Ground you stand on | four stories and a play

Gloria Ruth Sawai

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THE GROUND YOU STAND ON

Four Stories and a Play

By

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THE DAY I SAT WITH JESUS ON THE SUN DECK
AND A WIND CAME UP
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When an extraordinary event occurs in your life, you're apt to remember with unnatural clarity the details surrounding it. You remember shapes and sounds that weren't directly related to the happening but hovered there in the periphery of the experience. This can even happen when you read a great book for the first time— one that unsettles you and startles you into thought. You remember where you read it, what room, who was nearby.

I can still remember, for instance, where I read Of Human Bondage by W. Somerset Maugham. I was lying on a top bunk in our high school dormitory, wrapped in a blue bedspread. I lived in a dormitory because of my father. He was a very religious man and wanted me to get a spiritual kind of education. To hear the Word and know the Lord, as he put it. So he sent me to St. John's Lutheran Academy in Regina for two years. He was confident, I guess, that that's where I'd hear the Word. Anyway, I can still hear Mrs. Sverdrup, our housemother, knocking on the door at midnight and whispering in her Norwegian accent, "Now, Gloria, it iss past 12 o'clock. It iss time to turn off the light. Right now." Then scuffing down
the corridor in her bedroom slippers. What's interesting here is that I don't remember anything about the book itself except that someone in it had a club foot. But it must have moved me deeply when I was sixteen, which is some time ago now.

You can imagine then how distinctly I remember the day Jesus of Nazareth, in person, climbed the hill in our back yard to our house and then up the outside stairs to the sun deck where I was sitting. And how he stayed with me for awhile. You can surely understand how clear those details rest in my memory.

The event occurred on Monday morning, September 11, 1972, in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. These facts in themselves are more unusual than they may appear to be at first glance. September's my favorite month, Monday my favorite day, morning my favorite time. And although Moose Jaw may not be the most magnificent place in the world, even so, if you happen to be there on a Monday morning in September it has its beauty.

It's not hard to figure out why these are my favorites, by the way. I have a husband and five children. Things get hectic, especially on week-ends and holidays. Kids hanging around the house, eating, arguing, asking me every hour what there is to do in Moose Jaw. And television. The programs are always
the same, only the names change. Rough Riders, Stamp-
peders, Blue Bombers, whatever. So when school starts
in September I bask in freedom, especially on Monday.
No quarrels. No TV. And the morning, clear and lovely.
A new day. A fresh start.

On the morning of September 11, I got up at 7,
the usual time, cooked cream of wheat for the kids,
fried a bit of sausage for Fred, waved them all out
of the house, drank a second cup of coffee in peace,
and decided to get at last week's ironing. I wasn't
dressed yet but still in the pink kimono I'd bought
years ago on my trip to Japan, my one and only over-
seas trip, a 300-dollar quick tour of Tokyo and other
cities. I'd saved for this while working as a library
technician in Regina. And I'm glad I did. Since then
I've hardly been out of Saskatchewan. Once in awhile
a trip to Winnipeg, and a few times down to Medicine
Lake, Montana, to visit my sister.

I set up the ironing board and hauled out the
basket of week-old sprinkled clothes. When I unrolled
the first shirt it was completely dry and smelled stale.
The second was covered with little grey blots of mould.
So was the third. Fred teaches junior high science
here in Moose Jaw. He uses a lot of shirts. I decided
I'd have to unwrap the whole basketful and air every-
thing out. This I did, spreading the pungent garments
about the living room. While they were airing I would go outside and sit on the deck for awhile since it was such a clear and sunny day.

If you know Moose Jaw at all, you'll know about the new subdivision at the southeast end called Hillhurst. That's where we live, right on the edge of the city. In fact, our deck looks out on flat land as far as the eye can see, except for the back yard itself which is a fairly steep hill leading down to a stone quarry. But from the quarry the land straightens out into the Saskatchewan prairie. One clump of poplars stands beyond the quarry to the right, and high weeds have grown up among the rocks. Other than that it's plain—just earth and sky. But when the sun rises new in the morning, weeds and rocks take on an orange and rusty glow which is pleasing. To me at least.

I unplugged the iron and returned to the kitchen. I'd bring a cup of coffee out there, or maybe some orange juice. To reach the juice at the back of the fridge my hand passed right next to a bottle of dry red Calona. Now here was a better idea. A little wine on Monday morning, a little relaxation after a rowdy week-end. I held the familiar bottle comfortably in my hand and poured, anticipating a pleasant day.

On the deck I pulled an old canvas folding chair into the sun, and sat. Sat and sipped. Beauty and
tranquility floated toward me on Monday morning, September 11, around 9:40.

First he was a little bump on the far, far off prairie. Then he was a mole way beyond the quarry. Then a larger animal, a dog perhaps, moving out there through the grass. Nearing the quarry, he became a person. No doubt about that. A woman perhaps, still in her bathrobe. But edging out from the rocks, through the weeds, toward the hill, he was clear to me. I knew then who he was. I knew it just as I knew the sun was shining.

The reason I knew is that he looked exactly the way I'd seen him 5000 times in pictures, in books and Sunday School pamphlets. If there was ever a person I'd seen and heard about, over and over, this was the one. Even in grade school those terrible questions: Do you love the Lord? Are you saved by grace alone through faith? Are you awaiting eagerly the glorious day of his Second Coming? And will you be ready on that Great Day? I'd sometimes hidden under the bed when I was a child, wondering if I really had been saved by grace alone, or, without realizing it, I'd been trying some other method, like the Catholics, who were saved by their good works and would land in hell. Except for a few who knew in their hearts it was really
grace, but they didn't want to leave the church because of their relatives. And was this it? Would the trumpet sound tonight and the sky split in two? Would the great Lord and King, Alpha and Omega, holding aloft the seven candlesticks, accompanied by a heavenly host which no man could number, descend from heaven with a mighty shout? And was I ready? Rev. Hanson in his high pulpit in Swift Current, Saskatchewan, roared in my ears and clashed against my eardrums.

And there he was. Coming. Climbing the hill in our back yard, his body bent against the climb, his robes ruffling in the wind. He was coming. And I was not ready. All those mouldy clothes scattered about the living room. And me in this faded old thing, made in Japan, and drinking—in the middle of the morning.

He had reached the steps now. His right hand was on the railing. Jesus' fingers were curled around my railing. He was coming up. He was ascending. He was coming up to me here on the sun deck.

He stood on the top step and looked at me. I looked at him. He looked exactly right, exactly the same as all the pictures: white robe, purple stole, bronze hair, creamy skin. How had all those queer artists, illustrators of Sunday School papers, how had they gotten him exactly right like that?

He stood at the top of the stairs. I sat there
holding my glass. What do you say to Jesus when he comes? How do you address him? Do you call him Jesus? I supposed that was his first name. Or Christ? I remembered the woman at the well, the one living in adultery who'd called him Sir. Perhaps I could try that. Or maybe I should pretend not to recognize him. Maybe, for some reason, he didn't mean for me to recognize him. Then he spoke.

"Good morning," he said. "My name is Jesus."

"How do you do," I said. "My name is Gloria Olson."

My name is Gloria Olson. That's what I said, all right. As if he didn't know.

He smiled, standing there at the top of the stairs. I thought of what I should do next. Then I got up and unfolded another canvas chair.

"You have a nice view here," he said, leaning back against the canvas and pressing his sandaled feet against the iron bars of the railing.

"Thank you," I said. "We like it."

Nice view. Those were his very words. Everyone who comes to our house and stands on the deck says that. Everyone.

"I wasn't expecting company today." I straightened the folds in my pink kimono and tightened the cloth more securely over my knees. I picked up the
glass from the floor where I'd laid it.

"I was just passing through on my way to Winnipeg. I thought I'd drop by."

"I've heard a lot about you," I said. "You look quite a bit like your pictures." I raised the glass to my mouth and saw that his hands were empty. I should offer him something to drink. Tea? Milk? How should I ask him what he'd like to drink? What words should I use?

"It gets pretty dusty out there," I finally said. "Would you care for something to drink?" He looked at the glass in my hand. "I could make you some tea," I added.

"Thanks," he said. "What are you drinking?"

"Well, on Mondays I like to relax a bit after the busy week-end with the family all home. I have five children, you know. So sometimes after breakfast I have a little wine."

"That would be fine," he said.

By luck I found a clean tumbler in the cupboard. I stood by the sink, pouring the wine. And then, like a bolt of lightning, I realized my situation. Oh, Johann Sebastian Bach. Glory. Honor. Wisdom. Power. George Fredrick Handel. King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He's on my sun deck. Today he's sitting on my sun deck. I can ask him any question under the sun,
anything at all, he'll know the answer. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Well, now, wasn't this something for a Monday morning in Moose Jaw.

I opened the fridge door to replace the bottle. And I saw my father. It was New Year's morning. My father was sitting at the kitchen table. Mother had covered the oatmeal pot to let it simmer on the stove. I could hear the lid bumping against the rim, quietly. She sat across the table from Daddy. Sigrid and Freda sat on one side of the table, Raymond and I on the other. We were holding hymn books, little black books turned to page 1. It was dark outside. On New Year's morning we got up before sunrise. Daddy was looking at us with his chin pointed out. It meant be still and sit straight. Raymond sat as straight and stiff as a soldier, waiting for Daddy to notice how nice and stiff he sat. We began singing. Page 1. Hymn for the New Year. Philipp Nicolai. 1599. We didn't really need the books. We'd sung the same song every New Year's since the time of our conception. Daddy always sang the loudest.

The Morning Star upon us gleams; How full of grace and truth His beams, How passing fair His splendor. Good Shepherd, David's proper heir, My King in heav'n Thou dost me bear Upon Thy bosom tender. Near—est, Dear—est, High—est, Bright—est, Thou delight—est Still to love me, Thou so high enthroned a—bove me.
I didn't mind, actually, singing hymns on New Year's, as long as I was sure no one else would find out. I'd have been rather embarrassed if any of my friends ever found out how we spent New Year's. It's easy at a certain age to be embarrassed about your family. I remember Alice Johnson, how embarrassed she was about her father, Elmer Johnson. He was an alcoholic and couldn't control his urine. Her mother always had to clean up after him. Even so, the house smelled. I suppose she couldn't get it all. I know Alice was embarrassed when we saw Elmer all tousled and sick looking, with urine stains on his trousers. I really don't know what would be harder on a kid--having a father who's a drunk, or one who's sober on New Year's and sings The Morning Star.

I walked across the deck and handed Jesus the wine. I sat down, resting my glass on the flap of my kimono. Jesus was looking out over the prairie. He seemed to be noticing everything out there. He was obviously in no hurry to leave, but he didn't have much to say. I thought of what to say next.

"I suppose you're more used to the sea than to the prairie."

"Yes," he answered. "I've lived most of my life near water. But I like the prairie too. There's something nice about the prairie." He turned his face to
the wind, stronger now, coming toward us from the east.

Nice again. If I'd ever used that word to describe the prairie, in an English theme at St. John's, for example, it would have had three red circles around it. At least three. I raised my glass to the wind. Good old St. John's. Good old Pastor Solberg, standing in front of the wooden altar, holding the gospel aloft in his hand.

In the beginning wass the Word
And the Word wass with God
And the Word wass God
All things were made by Him
And without Him wass not anything made

I was sitting on a bench by Paul Thorson. We were sharing a hymnal. Our thumbs touched at the center of the book. It was winter. The chapel was cold—an army barracks left over from World War II. We wore parkas and sat close together. Paul fooled around with his thumb, pushing my thumb to my own side of the book, then pulling it back to his side. The wind howled outside. We watched our breath as we sang the hymn.

In Thine arms I rest me, Foes who would molest me
Cannot reach me here; Tho' the earth be shak-ing,
Ev-ry heart be quak-ing, Jesus calms my fear;
Fires may flash and thunder crash,
Yea, and sin and hell as-sail me,
Jesus will not fai-l me. . .

11
And here he was. Alpha and Omega. The Word. Sitting on my canvas chair and telling me the prairie's nice. What could I say to that?

"I like it too," I said.

Jesus was watching a magpie circling above the poplars just beyond the quarry. He seemed very nice actually. But he wasn't like my father. My father was perfect, mind you. But you know about perfect people--busy, busy. He wasn't as busy as Elsie though. Elsie was the busy one. You could never visit there without her having to do something else at the same time. Wash the leaves of her plants with milk or fold socks in the basement while you sat on a bench by the washing machine. I wouldn't mind sitting on a bench in the basement if that was all she had. But her living room was full of big soft chairs that no one ever sat in. Now Christ here didn't have any work to do at all.

The wind had risen now. His robes puffed about his legs. His hair swirled around his face. I set my glass down and held my kimono together at my knees. The wind was coming stronger now out of the east. My kimono flapped about my ankles. I bent down to secure the bottom, pressing the moving cloth close against my legs. A Saskatchewan wind comes up in a hurry, let me tell you. Then it happened. A gust of wind hit 12
me straight on, seeping into the folds of my kimono, reaching down into the bodice, billowing the cloth out, until above the sash, the robe was fully open. I knew without looking. The wind was suddenly blowing on my breasts. I felt it cool on both my breasts. Then as quickly as it came, it left, and we sat in the small breeze of before.

I looked at Jesus. He was looking at me. And at my breasts. Looking right at them. Jesus was sitting there on the sun deck, looking at my breasts.

What should I do? Say excuse me and push them back into the kimono? Make a little joke of it? Look what the wind blew in, or something? Or should I say nothing? Just tuck them in as inconspicuously as possible. What do you say when a wind comes up and blows your kimono open and he sees your breasts?

Now, I know there are ways and there are ways of exposing your breasts. I know a few things. I read books. And I've learned a lot from my cousin Millie. Millie's the black sheep in the relation. She left the Academy without graduating to become an artist's model in Winnipeg. Dancer too. Anyway, Millie's told me a few things about bodily exposure. She says, for instance, that when an artist wants to draw his model, he has her either completely nude and stretching and bending in various positions so he can sketch her
from different angles. Or he drapes her with cloth, sat
in usually. He covers one section of the body with the material and leaves the rest exposed. But he does it in a graceful way, maybe draping the cloth over her stomach or ankle. Never over the breasts. So I realized that my appearance right then wasn't actually pleasing, either aesthetically or erotically—from Millie's point of view. My breasts were just sticking out from the top of my old kimono. And for some reason which I certainly can't explain, even to this day, I did nothing about it. I just sat there.

Jesus must have recognized my confusion. He said—quite sincerely I thought—"You have nice breasts."

"Thanks," I said. And I didn't know what else to say so I asked him if he'd like more wine.

"Yes, I would," he said, and I left to refill the glass. When I returned he was watching the magpie swishing about in the tall weeds of the quarry. I sat down and watched him.

Then I got a very, very peculiar sensation. I know it was just an illusion, but it was so strong it scared me. It's hard to explain because nothing like it had ever happened to me before. The magpie began to float toward Jesus. I saw it fluttering toward him in the air as if some vacuum were sucking it in. And when it reached him, it flapped about on his chest,
which was bare because the top of his robe had slipped down. It nibbled at his little brown nipples and squawked and disappeared. For all the world, it seemed to disappear right into his pores. Then the same thing happened with a rock. A rock floating up from the quarry and landing on the breast of Jesus, melting into his skin. It was very strange, let me tell you, Jesus and I sitting there together with that happening. It made me kind of dizzy, so I closed my eyes.

And I saw the women in the public bath in Tokyo. Dozens of women and children. Some were squatting by the faucets that lined one wall. They were running hot water into their basins and washing themselves all over with their soapy wash cloths, then emptying the water and filling the basin several times with clear water, pouring it over their bodies for the rinse. Others, who'd finished washing, were sitting in the hot pool on the far side, soaking themselves in the steamy water as they jabbered away to each other.

Then I saw her. The woman without the breasts. She was squatting by a faucet near the door. The oldest woman I've ever seen. And the thinnest. Skin and bones. Literally. Just skin and bones. She bowed and smiled at everyone who entered. She had only three teeth. When she hunched over her basin, I saw the little creases of skin where her breasts had been.
When she stood up, the wrinkles disappeared. In their place were two shallow caves. Even the nipples seemed to have disappeared into the small brown caves of her breasts.

I opened my eyes and looked at Jesus. Fortunately, everything had stopped floating.

"Have you ever been to Japan?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "A few times."

I paid no attention to his answer but went on telling him about Japan as if he'd never been there. I couldn't seem to stop talking, especially about that old woman and her breasts.

"You should have seen her," I said. "She wasn't flat chested like some women even here in Moose Jaw. It wasn't like that at all. Her breasts weren't just flat. They were caved in. Just as if the flesh had sunk right there. Have you ever seen breasts like that before?"

Jesus' eyes were getting darker. He seemed to have sunk further down into his chair.

"Japanese women have smaller breasts to begin with usually," he said.

But he'd misunderstood me. It wasn't just her breasts that held me. It was her jaws, teeth, neck, ankles, heels. Everything. Not just her breasts. I said nothing for awhile. Jesus, too, was not talking.
Finally, I asked, "Well, what do you think of breasts like that?"

I knew immediately that I'd asked the wrong question. If you want personal and specific answers, you ask personal and specific questions. It's as simple as that. I should have asked him, for instance, what he thought of them from a sexual point of view. If he were a lover, let's say, would he like to hold such breasts in his hand and play on them with his teeth and fingers? Would he now? The woman, brown and shiny, was bending over her basin. Tiny bubbles of soap dribbled from the creases of her chest down to her navel. Hold them. Ha.

Or I could have asked for some kind of aesthetic opinion. If he were an artist, a sculptor let's say, would he travel to Italy, and would he spend weeks excavating the best marble from the hills near Florence, and then would he stay up night and day in his studio—without eating or bathing—and with matted hair and glazed eyes would he chisel out those little creases from his great stone slabs?

Or if he were a curator in a great museum in Paris, would he place these little wrinkles on a silver pedestal in the center of the foyer?

Or if he were a patron of the arts, would he attend the opening of this great exhibition and stand
in front of these white caves in his purple turtleneck, sipping champagne and nibbling on the little cracker with the shrimp in the middle, and would he turn to the one beside him, the one in the sleek black pants, and would he say to her, "Look, darling. Did you see this marvelous piece? Do you see how the artist has captured the very essence of the female form?"

These are some of the things I could have said if I'd had my wits about me. But my wits certainly left me that day. All I did say, and I didn't mean to--it just came out--was, "It's not nice and I don't like it."

I lifted my face, threw my head back, and let the wind blow on my neck and breasts. It was blowing harder again. I felt small grains of sand scrape against my skin.

Jesus lover of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly. While the nearer waters roll, while the tempest still is nigh..."

When I looked at him again, his eyes were blacker still and his body had shrunk considerably. He looked almost like Jimmy that time in Prince Albert. Jimmy's an old neighbor from Regina. On his twenty-seventh birthday he joined a motorcycle club, the Grim Reapers to be exact, and got into a lot of trouble. He ended up in maximum security in P.A. One summer on a camping trip up north we stopped to see him--Fred and the kids
and I. It wasn't a very good visit, by the way. If you're going to visit inmates you should do it regularly. I realize this now. But anyway, that's when his eyes looked black like that. But maybe he'd been smoking. It's probably not the same thing. Jimmy Lebrun. He never did think it was funny when I'd call him a Midnight Raider instead of a Grim Reaper. People are sensitive about their names.

Then Jesus finally answered. Everything took him a long time, even answering simple questions.

But I'm not sure what he said because something so strange happened then that whatever he did say was swept away. Right then the wind blew against my face, pulling my hair back. My kimono swirled about every which way, and I was swinging my arms in the air, like swimming. And there right below my eyes was the roof of our house. I was looking down on the top of the roof. I saw the row of shingles ripped loose from the August hail storm. And I remember thinking—Fred hasn't fixed those shingles yet. I'll have to remind him when he gets home from work. If it rains again the back bedroom will get soaked. Before I knew it I was circling over the sun deck, looking down on the top of Jesus' head. Only I wasn't. I was sitting in the canvas chair watching myself hover over his shoulders. Only it wasn't me hovering. It was the old 19
woman in Tokyo. I saw her gray hair twisting in the wind and her shiny little bum raised in the air, like a baby's. Water was dripping from her chin and toes. And soap bubbles trailed from her elbows like tinsel. She was floating down toward his chest. Only it wasn't her. It was me. I could taste bits of suds sticking to the corners of my mouth and feel the wind on my wet back and in the hollow caves of my breasts. I was smiling and bowing, and the wind was blowing in narrow wisps against my toothless gums. And then quickly, so quickly, like a flock of winter sparrows diving through snow into the branches of the poplars, I was splitting up into millions and millions of pieces and sinking into the tiny, tiny holes in his chest. It was like the magpie and the rock, like I had come apart into atoms or molecules or whatever it is we really are.

After that I was dizzy. I began to feel nauseated, sitting there on my chair. Jesus looked sick too. Sad and sick and lonesome. Oh, Christ, I thought, why are we sitting here on such a fine day pouring our sorrows into each other?

I had to get up and walk around. I'd go into the kitchen and make some tea.

I put the kettle on to boil. What on earth had gotten into me? Why had I spent this perfectly good
morning talking about breasts? My one chance in a lifetime and I'd let it go. Why didn't I have better control? Why did I always let everything get out of hand? **Breasts.** And why was my name Gloria? Such a pious name for one who can't think of anything else to talk about but breasts. Why wasn't it Lucille? Or Millie? You could talk about breasts all day if your name was Millie. But Gloria. Gloria. Glo-o-o-o-o-o-o-oria. I knew then why so many Glorias hang around bars, talking too loud, laughing shrilly at stupid jokes, making sure everyone hears them laugh at the dirty jokes. They're just trying to live down their name, that's all. I brought out the cups and poured the tea.

Everything was back to normal when I returned. Except that Jesus still looked desolate sitting there in my canvas chair. I handed him the tea and sat down beside him.

Oh, Daddy. And Phillip Nicolai. Oh, Bernard of Clairvoux. Oh, Sacred Head Now Wounded. Go away for a little while and let us sit together quietly, here in this small space under the sun.

I sipped the tea and watched his face. He looked so sorrowful I reached out and put my hand on his wrist. I sat there a long while, rubbing the little hairs on his wrist with my fingers. I couldn't help
it. After that he put his arm on my shoulder and his hand on the back of my neck, stroking the muscles there. It felt good. Whenever anything exciting or unusual happens to me my neck is the first to feel it. It gets stiff and knotted up. Then I usually get a headache, and frequently I become nauseous. So it felt very good having my neck rubbed.

I've never been able to handle sensation very well. I remember when I was in grade three and my folks took us to the Saskatoon Exhibition. We went to the grandstand show to see the battle of Wolfe and Montcalm on the Plains of Abraham. The stage was filled with Indians and pioneers and ladies in red, white and blue dresses, singing "In Days Of Yore From Britain's Shore". It was very spectacular but too much for me. My stomach was upset and my neck ached. I had to keep my head on my mother's lap the whole time, just opening my eyes once in awhile so I wouldn't miss everything.

So it felt really good to have my neck stroked like that. I could almost feel the knots untying and my body becoming warmer and more restful. Jesus too seemed to be feeling better. His body was back to normal. His eyes looked natural again.

Then, all of a sudden, he started to laugh. He held his hand on my neck and laughed out loud. I don't
know to this day what he was laughing about. There was nothing funny there at all. But hearing him made me laugh too. I couldn't stop. He was laughing so hard he spilled the tea over his purple stole. When I saw that I laughed even harder. I'd never thought of Jesus spilling his tea before. And when Jesus saw me laugh so hard and when he looked at my breasts shaking, he laughed harder still, till he wiped tears from his eyes.

After that we just sat there. I don't know how long. I know we watched the magpie carve black waves in the air above the rocks. And the rocks stiff and lovely among the swaying weeds. We watched the poplars twist and bend and rise again beyond the quarry. And then he had to leave.

"Goodbye, Gloria Olson," he said, rising from his chair. "Thanks for the hospitality."

He kissed me on my mouth. Then he flicked my nipple with his finger. And off he was. Down the stairs. Down the hill. Through the quarry, and into the prairie. I stood on the sun deck and watched. I watched until I could see him no longer. Until he was only some dim and ancient star on the far horizon.

I went inside the house. Well, now, wasn't that a nice visit. Wasn't that something. I examined the clothes, dry and sour in the living room. I'd have to
put them back in the wash, that's all. I couldn't stand the smell. I tucked my breasts back into my kimono and lugged the basket downstairs.

That's what happened to me in Moose Jaw in 1972. It was the main thing that happened to me that year.
One Saturday in spring, when the brother was twelve and the sister nine, they climbed the ladder in the church tower to the belfry. The tower was dim except for a yellow square of sunlight far above where the tunnel opened onto the bell deck. It was dusty, smelling of old feathers and bird droppings.

The sister was first. The brother followed below. She knew, climbing in her pink and flaring skirt, why he wanted to be second. And soft slender pleasures curled about in the center of her stomach. But as she stepped up on the wooden rungs, clinging with stiff hands to the bars, she scraped her feet hard against each rung, sending bits of dust and old bird droppings down on her brother's face, down on his upturned nose. That's what he gets, she thought, him and his dirty mind.

When they reached the top he shoved her with one free hand through the opening into the belfry and followed close behind. They lay on their stomachs, clutching with arms and thighs at the safety of the deck. Their heads leaned over the edge, their feet rested under the great iron bell suspended above. There was no railing. The height made them dizzy.

They lay quietly looking down on the church yard. The earth brown and wet, the carragana hedge sprouting
bits of green, the small graves beyond the hedge, shabby in spring mud and winter's limp weeds.

From here they saw everything. McFarlane's brick house on the hill north of church, the finest house in Norquay, Manitoba. Main Street--the Red and White Grocery, Mack Gilman's Dry Goods, Alver's new furniture store and undertaking parlor. South of Main Street, the Ukranian houses, little clay houses in yards that would soon be filled with rows of green vegetables and yellow sunflowers. And between these houses and the onion-domed church to the east, the livery barn where Doctor Neal, old and very thin, shuffled silently each day to drink whiskey with Lars Homstol.

"When I'm seventeen I'm going to leave this dump," the brother said.

"Why?" the sister asked.

"Why! Who wants to rot in this dump?"

"It's nicer than Graveltown. I heard some people from Graveltown are going to move here next month."

"They can have it," he said. "It's a dump."

They heard an airplane somewhere to the north, saw its distant curve approach, watched it roar over Norquay.

"Take me to United States," the sister yelled, aiming her voice with her two hands. She didn't learn
until she was twenty-one that that country had a the
in front of its name.

"Take me to United States," she yelled again, louder.

"United States! Who wants to go to United States?" the brother said.

"Where do you want to go?"

He sat up, facing the bell. "Halifax," he said, "to join the navy and see the world.

If they ask us who we are
We're the RCNVR.
Roll along, wavy navy,
Roll along."

His voice bounced off the iron bell, filling the tower, spilling out into the yard below.

When he was thirteen he got a job cleaning the church. Each Saturday he was paid fifty cents to straighten hymnals, dust pews, change numbers on the little wooden board above the pulpit that told what pages the hymns were on. The job didn't include the altar, however. He didn't wash the starched white cloth under the vessels or the plaster face of Jesus standing in the altar's niche with outstretched arms. Only the women did that.

A few complained. Mrs. Sorenson said that just because he was the preacher's son he shouldn't get
special privileges. "It doesn't look right," she told Alvera Nelson, wrapping a jar of molasses in the Red and White Grocery. Alvera said the preacher's son was a wild one and needed to be watched. "As a matter of fact, I wouldn't be surprised if he wasn't in on that Gussie Skogen business. And didn't Gussie get two months?"

But he kept the job for one whole summer, every Saturday flicking a limp cloth smelling faintly of lemons over the dusty pews. Each time he finished, he'd stand in his father's pulpit, surveying his handiwork.

The morning Alver hauled Frank Schultz to St. Paul's the two children stood on the church steps and held the door for him. Alver and Sig Karetsky lugged the casket out of their truck, hugging each an end. They lifted it up the steps, Sig first, backing through the lobby, past the swinging doors, down the nave's long aisle. Alver told him, bumping against the pews, to watch his step. Sig said how could he with this thing right under his nose. Alver laughed and they set the grey box on metal stands in the chancel of St. Paul's, a few feet in front of the altar. Just beyond the arms of Jesus.

The news spread to the edges of town like spokes in a bike. "They've got Frank Schultz down at St.
Paul's." By ten o'clock the children had gathered. Mary Sorenson, Joe Lippoway, Andy Grimsrud, Abie Gilman. The brother stood beside the swinging doors in the lobby, holding an offering plate.

"A nickel apiece," he said.

"Highway robbery," Joe Lippoway said.

"Can you go in with someone?" Andy asked, who was ten.

"With someone! Why? Are you a little nervous, Andy?" Joe said. "I believe Andy's a little nervous. Maybe you better not go in, Andy, if it makes you nervous."

"Who's nervous? I just want to be with someone, that's all. It's more fun if you're with someone."

"With someone it'll cost a nickel extra," the brother said. "A nickel apiece plus one if you go in by two's." He was the janitor. His father was the preacher. This was his kingdom to rule as he pleased.

"Who's first?"

"You be first."

"No. You go."

"I'll be next after you."

"No. I'll wait."

"Oh, for Christ's sake. I'll go." Joe threw a nickel into the brass plate and disappeared through the swinging doors. He was back almost immediately.
"Jesus. It's Schultz all right. And he's dead."

Abie Gilman and Andy Grimsrud went in together. Three nickels clanged into the plate. Their stay was only slightly longer.

"Did you see his hands?" Andy asked, standing by the bell rope, his hair the color of the rope. "Did you see how they were folded like he was praying?"

"Praying for Christ's sake. That's Alver's job," Joe explained. "He's the one who gets them looking good finally. Did you ever see old Schultz with clean fingernails before?"

"He didn't get the thumb right," Abie said. "It was sticking straight up. Alver should have tried to get the thumb to fold the right way."

When the sister went in with Mary Sorenson she saw only the face. Bluish white like skim milk. And shiny as mucelage.

In the afternoon, during the service, they sat by the hedge, snapping beetles between rocks and making whistles out of carragana pods. The sun was shining, warm and orange. The air was pungent with the moist smells of upturned soil, crushed pods, and the cracked shells of beetles.

"Well, soon old Schultz will be galloping his way to glory. Flying through the sky to the sweet by and by," Joe Lippoway said, measuring a distant cloud.
with two fingers. Joe lived in one of the clay houses south of Main Street with his father, who spoke only Russian.

"I don't care if it rains or freezes. I am safe in the arms of Jesus."

"Okay, Lippoway, you can shut your mouth right about now," the brother said.

"Ya, Lippoway, zip your lip," Abie Gilman added. Abie was a Jew and had no dealings with St. Paul's, except on burial days. But he was a Jew and felt a certain primal respect for holy places, especially those connected with the dead.

"I understand the Communists in Russia hardly believe in anything any more," the sister said, her neck stiffening against a bough.

When the mourners gathered at the grave, the little group watched from behind the hedge. The girls lay on their stomachs, elbows sunk in the ground, chins in their hands, peering through the branches. The boys stood, looking over its green and prickly top.

With six men and three ropes the casket had been lowered into the newly carved opening. Now the family was standing together at one end, their bodies leaning in a dark unity toward its edge. The preacher stood at the other end, holding a spade. He looked thin standing alone by the open grave. He spoke the words clearly but in a high voice that rose in the windless
air like little streams of smoke.

"From dust thou came.
To dust thou shalt return.
From dust thou shalt arise again."

They watched him dig the spade into the hill of clay beside the black hole, three times shoveling earth clods down on the box below.

When she heard her father's words the sister crumbled a lump of dirt between her fingers and wondered why Frank Schultz had suddenly become a thou. Up until now he'd only been Frank, a farmer six miles south of Norquay.

When Joe heard the words he made small flapping gestures with his crook't arms, as if he were flying. But no one was paying any attention to him now.

Abie Gilman seemed to hear a different voice. A quiet voice from an ancient flame. Take off your shoes, Moses. The ground that you are standing on is holy ground.

One afternoon in fall, she caught him smoking. He was sitting on the ground behind the garage, nearly hidden by Russian thistles. First she saw the wisps of gray rising from the thistles and the red sparks of his cigarette. Then she saw him sitting there, leaning against a rock. She stood and watched, strong
in the righteousness of her sex.

"So here's where you keep yourself," she finally said. He jerked the cigarette out of his mouth. "I didn't know you smoked." He held the glowing object down by his knee.

"So? Now you do."

"Well, isn't this interesting," she said. "I guess Dad would find it quite interesting too if he knew about it."

"Make sure you let him know then," he said, raising the cigarette with a flourish and taking a long drag.

"I didn't say I was going to tell him. I only said that if he knew he'd find it very interesting. That's all I said."

"Well, if he'd find it so interesting I think you should tell him. I think you should go right now and tell him." He snuffed out the cigarette and sat straight up. He picked up a thin stick, placed it on the end of his nose, the tip resting on his forehead. It was a favorite trick of his. Only he could do it because of his odd-shaped nose.

"You think that's quite clever, don't you, balancing things on your nose like that. I suppose you think the girls at school find it very smart and clever when you balance pencils on your nose like that and
get them to laughing."

"Do you know anyone else who can do it?" he asked.

"I should hope not," she said and turned to leave.

"Hey, wait a minute. Have you ever heard this song before?" She stopped, stood there among the swaying weeds, and listened to him sing in that curious new voice of his that she detested.

"Hang out your washing on the Siegfried line if the Siegfried Line's still there."

"Certainly I've heard it. Mr. Nelson sings that when he's mowing the grass."

"Do you know what it means?"

"No."

"You really don't know what it means?"

"How should I know what it means?"

"Well, I guess you don't at that, do you. I guess you haven't heard what that song's all about, have you? That," he lowered his voice significantly, "is the dirtiest song in the English language. A very obscene song."

"What's dirty about it?"

"I'd never tell." He leaned back against the rock and slipped another Sweet Caporal out of its celophanated package.

"What can be dirty about hanging out your wash
"O. You said it."

"I said what?"

"You said the dirty words."

"You mean those are the dirty words?"

"That's what I said." He flicked a match against a rock, bent his head into the weeds, out of the wind, and lit the cigarette, inhaling deeply.

"What part is dirty—hanging out the wash, or the Siegfried Line?"

"O. You said it again."

"But you said it first."

"I did not. I sang it. Singing's different. It's like quoting."

"Well, tell me what it means then."

"Me? Never."

"Does it mean the same as what Gussie Skogen did to Rattrey's cow?"

"I'd never say. You wouldn't get me to talk about anything like that."

She stood in the weeds and looked at him. She was curious about Gussie and the cow. She understood all right what he'd been trying to do out there in Rattrey's pasture. But she sometimes wondered how he'd managed. Had the cow been lying on the grass? Or had Gussie stood on the fence?
"So. You said the words, didn't you?" He raised his head, smoothly, easily, sending a delicate ribbon of smoke curling into the prairie sky.

He didn't forget. For several days he shadowed her with the song. When she was standing by the kitchen sink in a white apron, washing the supper dishes, he crept up behind her and whispered it in her ear. Once when she was climbing the stairs to go to the bathroom, he stopped her on the landing, winked lewdly, and sang softly between closed teeth.

"Hang out your washing on the Siegfried Line
If the Siegfried Line's still there."

In the bathroom she sat on the toilet, her panties curled around her ankles, her heart pounding.

Sometimes when they were in the same room as their father, where he sat drinking his coffee and reading the evening paper, or kneeling beside a door, hammer in hand, repairing a screen, her brother would sit casually, his leg draped over the arm of a chair, his hands paging idly through a magazine, and he'd hum the song softly under his breath. She would leave the room, trying not to hurry, and ask her mother in the kitchen if there was anything she could do to help.

Later he told her.

"You really thought that was a dirty song, didn't you? You were scared I was going to tell, weren't you. Ha."
"Oh! Really! Wasn't that a smart thing to do now? Weren't you very smart and clever to think of something like that!" She ran, furious, across the alley to Sorenson's.

When he was fifteen he got Sig Karetsky's old job working for Alver.

"Do you think it looks right?" Mrs. Sorenson asked Alvera Nelson when she heard the news. "The preacher's son working for Alver like that. Won't people think it's kind of fishy? I mean it could cause talk." She sat at the kitchen table, nibbling on a piece of shortbread.

"What's a mystery to me is why Alver would hire him. There's one that needs watching," Alvera said from across the table, her elbows sunk in little folds of fat.

But he went to work every Saturday, leaving the house at nine, whistling down the driveway.

One morning in June he forgot his lunch. His mother picked up the brown bag from the kitchen counter and told his sister to take it to him. She combed her hair, preened in front of the hall mirror until her mother called her to stop fussing over herself and get started. She slipped on her new blue sweater,
examining herself again from different angles in the hall mirror. She was going down town to bring her brother his lunch.

Outside the sun was pouring down. Shining on the purple blooms of lilacs, stippling the young leaves of carraganas. It flecked the wings of a meadowlark sitting on a fence post, spread over weeds and grass onto the graveled driveway. It soaked into the little crevices between the stones, warming the sleek backs of ants and beetles. There was no space anywhere without the light.

At the end of the driveway her father was kneeling beside the car, fiddling with his tool box. The sun spilled out over the car's slick top and down on the greasy tools. It shone warm on his curved shoulders and smooth gray back.

She walked past the lilacs to where her father knelt by the blue car. He looked up at her and smiled. "My. Aren't you all spiffed up this morning," he said. "Are you going to a wedding?"

She held the brown bag out in front of her. "Not a wedding. He forgot his lunch. I have to bring him his lunch. That's all."

She opened the gate and walked across the alley. At Sorenson's she stopped for a minute to watch her friend Mary do a backbend under the clothesline, her
body curved against the earth, her hair streaming.

"Where are you off to?" Mary asked, upside down.

"To Alver's. I'm bringing my brother his lunch. You knew he was working for Alver now, didn't you?"

"Well, yes," Mary said, her back circling the grass.

She walked down the sidewalk edged with dandelions and Russian thistle, past Nelson's, through the vacant lot to Main Street. She stopped at Gilman's where Abie was sweeping the sidewalk in front of his father's store. The straw of his broom gathered dust and gravel and crushed candy wrappings, guiding them over the sun-warmed cement into the narrow ditch on the curb's edge.

"Where do you think you're going?" he asked.

"Me? Oh, nowhere special. My dumb brother forgot his lunch and I have to bring it to him. You know he's working for Alver now, don't you?"

"Of course." Abie continued sweeping, tufts of yellow straw swirling over the concrete.

At Alver's she walked across the oiled floor, past lamps and sofas, to the office at the far end. She opened the door. He was sitting on a wooden chair, his feet up on the desk, staring at the ceiling.

"Is this all you have to do?" she asked.

He swiveled around, facing her. "What are you
"You forgot your lunch. It was sitting there right in front of your nose, but you forgot it. Is this all you do here?"

"All! Don't you know Alver's gone? Who'd answer the phone if I wasn't here? Who'd take care of things?" He picked up a yellow pencil, held it by his ear, ready for any important message.

"It doesn't look like much of a job to me."

"Some jobs take muscles. Some take brains."

He laid the yellow pencil on the desk blotter and fussed about in the drawer with a box of paper clips. She looked at a closed door across the room.

"Is that where you keep them?"

"When we've got them."

"You don't have any today?"

"Not in there."

"Well, here's the lunch you forgot." She set the bag on the desk and turned to leave.

"Hey, wait a minute. You might be interested in that shoe box." He pointed to the shelf beside the desk littered with old magazines, an ash tray, and a white shoe box with Captain's 4.98 written in black on one end.

"Why?"

"Oh, no special reason. I just thought you

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might like to know what's in that box. But I guess you wouldn't be interested after all."

She walked over to the shelf and grabbed the box. She opened the lid, lifted up a gauzy sheet of tissue paper. She saw it for less than a second, smaller than her hand, veins blue under the white skin, its tiny fingers curled tightly like the claws of a kitten. She shoved the box back on the shelf.

"Why did you do that? Why did you do such a stupid thing as that? What a stupid thing to do!"

"What did I do? I didn't tell you to open the box. I didn't make you. You're the little Pandora who grabs the box and puts her nose right in."

"Why is it in a shoe box?"

"What's wrong with a shoe box? Any smaller they flush them down the toilet."

"Oh, you're really something, aren't you? You really think of marvelous things, don't you. Brilliant and marvelous. It must make you very proud to think of such marvelous things. Well, have a nice time eating your lunch, that's all I have to say."

She fled from the room, past the sofas, lamps, and cane-back chairs, out the front door. She ran past Gilman's, cut across the vacant lot to Nelson's, past Sorenson's, and across the alley. She didn't stop until she reached her own yard and leaned against
the gate, her heart pounding.

Her father was still working on the car. He was lying under it on the gravel, hammering away at something. She saw only his feet, twisting under the bumper.

She ran to the house, through the kitchen where her mother was chopping walnuts, into the living room.

She sat on the piano bench and paged through ragged song books. She looked up at the photographs that littered the piano's top. A picture of her grandparents on their Golden Wedding Anniversary, standing in front of a poplar tree, holding a cake. One of her cousin Algren on his Confirmation Day, wearing a black suit, holding a scroll. One of her and her brother, when he was five and she was two, sitting in a chair together, holding a ball.

She turned some pages to her next week's lesson and played the first six bars of *A Minuet in G*.

"Ketchens," she said. "Remember?"

"Ketchens?"

"Yes. The chickens. Don't you remember?"

"Oh! Ketchens! Of course. The chickens in the kitchen at Ketchens. We made up a song about it."

"Don't forget the flies."

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"How could I?"

She lay back on the high bed, rested her head on limp pillows, pulled the green blanket up to her chin. He sat in the chrome and plastic chair beside the bed, holding a pair of sunglasses by one stem. "He took us to funny places," she said.

"None as queer as Ketchens." He twirled his sunglasses, perched them on the end of his upturned nose. "Why there I wonder."

"Mother was sick. Don't you remember? So he took us with him when he made calls, when he went out visiting people in the parish."

He turned his head, let the glasses slip into his hand. "I wonder if they still keep their chickens in the kitchen."

"They didn't keep them there. They just walked in. Don't you remember how hot it was, and they left the door open, but they didn't have a screen door?"

"And everywhere you looked--flies. I remember the light cord hanging from the kitchen ceiling. I thought some wind was twisting it. But it was flies, crawling all over the cord."

"And the peach sauce don't forget."

"I thought it was pears," he said.

"No. Peaches. Remember? Mrs. Ketchen asked if we'd stay for lunch, and Daddy said he'd be delighted."
And you started gagging."

"Well, I'd never been in such a place before."

"She served the peach sauce on plates, flat dinner plates, and we didn't know how to eat it. Your peach kept slipping all over the plate and you started laughing. Remember? Then Daddy cut it with a knife and told you to use your fork."

"Ketchens," he said. He sat quietly in the chrome and plastic chair, holding his sunglasses.

A nurse, plump and middle-aged, her clipped hair tidy under a white cap, walked into the room, carrying a trayful of tiny paper cups.

"Here's a little something for pain, honey. And to help you get to sleep when your visitor leaves." She laid the cup on the bedside table, turned to go, then stopped, her neat head framed by the wooden panels of the door and the bronze crucifix shining above it.

"Listen, honey, the doctor wonders if you've had any luck yet."

"Luck?"

"In the bathroom," she said, "with your bowels."

"No luck."

"Patience," she said. "It will come." She turned again to leave. They listened to her brisk steps down the corridor.

"No luck," he said. "That's too bad, honey, but
"Why is shit a pejorative anyway?" she asked.

"Why?"

"That's all they're interested in now. Everything else is beside the point. They don't care if I eat, sleep, bathe, talk, laugh, cry, love, hate. All they want to know is--"

"Listen, I'd like to change the subject if you don't mind. How was it anyway? How did it feel?"

"They give you something so you won't remember the pain. A shot in the bum every ten minutes so you won't remember. But I remember."

"What was it like then?"

The black night rumbled in her ears and through her veins. "As near as I can say, it was like someone had channeled the Niagara Falls through my bowels--for about six hours."

She turned over on her side, scrunched the pillow up, and lay back again. "Do you remember the summer in Norquay when I worked at St. Mary's? You were still working for Alver, I think. Anyway, I remember one morning picking peas in the hospital garden. It was hot and I was wearing shorts. Suddenly I heard this screaming from the hospital. Some woman was screaming her head off. I knew she was having a baby. And I remembered thinking as I pulled those pods that
when I grew up and had babies I wasn't going to do that. I was going to be poised the whole time—maybe just grit my teeth a little. And when it was over I'd ask the doctor if he'd like a cup of tea or something. I'd be real cute about it."

"And were you?"

"Are you crazy? I bawled and roared. I kept yelling at them to stop it. Stop the whole business. I'd changed my mind. But when it was over. Lord. It was so lovely. Such rest. I'd never known such magnificent rest before. I can't explain it. I watched the doctor hold the baby up by its legs. It was all bloody red, sleek and shiny. And I shouted Hallelujah like some Holy Roller."

"'Come unto me all ye that labor...'" he said. "Remember?"

When he'd gone she turned over on her side, reached for the tiny cup on the table, swallowed the green pill. Everything's green here, she thought as she sank into the pillows. She yawned. Then beneath the green blanket she slept.

The bench presses hard against the dark and twisted sore between her legs. She tries to move her thighs, to lift the aching from the wood's hardness. But her thighs cling to the bench and to the man sitting beside her and the baby under her blouse out of
the wind. She hears its small sucking noises, feels the gums biting her breast and the tiny fingers pressing back and forth rhythmically like a cat's paw.
The boat glides silently over the black water. The air is pungent with the wet salt smell of the sea.

The man's hand rests on his knee. The hand is rough. Beneath the fingernails tiny bits of earth are lodged.

Across the deck her brother leans against the railing. He's wearing sun glasses and he's alone. Where are the others? His uncle, his cousin Algren, Joseph? And the rest who laughed together on summer nights by the slough's edge. He leans against the railing and watches his father.

Her father is kneeling at the forward end of the ferry trying to fasten a sheet of loosened tin to the prow. He clutches it with one hand. With the other he rummages through the tool box, searching. His thin hair rises and curves like threads of smoke in the sea's wind. He can't find the right tools to fasten the tin. He keeps looking in the box. The tin rattles in the wind like the old Imperial oil sign on Main Street, on a dusty spring night on the prairie.

Moses is watching. He stands beside the kneeling man, holding his sandals in his hand.

Her brother takes off his sunglasses and wipes
his eyes. He's crying. She can see the tears glistering on his cheeks. But maybe he's happy. She couldn't tell. He often cries when he's happy. His nose is red and wet with crying.

The man sitting beside her looks out on the sea and on the passing islands. He's enjoying the scenery, she thinks, but he doesn't seem to notice her father kneeling at the ship's prow. She wants to tell him to look at her father now. She wants to tell everyone about her father. That for as long as she can remember her father has repaired things, mended things, Doors and carburetors. People's sorrows. She wants to say the words, the most important words she's ever heard. But they're stuck somewhere down beneath her bowels. Maybe it's the baby pulling at her breast, pushing on her belly, slipping down, his foot pressing against the gray and purple bruise between her legs. Maybe she can't say the words because of the baby.

Or maybe she had said them. Maybe without realizing it she had said them. Only no one had heard. No one was listening. No one was listening. No one...

The window shades were drawn against the morning sun, but narrow shafts of light sifted in from the window's edge—shiny slender lines flecked with particles of dust, swirling, disappearing, re-entering the sun's beams. She watched the tiny dots and thought
she smelled pansies or nasturtiums. Fresh soil.
She turned her head to find the fragrance. Her husband
was sitting beside the bed, looking at her.

One morning in August it happened. While the
sister was dialing in Toronto, the brother was leaning
back in a leather chair in a twenty-fifth floor office
in San Francisco. He was looking out of wall-sized
windows to the ocean, watching ships in the harbor.
From Rio de Janeiro, Yokohama, Hong Kong. He was
gazing at the ships and at the sun's brightness on
the ships and on the water. He was thinking of Manchuria.

When the telephone rang he raised the receiver
to his ear, poised a black pen over the sheet of yellow paper, ready for a message.

"Daddy just died," the sister said. "He was killed in a car accident," she said. "He was killed on Grant Street in a car accident. He's dead."

In Manchuria it was 9 p.m. Outside of Mukden old Chinese farmers were squatting in the barley fields. After a long day of work they were smoking their pipes lazily under the slanting rays of the sun, the smoke rising silently above the barley as they emptied their bowels into the fields.
"No," the brother said. That was all the brother said. For a long while he sat in his leather chair in San Francisco, touching the telephone.

But he didn't see the telephone or his hand resting on it, or the brown desk or wall-sized windows. He didn't see the harbor—the sunlight glittering on the water and on the ships. He didn't see the light pouring through the windows into his office, spreading over the green carpet, reaching into the farthest corners of the room. He didn't see it, but it was there. Moving over the desk and the leather chair and his body bent in the leather chair. Hovering over him. Glowing on his arms, on the telephone, on his hand touching the telephone.

Then he saw it.

And he saw the yellow of it. The yellow of it rolled off an iron bell and spilled out on a prairie town. The yellow pressed down on Main Street, pressed against the buildings on Main Street, against himself in Alver's new building, where he sat in a wooden chair, holding a pencil near his ear. It pressed against him—his chest and eyes—until the tears came, running down his cheeks.

The yellow drifted out into the street. It mingled with the dust in curbs. It rose in swirls above the town and lost itself in glimmering waves.
over the prairie.
MOTHER'S DAY

Mother's Day was on May 9th that year. On May 6th we had the blizzard and school was closed. On May 7th I was sick. I was sick until May 8th so I missed two days of school: May 6th, the day of the blizzard, and May 7th, the day I was sick. On Mother's Day, the 9th, I found the cat. And on Monday, May 10th, everything was back to normal.

I will begin with May 6th because that is the first day of all the days. I suppose I could even start with the night before since I heard later that the blizzard commenced in all its fury around 11 p.m. I, of course, was sleeping at that time and knew nothing of it. But people talked about it for days and weeks and months afterwards, so naturally I have quite a clear picture of how it all began.

It began with the wind. Even before I went to bed that night the wind was blowing. The snow had melted early that year, before the end of April, and although fields in the country were still wet and patched with dirty snow, the streets in town were dry and dusty. Every day we walked to school in whorls of dust and rolling thistles. Saskatchewan, as you know, is one of the three prairie provinces, and spring on the prairie is a dry and dusty scene in—
deed. It is unlike spring in areas farther south, such as the southern states in the United States. I've read about spring in these places and seen pictures of it. In Kentucky, for instance, spring is calm and colorful, and it lasts longer. In Kentucky there's more foliage: japonica, forsythia, dogwood. All these plants have lovely blooms and the blooms don't develop at the same rate. Thus the colors spread out over a longer period of time. My father subscribes to National Geographic, and I've read about these things and seen pictures.

In Saskatchewan, however, spring is bare. And if I may speak candidly, it is quite lonesome. The lonesome period is between the time the ice and snow melt and the time the grass turns green. (Weeds I should say. We don't have much grass.) The lonesome period is the dry time when the ground is gray, trees (what few we have) are bare, and rubbish, buried for months under snow, is fully exposed. The lonesome period is usually filled with wind. The wind whips up the dust, dead thistles, mouldy scraps of paper, whirling them across the alleys and down the streets, with no thought whatsoever to what pleases us.

I was lying in bed when I heard the wind. It rattled the windows, whistled in the chimney. It grew stronger, howling about the house like a great enemy.
who hated us personally and our home too, down to its very foundation. That's the feeling I got, that it really was an enemy and wanted to rip us right off the ground we'd settled on. I got out of bed and went downstairs to see how my mother and father were taking it. But they were sitting in the living room, reading, and didn't seem at all disturbed. My mother looked up at me, her face shining under the rosy lampshade, and said it was all right, just a heavy wind, nothing to worry about. "Crawl back to bed now, sweetheart," she said in a voice that was kinder than usual. So I did, and went to sleep finally, wondering why there was such a thing as wind. Nobody likes it that I know of. No prairie people anyway. And why had God created it?

I do not question the existence of God, as my friend Karen Holm does, whose father runs the Co-op Creamery here in town and who is a Communist. I can't deny what's right there in front of my nose in black and white. But at the same time I do not condemn unbelievers. "Judge not, lest ye be judged," the Scripture says. Nor do I try to convince them. Arguments lead to nowhere. If you tell a blind man the sun is yellow and he doesn't believe you, what can you do about it? Nothing. Nevertheless, although my faith is firm, I wonder sometimes why certain things happen.
Like the wind.

In the morning the sky was a whirl of grey and white. The snow was thicker than I'd ever seen it, and the wind still blowing, whining through the snow. I couldn't see the fence or garage from my bedroom window. Every inch of air was disrupted, uprooted, swirling about. Like refugees, I thought, as I knelt in front of the window in amazement. Like lonely refugees without homes, wandering in the cold, looking for a place to settle, a quiet place where they could put their babies to bed and have some hot tea and visit one another for awhile. But they couldn't find such a place, so they wandered, all in a frenzy, cold and lonesome.

I went downstairs in my pajamas. There'd be no school, that I knew. My father was sitting in the dining room at his desk. He was playing chess, like he does on Sunday mornings and stormy days when he can't work. He plays chess by correspondence since he has no partners here in town. You may have heard of chess players like this. A huge map of the world is tacked on the wall in front of his desk. On the desk itself is the wooden chessboard, and on a table next to it, little recipe boxes, filled with postcards. These cards have been sent to him from his playing partners all over the world. He even plays with one
man in South Africa, and he has many games going on at the same time. Every time a player makes a move he sends the move by postcard to my father. Then my father makes his move and sends a card back to the player. Sometimes it takes nearly a month for a card to reach another country, so you can imagine how long one game might last. But my father seems to enjoy this, keeping track of all his partners with little colored pins on his map of the world.

My father is a very intelligent man, I must say, but he is not a man of faith. He does not attend church with me and my mother, not even on special occasions. Even my mother doesn't attend every Sunday. Most of the time it's left up to me to uphold the family in spiritual matters.

My mother was in the kitchen, sitting at the table, drinking coffee and gazing out the window at the blizzard. Her arms were resting on the white table cloth, her hand held the cup. The whole kitchen smelled of coffee. She didn't even notice me come in. On very snowy days or rainy days, my mother abandons all her housewifely responsibilities and sits in front of the window all day, just looking out. We might as well forget about good dinners or a clean and tidy house on such days. She's completely engrossed by storms. In some respects my mother is a bit lazy.
Nevertheless, I do find her an interesting person.
In this day and age it's important, I feel, to observe
nature and meditate on all its wonders.

"That's some storm," I said.
"There'll be no school today," she said.
"I guess not," I said.

I went to the bread box and sliced two pieces
from a loaf. I brought out the butter and jam. I
knew she was not about to make any breakfast, so I'd
do it myself.

I sat down at the table to eat my bread and
watch the storm with my mother. I have a good feeling
about that day, nothing at all like the days that fol­
lowed. The blizzard was howling outside. The snow
was so high on the walk no one even tried to get out,
and the air so thick we couldn't see beyond the porch.
But the house was warm, and my mother was enjoying
her coffee and my father his chess. Every so often
my father would leave his game and come in the kitchen
to drink coffee with my mother. I knew they were both
having a good day. As the catechism says: "Let hus­
bands and wives love and respect each other."

In the early afternoon the storm ended. The
snow stopped, the wind ceased, the sky cleared, the
sun shone. And everyone in town shoveled themselves
out of their houses. I put on my boots and red parka
and walked down town between the drifts, clean and sparkling in the sun. I went to see my friend Esther. She was helping her father in the store, straightening tin cans of soup and dusting jars of pickles. We talked about the storm and what we should do for our mothers on Mother's Day. She thought she'd buy her mother a box of chocolates. I said I'd have to wait till Saturday to decide, when I'd have some money. Then I went home. That night I got sick.

I woke up in the middle of the night. My head was hot, my chest ached, and my throat was sore. I felt damp all over, and weak. I knew I was sick. I crouched under the blankets, shivering with cold, and sweating. Finally I got up. I turned on the hall light and walked down the corridor to my mother and father's bedroom. I opened their door and saw them in the light from the hall. They were both sound asleep. My father was lying on his right side with his knees up. My mother was lying on her right side too, with her knees up. She was lying right next to my father, her stomach against his back and her legs fitting into his, fitting right into them like a piece of a jigsaw puzzle. I touched her on her hair, but she didn't move. I touched her on the cheek, and she twitched a little. Then she opened her eyes and looked at me.

"I'm sick," I said and walked out of the room
and back to bed.

In a minute she was in my room, leaning over me in the dimness.

"Did you say you were sick?"
"Yes."
"Where?"
"All over."
"Here?" She touched my head.
"Yes."
"Here?" She touched my neck.
"Yes."

She turned on the lights. She looked at my face and neck. She looked at the sheets and quilts. They were damp.

"You are sick," she said.
"I know."

She walked down the hall to the bathroom and came back with a glass of water, a wash cloth, and a bottle of aspirins. She gave me an aspirin and water to drink. Then she washed my face with the cold, wet cloth, and my neck too. She covered me up and brought in an extra blanket.

"You'll be all right," she said. "Don't worry."

I didn't say anything. I just turned over on my side and went back to sleep. In the morning I was still sick. My chest was sore and my head ached. My
arms and legs felt damp and heavy. My mother came in again and looked at me.

"I'll make a mustard plaster," she said.

My mother is not an ignorant woman by any means, but she is not a woman of science. She does not read up on the latest developments in medicine as my father does, even though he's only a telephone man. She prefers remedies handed down by her mother and grandmother and even great grandmother for all I know. Mustard plaster is a case in point. If you're unfamiliar with that old remedy, this is how it works: I'm not sure of the proportions, but you don't use very much mustard—it burns. You spread this yellow paste on a piece of cloth which has been cut out to fit the chest it's going on. Then you lay another cloth over it and stitch it together around the edges. You put this on the chest, right next to the skin, and it's supposed to do some good—I'm not sure what except warm your chest considerably and make you sweat. She came upstairs carrying the mustard plaster, holding it in her two hands like a rolled out sheet of dough. When I saw it I began feeling embarrassed and wished like everything I hadn't gotten sick. I was eleven years old at the time, nearly twelve, and I was beginning to show. I was the only one in my class beginning to show. Ever so slightly, I know, but even so I wasn't
fond of the idea that someone would see me, even my mother.

"I believe I'm feeling better, better than last night," I said. "I don't think I need the mustard plaster."

"You'll be up and on your feet in no time with a good strong mustard plaster," she said. She laid the bulging cloth on a chair and lifted the quilt from under my chin, and sheet too. She unbuttoned my pajama top slowly and gently, and I felt myself getting more and more embarrassed. She spread out the fronts of my pajama top, looking at me. Then she lifted the mustard plaster from the chair and laid it on my chest, tucking it under my neck and part ways into my arm pits, and down to my stomach. She pressed her fingers ever so gently and I felt the pressing on the soft places on my chest where I'd begun to develop. I stared at the ceiling and didn't say anything. Neither did she. It seemed as if she didn't even notice, but I'm sure she did. I don't see how she could have missed. She buttoned my pajamas again and covered me with the sheet and quilt.

"Have a nice time in bed today," she said. "I'll bring you some magazines to read, and juice."

Maybe it doesn't make much sense to you how I felt about such things at that time. I certainly don't
feel that way now. But then I'll be fourteen next month and I'm fully developed. My mother has explained everything to me, about my body and sexual things. So now I understand all that. I have no problems in that line. But when I was eleven and just starting to develop I felt quite peculiar about it. I didn't want anyone to know. When I was alone I'd sometimes look at myself in the mirror without my clothes on. Then I'd put on a t-shirt or sweater to see if I showed. But I never wore t-shirts to school. I certainly didn't want everyone gawking. I'd leave the t-shirts to the grade 9 girls, Rosie Hollowachuck and her group. They seemed to enjoy letting the whole world know they were developing.

Anyway, I had a fairly pleasant morning after that, looking at National Geographics and at the icicles melting outside my window, falling asleep and waking up and drinking juice. If you're not in pain it can be quite enjoyable sometimes being sick.

Then, in the afternoon, it happened. I can't understand even now how my mother could have done that to me. But she did. She came upstairs in the late afternoon and said she would change my mustard plaster. She'd make a fresh batch and after that she'd be finished. She pulled down the quilt and sheet, unbuttoned my pajamas, and lifted the cloth from my chest.
My chest suddenly felt icy cold and terribly bare. I pulled my pajama top together quickly without buttoning it and snuggled under the covers. My mother left the room, carrying the used mustard plaster, folded like a book, in her hand. I heard her walk down the steps into the kitchen. I heard the cupboard door opening and pots banging. I heard her chatting away to my father about nothing in particular. And I thought no more about it until I opened my eyes and saw him standing in the doorway. My father. My father holding the fresh mustard plaster. My father coming to put the new mustard plaster on my chest. I looked at him and felt my face getting hot and my heart beating faster. Was he actually going to do it? Open my pajama top and see me? And press that bulging cloth against my chest? Did my mother send him up for that? I felt my eyes sting and I knew I was going to cry. I felt the wetness press against my eyeballs and drip over the edges of my eyes down the side of my head, into my hair. I couldn't say anything. I just lay there and cried.

"You're not feeling well at all, are you?" he said. "It's no great treat being sick. But maybe this will do the trick."

He lifted up the quilt and sheet. He spread open my pajama top. He looked down on my chest. I
know he saw my development. Even though he said nothing, I know he saw. Then he laid the cloth on me, smoothly and firmly, his hands heavy on the roundness there. He buttoned my pajamas and covered me with the sheet. He wiped my eyes with the edge of the sheet and told me I'd be better soon and not to cry and mother was cooking vegetable soup with dumplings for supper.

When he left I turned my face into the pillow and cried and cried. I cried until the pillow case was soaked, until my head ached. Then I went to sleep, and when I woke up my mother was standing beside me with a bowl of vegetable soup and dumplings. Needless to say, I don't have good feelings about that day.

In the evening I felt better, and on Saturday I was fine except that I had to stay inside all day and couldn't even go downtown to buy a Mother's Day present. My mother told me not to feel bad—if I stayed inside and got completely well by Sunday we could go to church together, the special service.

On Mother's Day I got up early. I washed my face and combed my hair. I put on my green dress with the long sleeves and white lace cuffs and went downstairs to make breakfast for my mother and father. I set the table with the blue placemats Aunt Hanna sent
from Denmark. I boiled eggs and made cinnamon toast because that's what I'm best at. My parents were pleased with the breakfast.

After breakfast my father went back to his desk to play chess with someone in India or Yugoslavia. My mother and I went to church.

I do worry sometimes about my father. His indifference to spiritual matters suggests a certain arrogance. And you must have heard what the Bible has to say about that: "Pride cometh before a fall." Of course, my father is not the only person who feels this way. Many people, at least in our part of the province, have no religious faith whatsoever. Men especially. Some men feel that religion is for women and children. And not even for all women. Some women they prefer without any religious faith at all. So they can have fun, if you know what I mean. But if a woman has children and has to take care of things, if a woman is responsible, if she has men and children to take care of, then she should have faith. That's what they think. Well, this kind of thinking holds no water whatsoever as far as I'm concerned. If religious faith is good for one, it's good for all.

We walked through melting snow to church, our rubber boots black and shining in the slush. When we got inside Mrs. Franklin and Mrs. Johnson met us at
the door and gave us each a carnation, a pink one for me because my mother was alive, a white one for my mother because her mother was dead. She died five years ago. She had sugar diabetes, but it was a heart attack she died from. We pinned the carnations to our coats and walked down the aisle to a middle pew, right behind Mr. and Mrs. Carlson and Jackson, who's one year older than I am.

The text that Sunday was from the Book of Proverbs, written by King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, although he had a lot of wives. Mother's Day is the only time it's ever read in church: "Who can find a virtuous woman, for her price is far above rubies."

After the sermon we sang the hymn we sing every Mother's Day. My mother says she could do without that song, but I myself feel it has a lot of meaning. We all stood up. Mrs. Carlson sang in her usual voice. Mr. Carlson didn't sing at all, just looked at the words. Jackson turned around and stared at me a couple of times with no expression.

Mid pleasures and palaces, though we may roam,
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.
A charm from the skies seems to hallow us there.
Which, seek thro' the world, is ne'er met with elsewhere.

Home, home, sweet, sweet home,
There's no place like home,
0, there's no place like home.

That afternoon I found the cat.

I had just come from Esther's house, only she wasn't home. I was on my way to Karen's house to see what she had done for her mother on Mother's Day. I knew it would be something clever because that's how she is. Communists are mixed up in a lot of ways, but they're not stupid.

The cat was in a ditch when I first saw it, a kitten actually, scratching at a little drift of snow and meowing. It was grey and skinny, its voice thin and unpleasant. I leaned over the ditch, picked it up by the fur of its neck as I'd been taught to do, and set it down on the concrete walk. But it didn't go anywhere. It didn't move. It just stood there by my ankle. I walked away and it followed me, meowing after me in its thin and ugly voice. I didn't know what to do, so I scooped it up with my two hands, laid it in the crook of my arm, and took it with me to Karen's house. I stood in the back porch at Karen's house and showed the cat to Mrs. Holm. She leaned against the porch wall, next to the giant-sized pile of newspapers, and told me I should take it back where I found it.

"In the ditch?" I asked.

"Wherever you found it," she said. "Its owner
will be looking for it."

"In the ditch?" I asked. "Will the owner look in the ditch?"

"It may be diseased," she said. "It's best not to bring it in the house." She spoke kindly but firmly. Mrs. Holm is not a cruel person, but she's no lover of cats.

I left Karen's house and went back to ask my mother if we could keep it. She said the same thing as Mrs. Holm. "Take it back where you found it."

"I found it in a ditch," I said.

"By whose house?" she asked. "It no doubt belongs to the people who live near the ditch.

"To Holm's?" I asked. "Mrs. Holm can't stand cats."

"Maybe another house," my mother said. "Ask at the other houses. I understand Mrs. Gilbertson has cats. But come home soon," she added. "It's nearly supper time."

I walked down the street, carrying the shivering kitten in my arms. I began knocking on doors. Everyone said the same thing: "Take it back where you found it." I said the same thing too: "I found it in a ditch." Then they said maybe Mrs. So and So would like to have it. And I'd knock on a few more doors.

The last door I knocked on was Mrs. McDonald's.
Mrs. McDonald had always seemed like a very friendly person to me. Whenever she saw me she'd ask about my parents. "How are those fine people?" she'd say. "Your parents are such lovely people." So I thought this might be my lucky chance. Maybe Mrs. McDonald would take the kitten.

"Me?" she asked, standing under the light in her front hall, rubbing her thin hands on the pockets of her frilly apron. "Oh, no, honey. I couldn't possibly. As much as I'd like to. Not with my allergy. But aren't you a precious one for caring so. Aren't you just the sweetest little girl, looking out for that poor animal. You are just the kindest little thing," she said. I thought she'd said enough, but she went on and on. I stood in the doorway and listened to every word. "You're going to make a very good mother," she said. "Just the nicest mother ever. Look at you cuddling that poor thing. What a sweet little mother you are." I believe she finished right then because she started closing the door, ever so gently, easing me out on the step, still holding the limp and whining cat.

What happened next is what I'm trying to figure out. I've spent two years now trying to figure this out, but I'm not sure I fully understand, even now.

I didn't know what to do with the kitten, so I
headed out of town on the dirt road that leads to Goertzen's. It was getting dark and windy and much colder, so I shoved the kitten under my jacket to keep it warm, pulled the sleeves of the jacket over my bare hands to keep them warm. I felt the cat under the cloth, pressing against my chest, its claws pushing back and forth into the softness there. I bent my head against the wind and stumbled through the ruts, my boots oozing down into the half frozen mud. I didn't know where I was going, just leaving town with that thin and ugly kitten pushing on my chest, nibbling at me, purring and pressing against me as if I were its home, as if I were the place where it belonged.

When I passed the correction line I looked back and saw the town lit up behind me. All the houses behind me with orange lights shining out of windows. I turned and saw the blackness ahead of me, the night, dark and empty as a cave. I tried walking faster through the mud, the cat still clinging to the softness on my chest. Then I realized I wasn't going anywhere. There was no place to go. Only Goertzen's, and that was too far—five more miles at least.

I stopped in the middle of the road and pulled the cat out from under my jacket. I held it up by the fur of its neck, looked at in the light of the snow that shone in the ditch by the road's edge, in
the light of pale and distant stars above. I saw its eyes glimmering in the starlight, its small kitten eyes, looking at me.

"You dumb cat," I said. "You damn cat. You God damn cat. You God damn stupid cat." Its eyes gleamed. "You don't know anything do you? Nothing at all. Not your father or your mother or where you belong. You dumb, stupid cat." And I hated the cat. I really did. I hated its grey and matted fur, its body, thin and ugly. But most of all, I hated it dangling there, alone, under the stars, watching me, waiting...

And that's when I did it. I jumped into the ditch and shuffled through the snow. I scraped at the snow with my feet and my one free hand. I scraped until I found a rock, until I found two. And then I did it. I laid the cat on the flattest rock, hard and icy. And I did it. I laid it, stomach down, on the big rock. I spread its legs out and pressed its head against the stone. And I lifted the other rock and hurled it down on the cat. It flipped and tumbled off, landing in the icy ditch and lay there, grey and quiet in the snow, its eyes glinting. Then I lifted it up by its hind leg and pressed it again down on the rock. I pressed its head and body with my hand, its fur stiff and icy on my fingers. I raised the
rock above my head and smashed it down on the silent cat. I kept smashing it until it was tangled and bloody, dangling on the icy rock. Then I picked it up by the end of its tail and flung it for all I was worth into the frozen field. I didn't look twice to where I'd heaved it. I just turned around and started back to town.

I saw the lights of town in a distance, the orange lights in all the houses. I used to like going home after dark and seeing those lights. In winter when it was dark at four I'd walk home from school and look at all the houses with orange light shining out the windows. I'd think of children and fathers going home in the cold and dark. And when they got there, the house would be warm, the supper cooking, and the mother setting the table and humming. But that night, walking into town and seeing the lights, it wasn't like that.

When I got home, my parents had already eaten supper and were sitting at the kitchen table drinking tea.

"You've been gone a long time," my father said. "Did you find a home for the kitten?"

"Yes," I said.

"Oh, where?" my mother asked.

"Some Ukranians took it," I said.
"You walked all the way out past the railroad tracks?"

"Only as far as Levinsky's."

"Did the Levinsky's take it then?"

"No," I said. "But Mrs. Levinsky said she knew some Ukranians who live on the other side of the Hutterites. She said they'd take it because they have a huge barn and a lot of other cats and fresh milk and hay, so the cat would be warm and comfortable and have friends. Mrs. Levinsky will take it there tomorrow."

"That was very kind of Mrs. Levinsky," my father said.

"I thought so," I said and went upstairs to the bathroom to wash my hands for supper.

I didn't think about my experience that night. I was too tired. I went to bed early and fell asleep right away. But since then it's been on my mind. I've thought about it now for a couple of years, and I still wonder about those lights, about the orange lights in all the houses. I think about this: there's no place you can go and be sure of things. There's no house you can go into and not hurt somebody or get hurt. Not anywhere. And how do you take that if you're a person of faith? I know what the Buddhists think about this. I've studied the Buddhists in the encyclopedia and I understand their doctrines. They think that if
you know you'll do wrong by going places or doing things, then don't go there. Don't do anything. Stay where you are. Just sit. Then you won't sin. That's what the Buddhists think. But I'm not a Buddhist, certainly. I think something else is true. It's like this: You walk into those houses, knowing all along it's not going to be true or right or everlasting, knowing all along you might get knocked on the head, or knock someone else on the head. You can never be sure. But you don't think about that. You just step right in. There'll always be some light there, little pieces of it anyway. And you can notice that. You can notice every little piece that's there, even if it doesn't last, even if it fades away like grass.

On Monday I went to school as usual. At recess I met Esther at our special place by the poplar tree and we talked about Mother's Day. I told her I made breakfast and went to church with my mother. She told me her mother liked the box of chocolates and they spent the day at Kobrinsky's. Her family doesn't go to church because they're Jews, not to synagogue either because there aren't enough Jews in our town to have one. They do celebrate festive occasions in their homes, however. Like the Passover. And Mother's Day. At least they do in our town. I don't know if they
have a Mother's Day in Israel or not. I know in Japan there's no special day set aside for mothers. Instead they have a Boys' Day and a Girls' Day. But the Scandinavian countries celebrate much the same as we do, at least in Norway, with flowers and gifts. I'm not sure what the customs are in Africa or South America.

But one thing I do know, and no one can argue against this fact, whether he's a Communist, a Christian, or a Jew. There's no nation in the whole world, not a single solitary one, without mothers.
I have completed three rows of the afghan. The first is purple, the second blue, the third violet. I am knitting it in loose and even stitches for lightness and warmth against the winter nights. I knit only in the early evening while I wait for supper to cook. Later I'll prepare my lessons for the mathematics classes I will teach tomorrow. The waiting is brief, my suppers simple. I cook only for myself. At this rate the afghan will take two months—or even three—to complete.

The phone rang in September on a windy evening at dusk. The soup had just begun to simmer on the burner turned to low. I was sitting near the window in the leather chair, the one I'd bought for Steve in '62. Geometric theorems were spread before me on the floor in neat designs. Outside, branches of the elm scraped against the siding.

I stuck the metal needles into the ball of purple yarn, laid the knitting on my lap, and reached to the side table for the receiver. It would be my mother.
She's a widow too, and when she calls it's always in that nearly-dark-but-not-quite time of day.

"Hello," I said, counting the last five stitches in the row. I had ended on purl.

"M-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m. . ."

"Hello? Whom are you calling?"

"M-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m. . ."

"Were you calling 469-2801?"

"M-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m. . ."

"You must have the wrong number."


"Oh. I see. This is Carolyn Janz. Were you calling me?"

"I-I-I-I-I-I-I'm taking a-s a-s a-s a-s a-s a-s a-s a-s a-s a-s a-s survey. W-w-w-w-w-w-w-w-w-w. . ."

I waited several seconds. I picked up my knitting. I re-counted the last four boxes of the row.

"Would you a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-answer a few questions?"

"Well, I suppose I could, if it doesn't take too long. But. . .if my supper starts to boil on the stove. . .well, you understand. So. What could I help you with?"

"D-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-do you think a-s a-s a-s a-s a-s a-s a-s a-s a-s a-s a-s speech impediment is a ha-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-andicap?"
"Well. That's an interesting question, isn't it? I hadn't really thought about it much. I suppose it could be. I think it might depend on what one is doing, what line of work he's in. Perhaps if one were in some kind of public relations, politics or such, then I would think. . .yes, I do believe that a speech impediment would be a handicap. But if one were to choose a different line of work. In a library perhaps. Or a mine. A coal mine, or some such place as that, then it may not be such a handicap. Actually, it's hard to say, isn't it? I don't really know. What do you think about that? Do you think it would be a handicap?"

My right leg had begun to ache. I twisted my body in the leather chair to let my weight rest on my left thigh. The ball of yarn fell to the floor. The silver needles dangled from the purple bundle.

"I-I-I-I-I-I- think a-s a-s a-s a-s a-s a-s a-s speech impediment is a ha-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-andicap."

"Yes, I guess you're right. I guess I would have to agree with you there."

He asked two more questions, then he thanked me, most sincerely he said, and I hung up the receiver. I picked up the yarn from the floor, removed the silver needles, and counted the stitches.
Knitting is like mathematics, and like poetry. All three are concerned with making patterns. Occasionally I dabble in poetry, no doubt for this very reason. Recently I have begun a new poem. I have written the first line: Purple is the color of irises.

2 -- A POEM FOR JOE

I'm nervous when the phone rings in the night. Maybe someone is ill. Or perhaps dead.

In October it rang. I threw off the quilt and sat up, my heart pounding. I slid off the bed, felt my way through the silent room, across the corridor, and into the living room. I fumbled with the receiver, lifted it from its black nest on the end table.

"Yes?" I said. "This is Carolyn Janz."

His voice was dark, oval as a cave, and distantly familiar. "Guess whooo?"

I sat down in the leather chair, the leather cold and stiff against the thin fabric of my night dress, against my back under the fabric, and my bare arms leaning. "I don't know," I said. I snapped on the floor lamp, swiveled my chair around to see the clock on the wall by the door. It was 2 a.m. "Who is it?"

"Guess whooo," he answered. The voice was blue-
black, lit only by echoes, glasses tinkling in some far-off room.

"I really don't want to guess. If you won't tell me, I'll just..."

"It's your ol-l-ld buddy." The voice lightened, took a shape, something I'd seen once in a room somewhere, or street, in a corridor, or perhaps a cab.

"Your voice sounds familiar, but I can't place you. I honestly can't. Why don't you tell me?"

"You don't remember huh? You've forgot your good ol-l-ld buddy."

"If you won't tell me, I..."

"Think. Row six, seat four, by the window."

So that's who it was, an old student of mine from a math class, sometime in the vague past. But I have been a teacher of mathematics for fifteen years now. At 150 students a year, the total is well over 2,000. And he wanted me to remember him in row six, seat four, by the window. It was absurd.

And then I did. I saw him sitting there in the fourth seat near the window, his wide shoulders hunched over the desk top, his black hair hanging, sharp and heavy, to his shoulders, his smooth brown face, the delicate scar from his lip to his ear.

"Well, for heaven's sake. Holy Whiteman, how are you?"
"I am fine and dandy," he said. "Long - time - no - see. Ha."

"Not so long," I said. "Only a year in fact. When did you get out?"

"I was re-leased exactly four days ago, on October the fifth, at exactly nine minutes and thirty-seven seconds past twelve o'clock noon."

"And what have you been doing since then?"

"What have I been doing? Ha."

"I guess it's good to be out," I said. "Are you living in town?"

"I am presently re-siding in the Royal George Hotel. Room 200. High class."

I laughed. If you want a cheap and sleazy room anywhere in the province of Alberta, look for a hotel named the Empress, or the King Edward, or the Royal George.

"Let me tell you about it," he said. "Number one, windows—with curtains. Number two, bedspread—pink—ha. Number three, mirror. Number four, toilet—with lid."

"It sounds classy," I said.

"You wanna see it?" he asked. "I'll make you a cup of coffee. Instant Maxwell House."

"It sounds inviting," I said.

"Ha."
I leaned forward in the leather chair, the leather warmer now and more pliable, my back lingering for a moment against the leather. "It was nice talking to you, Joe, but I'm still a math teacher you know. I have to get my sleep."

"Hey. Why didn't you answer my letters?"

The question came abruptly, too abruptly for me to formulate a decent reason. "I'm not very good at letters," I said. "But I did answer one of them, remember? You got the one I sent last Christmas with the list."

"I got the list all right. Some list."

"Don't complain," I said. "You got a pen pal out of it, didn't you?"

"Out of eight females on that there list, one female answered my letter--your mother."

"I guess people just don't like writing letters," I said. I leaned back in the leather chair, the leather warm and moist against my arms.

"Your mother must be getting pretty old," he said.

"She's over seventy. Why?"

"She says funny things."

"Like what?"

"Like--trust God, everything will turn out."

"That's how she is," I said. "She talks like
that."

"She has funny writing," he said. "I couldn't hardly read her writing."

"I know. It's a scrawl. Well, Joe, I . . . ."

"Hey. Do you wanna know what I'm gonna do some day? Some day I'm gonna buy me a ticket on the Greyhound Bus, and I'm gonna hop on that bus, and I'm gonna go and visit your mother."

"Wouldn't she be pleased," I said.

Picture my mother in Shoreline Apartment, number 208. In quilted robe she sinks back in the soft cushions of her floral sofa. She gazes out the large and spotless window, framed with drapery, beige to match the rug. She's looking out on Mirror Lake, the water smooth, the grass at its edge, clipped and tidy. The doorbell rings. She rises from her chair, walks carefully across the room, her footsteps neatly impressed in the rug's deep pile.

Picture Joe Holy Whiteman. Six feet three, blue black hair, swarthy skin, scar from lip to ear. He stands on the red carpet of the foyer, under the chandelier, smiling, eager to meet my mother, maybe to ask, what do you mean--trust God and everything will turn out?

Picture Mrs. Williams across the hall, who keeps track of things. Who orders her groceries on Friday,
has her rooms cleaned by Olga Storch on Saturday, travels by Yellow Cab to the United Church on Sunday morning, writes to her daughter Eunice, married to a realtor in Toronto (and he's doing so well, she says) on Sunday afternoon, and sips tea as she watches television on Sunday evening.

Picture all the residents of Shoreline Apartments. And Joe Holy Whiteman standing on the red carpet under the chandelier.

"You must do that some time," I said. "My mother would be happy to have you come. Listen, Joe, I really have to get some sleep..." 

"Yah, you better get back to your old man. He must be getting cold, alone there all by himself. Ha."

My old man—the term often confuses me. Does it refer to husband or father. "You mean my husband?"

"That's what I said."

"My husband isn't living," I informed him.

"You mean he's..."

"He's dead."

"Ohhh. I'm sorry to hear that. How did it happen?" His voice was gentle.

"He was killed in a car accident near Red Deer."

"No. When was this?"

"Let's see," I said. "It must be seven years ago now--this spring."
"Ohhh. I am verrry sorry."

"Thanks," I said. "It's all right."

"You're what they call a widow then, is that it?"

"Yes, I guess that's what they call it." I swiveled the chair around to look at the clock by the door. It was 2:15. I stood up, stretched, yawned, curled my toes into the green pile of the carpet.

"Really, Joe, I. . . ."

"Hey. How about the kids? How did your kids take that?"

"I don't have any children."

"No kids?"

"No."

"Really? No kids?"

"That's right."

"Ohhh, I'm sorry," he said. "That's too bad."

"Why do you say that?"

"Why! Woman was made for kids."

"Women are free. Haven't you heard?"

"Woman was made for kids."

"Some women. Not me." I sat back, stretched my legs out, then raised them and curled them against me in the leather chair. I was wide awake. Sleep now was out of the question.

"Hey. Would you do what they call an experiment?"

"Sure. Anything. What?"
"But don't take it as no disrespect. You're a very respectable woman. And I don't mean no disrespect."

"What is it?"

"Do you know that big mirror they got in the window down at the Hudsons Bay?"

"Yes."

"Well, you're standing on the sidewalk in front of Hudsons Bay in front of that there mirror. Right?"

"Right."

"And you don't have a stitch of clothes on, not one little thread."

"Good heavens! In the middle of the night? Won't I get picked up?"

"It's not night, it's day. You have to see."

"Really, in broad daylight? With all that traffic?"

"Come on. Listen. You got no clothes on, see? And you're looking in that mirror. Now, you start from the top of your head. You look at the top of your head, then you go down. Down, down, down till you get to your feet. But before you get to your feet you stop at each part and you ask yourself a question—what is that there part for? You got that? For each part you say, what is that there part for? ~
"I've got it."

"All right. Get ready. Get set. Go. And don't forget the belly button. Ha."

"Okay," I said. "Here I go. Down...down...down...down...down...down..."

"Where are you now?"

"My knees."

"Ohhh. Your eyes travel very fast."

"There. I'm finished. I'm on my big toe."

"See? It proves," he said.

"Proves what?"

"Woman was made for kids."

I laughed.

"Hey," he said. "Do you wanna cup of coffee? Instant Maxwell House?"

"I'm afraid not."

"I don't mean right now. Later, sometime?"

"Well, I'm really pretty busy..."

"You are a verrrry respectable woman. I guess you don't want no coffee."

"Mostly I'm just a busy woman. My days are full."

"I guess you don't want no coffee with a ex-con, huh? With a ex-con Indian? I guess you don't want no coffee with a damn Indian."

"Joe..."

"You wouldn't wanna be with no God damn Indian,"
huh? No fuckin Blackfoot? You wouldn't fuck no Indian."

The receiver was moist in my hand. It slipped a little. I caught it and held it for a moment beneath my chin and against my chest. And I wondered for an instant if he were on the other end of the line listening. And did he hear it? Did he hear it there under the thin cloth, hardly covering? I raised the receiver to my ear. He was there. Finally, he spoke, but so softly I pressed the receiver hard against my ear to hear him.

"Ohhh," he said. "I am very sorry."

Recently I have been studying the mathematical concept of function. I have been thinking about this: if the proposition "y is a function of x" means that all the possible values of the first term are determined by all the possible values of the second, it is upon this fact rather than upon the value of x as such that y depends. In the end, therefore, the true determinant is the systematic character of the relationship that unites the two terms; and so the formula \( y = F(x) \) is seen to be a superficial rendering of the formula \( y = F(xy) \).*

I have completed six rows of the afghan. I'm getting nowhere with poetry. Purple is the color of irises...

* From *A Sacramental Universe* by Archibald Bowman
In November my mother calls. It's five o'clock, the usual time. She says the usual things.

"I thought I'd call. I haven't heard from you, and I wonder about you. I wonder how you're doing, but I don't hear."

Then I say the usual things: that I've been busy, that my health is good, and the weather is fine. I repeat the words several times.

She tells me the weather in Edmonton is cold—15 degrees below zero, and I should be thankful I live in Calgary, that Aunt Mary is in the Bethany Home now because she can't manage anymore, living by herself, and why don't I send Aunt Mary a letter, or at least a card.

Then she asks, "Say, whatever happened to that nice young Indian fellow that used to write to me? I haven't heard from him for quite awhile. He seemed like such a pleasant young man."

"He's out now," I tell her. "He's out of jail."

"Did you hear me?" she says. "I asked you what happened to that Indian. You remember--the one who wrote to me?"

"He's OUT."

"Out? You mean out of jail?"
"YES."

"Well now, isn't that nice. I'm very happy to hear that. Have you heard how he's doing? Is he working? Do you think he'll straighten out?"

I try to explain. "It's kind of hard you know. They just put you on a Greyhound Bus with a few dollars in your pocket and send you into the city—with no place to go and nothing in particular to do."

"There must be something wrong with this line again," she says. "I think it's the cold weather. I asked you about that Indian. Has he got a job? Do you think he'll straighten out?"

"I was just saying that it's hard. They put you on a Greyhound Bus with. . . ."

"Just a minute," she says. "I'll change my battery."

I sit back in the leather chair, twisting my body into a more comfortable position, wishing that I'd called her yesterday when I thought about it.

"I was asking about that Indian." Her voice is louder now. "Do you think he'll straighten out?"

"YES," I shout into the receiver.

"Well, I am happy to hear that. Isn't that just fine?"

She reminds me again that Aunt Mary is in the Bethany Home because she can't live alone any more.
And wouldn't she enjoy a letter from me, even a postcard. Then I tell her that I'll write soon, and I hang up.

I'm on the ninth row of the afghan. I had thought to have it finished by winter, January at the latest. Now it looks as if it won't be done till spring, or even summer. It lies in a purple heap in a wicker basket beside the leather chair.

Nor have I finished the poem I started then. I can't seem to get past the third line. Purple is the color of irises / of bruises / and of kings' robes./ Maybe the other lines will come later. Perhaps in the dark of a winter night a pattern will emerge, an appropriate closure. If not, does it matter? I'm a Sunday poet.

It is mathematics that will ultimately sustain me. I concur with Alfred North Whitehead, who said that mathematics is more nearly precise and comes closer to the truth. In a thousand years, he said, it may be as common a language as speech is today. At any rate, I know that I am more confident here—with the clear, inevitable patterns of mathematics—patterns to build roads and bridges by, powerful intricate patterns to hurl rockets into space, to send them even past the moon, speeding through vast black silences toward unknown planets.
Scene 1

DR. THOR'S office. The walls are tastefully decorated with charts and graphs, enlarged drawings of the skull, nasal passages, sinus membranes, etc. The drawings are beautiful and well-framed. At left are the doctor's desk and chair, a fine desk made of walnut, a comfortable leather chair. At right, a sofa is covered with a lovely piece of fabric. Near center is the patient's chair. It resembles a modern expensive dentist's chair, black trimmed with chrome. A table beside it contains shiny silver instruments and a mirror. Behind and to the side of the chair is a machine that resembles a hair dryer except that small wires extend from its rim. Off white, silver, gold, and black are the chief colors except for the covering on the sofa, which may be a deep purple. In short, the office is beautiful. It reflects the competence of DR. THOR, a brilliant scientist, but a scientist whose work serves the purpose of aesthetics. As the scene opens the stage is in complete darkness. Strains from A Minuet in G by Beethoven are heard in a distance. A spot of light rises slowly on one of the drawings of the nose, then fades. It rises on the drawing of the skull and fades. Then it lights very gradually on the nose of EDWARD WUNDERLICHT, a young man—highly cerebral, intense, self-conscious. HE is seated in the center chair. WENDY, the nurse who is like her name—airy, light, easy, and affectionate—is standing behind EDWARD,
her finger touching the side of
his nose. They are both looking
straight ahead, like the subjects
of a Victorian painting. Lights
rise.

WENDY
(SHE holds EDWARD'S head between
her two hands, feeling his cheeks,
stroking his nose. SHE stands
back to view his posture, pushes
his stomach in, straightens his
shoulders.)

Try to sit nice and straight. This won't take long
and it's not at all painful. We're going to begin by
taking a few measurements.

EDWARD
(HE sits straight and stiff,
looking straight ahead.)

Am I straight enough now, ma'am?

WENDY
(SHE adjusts his head, strokes
his septum.)

That's very good. You're nice and straight.

Thank you, ma'am.

WENDY
You may call me Wendy if you wish.

You wouldn't mind?

WENDY
Not at all. I'd prefer it.

(SHE picks up a clipboard and pen
from the table and hands them to
EDWARD.)

Would you mind writing down the numbers as I call them?

EDWARD
Yes, ma'am. I mean Wendy. I mean no, I wouldn't mind
at all. I'd be glad to.

WENDY
(SHE finds a stool and places it
behind EDWARD. SHE picks up a
First the interocular breadth. I'll have to take three measurements for this.

EDWARD
I know.

WENDY
You do?

EDWARD
Yes.

WENDY
You know about the interocular breadth?

EDWARD
Of course. It's the width between the inner canthi. And since you can't measure the distance directly because of the intrusion of the septum, you must take the three measurements to find the width.

WENDY
How right you are.

(SHE measures as she speaks.)

So, I'll measure from the left canthus to the skull, the right canthus to the skull and the distance between the two points. That comes to 2.15 centimeters.

EDWARD
(HE writes the numbers down, trying not to change the position of his head, sitting stiff and rigid.)

Two point one five centimeters. Got it.

WENDY
Now the nasal height. That's the distance between. . .

EDWARD
The nasion and the stamion.

WENDY
Right again Edward. And that... is... 58.2 millimeters.
EDWARD
(HE sighs with relief, relaxes, writes.)
Well, that's a relief. At least I'm average in that respect.

WENDY
Really?

EDWARD
Yes, indeed. The average nasal height for Caucasians is 58.2 exactly. For those of the Negroid race the average nasal height is 54.9. Which is quite interesting, I feel, since the average upper face height for Negroes is 80.4 while for Whites it's only 79.6.

WENDY
My goodness. You certainly do know a lot about noses.

EDWARD
Yes, ma'am. I've made a very thorough study of the nose. Of noses in general and my own nose in particular.

WENDY
And yet you can't smell. That's very interesting.

EDWARD
That's not precisely true. I can smell to a certain extent. I can distinguish between two very strong and different scents if the sources of those scents are close enough to my nose. I could tell the difference between a skunk and an Easter lily if they were placed right under my nostrils. I mean, I could distinguish that the former was not the latter or the latter the former, if you know what I mean.

WENDY
I suppose that's something to be thankful for. The last measurement we'll take is of the nostrils. I'll have to use a different instrument for this.

(SHE fusses about the table, picks up some long wires.)

Now, spread your nostrils apart as wide as you can.

(EDWARD opens his nostrils wide, holding his breath.)

You may breathe, since this will take a bit of time.

EDWARD
(Still holding his nostrils apart and sitting straight and stiff)
Won't breathing change the dimensions of the nostrils slightly?

WENDY

Not enough to matter really.

(SHE crouches down, looking up into his nostrils.)

Now this might cause the slightest little pain, but hardly enough to notice. I'm going to place these wires in your nostrils and measure the diameters electrically.

(SHE attaches the wires to a box on the table and stands beside it, touching the instrument panel on the box.)


(SHE removes the wires.)

EDWARD

That wasn't bad at all.

WENDY

Now, let's see what we have here.

(SHE examines the electrical device on the table.)

Hmm. This is most interesting. The left nostril is 0.8 centimeters. The right is 0.91.

EDWARD

What?

(HE gets up from the chair, rushes to the table and examines the instrument panel.)

It is, isn't it? My right nostril is larger than my left. I never knew that before.

I wonder if it's noticeable.

(HE feels each nostril with his finger.)

Yes, I do believe I can see a difference.

WENDY

I'm sure it's not significant, and will have no effect on Dr. Thor's treatment of you.

EDWARD

But I wonder if anyone else has ever noticed it. When I'm walking down the street or riding up an elevator, do you suppose there have been those who've seen it
and thought—there's a man whose nostrils don't match?

WENDY

I hardly think so.

EDWARD

Are you sure?

WENDY

I'm positive. You're being entirely too self-conscious about it.

EDWARD

But people—even normal people—are concerned with how they appear to other people, aren't they? To some extent?

WENDY

Well, yes.

EDWARD

Even to a considerable extent?

WENDY

I suppose you could say that.

EDWARD

Almost exclusively?

WENDY

Well...

EDWARD

Look. I'll walk across the floor as if I'm walking on the sidewalk downtown. You be standing there by the stoplight reading a paper. I'll pass and you take a quick look and see if you can tell.

WENDY

This is extreme.

EDWARD

Please?

WENDY

Well, if it will set your mind at ease, okay.

(SHE picks up a medical magazine from the desk.)

Here I am on the corner of Fifth and Hennepin, reading my paper.

(SHE poses, pretending she's read-
ing.)

EDWARD
And here I am walking down Hennepin.

(HE walks past WENDY. SHE looks up at him flirtatiously.)

Well, how did I look?

WENDY
You looked good to me. I mean, I noticed no abnormality whatsoever.

EDWARD
Well, that's a relief. ...I suppose my mother knew about it. It's strange no one said anything. ...Esther or Aunt Rose. I wonder if my mother noticed it right after I was born. ...when they carried me in, and she looked down at me in my blanket. ...and was so happy to have a new baby boy, but sad too because of his nostrils? I wonder if Aunt Rose felt the same way when she...

WENDY
If I may speak frankly, I believe you're exaggerating the importance of your nostrils. At least their importance to other people. If someone is walking down the street thinking of nostrils, he's thinking of his own nostrils, not yours or anyone else's. You can be sure of that. People are not interested in other people's nostrils. And that's a fact. Sad but true.

EDWARD
Dr. Thor is.

WENDY
Dr. Thor's an exception. One in a million. He cares about nostrils. He has a vision of the nose. And a dream—that one day all the peoples of the earth will smell again. He's a genius that man.

EDWARD
I know. That's why I came here.

WENDY
So stop worrying, will you? You have very nice nostrils. I like the shape of them. I like how they're situated in exactly the right place.

(SHE cocks her head, looking at them.)

They're fine nostrils. I want you to know that before we go any further.
EDWARD
Oh, you're just saying that.

WENDY
No, I really mean it.

VOICE OF DR. THOR
Wendy?

WENDY
Yes, doctor?

THOR
Is the patient ready?

WENDY
I'm sorry, doctor. We were distracted. But it will only take a minute.

THOR
One minute then. I have another patient right after lunch.

WENDY
Yes, doctor. We'll be ready. Now, let me connect you.

(WENDY situates the rim of the machine over EDWARD'S head. Wires dangle down on his skull.)

EDWARD
I feel like I'm under a hair dryer.

WENDY
You are.

EDWARD
I am?

WENDY
Kind of. This is one of Dr. Thor's inventions. He's a genius that man.

EDWARD
I know. I've heard a lot about him.

WENDY
Transformed an ordinary hair dryer into an olfaction meter.
EDWARD
Hmm. An olfaction meter.

WENDY
Now. Sit real still. Just a few more mosquito bites. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight. (SHE is taping wires from the machine to his nose and skull.)
There. I've got you hooked.

EDWARD
(Sitting very straight, trying to see the wires by moving only his eyeballs.)
Well. So Dr. Thor thought of this little gadget.

WENDY
He certainly did. He's a marvel that man. I love him.
You do?

EDWARD

WENDY
Like a father, that is.

Oh, in that way.

EDWARD

WENDY
He's so brilliant. But very kind too. He's got a heart of... of... of...

EDWARD
Gold?

WENDY
(SHE'S preparing the table, setting out the graph, plugging in the machine, preparing sheets of paper, etc.)
I was almost going to say that. But that's not it. That's not really it. Actually, he's got a heart of... Sapphire?

EDWARD

WENDY
(Laughs.)

No.
EDWARD
Ruby? Emerald? Corundum?

WENDY
You're cute, you know that? What I want to say is--he's got a heart of flesh. Does that make any sense to you?

EDWARD
Certainly. Just like Ezekial said.

WENDY
Ezekial?

EDWARD
The prophet. You've read the book of Ezekial, haven't you?

WENDY
I...don't believe I have. But the name sounds familiar.

EDWARD

WENDY
Good heavens! Have you made a study of the prophets too--as well as the nose?

EDWARD
Well, when I was in high school they put me in this enrichment program. You could do pretty much as you pleased. So I did a comparative study of the Old and New Testaments, the Koran, and the Bhagavad Gita.

WENDY
Good lord!

EDWARD
Oh, it was very interesting. Then I tested their basic tenets against Freud's theories of instinct, repression, and guilt.

WENDY
Obviously, you're a pretty brilliant man yourself.

EDWARD
I guess you could say that.
WENDY
You don't sound overly pleased.

EDWARD
Oh, I'm pleased. I mean—who wants to be stupid? It's just that...

WENDY
Would you turn your head a little--to the left. No, not that much. There. That's perfect.

EDWARD
This is all done electrically is it?

WENDY
Yes, it is.

EDWARD
Marvelous isn't it--what can be done nowadays.

WENDY
What kind of work do you do?

EDWARD
I'm a research physicist--Honeywell.

WENDY
Yes?

EDWARD
I mean, that's where I work. Honeywell.

WENDY
Oh. Sounds impressive. How old are you anyway?

EDWARD
Twenty.

WENDY
Twenty! That's something. Are you married? (SHE covers EDWARD's eyes with a blindfold.)

EDWARD
No.

WENDY
What did he say by the way?

EDWARD
Who?
Ezekial.

EDWARD

(Laughs)

Oh. I will take away their heart of stone, and give them again a heart of flesh.

DR. THOR

(HE enters like a wind out of the north. His white hair flows. His voice rolls. His body vibrates youthful enthusiasm. He is formally dressed--black suit, white shirt, white tie. HE wears a crisp white medical smock over his suit. HE carries a large tray covered with a gleaming white cloth. HE lays the tray on the table.)

Edward Wunderlicht!

EDWARD

(Anxiously)

Dr. Thor?

THOR

Good morning!

EDWARD

(Relieved)

Oh, good morning.

THOR

Wendy, my little prairie chicken, are we ready?

WENDY

(Responds to his enthusiasm with enthusiasm)

We're all set.

THOR

Very good. Set the meter at six paces.

WENDY

Right. Six paces it is.

EDWARD

Well. So you're going to start working on me. I see. I can't see actually. I don't know what's going on...
We'll begin at the beginning. With a little test of identification. I don't expect you to identify all the items of course. No one is expected to complete the test. But do the best you can.

Yes, sir. I'll try my best.

I'll begin with something rather subtle. As soon as you think you can smell it, tell me. Name it as quickly as you can. We measure the distance as well as the intensity of your response.

(He lifts up the cloth covering the tray.)

It's kind of like a quiz show, isn't it?

Right. I'll bet you've been in a lot of quiz shows, haven't you.

A few. I've always enjoyed quizzes. But this one... I'm just afraid...

Don't worry. The doctor's here to help you. So relax.

Are we ready?

Ready.

Ready. I guess.

This will do for starters.

Dr. Thor! Don't you think that's just a bit difficult?

Please. I've devoted my whole life to the study of the nose. I know its function. I know its peculiarities. I know that some nerves respond to certain ob-
jects more than others. In short, I know what I'm doing. Just handle the meter like a good girl. (HE holds the rock aloft in his hand as if it were a great jewel.)

Item one. Begin. (HE moves forward, counting paces.)
Six paces. Five. Four.

WENDY
Couldn't you lower it? I don't think it's fair holding it up like that.

THOR
You're right. I'll start over. (HE backs up, starts over.)
Six paces. Five. Four. Anything yet?

WENDY
The graph shows nothing.

EDWARD
The graph is right. I can't smell a thing.

Now?

WENDY
Nothing.

Nothing.

EDWARD
THOR
(HE holds the rock up to EDWARD'S nose.)

Now?

EDWARD
This is terrible. I can't smell a thing.

THOR
Does the graph show any response?

WENDY
I'm afraid not.

THOR
We may have to give you a zero on this one.

EDWARD
I'm sorry.
WENDY
Don't feel bad. That was the hardest item of all.
(To THOR)
I really think that was unfair.

THOR
(He brings the rock up to WENDY'S nose.)
You can smell it, can't you? You can sense it. You
can delineate its fragrances.

WENDY
Yes. But I've been with you. I've had training.

EDWARD
What was it anyway?

THOR
A rock.

EDWARD
A rock!

THOR
(Examining the rock fondly)
Yes, a grey rock, speckled with tiny flecks of rust
and purple and red and brown.

EDWARD
Can most people smell rocks?

THOR
No. Most people cannot smell rocks. In that respect
you are very average.

EDWARD
That's some relief I suppose.

THOR
But if one's olfaction organ is strong and sensitive--
as it was meant to be--then he can not only smell a
rock, but he can distinguish its various constituents
as well--by smell.

(HE holds the rock up, turning
it around, sniffing at it from
different angles.)
I personally have always enjoyed the rusty grains in
this particular rock. It has a more subtle fragrance
than the purple and deeper crimson strains. However,
we'll move on to item two.

(HE lifts up the cloth.)
Item two—compare and contrast. Are you familiar with this kind of question?

EDWARD

Oh, my yes.

THOR

I'll confront you with two different materials. I'll call them 1 and 2 respectively. As soon as you can smell either, tell me. Say the name as quickly as you can.

(HE pulls out a test tube and a bouquet of sweet peas.)

At six paces. Item one. . .item two. . .

(HE pushes each item forward as he calls the number, vigorously, like the middle strike in karate.)

Five paces. One. . .Two. . .Do you smell anything yet?

EDWARD

No. Nothing at all.

THOR

Three paces. One. Two. Now?

Not yet either.

EDWARD

One pace. One. Two.

Stop. I do smell something. Number 2 is not the same at number 1. I can tell.

WENDY

The meter's moving, doctor. It really is.

THOR

The score?

WENDY

1.2 for number 2. 1.3 in fact.

And for item 1?

THOR

Nothing yet.
EDWARD
Oh, but I do smell something. It's not the same as number 2. It's different in some way.

THOR
In what way?

EDWARD
It's... it's...

WENDY
Think. Think of the way it's different.

THOR
Say the name of it.

WENDY
What is it? Come on, tell us.

Moss?

THOR
Not bad.

WENDY
You're close. It's part of nature.

THOR
Item 1 is sweet peas.

EDWARD
And number 2?

THOR
What did you think it was?

Tomatoes?

THOR
No. Ammonia.

EDWARD
I wasn't too close on that one.

WENDY
Don't feel bad. The meter did prove that your nose is... well... not dead.
THOR
Right. And where there's life there's hope. Let's try another.

(THOR lifts out a clod of earth.)

WENDY
(To THOR)
If he couldn't get ammonia, how will he get that?

THOR
Please don't interfere. I've already made one discovery. His olfaction nerves are more attuned to this than to the other.

(To EDWARD)
Can you smell this?

EDWARD
No.

THOR
Now?

EDWARD
No.

THOR
(Going back to the table, removing a stalk of wheat from the tray)
Can you smell this?

EDWARD
No.

THOR
Nothing?

EDWARD
Oh! There is something. I do sense... I can smell... But maybe it was my imagination. It must have been my imagination.

THOR
You imagined something?

EDWARD
Yes, but... 

WENDY
What was it? Maybe you did respond.
EDWARD
No. I just... for a moment, I thought... but it was nothing.

WENDY
Tell us.

THOR
It would help us.

EDWARD
No. It's impossible. It's ridiculous. I'm not saying it. It's stupid.

(EDWARD is forlorn. THOR and WENDY come to his side comfortably.)

THOR
Let's have a break, shall we? We'll skip the rest. I think our sampling is sufficient.

(HE removes the cloth from the tray, observing the goblet of wine and carafe of soup.)

Hmm. Yes. We'll break for lunch in fact. We'll see if he can smell any better when he can see and taste the objects as well. How does that sound?

WENDY
A splendid idea.

THOR
Remove the blindfold. Disconnect him.

(THOR fondles the goblet, sniffs the soup.)


EDWARD
What were those last objects anyway?

(HE walks over to the desk, examining the tray.)

This? This? Is this what they were?

THOR
Right.

EDWARD
Dirt?

THOR
Dirt, soil, loam. Earth, in short. Have you never smelled the earth, Edward Wunderlicht?
EDWARD
(Trying to smell the lump of soil)
I don't believe so. No. I can't smell anything.

THOR
Not even on a spring day after a rain, when the sun's rays pierce the storm scud, and the leaves glisten and the rocks shine in their wetness? Not even in a moment such as this have you sensed the sweet and holy fragrance of the earth?

EDWARD
No.
(HE picks up the stalk of wheat.)
This?

THOR
Yes.

EDWARD
I thought... I imagined...

THOR
What?

EDWARD
Nothing. It was silly.

WENDY
Let's eat. Soup's on.

THOR
Ah, very good. Please sit down, Edward. In a more comfortable chair. And we'll rest for a few minutes. Reax a bit. There. That's better. Well, little goldfinch, be a gracious hostess and give this despondent man a bowl of soup and a glass of wine. Let us see that face of woe brighten like a star.

(To EDWARD)
You think the world has ended, don't you—because you can't smell.

EDWARD
Not ended exactly. But I hate not being able to do what other people can do. I mean--it makes you feel a little dumb sometimes.

WENDY
(Ladles soup into EDWARD'S bowl.)
Here, let me fill your bowl.

111
THOR
And that's terrible? To feel a little dumb sometimes?

EDWARD
I think so. And besides if I can't smell I won't get the contract.

WENDY
(To THOR)
The usual amount?

THOR
Yes, thanks. You've been offered a contract of some kind?

EDWARD
With the Federal Government. In Washington. Twice the salary. But more important than that, an opportunity for research into light energy. The greatest opportunity imaginable. But I have to be in perfect health. And my senses have to be in order.

WENDY
(To THOR)
Some wine?

THOR
Thank you. We can help you smell again. . . if you're willing to risk it.

EDWARD
Risk?

THOR
Yes. The procedure for sensitizing the olfaction nerves is difficult. And for some. . . very humiliating.

Oh, no!

EDWARD
None for you?

WENDY

EDWARD
Oh, no. I mean yes. I'd like some. I mean. . . did you say humiliating?

THOR
(Slurping his soup)
Ah, what soup. My Martha cooks the best soup this side of China.
WENDY
(Who by now has dished out some for herself)
It certainly is delicious.

EDWARD
(Thoughtfully, making a bit of a discovery)
The vegetables do feel good in my mouth. I believe the potatoes are cooked to just the right texture.

THOR
Good for you, Edward. You are making progress.

EDWARD
What do you mean, progress? I can't smell it. I can't even taste it actually.

THOR
Nevertheless, you are coming along just fine.
(Talking to the soup)
Oh, you little shreds of cabbage you. And lovely translucent bits of onion. . . Perfect. Absolutely perfect.

WENDY
(Smelling and sipping)
The seasoning is unusual—richer than most soup, but not overpowering. I wonder how Martha does that.

THOR
Simple. One bay leaf. One clove. Salt, sugar, fresh pepper.

EDWARD
Monosodium glutamate?

THOR
None at all. No need when you have rich beef stock, plump ripe vegetables. Isn't this something? When you get old and your passions are no longer in a rage, tearing your insides out, then it becomes important to know the joys of soup well made. That's my Martha. What a dear.

WENDY
She certainly is. (Raising her glass)
To Martha.
THOR
(Raising his glass)

Martha.

EDWARD
(After a bit of confused hesitation)

Martha.

THOR
Yes, it would be very humiliating. Humiliating, that's true. So if you can't bear to be odd in any way whatsoever, then. . .

WENDY
But do you really think it's not being able to smell that makes you feel odd? Don't you think it might be something else?

EDWARD
Well, actually, when I come to think of it. . .I guess it's not that. No. It's not that exactly. I don't think most people care one way or another if you can't smell. It's something you don't even notice in another person, do you? Not even if you're standing close.

WENDY
Why do you feel odd then? I don't understand.

EDWARD
Maybe it's just that. . .I don't know. . .It's hard to say.

THOR
Round and around and around you go. I get dizzy trying to follow you. Try to speak directly. You're in the office of a physician. We're here to cure you, not cripple you.

EDWARD
I have the highest IQ of anyone who has ever come out of MIT. That. Sometimes that does make me feel, well, out of place.

THOR
Hmmm.

WENDY
I see.
EDWARD
And yet...I can't help it. That I know so much I mean, I just can't turn it off--my intelligence that is--like a light switch or something.

THOR
No, you can't do that.

WENDY
Certainly not.

EDWARD
Like even that--light! I get very excited about things like light. Its remarkable velocity. 186,000 miles per second. Per second! Just think of that. Have you ever timed that?

WENDY
No.

EDWARD
Well, try it. Look at your watch. Time it. Okay. The light hasn't started out yet. It's 186,000 miles! Now, it hasn't started, it hasn't started, it hasn't started. It started! It's here! What do you think of that? And all that radiant energy besides. Lumens upon lumens of radiant energy.

THOR
Remarkable.

EDWARD
And the most important things about it are quite different from what is most familiar. For example, the most familiar thing about light is that it goes in straight lines, and hardly any ordinary experiences disagree. But, light also bends sometimes! Examples of this phenomenon are the iridescent colours that appear on soap bubbles and on the surface of greasy water. And the coloured patterns when a bright light is observed through a fine mesh screen.

WENDY
Why, that's lovely.

Beautifful.

THOR

You think so?
Don't you?

Well, yes. But it always seemed as if other people... well, thought it kind of queer when I spoke of that. Or things like that. So sometimes I'd try to hide my thoughts. I'd pretend I didn't know so much. So I wouldn't be boring to them. Do you understand? But it gets kind of lonesome doing that all the time. Either way, in fact, it gets kind of lonesome.

I'm sure it does.

So. Sometimes you try to camouflage your brain, do you? Dwarf it?

Yes, I guess you could say that.

Take off your shoes. I want to tell you a story.

My shoes!

And socks. You too, Wendy. Take off your shoes and stockings.

Good heavens!

Quickly. Just throw them off. I'll get the bandages. (WENDY and EDWARD remove their shoes and socks while THOR rushes about for the bandages.)

Bind his feet. As tight as you can. So the toes ache. Now. Give me your feet. I'll bind yours. (HE holds up WENDY'S foot) You have lovely feet. Did you know that?

Why thank you. (She holds up EDWARD'S foot) Your feet are very nice too.
They are?

Certainly.

Keep binding. As tight as you can. Use up all the bandages if you must. I'll get some more. Keep wrapping. Keep wrapping.

But it's my nose, not my feet! I've never had a day of trouble with my feet. My feet haven't caused me an ounce of pain. I've never even had a corn.

I remember an awful pain in my foot once. Someone stepped on it. At a party. He weighed over 200 pounds. And was he stomping! I had little satin things on. It was dreadful.

I can't ever recall anyone stepping on my feet.

Are you ready?

Just a few more wrappings.

Keep wrapping. I'll begin. Once upon a time long long ago in China there lived a wise old man. A man of strong feelings, deep insights. A man far ahead of his time, far far ahead. I'll take that part. Now this wise man had two daughters—twins they were—the loveliest girls in Hankow: Mei Ling and Tsu Fong. Those are your parts. Who'll be Mei Ling?

Me!

Then you're Tsu Fong.

A daughter! Aren't there any sons?
THOR
No sons. They always wanted sons, but never had any.

WENDY
Don't get excited. It's only a story.

EDWARD
Well, all right.

THOR
Good. Now Mei Ling and Tsu Fong were, as I said, the finest maidens in all of Peiping.

Hankow.

THOR
Right. In fact, they were the sweetest little darlings south of Manchuria. Dazzling black hair, slender little necks and wrists, lovely fine-curved breasts.

Oh, no.

THOR
And such sweet noses you ever did see. Little flat septums dividing the eyes into delicate shapes, shapes like. . .like. . .like. . .

WENDY
Almonds?

THOR

EDWARD
Did each nostril have the same dimensions?

THOR
Exactly. They were perfectly symmetrical. Masterpieces!

Oh, no.
WENDY
It's all right. Your nostrils are fine. Don't interrupt.

THOR
Now, when the girls were four years old, they were taken to the chief midwife in Hankow to have their feet bound, according to the custom in that province.

WENDY
(Observing her feet)
I see.

EDWARD
Hupeh.

WENDY
What?

EDWARD
That's the province.

THOR
First it was Mei Ling's turn. The midwife looked at her tiny feet and said, "What dainty feet you have. And we'll keep them that way. The richest men in Hankow will want you for your tiny feet. Then it was Tsu Fong's turn. But Tsu Fong cried, "Why? Why? Why must my feet be bound?" And the midwife said, "So you can't use them of course. How vulgar for ladies to use their feet. You want them small and crippled so men will love you. So they can put your whole foot in their mouth when they make love to you." And Tsu Fong's feet were bandaged too.

WENDY
How cruel and sad.

EDWARD
It was indeed.

THOR
May I finish?

EDWARD
Please do. I've made a thorough study of this ancient custom and I find it most interesting.

THOR
So they hobbled about on tiny feet with twisted toes. But mostly they just sat.
And one day when they were sitting on the grass, they chanced to watch a game of tag across the road. Mr. Chan's sons were playing tag. They were laughing and leaping over the japonica bushes. And Tsu Fong watched them. Then she said beneath her breath, but vigorously with all her heart: "I want to jump the japonica."

WENDY

Good for her!

THOR

And she turned to her sister and said, "Don't you? Don't you? Come on, let's do it. And they rose up immediately to play. Then do you know what happened?

WENDY

No. What?

THOR

Find out. You're Mei Ling. See what happens.

WENDY

A splendid idea. I'm Mei Ling.

EDWARD

I'll be it.

WENDY

Ohh. My foot's asleep.

EDWARD

Get ready. I'm coming.

WENDY

(Tries to move, stumbles about)

Oh, Lord, I can't move.

EDWARD

There. I tagged you.

WENDY

You're going to get it.

EDWARD

I am?

WENDY

(Runs clumsily)

You are.
EDWARD

We'll see.

WENDY

(Stumbles and falls awkwardly.)

This is absolutely ridiculous. I refuse to take another step.

EDWARD

I won, didn't I? IwonIwonIwon.

WENDY

You and your big feet.

THOR

Well, do you want to hear the end or not?

EDWARD

Of course.

THOR

Unknown to the two girls, their father was watching them from a pagoda nearby. And when he saw what they were doing, when he saw them leaping over the japonica bushes, he hit his head with his hand and said, "Why didn't I think of that? Why haven't I ever thought of that?" And he did a most remarkable thing.

WENDY

What?

THOR

He rushed out on the grass and he unwound the bandages. Every single one of them.

(HE begins unwinding the bandages.)

And then do you know what happened?

EDWARD

No. Tell us.

THOR

People started talking. Whispering behind their fans. Who do the Wong girls think they are anyway, they thought, without bandages like that. The children made fun of them--called them Big Foot. Until Mei Ling just couldn't take it any longer. And she cried to have her feet bound once more.

EDWARD

And Tsu Fong?
THOR
She refused the bandages. She wanted her feet to be free.

WENDY
How did people treat her then?

THOR
They were afraid. They gossiped. They kept their distance.

EDWARD
How did Tsu Fong feel?

THOR
How would you feel?

EDWARD
Terrible.

THOR
That's how Tsu Fong felt. But she didn't give up. That's the point. She faced the criticism, suffered the pangs, braved the scorn. And when she grew up, she took giant-sized steps—like no other.

EDWARD
That's marvelous!

THOR
And marvelous is what we're talking about. We are talking about marvels, Edward Wunderlicht. But as you know, marvels occur when one takes chances, risks. Giant-sized risks. Do you understand that?

EDWARD
I most certainly do.

THOR
Then stop that nonsense about your IQ. Stop hiding your light under a bushel. Who do you want to be, anyway? Mei Ling or Tsu Fong?

EDWARD
I want to be Tsu Fong!

THOR
Well, then, what are we waiting for? Let's begin immediately.
EDWARD
Right. Let's get started.

THOR
Wendy, take him to the lab for a fitting.

WENDY
Yes, sir! This way for your fitting. Isn't it exciting?

EDWARD
For my fitting. Great. Let's go!

WENDY
Oh, you forgot your shoes.

EDWARD
I was so excited I forgot. Just think. Today—the greatest experiment of my life.
(HE shoves his feet into the shoes.)

There. I'm ready.

WENDY
Come with me then—for the fitting.

EDWARD
Excellent. Let's get on with it. I'm dizzy at the very thought of it. What is a fitting?

WENDY
You're marvelous. Really you are.

THOR
Youth. Youth.
(HE goes to the phone. Dials.)
Hello, sugar lump. What are you up to?...Martha! Shame on you. What's on for supper?...Sounds exquisite. The soup by the way was delicious. Perfect. Almost perfect. Just a bit too much potato. Otherwise perfect. Say, I'll be late tonight. I have a patient taking longer than usual. A most extraordinary fellow. Knows everything there is to know about the nose, including its dimensions. But he can't smell. Can't even smell a rock. What do you think of that?...That's right. Say, bring those pumpkins in, would you? The sun's bright now, but I smell a storm brewing...Okay, that's good. See you later, alligator. Remain chaste.
(HE hangs up the receiver.)
THOR
(Continued)
Oh you chaste Martha...Never has a woman been so frequently chased.

(HE goes to one of the portraits of the nose, stands in front of it in a dignified manner, hums the theme from Beethoven’s Minuet in G, conducting in the air with his arms as he does so.)

(Enter WENDY and EDWARD. EDWARD is wearing a strange looking instrument on his nose, a smelling aide, a grotesque contraption fitted to his nose. HE is deeply humiliated, close to tears. WENDY is being solicitous. We can see that SHE has been trying to encourage him, with no success.)

WENDY
But wait till it’s turned on. When Doctor Thor turns it on, you’ll smell! Think of that!

EDWARD
Ohhhhhhh.

WENDY
And it’s not forever. Not at all. Only a few weeks. Then you’ll be cured. Just think!

EDWARD
A few weeks!

THOR
Right. Three weeks if you keep the instrument on at all times. But if you keep it on for only eight or ten hours a day, it will probably take six to eight weeks.

EDWARD
You mean to work? Down town? To the theater and concerts? Shopping?

THOR
That’s what I mean all right. Unless you choose to become a hermit.

EDWARD
Ohhhh, nooooo.
WENDY
I didn't think so. Who wants to be a hermit?

EDWARD
Ohhh. This is terrible. . .terrible!

WENDY
No, it's not.

EDWARD
Yes, it is. It's just terrible.

THOR
Once there was a man who wore the first pair of spec­tacles ever invented. Once there was a man who wore the first hearing aid invented. Don't you want to be among the world's firsts?

WENDY
But not only that. It works. It's a remarkable in­vention, one of Dr. Thor's greatest.

EDWARD
(Grabs the mirror and looks at himself.)
It's dreadful. I didn't realize what you meant. I didn't know. . .

THOR
Remove it.

WENDY
What? He's just been fitted.

THOR
You heard me. Remove it.

WENDY
But. . .

THOR
He can't take it.

WENDY
But he hasn't even started yet. He hasn't even had a chance to smell one thing yet.

EDWARD
That's right. Not one single thing.
THOR
Take it off. I see my error. A man of his temperament couldn't possibly endure it.

EDWARD
What do you mean?

THOR
You heard me. Remove it.

EDWARD
Listen here. What did I come for anyway? Why am I here? Why did I have my septum examined, my nostrils measured? Why was I wired up in that chair—and blindfolded? Why the story about Chinese feet? Why! Do you want to know why? Because I want to smell, that's why. So let's get on with the business. Let's get on with the therapy. Let's turn this thing on and see what happens.

THOR
Ah. Very good. Please be seated. I'll adjust the instrument.

EDWARD
So—it's this chair again. It's beginning to feel like home.

THOR
Now listen to me carefully. I'm adjusting the aid so most of your olfaction nerves are completely deadened.

EDWARD
Deadened!

THOR
Only temporarily. At the same time, I'm magnifying the sensitivity of the remaining nerves so they grow strong. Then, as therapy progresses, I will temporarily deaden the strengthened nerves and gradually revitalize the deadened ones. Do you understand that much?

EDWARD
I think so. But will it work?

THOR
At first the sensations may be a bit lopsided, but at the end of therapy, I'll revitalize all the deadened nerves at once. And when I remove the instrument your smelling will be perfectly normal.
EDWARD
Wonderful! I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am.

THOR
(Adjusting EDWARD'S head)
Just slant your nose a bit. Up. Up. Stop. That's fine. This is the last adjustment.

WENDY
You don't have to tell Dr. Thor. All you have to do is go out of here smelling and he'll be more than happy.

THOR

EDWARD
Oh, I hardly know where to start.

THOR
(Gestures with his hand, the hand passing close to EDWARD'S smelling instrument.)
Start anywhere.

EDWARD
(His smelling instrument has been following the gesturing hand of THOR.)
Your hand! I can smell it! It smells like...For crying out loud, so that's how hands smell.

THOR
(Smelling his own hands)
Not all hands smell the same.
(Smelling EDWARD'S hands, EDWARD smelling his own hands, then THOR'S hands again.)
It sometimes depends on what you've been doing, or what brand of soap you use.

EDWARD
(Now sniffing THOR'S sleeve.)
I never knew! I never knew before that sleeves smelled like this.

THOR
(Sniffing his sleeve)
Like what?
EDWARD
So clean and nice. So very nice.

THOR
That's Martha for you.

EDWARD
(The instrument is touching THOR's hair.)

Your hair! So different from your hands.

THOR
(Getting embarrassed, backs away, points to tray.)

Why don't you try the objects on that tray?

EDWARD
(Of course.)

(Rushes to tray.)

I had no idea! I didn't know!

(Have you ever smelled anything like this before in your whole life?)

WENDY
(She sniffs at the flowers and then separates them into their colors.)

The purple ones are deeper, stronger than the pink and white. Did you notice that?

EDWARD
(Well, they are, aren't they? They certainly are. . . I have no words for this.)

THOR
(Try the rest of the objects.)

EDWARD
(Picks up the rock. Sniffs at it from different angles.)

I still can't seem to get at this one.

THOR
Don't worry. You're using only a small portion of your smelling organism. When we're done with you,
you'll smell everything. Including rocks.

EDWARD
(Puts the rock down, walks toward THOR with outstretched arms.)
I really can't begin to tell you how much... (HE stops abruptly, sniffs the air.)
What's that peculiar smell anyway? (THOR backs away. EDWARD follows, sniffing like a puppy.)
It seems to be coming from you! Isn't this interesting! Such a different smell. So utterly different from sweet peas.

THOR
(Moves away briskly and says in an aside.)
Martha, I told you not so much potato. But you never listen, do you?

WENDY
(Aside)
The potatoes again.

THOR
(HE swings EDWARD away from him, so EDWARD is now close to WENDY.)
Here. Try something else. (EDWARD sniffs ever so slightly toward WENDY. Then slowly, as if pulled by invisible wires, he moves toward her, sniffing. A ray of light seems to enter into him. HE looks at her in a kind of wonder.)

EDWARD
Ohhh. So... So... Like something I knew before... Long ago... Like...
(HE picks up the stalk of wheat. Sniffs at it. Looks at WENDY.)

WENDY
Like wheat? Wheat?

I can't explain it. Something from before. Long ago.
Sunny... soft...
THOR
Well! This is most interesting. You have a memory of smell. That means an even greater chance of success. We must find out more about this in our next meeting. There's no doubt at all now—you will smell again. Completely.

EDWARD
Oh, it's too much at one time. My head's in a whirl. I can't begin to tell you...

THOR
No need. No need. What you must do now is to go out into the world and smell. Go into the streets and byways, yards and gardens, and breathe. Breathe deeply, Edward Wunderlicht, of all that surrounds you. The smoke from burning autumn leaves. Leaves themselves—geraniums and late-blooming zinnia. And smell the grass as well, beneath the elm trees. And moss that's hidden under rocks. Go inside the houses too. Breathe the insides of houses. Smell the rooms in houses. The kitchens—ginger root and cloves and coffee beans and chocolate. Delineate each fragrance. And one day soon, sooner than you think, you'll be EDWARD WUNDERLICHT—a man who can smell!

(EWARD backs to the door, bowing, nodding, agreeing.)

WENDY
Good-bye, Edward.

EDWARD
Good-bye.

THOR
Remember. Dare to smell!
Scene 2

DR. THOR'S office a few weeks later. The office looks the same except for the light, which is now a golden amber. When the scene opens, WENDY is standing at the far right, gazing out the window at the falling snow. DR. THOR is standing at the opposite end of the room, staring at a large drawing of the nose or some section of it, that hangs on the wall. Their backs are toward each other.

WENDY
This is some storm.

THOR
It's still snowing?

WENDY
Worse than ever. The flakes are as big as cotton balls. And the wind is coming up. It'll be nasty for you, driving home.

THOR
(Joins WENDY at the window)
It's beautiful though.

WENDY
From a distance. But I'd hate to have to drive in it. Luckily I take the bus. Is Edward's the only appointment we have left?

THOR
Yes. Ever since I can remember, the first snowfall has thrilled me. I remember when I was just a tyke—when the first snow came I'd climb the ladder into the attic and rummage about in the trunk for my mitts and leggings. I'd be out with my sled before you could say Jack Robinson. Hmmm. If I were home now, Martha would make me a cup of steaming hot chocolate. She always does when it snows. I don't know when or where that custom started, but it's carried on every winter. For thirty years now.

WENDY
When I was little I used to think Christmas was coming the very next day. I'd get out the song books and ask
Mother if we could go Christmas shopping right that very minute. . . So, Martha makes you a cup of hot steaming chocolate when it snows.

THOR
Right. For thirty years now.

WENDY
I'll bet you'd like to be home right now--to have some.

THOR
That would be nice. Of course, we could have some here. We've got some chocolate left haven't we?

WENDY
Yes, but it wouldn't be the same, would it. Martha is the one who's made it for you--all these years.

THOR
That's true.

WENDY
We have only the one appointment left. Is that right?

THOR
Yes. Only Edward's. I was going to prepare him for the big day coming up tomorrow. Coming up sooner than I expected. He's made remarkable progress. An exceptional young man.

WENDY
Yes. So determined and enthusiastic.

THOR
I suppose you'll miss him, won't you?

WENDY
Oh, a little. Not especially. Look. Over there. Must be a foot of snow on that car. I'd sure hate to be driving in this thick traffic.

THOR
Yes, that's smart of you. I guess I should start taking the bus one of these days.

WENDY
You really should. I just settle back, read the paper, and leave the driving to them. Even in the worst storms I feel safe.

(Looks out window)

Look at that tangle of cars would you. And it's bound
to get worse. Can you imagine what it will be like by 5?

THOR
I hate to think of it.

WENDY
If I were driving I'd be asking you if I could leave early—that's certain. I wouldn't want to take three hours getting home. I'd be a nervous wreck.

THOR
And I wouldn't want you to. I'd be sending you on your way right now.

WENDY
Lucky I take the bus though. No problem. Only Edward's appointment left. Right?

THOR
Yes, I just want to tell him what to expect tomorrow.

WENDY
I know. I did that for Mrs. Carrie and Wilbur Small. Remember? It's actually not very complicated.

THOR
That's true.

WENDY
I could even handle it myself.

THOR
Yes, you could. . . Listen, I just thought of something—you could prepare Edward for tomorrow's session and I could leave early to miss some of that traffic.

WENDY
That's fine by me. No problem at all.

THOR
(Going to coat rack)
Right. I'll get started then. Before the rush hour.

WENDY
I think that's a wise idea. . . And Martha can make you a cup of steaming hot chocolate—like she's done for thirty years now.

THOR
Thanks. You're a sweetie. Don't stay late though.
THOR
(Continued)
That snow looks as if it's going to hang on for awhile.

WENDY
Don't worry. I won't.

THOR
(Leaving)
Adios.

WENDY
Bye.

(SHE watches THOR leave, then turns around and looks over the room. SHE tidies things on the table and desk, pushes the center chair back a bit, straightens the covering on the sofa. SHE goes to the window and looks out again, then returns to the desk and sits, waiting. SHE gets up, goes to the small table where the mirror is, examines herself in the mirror—her hair, her teeth, her eyes. SHE scrabes at the inner canthi of her eyes with her finger. SHE returns to the desk and sits. SHE finds lotion in the desk drawer, smooths it over her hands and arms, paying particular attention to her elbows. SHE gets up and goes to the window again, looks out, then turns abruptly to the desk. SHE gets out two cups and packets of chocolate, checks the electric teapot for water, then sits, waiting. At the sound of the door knob she is seated precisely in her chair, waiting. EDWARD enters, bundled in a heavy coat, cap, scarf. HE's all snowy. HE closes the door and faces WENDY.)

EDWARD
Hello.

WENDY
Hello. (Pause) It's still snowing I see.
EDWARD
Yes, it's really coming down.
(HE begins unwinding scarf, etc.)

WENDY
(Get up, goes to EDWARD.)
Here, let me help you with that. You're all snowy, aren't you?

EDWARD
Yes, it's coming down---thick and heavy.
(SHE watches EDWARD unbutton his coat and takes it from him, hanging it on the rack.)

EDWARD
So. Is Dr. Thor all set for his pep talk?

WENDY
He's not here.

EDWARD
Oh?

WENDY
He went home early... because of the snow. I give the pep talk today.

EDWARD
That sounds pleasant.

WENDY
Won't you sit down?
(EDWARD goes to the center chair.)
Wouldn't you prefer something more comfortable?

EDWARD
Thanks. Yes. I would.
(HE sits on the sofa.)

WENDY
(Oberves sofa for a moment, then turns around and takes the desk chair at the opposite end of the room.)

Was driving difficult?

EDWARD
A bit slippery. Visibility was low. But not too bad.
(THEY look at each other silently for a moment.)
WENDY
Would you care for some hot chocolate before we begin?

EDWARD
Chocolate?

WENDY
On snowy days like this I find it pleasant—drinking hot steaming chocolate. I always like to do that when it snows.

EDWARD
I'd like that. Thanks. Well, Thursday's the big day. It will soon be over.

WENDY
(Plugs the water in, sprinkles chocolate into the cups.)
Yes. So soon. Dr. Thor thinks you've been great. The best patient he's had.

EDWARD
He's the one who's been great. And you too. I'd never have gotten this far without you. Remember my first day out in the street with this thing on?

WENDY
Yah. Pretty bad wasn't it.

EDWARD
Bad's not the word for it.

WENDY
(After a pause, SHE begins to giggle quietly.)
Ha. Ha.

EDWARD
What's so funny?

WENDY
I was just thinking of that day. You going up the escalator at Daytons, and the woman with the flowers turning around and staring at you until she tripped on the escalator and fell down a dozen stairs.

EDWARD
Only three.

WENDY
Well, three then. But it was funny.
EDWARD
If you think that was funny, you should have seen her face when I helped her up.

WENDY
What did it look like?

EDWARD
First scared to death. And then very proper as if nothing was out of the ordinary. Her lips pursed and her head high, very dignified.

WENDY
And the taxi driver who refused to give you a ride.

EDWARD
Yah. "No practical jokers in my cab!" I felt so terrible I wore a scarf over my nose for three days.

WENDY
But when you stopped hiding it like that, wow, you were terrific. Just facing up to all those staring people--and then bowing like that. That was beautiful. Cyrano de Bergerac all over again.

(Examines teapot, begins pouring water into cups.)

What are your plans after Thursday?

EDWARD
Very exciting.

WENDY
(Brings him the chocolate. Observes the sofa again, but chooses the chair in the center of the room instead.)

Tell me.

EDWARD
They're setting the lab up in Washington right now. My very own lab. With four research assistants, two secretaries. . .It's hard to believe. It's a dream come true.

WENDY
Yes, I suppose it is.

EDWARD
Then to get this thing taken off. That'll be something. I won't miss these straps. That's for sure. I'm rashy.
WENDY

Rashy!

EDWARD

Under the straps. It's all red and itchy.

WENDY

(Goes to EDWARD, examines straps.)

Oh, I'm sorry. I should have checked this more carefully. Here, let me fix it.

(Goes to cupboard for lotion.)

EDWARD

It's only for one more day. I guess I can stand it that long.

WENDY

No, I insist. Here. (SHE sits on the sofa, next to EDWARD.)

Turn your head. No. Up. More. There. I'll just dab a bit of oil underneath so the straps won't chafe. (SHE fiddles with the oil, sitting closer to EDWARD.)

It'll only take a minute.

EDWARD

That feels better already. (HE turns toward her. Looks at her. Leans toward her. The instrument is poised near her face.)

You've changed soap.

WENDY

I have?

EDWARD

It's nice.

WENDY

Thanks.

EDWARD

Nicer than Monday's.

WENDY

Oh?

EDWARD

But not as nice as Friday's.
Is that so?

WENDY

EDWARD

(After a pause)

I'm going to miss coming here. . . I guess I'm going to miss you.

(HE looks down at her hand resting on her lap.)

WENDY

Well, I'll miss you too, I guess.

EDWARD

Yes, I'll miss you all right. I've become quite fond of. . . this hand. Your left hand that is.

(HE has picked up her hand and is examining it.)

WENDY

You have?

EDWARD

Yes. You have nice knuckles.

Really?

WENDY

Hmm. Hmm.

WENDY

(Touching his hand)

Yours are kind of thick.

EDWARD

(Examining his hand)

Do you think so? I can't see that. They look like most other knuckles to me.

Not to me.

EDWARD

Thick huh?

WENDY

And knobby.

EDWARD

Well, yours are kind of knobby too, come to think of it.
WENDY  
I thought you liked them.

EDWARD  
Oh, they're all right. But they are knobby. And all wrinkled. And as hard as walnuts.  
(HE nibbles at her knuckle.)

WENDY  
Oh, come on. They're not that hard.

EDWARD  
Yes they are.  
(Nibbles another)
But they taste very nice.

WENDY  
Like walnuts?

EDWARD  
No. More like pecans.

WENDY  
(Biting his knuckle)
Yours aren't very soft either.

EDWARD  
They're not?

WENDY  
No. Hard.

EDWARD  
Not as hard as this one.  
(HE bites her knuckle more vigorously.)

WENDY  
(Slaps his arm)
Ouch! Stop that.

EDWARD  
Watch out. You're jibbling my instrument.

WENDY  
I'll jiggle it all right. I'll knock it right off.

EDWARD  
(Grabs her, pins her)
You'll do nothing of the kind. I'll stab you first—with Dr. Thor's marvelous invention.
(HE bunts at her with his instrument. They struggle. They begin to melt. He tries to get at her, to kiss her on the mouth, but can't because of the instrument. WENDY laughs. EDWARD gets up, furious.)

EDWARD
Damn Dr. Thor and his marvelous invention... God damn all marvelous scientific inventions!
(HE looks at himself in the mirror.)
For seven weeks now you've been looking at me with this thing on my nose. How could you stand it? Because you're trained? You're trained to endure the grotesque? You're an RN? A super registered RN specialist, who can stand anything? That's why you can look at me without... without...

WENDY
It's only for one more day.

EDWARD
It's been four weeks!

WENDY
Come here. Turn around. Please?... You must have a very low opinion of me.

EDWARD
How can you say such a stupid thing as that?

WENDY
You think all I can see is that device on your nose. You think I can't see past that instrument. I have a very dwarfed vision is what you think.
(EDWARD is pacing.)
Stop pacing. Come here. Sit down. By me.
(EDWARD sits.)
I'm wheat, remember? I'm good for you. Wholesome. Your cream of wheat.

EDWARD
Stop that, will you? I'm sorry I ever told you.

WENDY
I'm not. I think it's very interesting. But it wasn't your mother. That part doesn't make sense.

EDWARD
It was my mother. I know.
WENDY
I can see that it might have been some woman. But not your mother. Maybe one of the women who took care of you. Your Aunt Esther. Or Rose.

EDWARD
It wasn't Aunt Esther or Rose. It was my mother. She was the only one who fed me from... who nursed me.

WENDY
So. You were four months old when she died and you remember her skin. You remember the smell of it. It's just a bit hard to swallow. Just a tiny wee bit.

EDWARD
Salvador Dali remembers being inside his mother's womb. He can remember exactly how it felt.

WENDY
Well, he's Italian. You're not.

EDWARD
What's Italian got to do with it?

WENDY
You know those Italians. They're obsessed with stomachs and breasts. All those painters and their breasts. Did you know that the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel has bellies and breasts painted all over it? I saw it myself last summer. Breasts and bellies rolling on and on through the heavens. On and on into eternity... On and on and on.

EDWARD
Salvador Dali is Spanish—not Italian. He was born in Spain—in 1904 to be exact.

WENDY
All right. Spanish then. Facts, facts, facts, facts. Make sure you get them all straight in your very precise and most scientific head.

EDWARD
I'll try.

WENDY
Even so, I'll bet Salvador Dali doesn't think his mother's womb smelled like wheat.

EDWARD
I'm not talking about the womb! I'm talking about skin.

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EDWARD
(Continued)
Skin. Outside skin. Her stomach and breasts. Not her womb.

WENDY
All right. Have it your way.

EDWARD
Why are you making such an issue of it anyway? What's wrong with having skin like wheat. Wheat's beautiful. Even Solomon thought so. And Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived. Did you know that?

No.

EDWARD
Well, he was. And a writer too. He wrote some very nice poetry. "Thy navel is like a round goblet which wanteth not liquor; thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies."

WENDY
Solomon said that?

EDWARD
He did.

WENDY
Where?

EDWARD
In the Song of Solomon. Don't you read anything at all?

WENDY
Say it again.

EDWARD
"Thy navel is like a round goblet which wanteth not liquor; thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies."

WENDY
You win. You and Solomon win. You and Solomon and Ezekial and all the prophets and all the saints of all ages—you all win. .. My navel smells like dry white Chablis. Or is it sparkling red burgundy?
EDWARD
I don't know...yet.

WENDY
Oh, for heaven's sake. I'm supposed to be telling you what to expect tomorrow. And I'm supposed to make it quick on account of the snow. Or we'll be here all night. Tomorrow the instrument comes off. Tomorrow you'll smell. You'll smell everything. Tomorrow it will be over, all over. And you can go to Washington to your four lab assistants and two secretaries. To your sweet little Washington D.C. secretaries. It's going to be a great day, isn't it, tomorrow?
Scene 3

DR. THOR'S office the following day. DR. THOR is pacing nervously around the room. WENDY is sitting at the desk writing.

WENDY

Why don't you try to relax?

THOR

Why isn't he here? He's ten minutes late. Twelve minutes in fact. He's always been on time before. What's happened?

WENDY

Any number of things could have happened. The roads are still bad. It's cold out. Maybe he had trouble getting his car started. It's such an old piece of junk.

THOR

Everything's ready. He should be here... So, he drives an old piece of junk does he? You've ridden with him I take it?

WENDY

A couple of times--home from work.

THOR

That's a bit out of his way, isn't it? Don't you still live south on Portland.

Yes.

THOR

I see. Well, he's not here. He's late. Maybe he overslept. Perhaps he stayed up too late last night.

WENDY

Perhaps. But don't worry. He'll be here.

THOR

Everything is ready, isn't it? Are the samples prepared?

WENDY

Yes, they're all laid out for the final exam.
THOR

Is his chart ready?

WENDY

Of course. Everything's ready. Why don't you sit down for a minute until he gets here.

THOR

(Looking at his watch)

It's not like him.

WENDY

Maybe he's doing a bit of Christmas shopping on the way.

THOR

This is no time for being cute. He's the most important patient I've had—the most sensitive and complex. I want to see this through successfully. Without any hitches.

WENDY

You will. You know that. Everything's been going perfectly. There's no chance of failure.

THOR

I certainly hope not.

That must be him.

(Door knob jiggles)

(HE walks toward door. EDWARD enters.)

Well, you finally made it, I see.

EDWARD

I'm awfully sorry I'm late. But I had to make a stop before I came up.

(HE takes off his coat and hangs it up.)

THOR

On your last day? The big day? You had to make a stop?

EDWARD

Yes. I wanted to buy us all a little Christmas present. To celebrate the day.

(HE hands WENDY the bag.)

Here. Open it.

WENDY

(Pulls out a bottle of wine.)

Well, look at this, would you. Imported from France.
Isn't that something. You have been Christmas shopping, haven't you. (SHE shows THOR the bottle.)

See? See?

THOR
Fine. Fine. But we're already a quarter of an hour late. I want to get started.

WENDY
Dear Dr. Thor... couldn't we... just one toast... before we begin? For old times' sake?

THOR
You're right. You are absolutely right. I don't know why I'm so nervous. A toast is in order. Wendy, be the gracious hostess.

WENDY
(Gets out three glasses. Hands bottle to EDWARD.)

Would you?

EDWARD
Certainly.

(HE opens the bottle.)

WENDY
(To THOR)
Wasn't that a fine idea he had? Don't you think it's a lovely idea? (SHE takes the bottle from EDWARD, fills three glasses.)

Well, it's burgundy I see.

EDWARD
Burgundy it is.

WENDY
So. Who will propose a toast?

EDWARD
I will... To Dr. Thor. To his brilliant mind, his generous spirit, and last but not least, his marvelous invention.

WENDY
To Dr. Thor. (THEY drink.)
THOR
Thank you. Thank you. Well, then, I believe it's my turn. To Edward Wunderlicht, a man of courage and determination. A man who stuck with it—to the very end.

WENDY
Bravo! To Edward Wunderlicht. . . . Now it's my turn. To the wisest man who ever lived—King Solomon. (To EDWARD) He was the wisest, wasn't he?

EDWARD
Tradition would have us believe so.

WENDY
I mean, the one who said those things about the stomach—that same one was the wisest man in the world. Right? Really a smart man. Who knows what he would have scored on an IQ test if they'd only been invented then.

THOR
How does Solomon fit in?

WENDY
He fits into wisdom. It's actually a toast to wisdom, isn't it?

EDWARD
Right. To Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived.

THOR
Anything you say. (THEY drink) There. Our fun is over. Let's . . .

EDWARD
One more. To Wendy, a heap of yellow wheat.

WENDY
Why, thank you.

THOR
(He lifts his glass, then stops himself.) To Wendy. . . . What does wheat have to do with it? Listen, I think I've had enough of these games. Let's get down to work. Put this away till later. (WENDY removes the glasses.) Edward, take the chair. Now, then, Wendy explained what we're doing today. There's no need to go into detail again. The procedure is simple. Let's start.
THOR (Continued)

Wendy, remove the instrument.
(WENDY unstraps the instrument.)

WEN

Let me just dab a bit of oil on this first. It's still a little rashy.

THOR (Examining EDWARD'S nose)

So it is. We'll have to do something about that next time.
(WENDY rubs EDWARD'S nose with oil.)

Now then, I'm going to re-sensitize all those nerves that were previously deadened. Do you understand?

EDWARD

Yes. Perfectly.

THOR

When I'm done, you'll smell everything.

EDWARD

Everything! Think of that!

Wendy, are you ready?

THOR

Ready.

WENDY

This will only take a couple of minutes. It won't feel any worse than a few mosquito bites.

EDWARD


THOR

(HE picks up an instrument that has a long thin needle attached to the end of it. HE works with the instrument on EDWARD'S nose. At first, EDWARD sits stiff and upright, looking straight ahead; but then he begins to twist in the chair, his eyes wide.)

Sit still, please. There's nothing to this. Really. Only the tiniest little pricks.

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(EDWARD rocks back and forth in the chair, his eyes gleaming.)

THOR

What's this anyway? There's no real pain connected with the procedure. Sit absolutely still if you please.

(EDWARD continues to rock, and now begins to make strange, low sounds, something between a moan and a laugh.)

That's enough. This is ridiculous. I'll be done in a minute. Only four left.

(EDWARD twists, making it increasingly more difficult for THOR to get at his nostrils.)

Wendy! What's come over him. Leave the meter. Hold him back while I finish.

WENDY

(Grasping the back of EDWARD'S shoulders.)

What is it? What's happening?

THOR

I don't know. Nerves probably. It'll be all right when we're finished.

WENDY

It's all right. It's soon over. In a minute it will be all over.

(EDWARD is twisting, rocking, moaning, laughing.)

THOR


(THOR steps aside triumphantly and looks at EDWARD as he would look at a monumental project just completed. WENDY, too, steps back, observing EDWARD. EDWARD sits still for a moment, then begins to sniff the air, laughing softly. HE leans forward and rises from the chair, as if he's pulled by strong invisible cords. HE steps forward, arms outstretched toward THOR, laughing joyfully. But suddenly HE's pulled sideways;
and in leaning toward the pull, he stumbles and falls to the floor. HE gets up on his hands and knees, crawls on the floor, observing it, smelling it, laughing.)

WENDY

Well, he's certainly excited about it, isn't he?

THOR

Yes, very excited. Only...

(EDWARD rises from the floor and reels back. HE grabs the chair for balance.)

WENDY

Is something wrong? . . . Something is wrong. What is it?

I don't know.

(EDWARD is pulled backwards as if by a strong wind. HE rams against the back wall. HE turns, facing the wall. HE clutches at it, smells it, feels it. It's as if he not only sees and smells the wall but its ingredients as well, the very source of all its elements.

WENDY

What's wrong?

THOR

(Stern and silent, like Michelangelo's Moses. THOR watches EDWARD. WENDY looks at THOR, imploring him with her eyes to do something. EDWARD reels away from the wall to the sofa, examining the sofa, smelling the bright covering on it, laughing, now almost hysterically. Then HE stops abruptly and stares at THOR and WENDY.)

My God!

THOR
(EDWARD is gazing at WENDY as if he's seeing her for the first time. HE steps away from the sofa and is pulled toward WENDY, powerfully and inevitably, by the magnetism of the whole universe. THOR, sensing his intention, stands in front of WENDY like a protective bulwark. But EDWARD will not be hindered. HE grabs THOR by the arm and flings him across the room. THOR falls to the floor. EDWARD now reaches out to WENDY, pulls her toward him, buries his head in her hair, feels her body roughly and boldly with his hands--her back, her breasts, her stomach, her thighs.

No! Edward!

I've waited...

No!

To know...

Please. Listen.

I wanted...

(WENDY is fighting EDWARD off with no success. HE's pulling her blouse, her skirt, digging his hands into her arms, neck, breasts.)

Help! Thor!

(THOR, who has been recovering from his own fall, is up now. And seeing EDWARD, he lunges toward him, grabs him by his neck and arms and throws him to the floor, pinning him.)
THOR
Don't touch her! You damn fool.
(To WENDY)
A hypodermic! Quick! I'll hold him.
(WENDY wastes no time getting
the needle ready while EDWARD
and THOR struggle together on
the floor.)
Don't waste a second. Get him through the pants.
(THOR holds onto EDWARD desper­
ately. WENDY plunges the needle
into him. Both WENDY and THOR
cling to EDWARD. WENDY is moan­
ing in fear. EDWARD collapses.)
He's out. Help me get him to the sofa.
(THOR and WENDY lug the limp body
of EDWARD to the sofa. They lift
him up and lay him down.)

WENDY
What happened? What's going to happen?

THOR
There's only one thing we can do--de-sensitize the
nerves while he's still out. Prepare the instruments.

WENDY
Yes, of course.
(SHE begins preparing the instru­
ments, then stops.)
You don't mean all the nerves, do you? You'll leave
some of them.

THOR
No. None.

WENDY
None! Why?

THOR
You saw what happened. We have no other choice.

WENDY
You don't mean permanently of course. Just until
everything is straightened out. Right?

THOR
I mean permanently. Hand me the needle.

WENDY
No.
THOR

What?

WENDY

No! You promised him. You told him he'd smell. He went through it all—on the basis of your promise—the whole humiliating procedure. He wore that—that monstrous instrument of yours for weeks because you promised. And you better make good on it. You just better.

THOR

Never mind. I'll do it myself.

(WITHIN GRABS THE NEEDLE FROM WENDY
and begins working on EDWARD.)

WENDY

What happened? You must know. Did it ever go like this before?

THOR

Never. But I had a premonition even from the first day. I sensed something.

WENDY

You should have removed it then—like you were going to. Not now when his hopes are up. That—that—damn instrument.

THOR

The instrument is not to blame. It was...

(EDWARD groans softly.)

WENDY

It's...it's...starting again.

THOR

No. He's all right. He's just waking up. Make some tea will you?

WENDY

(Walks away, toward the teakettle, back to THOR)

I don't want to see it. It's terrible.

(SHE prepares cups and water for tea, THOR kneels beside EDWARD, feels his forehead, covers him with a blanket. EDWARD awakens slowly. HE opens his eyes, looks at THOR and at the blanket, then at WENDY preparing tea. HE sits

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up on the edge of the sofa, looking around fearfully, breathing imperceptibly at first, then more distinctly.

EDWARD
(Softly)

It's gone.

THOR

Yes. We had to.

EDWARD
(More loudly)

It's all gone.

THOR

I'm sorry.

EDWARD
(HE gets up and walks to the table, tries to smell the objects there.)

There's nothing left. Nothing at all.

WENDY
(SHE goes to EDWARD, puts her arm around his waist, and leads him to the sofa.)

Won't you sit down? I'm making tea. It will be hot and good.

EDWARD
(His head is near WENDY'S. HE sniffs her hair.)

It's gone.

THOR
Can you tell us what happened?

EDWARD
What happened! Don't you know what happened? Your experiment didn't work—that's what happened. Your marvelous instrument failed.

THOR
No! That's not what happened. The instrument did not fail. It succeeded. You are the reason I had to desensitize. You, Edward.
EDWARD
(Moves toward THOR)
Then you did do it, didn't you. You took it all back.

THOR
I'm sorry. I had to.

EDWARD
You gave it all! Then you took it all back. That's it, isn't it?

THOR
I'm sorry.

EDWARD
And now you're sorry. That solves everything, doesn't it? To be sorry. Something went wrong. The genius made a mistake. And now he's sorry.

(To WENDY)
And you helped him, didn't you. You let him do it.

(HE picks up the nose instrument.)
You were right by his side, weren't you? It was all an amusing experiment. For both of you. Sensitize. De-sensitize. Sensitize. De-sensitize. Sensitize.
DE-SENSITIZE!

(HE smashes the instrument against the wall.)

THOR
I've heard enough! It was not an amusing experiment. You asked to smell. So I helped you. But something did go wrong. And now I'd like to hear your side of the story. You fooled with the instrument perhaps. You started making your own adjustments. You didn't follow directions.

EDWARD
I didn't follow directions? I followed them to the letter!

THOR
What happened then?

EDWARD
You know what happened. You saw what happened. I smelled! That's what happened! I smelled everything. That was the idea wasn't it? To smell everything? Rocks and water and everything? But it's gone. There's nothing left. You gave it all. Then you took it away. It's like a cave now. A dark and empty grave. I can't explain it. And I'm so cold. I'm freezing cold.
WENDY
Sit down and drink some tea, won't you?
(EDWARD sits. WENDY puts a blanket over his shoulder and hands him the tea.)
And keep the blanket over you for awhile. You're going to be all right. Everything will be all right. Really.

THOR
What can I say? We tried. And now it's over.

WENDY
Yes. Now it is over, Dr. Thor. For you it is all over. You've done what damage you could, so why don't you leave now? Just leave.

THOR
Wait a minute...

WENDY
Did you hear me? Leave him alone. Go. Get out. Go home to Martha where you belong. To Martha and your hot chocolate.
(SHE grabs his coat and hat and throws it at him, shoving him out the door.)
Right now! Off! Away! I'll take care of Edward!
(WENDY slams the door in THOR'S face. SHE stands for a moment in front of the door, cooling her anger. Then she returns to the sofa and sits beside EDWARD, quietly for a moment. Finally SHE speaks.)

It was awful. I was so afraid. You looked like you were seeing things—that weren't even there.

EDWARD
But they were there. Everything was there. Swamp and desert and wind and sky. It was all there. And you were there. Your hair and skin were there. It was magnificent. It just pulled me in somehow. Like a whirlpool. A great whirlpool. But now it's gone. And everything's empty. Cold and hollow as a cave.

WENDY
(After a pause)
But you're here. And I'm here. Warm yourself now, with the tea. You'll feel better when the shock is over.
EDWARD
Thanks. The tea's warm, and I feel better.
(Pause)
Well, that was some experience, wasn't it? I guess this is one day I'll never forget.

WENDY
I'm sorry about the job. I know you were looking forward to it.

EDWARD
That's strange, isn't it? I haven't thought about the job at all. It's the other that's so hard. That everything's empty again.

WENDY
But you still have the memory of it. That's important. You'll remember, won't you?

EDWARD
Yes, I'll remember.
(HE gets up, walks to the table, examines the objects that he once could smell. HE holds the stalk of wheat longer than he does the other objects.)
Zero. It's even worse than before I started. Absolutely zero.

WENDY
I'm sorry.

EDWARD
...Like a heap of wheat, set about with lilies... (HE throws the stalk down, stands apart from WENDY, looking in the opposite direction.)

Edward?

Yes?

WENDY
Come here. (HE doesn't come.)

Please? (HE comes.)

Sit down, won't you?
(EDWARD is about to sit down at the end of the sofa.)

WENDY

Here?

Edward?

EDWARD

Yes?

WENDY

In your man, many scientific, historical, and geographical studies. . .

EDWARD

Yes?

WENDY

Have you ever made a thorough investigation of the customs of the Aleuts?

EDWARD

Not a thorough study.

WENDY

Then let me tell you a few things about them. The Aleuts are natives of the Aleutian Islands, a chain of islands situated in the Bering Sea, and extending about 1,200 miles south-westward from Alaska.

EDWARD

Well, of course I know that.

WENDY

According to an article which I read myself in the Encyclopedia Britannica, these Aleutian Eskimos have many interesting customs.

EDWARD

I'm familiar with some.

WENDY

One of them is their form of greeting.

EDWARD

Oh?

WENDY

Why this particular form of greeting came about is not known. But I suspect it was brought on by the weather.
EDWARD
What are you talking about?

WENDY
The Aleutian Islands have the worst weather of any place in the whole world. Did you know that?

No.

WENDY
Cold winds from Siberia howl over the islands, clashing headlong with warm air from the Pacific, creating high velocity winds, dense fog, mist, rain, sleet, and freezing snow.

So?

WENDY
So I believe these particular geographical conditions have brought about the custom.

EDWARD
(Becoming increasingly more irritated.)

What custom are you talking about?

WENDY
Their form of greeting.

What form?

WENDY
I'm trying to tell you...if you give me a chance.

EDWARD
Tell me then. I'm listening.

WENDY
Well. Unlike Englishmen, who rely almost exclusively on their mouths, the Aleuts greet one another differently. They greet their loved ones, for example, by...

EDWARD
By?

WENDY
(SHE comes closer to EDWARD, her face almost touching his.)
WENDY

By approaching that person and... .

EDWARD

And?

WENDY

(Her face is now very close to his. Lights begin slowly to fade, and Beethoven's Minuet in G can be heard faintly in a distance.)

Touching his cheek.

(SHE touches his cheek with her nose.)

Both cheeks in fact.

(SHE touches his other cheek with her nose.)

Then... .

(SHE sits back a bit.)

EDWARD

(HE leans forward a bit.)

Then?

WENDY

Then his nose.

(SHE is closer again, touching his nose. Then SHE sits back a bit.)

He, of course, does likewise.

EDWARD

Yes, of course.

(HE touches her cheek with his nose.)

Like this?

WENDY

Yes.

EDWARD

(HE touches her other cheek with his nose.)

And this?

WENDY

Yes.

EDWARD

(Caressing her nose, cheeks, forehead.)

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WENDY

Yes. Yes. Yes.

(THEY are now caressing each other, touching each other's faces, neck, hair. The music has risen. The lights have dimmed—dimmed completely now except for one narrow beam of light shining brilliantly on the nose of EDWARD WUNDERLICHT.)