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A Long Drive to Sundown

A Novel

By

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B. A. University of Montana, 1986

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

University of Montana

1990

Approved by

Chairman, Board of Examiners

Dean, Graduate School

Date
"A solemn voice, not Mr. Burnshaw's says:

At some gigantic, solitary urn,
A trash can at the end of the world, the dead
Give up dead things and the living turn away."

Wallace Stevens
Mr. Burnshaw and the Statue

"It reminds one of the opossum."

Thomas McGuane
Ninety Two in the Shade
Part One
ONE

The scene at the Sundown bar, twenty miles east of Billings Montana on Interstate 90, had deteriorated into a rare-form cacophonous musical. It was the ninth of June, 1988, exactly two months from the day Cole Shilton came home. Cole's father, Wayne, and his three-piece band had reduced their country music repertoire to simple improvisation around 10:30, steeped in a discord of broken voices and guitar strings. Any and all singers welcome. Come on up.

Bill Stockdon, owner of the Sundown and Cole Shilton's boss, jumped up on stage with vigor, waved his hands around at the band and at the crowd pawing at itself and knocking over chairs and tables and spilling drinks. He was demonstrating that he was as good a sport as anyone. Then he turned back around and very politely asked Wayne to call it a night: "Please. Let's all go home."

The cacophony rolled on. Wayne, a five-nine good looking man who wore his hair slicked back, had spawned this musical debauchery because he thought this was the last time he would play country music on a stage, to a crowd of good timin' men and women. Bill yelled that Wayne and his band were going to bring the cops. Wayne sang that the cops were good old boys who'd never pour your drink out on the sidewalk. Bill suggested that Wayne had lost his fucking
mind, and Cole clearly heard Bill say, "Now get off stage."

At that point, Wayne kicked up the beat and strummed harder on his, now, five string electric guitar. Bill took off his hat and pointed it at Wayne's chest. He began yelling and the words came across the mike broken and unintelligible. Cole sat alone at a table, fifty feet from the band stand. He had shared the table with his mother and sister earlier in the evening. The two women left nearly an hour ago when Wayne spilled his third drink and whooped five times in a row. Both women had shaken their heads and looked up at the stage as if they had finally seen it all and that was all they intended to see. Cole could no longer hear what was said on stage because Bill had his hand over the mike, but he too had heard enough.

His father had been in California until a week ago, and this was the first night Cole had seen him in five years. His sister had invited him to come tonight because Wayne promised their mother earlier that day to give up music. And it seemed to Cole as though Wayne had given up music though clearly this wasn't what they all had in mind. As far as anyone who knew him could see, Wayne was too far gone in drinking and running to be relied upon to make a decision. It became especially plain to Catlin, his wife, that he had simply lost touch with reality. So she had left the bar, her purse held loosely under her right arm, after declaring to Cole and his sister that she was going to file for a divorce. Cole said nothing. His sister left with
her.

Cole continued to watch the scene unraveling on stage. Wayne was laughing at Bill and then suddenly, with malice, pushed him back. Bill nearly lost his balance. The mike fell off the stage, popped and squealed, and Wayne cued the drummer to start again. He sang two verses of an impromptu song, through the bass players mike, extolling the virtues of various female parts of Bill’s wife, and then Bill grabbed Wayne’s guitar by the neck. He turned around, hoping for help from the careening drunken crowd of thirty or forty local people, but they didn’t notice. They were enjoying the party. Bill turned back toward Wayne. Cole decided he too had finally seen all he intended to see and marooned the ice in his gin and tonic. He wandered off to the back door. One glance behind him showed Bill flat on his back on the dance floor, his feet had disappeared under the black cloth skirting the stage. His father faced the bass player and the cacophony began to peak.

Outside the bar, interstate travel hummed invitingly along. Cole got in his pickup and started it. As he revved the motor warm, he fished a roach out of the ash tray and lit it with a flick of a miniature lighter.
Cole wheeled off the Sundown's parking lot and onto the Interstate. Traffic stretched out sparse on the black strips of pavement. Yard lights bunched and scattered all along the northern horizon where Worden, Huntley, Shepherd and the Heights strung together. In the south, where the Crow Indian Reservation lay and the Yellowtail dam backed water up for miles down the Bighorn Canyon into Wyoming, only a few dots of light flickered in the warm night air. The reservation always made him think of the third-world countries he saw on T.V. He had only be through there on his way to Yellowtail.

He slipped a bluegrass cassette into the tape player and wild pickin' and grinnin' filled the cab of the pickup. He fished a can of Copenhagen out of his shirt pocket, opened it, let the steering wheel go free, dipped, loaded his lip, closed it and shook the grains off his fingers. He thought briefly about how he ought to quit chewing, but then recognized that he'd simply start smoking again.

Despite witnessing his father's performance at the Sundown, being stoned on the good bud brought back from
college and two-thirds drunk, Cole could envision himself as a small ship on a clear lake, properly weighted and afloat on an even keel. The wind coming in the open window felt good, and he put his hand into it imagining the silent sailing, the calm of the water and the depth. He will get a piece of land, he tells himself, raise cattle, horses, kids. He'll marry a small well-built woman and stay the hell out of harms way. One alighted cloud blemished the otherwise clear and starry sky out his side window.

When Cole topped the last big hill before Billings and began the descent into the Yellowstone River valley, he swung due west with the turnpike where I-90 and I-94 interchanged. Lockwood, the eastern most suburb of Billings, small and tightly conglomerated, crowded behind the chain-link fence on his left like a mob of hopeful prisoners waiting for the chance to hit the road. Small old houses, trailer parks and one burnt-out Motor Inn, with a sign still standing by its ruins reading '$6.50 SINGLE', were familiar and unchanged.

The overblown cow town itself, booming in the seventies and busting in the eighties, spread out behind a gateway of sandstone that Cole now passed through. He drifted down the interstate his father helped build in the early sixties during one of the times he had sworn off music and The Life. A huge sign, just at the city limits, read 'Billings, Alive and Well.' Buildings had been painted on the billboard from the same perspective a driver saw the real ones on the
horizon when he passed the sign. The sign caused a slight involuntary snort every time he passed it because it prominently displayed the one new bank, put up in '86, that still had most of its floor space for rent.

He banked onto the 27th Street interchange. Street lights gleamed and melted on the sloped and polished hood of the pickup. He pulled up to a stop sign and waited for traffic to wan. He glanced in the rear-view mirror to check the angle of his tan Stetson and stroked the strong line of his chin. Perfect razor stubble. A couple of black hairs stuck out of his thin left nostril. He sucked and pushed them back in with his finger and then gunned-it into the traffic that hadn't waned. His stomach fluttered in the gravitational pull. The power of the engine felt good. He grinned at the people driving next to him and thumped the outside of his door with his ring finger. A little wired, he told himself, and yet not out of control.

Parking on First, Cole had to walk two blocks to O'Rily's. He walked tall, broadened his shoulders and held sway against the night, the past, blowing emotions and the slight stings of guilt and fear he felt for blackmailing his employer and friend-of-the-family, Bill Stockdon, out of two hundred dollars that morning: and he had plans to hit him up for a lot more.
Three

In the bathroom at O'Rily's Cole was pissing and thinking about a redhead he just bought a drink for. Then a line of bathroom graffiti caught his attention. It read, "Braack! Waz that a fart or did you step on a duck?"

The joke was written on the wall in front of him, amidst the general clamor of other jokes, at eye level, and made him think the man who wrote it inane. The man must have scrawled it standing in a similar position as himself, over the urinal, writing with a wavering, unpropped hand.

A few last drops of piss hit the toilet water. Cole shook, hit the silver flush button on the wall, zipped, and with the chalk from the unused chalk board underlined "step on a duck."

Someone behind him blatted, "Come on man." Cole said excuse me and slipped past a fat man with a black beard. He went to the sink by the door to the bathroom and washed his hands. The joke and his thoughts about it had nearly ruined his mood. He shook the water off his hands and then while whipping them on his pants tried to understand where the nagging bad feeling was coming from.

Somehow the sound of the words, read aloud, inside the glow of his stoned brain, struck him as repulsive and he couldn't pull his attention away from it. Maybe the "Waz,"
spelled with a "z." made the scatological joke more obscene than funny. It reminded him of thick tongues, short, squat men with fat asses—of sick drunkenness. The "z" of the "waz" stood out in his mind the same as if a lamp had been turned on behind a scrim, showing the audience a scene meant for a tragedy when they were watching a comedy. The characters, confused, begin tearing at each other and uncover deformities. The audience, left watching, illusions rent, experience the scene without distance or laughter.

This revelation about the joke was the same kind of revelation he experienced about himself when the whole Philosophy department watched him get busted for possession of marijuana. Well, there it was. The same source of all the bad feelings he'd been having lately. He made himself leave the bathroom and think of the woman he had just bought a drink for.

He could see her across the room, through the mass of heads between them. She sat at the bar. Her blue leather purse would have to be slid from his seat. He pushed and excused himself past people. He talked to himself: a hairy redhead waits for me at the bar. She is smoking a cigarette. Her fuzzy face is not great. Her crushed-ice, green drink sits next to mine. She put her purse in my seat so no one else in the whole wide world would sit there but me. He stood just behind her, now. The drinks were her idea, something new, a mixture of many different kinds of booze. She smiled at him. I'll go home with her, though I
don't like her perfume. He put his head in her hair and smelled her scalp. Through the scent of her shampoo, he caught a whiff of what must have been her natural smell—like freshly cut grass. She ran her hand through his black hair. Then she removed her purse from the stool next to her and he sat down.

Cole stared at her profile. She watched him in the mirror. Her finely featured face crinkled when she smiled. Her blue eyes flicked. She thinks only of herself. Slowly breathing in, her nostrils opened slightly. The fine fuzz in the right one jittered inward. She blew and the hairs shot straight out screaming. Cole's heart flinched and he sat up straight. Then it occurred to him that she made him feel short. Why is that? Well simple. But if I'm to hold myself in that lush saddle of refined movement, something about her he had noticed earlier before he approached her, then I'll have to have a better image of myself. He imagined himself as a ship again, an old trick, but the ship on the water looked like a toy this time and the waves were miniature, yet swamping the tiny white vessel. This wouldn't do. He pushed his spotless tan Stetson back on his head, but nothing helped.

Finally he said, "You're making me feel short."

"Want another drink?" she asked.

Port-side damaged. A drink! She's ruthless. "I'm not as weak as all that," he sounded petulant and wanted to kick himself.
"Let's try the weather," she said. "How hot will it get this summer?"

Ah. An appeal. Nearly coy. He lifted an eyebrow at her. Layers of possibilities here. It took too long to build the appropriate response, however, so Cole fished a cigarette from her pack and lit it as a stall technique. He was drawing a blank. Sometimes he just wasn't into these pickup games. He blew the smoke over her head and surveyed the crowd. Twenty or thirty sedate people, all dressed well, jostled politely in the small bar. No one slobbering or wavering. A picture of the Sundown, in contrast, appeared to him, smudged under a blue thick water. His imagination built a scene on the picture. People with big wide open mouths passed in front of him as if he was there now. Faces grew round and oblong. Big teeth and red lips jetted out at him as if he saw them through a fish-eye lens. His father, on stage, hunched over his guitar, looked flat, two dimensional. Thick heads of hair floated like globs of stain on the dance floor between him and the band stand. His father winked at him and pulled a glob of stain away from a dancer. He bent down and kissed her big fat mouth. Cole kissed Carry, the redhead, and looked through the thick mental atmosphere at his father. His father's face had a serious look to it.

"Hey," she said, punching him in the arm.

Voices speaking sentences and the clinking of glass returned. Clear images of moderate revelers and strangers
solidified. "Well I think it might get warm," Cole said. He stood up and tugged on her coat. She leaned forward and crushed her cigarette out in a gray ceramic ash-tray.

"We can go to my place," she said. Then whispered, "I have a little dope." They stood outside O'Riley's door. First Street traffic sizzled by. A Camero burped at a stop light and caught the attention of a police car sitting in an alley across from O'Rily's. The Camero burst off the line. The cop hit his lights and bounced out of the alley in pursuit.

"No. Let's go to my place," Cole said. He was thinking he might get her to spend the night. "It's out of town, quiet, and I have a lot of dope." She shrugged, slightly apprehensive. He forced his full amorous attention on her. She was his height. Her breasts fell forward and lay supple as if cradled in a harness of pure silk, the nipples up front and straight out. Her light fabric shirt lay lightly across her shoulders and drifted smoothly down over those magnificent breasts. Cole couldn't believe his drunk luck now that he saw her outside, in full view. Carry's ass too had a way about it: rounded like an athlete's, dimpled like a young woman's, yet mature in its posture and tuned, self-consciously, to subtlety. Hips slightly cocked, her cheeks were not shy. My god. He thought. My hands around that ass: both cheeks, bare, smooth, in my wide spread fingers. Cole's mouth salivated. He swallowed.

"Like it?" she asked in a voice not necessarily pleased
at the overt once-over.

"Love it."

"You're gonna love it more each minute," she said.

Cole's heart lifted in his chest, became light. "Let's go to my place."

"How far?" She turned her head toward the traffic coming down First. The Sheraton Hotel stood tall and blunt against the clear night sky. He looked with her.

"Huntley," he said.

"How come I never meet men with money?" She turned her almost too finely featured face to him.

"You go to the wrong bars."

"But you're a decent boy, right?" she stood against him. He couldn't believe that she could touch him with so much of her body, standing in the street. She essentially parked against him.

"Four-star," he said.
Carry Talimage said, "Jesus, it smells awful out here! What is that smell?"

"Cow shit," Cole said.

He motioned her from the front of his pick-up to his small camper-trailer situated just outside the ring of light cast by a yard-lamp. "I wash out cattle trucks. They come in at any time during the night or day, and I wash them out for ten bucks. I can make anywhere from ten to sixty dollars a day."

"So you work out here twenty-four hours a day?"

"I'm available twenty-four hours a day," Cole said and led her toward the camper trailer.

A young man, the owner's cousin, stepped out of the office and waved goodbye to Cole. The boy, Scott, walked over to the rusted out Pontiac Grand Am parked behind the office and started the car. The back end sank from the torque of the engine just as the backup lights blinked on. Cole waved at the kid when he back past him out of the light. The Grand Am blasted noise out of its glass-packs, spit gravel that pocked the trailer and Cole while sliding through a u-turn. Cole flipped him off. The woman with red hair stood by the trailer door, her purse up, shielding her face. He unlocked a bar laying across the door and swung it
up. They went inside.

Carry sat on the bed and shook her head. "Why do I always get hooked up with farmers. It must be bad carma."

"Why ask me?" he said, missing a beat. Conversation stalled. He watched her survey the inside of the trailer: the bath was used for garbage and laundry; fridge, counter, sink, clock radio, bed, a sign on the counter read—"Clean sheets just for you." He put that sign up every time he went out. She shook her head again, but had clearly made a decision. She stood up, took off her light coat, and parked against him again.

"It is kind of strange out here. I know your not dangerous. but then one never knows. Do they?" She leaned into him, her perfect, fine lips brushed Cole's.

He said, "You like that."

"Jezz," she said and pecked his lips again. "I guess you're not as dumb as I thought."

Cole leaned on his left hand against the table, pushed her back and looked her over. Then he stood up straight. He understood fully then that she was playing a new game with him. One different from the pick-up game and not one he knew. But he'd follow his impulses anyway.

He stepped up to her and pulled her shirt off over her head. No bra. God, if only she had a different perfume. He massaged her breasts, smiled at her and said, "No sex tonight." At first he meant only to tease her; but once he said it, it fell between them like a challenge. Cole took
the battle of the sexes seriously, no matter how accidentally it began.

"That's just fine," she said. Her eyes said, "No way."

And the battle started. Each an expert warrior.

Naked, intertwined yet unconnected, they tired themselves without climax. Now she lay asleep. Cole wanted to scream. The feeling had been building. He wanted her. He refused himself even a probe. Why this asceticism at the last minute? Why all the artifice? The vision of his father? His mother's divorce plans? No. Maybe it's just being home and not having enough evidence against Bill to prove much of anything should it come to that. All he had were a few receipts that contradicted each other and some photos of Bill's hooker handing him cash in a dark corner of the Sundown. He had to have more than that—he was sure the important evidence was there, probably right under his nose, and he just hadn't found it yet.
The next morning, while Carry slept in the trailer, Cole had the small office radio, sitting behind his head on a shelf, tuned to the college radio station in Billings. Something or other by Tchaikovsky moved along through emotional triumph and debauchery, and Cole sat, leaning back in the swivel chair, with a water pistol in his right hand. He watched the large glass window overlooking the gravel parking lot and washout docks. His hangover gently strangling him. The woman in the trailer slept soundly.

Ammonia diluted, barely, with water filled the clear, red colored water-pistol. A fly buzzed and popped against the window, he shot at it, missed and then shot again when it stop—this time the green bulbous fly folded up and fell to the window sill with the ammonia-water mixture.

He had played this marksman-game all morning since no trucks had come in. An inch layer of flies, most dead, some flipping their wings and digging themselves deeper into the pile, were stacked on the window sill and floor below it. He couldn't sleep. He planned to hit Bill with the full black-mail today, or soon, whenever the effect would be the best. He spoke to the window, rehearsing, "Bill I want you to give me some land. I know just what section I want. Now, Bill, don't be an asshole." Then he squirted the
Ellison Long Drive

window several times, aimlessly, rapid-fire-like.

Cole held the water-pistol up to the morning light coming in the window and shook it to see for sure where the waterline was. He had just about an inch left in the handle. He let his hand fall back to the floor, the most challenging position to draw from, and leaned back into the music.

Outside, a black truck owned by Jack Kemp rolled past the window. It was a new '88 model with a sloped hood and rounded fenders. A metallic black, the truck looked gaudy in the daytime but elegant at night. Bill had been quick to point out to Cole that Jim, his father, made Kemp the man he was, and that Kemp had always been more of a drunk than anything. He said Kemp only showed up at his truck shop once every couple of weeks, when he had his drivers line up all ten trucks and trailers in a row, each a fenders length ahead of the other, at night under the tall yard-lights. The grey smoke of finely tuned, new engines puffing into the air made him feel good enough to drive back to whatever bar he came from in his white caddie and buy the house a round.

The Kemp driver jumped out of the cab after he backed onto the washout pad. He unlocked the tool-box under the sleeper and took out his own rain gear. Then he waved it at the office where he knew Cole would be. This was the signal that he would wash himself out and save the ten dollars Cole charged to do the job.
Not long after Cole settled back into his chair, Bill Stockdon, the owner, drove up in his Yellow '76 Cadillac. Dust rolled over the car when it stopped. Bill open the door and got out. He had on the same outfit as the night before, a western cut plaid shirt, Levis, wore-out cowboy boots and an equally wore-out hat. Bill wore the hat all the time. He wore it like it gave him the air of being an old-cow-hand. Cole could even imagine Bill singing that song to himself--"I'm an old-cow-hand. . . ."

Cole heard him step up to the building. He shoved opened the wobbly door that nearly fell off its hinges, pointed his swollen black eye at Cole and said, "Why don't you fix this son of a bitch instead of sitting on your ass all the time? But then what the hell maybe that's too much to ask. I guess some people just deserve to sit on their ass."

Cole shrugged and stood up. They matched height. Bill slipped between Cole's back and the wall and took possession of the chair in front of the desk. He gathered up the receipts and counted them, recounted them and then slammed them down on the desk.

"Are you sure you took enough? Maybe I should just give you my house and car and get it over with. Save you some time, some energy, seein' as how you work so hard." He leaned back in the chair and pushed his hat back off his brow exposing a white patch of skin that looked like a wet tortilla had been laid on it. His face had the crispy brown
look of someone who'd been out in the sun and wind a lot. And he had been, but he never worked. His face and body were limp and fleshy because he hired everything done. Cole had pointing out to Bill before that he was hypocritical, but Bill went untouched by the criticism and told him that that was the point of having money. Cole agreed then, and he still did.

"I don't know," Cole said. "I'm not sure I like Cadillacs. Make me another offer." He reached in front of Bill and picked up the receipts. "Besides, one hundred and twenty isn't a bad couple of days."

"Hell I saw more than six trucks come in here just yesterday." Bill said. He was right. "There should be over three hundred here, easily."

"Really?"

Bill shook his head for dramatic effect. "You have no idea what you are fucking with here, Cole."

"You have no idea just how protected I am."

Bill smashed the water pistol with his long fat-fingered hand. Water and ammonia sprayed over the top of the desk and soaked a yellow note-pad and the receipts. He snapped the receipts up and then wiped his hand against his pants. Cole saw that the cuts from the plastic burned and that Bill tried not to show it. His face was puffy from rising blood pressure and a hang over a mile deep sitting on his chest. His eyes panned from the desk to Cole's eyes. He stood up. Cole let his eyes wander. He wasn't worried about fighting
Bill, but he didn't meet Bill's eyes for another reason. He felt it was too soon to enter the point-of-no-return with Bill. As it stood, Bill held himself in check because he wasn't sure how far he had to go to push Cole over the edge. The game was sort of petty right now, neither sure how serious the other was. And Cole wanted to keep it that way until he had more evidence to play a more serious game. Also, Bill, for now, was content to use bullshit and guilt as his major weapon.

He said, "I've known your family a long time. I gave you a job when you got kicked out of school. Invited you to my parties and cook-outs. Why don't you just leave and let us all get back to business? I know people who would frighten the hell out of you if you saw them." He waved the receipts at Cole. "I am in a lot of things neck-deep and if you fuck up this cover you'll get hurt. You dumb bastard. Hell I can't even go over to your parent's house any more without thinking what a shame it is that you're going to get hurt. Hell, go play music for your dad. Not that he can play. the bastard." He wiped his hand on his shirt. His hand became the object of attention for them both and Bill shoved it in his pocket. Cole was enjoying Bill's discomfort and his efforts to hide it.

Cole broke the tension. "We've been through this already. I won't take so much off the top next time. I had bills to pay. I was five payments behind on my pickup."

"You dumb shit. Get a real job!"
Cole met Bill's eyes. "I like it here, Bill. Place to live, fresh air, close to my family and friends, good honest back labor for a class-act rancher with a true western sense of truth and dignity and heritage—you know Bill, it's like living the American dream."

"You just got a hard-on for people with money."

"That's your fantasy."

"Cute. You know what I mean. See ya." He pushed past Cole and walked out, slamming the door hard. It creaked but held. The car started. Cole lifted his eyebrows and consciously inhaled. Obscure violin music had provided the background for this tiny clash of wills and now the last few notes plinked out of the speaker. The audience burst into a commotion of wild approval.

Cole didn't have a hard-on for people with money—just Bill. When Bill's father died of too much booze and left him a conglomerate of ranches existing throughout Montana, Bill had begun selling women and pick-me-ups; trafficking Canadian whiskey, stealing cattle, moving his own sick cattle across state lines without permits, and fucking over his employees. Cole caught onto his operation when he noticed the cash flow at the washout was inundated with the extra money Bill was laundering from illegal activities. Cole took photos, copied receipts, wrote down names and addresses and stashed the whole lot of information in the hills because Bill had broken an unspoken trust between employer and employee by trying to work Cole into the ground
one day, just for the hell of it.

If the time ever came, Cole wouldn't hesitate to hand the evidence over to the feds., IRS, or whoever . . . Then it dawned on him that he wasn't sure who'd he'd send it to, so he picked the phone book off the corner of the desk and began hunting through the listings for an address to send it to.

Another Kemp truck pulled in just as he began. He tossed the book down and went to wash it out. The driver was called Cliffhanger because of a wreck he had years ago. Since the wreck, Cliffhanger always paid Cole an extra five to wash out his truck.
Later in the morning, when Cole was spraying the outside of a trailer down, he notice Carry step out of the camper and start across the gravel parking lot. She was squinting in the sun shine and wobbling on her high heals as they shifted around in the gravel.

When she got to the truck, she remarked on his yellow slicker with the hood up, and the large hose he held. "How quaint," she said.

He dropped the hose and motioned her over to him with his head. She looked around bewildered, so he began explaining the operation. He pointed out the pump, in a small shack, that created sixty pounds of water pressure. Then he showed her the inside of the cattle trailer he had just washed out, telling her to watch her shoes. The hem of her black dress pants evinced water stains already. She grimaced down at them. Her left black pump had a piece of green, watered-down cow shit on the tip. She shook her foot, but she couldn't dislodge it.

"Every now and then I get a mouth full of shit," Cole said to her, drawing her attention away from her shoes. "The water hits a corner or a crevasse and angles back into my mouth."

"And I kissed you?" She raised one eyebrow.
She looked good, rough and that made him feel anxious. The burning in his chest was like an espresso buzz. She looked into his eyes. That was part of what was making him anxious. She didn't flinch or run and hide behind some facade of bullshit. She just looked. Here I am, she seemed to say to him, but he couldn't be sure. He gave up trying to be certain about people years ago. Maybe this is one of his projections. Maybe there is nothing in her eyes for him, like so many others. But... there was always the chance, and this possibility helped quell his tendency to hate people.

The truck started and then drove off of the concrete slab. Cole sprayed the back of the trailer as it passed. He noticed Carry back off the concrete and sink one foot in the mud between the two concrete slabs trucks parked on to be washed out. She backed up farther, looking into the air where the water bloomed. Both feet sank in mud, but she still looked up, afraid the water would rain down on her. Finally, she found solid ground to stand on. She waited. The water jetted into the pale blue sky as Cole sprayed up to the top of the trailer. Then he twisted the nozzle shut and dropped the hose. The pump wined loudly behind them.

He walked over to her. "You want to hold it?" he asked loudly.

"Judging by last night, it won't do me any good," she yelled.

"You don't have to have sex all the time," he said back.
into her ear, his face close to her hair. He could feel fine wisps of it touching his face. He could smell more of the newly-cut-grass scent that he'd smelled last night. He liked that smell. "Sometimes it's fine to just play. Sometimes it's too stark to jump right in. Here." He picked her up. She stiffened and kept her legs straight. He carried her toward the slab, his face buried in her chest, the humps of her ass wedged between his chest and arms. They wobbled and almost fell a couple of times. Her chest expanded and held for a second each time. They got on the slab, and he set her down.

He turned the hose on and moved to hand it to her, holding it out in front of himself. It took as much strength as he could muster to hold it casually, as if it weighed nothing. She grabbed a hold of it, and he let go.

She tripped backwards when the force of the spray jammed into her. She fell on her butt and let go of the hose. It jumped loose and slashed through the air. Cole jumped astraddle Carry, and, standing over her, tried to protect her from the flailing, gushing hose.

He tried to block the flying copper nozzle that could hit with the force of a pro-baseball player swinging a bat. He grasped at the hose, but it evaded him and slipped passed his guard. The nozzle glanced off her hip. She yelped and curled up. She began cussing vehemently. Finally the hose shot into his hands like a trained object remembering its instructions—go, kill, come back. He twisted the nozzle
shut. Soaked and pained in the hip, she gained her feet and ran up the slab toward the trailer-house. Cole shut the pump down and walked up after her.

"You stupid son of a bitch!" she yelled when he entered the trailer. He laughed and then ducked as she threw a book at him.

"You're one hell of a woman," he said.

She took her clothes off. The heat in his chest made him breath fast. She said, barely controlling her voice. "Get undressed, you bastard."

"I need to wash up." He offered the palms of his hands as proof.

"Take your fucking clothes off!" she shrieked.

His whole body felt like it glowed with heat and anxiety.

"Fine." He stripped, wiped his hands and face clean on his shirt and they made love. He grabbed her butt cheeks, like he imagined he would, and squeezed. Her skin felt like cream in his rough hands. He picked her up and laid her back on the bed. She bit her lip. One breast was in his mouth and he worked it. He felt her running wet. She grabbed him and wiggled under his pelvis until he was deep inside of her. He took over, crazed. She screamed encouragingly.

"That's more like it." she said.
"What do you do for a living?" he asked. Lying next to a woman. A woman he had just had sex with. A woman he had just been inside of. This should be enough to blow my brain, he said to himself. But it never is.

"I live off of my husband," she answered.

He slapped her hip, stood up and put his pants on. "Well, then, I better not take you home hungry." He pointed his index finger at her. "But, I don't owe you anything more than that." Now they were back at it. He couldn't understand why he always fought with women. It was as if he talked to them through a closed, pane-glass door. He looked through the glass which he's afraid distorts his image. He must talk through a synthesizer box screwed to the wall next to the door. Whatever they heard on the other side was not exactly what he said. He could tell this because they never reacted to his words right. But he couldn't remedy the problem because he never knew what they were hearing. Then again, maybe they didn't want to hear him right.

"We all got rent to pay. You fuckin' hick," she said.

He threw the dregs of coffee out of a cup. The black and grainy water streaked across her stomach. She cussed and stood up slapping at her abdomen as if the coffee was hot. Her face turned red and splotches streaked her chest and neck. Cole turned to put the cup in the sink. A book hit just above his head and knocked the coffee pot and a ash tray full of marijuana roaches onto the floor.

"Why are you such a violent son of a bitch?"
She didn't answer but stood up. Her nipples wavered in little semi-circles. She approached him. He didn't know what to expect. He fought the impulse to shy back from her. She walked up to him and put her mouth on his lips like the end of a big rubber tube and blew hard, flatulating his cheeks and mouth. She pulled back and he pushed her back onto the bed. "You're no more married than I am. I can't believe anyone would live with you. Man, you are way out of hand."

"Don't talk to me about out-of-hand, you damn hick."

She put her cream-white panties on, slipped behind the table and said, "Am I going to have coffee or are you going to suck my tits?"

"You don't work for Bill do you?" he asked while cleaning off the stove.

"Bill? Who in the hell are you talking about?"

"Never mind," he said.
Later that day, in front of the plywood office building, looking out across the gravel lot, Cole sat next to Carry. They each had a drink in one hand, and they held each other's hand in the other.

After their tumultuous morning, they settled into a calm that allowed friendship. He had pulled out two lawn chairs and set them facing away from the setting sun. No trucks were on the docks in front of them. They couldn't see Pryor creek, but Cole pointed out the trail of thick brush and cottonwoods across an acre of green alfalfa where the creek ran.

Cottonwoods, he told her, were the most important part of the landscape for him. After living here all of his life, he had found two things out for sure: "I love cottonwoods and hate the white sun. Every workday the sun would cut deep into us. Then at noon or on break or whatever, we'd recuperate under the trees." He sipped his drink. "It's not just that either. The jagged way they grow. In the winter, snow on the ground and white clouds over head, they are like fractured air. Like the web of cracks in a busted window, the trees, black against the white ground and sky, are cracks spreading outward into the air or space around them. Even in winter they are my
favorite, because when my father quit playing music for a couple of years, when I was twelve, he bought about fifty head of cattle. When we'd go out to feed them, we would start out in the dark. It would be cold and your nose would freeze and fill with pain up into your sinuses. The pickup would be rumbling along, bumping and jolting across the field of frozen cow shit. The cows would be there in front of us, blowing steam and lurching forward with each step. The trees silhouetted against the hills looked lonely, like my father. He could never actually stay happy and stay at home. He loved us, my sister and I and my mother, but he could never stay put. Being home made him lonely for crowds and women—I knew this even then because he used to tell me of his exploits, there in the cab of the pickup, the snow bluish in the morning light.

Cole took his sweating hand out of Carry's and wiped it on his jeans. She was watching the hills in the distance. She had her red hair pulled back into a pony tail. The wind blew the untied wisps around her face. She didn't notice them.

While she sat silent, he studied the side of her head. Her left ear was small and as finely tooled as any intaglio cut into perfect marble. He liked ears and hers were a good example. The inward curling edge of the pinna rose smoothly out of the inner most part of her pink ear and moved in a finely cut line up over the top to fall around the back and melt into her connected earlobe. The auditory canal,
opening, perfectly round, to her inner ear, had a light covering of hair. Her ear on the whole was clean. Cole stuck his finger in his ear and scraped out a bit of wax and put it on her pinna. She ducked her head slowly to the side and smiled at him.

"Thanks for the story," she said.

"What about you. Where did you grow up?"

She didn't speak right away and turned her head back to the eastern hills. Red sun-light had splashed the brown hills and the line of shadow from the hill behind Cole and Carry inched its way up the sides of those barren sagebrush humps that reminded Cole so much of crunchy dry grass and grouse, a certain smell came into his nostrils when he saw such hills.

"I grew up in Idaho," she began, bored, talking fast. "My family is rich. I made a mistake when I got out of a private school there and married another rich kid named Paul. He was going to make movies. He basically had no talent for anything but being a baby. I moved here a year ago to teach art at a private catholic school and to escape from family and friends. I've been here for three years now."

They were silent for a moment and Cole was thinking about who he was and where he was and who he was with.

"What are we up to here?" he asked her.

"What do you mean?" She smoothed her hair back and tucked the lose wisps in with the rest.
"I don't know. I just picked you up in a bar and now you are here, after spending the night, and I don't know what it means."

"It doesn't mean anything."

"God. Where have I heard that line before." He sat forward in his chair. A truck pulled off the gravel county road onto the driveway and headed for the washout docks. Cole recognized the driver right off. It was his father.

"I think I'll go home." Carry said.

"Yeah. Just take my pick up. Write down where you live and put it on the counter." He watched the truck carefully.

"What's the matter?" She looked at the truck too.

"The man in that truck is crazy."

"Oh." she said.

Carry pushed herself out of the reclining lawn-chair and walked to the trailer. Cole walked out to the truck. His father was stepping down out of the cab. The paint glittering in the sunlight reminded Cole of summer nights on the outskirts of cities with his father at the wheel of a cattle truck, chewing gum a hundred miles an hours, talking of music, the road and the women on it.
Wayne stuck his short leg out of the door and pointed his foot at his son. He had a new boot on: light brown color, thick leather sole, walking heal, silver toe-guard on the pointed end. His pants looked new as well.

"Well what'd ya know there Cole?" His boot came level with Cole's eyes.

"Not much. Nice boots."

"Want a pair?"

"Why not." Stolen boots for sure, Cole thought. Not to take away from his generosity, but his father was prone to giving away stolen things. Cole knew that these possibly two-hundred dollar boots, judging by the stitching and leather, weren't just bought off the shelf. More than likely they came from some western outfitter's store, unsold but not undistributed.

Wayne thrust a pair of new boots out of the door and then jumped down after Cole grabbed them. His black and silver hair was greased and combed back. No matter how drunk he ever got, his hair never looked dishevelled. "Try them bastards on," he said. And while Cole fumbled with his boots, taking his old worn ones off and fighting into the new one's, his father said, "So, had ya a lady here, I see." Carry had left only a minute ago.
"Yeah. Strange girl."

"White girl?" he asked through a big smile.

"Yeah. Sure." Standard lines. Cole stood up in his new boots. They fit fine, a bit tight in the toe, but not bad for free foot-ware. Dad. Man of gifts. All of his life Cole had new clothes regularly: boots, down-filled jackets, hats and Levis. Sometimes box loads of gear would be scattered around the living room. The emptied boxes stacked in the corner by the dinning room table. Clothes stacked on the table top. Everyone reflected in the living room's picture window. The overhead lamp was a white blur above their heads in the glass. The two kids, Cole and his sister, Kate, were in their under-wear trying things on. Mom strutted around in a new pair of boots--blue or silver or maybe just tan. The old man and his buddy drank shots in the dinning room sitting around the table, laughing, thumbing through gentlemen magazines, pointing out vaginas of interest, swollen tits.

"Say, you open for business?" Wayne jumped out of the truck. He stood an inch shorter than Cole. I can wash it out myself, but if you want the cash I'll give you a twenty." He stood facing Cole, congenial and sober. Sure dad, Cole thought.

Cole said, "I am open for business. Let me get my gear." He turned away and ducked into the pump house where he kept his rain gear and rubber boots. The pump house had one naked bulb hanging from the middle two-by-six spanning the
slanted roof. He pulled the new boots off and pulled on the yellow slicker-pants. He slipped into the arm holes of the jacket, lined up the velcro and pressed the front closed. The switch for the pump hung on the north wall. He opened the breaker box and flipped the switch up. The pump spun whirring into hydraulic action and the pressure gage jumped to sixty.

Outside, Wayne sat in the driver's side of the truck, facing out the open door, looking at an unfolded map. He looked up when he saw Cole. "It needs to be pretty clean," he yelled. "I'm hauling some hay and general goods." He smiled, folded up the map and hopped down out of the cab of the truck. "Sorry I missed you over at the Sundown," he spoke into Cole's ear. "That fuckin' Bill got us all hammered. How long did you stay?"

"Long enough to see Bill hit the dance floor."
"Huh. I missed that. What happened?"
"I don't know. You see Catlin?"
"Sure. She's at the house." He hesitated. "I've been there all week."

"Yeah. O.K. I better get started."

Wayne grabbed his shoulder. "Things have been a bit rough with your mother and me, but we're ironing them out. This run will get us a little cash and I was thinking of taking her on a vacation. She likes the ocean. Don't worry about it. We've been together a long time. We'll work it out."
"O.K.," Cole said, and he stretched the hose out past the end of the trailer as far as it would unroll. At its full extension, he doubled back.

The trailer was a new aluminum model with punched-out, oblong holes in the side and back. The loading gate slid up easily. Its spring still strong. Cole tied off the pullrope, flopped the hose down inside and climbed in. He unlatched the top ramp and let it down. It thudded onto the deck, both the deck and ramp were thick with manure. The top deck didn't look like it had seen cattle recently which would make Cole's job harder. The shit had dried. He pulled the hose after him as he walked, slightly bent; the hood of his raincoat singing against the aluminum ceiling. He sprinkled the dried shit, soaking it, the nozzle twisted open a quarter turn. The tough, rubber-and-nylon hose was tumescent in his hands.

At the front of the top deck, another higher, smaller compartment was closed-off by a three foot wide ramp. He let the ramp down, climbed, bent over, into the short compartment. At the very fore, Cole turned to make his assault on all the flaky hard manure splattered on the walls and thick on the floor. He braced himself and turned the nozzle wide open. A two-inch round jet of water shot forth and drummed against the aluminum side of the trailer, exploding into a white-out of spray inundated with bits of grainy cowshit.
After Cole's father had given him the new boots, paid him with a new twenty, said he was hauling hay and other goods, Cole knew what his father was hauling. He had read the front page of yesterday's paper which read "Correl Outfitter's Looted." Western wear for the whole family. Probably a store somewhere, in another state, willing to take on cheap inventory from a bogus warehouse that would disappear within the week. Kemp had a big enough trucking outfit that it was unlikely one of his trucks would run into any trouble at a scale house, whichever direction Wayne was headed.

Cole put his new boots on. He suspected Bill's involvement in all of this. Kemp owed Bill a few favors. But Cole didn't know how much Bill had told Wayne about the blackmailing. So, he had second thoughts about asking his father if he was working for Bill. The question could bring up the rotten subject of blackmailing a friend of the family. This was a solid opportunity, though, so Cole decided to risk it. The opportunity seemed too valuable to waste.

"I suppose this is ol' Bill's handy work," Cole said while walking next to his father who was bumping tires with a hammer to check for flats.
"Yeah. Got a buyer in North Dakota."

Cole decided not to push it and asked his father if he had time to drop him off at Carry's house to get his pickup. Cole planned to follow his father and take pictures of the load wherever he dropped it off. Good photos would bolster Cole's thin pile of evidence. Bill didn't know what Cole had on him except for a few receipts. He showed the receipts to Bill after Bill noticed some cash was missing. But beyond this, Cole hadn't shown him anything, primarily because he didn't have much else.

Wayne said he had time to take Cole to his girlfriend's house. So he and Cole got into the '88 Peterbuilt and headed for a Billings residential neighborhood, near downtown, where Carry's address could be found.

After Wayne pulled from the curb in front of Carry's two bedroom blue house and overgrown yard, Cole ran up to the door and banged on it. His pickup was parked out front on the curb and there wasn't another car in the drive. If she wasn't home, he would have a hard time following his father in his own pickup, especially if Bill was going along for the ride like he was prone to do. Bill liked trucks. He always wanted to learn how to drive but just couldn't get the hang of the gears. Bill had no patients.

Carry opened the door just then and stepped back. She was wearing a short, red-and-white, horizontally striped skirt and a white sheer blouse. A man in a dark suit stood
in the middle of the room holding a small pamphlet.

"We need to go right now. Your car. You drive," Cole told Carry through the screen door. Then he ran to his pickup to get his camera. She didn't move from the door, but turned and talked to the man in the middle of the living room.

When Cole got back onto the porch, he spoke rapidly, "Come on. This is important. What's the problem?"

"This is John. He was helping me pray."

"What?"

"He just came up and knocked on the door and asked me if he could help me pray. I said sure. I could always use a hand at that. But so far, no luck. No prizes or up lifting spirit. I'm just doomed."

Both men stood looking at her blankly, then the Mormon's face turned beat red and he fled, pushing past Cole and Carry and murmuring prophesy.

"I do have some religious notions. I mean I don't want to make a joke out of this but he was much more interested in my knee. This one," she pointed to her left, exposed knee.

Cole grabbed her arm and pushed inside. "Where's the garage door? You have a car don't you? Come on." She nodded while he drug her. As they busted through the door at the kitchen, she hit the garage door opener. A light came on revealing a convertible Volkswagen bug.

"Shit." Cole said. He rounded the front of car and got
in the passenger side. "Come on Scarlet. We've got a red job to blow."

"You goddamn vulgar ass. I ain't going anywhere with you." She turned to leave, but Cole lunged through the open driver-side window and drug her back. He opened the door, changed his grip on her from the hand stuck out the window to the hand between car and door and pulled her inside. Her dress had hiked up past her smooth thighs and exposed frilly pink underwear. She put the key in and started the car. The little engine rattled and then idled out into a quaint chirping.

"Where to?" she asked batting her eyelids and slowly pulling her skirt down.

"Just back out and head to Main Street."

Traffic on Main Street, at 7:00pm, was scarce. Wayne had. Cole figured, about a two-minute jump on them. But the truck would be hard to miss if they turned the right way on Main and made up some time in the little car. Cole's qualified guess for direction was left or north because up Main, past the rental shops, department stores and restaurants, beyond the city limits, were warehouses and truck shops. Bill had rented a warehouse up there. 345 Swan. Cole had found out about the warehouse when he broke into Bill's house a few days ago and found the rental agreement. He bade Carry to turn left onto Main, head north, and make good time but don't get a ticket because
we'll lose him.

"Who?"

"My father."

"What is he driving? Or did he take the bus somewhere?"

Cole didn't answer. Then when he saw the truck, he pointed it out to Carry. He explained to her that he wanted to follow the truck and take pictures of what it took on and put off no matter where it went. He asked her if she had some time off coming from the school. She said she did.

"Well then, would you be so kind as to drive me around for a couple days?"

"No," she said. "No goddamn it." She had plants to water and why couldn't he drive himself.

He said, "Because they'll know it's me following them."

"What is this? Something illegal?"

"We won't be doing anything illegal. They are."

"What about your father? Is it right for a son to get his father in trouble? Are you some kind of cop?"

"Hell no. I won't get my father in trouble. The guy I am sure he is hauling stolen clothes and boots for... you remember Western Outfitter's was knocked over?"

"Knocked over?"

"Ripped off? You know, things stolen? Jesus. Get in the other lane... Please?"

"Get your filthy hands off the steering wheel."

"Damn damn damn. Just get me to where that truck is heading and you can fly to the damn moon."
"Don't be so caustic."

Cole looked over at her. They were traveling through the Heights now and the streets were lined with boutiques, hardware stores, bars, gas stations, the whole range of modern Americana.

"Look the guy I work for is neck deep in a bunch of petty crime. He has some girls he keeps at his bar outside of Huntley. He sells some drugs—mostly bennies, speed. Every now and then he sells a bit of coke. Lately he has hooked up with some more-serious people that my father knows. They are probably using Bill to get their stuff out of state. I am black mailing the son of a bitch."

"What?"

"I am trying to get some land where I can raise a family, raise animals, just ranch and carry on without having to work for someone else. I want to live on the schedule I set up, not on someone else's schedule. O.K.?"

He was yelling.

"Is this guy dangerous?"

"No."

"What about his friends?"

"Yeah. Watch out you don't get blocked by the cars turning up here."

"I'm driving."

"Fine. Anyway, they're not too nice, but then I am going to stay a long way away from them."

"How long will this take?"
"A couple of days."

"Can I call someone?"

"Yes. This isn't the FBI. I have to make a call too."

The Kemp truck pulled off of Main onto Swan. Cole and Carry followed and then drove past the driveway it turned in. They parked a block up the road. Cole told Carry to drive back to the Blue Bucket convenience store and make her phone call and would she please call this number and tell whoever answers the phone to get Scott to watch the washout. She agreed and Cole ducked through a county five-strand, barbed-wire fence and trotted across the short grass of a horse pasture that ended in some cottonwood trees separating the pasture from the warehouse.
Carry Talimage put the Volkswagen in first, slowly let the clutch out and sputtered away from the fence and Cole. She shifted to second then third and finessed the car to forty miles per hour. Her father had given her the car when she divorced Paul Printer and lost access to her trust fund. The marriage had been her father's idea. "Marry money like I did and you won't have to worry about anything. You can have fun too. I mean, Paul isn't a complete sap. Just imagine, with the trust fund your grandmother gave you and his trust fund, which I hear is a dandy, you'll never have to work. You can travel and paint around the world. And, let's face it, the best painters are in Europe. I'm sure you can get hooked up with some real talent overseas. Someone to nurture you and give you solid grist for your mill."

Thank's dad.

Her husband, Paul, had been a man who believed that because he had enough money to buy the kind of mobility, look and company a screen writer had, he was a screen writer (or at least a budding screen writer). He never wrote one screen play, though. He and Carry lied to his and her friends constantly about his big productions coming up—they weren't really friends, though. They didn't have friends
because they were living in cars and planes, never around anyone long enough to become friends.

Paul wasn’t much for talent, but he was just intelligent enough to pervert their sex life. As soon as he touched her naked skin, her stomach or one cheek of her ass, palmed it and followed its contour, she became two different people. Her body became an object for them both, a whore for their perverted entertainment. He could get her far enough into his fantasies and visions of sensuality to make her want to be a part of them. So she also became a third party to her whore body which she used for their delight. Inside Paul’s fantasies she became touched by both herself and him. They shared her body—which was as close as she would let him take her towards a menage a trois.

Her role in sex tended to be her only role in his life. He said she fulfilled a man’s need for an extended erotic relationship, but that there wasn’t any need to go beyond that, like talk about her painting or her ideas. She acted as a base for his other excursions, he unassumedly explained. He expected this was the case for her, also. It wasn’t, she told him. But that was her lack of vision, he retorted.

When she pressed to become involved in other parts of his life, they argued fiercely. She attacked the ramparts of his private life and he defended, never giving an inch. Finally, when the sex ended and thus her role in the relationship ended, he left her. She complied with his
request for a divorce and lost her trust fund.

Her father bought her a cheap car. She left home because to live with her mother became intolerable. The woman blamed Carry for the divorce, even after Carry explained. Carry, furthermore, only explained because she thought her mother was against the marriage in the first place. She soon realized that her mother hadn't been against the marriage, that she had misread her mother's signals.

She bumped over the curb at the Blue Bucket and stopped in front of a pay phone. The short squat building with a blue tiled roof shaded the front of her car and she stepped out. A red gravel truck sat idling in front of the doors. The driver came out of the store, nodded at her and smiled. Carry turned her attention to the phone, plugged in a quarter and dialed the school secretary's home number.

"Margret? Hi. Carry. I'm going to be sick for a couple of days. There is a great young substitute named Cris Pruitt who would be good to get for a while. Yeah. Sure. O.K. See you."

Carry took the number Cole gave her out of her shirt pocket and dropped another quarter in the slot. She dialed and let the phone ring. Finally a gruff woman's voice rolled into her ear. Carry said, "I am supposed to tell anyone that answers that Cole needs Scott to watch the washout. Just a day or two. He didn't say. I don't know. I can't say. That's all I know. Fine." She put the phone
in the cradle.

The truck driver, a young fairly handsome man with short brown hair, was eating a Jello Pudding Pop. He had some of it on his chin. Carry waved. He got nervous and waved back, his eyes widening. He looked around, jokingly, to make sure she had waved at him. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and said out the window of his truck, "Hi. I'm Jake." Carry waved again and walked into the convenience store. Out of the very corner of her eye, she saw him get out of his truck.

She walked the aisles slowly, deciding what to get for the trip. All she could see that interested her was junk food: potato chips, candy, cookies. What the hell. This is a vacation. She began picking items off the shelves as they caught her attention. The truck driver stood over by the pop cooler and stole glances at her. Boys. Boys. Boys. She walked over to the cooler and reached passed him to get a Coke. She noticed he shivered. She said to him, "Isn't truck driving boring?"

"I don't think so. I make good money," he said.

"Money's boring," Carry said and walked up to the cash register. There was a heavy woman sitting in a chair, smoking a cigarette behind the counter. She ate popcorn by the hand-full and watched a small T.V. After a minute when a commercial came on, she blinked once at Carry and then stood up and began to tally up Carry's junk food.

"Well." Jake stood close behind her. "Money's not
boring on its own. People bore themselves and others."

She didn't rebut or look at him.

"But I guess you know too much about that," he said.

"Just piss off." She felt foolish for arguing with this stranger. She merely wanted to give him a thrill at first, but then when she tries to thrill men she normally ends up in a fight. She isn't sure where her penchants to suckle up to men comes from, anyway.

"Anything for you queen bee," he said and he pushed out the glass door.

The cashier smiled at the money in her palm and then she counted out the correct change to Carry. Carry was fighting back the impulse to take a jab at this fat woman behind the counter. She was also fighting back the impulse to scream and pull the cigarette display onto the ground. Her mother used to call these tendencies of hers tantrums and spank her wildly for them. Carry didn't know where the impulse came from. Every since she could remember, she would get a fierce-burning inside her head like blood vessels were bursting and flooding her skull, and she would rant at people, knock things down and in general just get totally carried away. The fits didn't correspond to her period so that wasn't it. They didn't seem to happen concomitantly with any other regular event in her life. She would, at any time and any place, get tense and her jaw would set and then her incisors would begin grinding against each other like they were sharpening themselves. Things in her vision would
become two dimensional, flat and infinitely layered, one prop behind another creating a collage of items like paper dolls in paper houses eating paper food running along paper sidewalks in front of a paper sun with paper trees wiggling in an imaginary breeze. These visions, when she painted them (in garish colors), were absurd trash according to her father. Not very becoming, her mother would say of Carry's tantrums—after the wild paddling—when she let her stand straight and put her dress down.

Carry started her car and headed back to where she had dropped Cole off.

She thought a lot about her mother recently. She had acted so strange at Carry's wedding. And mother it took me a year to understand your behavior at my wedding, she began saying to herself in the familiar litany of unanswered questions. Did you think you were telling me something that would make a difference? And why do you call me three times a day still? I can't have been that important to you. Did I fulfill a need? Can't you hire some one to take my place? The way you stood up and yelled, "She's a virgin. She's a virgin." Did you want a door prize? And thanks so much for the bucket of fish. Carp wasn't it? "Food," you said. "Food makes a man happy." Mothers and their morose symbolism, Carry decided, have ruined our chances for a simply life. Everything we do is part of some tremendous war with men—a serious war. I never understood the stakes until I met Paul though. . . .
Carry drove back to where she dropped Cole off and parked as sundown came upon the arid land.

The beast cloaked in rough, red cheese cloth had caused enough tragedy for one day--image and theme mixed in Carry's mind--and sets on all our curves, leaving them blind frontiers to struggle within. Let me push against you. I can't seem to find where I begin and you end. She turned on the radio and Bad Mommas rapped out their synthesized notions of love. "Let me jump on the bed and break the legs of the man you say is just a friend. . . ."
Cole hid behind the trunk of a cottonwood when he saw Bill drive up in an old, orange Toyota pickup. He parked it beside Kemp's truck and flung open the door. Cole zoomed in on Bill with the new lens he had bought a week ago. Bill arched out of the tiny cab. Cole took a picture. Next, he caught Bill's sluggish profile outlined against the silver side of the aluminum cattle trailer. His stumpy, rounded nose and flat forehead were distinctive. Cole backed the lens off and took a context shot with Bill small and half way through a stride in front of the rear trailer duels.

Wayne stepped out of the metal warehouse door and shook Bill's hand. Cole didn't take a picture. If he intended to stay out of trouble with his father and the more serious men, he shouldn't have any evidence that could possibly be used against them. He watched Wayne pull his hand back and put it in his pant's pocket, making symmetry with the other side of his body. Wayne rocked forward on the toe of his new boots and listened while Bill gesticulated grotesquely, miming the act of sex and signaling sex to others as if he were a seaman joke teller signaling coded obscenities to other ships. Cole zoomed in and caught a particular thrust of Bill's middle finger and his grimaced face. Suddenly they both leaned back into howls of laughter. Cole could
hear the sound as if from distant jackals. Wayne and Bill turned to go inside. At the door to the warehouse, Bill turned and waited as another car pulled up. Six men got out of Bill's old cadillac. Cole recognized two of the men.

The driver, tall and heavy in the chest with long brown-reddish hair, was John Van Duke. The other man was Bert, a blond tall man with thick arms and fat calloused hands. Bert had just been in jail for shooting a policeman while escaping from a bank robbery in Great Falls. The cop didn't die, in fact he was only wounded in the lower part of his calf, just nicking the ham string. Burt had been in jail as long as Cole could remember, and he had never seen him in person until now. He knew it was him, though, from pictures. Bert's wife was friends with Cole's mother and Cole had been over to their house where pictures of Bert haunted the corner of the down stairs fireplace mantle.

John had spent time in the prison in Deer Lodge for shooting at Cole's house years ago. He also did time for statutory rape. Cole had no idea what to expect when John walked into the warehouse. He couldn't believe that Wayne would have anything to do with John. An explosion of words or a fight or something had to come about. He didn't know if Wayne and John had patched things up or what. It was not surprising that Bill was connected in with those two guys, but Wayne? Jesus. He took several pictures of John as he walked by the truck. He took no pictures of Burt. Burt frightened him.
After fifteen minutes, the big door to the warehouse opened. Wayne appeared and pulled the trailer's loading gate up. Then he went back into the warehouse and stood just inside the big door as John, Bert and the other men carried bails of hay into the trailer.

Cole took several more pictures of Bill and John. In one photo he caught Bill looking into the dark space over John's shoulder. Both men had their heads thrown back and were laughing. Bill's eyes darted down across John's shoulders. They could have been two farmers caught in a jovial moment of their lives, the darkness of the old farm shop behind them, a six pack of beer on the floor between them. He took a picture of Bill looking into a box and another one when Bill took out a shirt and threw it over his shoulder, his mouth a straight line.

In an hour they had the trailer lined with bails of hay and filled in with boxes. Cole had all the photos he needed for now and he snuck off into the dark. Halfway across the field, he ran into Carry who was skipping round and round as if dancing around a May-pole, a black specter roaming the gray moonlit stubble of the old horse pasture.
Cole and Carry followed Wayne onto I-90 and various roads that led them all, finally, to a town in North Dakota called New Town. The town had been built when the Billhorn dam filled a huge valley wherein several towns had to be abandoned to the resevoired water. New Town. The populace was unable to come up with any real name for the place and allowed New Town to become, by imaginative default, the name for the new dot that would be put on new maps coming out that year.

Wayne drove the trip straight through stopping to piss only once. Carry also drove the seven hour trip straight through. Cole sat in the back of the little convertible Volkswagen trying to decide what was going on with his father. He had always been wild, out of control. For instance Cole remembered the first time he because aware of his father's monumental instability.

He, Cole, must have been about six years old. During this time his family had an active farm: pigs, cows, chickens, cats and dogs, ducks, horses, kids doing chores, parents taking part in community activities like branding and castrating the neighbor's calves, etc. This anecdote has particularly to do with the cats. There were three of them. They were scraggly, watery eyed barnyard cats. They
were young, between kitten and cat stages. These cats were particularly wild and had one habit that continually annoyed Wayne. They would, when someone went in or out of the house, run meowling through the door and through the house.

On the evening in question, after Wayne had been out late playing music at the Sundown, when he swung the door open and stepped inside, the cats ran past him, yowling and knocking books and small figurines off of shelves. (Wayne was probably trying to be quiet, trying to hide the smell of another woman in silence and darkness, whatever) The cats pissed him off. He chased them down and caught all three, one at a time. Cole and his sister had learned to stay put during these late night arrivals of their father.

He gathered his semi-automatic 45 out of the night stand. Cats in his arms, he stood just outside the door. He shot each cat at arm's length. The blast from the gun broke up the night air. The last cat shit straight in the air and streaked his shoulder and hair. He washed himself and went to bed. Cole knew all these details because his father told the story on himself time and time again. Cole had heard the cats running, his father's grunts and diggings under couch and chairs. Then he heard a drawer open. He held onto the family Dachshund. The drawer closed and his father stomped away, cats meowing. Then three explosions—each shot made him cringe, he hid deep within his covers.

The next morning Wayne said he was sorry. He apologized to his two kids and promised to get them some different
Ellison
Long Drive
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cats.

Wayne had always been semi-out-of-control, but never for a sustained amount of time. His brain would burst wide open and anything might happen, but after that, after the explosion and damage and he had spent himself, he became sorrowful and repentant. He would hug the kids, tell them he loved them.

Wayne worked hard, most of the time. He took care to be smart about animals and kids. He was diligent. Then the flare up would come. . . . like the time he couldn't get his gelded appaloosa in the horse-trailer. The horse had been in it a hundred times, but one morning he wouldn't go. Wayne tried everything. He used grain and various other coaxings, but the horse became more resistant as the cold morning advanced upon noon.

Wayne, Cole remembered, had promised to ride in the March of Dimes ride that year from Columbus to Laurel, a twenty five mile charity ride put on by a Billings radio station. He had already missed the starting time. But he continued fighting with the horse because the attempt to put it into the trailer became a battle he wasn't going to lose.

The morning temperature hung around twenty degrees. The sky was wide-open-blue and the white sun punished the land with its cold blinding light. The battle began to rage. The more strength Wayne invested in each pull or push against the horse the more resistance the horse gave. Cole
remembered his father's face becoming pale and flushed alternately with anger and exertion. The dark grey speckled horse blew and fogged the air. Wayne put a lariat rope behind the horse, under its bulging rear muscles, and, with Cole pulling on the lead rope from inside the horse trailer. Wayne sucked up the slack. The rope cut into the horse's muscle. Cole pulled. The horse's face looked crazed: its eyes were wide and the whites slashed in the dim light in the trailer; its nostrils flared with each blast of air and snot, and its front hooves danced and chipped wood from the ramp.

Wayne pulled hard and the horse inched forward, dancing, skipping, jerking, wild like all of wilderness exploded within it. The horse was making one final stab against control for all things wild. Wayne hollered and cussed—man's wilderness within him. He grabbed the loose end of the lariat and snapped the appaloosa on the ass. The horse jumped straight into the air. Cole, inside the trailer, lost the lead rope and jumped out the side door. The horse stood on its hind legs pawing at the top of the trailer, banging and drumming on the ramp trying to climb over the top. Wayne pulled hard, furious, loosing control over himself. Then, as suddenly as the horse stood up, it slumped down and fell over onto its side, trying to turn away from the open trailer. The rope sank under the weight of the horse and Wayne was jerked to the ground. His straw cowboy hat came off his head and rolled on its rim a foot
away. The horse fell over next to Wayne and clipped his left arm when it immediately tried to gain its feet. It stomped at the ground, blew and lunged upright.

The horse ran off once it gained a standing position. Wayne too had gained his feet and, without hesitation, took in after the horse. He ran for a bit, then walked the horse down. This took an hour, but after walking up to it a hundred times, the horse realized there was no escape. It stopped and Wayne grabbed the lead rope. His face turned white by the cold and pure rage, his mind and rational control burned away by the inferno raging inside his head. Wayne tied the horse to the trailer, picked up his hat and clipped Cole across the head as he walked past him. When he got to the house he started the car. The new, brown Reviara roared through the gate with Wayne heavy on the gas peddle. He slid the car around and backed it up to the front of the trailer at a twenty-degree angle to the pickup the trailer was hooked to.

The horse had been pulling against the lead rope to no avail, and Wayne laced the end of a lariat through the loop in the front of the halter. He smiled at the horse and patted it on the cheek. Then he took the end of the rope and put it through the front window of the trailer. As he turned, rope in hand, to leave the trailer, he tried the horse once more by giving two tugs on the rope. Take your best bet horse. But the horse wouldn't take him up on the offer. So he exited through the side door, jumped in the
car and eased on the gas. The horse went berserk.

Wild screaming issued from the horse as it fought, fell, kicked, clawed, shook, screamed more. The dried shit on the ramp splintered off in showers. The horse's head and neck were stretched out straight. Slowly, half on it side, its front legs tucked under it, its back legs pounding the hell out of the wood and metal side of the trailer, Wayne drug the horse into the trailer.

Amazingly enough, Cole thought, after all that screaming and banging, the horse had no serious injuries, no broken neck, no gouges in its flesh. It stood up inside the trailer and when the tension was released it shook its head vigorously. Wayne inspected the horse briefly, then lifted the ramp closed. It was too late to go to the March of Dimes's ride, and Wayne left the horse in the trailer for a few hours. Then he let it out, gave it a good run down and went, later that afternoon, grim, to work at the Sundown where a party for all the participants would be getting out of its own particular control.

This was before Bill had any money in the place, before he had any money at all and people recognized him for the careless rich kid he was and had little indulgence for him. One of Bill's father's ranching hands was famous for putting out the word on Bill—"He isn't worth the piss it would take to strangle him." Then Bill got money.

Why did Wayne fall in with Bill? Cole, obvious to
himself, was on the brink of loosing respect for his father—through it all, he had known his father to be a strong man. Through it all, he had at least loved his family. It bothered him that his father had to get involved with Bill to such an extent as to simply put up with John and all other such assholes.
When Cole, Carry and Wayne drove into New Town it was six O' clock in the morning. They veered away from on coming traffic where the street split into two lanes separated by a wide meridian that ran down through the center of town. A few cars lined the sides of the main drag but no pedestrians could be seen. Since the sun had come up, Cole made Carry follow Wayne at a distance, and they dogged him through the small town. He drove a few blocks and then pulled off the main street onto a cross street. He swung the new rig around a tight, side-street curve and headed west, back tracking. He pulled over at the back of the New Town bank.

Cole, sitting in the back seat, took his camera out of its black leather case and took a few context shots. Then he put a new full roll of film in and waited.

"How was the trip?" he asked Carry.

"Long. I'm bushed."

"All we have to do is see where he drops this stuff off, take a few pictures and get to a hotel."

"Sounds wonderful." Carry was sedate, becalmed. The all night drive wore her down. Cole had offered to drive, but she said she liked to drive and stay up. She said it put her in a different state of mind, made her transcendent. He asked her what she meant, and all she could say was "You
know. Above your life." "Right," he had said. Then they
didn't speak the rest of the trip.

Now they sat quietly, parked a block away from the truck
in front of a small house, and Cole turned his imagination
on it. The house had possibly two bedrooms, a kitchen so
small you can't get the refrigerator door open all the way;
small enough that, if it was necessary, you couldn't escape
your spouse for the life of you, and you could possibly have
one of those marriages where every moment is a fight, every
word a contention looking for reassurance that you are not
being eaten alive by the son of a bitch you have set up
house keeping with for low these last two millennia.
Cole's mind wandered father into the lives he imagined lived
int his house in New Town. Mom, I am coming home. This
marriage thing sucks the big one. Cole's reflections ran
along these lines.

The house, in all actuality, had a red shingled roof
with only one long unbroken ridge spanning across the
building. The lazy slope of the roof fell away at two-foot
eaves hanging warped over yellow, flaking siding. Two black
windows faced Cole and Carry. A little boy's head poked up
in the right window and then faded back into the dark.
Another specter thought Cole. many ghosts on this trip.
Double exposures. You see the blurred image of, say, your
father. One is the past image; the other over lapping it
may simply be newer by one second, but the result of the
double exposure gives the sense of schizophrenia nonetheless.

Wayne stepped out from in front of the Truck and a younger man, about Cole's age, stepped out with him. The younger man was dressed in a three piece suit. A black tie lay thinly on his chest, which was wide, but not powerful, a weight room chest. The two men walked to the back of the truck and the man in the suit leaned against the trailer, not afraid to get dirty. Wayne gesticulated mildly in explanation or joke, Cole couldn't tell for which. The conversation looked amiable, and Cole took a picture of these two just for the hell of it. The picture would reveal his father's backside and the younger man's easy, smiling face. He doubted the picture would help his cause with Bill, but maybe. To tell the truth, Cole wasn't sure what would help his cause and what would act against him, and he was slowly loosing his compunction about photographing his father or any of the others, anyway.

Then Wayne stepped up into the truck and a puff of smoke announced the engine's ignition. Cole nudged Carry and she moaned. He shook her again. She woke up and grabbed the wheel.

"Jesus. I thought I had fallen asleep on the road."
"Let's stay with him. We're almost done."
She started the little engine.

"I hope all this is worth the trouble," she griped.
"Just come on."

The truck lurched forward and rolled onto the side street. Carry put the little car in gear and started in after it.

"Stay behind him quite a ways, now."

"Just shut the hell up. I can do this just fine without your yap."

"Fine. Fuck it up. I don't even care."

Carry stopped the car and announced, "If you don't just let me be. . . . I am tired and this has been a long favor to you, and I don't really even know you, so just let it go. I can't keep up this bullshit forever either. Let's just start again. Hi. I am Carry." She was turned around in her seat, her thin hand held out to Cole, waiting for an answer and a shake.

"O.K. Fine. Hi. I'm Cole." He squeezed her hand.

"Now let's go."

She put the car in gear again and followed the truck.

New Town over looked lake Sacajawea. The water was down considerably because of the drought and sun and when Cole and Carry followed Wayne down to a dock and a building hidden in a cove, they both noticed a house boat trying to get out of the cove where it had, evidently, landed the night before. The outboard engine whined its two-stroke whine and churned up black silt and mud. The driver, a
skinny, young man in shorts and an open purple wind breaker with a pink insignia scrawled on the back, turned his head back and forth, looking forward, looking back. He spun the wheel in his hands and the little outboard swept from side to side at isometric angles to the back of the boat. Finally the guy shut the motor down and sat in a lawn chair on the open deck.

Carry turned the little car around in the dirt road and they headed back out of the cove. Cole jumped out of the Volkswagen when they topped a hill and told Carry to meet him at the concession stand they had past on the way in. She pulled away and a new Chevy pickup, like Cole's, blew past, kicking up dust, with the young banker behind the wheel, not noticing anything. Cole trotted across the road in order to circle around and get the drop on the whole scene.

He had just crested a small, grassy knoll from where he could zoom in and take pictures, when he noticed that the young banker was aboard the house boat apparently talking with the boat's captain. Through his lens, on twenty-power, he could see that the conversation wasn't a nice one. The boat's man looked around and had his shoulder's hunched and his neck bowed a bit. The banker's face showed a man working himself up to do something and sure enough, after a moment, he slapped the boat's captain and knock him down. The young guy laid still on the deck of the boat. The
banker hesitated. He didn't like to do this, the doubtful look in his eyes said. Then he reared back and kicked the man in the right leg. The man's mouth shot open and his tongue lulled out. His eyes went shut, tight. He curled up slowly, like a cold machine, and lay still again. The banker looked around and shoved the man off the deck into the water. The ousted boat's captain sank, then came up sputtering and covered with mud. He wallowed over to the bank, climbed it and limped off out of sight.

Cole had no comment. Who knows, maybe the little fuck deserved it. He zoomed in on his father who was leaning against the pad-locked door to the building. He had his arms crossed and a tired speed look on his face. His eyes were wide open and dry. He blinked and blinked. His jaw crimped together and released, crimped together and released. Cole snapped a full body shot of his father and then took two context shots of the building and of the lake with the building small in the lower left hand corner of the photo.

The banker stepped out of the little row boat he had used and walked down the short dock adjusting his coat. When he approached Wayne, he smiled and dug a ring of keys out of his pant's pocket. He stabbed the lock with a key and removed it. The door opened and revealed darkness. The two men stepped inside.
After an hour of basting in the sun, Cole saw the two men come back out of the shed, shake hands and part. He snapped a photo of them grasping hands. The banker got in his pickup and drove off. Wayne climbed into the truck.

An hour latter, when Cole woke up, he saw five big men in farmer outfits: caps advertising fertilizer, baggy levis and loose fitting shirts. The men were unloading the trailer and Cole took photos. They had it empty, hay and all, in another hour, and Wayne, guided by one of the farmers, backed the rig off into some weeds, jack-knifed the truck and then pulled the trailer onto the little dirt road. He drove out.

Cole and Carry checked into the Drive and Sleep Motel and slept.
Fourteen

Carry and Cole woke at seven that night and found themselves surrounded by shabbiness. Fifteen for a single, Twenty for a double. These rates made the motel look like the best place to stay, and really how bad was it? They didn't have a lot of money between them, so there wasn't any big dilemma in deciding where to sleep. But, even taking that into consideration, they both expressed misgivings about the state of their room when they awoke.

The walls were in a badly warped, milk-colored state of simulated-wood-grain decay. The two nightstands and a chest of drawers must have been rescued from a trailer house engulfed in flames. Most of the time in these situations, Cole mused, you can say to yourself, At least it's clean. But not this time. Although, the manager did try to kill off the worse fumes. He, the skinny, pock-faced indian who managed the place and checked them in this morning, made it policy to put an open gallon of vinegar in the bathroom behind the toilet bowl. Now, the covers pulled up to their chins, taking stock, Cole and Carry could distinctly make out the smell of vinegar laced with just a thread of some other smell that wasn't at all pleasant.

"Let's don't," Carry said in response to Cole's minute advancement under the covers.
"What?" He had simply moved his little finger up and down an inch of her smooth soft hip.

"I don't want to in here."

"That's fairly pristine of you."

"Look, don't give me any shit."

"O.K. Fine. Let's get out of here and go eat something." She had been on edge since they left Billings—he wasn't sure why. She had that look of personal discovery on her face: introspective frowning. But what the hell, if she had an problem to solve internally, Cole could give a million miles of room.

She was ready for that suggestion. She flung the covers back and stood up. Her back was to Cole and in the instant before he reach out and grabbed her rudely, the light between her legs, crowned by a soft looking rumple of lightly tinted red hair carelessly hanging coiled, bloomed in his eyes.

"Jesus! You asshole, Cole. Just leave me alone today!"

"Come on just a tussle in the sack," he pleaded.

"No, you dipshit hick. I don't want you. Let's just go."

"Take off. Go on. Get the hell out."

She jabbed her leg at the hole in her pants and stumbled, calmed herself and gently slid the leg in the proper sleeve. Then in went the other and she hiked the pants up. "Fine," she said and when she got her shirt on
and purse slung around her shoulder, her underwear stuffed in the purse, she left.

Outside, Cole heard the little Volkswagen chirp to life and sputter off.

Twelve O'clock, a starry night, and Cole wandered from the Sportsman over to the Elks where there was a live band playing in the basement. New Town was like any other western small town he had ever been in. The local farmer's sons were drinking themselves into a stupor, like they do every day, waiting for some emergency or a bit of good paying work or for the old man to decide to retire or die of a heart attack.

The local girls who had grown up with all the local farmer's sons had made up their minds about marriage a while back in their lives and were either married with two children or were not married and hung around, if they stayed in town, various groups of farmer's sons. They flirted but were not delighted at the prospects: John will blow his wad as soon as he finally gets it in, after poking around for five minutes; Jack does not get it in but wants to have oral sex until both their mouths are chapped and red; Jeff will be sentimental and want to talk of the old days; and Clint, the most interesting, will make love but without a great deal of the kind of investment he put into telling stories.
In the basement of the Elks, dark and velvety, splashes of red hovered on the walls and spilled over the floor. The band was not good but not loud. Their rhythm was slow; their leads simple and made up of only a few notes. The bass-player, like every bass-player Cole had ever seen, was stoned or just looked that way. Cole bellied up to the bar and ordered a gin and tonic. The bar tender looked askance at him, his small eyes set deep into his fleshy face, and then mixed the drink. He set it in front of Cole and asked for two dollars and fifty cents. Cole dug in his pocket and came up with two-forty-five. He pulled his wallet out and dropped a new twenty on the counter. One more piece of Bill's ranch there on the bar. He drank from Bill's gin and tonic without hesitation or guilt. The drink was now Cole's. The twenty on the bar was now Cole's. He had not set out, when he first went home, to steal from anyone, but Bill had a unique talent of being able to work his way from being annoying, like a child, like someone you know cannot help themselves, like someone who really doesn't try to be a complete fuck up but cannot help themselves, to a real pain in the ass—to someone he wanted to knife.

Cole's supreme irritation with Bill had begun the first day of the second month he worked for him. First thing that morning, Bill, a young man with a wife and three young kids and a dead father who had left him possibly a million, tried to gyp Cole for fifty bucks on his pay check. Cole
mentioned the missing amount and Bill said, "Oh shit. We'll get it worked out tomorrow."

Cole said, "No. Damn it. We'll do it now or I'm leaving."

"O.K. Don't get mad," he said then laughed long arcs like it was the most petty thing to be mentioning a fifty dollar discrepancy to him, the big man who burns a fifty to light his ass hairs on fire.

"You ain't mad are you?" he asked after he handed Cole a new fifty from his wallet. Cole thought: a new one Bill. Just a fifty in your pocket Bill, nothing else? I saw. You conniving bastard.

"Mad?" What was their to say? Every response to that question was cut off. "No," but then your stuck trying to look like the fifty meant nothing to you either. "Yes," you are a sorehead and he'll take you to breakfast to make up, playing you like you were a petulant baby.

"No." Cole finally answered. "Bill I ain't mad, just paranoid."

"Well hell. Let's get a cup. . . ."

I would rather shove a knife in your gullet Bill. Yeah! Ha! Ha! Funny, but true; you finagling bastard! "Sure Bill," he said. He is, after all a friend of the family. He helps get your father employed. Sure Bill. You know Bill if you were a man you wouldn't hide behind your money. You'd be much more straight forward. You wouldn't wait
until someone was cornered by the need for money and then count coup.

Past grievances came to Cole, now, in rapid succession:

"Get me a cup, would you?" This over at the folk's house. Just mother home. What could Cole do? Refuse? Bill would make a swaggering mess out of that, "Oh now. You ain't mad are ya?" Again Bill, again I ain't mad but I would like wrap all your money tightly around a stick of dynamite and shove it up your ass, lit.

Then the final straw: Cole had seen what Bill was up to, but he hadn't fought it. He wanted to pull his head together and leave all that fighting and power shit behind him. College and jail and life in general had him slightly confused, unstable. His ballast had broken off and sunk to the lake floor. The winds blew him around and around in the dark water which swept in over the edge. The boat careened round a vortex. And Bill pulled an untimely stunt that put Cole in a vengeful state of mind.

The stunt was nothing obvious or devastating. Cole and another man had been planting old railroad ties in the ground and tamping them down level and straight since six O'clock AM. The ties were heavy. The sky was clear and pale and the sun, as always, white. No wind blew, but it would. Cole and another hand worked hard setting railroad ties ten feet apart, making a square hay pin. At two O'clock they finished. They had all the ties in the ground
and were packing to go home for the day. Then Bill drove up, sleep still in his eyes, and told them to jump in the back of his pickup. He had some things needing to be done. He drove them to the top pasture.

The soil in the top pasture was rock hard, and Bill wanted to put in another hay pin. He yanked a bucket from the front seat of the pickup and set it down. He reached and took out a spool of string which he handed to Matt, the other hand. He gave Cole the working end of a hundred-foot tape. At first Cole thought they would just take the measurements and then go home. It had been a long hard day already. But, while Cole and Matt put in the stakes and plotted out the pin, Bill left in the pickup again and came back driving a Farm-all with an auger attached to the power take-off unit on the back.

They began digging holes with the auger: the hard dirt resisting the dulled cutting edge. Cole and Matt had to push on the auger and shovel dirt away from the hole. This went on. They drilled all the holes into the gray soil by three thirty. Cole figured Bill was just getting a little more work done since he had two workers around for a couple of days. Then, when he showed up with the pickup loaded down with ties. Cole figured something more was up. And sure enough as soon as Bill wobbled out of the cab of the pickup he asked Cole if he was ready to go home.
It was a stupid game. Bill wanted to work Cole until he quit. He wanted to teach Cole some hokey, fucking, lesson. The other man could work like a mindless mule for weeks so there was no chance he would quit.

"No, Bill. Let's do it," Cole said. It was dumb. Who gave a shit if Cole quit, accept Bill? And, really, who gave a shit what Bill thought? But Cole couldn't let him have that small victory, just one more small victory like "Get me a cup." But that was the end of the truce Cole had unilaterally made with the world. "You can't hide." Cole said to the water swirling down into a hole in the urinal. "You can't stay out of it. The world won't let you. It can't let you. If it let you get away from its biggest game of all, powerplay, then it couldn't believe itself to be truly the only game in town."
The first moment of clarity that came to Carry on her way back to Billings occurred forty miles out. The rest of the trip both going and coming back saw her too steeped in the emotions she had been putting off to think at all. She had alternated from feeling displacement and sorrow to burning in anger. Her disappointment and sorrow stemmed from the fact that she was a long ways from home. She had no money, and a man she had loved (or had a feeling for that she took for love) since her childhood had alienated her from herself and from any hope that love could exist in the world from day to day and moment to moment without conflict and perversity. She, now, forty miles from Billings, realized that the dream of uncomplicated love was childish. This insight was a simple rational deduction, but it meant everything to her at the moment.

Now, she saw her failures in the light of that deduction—her attitude toward love had been childish, unimportant and, most of all, finite. Childish love was a stage. Adult love must be down the road some where.

Thinking back on her brief, one-fuck affair with Cole, from this height of realization, she felt stronger than ever and put him in perspective—he was a stranger. He and all like him were way back there.
The road, also, was the place to get these thoughts together--driving down the interstate through foreign land. Land that held no meaning for her, land that kept her afloat ("transcendent," as she had told Cole) because it repelled her. The landscape of eastern Montana repelled her imagination and any feeling she had of belonging or of being attached. The land was dry and hard and consumed in its own process of erosion: it needed nothing from her.

The land in eastern Montana and northern North Dakota made her feel lonely, but more complete. She could imagine herself as a figure on the horizon of this landscape. The figure of a woman standing on a grassy, wind blown hill. The woman is partly eroded. There are chinks in her personality and emotions, but at least she is just one figure. Carry can see herself alone for the first time rather than as a myriad of inextricable others that have laced their being into hers. Driving down the interstate, thirty miles from Billings, she doesn't feel populated, crowded, penetrated.

"I can't take in the world, for crying out loud," she said to the night. "I am not some vast receptacle for the bazaar and demented, for the ubiquitous, quixotic male."

Again, she thinks back: while she and Cole waited for Cole's father to make a move, behind the bank in New Town, she had decided then, without examining herself or her motives or whatever, that she had to leave Cole and stay
away from him and other men. She didn't have to investigate the notion or try to find the root to the impulse and examine it: all those rational games were diminutive and undermined one's ability to decide: they kept one afloat, light as a feather as if nothing happened to you unless you decide to put it inside an encapsulating concept of reasonableness, like some Kantian moral, categorical imperative. But she had had enough of that. Her father had undermined any and every decision she had ever "happened upon" while growing up. That was how her father put it. He would say, "You always just happen upon a decision instead of arriving at it. Thus you always decide the wrong thing."

Like the time when she was fourteen. She asked her father, sitting in a dark leather chair, a new book of philosophy in his hands that he was asked to write a review of, if she could go to the spring dance. He told her to think it over and decide for herself. She came back an hour later (it hadn't taken her an hour to decide but she had to give the impression of long deliberation) and said she thought it would be fine for her to go because that was what she wanted to do. What did the old man have to say? "I knew you'd come up with that decision. Young people have no notion of how to conduct their lives. You cannot go. It is my role as a parent to guide your virtual, incipient, penumbral reasoning faculties."
Carry passed Ballentine, twenty miles out of Billings, and the yard lights became more frequent and clustered in the darkness surrounding her. She had read *Clarissa* in college and had found her guiding tome. She wrote an essay on the book. Her most cogent and personally satisfying paragraph, she had memorized it: "Clarissa died because no one was willing to restore her, namely her father. In her soul, Clarissa knew that she could not be happy, could not be who she was if she were to marry either man; she could not even do it for her parents; no compromise is sufficient for the soul. Rather than understanding this, her father, her family refused to understand her. They worry not about Clarissa, but about themselves and what society thinks. They are completely unwilling to compromise their own thinking; for, in them was something implicit: society tells you what is right for you, what is wrong for you. They were hardly aware of themselves as having feelings contrary to society's beliefs. Clarissa, however, would not allow society to compromise her, even if it meant death, which it did."

She yelled the last few sentences trying to rally up the feeling of discovering and the sense of sanity it had given her years ago.

She had recognized a great lack of personality within herself then; a lack she had tried a hundred ways to fill, and now she headed past Billings, past her job, her friend,
heading nowhere in particular. She latched onto one purpose in her driving—simplify, cut back the layers of dust and chaff. The world is always trying to cover you up, as if you were lying on a sandy beach and the ocean sweeping over you was a great mass of people.

"They say a man can change your life. That is of course true. Any person will change your life and too many people will ruin it." She drove on. Visions of the ocean invited her.