1985

Inheritance | [Short stories]

Joyce Helena Brusin

The University of Montana

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INHERITANCE

By
Joyce Helena Brusin
B.A., California State University, Long Beach, 1980

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1985

Approved by

Chairman, Thesis Committee

Dean, Graduate School

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for my parents, Roy and Hertta,
for the stories they told me, and for the ones they didn't
'Each note is a history of itself, wide as a life is long,'

Jon Davis
"That Modern Malice"
for Charlie Parker
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Inheritance

(A story in three parts)

I

She has always been afraid of gypsies. There is one standing on her porch now, a sentry in the wet snow of November. Annelie opens her door to the woman's knock and the gypsy's eyes look into her face with practiced haughtiness.

"Please Madame, do you have some old winter boots you could spare? I have no shoes fit for this weather." There is a dare in the woman's voice as she looks over Annelie's wine colored wool dress and her fine leather shoes.

"I think I have some in the closet. Wait just a moment."

Annelie shuts the door, leaving the woman on the porch and goes to her hallway closet. The lights are not yet on in her house, she has just come home from work and only had time to hang her coat up and start the coffee on the stove.

She reaches to the back of the small, tightly packed closet and pulls out a pair of lined rubber boots with low heels. They have never been her favorites, and the heels are
worn down anyhow. They will be enough to send the woman away, and not so good that she would be back the next day looking to get a coat.

She opens the front door again and the woman, with wrinkled brown skin and the faded colorful skirts of a doll left too long in the sun, is looking at her with a twisted smile.

"Why, thank you Madame. Thank you very much," she says as Annelie hands her the boots. She turns and runs with small steps down the wooden stairs of the porch, as Annelie shuts her door against her and the wet 'ranta' snow, that falls heavier now than earlier, covering the city of Tampere with a low ceiling of gray mist, an anesthetic mask that may last for weeks.

Annelie hates to be called Madame. It is not unusual in Finland in the 1950's, twenty years after the Winter War with Russia, to be a woman, forty years old and single. The gypsy's tone of voice is what irritates her, the knowing condescendence of a woman who has had to wean at least five children from the abundance of her flesh.

Annelie goes through the house turning on the lights in all of her four rooms. In the living room is a glass bookcase with her old school editions of Dostoevski and
Sigrid Undset. There are old musty texts of English and French history, yellowing and crumbling at the corners of the pages.

On the floor is a bark basket filled with blue, red and yellow yarn. She is knitting a sweater for her cousin's new baby boy. It will be blue with a red and yellow duck waddling geometrically across its front.

It has been nearly two years since Annelie's mother died suddenly; a brain hemorrhage that happened one night that Annelie was working the evening shift at the telephone office. Her mother had been fifty-seven, an age that Annelie has seen many people die. Perhaps it is a time for decision. Do I go on or not?

In the weeks after her mother died, Annelie's lips broke out in blisters that covered her mouth nearly to her nose and down to her chin. Her mother had died in April, and it was not until May that she went back to her job at the telephone office where she was the evening supervisor.

This winter she has finally given her mother's clothes away. She called the Lutheran church and they took the dresses, sweaters and moth-eaten skirts away in a van. The closets are stuffed with her own clothes now, dresses she has bought on trips to Copenhagen and Stockholm.

Annelie goes into the kitchen and sweeps the wooden
table free of the crumbs from her breakfast. She feels the coming of the Finnish winter like a chloroform mask. It will be months before there is any life in her again.

***

The tarot reader's hands are like brown leather, reaching back with her jeweled fingers and her art, to the time of the Pharaohs. She places the cards one by one on the table between herself and Annelie. It is development that is important; a progression of the cards in a peculiar order.

"You have had a great sorrow."

"Now you will make a long trip."

"You will go to a big city, one situated near a large body of water."

Annelie listens to the gypsy's voice, a melody with words drawn out and half sung. The woman's black hair is knotted at the top of her head, and the scarves about her shoulders are like wrappings peeling away.

Outside the snow falls heavily, quietly covering the isthmus of Tampere with white wool. The lakes on either side of the city are beginning to freeze.

Annelie walks home after dark to her house in the Pispala district. In the dark of the Pyynikki woods she
meets her neighbor. Mirkko is alone; her husband works the night shift at the Finlayson textile factory. She is nearly nine months pregnant, her form hidden in the darkness under a heavy, fur collared cloak.

"Where are you going so late?" Annelie asks her.

"Oh, just over there for a little visit." Mirkko points to the street lights below them where the path changes to a cobblestone street.

Annelie watches her back as she walks quickly down the path towards the streetlights in front of the Pirkkanmaa maternity hospital.

A dog barks somewhere beyond the railroad water tower. There is no wind, the outlines of the pines and leafless birches are perfectly still as Annelie continues towards home.

The idea of a journey puzzles her. When and to where? She has lived near a large body of water only once. In the summers when she was a child her mother sent her to Raase, on the Gulf of Bothnia along the western coast of Finland. Her aunt and uncle lived in a cabin on the farthest peninsula. In the early summer the road to town flooded over, and her aunt would take a rowboat out onto the sea and they would row around the offshore islands into the city.

The water was very quiet and shallow, like lake water,
and Annelie would sit back and trail her fingers in it. In the hot afternoons of midsummer she would look up to see the pine trees of the shoreline motionless against the cloudless blue sky.

The first summer she had come to Raahe she was five years old. That hot dry summer she sat on the steps of the cabin waiting for her aunt or uncle to come and watch after her as she went swimming.

Her uncle always loved to tell her how one day he had looked everywhere for his red swim shorts. "They were nowhere in the cabin," he said, "and nowhere outside. Finally I came out to the porch and looked out to the ocean. There you were running through the water, one hand holding up my swimming shorts, the other one waving in the air."

Annelie spent ten summers on the ocean at Raahe, and only once had the water turned vicious. Her aunt and uncle had kept a dog, a quick witted one they claimed was half fox. His name was Telly and he was a thief. When they finally found his lair he had lined it with cheeses from the pharmacist's summer house, loaves of bread from the fishermen's boat, the druggist's wife's purse, and a wardrobe of dolls clothes.

One day when they rowed into town Telly was left
accidently locked in the cabin. He gnawed everything he
could find; their furniture, Annelie's toys, their racks of
wooden dishes.

Her uncle had said he had no choice but to kill the dog,
and Annelie still remembered being angry at Telly; but she
had thought it would only be to warn him, to teach him. A
dog like that would be able to save himself in the end.

When they drowned him, she stayed behind in the cabin,
stitching on her new white pinafore. They tied a rock around
his neck, put him in the rowboat and took him out to the
middle of the sheltered bay. He's down there still, she
thought, wily and proud, his white bones a target for the sun
piercing the water.

When she arrives home on this winter night, Annelie's
kitchen in her own house smells of dill and coffee. The old
scales and pots her mother had used decorate the shelves
around the room. There are hollowed out wooden bowls and
butter dishes on the table, and white bone china plates in
the dining room cabinet.

This is the fourth house she can remember. It had been
her grandparents' house and then her mother's and
stepfather's.
She had sat in this kitchen when she was fourteen and listened to her mother tell her about her own father. He was a local politician, aging then, not very tall, with blue eyes and dark hair.

"He has never worried much about his past," her mother said.

Annelie’s stepfather had been much younger. He had seen her mother for the first time when he was fourteen and she was twenty-three.

"Some day I'll marry her," he told his mother, and on his nineteenth birthday he had.

Annelie had been ten years old then and she had been embarrassed about him because he was so young. When he came to walk her home from school, she would ask him to wait at a corner several blocks away so that her friends wouldn't see him.

He became an upholsterer, while her mother worked in the shoe factory. During the Depression he lost his good humor, and before he died he was as surly and biting as one of his hunting dogs.

Now at home, Annelie sits in her kitchen, the room lit only by the glow of lights from the next room. She flips
through the envelopes that have come in the mail. A letter from a friend in Karelia, a statement from the bank concerning her savings, and a letter from her aunt Suoma in San Francisco. She opens the letter from Suoma first.

"My little girl Ulla has decided to get married," Suoma writes. "She is marrying a genius physicist. We are planning a small wedding for family members on August 17th. Why don't you come? I think you may need something that will help you make a new start after losing your mother. Come and visit us. Jussi and I will help you get a visa. You can stay for as long as you like."

There are thirty-thousand 'new' markka in her savings account. Just about enough for a ticket. She has checked the costs for a one-way passage before.

The next Friday, before she has even said anything to her supervisor, she goes to the travel office on Hammenkatu street and books a flight to Stockholm, and from there on to San Francisco. She will leave the second weekend in May.

Now the winter seems hardly to exist. The cobblestone streets of Tampere seem a alien place; hardly the familiar landscapes with their worn and polished patterns.

***
As the propellors spin, she watches the airfield beside her. In her lap is a bouquet of red roses. She sits stiffly in her starched summer skirt and blouse, feeling the sweat already beginning to trickle down the insides of her arms as the plane cabin grows more and more stuffy. The plane begins to take off and Annelie senses the heat and power of its engines.

We're going to hell, she thinks, feeling the plane lift off and she looks down to see the figures growing smaller on the airfield, as above them the clouds open like soft and beguiling arms.
She saw the Golden Gate bridge below her. In her ears the pressure was building up until she was afraid they would burst. The bridge looked just like the photograph she'd seen so many times in the bookstore on Hammenkatu street. The mist rolled over and between its towers like puffs of gentle smoke.

She was amazed at the blue water; what the depth of it must be, and how it broke apart in white breakers against the towers of the bridge. There were low hills all around this bay. The bridge emerged from a green countryside with deserted inlets and empty roads and spanned the water until it reached the city, where the buildings clustered like shells. They were approaching the city and she could see individual buildings now. There was a tall steepled building, with what seemed to be a clock, and a tall white tower on a hill beyond.

The Chinese gentleman next to her was rolling up the maps and charts he'd been reading during the flight.

"San Francisco is like a painted whore," he said, looking out the window. "Beautiful on the outside, diseased
on the inside."

Annelie looked down on the bay, where a regatta of sailboats cut through the water. It was the second Sunday in May. Mother's Day in America.

It took her three hours to go through customs. When she reached the officer she still felt herself smiling and growing tall, like a stalk into this blue and green, this sunshine and mist.

The officer opened each container in all three of her bags. Each jar of face cream, jewelry bags and a pencil case. He flipped through the pages of her address book.

He inspected each piece of her clothing individually, tossing them to the ground alongside the counter as if they were exactly what he had suspected. In her shopping bag she had carried on the plane, he found the Jaffa oranges she had bought in Copenhagen.

"What are these?" he asked her.

"They are oranges," she said, pronouncing each word separately and precisely in the British manner.

"They're oranges," he said, his face twitching. "And how many of them are there?"

"There are four of them," she answered.

"Four of them," he said and threw each of the oranges
against the concrete wall; where, plump and thick skinned, they broke apart like the insides of some newly butchered animal.

She began finally to cry.
The customs man turned and walked away.
A black man, dressed in a janitor's uniform, walked up to her as she stooped to the floor to gather up her clothes.
"I'll help you," he said, and folded her shirts and assembled her shoe bags for her as she continued to cry.

For the first week the sirens of the fire engines woke her each night. She began to be afraid that she might wake to smoke curling around her.
"No, there isn't a fire every time you hear them," her aunt Suoma said.."Sometimes kids have set off the alarms for a joke. The trucks will always come, though, just to make sure."

After that Annelie noticed the red pillar boxes on every street. Sometimes the glass was broken, jagged and dirty, revealing the tiny switch that summoned the fire engines.

Around Suoma's Albion Street apartment the winos sat in
couples in the doorways. Annelie lived there on Mondays and Tuesdays, which were her days off from the job Sucma had helped her find, as a maid, a "second floor girl," for a pharmacist's family in Sea Cliff.

Sucma had sent her off one morning with something called a "social security number" scratched on a piece of paper.

"They'll ask you for it," Sucma said. "This was Meri's brother's number. He died last year. Go ahead and use it for now."

Annelie took the number 12 bus to Sea Cliff. When it arrived at her stop she was the last person left on board. The pharmacist's family lived in a two story house that was painted white with black window sills and doorways.

The pharmacist's wife was especially pleased that Annelie could speak English.

"We're so happy, to have you," Mrs. Meinholz said. "Your room will be the last one at the end of the upstairs hall."

The room's window faced out onto the ocean over China Beach. Annelie supposed it was called China Beach because that was the next place one would come to, after having set out on the ocean. Late afternoons she would imagine she saw sailing ships topping the horizon, old schooners emerging through the fog, carrying cinnamon and silk.
Some days she walked the blindly curving streets of Sea Cliff alone. On foggy days these cliffs above the Pacific seemed an entirely separate world from the pork and incense smells of Chinatown, or from the streets off of Mission Street, filled with crumbled old newspapers, broken bottles and the sticky black soot from buses.

One morning in Sea Cliff a black Scotty dog, collared with diamonds and sapphires, emerged from the fog like a pagan idol. His mistress followed, a priestess in a caftan and London Fog coat, the lining of which showed at the hemline.

"Gud dag," the woman said to Annelie.

Startled, Annelie answered. "Gud morgan."

A crazy old Swede, Annelie thought, in this sea-walled place so like a fortress. A prison with walls of brick and ivy.

Suoma knew all the Scandanavian bars in San Francisco. There was the Pilsner on Church Street where the merchant sailors all checked in first thing after coming home from Japan. On 18th street there was Dover Hall, where they had dancing and orchestras. Finally, there was a place called Al's Cafe on Valencia. It had big windows on two sides, and
at night they pulled the curtains and had dancing to a jukebox.

Suoma's daughter was engaged to marry a graduate student in physics at Berkeley. He was bald and wore gold rimmed glasses. His name was David; the same name as the man in the tweed jacket who asked Annelie to dance at Al's Cafe. David had been surprised to find her there.

"Your aunt brought you here?" he asked. "It's not a very good place. There's only fishermen come here, and it's rough. If you like to dance, we could go to the Jack Tar some night."

David had been in the war in Germany. He told Annelie that French women were all very attractive because they all looked different.

"They wouldn't have any of this little black skirt, white blouse business over there," he said.

One afternoon David took her walking at the Presidio. They drove through Sea Cliff to get there. The sun was shining onto the watered lawns and each mansion looked earthly and in its natural place once more. At the Presidio the wind blew her hair back from her face and stung her cheeks red. She was wearing the Evan Picone skirt she'd
bought with forty dollars of her first wages. The scent of new "My Sin" perfume huddled under her collar like a curled mink.

In August Suoma's daughter married her physics student in Berkeley. Suoma, her husband and daughter, and Annelie, drove across the Bay Bridge in Suoma's Cadillac. The old back seat had been restored for the occasion.

"We have to go back for my overnight bag," Suoma's daughter yelled. "You're the one who forgot it," she told her stepfather. She held her white dress gathered up around her calves, well off the cluttered and sooty floor of the car. She wore a pair of brown loafers from her own student days at Berkeley; her wedding shoes were wrapped in tissue in a box beside her.

Annelie looked down through the railings at the Bay under them. Barges and tankers sliced through it; the white wakes of their passage stitched a lace overlay on the afternoon's ancient patterns.

At the church the four bridesmaids wore lampshade hats and aquamarine dresses that made them look as if they were dressed in several layers of a tropical sea.
Annelie spent Christmas with David. He made her eggnog and spiced wine. In his kitchen he had a spatula, a coffeepot and a frying pan. How he had managed to cook her a roast for dinner, she couldn't imagine. Before they'd always had pork chops.

"I borrowed the pan from Clarence downstairs," he said. "I make a pretty fair pot roast, too. I just need a different pan for that."

"It's very good," she said, cutting the tender meat of the roast with her knife and fork.

David salted his food and tossed the remainder of a whiskey and water down his throat. He had two ex-wives. One still called him regularly from the East Bay; the other one had gone back to Tyler, Texas to live with her mother.

"I like the fact that you don't drink much," David said, and put the coffee on to boil.

It began in February. A bloated heavy feeling that spread the walls of her abdomen out and around. She sat at the kitchen table sipping the warm cognac in the dark. At forty you never know. The kind doctor you go to tells you
one thing, and he is very sure, but still you sit in the dark and wonder.

"It's all in my mind," Annelie would think, and pull the shade and to bed.

At the end of April she took the train to New York. She stood on the docks of the New York harbor watching the luggage roll off the railroad cars.

"I'm sailing on the Margarite," she told the porter who unloaded the bags, and didn't look up to see which way her arm was pointing.

In the days before the ship sailed she stayed in a guest house behind a former Finnish ambassador's residence. His maid was a friend of Suoma's and they'd arranged for Annelie to stay there. Walking down the hallway from the bathroom to her room with the white sheets and rose colored blankets, Annelie could smell the cigar smoke and damp towels rising from the wallpaper.

In the mornings sweat made the sheets stick to her body, and even before she opened her eyes, the room turned over and over like a cylinder behind her eyes.

She felt at least a little sick every moment of the crossing on the "Margarite." The sun shone every day, and
every night the moon took to the water like a skater to ice. The soft music from the band playing in the lounge would drift out to the docks as the doors opened and closed.

There were two old Finnish women on board from the backwoods of Michigan. They wore long brown overcoats and felt hats like Annelie's grandmother had worn. Annelie would stand near the railing in the daytime, the wind letting her feel less sick, and talk with the old women.

"Where are you going?" Annelie asked them.

"Home to Lahti."

"How long have you been gone?"

"Thirty-five years."

The three of them stood together facing the sea. The old women turned away from Annelie and smoked their men's cigars. When the ship docked in Helsinki she had to lead them to the train station.
"What do American doctors know?" the obstetrician asked as Annelie lay on the thin cold cotton. Outside the heat of the Finnish summer had sucked the cooling wind from every alley where school kids smoked, and from every path cut into the hills that made and surrounded Tampere.

She heard this doctor, whose gold spectacles lay like manacles over his nose, draw a breath and felt him cut his hand through her. His wrist turned sharply and he held his breath.

When he had drawn his hand out of her, she opened her eyes to see him standing at his sink, a bar of soap in his hand. His blue eyes, held together by a wire through his skull, were fixed on her.

"You can sit up now," he said.

As she did Annelie picked up her white, yellow flowered dress from the chair beside her and laid it across her lap.

"It's moving," he said. He pressed his lips together and looked away.

"So your American doctor was right," he said, after a
moment. "I can tell you it will be a girl." He smiled at her slightly. "These kind, they always are."

As she walked home, she talked to her mother. When Annelie talked with her mother she always imagined her sitting in the kitchen on a high wooden stool Annelie's stepfather had made. The window to her right was open and Annelie could see the white apple blossoms on the tree outside. Her mother had been tall and had dark hair with streaks of gray. She held her long legs elegantly crossed.

"Why am I afraid?" Annelie asked.

Her mother looked up to smile sadly at her.

Annelie remembered being burned by the coffee. It was in the second house she could remember, and she was four years old. She stood in the middle of the kitchen screaming. Her grandmother came running in from outside where she had been feeding the hogs. She took Annelie's arm and poured cold water on it. Annelie looked up to see her mother's sister standing over her, an empty cup in her hand.

"Keep her away from the stove," her grandmother snapped and turned away.

In June, at midsummer, Annelie sat in a rowboat and
looked down at the long white burn scar on her left forearm. It was visible to her as she rowed. The oars felt like rough concrete in her swollen hands. Marianna, eight years old, and the daughter of a co-worker at the telephone company, sat across from her. Marianna's legs were bare beneath her light blue summer dress, and her black hair was as rich and full as the sound of a troika's bells across the snow.

"Hurry Annelie," she said. "We'll miss the bonfire."

"We will not; and sit still before you tip the boat over."

The boat creaked and she continued to raise and pull the oars back in her hands. Her mother's ruby engagement ring was her only jewelry. She was pleased with the new strengthened setting that looked so much like the original. The stones glittered through the water as she dipped her hands to cool the sting.

For two years now in Tampere, Annelie had come to the cemetery on her mother's name day. She bought some orange roses from the marketplace and carried them here in a newspaper cone, walking the six blocks along the wide
boulevard. Each year it was sunny and hot. Swarms of bees
nestled in the bleeding heart.

The red were buried in one section under the tall pines
and the white were in another. They had been hard line
soldiers, who were now forty years at their own dark side of
the civil war. Annelie, born the year they had all been
killed, walked past them and turned into the main part of the
cemetery.

Her mother's grave was near the high wrought iron
fence. There was room for five more coffins or urns in
the ground with those of her mother and grandparents. The
three small begonia plants, spaced evenly apart across the
front of the long tombstone, were full of flowers; pink and
orange starbursts against the base of the smooth gray rock.

Her mother's sister Eila's name was cut there too, even
though she was buried in the infants' section. Annelie could
just barely remember her, a small shadow crying one day in a
closet when they were both three. There was no face or voice
to the shadow, and Annelie could not remember if it had
mattered that it vanished.

The summer passed, and one day in the autumn Annelie
called the taxi at four o'clock in the afternoon. It occured
to her that maybe she ought to take some extra clothes along. No, she thought, they'd have everything she needed there. She put her hands in the pockets of her raincoat and went out.

Outside it was overcast; the wind blew in from the lake over the hill behind her house, and sent brown and orange leaves leaping and turning, like accompanying dancers, into the alleys and sidestreets around her.

She stood in front of a grocery store in her neighborhood and waited. Her neighbor Mirkko emerged from the store with a quart of milk, and looked Annelie over.

"A little windy and cold to be going downtown, isn't it?" her neighbor asked.

Annelie nodded. "I'm just going for a little trip."

Annelie thought of the time she'd seen Mirkko walking through the Pyynikki woods on her way to the maternity hospital.

Mirkko smiled. She knew what kind of little trip Annelie had in mind.

When the taxi came, Annelie gave the address of the Pirkkamaa maternity hospital.

"In a hurry or no?" asked the driver.

"Take your time," Annelie said.

She thought about all the stories she'd heard about
midwives. They were all big-boned country girls who grew up supervising the deliveries of farm animals. People were no different to them.

"Now," a midwife had said to a friend of Annelie's, "you will be quiet. No more noise from upstairs."

Another friend had been asked: "Were you screaming way back when this all began?"

At four-thirty that autumn afternoon Annelie was given a bed at the hospital. She looked down at her feet emerging out of the sheets at the foot of the bed, just under the curtains of the already darkening window. She thought of how the passersby could often recognize the feet of women in labor.

"I wondered where my Mirkko was, "her neighbor's mother had said, "and whether it was getting to be around her time. Then I walked by on my way to the 'tori' and saw her feet there in the window."

Annelie stared hard now at the white ceiling. This will end, she thought, and something else will begin. It will be from me. Something in me will begin again.

"Sit up," the midwife said. "Sit up and take hold of
your socks. Here at your ankles."

The baby was already crying.
"You have a girl," the mid-wife said. "She looks very well. Sounds well, too."

All babies are pink, Annelie thought. This one, when she was cleaned, looked a little yellow behind her wet blue eyes.

Annelie did not want to go home with her baby. The woman next to her had a big, fat red-headed boy. He barely had to lap at his mother's nipples to get enough milk to feed his six kilos happily.

Annelie's baby tried, but was frustrated at how little she found.

"The first thing I am going to do when I finally get home," said the red-headed giant's mother, "is play my new Paul Anka record, 'You Are My Destiny.'"

Annelie named her daughter for her little aunt Eila who had died when they were both three.

On her tenth day in the hospital they told Annelie she had to go home. She packed a shopping bag with the
things they had given her, and dressed the baby in some
clothes that friends had brought her. She walked out into
the street, where the first bite of winter could be felt in
the wind. At the 'tori' she decided to call a taxi. She
watched the traffic go by her on the cobblestones near the
marketplace and waited. Instead of a taxi, the horse drawn
vosika came by and stopped in front of her.

"Aren't you Helmi Vuorenmaa's daughter?" the driver
asked. "She used to raise hogs in Pispala."

"I'm her granddaughter," Annelie said as she climbed
into the carriage.

"That must be your own granddaughter right there," the
driver said.

"No. She's my daughter," said Annelie, "We just don't
start out as young as we should, some of us."
The roads going out of Denver towards Idaho Springs were quiet. David had been standing by the side of the road for a good forty-five minutes. It was late summer and the air was dusty. Dust clung to his clothes and painted his arm in a thin layer of brown.

He wore his coveralls, with the sleeves pushed up past his elbows, and his pant legs covered the tops of his green canvas sneakers. In his gray canvas backpack he carried a thick sweater, pants, some T-shirts and underwear. He carried his winter jacket over one elbow.

He had tried to join the Army in Denver, but they wouldn't have him. One of his eyes was too bad. A person couldn't tell by looking at him, but he could hardly see out of his right one at all. It was peacetime and the Army couldn't use everybody. He had spent most of 1941 in Denver, drawing unemployment.

The little red sedan was visible from a long ways off. When it was close enough for David to see the figure driving it, he stuck out his arm with his thumb pointed west. He was a little surprised when the car slowed down.
"Where are you headin'?" the driver asked, rolling down his window.

"Idaho Springs," David answered.

"I'm headed through there. I'll drop you off."

David sat down on the front seat and laid his backpack and jacket on the floor in front of him.

"What's bringing you out to a little place like Idaho Springs?" the man asked as he drove back onto the highway.

"I'm going there to work."

"In the mines, are you?"

"I hope to. I heard in Denver that they were hiring out there."

"Have you mined before?" the man asked. He had a high forehead, and brown eyes that were strangely dark in a pale face.

"Yes, I have. I worked two years with my brother up in the mines in Butte."

"A mining family are you?"

"Looks thataway"

"Not much else to do in Butte, is there," said the man.

"That's about the truth," David said, after a pause.

"How old are you son?"

"Twenty-five."

"You look younger somehow."

"I know."
"So what were you doing in Denver?"

"Looking for work."

"Did you stay very long?"

"For a year. Last summer I came up from Chillicothe, Missouri. I hitchhiked through Missouri and came Kansas I couldn't get a ride. I got a train of tank cars then and rode all the way across to Colorado. Took a freight train into Denver. A guy at the boarding house where I started living told me I might be eligible for unemployment from my job in the mines in Butte. That unemployment kept me fed through this past year."

"You see a lot of the country, there. What in the hell where you doing down in Missouri?"

"Going to business college."

The man laughed. "What for?"

"My brother helped me save the money," David said. "He wanted me to get a better job. I was pretty good at typing in highschool."

"Did you finish your courses?" the man asked.

"No. I ran out of money."

David looked up to see a deer scamper down an embankment ahead of them.

"Did you see that deer up there?" he asked quickly.

"Lots of them around here. You go hunting?"

"No. I don't care for it much. I used to go shooting
rabbits when I was a kid, but that was all. Fishing I like."

That summer when he had ridden the tank cars through the hottest part of Kansas, David had been thinking about Lake Delmo, where he liked to go fishing. He thought he'd hike there when he got home, dangle his feet in the water, and listen to the squirrels squawk in the lodgepole above him.

He had been planning on going home to Butte then. While riding the tank cars, the only place to sit or lie down had been on the ledges between cars. The empty tanks had jolted so much that he had to always be hanging on to the railing above him.

In the railyards they'd stopped at along the way, he'd sat in the shadow of the cars, waiting his turn at the water spigot. He sat there, with the sweat running down his neck and back, thinking about the last train he would take.

It would be the one that ran along the Big Hole river. He'd watch the canyons open up ahead of him like slow sequences in a silent motion picture. This would be a movie in color, though. The green banks, the darker green of the trees, and the slow curves of the deep blue river, moving much smoother than any long snake of empty tanks.

"Where are you going?" he asked the man in the khaki pants and gold rimmed glasses, who'd sat next to him in the shade of the tank cars.

"Okenaugun, Washington," the man said. "I'm going to
pick apples. Gonna be lots of apples this year. 'Specially for me.' He laughed. "You comin' from Missouri, ain't you?"

"Yeah. I've been in Chillicothe going to business college."

'Don't like the hard work, huh?"

David wanted to say something, but the man had turned his ruddy face away from the sun, and David could see the dirty collar of his light shirt as it fell away from his thick shoulders.

In that railyard a man had told David about Denver. "There's work there if you want it," the man said.

David had a friend in Denver; a guy named Al Beckett who had been in his office practices class at Chillicothe. He was a blue-eyed handsome Irishman, who liked to play tennis. He invited David along and David liked to go; especially when Anna Lou came along. David liked the sound of her voice. She had wavy brown hair that was thick around the sides of her face, and her green eyes had a sparkle like creme de menthe and ice. She was from South Carolina, and when the summer began she had packed her racket and white lace dresses and gone home.

David had decided to take the man's advice and go to Denver. It was snowing, a summer storm in the Rockies, when he got off the freight train. His canvas sneakers had made tracks on the thin layers of white on the sidewalks. He
found the boarding house where Al lived, and Al had convinced
the landlady to give David a month's credit.

They were halfway between Denver and Idaho Springs now.
David looked over at the man driving.
"So how did you like Denver?" the man asked.
"Pretty well. Never did find any work of course. My
landlady's son drove a laundry truck around town. He was
actually a graduate mining engineer, this guy, but he made
part of a living driving this truck. I used to ride around
town with him just to pass the time. He knew the words to
opera songs and we'd drive around town singing them all the
time."

"Is that all your buddy did? Drive that truck?"

"Nope. He and a friend of his had their own way of
making a living. They had come across the opening of an old
mine shaft up in the mountains. They fixed it up to look
like a working mine. They sprinkled sawdust in the tunnel
and put up some light bulbs. For fifty cents a head they'd
walk tourists a little ways into the mine tunnel, with my
friend explaining the various ores and veins and such. He
conned these tourists with a big speel about ore values,
purity and such. They'd only go a certain distance into the
tunnel and then they'd tell the people they had to stop
because the day shift was getting ready to blast."
The man driving laughed. "Smart guy, your friend."
"Makes himself a living," David said.
"What kind of work did you do in Butte?" asked the man. "My name is Johnson, by the way, Mike Johnson." He extended his hand for David to shake.
"Mine's Dave. Dave Kuusela."
"That's a Finn name, ain't it. Lotta Finns in Butte."
"Sure seem to be," David said.
"So what kind of work did you do?"
"Built timber supports for the raises. Drilled and broke rock. I worked in the Anselmo, the Steward too.
"I've been hearing talk those jobs in Idaho Springs might not last all that long. They're not sure how much is still under there, or how much they'll end up taking in from it all. I do know there's work in Silverton, where I'm going. I need to get there as soon as I can, and I've been hoping to find somebody to help me drive. If you helped me out driving and went all the way to Silverton, I'm pretty sure as you could find a job in the mines there."

The man seemed to know what he was talking about. Where'd he get all these predictions, David wondered.
"That's fine," David said, after a moment. "Pretty country down around Silverton is it?"
"Beautiful."
They arrived in the San Juan mountains in late afternoon. Jagged peaks that looked as if lightning had carved them and softer mountains of dark red earth, rose up on every side. There were aspen everywhere and small, clear, swift running streams ran out of the canyons and washes.

David drove slowly. The roads seemed at some curves to be ending in mid-air. The bright mountain sun was giving away to thick gray clouds that would bring a couple of hours of steady rain.

From the road above, the town of Silverton lay like a cowering insect on the dark green valley floor. Once on the main street, it seemed to David that they must be celebrating the last days before Armageddon. He could see saloon doors swinging open and shut. Shutters on the white houses of the side streets were painted raucous pinks and greens.

They drove to the end of town and took a road that ended near spreading groves of aspen, that shuffled softly in the wind. David parked the car and they got out. From the trees near them a tower rose up with cables that reached through other towers to the mountainside high above them, where beyond the aspen and even the fir trees, on the bare grey stone of the mountain there was the mouth of a silver mine.

They rode an empty ore bucket, big enough to fit four men, up to the mine. A green miners' boarding house rose up on slats from the face of the mountain. Up so high in the
mountains, the wind was blowing with a gale's force.

"I'll tell them in the office that you'd like to start on the night shift tonight," Mike Johnson said, as he and David shook hands. "Thanks for your help driving. I really appreciated it.

"I'll show you where you can check out some clothes and equipment."

Mike took him to the desk inside the boarding house and then walked back outside.

"How'd you meet the super?" the man behind the clothing counter asked David.

"The super?"

"That there was the mine superintendent, Mr. Michael Johnson. Just come in from some meeting in Denver, from what we were told."

Luckily no one had asked him to write anything. He borrowed the office typewriter to type a letter to his brother Toivo in Butte.

"I am doing fine with little money as the boarding house meals are included in the pay," he wrote. "Thanks for letting me know about Millie Nordström getting married."

He signed his name, and it wasn't until the "e" of Dave that his hand began to tremble.

It was after a tennis game in Chillicothe that his
problem had first begun. His arm had been kind of tired, and after the game he'd gone to take a shorthand test. His hand started trembling about two minutes into the test. He tried stopping and starting, but it only got worse.

"I seem to have hurt my writing hand today," he told the teacher. Every day from then on it was the same. At the end of a week he had quit school.

He hadn't wanted to go home again. He'd wanted to finish school. His Pa had collapsed in the tunnels of the Anselmo when he was fifty-four, and had died a week later of TB in the asylum at Galen. David had been nine years old then, but he knew now that the TB had started out silicosis, "copper lung," but there was no mention of that anywhere official. Working in mines was like that; after a while all you were left with was folklore.

In Denver, his friend Al had talked him into going and seeing a doctor about his writing. The doctor had sat back in his dark, cool office, the shades pulled to filter the afternoon sun.

"It sounds to me as if your mind is rebelling," he'd said. "It didn't like what you were doing. You had been refusing to listen to yourself, and you can't get away with that for very long. I can suggest that you look for another line of work. You simply didn't like business shorthand."
The ink splotches the doctor had shown him had confused David. He didn't know what he was supposed to see. He came up with pinned butterflies, metal springs and coils.

"The only thing of significance," said the doctor, "is that you never seem to see anything living."

These Colorado miners were greenhorns. They farmed in the summer and worked in the mines in the autumn and winter. David couldn't believe the things they did. It was a wonder they hadn't blown themselves up months ago.

They knew nothing about working with dynamite. In order to break rock, long narrow holes were drilled up into the rock, and dynamite was inserted into them and then exploded. The force of the blast would break the rock loose, and send it tumbling down into chutes, from which it was emptied into box cars.

These miners in Silverton always drilled the holes straight and packed large amounts of dynamite into them which they exploded all at once. The force of the blast came down on the timbers supporting the raise where they had been working, and the rock was broken into chunks too large to fall down the chutes.

"In hard ore like this, you should drill your holes at an angle," David them, but they kept drilling straight.
"If you time the blasts to go off in sequence instead of all at once," David told them, "you won't have everything blown to hell. The timbers would be left standing, and you wouldn't have to build new ladders."

These greenhorns thought they were doing just fine the way they were working.

One day David stood on a ladder next to where the dynamite and caps were lying side by side.

"You ought to keep these far, far away from each other," he said to the older men working above him.

"Toss me up a roll of those caps, will ya," one of them said to him.

David picked up a roll of caps and climbed up the ladder and handed them to the man. He decided he would ask for another job.

When he got off work that night, the shift boss said to him: "Why don't you load the cars from now on. Looks like you're getting tired of working up in the raises."

It was better down in the tunnel with the ore cars. For the next two months he worked at loading them, many times having to climb up into the rock chutes, risking getting buried under rock, to free the large chunks of ore that blocked them.

"You'll get bored up here all winter. No way out for
five months," said a miner at supper one night. "All the passes will be closed, and there ain't nothing to do but sit up here or go into town and get drunk."

"Yeah," David said. "I've been staying up here, eating and getting fat. It's getting so my clothes ain't fitting anymore."

Things were getting a little dull, too. Silverton was such a small place, and the mountains leaned over you on every side. David would have liked to have seen more of what was out there in the mountains, but then winter was coming on.

On a Sunday he decided to leave. He typed out a note to his brother Toivo in Butte.

"Think I'll head out to California," he wrote. "See what's doing out there. Maybe I'll be able to get some construction work."

On Monday he asked for his three months pay and rode the ore bucket down to the bottom of the mountain. He walked through Silverton with his canvas backpack. It was cold enough for his thick gray sweater.

On a street corner near the far end of town, an old woman, pale, with hair absolutely black, was passing out tracts. Her eyes had a look of running. The hem was hanging down from her long, dark coat and her gloves had more holes than wool. She only looked at David when she handed him the tract.
"Getting a little chilly out here for you, ain't it, ma?" he said, and walked away towards the road to Ouray, Salt Lake and California. He was fat around the belly and his thumb was pointed north.
The ice cracks under my feet as I walk to where you are standing at the seam where the streetlamp dims to night. Your face above your black cloak retreats into the picture I have never seen; heavy eyebrows, red lips brilliant like a signature.

You turn to walk beside me and you disappear. I feel you in the glare of ice. My grandmother walks on roses coiling from the snow.

Even in dreams your hair is black. When I was twelve I dreamed we had a horse in the backyard; a young stallion the color of light molasses. He dissolved past the peach tree with a slow kick.

In the same dream you lived in my closet. You had a big oak dresser with your stockings piled in long, neat rows in the bottom drawer. You turned from me when I spoke to you, taking away all I would ever know of your face.

You are like steam that rises off a hot geyser pool into the night, clouding our vision until we look past you.
When my father David was six years old he was arrested. What he remembers are the formalities.

He had been standing at the front window of the apartment where he lived with you and had watched the three men climb the hill. They went through the doorway under him and he heard their footsteps as they came up the stairs.

They knocked and he opened the door to them. They walked past him into the three rooms of the apartment, looking in closets, checking pots on the stove, and separately lifting each coat away from the hallway rack, as if to make an exact count.

"Your ma here?" one of them asked.

"No," David said.

They took my father with them to the Silver Bow County jail where they kept him for three days. On the second day he was taken out of his cell and led to a room where a man in a brown suit pulled up a chair for him.

The man wanted to know about the day Makkela had come looking for Kivela. You and Daddy had moved up the hill to Finntown from the Cabbage Patch and Makkela had not moved with you. You had moved into Kivela's place. It was dry with a fireplace and a big coal burning stove. A glass door with blue curtains separated the bedroom from the parlor.

My father slept on the sofa, with the moonlight shining
in through the front windows. It was summer and the sun woke him very early each morning.

He had stood at the front window one afternoon and watched Makkela climb the hill. At six years Daddy had already been to the motion pictures. Downstairs someone played the piano staccato, and he watched the window as though it were a moving picture screen. Outside, Makkela took Kivela's head and pounded it into the street. His shirt flapped open again and again as he did it, uncovering the red flesh of his chest covered with sweat.

There had been days when Daddy had sat in the apartment and the piano had trickled softly as you climbed the stairs. But for three days after Makkela had killed Kivela you had been gone.

Daddy remembered none of this for the lawyer in the brown suit.

"But someone saw you at the window," the lawyer said.

"No window," David said. "I was on the floor. On the floor I was taking a nap where I couldn't see anything."

When Daddy came home from the jail you were there. The rooms of the apartment smelled like coffee that had boiled over for hours until scorching on the bottom of the pot. Your hands as you rested them slowly on his neck were soft
and wet and smelled as if you had been twisting your bottles open and closed for hours. The rest of you as you stood there looking at him and not speaking, smelled a little of soap and a little of the sweat he had come to know you by.

You were working in the Finlen Hotel laundry again.

"Come and help me," you said, and together you walked down the street to the hotel. He helped you fold the long sheets. Both of you held an end and you would pull against each other, first one hand and then the other to straighten the grain of the cloth. When that was done you folded the sheet over and over, until it was one square between you and you were looking down at each other's hands.

"A dog lives as long as its teeth," you said at breakfast one morning.

You had cooked enough oatmeal for the two of you. Daddy ate from a bowl, and you ate with a wooden spoon from the pot you'd cooked in.

The steam rose up in slow curls from the saucer where your coffee was cooling.

"My teeth are going bad, you said. "I must have about eight or ten years left."
Saturday nights you would take him to the sauna. You took him to the ladies side. He was nine years old then and until a boy was eleven he stayed with his mother.

Old women sat side by side across the highest benches where it was the hottest. It was a wood burning sauna, but the rocks on top of the stove were black and shiny as coals. One old woman sat just up from the stove and every few minutes she tossed a ladle of water onto the rocks. First she would throw only a part of it, then after that steam had taken to the air, she tossed the remainder of the water.

The steam was called "loyly" and it stung and choked him until he felt he would become nothing but liquid and flow along the wood grain.

The old women sat on their small and tattered cloths, their heads tucked down just below the ceiling.

"My heart," said one of them. "It's really going."

"Mine too," said another. "Never so fast as tonight."

These were your contests to see whose heart beat fastest. There were never any winners, only entrants.

With your milk-skinned arms at your side, you began to sing. A song about a river you had seen, and its valley.

"Beautiful, beautiful Ohio...."
Another ladle was tossed onto the rocks and David bent his head down and wrapped his arms around his head to make a pocket of air he could stand to breathe.

These old ladies were never satisfied. It was never hot enough for them.

"Lisaa loylyaa", they kept saying, until it was like breathing whole fistfuls of fire, and while you still sang David ran from the sauna, past the metal tubs of water in the washing room, and opened the outside door to the twilight of summer.

The gallows frames of the mines were etched black on the hill above him. Through them the city was speckled with light. He looked down to the unswept floor at his feet and then back out again towards the Flat, where the molten slag from the Piedmont smelter was just beginning to be seen, shining faintly like a pale pink lip. He knew that by nightfall it would be a glorious fall of red water, a stamp forever on his memory of what was possible when the waste of the earth poured forth and danced a final tarantela.

One night Daddy walked in his sleep to that same window of the apartment in Butte. He woke up crying, the rooms behind him were empty, and you had been gone again for days.
He saw only the shoe lying in the gutter of the black street. He was old enough then to count the phases of the moon. It was half and waning.

For days after you died David sat on the porch of the apartment house and counted his change. He pulled it from his pocket and counted it from one hand into the other and then put it into the other pocket.

The door opened behind him and he heard the scrape of boots on the splintered wood.

"Dugan the undertaker's going to have to bury your mother in her coat son," a voice said. "It appears she didn't have anything else on."

The man laughed towards the side of the house as if there had to have been someone else there listening.

At your funeral my father sat between his brothers. I sit behind and watch him. As the organ plays his ears turn the color of blood in the snow. I have painted the church yellow. The stained glass crackles with sun. It was summer and you'd walked home late.

Your slippers were soft-soled and black, sewn with French knots of pink and yellow flowers. The leaves had been worn through by your toes.
You were warm inside when the wheels of the Ford pressed through your skin into the bones of your chest.

The Meaderville conductor heard your scream, and from the tracks in front of him he saw an angel in black rise up, and with its terrible face it dimmed the lights on the hill. It had all but turned his hair gray, he said.

Some Irish picked you up from where you had rolled against the gutter and drove you to the hospital.

They did not know your name or age, or where to send you, and so you became the Standard's lead story the following day.

Woman, approximately 35 years of age, medium height and build, with dark brown hair. Has features characteristic of the Finnish race. Dressed in a man's black overcoat, and a pink dress of the kind worn by housewives, tied with a red belt. Also wearing tan stockings and a pair of black house slippers. Only jewelry worn is one cheap ring with red stone.

My uncles borrowed money to bury you, as my father slipped four pink carnations between your fingers.
For sixty years the weeds and wild baby's breath have covered your grave. One summer as I walked towards it a quail rose from my feet. She had been hiding near the widest part of you there in the ground. The flowers I brought covered the chiseled "S" of your name.

As I left, a jackrabbit hopped through the baby's breath and came to eat the fresh daisies and chrysanthemums.

Where you were born in western Finland, on the Gulf of Bothnia in 1876, there were open fields of barley that grew up around you. Around the red barns at harvest and on the pebbled shore of the ocean, were people who fought with knives that they had made for one another. "Pukkas" so heavy, and bloody that the Czar in "Petari" sent his Cossacks from the steppes of Russia to keep the peace.

Children like you rose up from the pounding hooves of their horses. The sound of you is buried, but never the sight. There are rivers, like the Ohio, that took you far. On one of them there is an island, where you are standing, surrounded by the dark emerald space behind my head.
"This is the Dance of the Hours that's playing now," my father says. "This is the part where the couple are fighting."

He points at the turntable where the record is turning around. He has just finished adjusting the speed with the little round disc he has that tells him when there are exactly 33 revolutions per minute. This part of the "Dance of the Hours" is angry, like a symphony, and boring. I like the prettier part where the couple make up.

It's Sunday afternoon and I want to listen to the ten most requested songs on K101. Outside the three windows of our living room, that look exactly like what the newspaper's Home section calls "bay windows," I can see the Bay, in a thin blue line, and the Oakland bridge looks industrial, like something out of a social studies book.

"Brother Dominic wants you to fix his radio," I tell my father. The rectory across the street is low and flat, and regular looking. Not like the church next to it that smells like wax on the inside and has Latin letters on the outside that mean "Immaculate Conception."
"His car radio?" my father asks.
"I think so."

"When did you talk to him?"

"Yesterday, after the last wedding."

There are three weddings in a row every Saturday at Immaculate. The first one starts at ten o'clock in the morning and the last one is usually over at four. Sometimes they have those very fancy elegant ones in the evenings, but usually they are all during the day. My mother says that couples like that church because it is small and old-fashioned.

In the summertime, when most of the weddings are, my friend Lisa is next door living with her Aunt Rosa. Whenever we're outside we go across the street to watch the bride come out. Sometimes she smiles and waves at us.

The priests at Immaculate are all from Italy. Brother Dominic has a shiny old green car, about the same year as ours, which is a 1949 Chevy that my father bought used sixteen years ago, before he ever met my mother. Brother Dominic's car has a much better paint job. He never takes it anywhere. It's always parked in the schoolyard in the shade of the rectory. Everytime we take our car to Castro street to go to the delicatessen, the hippies ask Daddy how much he
wants for it

Somedays I walk up the hill from school and see my father's legs sticking out the door of Brother Dominic's car while he takes out the radio or puts it back in. He always unscrews the ceiling lamp so it won't drain the battery while the door is open.

Those are days when my father works graveyard. He comes home after I've gone to school in the mornings. At night when I go to bed, my mother sits at the kitchen table and reads her European magazines. I know how to say "stupid question gets a stupid answer" in German, and in Swedish "prata ente med matten munnen" means don't talk with your mouth full.

Usually my mother and I speak Finnish to each other. Paranoid people always ask my father if he minds, since he can't understand any. I think he kind of likes it; it means he doesn't have to listen to us when he doesn't want to. When my mother is mad at him, she will tell me exactly what she wants to say, and then I have to go tell him. I get very tired of walking between the kitchen and dining room, but I keep doing it.

One night when my father is working overtime on the carrier Midway, I tell my mother about Frank. Frank lives next door in the garage of Rosa's house. He's an old German
and when he talks about being in the war, he gets up and shows you where his wounds were.

"Here. The bullet went here. Through the big meat," he says, pointing at the seat of his pants.

He sits outside in the yard and talks to us. He's about forty. Once he gave Lisa and me some New Years party things with lipstick stains on the noisemaker. I thought that was kind of strange. Giving us those things that had been in somebody else's mouth, and then the lipstick all over them. There are never any ladies at his house, but maybe over New Year's he met one.

He feeds most of the neighborhood cats. When they go to have their babies, they always go to his house. Once my mother saw him leave with a big burlap sack that was wiggling.

"I'm just going out for a little trip," he said, all red in the face and very nervous.

I never worried much about him, except for those lipstick things. One day when I was selling candy for the Le Conte School graduation, I went over to see if he would buy any Heath Bars for a quarter a piece.

"Here. I'll take four," he said.

He was standing in the doorway of his basement apartment. There was soap all over his pale hands and wrists.
because he was washing them in the bathroom just on the other side of his doorway.

"Come in. Come in," he said. He seemed awfully friendly for four o'clock on a weekday. He usually didn't talk except on the weekends, when he wasn't doing his tailoring work.

There was something new on his wall. Four blondes, sitting like cats with their tails tucked under them; each on her own rug in her own picture.

He gave me the dollar and I handed him the four Heath Bars. He took them in one hand and put the other one behind my head. I couldn't move my face anywhere. He was kissing me very hard on my mouth. Then he was kissing me in my mouth.

I had thought about kissing. I had wanted to kiss Brian Pangan, who had eleven brothers and sisters, since I was in kindergarten. I had thought about kissing Kevin Kram who was the paperboy and whose father worked at Hunter's Point too. Sometimes I even wished I was Laura Ingalls in the Little House books and could kiss Almanzo Wilder. But I had never, ever wanted to even see the pink and wet insides of Frank's mouth right in front of my eyes. His eyes were closed and I felt sick.

For a minute I was afraid he might pull me all the way into his apartment. But he just kissed me again. There wasn't any taste to his mouth, it was just wet. Then he let
go of the back of my neck, and I bent down and took the box of candy in my hands and ran across the concrete floor of the garage to the outside door. It was partly open and I thought, please God don't let him be able to close it with the buzzer, just the same way he opens it.

I went back home and ran up the stairs. I hated the thought of his pink, wet mouth and all I could think of was Listerine, so I gargled with it three times full strength. I still didn't feel clean. I walked around the house looking for someplace to sit down. I felt like telling somebody, but there wasn't anyone who wouldn't get mad right away.

Finally, when about three weeks had passed and I couldn't stand it anymore, I told my friend Lisa.

Very slowly, in her low voice that she always used when she was teaching me something, like a new dance or how to act when somebody whistles at you, she said: "Maybe you remind him of his daughter he can't see anymore. Does he have a daughter somewhere?"


Lisa was no help, so that night my father was on the Midway, I told my mother.
My mother asked me a lot about Frank. What exactly had he done, she asked.

"What did he say to you? Did he say things you didn't understand?"

"No," I said. "I understood everything."

She was running her fingers through her black hair in just the same way she sometimes did to me. Her red nails were sharp and kept catching in the curly hair we had close to our scalp.

"Have you told anyone else?"

"Just Lisa."

"Has he ever done anything like that to her?"

"No," I said.

She got up from the kitchen table and poured another cup of coffee out of the glass coffeepot on the stove. When she sat back down she began running her fingertips along the flowers and wooden buckets painted on the plastic tablecloth.

"Stay away from him," she said. "He's alone too much, but he shouldn't have done that to you."

"I don't think you should say anything to Daddy," she added after a minute. "We can take care of this between ourselves, I think."
My mother will only dress up for dances. I'll stand in the hallway next to the gas heater with its sort of plastic windows that light up purple when the heat is low, and red when it's on high, and watch her as she dresses in front of the big mirror on her dresser. She has a black slip she always wears with her black and dark blue dresses. She puts on the slip and then she dusts herself with powder from a green box that has been on the bathroom shelf since I can remember.

There is a bottle of Chanel No. 5 perfume in a black velvet pouch in the second drawer of her dresser. She tilts the bottle and puts the perfume on before she clips on a pair of earrings and her long silver chain that looks like it came from a gypsy camp.

Her dance dress is made out of dark blue silk and has gold leaves painted on the cloth. Her black shoes have heels that must sometimes make holes in the carpet.

My parents always go to the dances at Dover Hall with their friends. My best friend Helen is always there with her parents and the two of us go up to the balcony upstairs and watch the dance floor.

"Your mother's dancing with your father now," Helen will say. I can never tell if my mother smiles when she
dances. All I can see from up there is her little black head and blue dress.

When Helen and I get bored we ride the elevator that looks like a cage. We go back and forth between the balcony and the street level. No one ever bothers us. When we feel like it we stand by the outside door and watch everyone we know going back and forth to the Dover Club bar next door. Helen watches for her father because once he goes over there he doesn't come back.

"This is a Wagner piece that's playing now," my father says, and points with the book in his hand towards the turntable in the living room.

I think this music is more boring and angry than anything, and I go downstairs to the front porch. Across the street they are having a priest's installation. The schoolyard is full of folding chairs and everyone is dressed up as if it were Easter.

I turn my head and see Frank standing in front of his garage door.

"I want to talk to you," he says. His face is sweaty and he looks like he might start crying. "You have been not talking to me", he says, like it makes him very sad.

"I want us to be friends," he says, and I see his lower
lip shaking.

Stupid idiot, I think. I don't want to say anything to you.

He keeps looking at me. I put my hands in my pockets to see if I have any change. I can feel a dime and a nickel there; enough for an orange bar. I walk past Frank without saying anything and go to Cancilla's on the corner.

Inside the store is cool and dark, the fruit and vegetable refrigerator is humming loud. I walk down to the ice cream counter and reach in for an orange bar.

Pete Cancilla is on the phone behind the counter, he puts his hand over the receiver and asks me if I've had chicken pox. His five kids have chicken pox.

"Yeah," I say, and put the change in his hand.

"What did your mother do? Did she keep you in bed all the time?"

"For two weeks."

"What did she put on your skin?"

"Camomile lotion."

"Camomile lotion?" Pete looks at me funny, like he thinks it must have been something else. "Are you sure?"

"Yeah."

Outside, in the hot sun a hippy girl is sitting against the wall and staring at a string of beads.
"She's meditating," my mother told me one day when we got off the bus and saw her. "Probably from a rich family," she added.

Up the hill Frank is still standing in his doorway. I wonder why he hasn't gone back in out of the sun. He stares at me while I pass him; his face is still sweaty and his eyes are shining very brightly out of his stupid fat face.

I nod to him just a little as I pass him, and he looks relieved.

I look at him and think: Do you know what it's like to be hurt, idiot?
Each night when she opens the front door and steps inside, she feels him standing in the corner of the living room, where the television sits quietly in the darkness and the lace curtains hang motionless to the floor. She walks towards him and switches on the light, and in the instant before she can see him he is gone.

She unbuttons her coat and walks down the dark hallway to the bedroom where Jonathan is working, his picture wheels and black and white photos spread across the desktop under the lavender shade of a lamp. Among the photos there is one of a baby, eyes closed and mouth puckered, who rests under a hand as wide as its whole face.

"Did you go to Memorial Hospital?" Emily asks.

"Yeah." Jonathan doesn't turn around. His shoulders are hunched, his feet hang from the rungs of the chair, gathering his long legs under him as if he is tensing to spring.

"Did you find out anything?" Emily asks.

"I found a nurse on the oncology ward," he says, and turns halfway around to face her. "He died of lung cancer.
He must have died at home, because the nurse didn't know he was dead either, until I told her."

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At night the shadows move to the music of Schumann. Under the warm sheets that smell of a rainy winter's damp and Jonathan's cigarettes, she waits for a sign; for the profile of a face, or the jagged edge of a continent to etch its lines onto the ceiling above her. She wouldn't be afraid.

There must have been some sort of memorial service, she thinks. All the black families from the west side would have come to the synagogue. The children he'd delivered stood in a row beside their parents. Their brown eyes would never have blinked and would have watched her while she took her seat in the back. Watched her the way they always had in the supermarket.

Sometime before dawn the cat wakes her as it sucks the blanket, hungry for the wool soaked through with its own beaded threads of spit. Jonathan breathes regularly, turns and lightly grinds his teeth. In the hospital she had once awakened like this, hearing only the quiet flapping of a shade in the early morning darkness.
"Are you having a nightmare, honey?"

She must have pressed the call button. The short black nurse stood in front of her, alongside the bed. The green light from the corridor was divided by the white, pear shape of her.

"Did you want something for pain, honey?"

She wanted to ask about her hands. Her fingers were tingling. Floating under the sheets. Why? Nothing had hurt her hands.

"What have they given you for pain so far? Let me go see what you can have." Gone. Gone home maybe. But Emily's fingers began to be solid again. She squeezed her hands under the sheets and felt her toes, first the big ones and then the others, moving in waves as she concentrated on them.

Out in the green light of the hall they kept wheeling the carts up and down. All night long there were dead people on the carts. Like the one they were bringing out the door, just before the men with the stretcher came out to carry her in. Dead people were out there in the green light. The same ones going back and forth. Were they covered? Or were they out in the light?

The next time she woke up Gary was standing by the bed.
"Let's see if you can stand up," he said.

It was like getting up early, very early in the morning at home. The walls were very bright. Like bright kitchen walls

"Put your feet here. There now. How do you feel?"

She felt herself smile. Behind the curtain she heard her father smile. She had heard his voice before, and now he was quiet.

"How old are you?" the nurse asked her, tucking the blanket more securely around Emily's feet.

"Nineteen."

"Were you in an accident? You know our head nurse broke her kneecap skiing. I should ask her to come see you."

One afternoon Emily heard the squeak of crutches along the linoleum. Across the room the woman with the hysterectomy was sitting up reading.

"How are you?" the head nurse on crutches asked Emily. Her starched cap was leaning sideways. Emily wanted to ask her to fix it.

The nurse talked to Emily about something. Her voice was a low hum without words. She picked up the picture of Emily's dog that her parents had brought, checked the soil
of the plants the other nurses had given Emily.

Suddenly she turned with her crutches and started out of the room, smiling and seeming to laugh a little. This time Emily understood her words.

"So," she said. "I broke my knee and you broke your back."

That was why her fingers had tingled.

"What do you like to do?" Gary asked.

He was making his rounds late. His black attache case was open on the floor revealing pockets filled with jewelry he'd made and a small drawing pad.

"I like to take pictures. Like a photographer," she said.

"Really? Do you draw? Here, let me show you something."

He took a charcoal pencil in his hands. Charcoal and thick hands. The room was quiet, the woman with the hysterectomy sleeping.

"I need someone to help me take pictures of my drawings," he said. "When you get over this, would you like some work doing that?"

"By the way, if you go back to school now, it's very important that you don't fall down."

The world became like the Seurat painting up on the
screen in Art Appreciation. There was the prospect of rain everywhere.

"Here, what do you think of these?" Gary asked. "I made this one for my friend Charlie. It's worth eight grand."

Emily picked up the ring. The opal was almost completely blue. She held the gold nugget band in her hand and tilted the ring back and forth in the light coming through the Venetian blinds of the fourth story window. Every few seconds she could see the fire in the stone.

She put the ring back into the velvet case that was full of gold jewelry, together with some silver chains and loose champagne diamonds.

"That ice emerald I gave you. I should set that," he said. "I was thinking of a stick pin."

She walked to the window. The evening sun lit the tops of the buildings through a smoky haze. She looked down on the skateboard rink next to the empty parking lot of the pharmaceutical company next door.

"Would you like to go to dinner?" she asked. "Before you drop me off?"

"Sure. We'll go to Dimitri's."
The phone rang in his private office. She heard him put it on hold.

"I have to give these gals a pre-op report," he said, from the doorway. "I'm scrubbing in tomorrow with this surgeon who's operating on an old patient, and these gals have been calling me all day for this report. Why don't you wait for me in the living room...Jesus, I mean"....

Sitting in the waiting room she remembered the old lady who had sat next to her there one rainy Thursday after she'd first been released from the hospital. The old lady was proud, telling Emily she'd been to the doctor's wedding years before.

"He does everything," the old lady said. "He's fantastic. An artist."

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Jonathan had been reading the paper in the living room when a friend called to tell Emily that Gary was dead. Emily picked up the phone in the darkened bedroom. Outside, the yellow street light was shining, making the white telephone glow like a freeway call box.

She opened and closed the drawer of the telephone desk as their friend Irene spoke.
"I thought you would want to know...two years with someone."

Emily's arms had begun shaking, now the trembling moved up to her neck.

"Thank you," she said. "I'm glad you called." The receiver fell down onto the two buttons of the cradle and clanked into place. She got up off of the bed and went out into the living room, where Jonathan sat, the cat climbing his black shirt.

The print of his newspaper was blurred, and the paper rustled loudly as she pushed it aside. She tried to say something to the face looking at her, but her lips would not come together. She tried again and felt her face spread out across the walls of the room.

For two days after Irene had called, Gary's exchange had kept insisting that he'd be in in the morning. Finally, the unfamiliar voice of a nurse answered Emily's call.

"I'm sorry, we can't tell you anything," the nurse said. "Were you a patient?"

"Awhile back, yes."

"What's your name?"

"I'd rather not give you that. I'm just very concerned."

"I'm sorry. We aren't allowed to tell you anything."
"Is he dead?"

Emily could hear papers rustling.

"Yes," the nurse said finally. "He has passed away. That's all I can tell you."

"Thank you," Emily said, and hung up the phone. She imagined the nurse there, behind the amber glass of the counter window, with Gary's drawing of Einstein hanging over her head.

At home Jonathan sits in the living room in the evenings and reads the opinion pages. When she wants to hide, Emily goes into the bathroom. Then Jonathan becomes angry and she comes out and consoles him. In the mornings the radio plays and she sits on the edge of their bed and brushes her hair. What is there, she wonders, of Gary in this soprano who is singing Berlioz? She is a sad German, like his mother. Young and sad.

She would like him to know that he has many widows.

"Do you want me to find out if he's buried somewhere," Jonathan asks.

"No."
The next weekend she goes out to San Pedro, and climbs the steep ramp up to the Princess Alexandria ship-restaurant. Tankers are sitting idle in the hot sun glaring off the water.

She asks the head waiter if she could possibly speak to the manager. Gary's best friend Charlie appears. She is surprised that his hair is solidly gray.

"I'm Emily Stanford," she says, and at his silent stare, adds, "a friend of Gary Fried's." She sees a flashes of recognition and then surprise in his eyes.

"What do you want?"

"I want to know if you know where Gary's daughter is? There's something I want to give her."

"She goes to junior highschool out in the valley. What is it you want to get to her?"

"A drawing, a big one, that she was the model for."

"Well, I'm sure she might like to have it. Let me go see if I have anything in my office that would tell us exactly where we could find her."

Emily drives the Hollywood freeway north and then crosses over into the valley. She finds Gary's daughter's house in Northridge. A yellow stucco building with a clipped lawn and blooming roses in front. She opens the back of
Jonathan's jeep and pulls out the large framed charcoal
drawing wrapped in two white bedsheets.

Just before she carries it to the door, she opens the
sheets to see the girl's face; a girl deaf since birth who
sits with earphones on, hearing her own voice for the first
time.