a disgusted look.

"No, Simon wouldn't hit me."

"Not even if you hit him first?"

"I don't know. It doesn't even matter. It wasn't him."

"Then who was it?" She continued to stir while emptying creamer after creamer into her cup until she had it filled to the rim. I don't understand why she even bothered drinking coffee.

"My dad."

"Dan beat you up?"

"No." He looked at her, annoyed. "My real father. He showed up at our front door last night totally tanked and began wailing on my mom. The bastard trashed the front room and demanded money from her. She gave him twenty bucks and he went ballistic. Accused her of hiding money from him and continued beating her up. I heard her screaming as I drove up, ran inside and he tackled me as soon as he saw me. We didn't even notice my mom calling the cops. I swear, I'd never been so happy to hear police sirens."

"For sure. But why did he mess your mom up in the first place?"

"Don't know. Like I said he was wasted, probably high. But I got him back a few. He didn't exactly leave walking on his own two legs."

"So all this fighting is really about the two of you proving your masculinity. He's feeling inferior because Dan married his wife and

gave her and his only son a decent life. You're just plain paranoid that you're not as much of a man as Dan. Hey, that rhymes." Denise emptied her cup, leaving only a few granules of sugar and a bright magenta lip mark. "There's Alec." She waved to him. "Time to be devilishly beautiful and angelically stupid."

Neal glowered at her as she walked away. "Why does she do that?"

"Because she's broke and hungry." My voice came out louder than I expected.

"No. I mean, why is she always putting me down like that? She's always psychoanalysing me, and she never says anything remotely positive."

"She can't get at you any other way. She knows she'll never have a taste of that side of beef hanging between your legs. I suppose women hate and love gay men for the same reasons."

"Do you hate me?" He began rolling the empty sugar packets into little balls.

"Yeah. I have a voodoo doll that looks just like you. It even has a wiener stapled to its crotch. Every night I stick pins all over it and cook the wiener in the microwave until it explodes."

He laughed. I didn't.

"You're kidding, right?"

"Guess so." I gave a half-hearted smile. He got up and moved over to my side of the booth.

"You look as if you've been eating your own shit."

"I went over to Jimmy's to return his book."

"Why did you even bother?"

"I just didn't feel right keeping it or tossing it away."

"He beats the shit out of you and you don't feel right keeping one of his stinking books?"

"Lay off. I don't need anyone else trashing me."

"Did he hit you?"

"Slapped me. Once. I threw a beer bottle at him but I missed."

"Too bad."

"All the way home I kept telling myself that I was one lucky little bitch. His mom is pretty pathetic. It wasn't Jimmy who treated her like crap, it was all that fucking yang in him. None of that yang came when he needed to get it up."

"When I was a kid my mom expected men to hit her. If they didn't at first she'd start pushing their buttons until they did beat her up or just left. She was seriously fucked up. Still is, in a way. Expects people to treat her like trash and when they don't she makes a big deal out of it. Mrs. Walker came over last night just to gather some juicy gossip. She makes my mom a cup of tea to calm her down, and my mom sent over a fruit basket today. That fucked up or what?"

The place began filling up with people. We decided to leave. I threw a couple of loonies onto the table. Denise was in a booth in the front. Alec was seated beside her, his fifty-year-old hands caressing her shoulders and his eyes staring at her tits. We didn't bother saying goodbye.

Outside the moon was an angry rip in the thick, black sky.

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The grey sheet of sky threatened to storm. Denise scurried behind me in her slut high heels and leopard print mini.

"Don't walk so fast!"

"Ain't walking fast." I sped up my already brisk pace.

"Max!" I looked back. She took off her shoes and tugged at her skirt. Someone whistled.

"Come on, Denise, come on. I know you can do it." I joked, "I know you're used to walking on stilts but this is how normal, sane people walk."

"Well, then how did you ever learn to walk? Damn it! It's starting to rain!"

"Maybe if you didn't spend half of eternity saying good-bye to Ryan, we'd be home."

"Nag, nag, nag."

"Blah, blah, blah."

Denise ran ahead with her big tote bag over her even bigger hair.

"Come over, later. My brother's staying with me. I want you to meet him." She jetted around the corner.

I slowed my pace. The smell of wet cement mingled with the smell

of stale cigarette smoke from my sweater. By the time I reached the apartment it was, as Mrs. Durbins from down the hall would say, 'raining like a cow pissing sideways on a rock.'

My boots left dark footprints on the carpeted front entrance. The elevator door was closing.

"Hey! Hold the door." It shut before it re-opened. "Thanks."

"No problem. Man, you're wet."

"Nothing gets past you, does it?" I went to punch the button for my floor, but it was already lit. "You headed for three?"

"You're one for the obvious yourself."

He wore a rain splattered grey trench coat and was carrying a matching umbrella and suitcase. I wondered if his socks matched his underwear. The doors opened. I ran into my apartment to change my clothes and pull a comb through my hair. The phone rang as I was about to leave.

"Are you rewriting *War and Peace*, for Christ's sake?"

"I'm doing it for Mother Goose. See ya." She was waiting across the hall with the phone still in her hand.

"Why're you wearing that for?" I had on my 'Braineater' t-shirt, a yellow and purple chequered shirt and my blue cowboy boots.

"Just to piss you off. It clashes with your washroom."

"It clashes with everything."

"Nag, nag, nag."

"Blah, blah, blah." She gave me her the-things-I-have-to-put-up-with look and ushered me into her apartment.

"Max, that's my brother Carl." She pointed to a skinny kid half immersed in her fridge.

"Carl, what are you looking for?"

"Beer."

"When did you start drinking? You're only fifteen for fuck's sake."

"Man, don't get on my case. I swear you're turning into Mom. Anyway, you started drinking when you were my age so don't get preachy with me." He pulled out a couple of bottles and handed one to me. "Hi. You're Max?"

I nodded and took the beer.

"Yeah, let the kid get fucking smashed, puke his guts out, and wake up with a bitchin' hangover. It'll be a learning experience."

"Hey, I've drank before. Lots of times." He drained the whole bottle as if to prove it.

"Your brother's gonna be a real man."

Denise gave me a dirty look. "You're gonna be a great mother." She lit up a cigarette. Carl held his hand out.

"For fuck's sake." She threw the pack at him. "Does Mom know you smoke?"

"Hell no, she just thinks I have very strange b.o. Of course she knows. She follows me around, watching everything I do. She even knows when I fart. And when I don't fart the same time the next day she gets worried."

"Don't be a smart ass."

"Lay off of him. When you were fifteen, you were drunk and high every damn weekend."

"Yeah, well I was also living on my own." She marched angrily into her bedroom. Carl came and sat beside me on the couch. I got a good look at him. He was fifteen trying to look twenty five but wishing he were six. His eyes restlessly roamed around the room.

"What?" His eyes finally settled down. "Quit staring."

"You look like your father."

"Kinda. I guess. Better than looking like my mother. You've met my dad?"

"No. Seen pictures of him."

"My dad's real cool. He lets me do anything. Mom's the one that's a pain. She wants me to go to college after high school. Fuck the idea. I'm going to be a plumber just like my dad. They make tons of cash. Maybe meet a cute, young housewife and clean out some of her plumbing." He winked at me. I laughed.

"What's so funny?" His face reddened.

"Nothing. Is that what your dad does? Unclog a toilet and throw in a quikie?"

"Well, I don't know. He jokes about it but I guess it's all talk."

"It usually is."

"He got us a dog this Christmas. German shepherd. One of his buddies didn't want it no more and sold it to him. You should see its balls. Hell, they're so big they almost touch the floor." He put out his smoke. "But he's an idiot. Pisses all over the house and he doesn't do

any tricks. But man, those balls."

"I guess it makes up for the other males in that house." Denise emerged from her room with a toothy grin.

"Fuck you."

"Keep it up, you little snot, and I'll have you shipped back to Edmonton so fast."

"Fuck you."

"I mean it Carl. I don't need you shitfacing around here. You can treat Mom like crap but don't be throwing it on me."

"Fuck you."

"You little bastard." She slapped him so hard that she lost her balance and fell on top of him. I watched them claw and kick and bite and pull at each other. The only noise was the thumping of bodies against the floor. Neither of them spoke, let alone screamed. It was as if their parents were in the next room asleep and they were afraid of waking them. Afraid of being caught in battle. Afraid of punishment.

I finished my beer.

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I was about to hang up after the eighth ring when Neal answered.

"Hiya pretty boy."

"Eh."

"What's up?"

"Nothing."

"Wanna do something?"

"Sure."

"What do you wanna do?"

"I don't know. What do you wanna do?"

"I don't know. You hungry?"

"Are you?"

"Kinda."

"Yeah, so am I."

"Where you wanna go?"

"I don't know. Where do you wanna go?"

"Aw, for fuck's sake!"

"What?"

"Nothing. Ain't hungry no more."

"Yeah, neither am I."

"So?"

"What?"

"So what do you want to do?"

"I don't know. What do you want to do?"

Click.

PIZZA

"That'll be \$41.31."

"Here." I handed over a couple of crumpled bills.

"You have penny?"

"Yeah."

She waited with her hand held out, with the crumpled bills still in it, while I searched my pockets.

"So what you make? Special dinner pah-ty? Too much food for you to eat all. You get fat."

"Yeah. A special dinner party. Pizza. Special pizza."

"With whipped cream?"

"Well, Mrs. Chien. That's what makes it a special pizza."

"No, you lie. No dough here. You make own dough?"

"Yep, homemade dough and the whipped cream is for the dessert."

"What dessert? Pie? Cake? You know make cheesecake? My Suzie make good cheesecake. Learn in Montreal. You make cheesecake for special dinner pah-ty? Suzie make it all the time."

My pockets were empty of any change. I went through my backpack while Mrs. Chien, with my crumpled bills still in her outstretched hand, watched.

"Nah, no time for that. I'll just whip something together. Doesn't really matter as long as there is whipped cream on it. I usually go out to the garden and scoop some dirt into a nice crystal bowl, sprinkle some fertilizer and cover it up with whipped cream. Lots of vitamins and it's fat free. Well, except for the whipped cream. Deluxe dirt dessert. Does your daughter make that for you? I don't know if they have that in Montreal."

"*Chee sien!* You crazy talk. Dirt dessert. Your mother not teach you that. She make good dessert. Chinese dessert like *dahn tahk* and *gai mai bow*. Real, not crazy like dirt dessert."

"Deluxe dirt dessert."

"*Chee sien*. Tell your mother to teach you make *dahn tahk*. No bakery can make like her. They make too greasy and heavy. She make it so light."

No change was to be found in my backpack. I went back through my pockets.

"It's her secret ingredient."

"Secret? What secret?"

"She told me not to tell. It's an old family cooking secret."

"Oh, she no mind. Me and her good friends."

"Well, I guess. Just don't tell her I told you." I leaned over the counter and whispered, "It's Alka Seltzer."

"What?" She laid the crumpled bills on the counter, stepped back and crossed her arms. I leaned over more.

"Really, it's Alka Seltzer. She adds about a half a cup of the stuff into the batter. It creates tiny air bubbles to lighten the batter. She won't tell anyone 'cause she's afraid people will think that she's *chee sien*. It also prevents upset stomachs."

"Ah, *gum syoi*. Make fun of old woman. The gods be mad with you."

"Maybe if I offer them a couple of Mum's *dahn tahks* they'll forgive me. They probably just have a case of heartburn."

I resumed my search for the penny.

"*Aiya*. Now she make fun of gods. You young people. Always make fun. You know when you little, your mother call you 'little *mah lo*.' You always running and screaming. Not like little girl. She don't stop you. Just sit there and say, 'that my baby, little *mah lo*.' Now you even look like *mah lo*. Hair short like big monkey, boy monkey. My Suzie have long, long hair. Shiny, black river down her back. She go to Montreal and come back with short hair. Not know who she is when she come home. Thought, '*Aiya*, have strange girl in house.'"

"Well, that's what Montreal is known for, you know, cheesecake baking schools and evil hairdressers. They had a story on that on the evening news last Wednesday."

I looked down at my backpack, wondering if I should search

through it again, and I saw a penny on the floor. I crouched down pretending to tie my shoelaces and grabbed the penny.

"Always make fun. Don't make too much fun tonight. Maybe burn special pizza."

"Then I'll just cover it up with whipped cream and serve it as dessert."

I placed the penny on top of the bills.

"*Aiya, fahn sai ngaw.* Here, take change. This old woman too tired to play. Close windows tonight. It going to rain. You catch cold so fast. Every time I talk to your mother she tell me you sick. You should make oxtail soup. I make every week for Suzie and she never sick."

"I don't eat meat."

"No meat, just bone."

"Don't eat bones either."

"No more argue. I tell your mother to make oxtail soup. Let her argue with you. I have own children to make me crazy. Bye-bye."

"See ya. And Mrs. Chien, make sure you grind the Alka Seltzer up real good or you'll end up with chunky dahn tahks. Then the gods will really get mad."

"*Chee sien.*"

"Ma!"

"In the kitchen — Yes, I know, Mrs. Chien. I'm sure she was joking ... Of course, of course ... You know how these young people are like ... no, I'm not saying that Suzie is like that ... Yes, I'll tell her ... oxtail ... Bye!"

"I bought you some dragon eyes."

"You know every time you go over to Mrs. Chien's store I get a phone call. Why must you bother her? She goes blabbing to her *mah johng* club about how I let you run wild. Why did you tell her I put Alka Seltzer in my *dahn tahk*?"

She stood there with her hands on her nonexistent hips.

"You're lucky I didn't tell her about the Roloids in your *jook*."

The lines around her mouth deepened. She looked up at me and removed a piece of lint in my hair.

"Very funny. I had planned to spend the afternoon quietly reading

but I end up getting lecture on parenting skills from Mrs. Chien."

"*Cosmo*. Interesting. Picking up tips on how to be a better lover?"

She had her place in the magazine marked with the phone bill.

"No. What's this word here?"

"Chartreuse. It's a shade of green. You remember that dress that Mrs. Mah wore to Cindy's wedding?"

"The one with the giant shoulder pads? Who could forget. She looked like an overcooked artichoke."

I took out a branch of dragon eyes.

"That's chartreuse."

She went into the kitchen and returned with a plate and a damp cloth.

"Put them here. How can a colour so ugly have such a fancy name? You know, that colour looks the way my piss smells after I eat asparagus."

"Ma. Here, eat some dragon eyes."

"What? You don't like your Mother talking about her piss? At least it's natural. Not like you telling Mrs. Chien about dirt dessert."

She carefully placed the pit on the edge of the plate so it didn't touch any of the uneaten fruit.

"It was a joke. I thought it was kinda funny."

"Well, she has a sense of humour like an octopus has feathers."

"You could always glue some on."

"*Aiya*. Is everything a joke to you? Are you going to be telling knock knock jokes at my funeral?"

"Ma."

"Don't 'Ma' me. People look at me and they don't see me with respect. They see me as a mother who has let her only child run wild. You think I enjoy walking through Chinatown and have people whispering behind me?"

She wiped her hands and the area around the plate.

"You probably have a piece of toilet paper stuck to your shoe."

"Max, can you hold a normal conversation without throwing in wisecracks? I'm tired of being held responsible for everything you do. People think I brought you up to do nothing but make fun of everything. You can't even take your job seriously."

She was now wiping down the table legs.

"Do you think I'm a failure? Is that it? Do you think I'm a useless piece of shit just because I don't kiss my boss' fat ass?"

"You don't have a boss. You don't have a damn job any more! You don't even have a decent education!"

She threw the cloth onto the plate of dragon eye pits and carried it into the kitchen. I followed.

"So now I'm an idiot. Am I so stupid because I don't need to be spoon fed information? Just because I don't have a fuckin' piece of paper to frame and hang on my wall doesn't make me stupid."

"Watch your language."

"What? You think I'm a fuck-up, I might as well talk like one. I'm so sorry that you're so fuckin' ashamed of me. Maybe if you had a daughter like good old Suzie you'd have something to be proud of. I'm sorry I ain't a perfect little Barbie doll think that you can show to all your friends."

"Get out of my house! I've had enough of you!" Her body shook as she washed the plate.

"What's the difference between the Energizer Bunny having sex and me having sex?"

"Get out!" The plate fell and shattered.

"The Energizer Bunny keeps going and going and going while I keep coming and coming and coming. Be proud of that!"

•

"Shh. Here she comes."

I slid into the booth beside Neal.

"What?" I searched my pockets for my smokes. Simon offered me one of his. "Thanks. Now what's the big secret?"

"What secret?" Neal said and continued to chew on his thumbnail.

"Don't play with me. You'd better switch fingers before you reach bone."

"It's just gossip. You know. Neal's a sucker for stuff like that."

"Fuck you."

"Well he's a sucker for something. Fine. Don't tell me."

"It's about Jimmy," Neal said.

"What about him?" I signalled Todd for a coffee.

"Shut your mouth, Neal." Simon gave him a dirty look.

"She's gonna hear about it."

"You're always blabbing your mouth off. You just don't know when to fuckin' shut up."

"Fuck off."

"Excuse me. But can someone please tell me whatever I am or am not supposed to hear 'cause I have to go to pee really badly."

"Jimmy's dead."

Someone in a nearby booth was having a good laugh. I almost didn't hear Neal.

"Excuse me." I darted into the washroom.

I sat there on the toilet until Denise began pounding on the stall door.

"Max, you in there?"

"Yeah."

"Well get out. I've got to piss and the other stall is dirty."

I stood there amidst the graffiti and toilet paper. Denise emerged from the stall.

"I just heard about Jimmy. It was on the news. They didn't mention his name or nothing but, uh."

"Neal told me."

"I know, he and Simon were fighting about it when I got here."

She brushed her hair and squirted hairspray above her head. Then she tossed her head forward, gave her hair a couple of shakes, looked up and re-squirted above her head. She emptied her makeup bag onto the counter and began putting stuff onto her already painted face.

"For fuck's sake, Denise. Jimmy's dead and you're screwing around with makeup."

"Well, he's dead. I'm not."

"Don't you give a damn? He's dead! Fuckin' stone cold dead!"

I ran out of the washroom and out of the coffee shop. I heard Neal yelling for me. I ran faster. People moved to get out of my way. A few weren't fast enough. I finally got to my apartment building. My footsteps echoed up the sixteen flights of stairs and taunted my tired legs. With each flight of stairs, gravity doubled, or at least it seemed to. I was

barely inside my apartment before the phone started ringing.

"Yeah?" I assumed it was Denise and was ready to mouth off.

"Maxine?"

"Mrs. Tam?"

"Come over. I make cake. You like chocolate? Maybe pie? Come and we talk. O.K.?"

She hung up before I could decline her offer.

Grant Buday / TWO STORIES

TOADS

Svoboda already had five TVs from tenants who couldn't pay their rent in cash. He didn't want another one, especially from Boyle Rupp. He wanted Boyle out and this was his chance. It also meant he could jack the rent as much as he wanted on the next person, especially as the vacancy rate in Vancouver was zero. So when the opportunity came, Svoboda turfed Boyle just like that. Nineteen years Boyle had been there, nineteen years.

Svoboda was a reformed alcoholic whose teeth looked like rusty nails. Instead of a case of beer each evening he drank a case of Coke. He was there when Horst Nunn came over to help Boyle move. Svoboda was in working greens. He was one of those guys who lived in working greens. Boyle said he'd seen him in Bino's on Saturday night with his wife eating Baron of Beef wearing those same clothes. He even went to church in them.

While Boyle and Horst packed stuff out, Svoboda inspected the suite hunting for excuses not to return the damage deposit. When Boyle had moved in the rent had been a hundred a month and the damage deposit half that. Still, Svoboda meant to keep it. He managed to write up a list — using one of those flat carpenter's pencils — that included *skuf florz, holz in wal, brokn ice tray in frezer*. He estimated the costs at fifty on the nose.

When Boyle complained Svoboda said he was lucky he didn't make him pay more. "Look at that oven!"

"I haven't used the oven in six years!"

"You're the worst tenant I ever had! Noise all the time!"

"Noise! I'm never here! How could I make noise?"

"What about those whores?"

"Whores! With the rent you charge? Who could afford it!"

Argument was futile. When the place was cleaned out, Boyle didn't even stop for a last look. He and Horst just got into the car.

"Goddamn Bohunk. I never made a sound. Nineteen years."

"So this is it?" Horst was looking into the back seat piled with boxes.

"That's it." Boyle pulled out. "You're saving my life."

Horst said nothing.

At first, Boyle had planned to move into his car. But, as he'd said to Horst, "Where can I park without the cops getting on my ass?" Boyle had asked the question out loud, knowing damn well there was room in the alley behind Horst's place to park. The problem was Boyle drove for Pink Lady Messenger Service, so he couldn't have his own car full of boxes. Boyle also knew that Horst's Pacer was parked out back and had been off the road for a year. So it was let him sleep in Horst's car or have Boyle camped out on the living room floor, and no way, Horst wasn't having that. Never. This way Boyle could use his Beetle for work and have the Pacer as a temporary home. "Temporary." Horst had emphasized that.

So Boyle moved into Horst's Pacer. He poured gas in the tank so he could run the heater and pinned up towels for curtains. That first night Boyle used Horst's phone to order up a pizza. Yet Boyle couldn't convince the guy that the address really was a red Pacer in an alley. Horst, listening, finally said, "Fuck. Just deliver it here."

When the pizza arrived, Boyle insisted on taking the delivery kid out back to show him the car so that next time he'd know he was on the level. Yet the kid still thought they were shitting him.

"It's a new trend in urban living," said Boyle.

The kid was wearing a Corvette Stingray t-shirt. "Okay, but a Pacer?"

When the kid was gone, Boyle invited Horst to sit in the car and eat pizza. They played the radio and drank beer.

"So you're finding a place soon, right?"

"Jesus Horst. I'm fifty. You think I like this?" Boyle insisted Horst take the last piece. Horst knew it was bribery, but after a month of Kraft Dinner, he went for it. "I never brought a whore there once," said Boyle.

They arranged that Boyle use Horst's bathroom in the morning before work, then again at night before bed. Beyond that, they were living in separate houses.

That night Horst's landlord, Leo Buljan, discovered Boyle out back. Leo was huge, so Boyle, terrified, refused to get out of the car. He rolled the window down an inch and they argued. Then Leo lost his temper and grabbed the window, and Boyle cranked it up tight, pinching Leo's fingers. Horst came running when Leo started howling. It took a lot of talking before Horst had him calmed down to where he wasn't going to get a hammer, break the window, and drag Boyle out.

"Okay," said Leo. "He can stay. But I want rent. Hundred a month." He hulked off to ice his fingers.

Horst was secretly pleased. It was great. Boyle got the message, loud and clear, that he better get his ass someplace else. It also meant Horst didn't take the rap for being too cheap to let him stay.

"That guy's gonna kill me!"

"You oughta see his gun collection," said Horst. "Goes to the Barnet Rifle Range twice a week. Drinks vodka."

"A hundred a month," said Boyle.

"Yeah." Horst tried sounding sympathetic.

"That's pretty good. Goddamn Svoboda was bleeding me for four hundred. What's this guy's name?" Boyle had his cheque book out.

The next night Horst heard singing. He peeked through the blinds and saw Boyle and Leo in the Pacer, drunk, singing Serbian songs.

In the morning, Boyle knocked on Horst's door carrying two cups of coffee.

"Leo hooked up an extension cord for me so I can use my perk. He's a good guy!"

"How're his fingers?"

"Not even bruised!"

Horst sat at the kitchen table while Boyle used the toilet. Horst hated anyone using his toilet. It disgusted him. He shut his eyes trying not to think about it.

"Jesus," said Boyle when he came out, "been holding that dump all night. So. See you at the track?"

"You just got evicted for not being able to pay your rent and you got money to bet?"

Boyle peeled off a couple of twenties. "Leo's gonna lay down a piece of plywood and some foam rubber to level out the back seat. This should cover it. Hey." Boyle looked at Horst's plants. His suite was a jungle. "I'll give you ten for a couple of these buggers."

When Boyle pulled in about midnight both doors of his Beetle opened and shut and Horst heard a woman's laughter. He made it to the window in time to see a hooker getting into the back seat of his Pacer. Boyle had his hands all over her ass as he crawled in behind. Horst went from the bedroom window to the living room window for a better view. He shifted some of the plants and watched. For a minute the light was on and he could see the silhouettes of two bodies moving about behind the towels. Then the light went out. Pretty soon the Pacer was rocking side to side.

In the morning Boyle appeared at the door with two coffees.

"Where were you? I got the triactor! Bunce got it too. Paid three-fifty!"

Horst smelled Boyle from across the table. "You stink."

Boyle grinned.

"My car probably smells like dead fish."

"Jesus Horst. It's been so long I forgot what it looks like."

"Where'd you find her?"

"Mr Submarine on Hastings."

"I'd prefer you didn't fuck whores in my car."

"OK, OK." Boyle strolled whistling to the bathroom.

A minute later Horst heard the water running in the tub. He shouted and ran to the door. It was locked.

"I need a bath!"

"This isn't part of the deal! Go walk through a car wash!"

"Can't hear you!"

When Boyle came out he said he'd buy Horst another toothbrush, and by the way he was out of dental floss.

"You used my toothbrush?"

"I had something stuck. Hey. Me'n Leo're going to the casino tonight."

"Leo doesn't gamble."

"I'm gonna show him the ropes."

When Boyle left for work Horst took a deep breath then pushed open the bathroom door. The window was steamed and the tub had a brown ring and was full of hair — Boyle Rupp's hair. Horst felt ill. Two wet towels lay on the floor and the toilet hadn't been flushed. Horst stared at his toothbrush. Picking it up with a piece of toilet paper he threw it away. He spent the morning scrubbing and disinfecting. He had an aversion as deep as his horror of snakes to people using his toilet.

The next morning when Boyle knocked with two coffees, Horst opened the door but kept the chain on. He stated the New Order.

"But we had a deal!"

"The deal didn't include you shitting up my bathroom or using my toothbrush."

"So what'm I gonna do?"

"There's a hose around the side of the house. Wash with that. As for your other needs," Horst pointed out the garden of the Chinese lady across the alley. "She'll appreciate the fertilizer."

Every morning for the next week Horst watched Boyle head around to Leo's with two coffees. It was late April and the weather was warming up. In fact, it hadn't rained in five days, which had to be some kind of record for Vancouver. Horst knew Boyle had no intention of finding a proper place. The fucker liked it here. It gave him three hundred more to piss away at the track and the casino. Horst decided he was demanding rent too. It was his car, after all. It was only fair. A hundred to Leo and a hundred to Horst. ... Yet he wondered. If he took money from Boyle, then Boyle suddenly had rights. He'd be a tenant. Hell. He almost was already. No. The only way to really get rid of him was to pay up the car insurance and get it back on the road. And that meant getting a job. What a choice: a job or Boyle. Horst usually worked as a gardener. And it *was* spring, after all.

Saturday was not only sunny, but hot. Suddenly everyone was

outside, waving hello to neighbours they usually hated. Boyle had the windows down and the seat cranked back, reading the Racing Form. Horst wanted to go out on the back porch and drink his coffee — but he didn't want to see Boyle. He especially didn't want to see Boyle smug and relaxed like he had the world where he wanted it. After an hour of pacing and picking dead leaves off his plants, Horst stumped down the steps to the car. Boyle saw him coming.

"Ever think of getting a sun roof?"

"Ever think of getting a proper place to live?"

Boyle picked up the classifieds on the seat beside him. "City's tighter than a frog's ass. You can get sun roofs for a couple hundred."

"If I had a couple hundred I'd renew my car insurance instead of riding the bus."

"Couple hundred? You live under a rug? Insurance'll cost you a grand." Boyle paged through the paper. "Here. Found you a job."

Horst was both offended and intrigued. "Who're you, my mother?"

Boyle slapped the paper and showed Horst a job he'd circled. "Telemarketing. Work from your home. No traffic, no boss, no hassles."

"No money either."

"You gotta be a self-starter. I'm telling you Horst, I'm out there all day, it's hell. Driving's the shits. Gives you ulcers. If I could work from home I'd be happier'n a clam. Here's the number." Boyle passed Horst a losing ticket from the track with a phone number on it.

"What else did you find?"

Boyle plucked the paper from Horst's hand and tossed it into the back seat. "Fuck all." He picked up the Racing Form.

"Gimme the paper."

"The newspaper."

"Told you. Nothing there."

"Just let me look."

"I'm doing the crossword."

"I'll give it back." Horst spoke with exaggerated calm. Boyle was hiding something. Horst smelled it. He took the paper and went inside. It took a while but he found it: *Long Weekend Every week! Wanted: Experienced gardener for indoor plant maintenance throughout city. Four days per week. Good wage, great benefits. Reliable car a must.*

Horst looked around at his plants. Boyle knew that of the hundred some jobs Horst had held, a dozen had been in gardening and nurseries. "The motherfucker. So that's his game. I let him live in my car and use my bathroom and this is what the guy pulls!" Horst swung open the door intending to throw him out. Boyle however, was gone. He'd headed for the track.

Horst wrote out a resume and cover letter. He'd kill two birds with one stone: turf Boyle, get a job, plus have his car back on the road again — three birds and one weasel.

Horst felt sure he had the job in the bag. So he went ahead and told Boyle that was it, he needed the car. Boyle surprised him with his calm.

"No problem. Leo said I could store my stuff in the basement here."

Horst was actually disappointed there wasn't more drama. Not a word about the job, nor any mention of how Boyle had tried hiding it so Horst wouldn't get it and pull the car out from under him.

A week later two things happened. The first was that Horst got turned down for the job. He kept his secret. The second was that Boyle rear-ended a bus. A wrecker left the smashed-in remains of his Beetle beside the Pacer. Boyle was in tears.

"Horst! Lemme buy your car. Lemme rent it! I'll give you two hundred a month, three hundred! I'll live in the Beetle and use yours for work. How about it?"

Horst spoke quietly, his voice soaked in sympathy. "But Boyle," Horst lied, "I'm working now. I need my car."

Boyle's eyes went dead as a clubbed cod's. He slumped to the steps and was having trouble breathing. He searched the ground. "Horst, what about that job I showed you? Telephone sales. Maybe I could do that — from your place! You'll be out all day!" The hopefulness in Boyle's voice was embarrassing.

Horst didn't know what to do. But whatever it was, he wasn't telling Boyle the truth yet. He wasn't letting him off the ropes so soon. "I don't know ..."

"I won't use the toilet or anything! I promise. I'll even clean the place up."

Horst drew a deep breath and gazed up the alley. "Let me think about it."

The next day, Sunday, it rained. The world had returned to normal. It might be spring according to the calendar, but in Vancouver that meant dick. The clouds slid in low, as dense and heavy as slabs of clay, and it poured. It was dark and cold and November all over again. Horst felt a kind of relief. The relief of one born in Vancouver. Of one whose earliest memories were of rain. Rain drumming down, rain hissing, rain drizzling. Rain. Relentless rain. From October to April. Eternal midweek mornings of rain. It calmed him. It made him feel at home. Horst wandered his place with a coffee picking at his plants. He liked rainy mornings, especially Sunday mornings when he could hear the church bells up the street.

He looked out the window and watched Boyle sitting in the smashed-in Beetle. The rain battered the metal roof, blurred windows and puddled around the wheels. Jesus, thought Horst, What a sight. Fifty years old and living in a car in an alley. Boyle was a loser. And Horst realized that's why he put up with him, that's why he hadn't turfed him. Not out of sympathy. No. Not at all. Watching Boyle sitting out there like a toad in a hole, Horst saw how much more of a loser Boyle was than he was, much more, a real bum, a write-off, and that's why he let him stick around. In fact, that's why Boyle should be kept around, so this fact would not be forgotten — by either of them.

Horst thought: Okay. Tomorrow I'll let him off the hook. He can use my car. 9 to 5. No evenings or weekends. And he's gotta fork over 2 bills rent. Horst went over the conditions again in his mind, then added one more. And you can't use my toilet.

SAW-BLADE SKY

Horst knows he shouldn't, but opens the door anyway.

Werner — drunk. He jerks his thumb back over his shoulder at his apartment down the hall. "Got tired of sitting in my box."

Horst sees Werner's on one of those drunks where Horst doesn't know if Werner's going to hug him or slug him.

"So," says Horst, "What's up?"

"My box, man." Werner's pharmaceutical eyes travel up the wall. "You know what I'm saying?"

Horst nods. He knows exactly what Werner's saying.

Werner squints past Horst into his place. "Anything to drink in there?"

Horst leans into the doorframe, blocking Werner's view. "Shit no. I'm dry."

Horst's head races, thinking up excuses. It's Saturday night and he doesn't want to get stuck with Werner dumping his crap-cart of bitterness on him. Shit, thinks Horst, I should never answer my door.

"Fucking Lorraine, man. Took all that wine I made."

"All those big jugs?"

"Doesn't realize I love her."

"Where's she living?"

"Where's she living? There, man." Werner jerks his thumb to the right, which is west. "Living with the Volvos." Werner means the west side of Vancouver, west of Main. Lorraine dumped Werner last year. It was inevitable, but the capper was him accusing her of ripping off his car and selling it on him. A rusted-out Impala that sat for a year in the alley out back. Lorraine and Werner argued for days over it.

Horst avoids Werner's eyes, recalling the incident.

The car disappeared alright, but it wasn't Lorraine — it was Horst. He called a scrap metal dealer and got it hauled away. It would've sat out there forever with the cats screwing under it.

Horst misses Lorraine. She and Horst had some good talks. Then she picked up Werner, like a disease. After that when Horst knocked on Lorraine's door, instead of her swinging it open and inviting him in, the door stayed shut. Werner'd be standing behind it, all paranoid, saying: "Who's there?"

"Horst."

"Who?"

"Horst. From down the hall."

"Oh. Oh yeah man. Whataya want?"

"Lorraine there?"

"She's busy."

Well, now Werner was at Horst's door.

"Kind of caught me at a bad time."

Werner stares with his nicotine eyes. He's fifty, has long black hair, a face shaved blue, and a little jaw, like he's been clenching it so tight so long it's shrunk. Then he's nodding, like he's got Horst's number. "Okay man. I hear you." And he's travelling back down the hall to his place, shaking his head at Horst: like — What an asshole.

Horst shuts the door. "Fuck." He goes into the bathroom to listen. Werner's got his TV on and he's making sarcastic noises at it. He's lonely. Horst thinks — Maybe I should invite him in after all? And in fact he does have half a bottle of red. But shit ... if I share it with Werner I'll never get to sleep. Horst sits on the edge of the bath tub. He can't believe he's feeling guilty. Werner's never given him the time of day. Christ, thinks Horst, that bastard wouldn't piss on me if I was on fire! And Horst knows if he lets him in once he'll show up regularly. He might even want to use the toilet. Besides, if he lets Werner in he'll see the plant-stand Horst pinched from downstairs. It was Lorraine's. She wasn't using it. Hell, thinks Horst, it was broken. Horst saw Werner chase Lorraine into the alley with that plant stand and break it across her back. Fortunately, Lorraine's three times Werner's size. She just turned around and flattened him. Fifty-year-old ex-junkie draft-dodger scam-artist. She liked all that. It was exciting. She told Horst so. Yet, hell if Horst'll have Werner shitting in his toilet. And if

he recognizes the plant stand, who knows, he might shoot him. Lorraine told Horst Werner's got a gun. Well, a sort of gun. A flare gun. Stole it from a boat. Still, it'd burn a good hole in you. Horst imagines his apartment lighting up like a nuclear blast and a smoking hole in his chest. And that'd be the not-so-glorious end of Horst Nunn. Done in by Werner Rugg. A fate with the charm of death by rat bite.

Horst wonders if Werner knows he slept with Lorraine. Maybe all this time he's been next door there brooding ugly revenge, thinking of ways to torture Horst for having made it with his woman. Though of course it wasn't like that. Horst and Corinne had been fighting and she was saying fuck this and walked out. Horst paced around then knocked on Lorraine's door. It was a Saturday night and Werner was doing weekends in jail on a possession charge. Lorraine kind of liked that Werner was doing time. It gave her life an edge. Made her feel inner city. She was very much into being the hip momma. So she welcomed Horst. She had a bottle of red and they got drunk. It was the hugging that got it going. Lorraine was into this New Age hugging and it went from there into some old time fucking. Horst remembers the bed had black sheets and smelled of cigarettes and b.o. Lorraine was the biggest woman he'd ever done it with. Not fat, but massive. Felt like he was humping a chesterfield, and when she got on top of him — Christ! — it was like he was trapped under a mattress. He spent the night though, and they did it again in the morning. Corinne was sitting at the kitchen table when he stepped in stinking of sex and cigarettes. Six months later they were divorced.

The morning after Werner knocked on Horst's door, Horst peeks through the blinds and sees Werner pegging sheets on the clothes line out back.

Horst nearly drops his coffee. And not just because he's never seen Werner do laundry before, but because Horst recognizes the sheets. Two sheets and two pillow cases, a set. When Werner's gone, Horst steps outside. Fuck, these are mine, thinks Horst. They are. They belonged to me and Corinne. The sheets are a deep blue with moons and clouds and a kind of night-on-the desert look. Werner's got my sheets! thinks Horst. And if that's not ugly enough, he's slept on them! Werner's probably jerked off or fucked some slut on them. Horst steps

back, appalled. Horst and Corinne got the sheets as a wedding present. And now Werner's got them. Werner, who's probably infested with lice!

Horst is halfway around the house to Werner's suite when he halts.

Number one: Werner's got that flare gun.

Number two: maybe he's simply got sheets with the same pattern.

Is it possible?

Horst dials Moose Jaw. Sunday morning the rates are reduced.

He's got to talk to Corinne and get this straight.

Gary answers. Horst tightens the cloth over the mouthpiece.

"Is Corinne there?"

"Who's calling?"

Horst stammers.

"That you Horst?"

He pulls the cloth away. "Yeah."

"Well fuck you."

"I gotta talk to her."

"Talk to yourself."

"Gary!"

"She's busy."

"What kind of sheets you got?"

"Why are you such an asshole? She's eight months pregnant. What the fuck you mean, sheets?"

Horst's voice fails. "... Eight months?"

"Eight. You got a message I'll pass it along. That's as close as you're getting."

"The pattern. Just tell me the pattern."

"White sheets, Horst, we got white flannel sheets. Now go back to bed and sleep it off."

Horst heads down to the Beer and Wine store at the Waldorf.

The basement of the house is a mausoleum to past tenants. Clothes, books, chairs and boxes left by people who no one, not even Leo Buljan, the landlord, remembers. People from the sixties and even the fifties. Maybe further. Leo says the place was built in 1908. Horst sets his wine bottle on a trunk and looks around. It's musty and dank and the rough cedar planks supporting the main floor are only

inches from Horst's head. In a corner lies a mattress gutted by mice, paint cans, a roll of carpet that stinks like a sack. Horst spots Corinne's wicker picnic basket ... a couple of rolls of wrapping paper stick out. Images of Christmases past suddenly plump tears to his eyes. He reaches for the bottle, realizing he should've got two.

The bells ring for five o'clock mass up the street. Drunk, Horst recalls a couple of weeks ago he was walking over to the track in the evening, and as he was passing the church there was an old lady going up the steps, real slow, pushing herself up on a cane and resting at each step. She was wearing her best clothes. Horst could actually smell her face powder from the sidewalk. He didn't know whether to laugh or cry. He nearly turned around and went into the church himself. But he knows what it looks like inside — he and Corinne got married there. He kept going. He bet heavy that night.

Horst watches those sheets float on the October breeze. Hell. Take them down. Just take them. IF Werner comes knocking, say — I don't know. Why would I take your sheets, man? What the fuck can Werner say to that? Horst finishes the last inch of wine, listens for sounds from Werner's suite, then steps onto the porch and takes them. He strips his bed then remakes it. He stands there looking at them for a long time. Then he sits, and slides his palm slowly over the surface. ... He remembers that time in Alberta, near Red Deer, way out in the middle of nowhere, all rock and dirt and flat land. The car broke down and he and Corinne were arguing. As usual, Horst was losing. Even when he was right he managed to lose arguments. They argued until they were exhausted. Horst remembers thinking how bleak Alberta was. Tumbleweeds snagged in barbed wire, coulees full of baked red dirt. What a fucking hole. They used up all the windshield cleaning fluid in one day! The car was crusted. They sat out there under a sky the colour of a rusty saw blade, the pebbly prairie wind nicking the windows and the gusts rocking the car. That's where it ended. That's where Corinne said she'd had it. She'd stared straight ahead: "I hate Vancouver. I hate the rain. The mountains make me claustrophobic and the sea stinks like a sewer." She'd turned to him.

"So, what's it going to be?"

Horst had avoided her eyes and said nothing, which pissed her off

even more. As usual, by doing nothing, he was forcing her to make all the moves.

“Well?”

Horst had shrugged. He was relieved and crushed at the same time.

Horst pulls the sheets up and pins them back onto the line. Then he stares out at the blue-black sky. The sun’s gone, leaving only a few bloody clouds beyond the rooftops. He hears the popping of a string of fire crackers. In two weeks it’ll be Halloween. Then everyone’ll be knocking at his door expecting something.

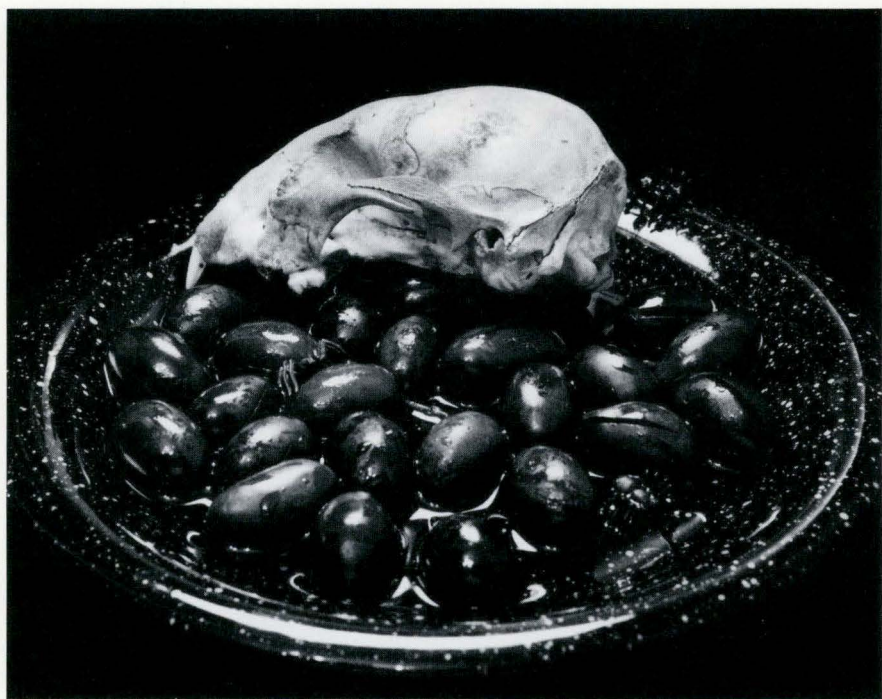
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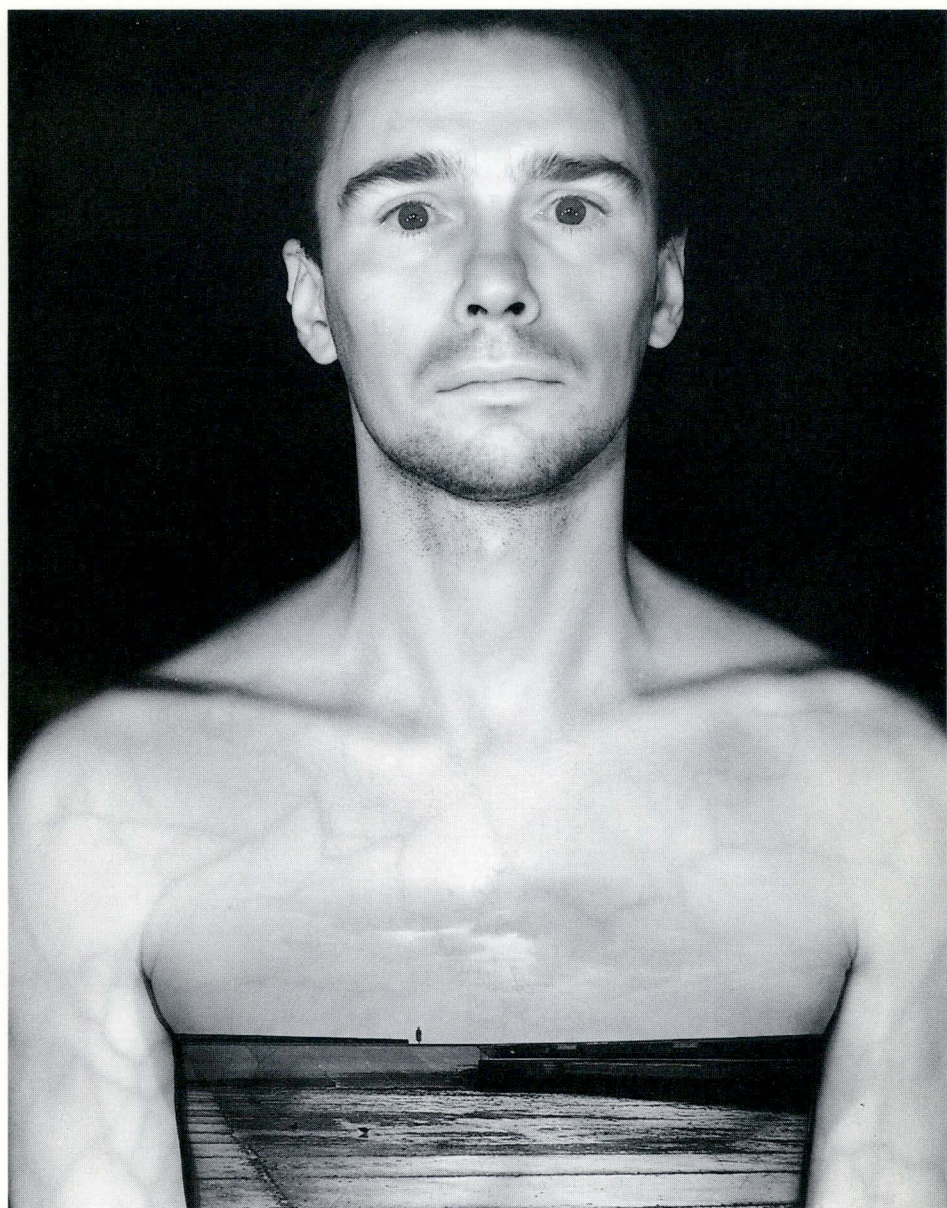
ARTIST'S STATEMENT

A work usually begins with an attraction to one element, an object or image. I then look for other elements that will “fit” with it. This “fit” is the heart of the creative process for me because it is primarily intuitive, with the intellect acting more as a mentor — suggesting general directions and minor details. Once I have the different elements, I combine or arrange them aesthetically within the limitations of the materials and my ability to use them.

For example, the portrait with the solitary figure on the seawall superimposed on the torso came out of testing a new infra-red film. After making a contact sheet, I was intrigued by the emotion the film created in what was essentially the blank expression of the sitter. I searched through my other contact sheets for something I could pair with this image and found what I was looking for when I came across the solitary figure captured on the horizon of a vista.

The act of fusion and the mutation which results is a constant in my work that mirrors the process of making the work itself. For I’ve always been more interested in *making* pictures than in *taking* pictures. I try to avoid simply representing what is present by using two or three negatives in separate enlargers to create a non-realistic result. For a still life, I combine unlikely elements; however, in the simpler still lifes, I often focus on the fine, and somewhat contradictory, line between the appetizing and the repulsive or the fickle interplay between our sense of vision and our sense of taste.



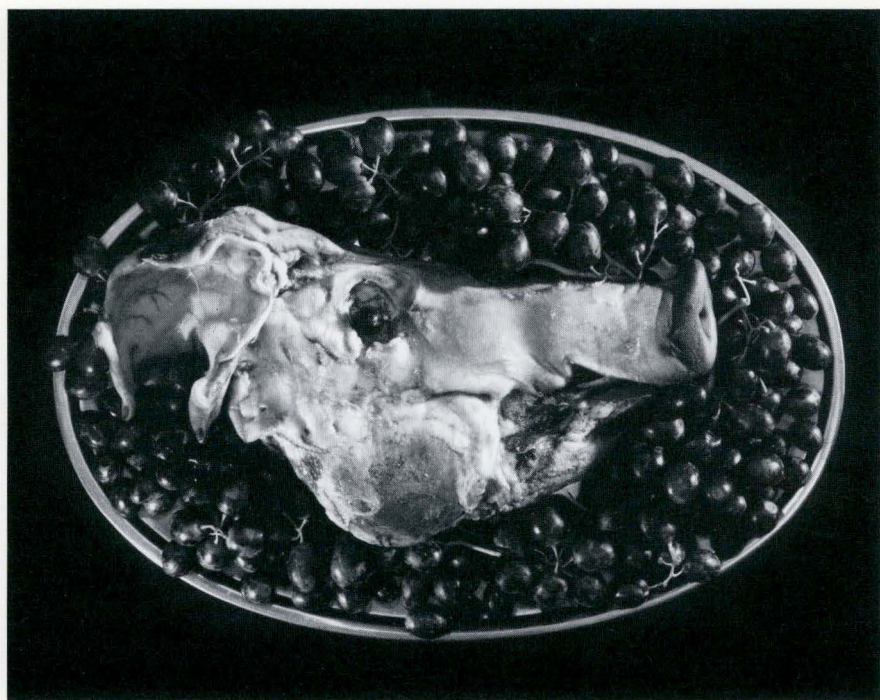


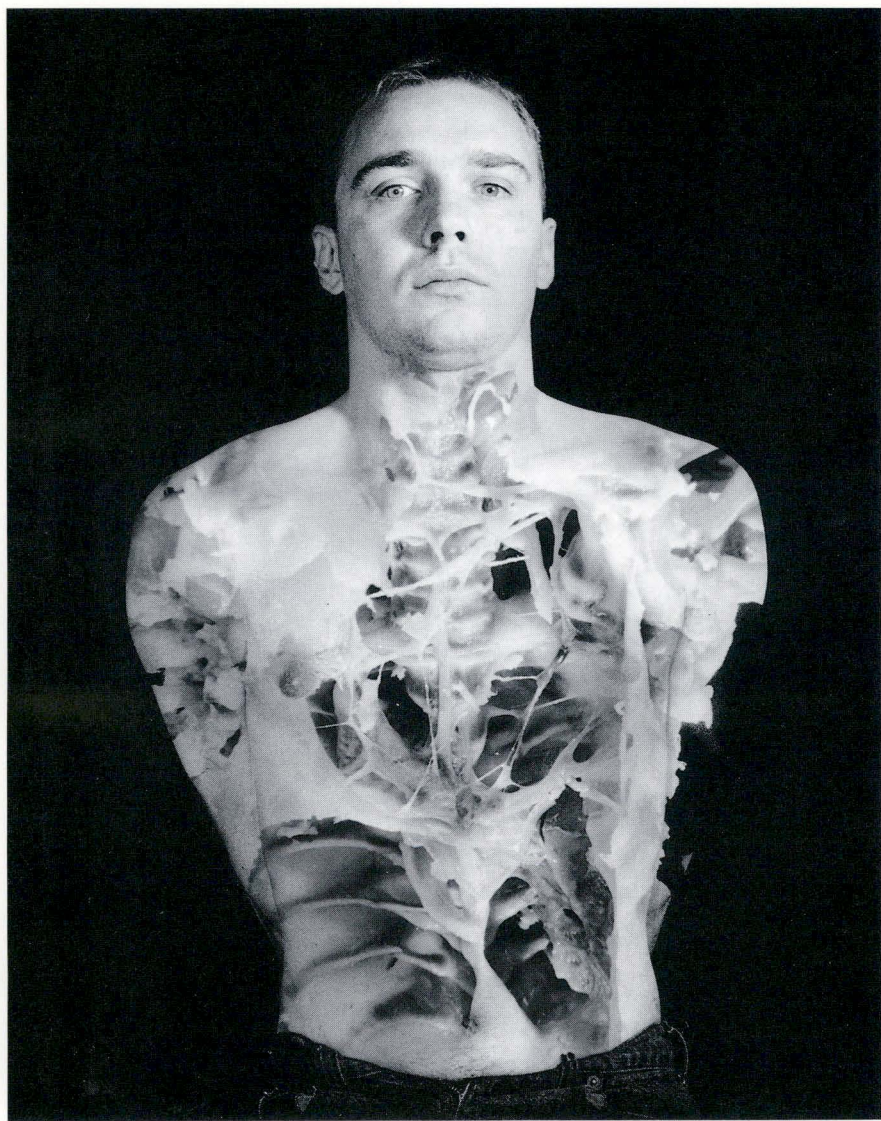


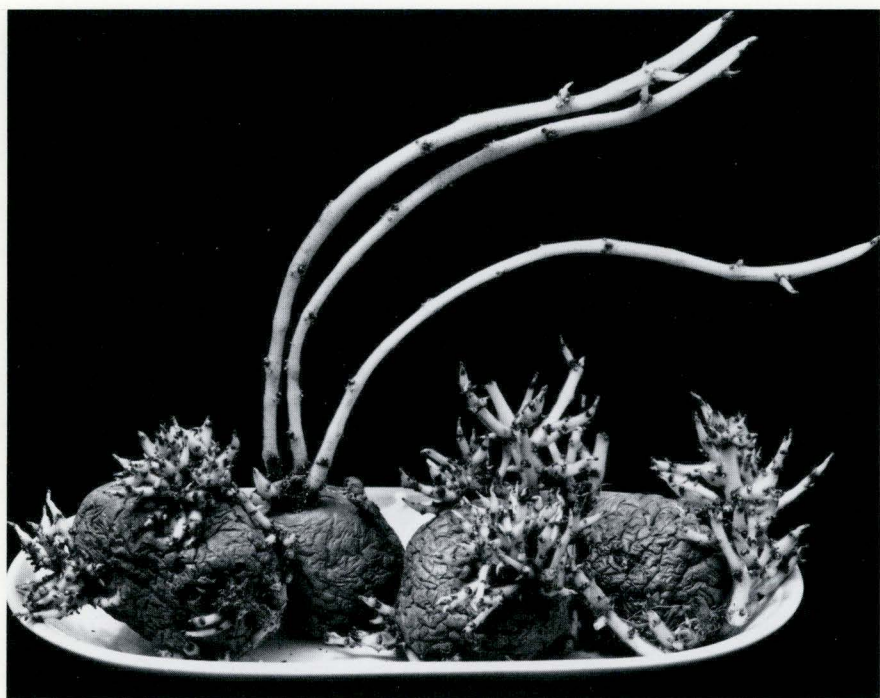




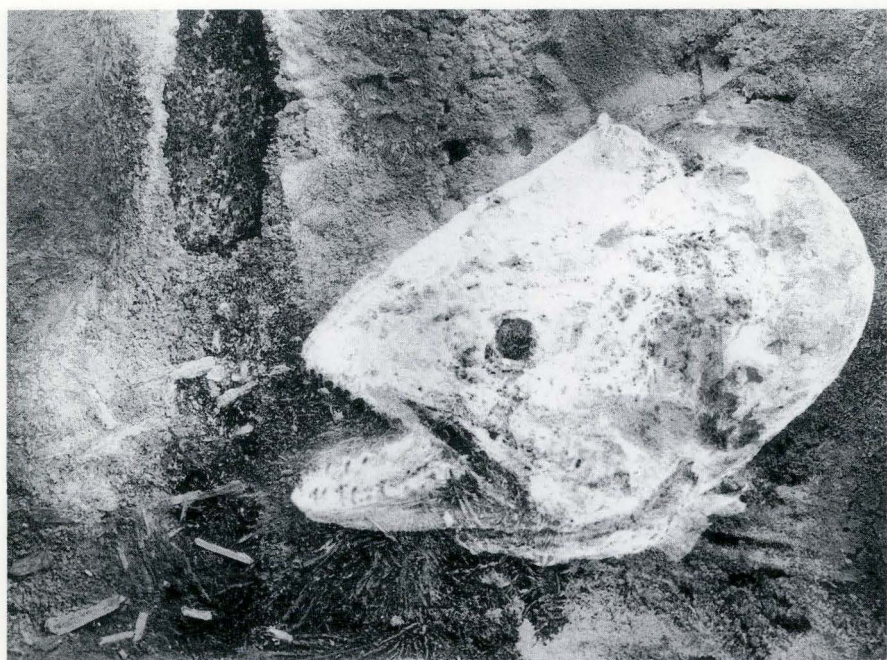


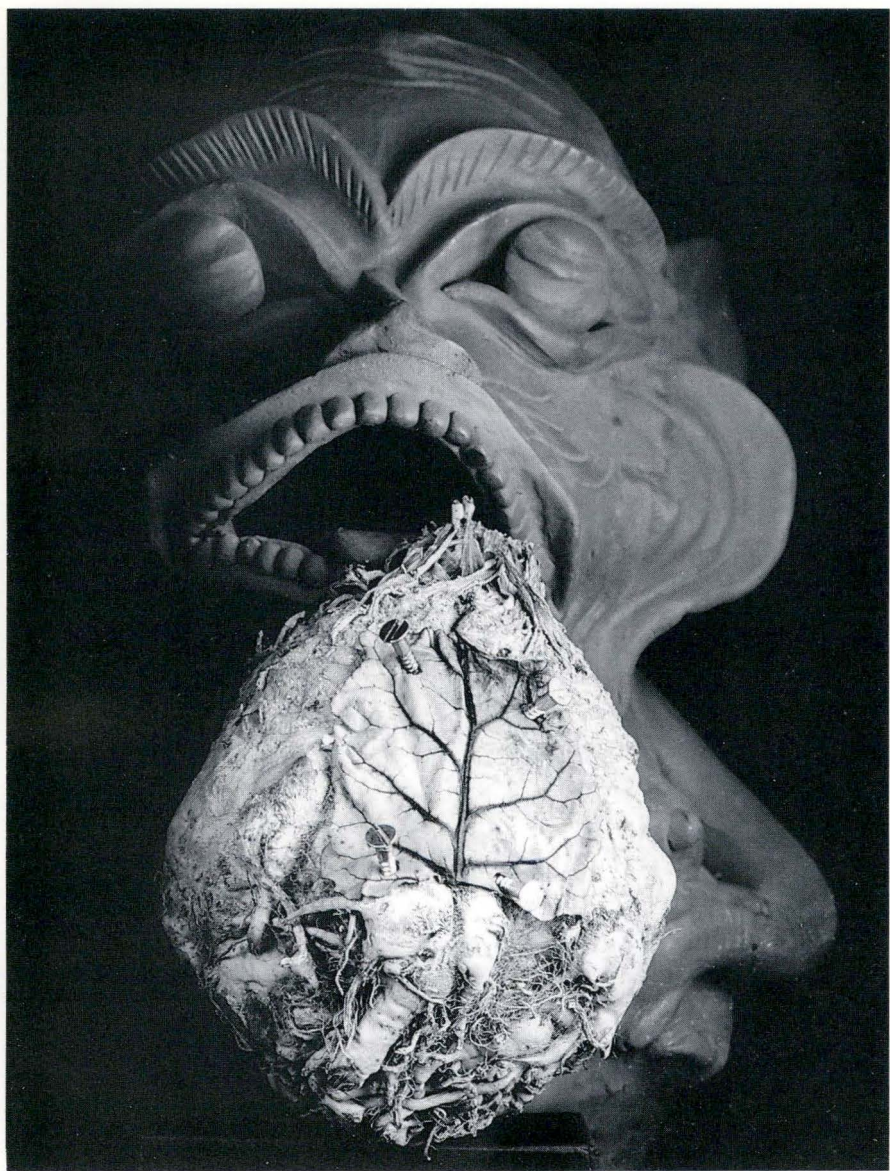


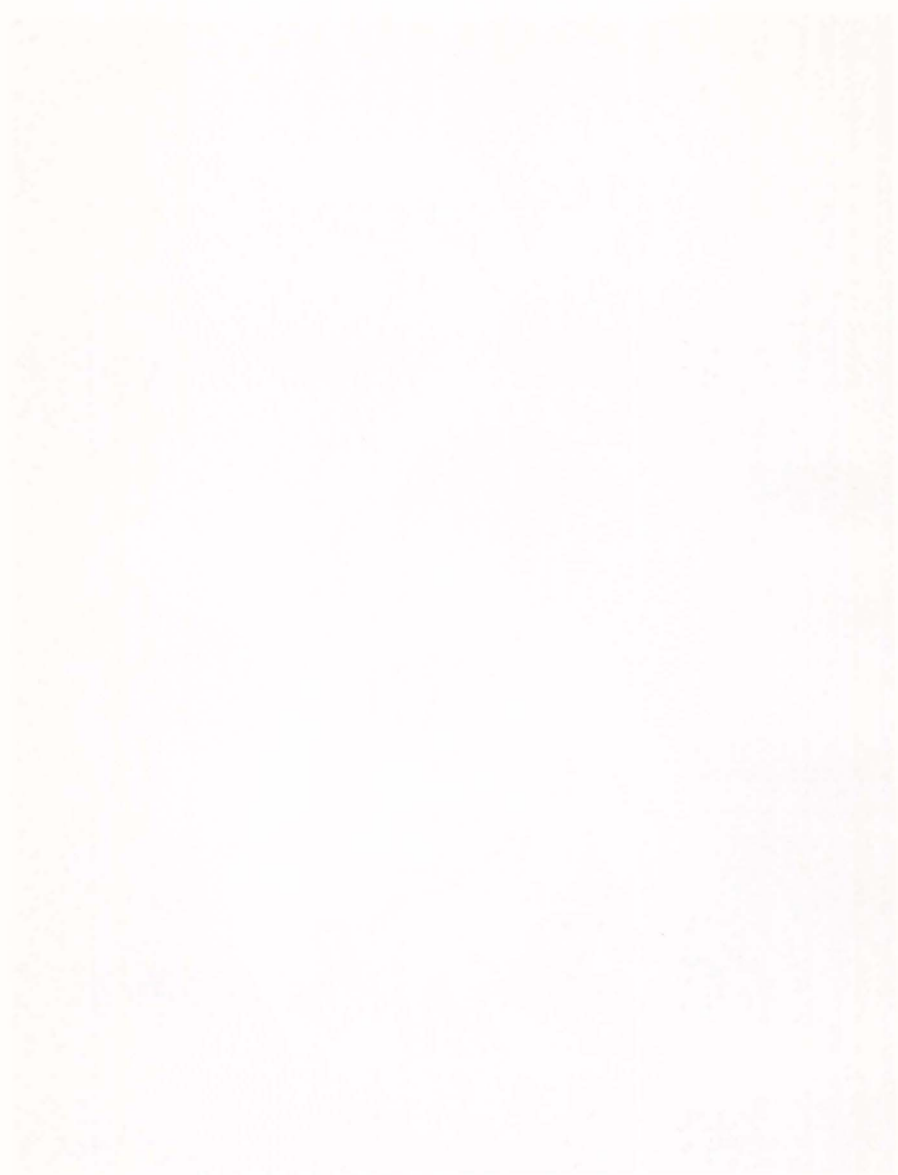












Raymond Low / TRAVERSE

It's quarter past eleven as I'm driving north on the Macdonald Cartier Freeway when I spot the station wagon on the side road, the driver waving his flashlight around like a beacon.

My mother and father were devoted Christians to the end, faithful to the sacred word. I have read the Bible three times already, twice by my own choosing. And although I am not the total saint my friends make me out to be, my religious devotion goes further than simply praising God on Sundays. I never walk by the homeless without handing over spare change, I never avoid charities, and much to the concern of my husband, I often pick up hitchhikers.

I slowly pull my car over behind the station wagon.

Don't you realize that honest, good people don't ever hitchhike? he would probably say to me right now. *You read the papers, you hear about all the weirdos out there. They don't care about good Samaritans, they only care about what they want to do. You're unimportant to them, Jen.*

I get out of the car, leaving the motor running and the door open. I hear the roar as other cars speed by. It is early February, and the dirt brown slush on the freeway sprays inches away from my feet.

"Need some help, sir?" I ask, approaching the man. He is of medium height, just a few inches taller than me. I guess he's in his forties, light brown hair, a narrow but full face obviously unshaven in the last two days or so. He shivers in his thin blue polo jacket; I feel sympathy for him already.

"Yeah. The motor's out." His body may be shaking but his voice is undaunted. "I've tried everything. It's dead. I was wondering if you could give me a lift."

I look over towards his car. The hood is up and I see the ugly mess of steel and oil.

"Where are you headed?" I ask.

"Lawrence Heights." And even before I can say anything, he adds, "Look, I know it's dark. You can just drop me off by the Etobicoke

train station. I can make it from there.”

I don’t bother to muse over his offer. I rarely do. “Well then, what are you standing out here in the cold for? Come on in.”

His face loosens up. “I really appreciate this — ”

“Ah, don’t mention it.”

I head back to the car as he secures his. I get in, reach over, unlock the door. He slides into the passenger seat with a sigh of relief. “You know, this is really embarrassing for me.” He rubs his bare hands for warmth. “I’ve never had to do this before. Car usually works fine, never given me any hassles. Picks the worst day to fall out on me. Thank you very much.”

“You’re welcome.” I smile as I pull the car back onto the freeway. “Trying to head home as soon as possible?”

He nods. “Yeah. I hear there’s gonna be another five centimetres of snow overnight.” There is a certain lack of tone in his voice I did not notice before, like someone just trying to make conversation.

“Five? I heard seven.”

“Either way, it’s a lot. A whole lot.” He is quiet for a moment but suddenly slaps himself in the forehead. “I’m sorry, I’ve been sitting here and I haven’t even introduced myself. My name’s Russell Kwerston.” He extends a hand and I shake it.

“Jenny Fischer.” I glance in the rearview mirror. I don’t enjoy looking like a total louse, even in front of strangers. I have dark orange hair, ending at my shoulders, and a small round face much like my mother. I am only thirty two, just another quality my husband thinks makes me a susceptible victim.

You’re a beautiful girl, Jen. You may not want to think so, but you’d be surprised at how people think of you. Some of it is not very comforting. At all.

We drive in silence for a few minutes. Outside the snow is starting to come down more rapidly, and I turn on the windshield wipers.

“Live around here, Jen?”

“No. Down by Scarborough.”

“House?”

“No, an apartment.”

“Is it new?”

I shrug. “Somewhat.”

“Scarborough. That’s quite a long drive.”

"Yeah it is."

"Coming back from work?"

I've always enjoyed talking to the people I pick up. It's always interesting to see and chat with a variety of people. It's a lot better than a quiet ride. But now every question seems too personal and it makes me feel uncomfortable.

"Yes."

"Good pay?"

"I'd say so."

"You sure?"

"Yes."

"That's good. Where do you work?"

"Um ..."

He shifts so that he is looking directly at me. I don't like it and I begin to squirm in my seat.

"Are my questions making you nervous, Jen?" There is no friendliness in his voice, and I doubt he'd honestly care what answer I give.

"N-no. Of course not."

"I'll stop." He continues to stare. I turn on the radio. I look again in the rearview mirror. I look all around me. There are cars everywhere. They settle me down.

"Mind if I smoke?" he asks.

"Actually, smoke hurts my eyes."

"Does it?" he says in a motherly tone.

"Yes." My voice is hoarse.

"What else irritates you?"

"I'm sorry?"

"Is there anything else that bothers you that I should know about?"

"No."

"Positive?"

"Yes."

"Don't be afraid — "

"I'm n — ... I'm not."

I can feel him staring at me more intently. I don't dare look back.

"I'm sorry. Am I making you nervous, Jen?" he says. He shakes his head as if scolding himself. "I'm sorry." He sits back normally, staring at the road ahead of him. "I really am."

I am beginning to sweat. "That's okay, Mr. Kw—"

"Russell. Please, call me Russell."

I nod. I know the train station is just north of Highway 409, but I'm also aware I'm very far from there. I listen to radio traffic reports, but they don't mean much to me. The reporter then goes through local news. The bank rate is down. Two teenagers were killed in a bus accident. A heroic fireman emerges from a burning building. Sports. The Leafs win again. A coach has been fired. I couldn't care less. Afterwards, they continue with their nightly selection of adult contemporary music.

I hear a car horn beep behind me, and I suddenly realize I'm driving ten miles per hour too slowly. I speed up. Russell hasn't said a word in about seven minutes. I wonder if he's fallen asleep. I slowly turn my head. He is wide awake, just reservedly serene. I try to understand how on earth I got myself into this predicament.

He played you for a fool, Jen. He put on a little fake smile, pretended to be such a nice fellow and you fell for it. And now you're driving, miles from home with an insane man beside you. You're so naive, Jen —

I block my husband's voice and try to reassure myself I'm going to be alright. Russell hasn't done anything yet to harm me physically. He's just talking. That's what a lot of the lunatics are about — talk. Manipulation. Making other people *think* they're crazy. Children do it all the time — pretending to be sick so they can miss a day of school; I'm surprised people haven't connected the two.

I suddenly realize I've forgotten to put on my seatbelt. I pull the strap over me, and the click triggers something in Russell, for he abruptly begins to breathe very deeply. He looks out the side window.

"I murdered someone today," he says.

I grip the wheel a bit tighter. A part of me laughs in skepticism; the other part begins to worry.

"You don't believe me, do you?"

"I don't know."

"Well I did. That's why I was out there in the first place." He taps his fingers on the dashboard. "Figured I'd just dump her somewhere in Mimico Valley. You know where that is? No? Anyways, it was damn easy. I'm thinking, there must be a hitch. So I'm driving back and what happens? Car trouble. Would you believe that? Would you be-

lieve that? What do they call that? *Irony*, I think is the word."

"What do you want?" I blurt out. "Do you want the car? Do you need money — "

"I don't want your money."

"You can take the car, just — "

"I don't *want* your goddamned car. Just drive."

I nod because I'm afraid of blurting out the wrong thing. He shifts around again and faces me. "I'm scaring you, aren't I?"

"No." My face is rigid.

"You aren't frightened?"

"No."

"You don't look like it." He eases his left arm around the headrest of my seat. "I know you are. It's alright to admit it, you know. We're all good friends, aren't we? Tell me you're at least a bit scared."

"Fine. I'm scared."

He takes notice of my tone. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

"I don't believe you."

"Fine."

"I'm just trying to be friendly."

"And I'm just trying to keep my attention on the road."

A pause. "Are you married, Jen?"

"Yes I am."

"What's your husband's name?"

"Thomas."

"Happily married?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"You have any children, Jen?"

I'm silent for a moment. "That's none of your business."

He glares at me. "But Jen, I told you, we're friends." His right hand moves over and settles on my knee. "We're friends, right?"

I am beginning to snifle. I shake my head.

"No?"

I shake my head once more.

"No?" His hand slides upwards. "You know that's really disappoint-

ing. I'm really beginning to like you. Honestly. You sound like an interesting person. C'mon. I'm a good friend, right?" His hand stops on the inside of my thigh.

I begin to cry. Slowly. "Please stop."

He doesn't move an inch. "You have any children, Jen?" he repeats.

I am shivering enough for him to notice. "Yes. One. My son."

"What's his name?"

I begin to choke. "Please, I can't tell you — "

"Why not?" he asks innocently.

"Please. He's only a baby — "

"I just want his name, Jen. That's all."

"I'm sorry. Please — "

"What is it? Mark? Peter? Thomas Junior?"

"Please — "

He jams his hand between my legs, pushing me backwards. The air surges out of me, and I am too shocked to scream. He shouts into my ear so loudly I think I'm going to go crazy. "All I want is a damn name Jen. Is that too harsh a request? Do you think it matters if I know his name — "

I feel myself losing control of the car. It swerves to the left, and I barely miss the rail. I jerk back into the lane, and a car behind me sounds its horn. I barely hear it as I try to keep my eyes on the road ahead.

"What is your problem?" he continues. He does not appear to care we are on the highway and that I just missed causing an accident. He presses even harder now, and I'm not sure what I feel more, shame or pain.

"Please, I can't drive with you — " I begin to choke again. "Please."

"A simple request. That's all I'm asking for, Jen."

Now I am beginning to drive too slowly again. The same car beeps at me, then swerves to the next lane, speeding past.

"Does he have a name?"

"Darrin," I moan. "It's Darrin."

He lets go and sits back, straightening his jacket.

"Thank you. Now that wasn't so hard, was it?"

I thrust the palm of my hand into my eyes to wipe away the tears.

My knees are weak, but somehow I am able to keep steady on the road. I'm tempted to pull over but I feel too sick; I need to keep moving. Besides, Russell would probably grow angry even before I could get out. I'd take the chance if I had the nerve. I dig into my jeans for a tissue. Something to relax me. His hand appears in front of my face with a kleenex. I take it and wipe my face dry.

"I want to apologize," he says after awhile.

I don't reply. He sounds completely sincere now, in a way that makes me angry.

"Will you forgive me?"

I nod just to please him for the moment.

His voice is calm. "When I say I consider you a friend, I mean it. You're very kind, you know. There's not too many people like you who would pick up a total stranger. Especially at night. You don't know how I felt when you pulled over. I'm curious ... why did you do it?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"What persuaded you to stop? I know a hundred people who would never do what you did."

"That's just the way I am."

"And just who guides you to be the 'person you are'?"

"The Bible does."

He grins. "Ah. A religious follower. Darn. You don't strike me as a religious fanatic, Jen. Then again, I'm not very good with faces. You're a dying breed, wouldn't you say? My father was a Protestant. But I never followed that crap to begin with. Oh, he tried to bend me, but I was too rebellious to listen.

"I mean, it doesn't really get you anywhere, does it? Look at yourself, for instance. Here you are helping others to the last drop. Why? Because you think if you do, God'll be on your side forever. And now you're stuck in a car with me. How's your belief now?"

"I don't help others for success. I do it because I want to. The consequences I'm totally aware of. And I accept them." For once, my voice is stern.

"Is that you speaking, or just what you're taught?"

"I hear that constantly from my husband. You think I'm one of those people who'll believe anything, don't you?"

"No, no, I was just wondering. So you aren't the least bit con-

cerned?"

"About what?"

"Me."

"I'm concerned for my family. I'm not afraid of death." I turn off the radio; it's annoying me. "Besides, I don't believe you'd kill me."

"You don't? Why not?"

"You would've done it by now." He laughs. Not hysterically, but in a way I find discomfoting nonetheless.

"Very clever, Jen, I must say. You're right, I wouldn't. I don't make it a habit of going around killing people. In fact, I'm sort of regretting strangling her in the first place."

"Who is *'her'*?"

"My wife."

"You killed your wife?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"You want to know?"

"Yes. Tell me about her."

"Sheila? I met her in college. Wonderful little lady. Biology was her thing. But she was a cripple. Couldn't walk. People thought she was clumsy. They saw the wheelchair and they thought she lucked her way in.

"But I knew. And I fell in love. So after I finished my third year in marketing, I asked her to marry me. She was in her third semester, but she wasn't going anywhere with it, so she said: 'What the hell, let's do it.' It was wonderful, Jen. It really was. We even thought about adopting.

"But we never did. I mean, how can you take care of children when you have enough trouble taking care of your wife? I didn't know how hard it was until I moved in with her. Every day, the same old thing. I helped her into the bathtub. I helped her to the toilet. I was cooking, I was taking out the garbage, I was washing the clothes. I had to do everything manually. And I got tired of it."

"And that's why you killed her?" I ask.

He shakes his head.

"She just sat there, Jen. Ate all day, got fat. At first I was there for her. I loved lending a shoulder for her to lean on. But how can you

keep doing that every day when you know you've got to do this and then you've got to do that? Twelve years I put up with her."

"If you were so unhappy," I say, "then why did you spend twelve years with her?"

He shrugs. "I don't know." I am about to shake my head but think better of it and continue to listen.

"I'm not sure what got into me tonight. I just ... had enough, I suppose. I hit her. I've never hit her before ... sometimes I would scare her, but I never ... it just happened. I think I started yelling. I don't remember. Next thing I know, she's on the floor, and I'm on top of her, I've got my hands around her neck ... she was trying to say something, I don't know.

"Took her out to the backyard. Threw her into the backseat all covered up. I was thinking like a criminal, I couldn't believe it. I was honestly thinking nobody would notice if she disappeared. Shows you my intelligence. Drove out here about fifteen miles over the limit and dumped her in the valley.

"I'm not a killer, Jen. No matter what you think. I never planned this out. I never even thought about it before tonight."

He stops for a moment and there is silence in the car.

"You think I'm crazy, don't you?"

"I'm not sure what to think," I say.

"Amuse me."

"I'm not going to judge you."

"Why not? If you picked up a paper and saw a headline, '*Man Strangles Handicapped Wife*', you'd have a pretty good idea of what to say. So why not now? Are you afraid of what I'm going to do?"

"Yes. Yes I am."

"I'm not crazy, Jen."

"I don't care."

"I didn't murder without reason."

"There is no reason for murder," I remind him.

He politely laughs. "Ah, one of the Commandments you hold so dear to your heart, right?"

"That's correct."

"You would not kill."

"No."

"Not even to protect your husband? Your son?"

I don't say anything.

"I'd like an answer."

I bite my lip. "I'm not sure."

"You see? But I know you would. You wouldn't think twice about it. You have your reasons to do so. I have mine. There's no difference."

"I think there is."

He nods. "Fair enough."

I notice for the first time I am sweating profusely. My shirt is soaked. I open a window and feel the chill hit my face. I look over at Russell. He sits back casually. I swear he looks like your everyday person.

"Do you believe in forgiveness?" he asks.

"Yes," I reply. "I suppose I do. Everybody has the right to be forgiven."

"Even me? After what I've done?"

I think it over. "Is that all you want?"

"Pardon?"

"Do you want forgiveness for what you've done?"

"I just want to know if what you say is true. So, would I be forgiven?"

"It depends on who you are asking for forgiveness."

"Would you?"

I shrug. "Yes."

He frowns inquisitively. "Wait a minute. A moment ago, you told me what I did was inexcusable, right?"

"Correct."

"And now you're telling me you'd forgive me."

"Religion works in strange ways."

"What if I hadn't killed my wife? What if I killed your husband? Would you still forgive me?"

"Probably not."

"So forgiveness is not absolute to you?"

"I guess not."

"That's what I thought."

"What's your point?"

"I didn't know there was one, Jen."

His voice is totally innocent, and I am reminded of the harmless looking man I picked up in the first place. The snow is starting to wind down, and I turn off the wipers.

"You didn't answer my question," he starts up again.

"And what question was that?"

"Do you think I'm crazy?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"I like to hear your opinions, Jen. Living with Sheila after all these years, it's nice to engage in an intelligent conversation." He smiles.

"So, do you think I'm crazy?"

"No."

"No?"

"I think you're just a confused person who's been through a lot. But it doesn't mean you don't need help."

I brace for whatever anger he feels towards my criticism. He doesn't say anything. In fact, he seems to take it all in with the subtlety of a cat. He looks me in the face.

"Would you forgive me?"

I laugh. "I've already told you — "

"No, not for that. I mean for the way I've mistreated you. Whatever hell I've put you through. Would you ever forgive me for that?"

I look straight ahead as I muse over it. "Yes." And I mean it.

I see he is stunned.

"Thank you," he says. From the corner of my eye I see something in his face, a sadness that lies between regret and compassion. And a need. A desperate need to say something, even if only to a total stranger. But the expression dies just as quickly as it came and he turns away, looking straight ahead.

The freeway is becoming emptier and emptier. I think about my family. Darrin must be keeping his father up with his constant crying. He's going through those stages, like my sister predicted. I contemplate telling Thomas about tonight. I decide not to. He would never let me forget it, that's for sure. He'd tell as many people as he could, so they could see what a foolish person I was.

"Pull over," Russell orders without emotion. "Now."

I do as he says, without argument. I am totally unprepared for this. He said he wouldn't harm me, but I should have known better than to

depend on him standing by his words. I put the car in park. I have never considered death, never thought about it so strongly. In some naive way, a part of me thinks I'm going to live forever, that there's no way I could ever die, that I could find a safe solution to everything.

"What are you going to do now?" I ask quietly.

He frowns. "Nothing. We're here." He points, and I look to my left. Even from here, with the cold frosting the windows and the light snow flying around, I can see the train station. He opens the door and prepares to step out.

"I could report you to the police later on — " I begin to say. I don't know why I say it.

"Yes, I know."

"But I'm not going to."

He does not look surprised. Instead he nods. Getting out, he prepares to close the door but stops and leans in, looking straight into my eyes. I barely recognize his face.

"If there truly is a God," he says, "you will never have to deal with someone like me again."

I force a smile as he closes the door behind him, and I watch as he makes his way towards the station. He doesn't look back, and I observe his body getting smaller and smaller until it finally disappears. Exhaustion hits me, and I realize I've been sitting still for too long. I turn on the radio and drive home.

Barbara Parkin / BROCHURE TO SAVE THE MARRIAGE

The Day before the first day: Flight CX800: Nap over Japan. D. wakes. The twins in *Twins* separate. Buffooning actors drag each other across lines. I hold D.'s hand because I am trying. We glide over the dateline. Today comes after tomorrow. Yesterday will catch up soon. Everything rides on this, the vacation of miracles. Laughter. On the plane we use it like medicine. We pour it over Eroica Hair Tonic for Men, the vomit depository, & the plastic bags telling us to Arrive in Better Shape. When we land we get an extra day & a shoe horn. Things look possible.

Day One: Peanut butter bun with a piece of insect. One glass coconut milk. One beer. HiC orange drink.

Day Two: Filet o'fish. Small fries. Trucks tow baskets of skinned animals, waiting to be hung in street vendors' stalls. Carts take narrow streets, teeming with socks, fruit, Panther brand underwear, shelled walnuts, live chickens. D.'s underwear needs replacing. Elastic shot.

Day Three: Ride a sampan steered by a young girl through the junk boats in the typhoon shelter in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong. D. snaps a photo as we leave. I tell him he is culturally impenetrable. He says I should be more impenetrable. I remind him that we agreed not to mention C..

Day Four: The store across from our hotel is called Golden Marriage Co. All You Need. Bed linen. Sheets. Napkins. D. says when we get back to Canada we should have a separation agreement made. He announces this after our fight in Chatter Park. We are supposed to put C. behind us, that is my position. I am a liar, that is D.'s position. Around us, middle-aged women do Tai Chi exercises. I want to be one

of them. I do not know anything about them. C. would remind me of this. He is coming up, a lot.

Day Five: We take the subway to Wong Tai Sin, a city in The New Territories. Once we arrive I smoke a Marlboro & fall asleep for an hour, dreaming of C.. He boards a plane. A flight attendant holds his hand across the Pacific. In my dream he is prone to trembling. Not sure what he is doing.

Day Six: We land for a two-day stopover in Bangkok. A gang of pre-schoolers play tag along the six-lane highway we're riding on. I start to think about babies. I don't tell D. because I know it will upset him. For dinner we eat car exhaust with the meat skewers we buy from street vendors.

Day Seven: All day people sweep the streets & the sidewalks. Still, dirt everywhere. We visit three Wats & a giant golden buddha, reclining. At one of the temple grounds we enter a massage tent made of fine white cloth. Rows of white beds: white bodies caught in the act, receiving back rubs, leg rubs. We pay. We take our places. I cannot look at D., the sensation of four hands moving along his legs. I turn to face the billowing walls of the tent. Fingers press into my scalp. Later, a stoned blonde man serves us *Gado Gado* for dinner & collapses on the restaurant floor.

The brochure to save the marriage said, *You Save \$600 By Adding A Stop In Koi Samui, Thailand, Before June 2nd.*

Day Eight: D. lies on his back, head entirely submerged in Thai waters & hears cracking, like glass. There is a sound between his ears. His brain is splintering. Ear wax, I say. Two couples dance on the beach. All are topless. Beyond the couples there is nothing, an empty beach.

Day Nine: Sand like brown sugar. Sand between D.'s fingers moves inward, fisting. At the beach-front massage tent, a woman named Mama feels up a girl who strips off her shirt. Mama says, "You've got one titty bigger than the other." The girl drops her cotton pants & climbs on the massage bed. The masseuse scans for witnesses.

Day Ten: Lightning flashes against noisy palm trees and falling coconuts in the wind. Dark sky hangs over a bath-water sea, flashing yellow for an instant. Clouds rumble, anxious. Rain spills from the air like a colorless drape, unrolling continuously. D. wants to go to the disco across the island. Out of the sand, I sculpt a man's face & shoulders. He washes away in the tide. I write a postcard home: *Thailand is not a cure. Exactly. Wish you were here.*

A bulldozer arrives to remove palm trees. Mama points the driver toward the trees surrounding the restaurant where we are sitting. One of our dining companions looks terrified except when she laughs, loudly. Her boyfriend drinks something called a Blow Job. He tells a chirping bird to fuck off. Finishes the last of his burger, throws a piece of burger lettuce onto her plate. D. says the guy's haircut reminds him of C. I want to be in Thailand, along with my body. I watch two wild dogs & three pigs play cat and mouse on the sand.

Day Eleven: Sun stroke. Scaly bumps in patches on both our arms & thighs. I'm stuck at 39.4 degrees. Diarrhoea in the squatting basin. Mosquito larvae breed in the water container. Slime covers the gritty floor. D. & I lie under mosquito netting & watch bugs fall through the holes. Take turns staggering to the restaurant for pots of ginger tea. Don't think either of us has felt this generous for months. D. reads to me from a travel brochure about the Bulak Laut Bungalows in Pangandaran, Indonesia.

Day Twelve: Sleep.

Day Thirteen: We move into the brochure's life.

In a strategic position right by the beach freely face Indian ocean and white sand. Far away crowd and high way pollution. Greenish circumstance with fresh oceanic air. Bungalows in bamboo house and unique interior design performs peaceful joyment. Advantageous location in the west coast near Animal Preservation, so the evening can be seen, the sunset, the flying bats. With family and relatives the right place for spending holyday.

Children in gangs put their hands out at us & say, "Hello, Mister, give me money." Then they laugh. I decide to spend the rest of our down payment savings. We dine separately on Tuesday. Later that night we make love for the first time in a month.

Day Fourteen: A woman in a bamboo cap & rubber thongs walks onto the motel compound & stands before me with a sack of fruit over her shoulder, saying, "500 rp. for a pineapple. I'll chop it up for you." The rp. translate into a couple of dimes. I am already eating a pineapple, though, & she can see this. I shake my head, but she remains, until I look away for her to leave. She walks back one kilometre to the marketplace in the midday sun. I know it is a kilometre because I went there this morning. My chest wet with sweat, and nothing but a camera over my shoulder. I feel watched by C.

Day Fifteen: D. & I play in the waves. Something is keeping us together. We move into the sea & don't know it. I look toward the shore & cannot find it. Waves rise on all sides of our bodies. I can no longer see D. A wave presses violently on my head & drags me out. I am nothing. My will is flat. D. is visible in the spaces between bursts of wave. He is fifty feet east. The water jerks me under & out, further from him. Each second takes us closer to loneliness & we stay married to avoid that. Under & out. I think, This will be a quick. Once I understand this, the fear is gone. This death will be peaceful. But my body thrashes. I rise above & watch my body try to save itself. It is calling, "Help me." It swallows more water. It holds its breath. Its arms are enormous suddenly, doing the front crawl & not moving. Everything that is known, the shape of D.'s face, is precious. D. is the only person the body wants to say goodbye to. It wants to mouth, I am sorry. D. yells to the body & gestures: GO SIDEWAYS. DO THE CRAWL SIDEWAYS. NINETY DEGREES TO THE SHORE. When I understand the body will live, I return to it. I am crawling up the sand, people watching. I go on. The journey is exhausting.

Day Sixteen and Seventeen: We do not leave the motel room. We lie on the batiked bedspread, staring at the bamboo mats on the ceiling. Bodies ache to the touch. The strain of the fight, immense strength of

water. My shoulders burn as if every muscle & ligament has been torn.

Day Eighteen: We sit on the concrete outside our room & watch the waves that nearly took us. At lunch, two men approach & ask about the children we don't have. "Hello Mister." (I am not addressed.) "Where is your country? Are you married? Is this your wife?" They remind me of two doctors at the Fertility Clinic back home. They try to sell us chocolate buns & a knife with an intricately carved handle for only five dollars. "Come on, Mister. Good knife. Sharp." I think we should buy it. I nod approval at D. He says, "I really love you sometimes."

Day Nineteen: D. goes to the Monkey Forest without me. I stay alone at the motel. Like every other tourist, I cannot understand anything. How can I *see* anything in this place? *I hear your voice, even here. Hope your studies are going well. Happy Birthday.* Can't decide whether to send this card to C. It takes me two hours to write these sentences. Sending it would be a sign of weakness. Not sending it would be a sign of weakness. I mail it.

Day Twenty: Jakarta: Concrete with fierce traffic. That is what I can see. We take a taxi to the airport, an Indonesian pop song sung in English hums from the front dash: "True love means planning a life for two. You fill my dreams. You are my life forever." I laugh wildly. I go over the top. D. is solemn, just like our driver. I have offended them both.

Day Twenty-one: Singapore. One-night stopover. We take a tour bus to the famous Open Zoo, an animal reserve without cages. I pose for D.'s camera, holding a mother chimpanzee on my lap. She is shaking. Of course she wants to get off.

Day Twenty-two: CX801: We fly home holding hands. I throw out the postcards in my purse. In my shirt pocket I carry loose tea picked from plantation fields across from the motel compound. We will drink it until there is no more.

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

BALZ BIETENHOLZ has been making photographs for ten years. He lives in Vancouver.

GRANT BUDAY lives in East Vancouver. He is a contributing editor for *The Vancouver Review*. The stories "Toads" and "Saw-Blade Sky" are part of a collection titled *Monday Night Man*.

JEN LAM is a 20-year-old East Van kid who spends most of her time creating bellybutton lint sculptures. On her day off she can be found in her studio/laboratory with her turbo-charged coffee machine going full blast and her phone constantly ringing under a mountain of dirty lingerie. She has dedicated her life to her pet cockroach, Dogg, who unfortunately, was recently found crushed under the heel of her sister's shiny, new mauve Doc Martens. A lawsuit is pending. She is now considering a career in hotel security and dreams of one day having her own cult.

EVELYN LAU's most recent book of poetry, *In The House of Slaves*, was published by Coach House Press. She is the author of *Runaway, Diary of a Street Kid* (Harper Collins), *You Are Not Who You Claim* (Press Porcépic), and *Oedipal Dreams* (Beach Holme). Her work has won several awards. *Runaway* was made into a CBC television movie, adapted for stage and translated into four languages.

RAYMOND LOW is a sixteen-year-old student at East York Collegiate Institute in Toronto. He has published humour articles in *TG Magazine*. He describes "Traverse" as his first attempt at "serious work."

DARLENE MADOTT is a lawyer and writer. Her call to the Ontario Bar in 1985 coincided with the publication of a collection of short stories, *Bottled Roses*, by Oberon. Prior to entering law school, she worked on the editorial staffs of *Saturday Night* and *Toronto Life* maga-

zines. Her short stories have appeared in literary periodicals across Canada. She has recently completed a film script for producer Bernard Zukerman and is at work on another. She continues to practise as a barrister in Toronto and is also a wife and mother.

BARBARA PARKIN's fiction and poetry have appeared in *Descant*, *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, *CV2*, *Prairie Fire*, *Queen's Quarterly*, *Coming Attractions '93*, and others.

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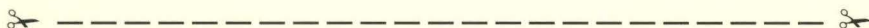
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