

12-15-2006

## Adult Education

James Wyatt  
*University of New Orleans*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td>

---

### Recommended Citation

Wyatt, James, "Adult Education" (2006). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. 475.  
<https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/475>

This Thesis is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by ScholarWorks@UNO with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Thesis in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uno.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uno.edu).

Adult Education

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
in  
Drama and Communications  
Creative Writing

by

James Wyatt

A.B. University of Missouri-Columbia, 1986  
M.A.T. University of Iowa, 1991

December, 2006

Experience is a hard teacher because she gives the test first, the lesson afterwards.

—Vern Law

For Agnieszka and Theo

## Acknowledgements

As this collection of short stories centers on teachers and education, it seems fitting to first thank some of the teachers who have helped me.

I've been fortunate to have worked closely with Amanda and Joseph Boyden during the course of my M.F.A. They are outstanding writers, and no teacher could give his time more generously or offer his help more selflessly than they do for their students.

Although I've never formally taken a class with the third member of my thesis committee, Michael Winter, I've valued the opportunities I've had to consult with him about my work. He has consistently given me new perspectives on writing.

When I was an undergraduate student at the University of Missouri, I was lucky to take a workshop with Bob Shacochis, who taught me that writing matters and who inspired me to submit only my best work.

I've learned much from the writing workshops I've taken through the University of New Orleans, and I owe a debt of gratitude to everyone who participated in them. I would like in particular, though, to thank Emily Dziuban for her encouragement and for her thoughtful and thorough critiques.

Brian Chanen, a colleague at the American School of Warsaw, has taught me through his own example how much one can achieve. Watching him pursue a PhD, raise a family, teach full-time, and simultaneously train for a marathon helped to convince me that I might be able to complete this MFA.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my wife Agnieszka for her support while I pursued this degree. She has done far more than her share of duties when deadlines loomed, she has made excuses for my absences, she has served as my first reader, and yet, despite all these impositions, she has always encouraged me. I don't know how I got so lucky.

## Table of Contents

Pi Day .....	1
Snares .....	31
Blunt Not the Heart .....	54
The Fatted Calf .....	77
The Good Heart .....	92
In the Middle .....	107
Shakesteer's .....	135
Adult Education .....	162
Ars Poetica .....	186
Vita .....	208

## Pi Day

This isn't Jake Tierney's best morning.

Last night Tierney celebrated his fiftieth birthday, not alone, but in the company of strangers. He spent a long night in a *lokanta* in central Istanbul, taking drags off a communal narghile, drinking, and arguing with a group of tourists about whether or not Islam is a religion of the sword. This morning Tierney woke with the licorice smell of raki exuding from his pores, a rattle in his chest from the sweet, apple-flavored tobacco, and the conviction that someone must have trepanned his skull without anesthesia.

Now Tierney—fat, slump-shouldered, unshaven—skulks down the hallway of Beygir Academy, his satchel in one hand and his duffel in the other. His footsteps echo painfully throughout the tiled corridor. When he arrives at his classroom, he pauses and mops the sweat from his forehead with his coat sleeve. Through the closed door he can hear his students shouting and laughing. All Tierney wants is to survive this first period and then to sneak back home, where he might sleep until his afternoon classes; but as he pushes the door open, he hears behind him in the hall the voice of his director, Dr. Debbie Donaldson. “Jake. I need to talk to you about Murat.”

Murat. Tierney winces at the name.

He turns around to face Donaldson and stares in disbelief. She's dressed in some sort of costume, a wedge-shaped piece of foam covered in brown velour. There's a hole cut out of the top of the wedge from which her face protrudes, and her legs, clad in brown tights, extend from the bottom. She looks like a pyramid of dung. Tierney rubs his pounding head. “What's that you're wearing?”

She looks surprised that he's asking. “It's my costume for pi day.”

“Pie day? At the cafeteria?”

“Pi day. P. I. Three point one four. Today’s March fourteenth.”

Tierney looks at her, uncomprehending.

“Third month, fourteenth day? Three-fourteen?” She walks around Tierney and leans against the doorframe, blocking his escape.

“Oh,” Tierney says at last. “I think they write it fourteen-three here.”

“Jake, the memo I sent out requested all departments to recognize pi day. You know how much I value interdisciplinary approaches. As department head . . .”

“Of course, of course. It just slipped my mind for a minute.” Pi day. Christ, what a waste of time. “We’re writing poems about pi—I’ve asked the other teachers to do something also.”

He smiles and tries to slip past her into the classroom, but she maneuvers her foam wedge into his path. “Let’s make sure the English department is supporting the effort. And, Jake, Murat wants to talk to me about you. He won’t say what’s the matter.”

“Dr. Donaldson—”

She flashes her teeth at him. “Jake, you know I want to be called Dr. Debbie!”

Dr. Debbie. The name suits her. It’s the perfect combination of pretended informality and approachability coupled with an absolute insistence on recognizing her doctoral degree—an Ed.D, Tierney is sure, not a Ph.D, and probably from a correspondence school, somewhere where she wasn’t required to have a language or write a dissertation. Tierney, for his part, does have a Ph.D, in English Literature, but Debbie has never called him Dr. Tierney. Or even Dr. Jake.

“Dr. Debbie,” he corrects himself. She takes a step back, and Tierney notices that she’s opened up a gap. “I’d better get to class.” And he slips past her into his classroom.

\* \* \*



“Can we turn our attention back to the poem, please?” Tierney asks, but Murat drums on his desk with his hands, and even Zeynep and Cengiz, his star students, are chatting to each other in Turkish. Tierney glances down at his own book. He hasn’t found a way to pull the class into Donne’s poem.

“Why does Donne say,” Tierney begins, but the letters blur on the page. He squints them back into shape. “Why does he say that death is ‘slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men?’”

No one answers. He looks around the room. The conversations drop off into silence. Some of the students have their heads down on their desks. A group of girls stares at him with blank expressions. Tierney points to the word he’s written on the board, *mortality*. “Any ideas?” Still no one speaks.

Finally a voice from the back of the room says, “Sir, *sey*, what does it matter?”

Murat. Without looking, Tierney knows. Murat verbalizes every pause with “*sey*” or “*yani*.” For Tierney, Murat symbolizes everything he hates about Beygir Academy. He’s the triumph of money over education. He weasels and kisses ass because he’s too stupid to understand any of the work, but still he finds an opportunity every day to let Tierney know that literature is a waste of time, that only business matters.

On another day, Tierney might kick him out of class, but he knows he should be careful with Murat today, after the events of yesterday morning, and so he ignores the question.

“Do you see? Donne is saying that death isn’t a master. He’s a slave,” Tierney says. “If there’s a war, or if somebody puts his head in an oven, death has to punch his timecard and go to work.”

Tierney looks around the room for a reaction. The private conversations have resumed in various groups. Tierney feels poisoned by the raki, and he’s angry with this class, angry at their lack of interest.

But he's angry with himself, too. Despite the thousand things Tierney hates about Beygir Academy, he's always believed that his contact with the students is what matters most. This morning, though, he's cheating them: it's a wasted day, and they can't afford it. Somehow, before the external exams at the start of May, Tierney has to coach this group of twelfth graders through the metaphysical poets. The metaphysical poets—it's an appalling choice for a class of second-language speakers, but he inherited the syllabus from his predecessor and he's been powerless to change it.

And then Murat yells, "It's snowing!" He runs from his seat to the window. "It's snowing!"

Tierney looks out the window. Sure enough, giant, wet flakes are floating past. How can it snow in mid-March, in a Mediterranean country? This school year Ramadan started in November, so *Şeker Bayram* came in December. Then it was a long slog through winter until their cold and miserable February break for *Kurban Bayram*, with no vacation, of course, for Christmas. And now it's snowing again. "Always winter and never Christmas," Tierney thinks, remembering a line from Narnia.

In the distance, across the fields which surround the school, Tierney can see the *gecekondu*, the "overnight houses," that line the Trans-European Motorway into Istanbul. Perhaps they'll call school early and he can spend the day in bed, close to his own toilet. A few inches of snow on the TEM would bring traffic to a standstill, and the students' buses wouldn't make the trip from Istanbul.

All the students have left their seats and are gathered at the window. Tierney knows that he's lost the class for the day. "Everybody sit down, please," he says. "You've seen snow before."

Reluctantly, they make their way back to their desks. All except for Murat, who remains at the window. He begins to chant, "Snow day, *Inshallah*. Snow day, *Inshallah*." He holds his arms in the air and snakes his hips.

Tierney is dripping in sweat. “Murat,” he says, “shut the fuck up.” As soon as the words are out, Tierney regrets them.

Murat stares hard at Tierney, and then he says, “Sir, *yani*, you shouldn’t talk to me like that. Not in front of everyone. Not after yesterday.” He turns and walks out of the classroom, slamming the door behind him.

Tierney holds his throbbing forehead in his hand for a moment, and then he turns back to his class. They look up at him now, interested for the first time today in what he might have to say. “We’re finished for the day,” Tierney says, although there are still thirty minutes left in the period. “We’re done with Donne.” No one laughs at the joke, but they continue to stare at him. “Make sure you read Marvell’s ‘To His Coy Mistress’ for tomorrow.”

When they’ve gone, Tierney tucks the anthology of poetry into his tattered leather satchel and picks up his canvas gym bag from the floor. Considering how trashed he feels this morning, bringing his workout clothes was an act of crazed optimism. But two weeks ago he made a promise to himself that he would run every day, a promise made after finding out that his cholesterol numbers were pushing the boundaries of the stratosphere.

With his bags slung over his shoulder, Tierney sets out back down the hall. Perhaps he can sneak out of the building, sneak home to his *lojman*, without being noticed. If he goes down the east staircase, he can walk through the administrative wing to the back door, and from there it’s a short walk to his apartment, with little chance of being seen by his colleagues or students. The only difficulty is that brief walk through the administrative wing. Still, with first period still in session, the odds are good that the deans’ doors will be closed and no one will see him heading out the back exit.

When he enters the wing, he's relieved to see that it's empty. He strides out, clutching his bags. He's half-way to the exit—home, peace, nap—when Dr. Debbie opens her door and steps out into the hallway directly in front of him. She's still wearing her brown wedge of foam.

"Jake," she says. "Murat is here in my office." She studies him. "Are you not feeling well? Isn't class still in session?"

Shit. "The students are doing some research, so I've sent them to the library," Tierney says. "I was just coming to see you."

"About Murat?" She gives Tierney one of her cold, false smiles. "He says you hit him. Did you?"

He holds up his hands, palms flat. "Dr. Debbie. I never hit him."

She stares, as if appraising him. "Okay," she says. "Murat is just inside. Why don't you go and talk to him for a moment first. Maybe you two can work this out."

When Tierney enters Dr. Debbie's office, he sees Murat sitting on her leather couch, feet up on a chair. Murat, thin and tall, looks immaculate, as always—his hair perfectly cut, his school uniform tailor-made. He wears gold chains around his neck. He smiles when he sees Tierney and sing-songs, "I'm gonna get you fiiire-erd, Sir."

"Shut up, Murat," Tierney says. The aspirins he took this morning have done nothing, and his skull pulsates with pain. He drops his bags on the floor and sits in one of the armchairs across from Murat.

"You shouldn't have hit me, Sir."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Murat. I never hit you."

"Şey, Sir, you did. Yesterday morning. I was very upset last night. My father says you're going to get the, *yani*, sack."

Tierney's head throbs a steady rhythm. All he wants is a chance to lie down and sweat the rest of the raki out of his system, and he's not in the mood for Murat's game of blackmail. He mumbles, "Suck my cock."

Murat looks past Tierney to the door. He must spy Dr. Debbie hovering in the hallway just outside, because he calls out, "*Şey*, sir, what is, *yani*, 'cock'? My English is not so good."

Dr. Debbie hurries back into her office, her pi costume bouncing around her. She stares hard at Tierney. "What's this about?"

Tierney turns back to Murat. He rubs his head and tries to think of what to say in response, but the thing that keeps coming to mind is the ending of Frances Cornford's poem "The Watch": "Oh death come quick come quick come quick come quick." Finally he says, "Not 'cock,' Murat. 'Clock.' I was correcting your English. When it's on the wall, it's a clock; when it's on your wrist, it's a watch." Tierney makes a show of looking at his own watch. "And you're right—class is about to start. You'd better run along."

Murat seems to weigh his choices. At last he says, "My father is very, *şey*, upset. He says you shouldn't hit me anymore." For effect, he looks weepy and nervously gathers his books, his backpack, and his navy blazer. At the door he turns back one last time, "Please, Sir, don't hit me anymore."

Dr. Debbie attempts to sit on her desk, but the foam wedge won't allow her to bend. She settles for standing. "I don't need to remind you who his father is."

"His father is the Don Corleone of lower Anatolia." Tierney wonders if Dr. Debbie can also hear his stomach gurgling as a variety of *mezes* work their way violently through his guts.

She paces in front of her desk. "His father has been very generous to this school. His father just built us a new gymnasium."

“His father had to build us a gym or we wouldn’t keep his idiot son at this school.” Tierney knows that he’s playing this all wrong—he ought to be expressing concern for Murat. He ought to be asking, *what kind of troubled boy would make something like this up?*

“We have rules and standards at this school, Jake”

God how he hates her.

He hates the way she insists upon calling the members of the faculty “educators” and not “teachers.” He hates her fat, American, middle-aged body—a human torso transplanted onto an elephant ass. He hates how she refers to herself as a “generalist” when what she really means is that she knows nothing about any subject.

“Dr. Debbie,” he says finally, keeping his voice level, “I know we have rules and standards. I know how selective we are. That’s why I’m curious why a kid as demonstrably stupid as Murat was accepted. Perhaps if I could just take a look at his entrance exams . . .”

“You know that those are confidential. Are you suggesting that there was bribery involved, Jake?”

“Not at all. I’m sure there’s a perfectly reasonable explanation why the dumbest kid in Turkey with the richest father got a place at our school.”

She glares at him and drops her show of affability. “You know that’s not how things work here.”

Tierney looks around the room. Like Dr. Debbie, the office is a sham. Dark wood and brass fill the room, while deep red Hereke rugs cover the floor; the bookshelves are lined with matching, leather-clad volumes; an antique wooden desk dominates the center of the room; and, on the wall hangs a large photograph of Deborah Donaldson wearing her doctoral robes—but despite its pretensions of old-world academia, the office, like the rest of the school, was built just three years ago, and the books, Tierney is certain, like Jay Gatsby’s, have never been opened.

Dr. Debbie breaks the silence. “I need your word that you didn’t lay a hand on him.”

His face feels flushed, and the pain in his head hasn’t subsided. Tierney hates lying—he’s been teaching *Heart of Darkness* to his eleventh-graders, and one of Marlowe’s observations always resonates with him: “There is a taint of death, a flavor of mortality in lies.”

“I swear I never hit him.”

“There’s no truth in it?”

At another time in his life, he would have told Dr. Debbie to get fucked, but now he can’t. He needs this job. Schools, like baseball, come in leagues—he’s worked in the majors, but this one is not even double A. Since losing his university post, Tierney has worked his way down through the international teaching circuit: from big Asian schools in cities like Jakarta and Bangkok through Eastern Europe, to Latin American schools with barely adequate salaries, and now to his current method of picking up teaching jobs where he can find them—small schools that needed an English teacher quickly, or struggling schools that thought they wanted the prestige of having a Ph.D on their faculty.

And yet he knows that there’s still room to fall further. If he loses this job, he’ll probably be looking for work at for-profit schools in places like Tajikistan, where nobody checks too carefully the references of their teachers and where the salaries aren’t paid in hard currency. He can’t afford it. At fifty, retirement doesn’t look so far away.

“He’s lying.”

She hesitates. “You know, Jake, we have some other concerns about you. We don’t feel you’re keeping up with all your duties.”

Tierney appreciates the use of the first person plural, absolving her from any direct responsibility. He mops the sweat from his brow and braces himself to hear some variation on a

speech that he heard many times before. “What exactly have I done? Or rather, what have I not done?”

“For starters, you haven’t submitted the revised curriculum.”

“We have a curriculum. I revised it and sent it to you in January.”

“And I pointed out to you that it didn’t emphasize technology in the classroom. I asked for a further revision, which was due last week. I’ve sent you two emails on the subject, neither of which you’ve answered.”

He’s never read the memos. She bombards him with emails, several a day, and he’s taken to deleting them unread unless he detects some clue—a frowny-face emoticon in the subject line, say, the most severe expression she’s capable of recording in writing—that one might be important.

“Ah. The *technology* revision. I’m working on it, but you know that midterm grades are due today. I can have it to you in a couple of weeks.” What he would give to get out of this office, to lie on his couch.

She gives him a disappointed look. “You see, Jake, this is just what I mean. You’re not keeping up with the modern world. If you had all your grades on the electronic gradebook, it would be simple—your grades would always be up-to-date, and you’d just have to hit ‘send.’”

Tierney begins to protest, but she cuts him off. She’s showing her teeth, but her voice has gone a degree colder. “I didn’t know we were hiring such a Luddite when we hired you, Jake. Technology is very important to our school.” She moves back behind her desk and tries to sit, forgetting that she’s wearing a huge wedge of foam. She slides halfway down the seat before she manages to get upright again.

“Work with me, Jake. Show me that our trust in you wasn’t misplaced. Get me that curriculum today, and get your grades sent in on time. If you do that, I’ll support you when I meet with Murat’s father.”



He wonders if she knows what a Herculean task she's setting him. His grades are a nightmare, and he hasn't even thought about revising the curriculum again, but considering his situation, he nods his assent.

"Grades and curriculum, Jake, and I'll try to defend you."

Tierney drags himself from the quiet of the administrative wing into the chaos of the high school, repeating under his breath, "Curriculum, pi day, grades." He pushes his way through a crowd of students on the ground floor, home to the science labs. The smell of formaldehyde and half-rotten fetal pigs permeates the air, making him want to wretch. "Excuse me, ladies . . . pardon me, gentleman," he says, trying to push his way through to the toilets. But it does little good—it's break-time, and students crowd everywhere, jostling and pushing each other, stopping to talk in the middle of the hall. It's a sea of blue and gray that he tries to part.

He pushes his way to the boys' john, where he shits noisily, far too relieved to feel the humiliation of doing so where the students can hear. At the sink, he splashes cold water on his face and looks in the mirror. His shirt pulls tight across his big gut. He still has that slack-faced look of too much drink.

When Tierney finally makes it up to the third floor and to the English wing, class has started and the students have vanished. All except for Murat, who stands outside the door to the English Department room, waiting. "Shouldn't you be in class, Murat?" Tierney asks. "Everyone else is."

"Why do you lie, Sir? Why do you say you didn't hit me?"

"I didn't hit you, Murat."

"Sir, *sey*, my father is very angry with you."

"Is that a threat?"

Murat steps close to Tierney, so close that Tierney can smell Murat's garlicky breath. In a low voice Murat sing-songs again, "I'm going to get you *fiire-erd*, Sir."

Tierney looks up and down the hallway. They are alone, and for a moment he considers putting his hands on Murat and shoving him into the lockers, but it suddenly seems too perfect. He takes a few steps down the hall towards the next classroom, where he finds Berk, Murat's best friend, his body compressed in the space between the door and the end of the lockers. Tierney walks back to Murat. "I'm not lying, Murat, you know that. And without a witness, your daddy doesn't have any case against me."

"Wait and see, Sir."

He brushes his way past Murat and into the office. The room is a tiny one, stuffed to bursting with four desks, and there's barely room for Tierney to slip in between them. He drops his satchel on the desktop, stows his gym bag under the desk, and slides into his chair. His head radiates pain from a point between his eyes. He knows only one sure-fire cure for a hangover and decides it's time to use it. He picks up the phone and calls the *çaycı* in the tea service. "*Bir* Coca Cola, *lütfen*. Coca Cola. With ice."

The *çaycıs* are the one redeeming feature of Beygir Academy—call them up and in a few moments they'll bring you a beverage on a shiny silver tray. Dr. Debbie, the Turkish Ministry of Education, the board, his colleagues—all these things he could do without, but the tea service is a great idea.

Half of his English department share this office, the people for whom he's revising the curriculum. In the desk facing him sits Janet, the Dungeons and Dragons queen. He studies her for a minute as she reads a student essay, red pen in hand. She's painfully thin, bad-skinned, her hair long and unstyled; her lips move as she reads the essay. He will be revising the ninth-grade curriculum for Janet, an exercise in futility since Janet doesn't even follow the existing one. Instead,

she chooses every year to teach *The Bell Jar* for the entire first semester. Not only is *The Bell Jar* not on the ninth-grade curriculum, but the school doesn't even have copies of *The Bell Jar* in the bookroom—she spends hours at the copy-machine at the start of the year photocopying the entire book. But Tierney knows that *The Bell Jar* is one of the few books that Janet has ever read—she studied it at university, so perhaps she even has some vague idea what it's about. Now, during the second semester, Janet's students are writing haiku, although there is no mention of haiku on the syllabus either, and fifty copies of *Julius Caesar*, which *is* on the curriculum, remain in the bookroom, unused.

When the *çayci* shows up, his pressed red uniform top worn over ancient, patched trousers, Tierney hands him a million lira and tells him to keep the change. And then Tierney prepares his cure. He takes a big swig of Coke, making some room in the glass for the secret ingredient, then he opens the bottom drawer of the desk, where, under a stack of ungraded essays, he uncovers a bottle of Jack Daniels—the good stuff, brought from the States. And finally, while he makes a great show of rummaging around in the drawer as if he's looking for a paper, he surreptitiously removes the cap, brings the glass down below the edge of the desk, out of Janet's line of sight, and pours two fingers of Jack into the glass. Stirring is out of the question—too obvious—so he gives the glass a swirl and returns it to his desk. He takes a sip. It's not quite hair of the dog that bit him, but it's the hair of *some* dog, and it will do.

At the desk against the wall, at a right angle to Janet and Tierney, sits Thompson, an antediluvian whose classes consist only of lectures, delivered in a droning monotone, written and memorized sometime before the Peloponnesian War. Most of Thompson's eighth-graders are far too bored to ask any questions, but those few unfortunates who do find that he has gone so deaf that he responds to whatever they ask with yet another memorized lecture.

Tierney looks at Thompson—his flesh hangs off his skeleton like a wet shirt on a clothes-hanger, his head is skull-like, and except for liver marks, he has almost no coloration. It is for Thompson that Tierney will be revising the eighth-grade curriculum so that it includes greater emphasis on technology. In truth, a mimeograph machine would be new technology for Thompson, cutting-edge equipment that would allow his students to read his lectures instead of having to sit through them.

Thompson notices Tierney's stare. "I saw you talking to that Murat in the hall," Thompson booms out.

"Today's pi day," Tierney says, by way of response. It's a non-sequitur, but Tierney knows that Thompson won't hear anyhow, and this way he's fulfilled his obligation to inform him of today's activities.

"There are only two types of boys."

"Yes, I know—lazy and stupid. You've told me this."

"Lazy and stupid."

Thompson gets up and walks to the door in his halting old-man gait. Incredibly, Thompson seems to fancy himself a dandy: he's wearing a silken shirt tucked into tight, gigolo trousers. He stops at the door and turns back to Tierney. "Although sometimes it is possible for a boy to be both."

In the corner, under the window, is the only desk with a computer, the "work station," as Dr. Debbie calls it, where she expects the faculty to be "integrating technology." For some reason, this has become Brett's desk, even though this is the computer that everyone in the English department must use to enter his grades. Brett sits there now, trying to surf the Internet, but the school's connection is too slow for surfing, or even paddling: text-based pages load, but frames or graphics cause problems. Brett is fresh out of college, which means that he's young enough to be

willing to serve as an intern, a special form of indentured servitude. Brett does whatever odd job anyone thinks of—running errands, photocopying, subbing—in exchange for subsistence wages and the chance to live in exotic Turkey for a year.

The Jack and Coke is starting to work its magic. There's a little less edge to the headache, and the details of this morning's encounters with Murat and Dr. Debbie have pleasantly fuzzed.

Pi day. He needs to spread the word.

“How's *The Bell Jar* coming, Janet?”

She looks up at him through thick, smeared glasses, which magnify her eyes. “Oh, we've finished that. We're writing haikus now.”

“So soon? Listen, here's a great lesson for you. Today's pi day, so why not have your students write haiku about pi?”

He can see that she doesn't understand, but she nods her head. She's thankful, he supposes, for any suggestions of what she might do to occupy class time.

Brett interrupts, “It's five seven five, right?”

Tierney glances at him. “No, I think it's three one four.”

“Syllables? For haiku?”

“Pee-eye pi, not dessert pie,” Tierney continues. “It's cross-curricular, you understand. With the math department. Dr. Debbie's really into cross-curricular activities.”

Janet nods again, somewhat more enthusiastically.

“And wait until you see what Dr. Debbie has up her sleeve for the morning assembly.”

Brett speaks up, excitedly, “I've got one.”

“One what?”

“Haiku. I wrote it while you were talking.” He reads off the computer screen:

*“Non terminating,  
An irrational number.  
Will it never end?”*

Tierney wonders if he could ever have been this young. Was he ever as enthusiastic as Brett? Brett, puppy-like, is so eager to please that he'll even write haiku about pi, no matter that the assignment was proposed sarcastically. Just give him a job. Is this an admirable trait, Tierney wonders, or just stupidity which should be trained out of the boy? Neither. At the moment it's a weakness to be exploited.

“Brett, that's incredible. You wrote that just now? I'll tell you what—how would you like to teach my classes today? I've got eleventh-graders at 12:40 and twelfth-graders at 2:30.”

“Really? That'd be great.” Suddenly Brett looks surprisingly uneasy. “But aren't you teaching *Heart of Darkness*? And Metaphysical Poetry? I'm not sure what I'd do with them.”

“Forget it—your pi poem is perfect.” Tierney takes another pull on the Jack and Coke. He's starting to enjoy this. “Read your haiku to them, and then get them to write pi poetry of their own. If there's time left over, you can have them draw pictures representing pi and put some of them up in the hallway. Just make sure you tell the twelfth graders that they need to read ‘To His Coy Mistress’ for tomorrow.”

At eleven o'clock Janet and Brett dutifully leave to attend the morning assembly in the theater. Tierney supposes he's seen enough of Dr. Debbie for one day, and with the office empty and Brett taking over his afternoon classes, he's just bought himself more time for grading and curriculum.

Grades are due and Tierney hasn't even begun to look at them. The problem isn't that he hasn't kept his grades on the computer, as Dr. Debbie suggested; he hasn't kept them anywhere. Dozens of slips of paper with grades written on them lie scattered about. There are also two or three sets of papers that he has promised the students that he would grade and record before the

end of the term. These suddenly seem important—without them, he doesn't have many assignments to base the quarter's grades on.

He starts with the loose scraps of paper in the top drawer. The first stack he comes across are essays on John Donne, still waiting to be graded. Under this mound of papers he finds one of his grade sheets, a list of students' names with numbers by them. There is no record of what the assignment was, and he's not even sure how many points it was worth.

Has Murat really contacted his father? He's bluffing, Tierney thinks, but he also knows that Murat generally gets what he wants. Tierney can only hope that by getting his grading done and revising the curriculum he can buy some support from Dr. Debbie. Still, somebody should stand up to Murat, stand up for education, for learning.

When Tierney has collected all the loose scraps of grades, he moves over to the computer and starts to enter scores into the gradebook program. With little information to go on, he begins inventing assignment titles for each, calling one "poetry quiz" and another "reading comprehension—Donne." He invents dates for each assignment, and when he can't find a score for a particular student, he makes it up. A second Jack and Coke speeds up the process.

At two-thirty Tierney has finished entering all the scores he can find, but there are still piles of papers which aren't graded. In his search through his desk he's found three stacks of essays, each, he supposes, of about 25 papers. He does a little arithmetic, jotting down some numbers on the back of one of the essays. If he took ten minutes on each paper, he'd be done in 750 minutes. That's twelve and a half hours, assuming he doesn't take any breaks. Getting the grades done before midnight looks less promising.

He pulls one essay out of the stack at random and begins reading, "Jon Donne was one very impotent poet who wrote a poetry long ago . . ." He stops and puts the paper back somewhere in

the middle of the stack. He opens up the bottom drawer, takes out the bottle of Jack, and, since he's alone, takes a quick swig.

He's barely managed to get the top screwed back on the bottle when the beatniks come in, Cengis and Zeynep, his best English students. Although they'll read and discuss anything—even the metaphysical poets—their real interest lies in the Beats: they know intimate details of Kerouac's life, and they can recite long sections of *Howl* by heart. He's often wondered why, of all the literary trends, they've settled on the Beats, but perhaps it makes a kind of sense. Like America in the 50s, Turkey is a country of conformism, sexual inhibition and of political repression. They're rebelling against all this the best way they know how.

Zeynep's costume of rebellion causes Tierney to feel ill at ease. She wears the mandatory school uniform, but she's had it carefully tailored into something perverse: the gray skirt might have fit her properly five years ago, but now it's become a tight super-mini, stretched across her hips and revealing her thighs. Her sweater pulls tight against her breasts. Tierney looks away.

Cengis also wears the school uniform, but his tie is loose, his shirt dirty, his top buttons undone. His hands are stained from tobacco, and his hair is a shaggy mess atop his head.

"We heard you missed your classes today," Zeynep says. "Are you still sick?"

"We heard they had to write poems about pi," adds Cengis. "Can I smoke?" He's taken out a packet of cheap cigarettes.

"No, not here." He can see they're surprised—he's not usually strict with them. "The office will smell of smoke, and I can't use any more trouble today."

"Murat?" asks Cengis. "He's been telling everyone that you'll be finished before the end of the week."

"We don't want to lose you."



Tierney reaches down into his desk drawer and produces the bottle. He passes it to them and lets them each take a swallow. With these two, the prohibition against alcohol strikes him as silly: they swallow the Jack Daniels without a cough, and he knows that they drink in the dormitory. He puts the stack of essays back into his desk drawer. The three of them sit there together around his desk, and he lets them quiz him once again about San Francisco. What is City Lights Bookstore like? Did he really meet Ferlinghetti? Has he been to Vesuvio? To The Cellar?

Tierney checks his watch. It's seven-thirty, and the halls are dark. Even the guards have locked up and gone home. Since Cengiz and Zeynep left, Tierney has managed to grade one stack of essays. The others are neatly piled on his desk, waiting, but he can't bear the thought of reading another one. The papers are so unremittingly, brutally awful that he can't concentrate on them for long—he gets up, paces around the room, glances at a six-month old *New Yorker*. One of the consequences of his hangover cure is that he's finding it progressively harder to concentrate on anything as the night wears on.

On impulse, Tierney pulls his gym bag out from under his desk. He's certain that he would be able to focus better if he could first get in a workout. Although still buzzing from the Jack and Cokes, he begins to suit up for a run, pulling on a pair of sweat pants and a windbreaker, cramming a pair of cotton gloves on his hands. He's tugging an old stocking cap over his ears when Murat pushes the door open.

Tierney glares at him. "What are you doing here? The school's closed."

"Şey, Sir, I had to talk to you, so I sneaked up from the dorm. I spoke to my father. He says that if you apologize, he's not gonna get you fired." Murat makes this offer in his most magnanimous manner.

"You want me to apologize to you?"

Murat nods. He looks Tierney in the eye, waiting.

Apologize to Murat? When Murat has disrupted his class every day for the last year?

“Maybe you should apologize to me,” Tierney says. “Have you considered this? Maybe you should tell me that you’re sorry for singing out loud during my class.”

“Sir, you did a bad thing. You should treat me with, *yami*, respect.”

“Or maybe you could apologize for all the times you decided you were bored and walked out in the middle of a discussion.” How many times has Tierney sent Murat to the office? And yet Murat has never been suspended, never placed on probation.

Murat looks surprised. “You’re not gonna apologize, Sir? You want me to tell my father that you wouldn’t say sorry?”

“Tell your father that he owes *me* an apology. He should be sorry that he ever got you into this school.” Tierney walks past Murat and out of the office. Almost at once his stomach knots. If Murat hasn’t already spoken to his father, he’s sure to now.

As he heads down the hallway past the English classrooms, Tierney notices that Brett has been busy decorating the department’s bulletin board, papering it in yellow and artfully clustering several handwritten poems around a drawing of a pie. He reads one:

*It's not a dessert  
Instead, it's a strange symbol  
To describe circles*

Tierney has a feeling that most of these haiku will prove to be Brett’s own compositions.

As soon as he gets outside the building, he begins to jog slowly. When he found out his cholesterol results, Tierney set a goal of being able to run five kilometers. So far, though, he has yet to complete the trail he’s measured out without stopping to walk, and the only way he can even begin to run for any length of time is to plod along at an old-man pace.

When he jogs up to the gate, the guards laugh and smile. They raise the bar for him, calling out, “*Iyi Akşamlar*, Jake Bey, Good evening.”

Tierney waves and tries to smile. It’s too much of a strain to say anything in reply.

Outside of the gate, he turns left and heads up the road. Fifty fucking years old—he’s got to get back in shape. The buzz he’s got on makes this jog even harder than usual, and he wheezes so loudly as he puffs along that it alarms even him.

What to do about Murat? Murat has never cared about an idea, never been interested in a book or a poem. Why should Murat never be held accountable, always protected by his father’s influence? Tierney knows that he stepped over the line yesterday, but why should one student be allowed to ruin a class for eighteen others? And yet if Murat’s father complains, Tierney knows that Dr. Debbie is unlikely to defend him.

Tierney’s about ten minutes into his jog when it begins to snow again. He turns off the main road, panting, and slogs his way up a dirt track, where his running path leads him close to the new lot of *gecekondu*, “overnight houses,” shacks that the Anatolian peasants who move to Istanbul throw together, seemingly overnight. If the house are built and occupied before the authorities notice, the tenants become quasi-legal squatters. From the trail, Tierney can see the ramshackle houses, built almost on top of each other, with no planning as to where the next one might be placed.

How can it be that this land, where Justinian built the Hagia Sophia and Sultan Ahmet constructed the Blue Mosque, where the Byzantine and Ottoman empires flourished, is now home to these monstrous, ugly, third-world shacks? What does that say about civilization?

Tierney stops running, bends over and holds his sides. He straightens up and looks out over the *gecekondu*. Watching the snow fall on the shacks, a line from Joyce comes back to him, one which he alters only slightly: “The newspapers were right: Snow was general all over Turkey. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills.”

He begins to walk back to school.

Tierney wakes with a start to the sound of Thompson noisily trying each of his keys in the already unlocked office door. He jerks his head up from a puddle of drool on the desk, nudges the mouse to wake up the computer, and checks the digital clock in the corner of the screen. It's seven a.m., exactly. Tierney has heard tell that Thompson arrives to work every day at precisely seven in the morning, but never before has he been at school at this time of the morning to actually verify it. Why on earth would the man want to arrive at school a full hour early? It's not as if he's preparing new lesson plans.

Tierney threads his way through the desks to the office door and opens it. Thompson stands in the hallway, clearly confused, clutching a battered thermos.

"I spent the night here," Tierney shouts in explanation.

Thompson shouts back, "'Early to bed, early to rise,' Mr. Tierney. Glad to see it."

Tierney steps back from the door to make way for Thompson to plod to his desk. Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, Tierney tries to recollect last night's activities. After his run he began grading, reading only brief excerpts from the essays—the beginning paragraph, a few sentences from the middle, and the conclusion. This technique worked so well that halfway through, he began to skip the conclusions, and towards the end, he also dispensed with reading anything from the main body of the essays. He wrote grades on the backs of the papers, and then went back through them, making some odd scribbles on the inside pages—a checkmark here, a question mark there. Sometimes he wrote the words "unclear" or "expand on this."

He finished entering the grades on the computer at two minutes before midnight, holding his breath when he pushed the send button. When he received an encouraging pop-up, "Grades

Sent,” he felt that he had, at least technically, fulfilled another of his pi day missions. And now with pi day finished, Tierney wonders what new activities Dr. Debbie has planned for the Ides of March.

Thompson pours himself a cup of coffee from his thermos and then sits with his cup, staring at the wall. Tierney can’t help it; he has to know. He shouts, “What are you doing here?”

“Yes, he is an ass, that Murat. I taught him, too. In eighth grade.”

“No. What are you doing here?” He moves closer and shouts the words.

“Exactly. Just two types of boys.”

Some mysteries are not meant to be solved. Tierney makes his way back to the computer, and looks at the Word file still open on the desktop. This is the curriculum document that he spent the hours after midnight revising. He’d tried to find a curriculum strand on the Internet that he could steal, but he couldn’t get a single page to load no matter how long he waited, and so he spent the night on this creative writing project. Now Tierney feels slightly apprehensive to read it. His memory of the document isn’t good, and he has a feeling that the combination of sleep deprivation and Jack Daniels might have been dangerous.

He scrolls down through the document: it is ridiculous, but perhaps no more so than the assignment required. He sees that he’s invented some new teaching units for his faculty. Janet, he’s sure, will be pleased to see that she has a new unit on hypertext fiction that she’ll need to ignore in order to adequately cover *The Bell Jar*.

He decides to print out the document.

As the printer hums, Tierney glances over at Thompson, who continues to sit at his desk largely immobile, raising his arm only occasionally for another sip of coffee. Tierney looks back at the monitor and sees that Thompson’s lectures on *Huckleberry Finn* have been scrapped—his students will now analyze how the characterization of Laura Croft in the *Tomb Raider* movie differs from the video game. It’s a pity that Thompson will never learn of this new emphasis on film and

computer games in the eighth grade curriculum, but Tierney is certain of the document's fate: Dr. Debbie will glance at the curriculum to see if he's added a column about technology, and then it will go into a notebook, and then onto a shelf, and if anyone asks about the English department, Dr. Debbie will be able to say that their methods are bang up-to-date.

It's seven-thirty—perhaps he can drop off the curriculum with Dr. Debbie before class starts. He grabs the document from the printer, and squeezes past Thompson out into the corridor. Along the way, he stops at the faculty toilet, taking a hard look in the mirror. He has two days' stubble, his eyes are bloodshot, his shirt is creased. The sweat from last night's run has dried on him. He unbuttons his shirt and tries to wash his armpits with a soapy paper towel, but the towel falls apart into clumpy bits which he must pick off his skin. He runs some fresh water on his hands and tries to plaster down his hair.

Tierney heads down the east staircase and enters the administrative wing. When he reaches Dr. Debbie's office, he lifts his hand to knock but pauses when he catches sight of her through the window. She sits behind her desk wearing a gray pinstriped suit. Tierney looks to the leather armchair. Facing her, wearing a matching gray pinstripe, sits Murat's father. The two smile and laugh. Suddenly Tierney thinks of the ending from *Animal Farm*, "The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which."

Tierney turns and walks back down the hallway. He stops along the way to rip the curriculum papers in half and place the pieces in the waste can.

He checks his watch. In fifteen minutes he needs to meet his twelfth-graders. He's always believed that no matter what problems he might find at a school, he could always close the door to his classroom and teach. He finds himself now looking forward to seeing his seniors. What was it

that he assigned them? “To His Coy Mistress,” he remembers. He has just enough time to pick up his text from the English office and get to his classroom.

Is there any chance that Dr. Debbie might defend him? Unlikely. It’s over; probably it’s over. He tells himself that there’s something liberating in all this. Now he doesn’t have to listen to her shit anymore.

He picks up his anthology from his office and skims through the poem quickly to remind himself of it. Although he’s read the poem often before, he’s never taught it, and he knows he really should have spent some time studying the text before class. Still, its basic structure is familiar: an argument in three parts. He will have to find a way, though, to sell the poem to his students—there are too many difficulties to lead them through, at least for a first reading. Some time ago Tierney realized that all good teaching is lying: since you can’t present anything in all its complexity, you simplify. You find some pathway in, even if by doing so you have to jettison some of the magic of the work. Tierney decides that his only chance is to sell this poem as a song of seduction.

When he enters the classroom, his students continue their conversations, barely taking notice of him. They’re supposed to rise and stand by their desks quietly until he tells them to sit, and he’s heard that they do this for their Turkish teachers, but he has never insisted on it. He opens his book to the Marvell poem and puts it on his desk. Murat, he notices, has taken his usual seat at the back.

“Okay. Let’s start, please.” He waits expectantly until they eventually settle down, a technique he’s always found more effective than yelling for quiet. “How many of you have read ‘To His Coy Mistress’ for today? It’s alright—be honest—I just want to know what I’m up against.”

A few hands go up. Murat raises his hand high and looks at Tierney, as if challenging him. Tierney can’t imagine that Murat has really read the poem, but he decides to let it go.

Other students begin to speak out of turn: “Sir, *yani*, we read it, but it didn’t make any sense” and “We tried, Sir, but it was very hard.”

On another day Tierney might have been angry with them for being so ill-prepared, but today it seems to make little difference. “It’s okay. We’ll talk about it.”

He picks up his book from the desk and begins to read, “Had we but world enough, and time, this coyness, lady, were no crime.” He looks up. “Okay, first question. What’s coyness?”

No responses. The boys in the back keep their heads down, deliberately avoiding his gaze.

“People, I’ve told you before, with poetry, you really have to use your dictionaries. If there are words you don’t know, look them up. A poem’s not like a novel—it’s not a loose, baggy monster—every word counts.”

Cengiz, he can see, wants to help him out and raises his tobacco-stained hand. “Sir, I’m not certain how to explain it in English, but I think I know it in Turkish.” He turns to face his classmates and says, “*nazlı*.”

Much discussion ensues in Turkish. Finally Zeynep offers, “It’s like when a woman wants a man to pay attention to her, but she doesn’t really care about him.”

And Neslihan says, “A flirt.”

“Flirtatious, yes,” Tierney confirms. “That’s part of it. But notice the word is not ‘coy’ but ‘coyness,’ the state of being coy.” He writes *flirtatiousness* on the board. “But there’s another part to it. It also means something more like ‘shyness.’” He writes this, too, on the blackboard. “It even means something like withdrawing from physical contact.”

Murat’s face lights up. Without raising his hand he blurts out, “Sex. You’re talking about sex.”

Surprised to have any response from Murat, Tierney nods. “That’s right, Murat, it’s a poem about sex. Or rather, it’s a poem about seduction.” Some of the students look puzzled, so he



continues, “It’s a poem about a guy trying to get sex. It’s a poem where a guy tries to convince a girl why she should sleep with him. She’s coy—that is, she may flirt with him, but she won’t go to bed with him.” He looks around at the class; he’s never sure how much they know about things sexual. He sometimes thinks that they are more innocent than American teenagers, and yet they don’t appear embarrassed by the discussion.

He reads the first line again, “‘Had we but world enough, and time, this coyness, lady, were no crime.’ What do you think the first line means?”

After a moment Neslihan raises her hand. “It means, that if they could live forever, then it wouldn’t matter that she’s, *sey*, coy.”

Tierney smiles and nods. Neslihan’s not his best student, but she’s usually solid. “That’s right. If the world were infinite and time were infinite, then, the poet says, we could take our time and you could be as shy as you want. Why? What would they do in that case?”

Everyone looks down at his or her book, no one daring to meet Tierney’s eye. He waits for a while, and then decides to help them out. “‘We would sit down, and think which way to walk, and pass our long love’s day.’ They could take forever and let their love grow.”

He looks around to see if they’re following. It’s hard to tell: some of them seem to be paying attention, but others are looking out the window. “You see, it’s an argument, like in logic.” He writes down a first premise on the board, *If we could live forever, then you could be coy*, underlining the “if” and the “then” heavily as he writes. He glances over the first section of the poem and decides he should skip ahead. “Vegetable love” will be hard to explain, and he senses trouble in the line about the conversion of the Jews—he’s heard anti-Semitism in this classroom before, and he’s not in the mood to hear it today. He decides to move ahead and to come back to the difficult parts tomorrow. He asks, “But what’s the second part of the argument?”

Cengiz studies his book. “It’s the second paragraph—‘But at my back I always hear Time’s winged chariot hurrying near.’”

“Good. But we call those things ‘stanzas’ in poetry, not paragraphs. And notice that you have to read that word as wing-ed to keep the meter. Do you see the idea here? Time is personified. So what’s the line saying?”

Zeynep again raises her hand. Sometimes he feels as if he’s teaching to a class of two or three students, but as he looks around the room, Tierney is surprised to see that the boys in the back are paying some attention. Even Murat is studying the poem, looking, Tierney supposes, for more references to sex. He points to Zeynep, and she says, “It’s the second part of the argument. Time isn’t infinite.”

“Yes. Good.” Under his previous line, *If we could live forever, then you could be coy*, he writes another, *But we can not live forever*.

He realizes suddenly that the argument, the way he’s writing it doesn’t quite work. You can’t draw any conclusions from those two premises; to do so would be a fallacy, denying the antecedent. He doubts the class will notice—he himself has never noticed it before—but still he decides to take a different tack. He writes in bold letters on the board, *carpe diem*. “Do you know what this means?”

Most of them do. Even Berk, Murat’s friend, who has never said anything in class, offers, “Seize the day.”

And Burcu says, “It’s like in that film, *Dead Poet’s Society*.”

Tierney inwardly groans. He despises the film, but it somehow hits the mark with teenage girls; best to play along. “That’s right, or as the song says, ‘Sha La La La La live for today.’” His students don’t get the reference, of course, and they don’t laugh, so he hurries on. “The poem’s making a *carpe diem* argument. Life’s short. We have to make the most of it.”

He has a memory of a punk song that his college students once played for him, and he decides to mention it, even though he knows that a reference to The Butthole Surfers will be just as meaningless to them as was his reference to The Grass Roots. Still, the words seem right. “Or as another song says, ‘the funny thing about regret is that it’s better to regret something you have done than to regret something you haven’t done.’”

Tierney suddenly relives the memory of his encounter the day before yesterday with Murat—he grabbed Murat tightly by the shoulders and shoved him hard against the lockers. The lockers reverberated with a hollow bang, and Tierney pressed his forearm against Murat’s throat, leaning his weight into his arm. He can picture the shocked expression on Murat’s face as he wheezed for air. “Shape up, Murat. I’m sick of this shit,” he said. It was the sort of thing Tierney thought he’d never do to a student.

To put the thought out of his mind, he returns to the poem. “And how does Marvell develop this second part of the argument? You see, in the first part of the argument, he gave examples of what they could do if they could live forever. What does he offer to us in this part of the argument?”

Silence again. They study the poem, trying to make sense of Marvell’s English. He waits—always count slowly to three before answering your own question. Let them have a chance to figure it out.

One of the boys in the back of the room, Ceyhun, raises his hand. “Well, it says, ‘Worms shall try that long preserved virginity.’ But I don’t get what it means.”

“The worms are what’s in store for all of us after we die. You remember Mercutio’s line from *Romeo and Juliet*? ‘They have made worm’s meat of me?’ The poet’s argument to his love is that if she goes to her grave a virgin, only the worms will benefit.”

Suddenly, without prompting, Murat reads another line, “The grave’s a fine and private place, but none, I think, do there embrace.”

Tierney is again surprised by Murat’s interest. Or is it only the word “embrace” that he’s picked-up on? In any case Tierney tries to smile encouragingly. “Good, Murat.”

Tierney reads the lines over again to himself, and an incredible weight seems to settle on his chest, an almost unbearable heaviness. For a moment, he has to force himself to take deep, measured breaths. Why this sudden sadness? It doesn’t make any sense, but he does realize that his attempt to sell this poem as a song of seduction is far too simple. There’s much more here. He turns his back to the class and then writes slowly on the blackboard, *memento mori*.

After a long moment, he turns back to them. “Of course, there’s a corollary to *carpe diem*. It’s called *memento mori*—‘remember, you must die.’ It’s a reminder that death is what awaits us all. A human skull often serves as a *memento mori*. Have you ever seen renaissance paintings that feature a skull in them? Like Dutch Vanitas paintings? Or like Holbein’s painting, ‘The Ambassadors?’” They haven’t, of course, but this is another teaching technique he’s developed over the years, trying to throw out bits and pieces of culture, hoping that something will interest them, and that they’ll pursue it on their own. “Or maybe you remember Hamlet, when he’s holding Yorick’s skull? Artists and writers put those skulls in their works as a kind of reminder of what will happen to us. A warning—are we living the kinds of lives we ought to?”

He is about to try to explore Vanitas further when he senses that the class has grown very quiet, almost silent, and they’re looking at him intensely. He shuts his mouth and stands there, returning their gaze. The sun has gone behind a cloud, and the light in the room fades; the class breathes almost as one. No one speaks.

Murat breaks the spell. He calls out, “Look, Sir is crying.”

## Snares

Gordon reached across the jumble of plates for the bottle of *raki*. He'd lost track of the conversation around him. The *taverna* sat high on a hill, its balcony overlooking the Sea of Marmara, but even at a height the smell of murky water and dead fish reached his nostrils. Citronella candles flickered on the tables. Gordon filled the bottom of his glass with the aniseed liqueur and then splashed in mineral water. He swirled the glass in his hand and watched the mixture cloud. How did it happen? How did two clear liquids combine to form a hazy one?

So many things had become unclear. Three weeks ago he'd been in Missouri; now he was in a different world, one that seemed just as real, or as unreal, as the previous. Here he was in Turkey, drinking late at night, no longer ensnared by thoughts of wife or child.

Earlier in the evening, Gordon had eaten stuffed grape leaves. He'd dipped flat pita bread, still warm to the touch, into an eggplant puree that tasted of wood smoke and garlic. After clearing the dinner plates, the waiter had brought out a handheld vacuum sweeper and, with as much ostentation as if he held a silver brush and pan, had run the whirring Dustbuster across the tabletop. For desert, Gordon had been served sweet Turkish coffee, but he'd drunk too far down into his cup and tasted the bitter grit of coffee grounds on his tongue.

Across the table, one of the experienced teachers—Matt, a pockmarked twenty-something—licked the rolling paper and twist-sealed the ends of a joint. He wore a red t-shirt with an emblem of a crescent moon and a single star, the Turkish flag. His biceps were the size of Gordon's thighs. Matt looked up and met Gordon's stare. He nodded his head toward a Ziploc full of grass on the table. "I scored it today in Martiköy."

“Obviously you haven’t watched *Midnight Express*.” It pissed Gordon off to think of the trouble that they all could get into.

Matt clicked the wheel on his Zippo. “Dude,” he said in mock-surfer, “you so need to chill out.” He lit the joint, dragged deep, and passed it to Kari, his girlfriend. Gordon felt certain that Matt had swapped place cards in order to sit next to her tonight. The two had become a couple almost from the first day she arrived.

The *taverna* had been rented for the night by the school’s director. This was the first party of the year, one she called “a mixer.” In her officious manner, she’d stood at the start of the evening and announced, “I’ve jumbled you up, new teachers and old-hands.” She’d clapped. “Go. Find your places.”

A bit later, a band had played and Gordon had watched the Turkish women on the faculty dance to frenetic Eastern rhythms played on instruments he couldn’t identify—lutes and zithers, perhaps. Unlike the expats, the Turks had dressed for the evening, and many of the women had worn short skirts and tight blouses. As he’d watched their hands snake overhead, he’d felt a sexual frisson, although he knew that they certainly weren’t dancing for him.

Now only this table of diehard drinkers remained—the others, both Turks and expats, had taken the minibuses back to campus. Somehow Gordon had missed the last bus back. He wasn’t even entirely certain of where they were. Somewhere beyond Martiköy. A little village on the coast. How had he missed that last bus? He was drinking too quickly, he thought, and not paying attention. Tierney had a car; he’d said he would drive them all back to campus. Tierney was ass-falling drunk, but Gordon had no choice but to wait for the man to give him a ride.

The waiters were gathered around a television at the corner of the bar where they watched a soundless soccer game, waiting, apparently, for the table of inebriated Americans to go home. The skunk-sweet scent of burning cannabis drifted across the table, and Gordon wondered how long it

would be before the waiters smelled it too and called the police. “Don’t you teach Civics?” Gordon asked. “And Ethics?”

Matt exhaled a lungful of smoke. “I only teach the theory.”

The woman who sat to Gordon’s right was named Sheryl, and she was the new librarian. Like him, this was her first overseas job. She was divorced. Childless. She wore Birkenstocks and a linen dress, and her dark hair, parted in the middle, hung around her face. She reeked of patchouli oil, and her legs were unshaven, but he was willing to overlook those faults because she kept herself fit; because she was attractive in an earthy way. He’d decided that she might be his only reprieve from a year of sexual abstinence. The younger people had already coupled up, and the other women close to his age—thick-ankled and graying—repulsed him.

“Let’s go down to the sea,” Sheryl said suddenly.

Gordon looked down the hill to the sea. It was a steep descent along a narrow dirt path. The trail disappeared into darkness. He doubted they could hike it in their street shoes. “Sure,” he said. “If you like.”

He’d been trying to impress her all night, filling her glass when it got low, telling jokes, cupping his hand around a match to light her cigarette. He wanted to reach out casually; to wrap his hand around her upper arm and feel under his thumb the scarred circle of her smallpox vaccination. He wanted to touch her, but he was unsure of his timing. Perhaps he was too drunk to make good choices. But then, he thought, the fact that I’m aware of being drunk means I’m not too far gone.

“I love the water,” Kari said. She pinched the joint between thumb and forefinger. “I want to live on the water.”

This was Kari’s first trip outside of the U.S., and earlier in the evening she had told the group stories of her adventure: “On the flight, there was a picture of a little airplane on the television screen that showed you just where you were. We flew over Greenland!”

A cat mewed near Gordon's feet—a group of strays had gathered on the balcony. Two of the braver ones jumped to a nearby tabletop where leftovers still remained. Others swished their tails around the perimeter of Gordon's table. They were filthy-looking creatures, their faces puffed with scar tissue. It shocked Gordon how many were one-eyed.

"I'm going to forage for food," Matt said. He took an empty plate and began to travel from table to table.

On the other side of Sheryl sat Tierney, a man a bit older than Gordon, a long-term expatriate. A fat poseur, in Gordon's estimation. Tierney was drinking Turkish gin, spelled on the label with a "c" instead of a "g," a gut-rot concoction that Gordon couldn't stomach even when mixed with Schweppes. "You know, last year's math teacher vanished," Tierney said. "One day he just didn't show up for school."

Gordon realized that he was being addressed. He had heard the story of his predecessor. He knew the man had packed a single suitcase and taken a cab to the airport, leaving the rest of his belongings in his apartment. Gordon had heard the story, and moreover, he knew the point of it: Tierney thought that he, too, wouldn't last out his contract.

Tierney motioned for the joint and Kari handed it across the table. As she leaned forward, Gordon caught sight of her breasts under her loose blouse. The pink of her nipples. "Turkey will do that to you," Tierney continued.

Matt returned with a plateful of odd appetizers—*dolmas*, half-eaten pita bread, fried fish. "We're not just expatriates, you know," Matt said. He plunked the plate onto the middle of the table. "We're, like, refugees from reality."

"Stop trying to scare us," Gordon said. He reached again for the bottle of *raki*. "I think we can all cope." He could tell what these two thought of him—that he was a naïf, a romantic, not



tough enough for the expat life. It was ridiculous; as if anyone couldn't start anew. Gordon sloshed the *raki* into his glass, surprising himself with the unsteadiness of his aim.

Tierney flicked a bit of fish off the table and the cats leapt upon it, fighting and hissing.

"Does nobody else want to go down to the sea?" Sheryl reached out and took the joint from Tierney. She took a toke and blew smoke out through her nose. Gordon wondered what it would be like with her. Her armpits, he thought, like her legs, would be unshaven.

"You've heard there's a spook on campus?" Tierney seemed to be speaking directly to Sheryl.

"I don't believe in ghosts," Kari announced, as if this opinion were a sign of her intellectual integrity. She wasn't pretty, Gordon decided. Her lips were full and her eyes were large, but her features were overexaggerated, as if she were a caricature of pretty.

"He means a spy," Matt said. "CIA. One of my students says he heard it from his father, who works in intelligence. If you believe that."

Sheryl held out a forkful of salmon to a large black cat. The cat inched toward the outstretched fork. "What would a spy be doing at our school?"

"I'm betting on Gordon here," Tierney continued. "A neo-con James Bond for the new millennium."

Gordon wondered if he really might be the spook that Tierney was talking about. That would be fitting irony, wouldn't it? Tierney would have to revise his opinion of Gordon as a Midwestern know-nothing.

Spook wasn't the right word. He hadn't been recruited, not exactly. There had been no papers signed, but he had been in contact with a woman who worked for the CIA—Marnie, an old classmate. She had been interested when he told her that he was moving to Turkey, and she'd suggested they talk again. Unlike Matt and Tierney, she valued his opinions about the world.

Suddenly one of the waiters ran from the bar, shouting, clapping his hands, towards their table. Busted, Gordon thought, shit, we're busted. The waiter must have caught the scent of the marijuana. But no—the man kicked at the cats, which scattered and leapt over the wall of the balcony into the brush, and then he returned to the television at the bar.

Matt pinched out the last of the joint and threw it over the balcony. He picked up the bag of pot from the table and crammed it in his pocket. “The sea,” he said. “To the sea.”

“Let's take the bottles,” Tierney said. “We've paid for them.” He picked up the gin in his left hand and handed the bottle of *raki* to Gordon. “Be careful with that, Gordon,” he said. “Drinking is the expat's disease.”

Gordon rose to his feet. He took a step and realized that he would have to concentrate to walk a straight line to the door. As he passed the bar, he noticed their waiter reaching for the telephone.

Tierney stopped in front of Gordon at the exit and turned back to face the waiters. He touched the top of his head. “*Allahausmarladık*,” Tierney said.

The waiter covered the receiver with his hand. “*Güle, güle*,” he replied.

They walked around the back of the *taverna* to the seaside path. “What was that you said?” Sheryl asked.

“It's a kind of goodbye,” Tierney said. “The person leaving says, ‘*Allahausmarladık*,’ which means something like ‘God watch over you,’ and the person left behind says, ‘*Güle, güle*,’ which is ‘smilingly, smilingly.’”

“It sounds like it's easier to be the person who stays than it is to be the person who goes,” Sheryl said. “‘*Güle, güle*’ I can say.”

Staying and going, Gordon thought. Jeanne had stayed; he had gone. The memories sneaked up on him when his guard was down—when he lay in bed waiting for sleep or when he daydreamed or, like now, when he was drunk.

He had been fixing breakfast when Jeanne had come into the kitchen. “There’s a puddle in the bed,” she’d said. “It doesn’t smell like pee.”

He’d looked at her, not understanding.

“I think my water broke.”

She was only in her twenty-third week. They rushed to the hospital, but the baby was coming too early, far too early. “Not viable,” the doctors said, an ugly term that he still couldn’t shake from his memory. Jeanne went into labor; she seemed to be in shock when the contractions started. “Push,” the nurse shouted. “Think about what you’re doing.” When the baby was born, the nurses wrapped it in a blanket and let Jeanne hold it. A girl. Gordon had held out his pinkie finger to the baby, and she grasped it with her tiny hand. She lived only a few minutes.

Jeanne never recovered. After the baby died, her milk came through, just as if she had a child to feed. It leaked through her bras and tee-shirts. It left stains that wouldn’t let her forget the child that they had to bury. Gordon couldn’t escape his vision of the baby, its flesh almost translucent, but Jeanne’s pain was deeper, unfathomably deeper. There was no consoling her. And she aimed so much hatred at Gordon. Was it postpartum depression—some hormonal imbalance that might subside—or was he a sacrificial victim of her grief?

She started smoking again, buying cartons of unfiltered Chesterfields. Her skin was bad and her complexion sallow. When he suggested therapy, she turned upon him, like a cornered animal. “What do you know about it? When have you ever grieved?” He was shocked by her anger; it was as if she was another person.

Gradually he gave up. He wasn't wanted—not in her bed, not as her companion, not to talk to. He'd taken the dog, and he'd found a single trailer on the edge of Empyrean, a small town outside of the city, an area surrounded by woods. It had meant a long commute to school, but the rent was cheap, and he'd liked the feeling of living in the country.

The descent to the beach was even steeper than Gordon expected. The path was a soft silt that gave way under his feet, and Gordon found himself grabbing at clumps of stiff grass to keep from sliding all the way down the hill. His eyes still hadn't adjusted the darkness, and he could barely see what lay in front of him. Gordon took a swig from the bottle and slipped again, spilling some of the *raki* onto his shirt. He felt the cool of the alcohol evaporating against his chest.

Sheryl stopped suddenly and Gordon bumped into her. In the darkness, his hand brushed against her ass. "I'm going to kill myself in these," she said. She took off her sandals and carried them.

"Fuck," he heard Matt yell. "Fuck, fuck, fuck."

"Are you all right?" Kari asked. "What happened?"

"The pot. I've lost the goddamned bag of pot." Gordon could hear him shuffling his hands around. "Shit. It cost a fortune."

Gordon thought again of Sheryl, the momentary contact, the firmness of her flesh under his hand. He imagined them together; would she want to be on top? The thought excited him. He'd been with no one since he separated from his wife.

"Found it," Matt said. "It's okay. Let's go."

Gordon was already so sick of him. Matt, who had lived in Istanbul for one year and hence regarded himself an expert on all things Turkish. And then there was Tierney, with his practiced blasé air. They thought Gordon was a Missouri hick—poorly traveled, poorly read. But he knew about Turkey. He'd read histories and guidebooks; he'd always wanted to travel. After Gordon had

gotten the job in Istanbul, he'd watched the opening scene of *From Russia with Love* on DVD—Bond arriving in Istanbul by rowing through the Basilica Cistern. And when he first arrived in Turkey, he'd stood in the cistern, amid the myriad columns, thinking that he had done it. Istanbul was no longer a pipedream.

The trail flattened out at the bottom. Gordon's eyes had begun to adjust to the dark. The beach was rocky and littered with plastic bottles and beer cans. At the water's edge, they picked their way across huge slabs of stone. They sat on the seawall.

"I'm going to roll another one," Matt said. He took out the bag from his pocket. "Shit. I can't see if there are seeds in here or not."

"Let's chance it," Kari said.

Gordon took a swig from the bottle of *raki*. Drunk straight up, the taste of licorice was overpowering. He sat on the rock wall and listened to the waves.

"The cats were pretty," Kari said. "I've hardly seen an animal since I got here. Except lizards."

A flashlight combed the beach some distance down the coast from them. Crabbers, Gordon thought. He remembered childhood vacations in Florida—at night, after the tides, one could spotlight crabs on the beach. They froze in the light as if mesmerized and waited to be netted.

"Muslims don't keep dogs," Matt said. "They think they're unclean."

"You want to see a dog?" Tierney passed the bottle of gin to Sheryl. "Go to the zoo at Topkapi. They've got dogs in cages."

"Yesterday," Sheryl said, "when I went jogging, outside of the school gates, a bunch of dogs barked at me."

Matt flicked open his lighter. His face was briefly illuminated by the flame. "Watch out," he said. "Those dogs are wild. They hate people." He blew out the end of the joint, letting it fade to a glow, and then passed it to Tierney.

"Last year one of them got on campus." Tierney pinched the joint and took a long toke. "The guards," he began, but he stopped and coughed smoke.

Sheryl reached out for the joint. Gordon wanted to brush her hair back from her face.

He thought back to Kansas City. When he used to meet up with old acquaintances, late at night, after a bottle of wine or two, they'd often played a game: where would you go if you could go anywhere? If life hadn't trapped you, where would you be? Gordon had always had a ready answer: Istanbul. Now he wondered how the others coped with their lives of quiet desperation. Caught in jobs that mattered to no one, with wives they no longer desired. They became workaholics. They watched television. They drank. At some point, you had to move on. It was too easy to dwell on the sorrow, to find nourishment in the suffering. Better to put the hurt behind you. Like sharks, Gordon thought, we move forward or die.

"What about the dog?" Kari asked.

"The guards finally took control of the situation," Tierney said. "About five of them came out with pistols drawn. It sounded like a shooting war."

Sheryl started to pass the joint back to Tierney, but stopped. "They shot the dog?"

The crabbers came closer, bouncing the beams of their flashlights near the shore. Were they crabbers? Did they have crabs here? Gordon couldn't recall seeing them for sale.

"It wasn't really a dog," Tierney said. He took the joint from Sheryl. "What did Dewey say? That *Homo sapiens* is a necessary but insufficient condition of being human? I think the same might be said of dogs and *canis familiaris*."

“That sounds like a Nazi philosophy,” Gordon said. He meant what Dewey said, not Tierney’s amendment, but he realized that he hadn’t said it well. He was too drunk.

“They were feral,” Matt said.

“I didn’t know the Nazis had a thing about dogs,” Kari said.

“Do you know,” Tierney said, “that in Turkish you drink a cigarette instead of smoking it?”

“Then you must be fucking thirsty,” Matt said, reaching for the joint. “What can I use as a roach clip?”

“My dog died,” Gordon said, “last year.” Why had he begun this story? He knew it was a bad idea. “She was an Irish setter, and my wife named her Priscilla, after Priscilla Presley. Our first dog had been named Elvis.”

He took another drink from the bottle. This wasn’t the kind of story that was going to maneuver him any closer to Sheryl’s bed, but still he blundered ahead. “Priscilla’d had pups that I’d given away, but she still had her milk. And then this kitten came into the house. It was just tiny, but Priscilla adopted it. The dog used to nurse the kitten. I’d never seen the likes.”

This would be a good place to stop, he thought, while the story was still cute, but the *raki* had loosened his tongue. “Then Priscilla disappeared. One day she just didn’t come home.” He paused, hardly able to speak. “And the kitten didn’t understand that all dogs weren’t his friends. He got torn apart. Strays.” Gordon felt the tears coming, but he wouldn’t be caught crying over the story. He took a swig of *raki* from the bottle and pretended to choke. He held his hand up to his throat.

Sheryl pounded his back. “Can you breathe?”

“Give him some water,” Kari said.

“Fuck that,” Matt said. He flicked the roach into the sea. “If it’s not mixed with *raki*, he won’t know what to do with it.”

The beam of a flashlight swept across the area where they sat. “Oh shit,” Tierney said.

It was the *polis*, two young cops. They looked like boys, brothers perhaps, barely old enough to shave. A pubescent Tweedledum and Tweedledee, one slightly taller than the other. The shorter cop aimed his flashlight from face to face, and Gordon held up his hand against the glare. Bigger brother spoke brusquely in Turkish. No one answered, and it occurred to Gordon that the others were too drunk, or too fucked up, to be of much use. “Do you speak English?” he asked.

The taller one spoke again. Gordon could recognize only the anger in the voice.

Tierney turned to Matt and whispered, “Itch-day e-thay ot-pay.”

“Speak English,” Matt said. “They don’t.”

“Get rid of the smoke!” Sheryl hissed. “Get a brain.”

“I’ve dropped it. Don’t worry.”

Tierney seemed to be waking up to the situation—he began to speak to the cops in Turkish. The cops pointed up and down the beach, talking loudly. At last Tierney turned back to the group. “Drunk sweep,” he said. “They say we can’t have liquor here.”

Gordon thought back to the empty beer cans littering the beach. “Tell them we didn’t know.”

The shorter cop suddenly grabbed Tierney’s arm and pulled him towards the road. “I don’t think he cares.”

The other policeman gestured for the bottles. He took the gin in one hand and the *raki* in the other, and then he gestured with the whole of his outstretched arm, pointing up the beach, across the rocks and to the road, where a paddy wagon sat.

The policemen led them to the van. Gordon played and replayed in his head the conversation about the Priscilla and the kitten. Although he’d made a fool of himself by talking about them, at least there were a few parts of the story he’d had the sense to censor. He hadn’t told



the others about moving away from Jeanne. And he hadn't told them that the dog hadn't simply disappeared—when Priscilla didn't come home, he'd gone looking for her.

Gordon had walked through the woods which surrounded his trailer park. “Priscilla! Here girl,” he'd called out, listening to hear her scurrying through the brush towards him. He walked hours before he found her. She looked unmarked, but she was dead. And then he saw the dark wire wrapped around her neck. Strangled to death. The woods were used by poachers; someone had set a snare under this fence to catch whatever animals might be using the run.

Drunk, he had called Jeanne. “Priscilla died,” he'd said. “Can we talk?”

“Let me get this straight. You're upset because the dog died.” She'd begun to cry. “Fuck off, Gordon. Just leave me the fuck alone.”

It was soon after that Gordon had remembered his dream of Istanbul. He'd realized he was free—no wife, no pets, nothing to tie him down.

The police unlocked the rear door of the paddy wagon, and Gordon squeezed inside. It smelled of drink and body odor. Three dirty, ragged men, habitual drunks from the look of them, sat glumly on one bench. Gordon took a seat on the bench opposite them, and Sheryl and Kari sat next to him. Matt and Tierney pushed in.

The taller of the two cops climbed into the wagon and sat down opposite Gordon on the drunks' bench. He still held a bottle in each hand. The short cop climbed into the front of the van, a wire screen separating him from them.

The paddy wagon lurched forward onto the road. The van braked hard and he slid into Sheryl. “Sorry.” He wondered if he might put his arm around her.

“Are they really going to run us in?” Sheryl asked.

“Cool,” Matt said.

Gordon felt horribly, painfully sober. The *raki* had left him with a licorice slosh in his stomach, but his mind felt clear. The others, incredibly, seemed not to understand their situation. “Look around at these people,” Gordon said. The hard-looking Turks in the wagon stared at the floor and did not speak. “They’re scared shitless. This is no joke.”

“What?” Kari asked. “Is drinking some kind of hanging crime here?”

The van picked up speed again, and Gordon looked for a handhold. His back bounced against the hard backrest. The van slowed suddenly and then thumped through what seemed to be an open trench. Gordon felt himself airborne.

“These roads are un-fucking-believable,” Kari said. “There are more potholes than road.”

“Once, on the way to Martiköy, I flatted two tires,” Matt said. “The second time I bent a rim.”

Sheryl laughed. “There must be a good Roman road down there somewhere.”

“If it was a Roman road, it’d be straight,” Tierney said. “These things are goddamned goat paths.”

“Can none of you focus on what’s happening?” Gordon said. This trip was bad news—he didn’t know much about the Turkish police, but he had a feeling that there would be no reading of Miranda rights. “We’re being taken to a Turkish jail.”

“Dude, chill,” Matt said. “We were drinking on a beach. They’ll make us pay a fine.”

“Maybe the waiters phoned in the marijuana,” Gordon said. “Have you thought of that? You all weren’t very subtle about it.” Through the front window Gordon could see headlights coming straight at them. The driver made no move to change lanes.

“Do you think we should offer up some baksheesh?” Tierney asked. “I’ve bribed my way out of a speeding ticket but never out of a Black Maria.”

The headlights in the windscreen grew larger and brighter. Gordon gripped the bottom of his bench with both hands. Shit, he thought, we're going to die before we're even interrogated.

"Maybe I really should have ditched the pot," Matt said.

"You don't still have it," Kari said. "Do you?"

"Fuck, yes." Matt patted a noticeable bulge in his front pocket. "I only got it today, and I paid way too much for it."

The headlights seemed to be right on top of them. "Allah, Allah!" the driver shouted. He twisted the wheel hard. Kari slid off the bench and went to one knee on the floor. Sheryl clutched at Gordon's arm. He could feel the van begin to tip. The driver jerked the wheel again and the van rocked from side to side before settling on its suspension.

"Holy shit!" Sheryl said.

The taller cop had also toppled to the floor. He knelt now by the wire mesh, still holding their bottles, and shouted at the driver.

"They drive like children in pedal cars," Matt said. "They don't steer, they just point their cars in a direction."

"Lane markers and road signs are just advice here," Tierney said.

Gordon wanted out of the van. He wanted to go home to his *lojman* and lie down; he wanted this day to end. So many things had gone wrong, starting with his morning classes. In Kansas City, Gordon's strength as a teacher had been that he made math fun. Every teacher wanted to be liked—it was the great secret of education—but a math teacher had to work so much harder than most. Gordon had kept a pair of Groucho glasses in his desk. He'd played Jeopardy with the homework answers. Each March, he celebrated pi day.

But here, the students weren't amused by him. They insisted that they had exams to prepare for, pressing him to move faster, but the math was more advanced than anything he'd looked at in

years. There were problems in the book that he couldn't solve. Sometimes he'd resorted to asking his best students to show their work on the board and then nodding appreciatively. But today he'd been caught—two of the students had disagreed on a proof and had asked Gordon who was right. "Let me double-check my work and get back to you on Monday," he'd said lamely.

How the fuck could Matt have held onto the marijuana? What if they were searched at the station?

He thought again of his meeting with Marnie. If the worst happened, if they were jailed, would she have some pull? Could he mention her name to the embassy? Perhaps that would somehow compromise her.

The paddy wagon seemed to have reached a town. Gordon could see streetlamps overhead, and the driver turned down one road and then another. At last they stopped. The short cop opened the back door, and the Turkish men began to pile out. The other policeman motioned for Gordon to follow.

Outside the van, the night air was cool. "Where are we?" Sheryl asked.

The Turks began to single file into the police station, as if it was a drill they knew well.

Tierney glanced up and down the street. "Welcome back to Martiköy, Gordon."

During Gordon's first days in Turkey, the school had organized a bus to Martiköy so the new teachers could do their shopping. The Saturday market had sprawled throughout the city, and Gordon had left the group to explore. Vendors' tables filled every available space on the sidewalks. In America, food was wrapped, sanitized, sealed; here, huge bags of spices sat open, whole sacks of saffron, stick cinnamon, and cumin. Pigeons pecked at sunflower seeds until they were shooed away. Gordon went a block further and the smell of the fishmongers' stalls assaulted him.

Women haggled over prices and men walked arm in arm. Despite the heat, the men wore long trousers; some had jackets and woolen skullcaps. Many of the women wore headscarves and

their bodies were made shapeless by long raincoats. He saw one woman dressed head-to-toe in black being led by a man—no slit was cut into the veil for her eyes. Gordon had worn shorts. A white-haired man slapped his cane into Gordon's bare legs as he passed.

He tried to make his way back to where the bus had parked. Before setting out, he had picked out a merchant selling huge stainless steel pots as a landmark, but since then he had come across others selling identical goods. Was this mosque the same one that the van had parked near? The world had become a mass of the unfamiliar. Surely this was what it was like to grow old, to become senile and confused. He felt nauseated as he realized that the bus must have departed without him. At last he found a taxi driver who understood where he wanted to go. "Twenty dollar," the driver said. He twice opened and closed his hands, wriggling all his fingers each time, to emphasize the point. Gordon nodded. He was probably being ripped-off, but what else could he do?

When the taxi had pulled up at his *lojman*, a group of teachers sat on folding chairs in his lawn. They'd cheered as he got out of the taxi. "Gordon! Gordon!" Matt had handed him a can of Efes beer, and Tierney had said, "We always have a bet at the start of the year—who'll be the first person to get lost." He'd motioned to the others. "We're your backers."

Inside the police station, Gordon's group was herded into a dimly lit room filled with Turkish men, picked up, apparently, on earlier sweeps. The men stood quietly, heads bowed. Many held their hands protectively in front of their genitals.

"This isn't looking so good," Tierney said.

No shit, Gordon thought. Already he was wondering how he would explain this to the headmistress. In the country for less than a month and already busted. Matt with his fucking marijuana. Were they allowed to call the embassy? "I should tell you something," he heard himself say, but then he stopped and began again, whispering. "If this gets bad, I may be able to help.

Before I came here, I talked to a CIA agent,” he said. “An old girlfriend. She says she works for AID, but everyone knows it’s some kind of light cover. When I told her I was coming here, she asked me to keep my eyes open. I can contact her.”

The others stared at him for a long moment without speaking. At last Tierney said, “So you think you’re the spook?” There was a laugh in his voice.

“Maybe,” Gordon said. “I don’t know.”

“Haven’t you just blown your cover?” Kari asked.

“Dude, I never took you for a snitch.”

Gordon studied Matt. “What do you mean?”

“A snitch. A fink. A narc.” He patted at his bulging pocket. “Who do you think she wants you to spy on? It’s not like you speak Turkish. You don’t have access to secrets. If she wants you to spy on anybody, it must be on us. The other expats.”

“Maybe she was just talking,” Sheryl said. “‘Keep your eyes open.’ I mean, it doesn’t sound like you’re on the payroll.”

This wasn’t the reaction Gordon had expected. He’d pictured himself as a quiet hero, helping with national security, fighting terrorism. He’d thought they might be grateful for his help. He’d thought Sheryl might be impressed.

The two young cops sprawled in folding chairs, smoking strong cigarettes. The room was quiet. At last, a mustachioed policeman entered. He looked around at the silent group. When his stare fell on the Gordon and the others, he called out in Turkish. The brothers sprung to their feet. They dropped their cigarettes on the floor.

“We’re foreigners,” Tierney said. “*Yabancıyız.*”

The police officer spoke in harsh tones to the two young cops, who looked away. After a moment, he walked up to Gordon’s group, motioning with hand. “*Gelin,*” he said. “Come.” He led

them out of the room. At the exit, he pushed the door open and wagged his finger in their faces.

“Only a drunk on bar,” he said. “Never in beach.”

“Right,” Matt said. “On bar only.”

“We understand,” Gordon said. Matt, the idiot, was asking to be searched. “It won’t happen again.”

Sheryl sniggered, at what Gordon was unsure.

“*Iyi Geceley,*” the policeman said. “Goody night.”

“Let’s get out of here,” Gordon said. He walked down the street and the others followed, laughing. At the corner, he heard footsteps behind him. “*Bakarmisini?*” the tall policeman called. “*Raki. Cin.*” He handed the bottles to Tierney and jogged back towards the station.

Maybe Tierney’s right, Gordon thought; maybe there is some kind of madness to this place. Gordon had arrived thinking only of the adventure, but these past days had been harder than he had expected. Chaotic.

Already he was sick of living out of a suitcase. He’d brought only a few days’ worth of clothes; he had nothing for the colder weather that was approaching. In his shipment there was a trench coat that he’d bought in Kansas City, a Humphrey Bogart kind of coat, replete with epaulets and belt. He’d chosen it not only for its practicality but also because he associated it with foreign correspondents and spies. But his shipment had never arrived. He was using a jam jar as a drinking glass. He constantly had to wash out his few clothes in the kitchen sink.

Yesterday, Gordon had left school early and caught a ride into Istanbul. He’d gone to the shipping agent’s office with the belief that he might get a firm answer if he spoke to the man face-to-face. “Very good news,” the agent had enthused. He was sweaty and beer-bellied. “We are only waiting for your shipment to clear customs. Perhaps tomorrow.”

Gordon felt his jaw tighten. It was the same thing he'd heard every day for the past weeks. Always tomorrow, Gordon thought. "Does a bribe need to be paid?"

"We take care of baksheesh," the man said. "Don't worry. Soon. Perhaps tomorrow."

"So I can call you tomorrow. "

"Yes, yes, call. But perhaps not tomorrow. Perhaps tomorrow tomorrow. We will let you know."

And then Gordon had begun the trek back to school. Without a car, the journey took hours: a ferry ride across the Bosphorus, a crowded commuter train, and then a minibus. Near the ferry station he'd been surrounded by a pack of grubby shoeshine boys calling out "Shiney? Shiney?" Gordon had waved them off. "Suede," he said. "Don't shine." But one of the kids daubed brown polish on the leather regardless. Gordon had shoved him, perhaps harder than he'd intended, and the boy had tumbled face first, his shoeshine equipment clattering on the cobblestones. Gordon had turned quickly and walked away, but the boy had followed him, reciting all the English words of abuse that he had heard others hurl at him, words he probably didn't fully understand: "Piss off! Bugger off you little prick. Go to hell."

Now Gordon looked down the street. No traffic. No pedestrians.

"We're miles from my car," Tierney said.

Most of the shop windows were dark or shuttered, but opposite them, a window display of headless mannequins dressed in puffy wedding gowns glowed violet-blue under an ultraviolet light.

"We're not going to find a taxi now," Matt said. "We might as well wait until morning."

"What a window dressing," Sheryl said. "It certainly makes me want to get married."

Tierney held up the half-empty bottles. "Let's have a drink." He sat on a park bench facing the bridal gowns.



“I just want to get home,” Gordon said. “I want to find my bed.” His wave of sobriety had passed. He realized that he would feel very, very sick tomorrow. Or perhaps it was today.

Sheryl slumped onto the bench next to Tierney. She held her head in her hands. Gordon hesitated a moment, and then sat next to her. Kari and Matt glanced at one another and folded themselves up cross-legged on the sidewalk, facing the bench. Tierney placed the two bottles on the ground in the middle of the group. “*Şerefe*,” he said. “Cheers.”

Gordon leaned forward for the *raki*. As he reached for it, his hand outstretched, he watched the liqueur begin to slosh inside the bottle, a Lilliputian tidal wave gaining strength. The entire bottle, he realized, was vibrating. He sat back and put his hand against the wooden bench; it too trembled. And then in the shop window the black lights flickered off; the wedding dresses vanished. The streetlights, too, faded to a glow and then went out.

As suddenly as it began, the vibration of the bench under Gordon’s hand ceased. He became aware of the din of the street. Sirens wailed and horns honked, each with its own steady cadence. Car headlights flashed on and off along the otherwise dark street.

“Holy fuck!” Sheryl shouted above the hubbub. “Was that an earthquake?”

“A little temblor,” Tierney shouted in response. “We get them all the time.”

One by one the alarms began to quiet. “I’m so freaked,” Kari said.

Matt said, “Don’t worry. It’s over. It was nothing.”

“I don’t know what happened to the power, though,” Tierney said. “That’s unusual.”

As Gordon’s eyes adjusted to the darkness, he realized that Matt and Kari had begun to make out. He could just see Matt’s hand moving under her blouse. He couldn’t stop himself from watching. Was it desire or envy he felt?

The lights flickered back on in the shop window, and Matt and Kari separated. Gradually, the overhead lamps began again to glow. Tierney picked up the gin and took a swig. “You see? All’s well that ends well.”

“Does it end well?” Sheryl asked. “Is this a major fault zone? I worried about lots of things before I took this job—terrorism, hospitals, the blood supply. I didn’t think about earthquakes.”

Tierney shrugged. “Someday there’ll be a big one, and then Istanbul will be screwed. A lot of these buildings will collapse like sandcastles. I’ve seen trucks hauling used rebar—they wait for the concrete to set a little, and then they pull out the rods to use somewhere else.”

Gordon reached out his hand to touch Sheryl’s arm. He meant it as a gesture of reassurance, but she stiffened. “What are you doing?” she asked.

He had failed so miserably this evening to impress her. He reached for the bottle of *raki* and took a pull. He felt suddenly dizzy. Why was he so unable to make a connection with this group?

No matter where you go, there you are, he thought. There would be no secret dockings in the Basilica Cistern. He wasn’t James Bond, only a would-be snitch. He wasn’t free, only alone. No one gave a good goddamn about him.

Matt and Kari engaged in another embrace, no longer worried about an audience. She moaned softly. “I’m going for a walk,” Gordon said.

He put the bottle on the ground and rose unsteadily to his feet. The sidewalk seemed to move with him, and he stumbled forward. He made his way across the street. In front of the bridal shop he stopped and studied the oddly-glowing dresses.

Gordon thought again of his dog lying dead under the fence. The snare, a cable with a locking slide, had been designed to tighten as the animal struggled. It gave back no slack. If Priscilla had stayed still, if she hadn’t tried to fight her way out, she might have lain there until he had found and released her. Instead, she had twisted and turned, pulled against the wire, until it had strangled

her to death. Gordon tried to force the image from his mind. He leaned his head against the glass of the shop window.

The glass felt cool under his forehead, and Gordon closed his eyes, thinking still of all that had passed. From behind him, across the street, he heard the clink of bottles and a burst of laughter. He opened his eyes. He lifted his head and turned to face the group.

## Blunt Not the Heart

Reddick sat at his desk and pried at the safety cap on the bottle of painkillers. His knee throbbed, but the childproof lid would yield to no combination of push, pull, or twist. Fuck it—he'd cut the Gordian knot. He shoved aside the knickknacks on his desk and grabbed up a pair of long-bladed scissors. As he took aim, the points hovering above the bottle, Sheila, his secretary, rolled into the room.

She stared at him. "Who are you? Hank the Ripper?"

Reddick looked at her. She wore a bright floral dress that drew attention to her bulk. Even now, Reddick sometimes wondered how Sheila lived. Where she found clothes to fit her. How she washed herself. How she put on her shoes.

Sheila made her way to the chair in front of his desk and Reddick watched with apprehension as she sat down. "The Happy Crapper has struck again."

Another thing, Reddick thought. Something else he would have to pretend to give a damn about.

This year, Reddick's first as middle school principal, had been hell. Before, Reddick had coached football and taught English in the high school. The students had liked him. His colleagues had respected him. But when Kim got pregnant and they needed more money, the only option had been a move into administration. The middle school children were a tribe of savages. They screamed during assembly. They flung butter-pats and four-letter words in the cafeteria. Despite his efforts to win them over, he could tell that they hated him.

"Where is it this time?" Reddick asked. He took a practice stab with the scissors.

“Boys’ john. First floor.” She watched him closely as he measured out where he would strike.

Reddick jabbed down hard with the scissors. The blades caught the bottle slightly off-center, caroming it towards the edge of his desk. He grabbed at the bottle, catching it just in time, but in the process he backhanded the clutter on his desk. His statue clattered to the floor.

He hoped he hadn’t broken it. The statue was a gift from his wife. Two years ago, when Kim got pregnant, she and Reddick had spent the last of their savings on a package tour of Italy, recompense for the honeymoon they’d never been able to afford. In Naples, she’d stopped in front of the Farnese Hercules and whispered, “It’s you.” Reddick could see the resemblance, but he felt certain that she hadn’t meant it entirely as a compliment. True, Reddick was bearded, lineman-large, still muscled despite the years. But this Hercules had gone thick at the waist. He leaned on his club, tired of his labors. Later in the gift shop, Kim had bought Reddick the kitschy reproduction.

Now Reddick rose to his feet and grimaced. He bent to pick up the fallen statue and felt a white jolt of pain. Reddick lowered himself back into his chair. He wanted that goddamned bottle open.

Reddick again placed the bottle in the middle of his desk, but this time, as he raised the scissors, he kept the fingers of his left hand cupped tightly around the bottle. He jabbed down with the scissors and gashed a hole into the side of the bottle. He twisted the blade in the wound and then shook out four tablets into his hand, double the prescribed dose. He washed them down with a mug of cold coffee.

“Babe, don’t those have codeine in them?” Sheila asked.

“Hydrococone. Better still.” Reddick pushed himself up from his chair with his arms, trying to keep the strain off his knee. “So The Happy Crapper strikes again?” He smiled at Sheila.

“Come, Watson. The game’s afoot.”

Despite her girth, Sheila moved down the hallway at a pace quicker than Reddick would have liked. With every step, his knee seized with pain. The halls were filled with students who ran back and forth, laughing loudly, until they saw Reddick. Then they gaped up at him, stepped back against the lockers to get out of his way. It was his size, Reddick thought. They didn't believe him to be a gentle giant.

A group of teachers was gathered outside the door to the boys' restroom, blocking the door, chatting, pointing students to the other toilets. Reddick noted that Schmidt, the wrestling coach, was among them. Schmidt had also applied for the principal's job, and now he seemed always to have a comment for Reddick.

The group fell silent when Reddick walked up. These middle school teachers were unlike any he'd known in the high school. They looked constantly for reassurance and a pat on the back, as if they were children themselves. At the same time, they excluded him from their jokes and their conversations. Well, he didn't give a damn. He wasn't going to compliment them on their colorful bulletin boards.

"The scene of the crime," Sheila said. She pushed the door open for Reddick.

He walked inside. There, in the middle of the floor, sat a firm turd perfectly centered on a sheet of notebook paper.

"Lordy," Sheila said. "He's got good aim."

Reddick bent at the waist to look. The sheet, as always, was filled from top to bottom with profanities: *Fuck cocksucker twat*. The words continued down the page in a childish scrawl, *motherfucker asshole shit dickhead*. The Crapper sometimes struck in one of the boys' johns, sometimes the girls', but the modus operandi never varied. Suddenly Reddick felt nauseated by the sight and the odor. He straightened. "Let's get out of here."

They walked out into the hallway. “You watch,” Sheila said. “There’ll be another one before the end of the year. He won’t be able to stop himself.”

“How do you know it’s a he?” Reddick asked, although he himself suspected a seventh-grade boy, T.V Wilson, of being The Crapper. Reddick turned to the group of teachers. “Anybody see anything?” Reddick asked. “Any ideas?”

“At least we know it’s someone in school today. There are loads of absences.”

“Could be a copycat.”

“Actually,” Schmidt said, “We suspect it’s you, Reddick.”

Although Schmidt only reached to his Reddick’s chest, he seemed dressed, as always, to show off his build: a knit shirt that pulled tight at his biceps. Sometimes Reddick wanted nothing more than to lash out with a jab to Schmidt’s nose. He was pretty sure he could take him if the fight didn’t wind up on the floor.

Reddick turned to Sheila. “Let’s find the janitor.”

In his office, Reddick considered taking more of the hydrocodone, but he knew he shouldn’t. Instead he uncapped a bottle of Tylenol.

He could feel the sweat dripping from his armpits, soaking into his short-sleeve dress shirt. The June sun baked the room, but the blinds bunched crookedly at the top of the window frame and no amount of tugging would lower them.

The phone rang. Reddick shook some of the Tylenols onto his desk. He rolled two of the tablets under his fingers. He picked up the receiver.

“Come home,” his wife said.

Reddick checked his watch. It was only one-thirty: Kim shouldn’t be home at this time of day. “What’s wrong?”

“I’ve fired her. Peg.” He could hear a shake in her voice.

“You gave her notice?”

“I’ve fired her. Now. Immediately. I’m taking the day off from work so I can watch Joey.”

Reddick closed the notebook. “What happened?”

“That cunt. I can’t stand to call her Aunty now.”

It was a word he’d never heard Kim use before. “I’ll be right there.”

He limped from his office to the parking lot, where he slid behind the wheel of his aging Ford. He cranked the ignition until the engine finally caught. The whole car shook in synch with the firing of the pistons. It angered Reddick to think that a world existed—at least on television shows and in the pages of glossy magazines—where people drove Porsches and wore Armani suits; and then there was this world, Reddick’s world, where he and Kim moved from one month’s paycheck to the next.

He lowered the lever into drive. The transmission slipped for a moment before the car lurched out of the parking place. Even pushing the pedals caused his knee to throb, but thank god the painkillers were beginning to kick in.

Reddick turned right out of the lot and stepped down on the gas, trying to hurry, and the car shuddered towards home. He couldn’t stop thinking about the tremor in Kim’s voice.

He drove past boarded-up shop fronts, over pot-holed roads. Empyrean was his hometown, and he’d lived here for its boom and its bust. Now it was caught in a vicious cycle. Those people with money and education left; they sold their houses at a loss and further fueled the market for cheap housing. A welfare capital had been created, a place where no one would ever vote to raise taxes for education. We should have a sign, Reddick thought, that reads, *Welcome to Empyrean, the Asshole of Western Missouri.*



What could have happened between Kim and Aunty Peg? They needed her. Kim worked in social services, one of the few boom industries in Empyrean, but it wasn't a career to grow rich in. When she wanted to return to work, they didn't know what to do with Joey. They couldn't stomach the thought of daycare. Nannies were too expensive. Then they'd found Peg.

Peg was some sort of distant relative to Kim—a second cousin once removed or a third cousin; they had never worked it out exactly. Peg had seemed perfect for the job. She didn't want a lot of money. She was getting benefits, she said, and just wanted to supplement her income on the quiet.

She insisted they call her Aunty Peg. "Like I'm part of the family. Right, Joey-Woey?" She talked to Joey in a singsong voice, and, although they asked her not to, she persisted in using baby talk. She called out, "Oh-oh. Bumps-a-daisy," when he fell down. But Reddick liked the way her face lit up when she saw the baby. "Joey, Joey, Joey," she sang out, her voice high-pitched.

"She's dumb as a post," Kim had complained.

"She seems to like Joey."

"It's like having the Teletubbies in the house."

Reddick knew that Kim had never liked her. He knew that she suspected Peg of watching television during the day when she was supposed to be watching Joey—they had come home to find the set switched to a different channel from where they'd left it. But to fire Peg without notice was insane. How would they get by?

The front door was open, the screen ajar. Last week, the compressor on the aging air-conditioner had died with a clunk and they were still waiting for the repairman to come. Fixing it would mean another expense, something else to charge to one of their credit cards.

Reddick entered the house to find Kim sitting on the couch holding a beer. The bottle had sweated and left rings of water on her jeans, but Kim didn't seem to notice. Joey was sleeping on the couch next to her; she touched his head. When she saw Reddick she raised her index finger to her lips.

She got up quietly from the couch and picked up her Dictaphone from the coffee table. "Let's go to the kitchen," she whispered.

Reddick followed her into the kitchen. "Are you okay?" he asked.

"You need to hear this," Kim said.

She closed the kitchen door. "I hid this on the bookshelf," she said. "I just wanted to find out how much television she was watching." She pressed the play button and turned up the volume.

Reddick leaned forward and listened. It took him a while to make sense of the tinny sounds on the tape, but after a moment, he could make out Joey's noises, his usual babble, and then he heard Aunty Peg's high-pitched squeal: "La la. Time for breakfast. Yummy yummy yummy."

Reddick looked at Kim and shrugged. It was typical Aunty Peg.

"Just listen. That's while we're still in the house. You hear? There. There, we're saying goodbye. That's the door shutting. Now listen."

Joey babbled some more, and then Aunty Peg spoke again: "Eat your fucking slop, pig." What struck Reddick hardest, even more than the words she used, was the tone of Peg's voice. It had dropped several steps in pitch. No longer song-like, it was the sound of pure hatred. He felt a prickling along the back of his neck. He could hear Joey whining and then Peg's voice: "Shut up. Just shut the fuck up. Stop whining like a fucking dog." Kim pressed the stop button.

Reddick tried to make sense of what had happened to his son, his baby. He hurried back into the living room and looked at Joey asleep on the couch. He slept on his back, his arms

outstretched. Reddick wanted to pick him up and hold him, but he only bent down and touched Joey's head, brushed back his hair.

Kim slid onto the couch next to Joey. Reddick touched her leg, but she didn't look at him. Reddick kept his voice level. "Do you think she's done anything else?"

When she raised her eyes to his, he could see they were red. "What kind of place is this?" she asked.

Kim had never wanted to return to Emphyrean, Reddick knew. They'd married young, at college. Reddick had played football, and although the pro scouts had come to watch him, they wanted to see speed in a lineman, not just size. He'd told Kim that he felt connected to Emphyrean. They had bought their house before the town completely went to hell, when property had some value. And now they were trapped by their mortgage.

"Do you think she's hurt him physically?" he asked.

Kim looked away again. "Listen. I came home at noon and checked the tape while she and Joey were out for their walk." She took a swallow of beer. "As soon as they came up the drive, I told her she was fired. She didn't even ask why. She just nodded her head and left. That's guilty behavior, Hank. She knew she had done wrong."

Reddick began to undress Joey, unsnapping his trousers.

"You'll wake him, Hank. Let him sleep."

Reddick freed the trousers and ran his hands up and down Joey's legs. He didn't even know what he was looking for—bruises? Burns? He gently felt the back of Joey's thighs, searching for lumps. His body was so small, so fragile. Reddick found nothing, but what did that mean? He wondered if Peg could have hurt the boy in ways that didn't show.

Reddick began to fumble with the buttons on Joey's shirt. Joey woke with a start and began to cry. Reddick picked him up and held him tight to his chest. His only goal since Joey was born

had been to keep him safe. He'd bought car seats and baby monitors. He'd wanted only to protect his child. How could he have left him alone with Peg? How could he have failed so badly?

Joey's cries became louder. "Shhh," Reddick whispered. "It's okay." He held him tight. Against his will, Reddick began to cry. He ran his hand up and down Joey's back.

"You're scaring him," Kim said. She took Joey away and held him.

"We should call the police," Reddick said. "We should press charges."

Kim shook her head. "We hired her illegally." She bounced Joey in her arms. "Plus, I don't think there's a law against speaking rudely to a child."

At the table, amongst the clutter of the kitchen, Reddick poured another glass of beer. Kim was playing with Joey in the living room. Reddick wiped the sweat from his face with a towel. His knee had begun to throb again with pain. Reddick decided to allow himself another dose. He took two hydrocodone tablets from his pocket.

He'd damaged the knee two weeks ago. After school, Reddick had been doing his rounds, inspecting the school, and when he walked into the weight room, he'd found Schmidt at the squat bar. "Reddick," Schmidt had said, "I hear you used to lift a little. In your day."

Reddick had tried to laugh off the comment. "Not like you, Coach." He watched as Schmidt loaded plate after plate on the bar.

"Don't worry," Schmidt said. "I'll be sure to lighten the bar for you when I'm done." Schmidt squatted the bar once, the veins bulging in his neck and on his forehead, and Reddick could see that it was all the man could do to get the bar back onto the rest. Reddick counted the plates; then he slipped underneath the bar and squatted it ten times. On the last rep, he'd felt a tear in his right knee, the one he'd injured years ago playing football. He'd said nothing to Schmidt. He'd forced himself to walk out of the gym without limping.

Reddick picked up the Dictaphone. He pushed play and listened. There was a long stretch of silence, and then he could hear the opening music to a television soap opera. Peg's voice: "Be quiet, you goddamned mongoloid. You ugly dog."

How long had it gone on? What else had she done?

With Joey asleep, Reddick and Kim lay on the bed in the darkness and whispered. He could still hear the tinge of anger in her voice. "Hank, why are we still here?"

At college, she'd studied Romance languages; she'd hoped to live abroad. He knew that she'd never really forgiven him for settling here. "Aunty Peg did this," he said.

"Is this really where you want us to raise our son?"

Reddick started to answer that this place didn't have to touch them, that they didn't have to be dragged down by Emphyrean, but somehow it felt like a lie. "This is our home. I don't want to run away."

"It's always another battle for you, isn't it?"

"I'm a teacher."

"Not anymore."

"Kim," he said, "what if she's hurt him?" He reached out to touch her hand, but she pulled back.

"He's thriving," she said. "He's healthy."

Reddick pictured Peg's face. She didn't often wear her dentures—she claimed they were too painful—but when she did, the white of her top teeth shined in contrast with the crooked and yellowed lower ones. "I'd like to slap the teeth out of her mouth."

"I know," Kim said. She turned away; rolled to her side. "I dream about hurting her."

\* \* \*

At school the next morning, Reddick couldn't work. He sat at his desk in the heat of his office and tried to write the end of year report, but the only thoughts that came to him were of Joey left alone in the house with Peg.

He took out the Dictaphone from his satchel. He had played and replayed the whole of the tape, but in places he still couldn't make out what was being said. He pushed the play button and listened. Muffled noises. The television? Or was Joey crying? Peg's voice. "Retard. You're just as stupid as your mother." The tape reached its end and the machine clicked off. Reddick picked it up and hit rewind.

He shook a handful of the hydrocodone onto his desk. He dropped two into his cola and let them dissolve. It tasted bitter on his tongue, but he drank it down.

Reddick didn't think of himself as a scholar—before he'd begun teaching, when he lived for football, he'd hardly read anything. But sometimes you didn't choose your subject; it chose you. There were novels and plays that Reddick had re-read every time he taught them. Over the years, the books he taught had taken on meaning for him, like a secular bible. Now he thought of the moment in *Macbeth* when Macduff is urged to seek vengeance for the death of his son. Macduff cries out, "He has no children." It was a line that Reddick had puzzled over, but at this moment he understood. What suffering could Macduff cause Macbeth that could compare to his own?

Peg had simply walked away. No punishment. No humiliation. She would probably find another job with another family. She would probably be turned loose on another child.

What would equal justice for Peg? It was a game he had begun playing last night as he'd lain awake in bed. What was the worst thing he could wish upon her? Shingles? Painful but curable. Incontinence? Embarrassing, but too easy—she could always wear a diaper. Disfigurement? But then it wasn't as if she traded on her looks at the moment.

But there was one thought that he couldn't shake from his mind. He pictured Peg with bloodied, four-fingered hands trying helplessly to pick up her own thumbs. The thought sickened him. And yet. And yet wasn't it the opposable thumb that distinguished man from animal? There was justice to satisfy him—Peg struggling with every task of every day. Every time she tried to light a match or fasten a button or pick up a coin she would be reminded of her sins.

“What's wrong, babe?”

He hadn't noticed Sheila enter the room. “End of year reports,” he said. Although he'd always thought of Sheila as a friend, he didn't want to tell her what had happened to Joey. It seemed shameful. He didn't want anyone to know.

Sheila settled her weight on the chair in front of Reddick's desk. Rumor had it that Sheila had once been beautiful; that she had gained the weight suddenly, late in life. Reddick knew that she was sick of secretarial work. Sheila applied constantly for jobs with various Kansas City businesses. But no matter how glowing a reference he gave, Sheila never got the job. It made no difference that she was smart and hard-working—as soon as the firm saw her in the flesh, her abundance of flesh, the process ended. It was an unjust universe, Reddick thought. The kind, the meek, the peacemakers shall inherit the short end of the stick.

“I've got a suspect for you,” Sheila said. “A seventh-grader. T.V. Wilson was seen in the hallway yesterday at about the right time.”

T.V. Wilson. Earlier in the year, the boy had phoned in a bomb threat, only to call back a minute later to say, no, he'd gotten it wrong: the evacuation should take place during *third* period, when he had his math test. He'd even given his name when asked.

“Send him in,” Reddick said.

T.V. was skinny and dark-haired, and his thick glasses rested halfway down his nose. Despite the heat, he wore an olive-drab army jacket. He shifted his weight from foot to foot in front of Reddick's desk.

Reddick decided to let the boy sweat for a while. He pretended to study T.V.'s file. After a moment, Reddick glanced up to see that the boy was looking around the room, seemingly unconcerned. "Do you know why you're here?"

T.V. shrugged. He pushed his glasses back up on his nose with his middle finger, a gesture Reddick was unsure how to interpret. He wasn't sure the boy was bright enough for subtlety.

Reddick tried an outright accusation. "We know you defecated on the floor."

T.V. looked puzzled. "Do what?"

"Crap. We know you crapped on the floor."

The boy started to laugh, but he stopped when Reddick got up and walked towards him. "Why were you out of class yesterday morning?"

"I went outside to smoke."

It was a stupid lie. Reddick tapped on the boy's chest with his index finger. "Why don't you just admit to it?"

The boy reacted as if he had been punched. He fell to the floor and covered his head. "You can't hit me!" he shrieked. "You can't hit me!"

Sheila poked her head in. "What happened?" Reddick was surprised by how quickly she'd gotten to the door.

"Nothing happened," Reddick said. "T.V. here is a fine actor. He walked back around his desk. He's suspended for the rest of the week. For smoking."

\* \* \*



In the afternoon, as Reddick limped down the hallway, he paused at the door to the gymnasium to watch Schmidt's P.E. class. Some of the children played a rowdy game of basketball, and two of the boys seemed to be in a contest to see who could foul the other the hardest. A group of girls had left the game and sat on the floor talking. Schmidt reclined on the bleachers, reading a magazine, only occasionally looking up to see if there was bloodshed on the court.

When Kim had learned that Reddick had damaged his knee in a pissing contest with Schmidt, she'd been furious. "Haven't you ever heard that discretion is the better part of valor?"

"Why does nobody remember that Falstaff said that? And he was a coward."

"You know better, Hank," she'd said.

Now Reddick made his way back to the office. "Find out who's got lunch duty this week and tell them not to bother," he said to Sheila. "Send a message to Schmidt that we need him to cover."

She shook her head. "Hank, that's evil." Then she smiled. "I'll tell him we need someone for morning break, too."

Reddick woke in the night to the sound of Joey crying. Kim, usually the first to wake, was still asleep, her pillow pulled over her head. He eased his body from the bed, wincing in pain as pressure was applied to his knee, and hobbled into Joey's room.

In the darkness, he picked the boy up and held him. Joey settled in the crook of Reddick's arm but continued to cry. Reddick sat down on a chair and rocked. With his free hand, he felt the area around Joey's diaper. Dry. It was unlike Joey to wake for no reason, to want only comforting. "Hush," Reddick said. "It's all right."

Reddick had never known Joey to have nightmares. He wished his son were old enough to communicate what had happened to him. He wondered in how many ways Peg could have scarred him. Did he see her now in his dreams? Did he have fears that wouldn't go away?

As Reddick's eyes adjusted to the dark, he began to make out the shapes in Joey's room. Over the bed hung a mobile of mythical creatures, and Joey's shelf was filled with stuffed animals. Why were so many toys frightening things made safe? Teddy bears, cartoon monsters, even plush alligators? Perhaps we do it for ourselves, Reddick thought. Perhaps we want to convince ourselves that the world is not the place we know it to be.

Reddick rocked, and gradually he felt Joey relax, his breathing become deep and regular. Reddick held Joey tightly in one arm and pushed himself to his feet. He hobbled back to the crib and laid Joey down as gently as possible, turning him on his side, tucking the blanket in under the sides of the mattress. He crept out of the room.

Reddick had only arrived at school when Sheila entered his office. "Mrs. Wilson is here to see you," she said. "T.V.'s mother."

Reddick tried not to stare when Mrs. Wilson entered his office. Her eyes were rimmed with thick, raccoon eyeliner that stood in opposition to her pale skin. She wore a white dress decorated with red hearts. It billowed at the waist; the sleeves were flounced; lace dripped from the collar. She looked like a goth Cinderella.

"He didn't do nothing," she said. She sat in the chair in front of Reddick's desk and stuck a cigarette in her mouth. He watched as she searched through her purse, also decorated with hearts.

"This is a non-smoking campus," Reddick said.

She pulled out a pack of bar matches and lit up. “He sure as hell didn’t shit on the floor,” she said. “He may not be a genius, but he’s potty trained.” She shook out the match and dropped it to the linoleum.

“I didn’t suspend him for that,” Reddick said. “He cut class to smoke.”

“He’s got my permission to smoke,” she said. She took a long drag on her cigarette. “I can write you a note if you want.”

“You can’t give him permission to smoke.” He wondered what kind of mother would permit her child to harm himself. Before Joey was born, Reddick had never worried, but afterwards, every journey in the car had become a potential accident, every bottle cap something to choke upon. And now that Joey had begun to toddle about the house, the dangers multiplied. He’d padded the edges of tables and put locks on the cabinets. But how had he failed to see the biggest danger of all? Reddick watched Mrs. Wilson blow smoke through her nose. “You can’t smoke in here either.”

As if in response, she took a roll of breath mints from her purse, unrolled one and popped it in her mouth. She took another drag on her cigarette. Did she think the two would cancel each other out?

“He told me how you pushed him.” She dropped her cigarette to the floor and ground it underfoot. “I’m going to report you to the school board. I’m a taxpayer, mister.”

Reddick doubted that she was—more likely she was a recipient of tax dollars—but it didn’t matter. “You do that,” he said.

The afternoon heat was unbearable. Reddick’s knee hurt again, but it wasn’t time yet for more hydrocodone. He decided to take one instead of two—a compromise position. He shook another pill out of the ruptured bottle. Today had been a waste. He’d accomplished nothing.

Reddick picked up the tiny Hercules from his desk. His labors, which had gone on so long, had been assigned to Hercules as punishment for killing his wife and children in a fit of madness. Reddick wondered if that fact had made it into the Disney version of the story.

“Maggot,” Peg had called Joey. “Filth.” How could they have ever believed she cared for him?

Another image of Peg had formed in his brain. Even more than chopping the thumbs from her hands, he wanted to cut her tongue from her mouth. He imagined feeding it back to her; forcing her to swallow it.

Reddick thought about T.V. Wilson. He was an unpopular kid, friendless, bad at school. Reddick had suspended him earlier over the bomb scare. Of course he wanted revenge.

In college, Reddick had once been matched up against an offensive lineman who’d psyched himself up into bloodlust. Playing the line was trench warfare, but Reddick had never been a dirty player. In this game, the quarterback couldn’t pass for shit, throwing low arc-less passes that Reddick was sure he could bat down; but every time he raised his hand to swat at the ball, the offensive lineman punched him the solar plexus with the heel of his palm. The blows left Reddick feeling as if he wanted to sit down and gasp for air. Just before halftime, Reddick slipped on the grass and the lineman ground his cleats into Reddick’s hand. Reddick felt sure he could hear the small bones breaking. He held the hand next to his chest and rocked, but he waved off the medics and rose to his feet for the next down.

On the snap, Reddick grabbed the lineman’s facemask and yanked him forward, twisting, and slung him to the ground. Whistles blew and flags were thrown. Reddick had been pulled from the game and screamed at in turn by each of his coaches. But none of that robbed him of the satisfaction he’d felt as they stretchered the man off the field.

He looked at the clock. School wouldn't finish for another hour, but what good was it doing him to stay?

"I'm going home," Reddick told Sheila.

She looked concerned. "What if somebody calls?"

"You can handle it."

In the parking lot, Reddick noticed something written in the dust on the hood of his battered Ford. He walked closer. Someone had printed *Bite me, Reddick* in large block letters. He smudged it out, and then regretted the action—he had nothing with which to wipe the dirt from his hand.

He limped back inside to wash his hands. The faculty restrooms were farther away than Reddick wanted to walk. He pushed open the door to the boys' john nearest the gym. A turd sat in the middle of the floor, centered atop a sheet of paper. Reddick walked closer. Words filled the page. *Pussy shit peckerhead fucker douchebag cock.*

When Joey had gone to bed, Reddick and Kim sat on the back porch. The evening air had cooled a bit. Kim drank a beer; Reddick poured a second shot from a bottle of Wild Turkey. "Kim," he said. "We fucked up."

"I know." She seemed at last to have forgiven him a bit.

"We should take him to a psychiatrist."

"Hank, he can't even speak yet. She's gone, and he won't remember this."

"I can't stop thinking about it," Reddick said. "All day long, I keep wondering what else she could have done to him."

"He's going to be okay, Hank." She took a swallow of beer. "Listen," she said, "I see physical abuse in my work. Trust me, that's not Joey."

“I want to hurt her.” Reddick stopped himself from saying more.

Kim was silent for a long moment. “I know. I hate her. I can’t stop thinking how much I hate her. But it doesn’t do any good to think about it. At least she’s gone.”

Reddick closed his copy of *Macbeth*. He’d found the line he’d been looking for. Malcom had advised Macduff, “Blunt not the heart, enrage it.” It made sense. *Use your head*, everyone said, but perhaps we should really be listening to our hearts. Wasn’t there such a thing as justifiable anger?

Reddick sat alone in the darkened living room and poured out another shot of bourbon. Kim was asleep. Reddick put two of his magic pills on his tongue and washed them down with the shot. He’d been knocking back more of the hydrocodone than was allowed, and he was running out. He would try to find another doctor to write him a second prescription.

Perhaps there had been physical abuse. The thought made Reddick sick. Or perhaps she had ignored his needs. Or perhaps she had only done the things Reddick had heard on the tape, swearing and shouting at the boy. But couldn’t that hurt him, too? So many things in life affect us, things we might hardly remember.

Reddick’s skin felt clammy. He went to the bathroom and looked in the mirror. His pupils were pinpoint.

He returned to the living room and poured out another shot.

Reddick thought of finding the turd in the boys’ john today. On some level, Reddick understood The Crapper—what but hatred and revenge could lie behind his actions? Reddick knew those feelings. Shit or be shat upon; that was the lesson the world taught.

Well, Reddick thought, I suppose we know now that it’s not T.V. Wilson, suspended and away from school.

Perhaps it wasn't a student at all. He thought of the duties he had assigned Schmidt. There was someone with motive.

Shit flows downhill, Reddick thought. Of that you could be certain. There was so little justice. God, heaven, hell—those were just fairy tales for the simple-minded. When you die, you rot; Reddick was certain of it. So much for divine justice. If there was to be any justice at all, it had to be made here on earth.

He imagined again the bloody pulp of Peg's tongue cut from her mouth.

It was no good; he could never do it. He wasn't capable.

But Reddick could imagine scaring the fuck out of her. It was almost as good. He imagined Peg discovering that someone had been inside her house while she slept. What could be more terrifying than a nighttime visit from The Crapper? He imagined her waking up, walking into her kitchen to find her floor shat upon.

He found a sheet of notepaper and began to fill it with the words from the tape. *Pig stupid fucking retard goddamned ugly mongoloid dog shut the fuck up.*

Reddick folded the paper, put it in his pocket, and went to his garage to see what tools he could find.

He paused in front of her door. So far no one had challenged him. Most of the windows in the complex were dark; in others, televisions flashed like multicolored lightning. Reddick took a deep breath to slow the pounding of his heart. He took another.

He tried the doorknob. Locked. He had no plan for how to enter her apartment. Gently he sat his bag of tools on the mat, a rectangle of Astroturf with *welcome* spelled out in white plastic flowers. Reddick's head spun, and he steadied himself by resting his forehead against the peeling paint of her door.

To his left, the screen vibrated in its frame. The window was propped open on top of a box fan. Reddick took up his tools and tried to move there on soft feet, but the pills and the bourbon had fucked him up too badly. He stumbled. The tools rattled in their bag.

The only bag he'd found in his garage was the canvas leaf catcher from his lawn mower, and handling it had stained his hands a dark green. He'd taken only a few tools: the long-armed tree pruners, a flashlight, vise-grips, a rusty pair of bolt-cutters.

The fan ran noisily, shaking against the fabric of the screen. Reddick took the pruners from the bag and jabbed their blades into the wire mesh. He pulled hard and ripped a gash.

Inside, Reddick found the small flashlight in the canvas bag. The narrow beam of light illuminated patches of a living room and an open kitchen. Reddick tried to make sense of the cluttered chaos. In front of him the sink and counters were piled high with dirty dishes. He shined the light to the edge of the kitchen, where a hallway began, and then back across counter and appliances. A large sheet of paper was affixed to the refrigerator with fruit-shaped magnets. Reddick recognized Peg's scrawl and moved closer to read it. *Do not open door. For anybody. Do not eat pie— mine! Do not leave for school until alarm clock says 8:00.* Reddick turned and swept the flashlight back to the living room. Newspapers spilled from sagging couches onto the floor.

Reddick almost walked into a plastic picnic table. He shined the beam about the tabletop and saw that it was covered with empty bottles and coffee mugs. A full ashtray. A hairbrush. A stained and tattered copy of *People*. Something caught his eye and he ran the light back to it. There on a plate lay the white, straight teeth of Peg's dental bridge. The sight of it repulsed Reddick—the teeth lying there as if they'd been knocked from her mouth.

Reddick took from his pocket the piece of notepaper and unfolded it. He shined the light on the page. *Maggot fucking dog bastard retard.* He ran the flashlight's beam to the middle of the kitchen floor.



So this was what it felt like to be The Happy Crapper.

What kind of filth had he imagined he could bring to this household that it didn't already possess? Had he really believed that he would drop his trousers and defecate on her floor?

Reddick stuffed the note back in his pocket. Still, he wanted something, some small taste of vengeance.

He thought of Peg's dental bridge lying on the plate. He swept his flashlight along the tabletop until he found them. Three white teeth poking up from artificial gums and metal clasps.

Reddick took the loppers from his bag. He set the flashlight on the table, and then he slotted the crook of the blades over the bridge. He tried to leverage the long arms of the pruners, but the teeth slid away. They dropped to the plate with a clatter.

"Aunty?" A child's voice, a girl's voice, from somewhere down the hall. "What are you doing?"

He switched off the flashlight and stood still. Reddick's mind reeled back to the note on the refrigerator. A child. Peg had left a child alone in the apartment.

The sound of footsteps on the carpet. "Aunty?" There was excitement in her voice.

The overhead light switched on. A girl in pyjamas stood at the edge of the kitchen. How old was she? Seven or eight, perhaps. She rubbed her eyes.

And then she took in Reddick and let out a scream. She grabbed her arms to her chest. She flattened herself against the wall, staring at Reddick. She bit at her thumb. Slowly she sank into a crouch.

Reddick lowered the loppers. "It's okay." He knelt and shoved the tools back into the sack. "Don't worry," he said. "Everything's okay."

The girl began to cry in short, terrified rasps. Reddick stood and walked toward her. "Shhh," he said. "Let's go back to bed." He tried to pick her up, but she cried out and pushed

against him. “Shhh. It’s okay.” He scooped her up and tried to rock her. “Don’t be afraid. Back to bed now.” But the girl began again to scream.

Reddick set her back onto the floor. She curled up fetus-like, still crying. He grabbed the bag of tools and ran to the door.

Reddick stood at the sink and rubbed soap on his grass-stained hands. He rinsed and washed again, but the green remained.

He limped into Joey’s room. The boy’s nightlight was on. Joey had thrown off his cover and worked himself into the top corner of the crib. Reddick lifted him gently. He moved him back to the center of the mattress and covered him with the sheet. He bent down and kissed his son on the forehead.

Outside his bedroom, Reddick stripped off his clothes. He tried to slip quietly into bed, but Kim stirred. He put his arm around her. “Sorry,” he whispered.

She pressed close to him. “Hello, stranger,” she said. “Do I know you?”

Reddick snuggled against her. He ran his hand through her hair. “I hope so,” he said.

## The Fatted Calf

The doorbell sounded three sharp buzzes. I walked into the living room to find my father sitting on the couch and cradling the TV remote against his ear. “Hello. Hello?” He held a mug of tea, the spoon still in it. The television blasted out a children’s cartoon.

“Dad,” I said, “I wish you wouldn’t use the stove. There are cold drinks in the fridge.”

He held out the remote to me, puzzled. “I’m worried that we haven’t heard from your mother.”

I’d have been more worried if we had—three years ago a massive stroke had felled her to the floor. I took the remote from my father and lowered the television’s volume by half. “It’s the door,” I said. “Tommy’s here.”

“Tommy!” He struggled to pull himself up off the couch, sloshing tea onto his trousers.

I opened the front door. Tommy stood coatless in the cold. Despite the evening’s half-light, he wore a pair of cheap mirrored sunglasses. It’s not hyperbole to say he looked junkie-thin. “Hey there, J.P.” He called me by my childhood name, the one I thought I had outgrown and left behind.

I’d once hoped to escape from Emyrean forever, but since Tommy couldn’t look after himself, much less our father, I’d moved back into my boyhood room, my old books still on the shelves, the walls still discolored from where my posters used to hang. I’d subleased my apartment in Chicago and had taken a year’s leave of absence from the private school where I was employed. In place of all that, I taught biology at my alma mater, a temple to mediocrity where my job was threatened if I ridiculed intelligent design.

I looked at Tommy's truck, parked half in the grass, half on the street. "I thought your license was suspended."

"Can't look for work if I can't drive." He pushed past me into the room. "And you keep telling me to get a job."

Dad made his way toward the door. "Tommy's here," he said.

"Let's go to the kitchen where we can talk," I said to Tommy.

He shook his head. "Let's take Dad out."

I lowered my voice. "He's really confused tonight."

Tommy called above the noise of the television, "Hey Dad. Drinkies. Want to come out for a drink?"

"A drink?" Dad nodded. "Sure."

"You want to take him out to a bar?"

"Let's go," Tommy said. "Get your coat on, Dad."

My father began to sing, "*Grab your coat, and get your hat / Leave your worries on the doorstep.*"

"That's the idea," Tommy said. "But no more singing, okay?"

This was one of the mysteries of my father's disease. Even as the Alzheimer's had tangled his brain into neurofibrillary knots, the dementia had also, somehow, turned him into a singer. He remembered the words to songs I never knew he liked. When I was a boy I never heard him sing, but now he wouldn't stop.

"Tommy," I said. "Be reasonable. For once. It's freezing outside. He's seventy-five."

"We'll go to Carl's," Tommy said, "for old times' sake."

"I've never been to Carl's."

He shrugged. "Okay, then. My old times."

\* \* \*

I pushed open the door to Carl's and held it for Tommy and my father. Clouds of cigarette smoke obscured dim bulbs suspended from the ceiling. A jukebox in the corner—a plain, black rectangle, no neon Wurlitzer—played “Woolly Bully.” My father paused just inside the door.

“I don't like this music,” Dad said. “I like the old songs.”

“Aren't you going to take off your sunglasses?” I asked Tommy.

A fat-faced man with curly blond hair staggered up. The outline of a penis was drawn in magic marker on the left side of his face—the balls high on his cheekbone, the shaft curving towards his mouth, two globules of come near his lips. “Hey Tommy,” he said, “Do I have a dick on my face?”

Tommy looked at him. “No,” he said.

“Fuck you, Tommy. Like you'd tell me.” The man turned to my father. “Have I got a cock on me?”

Dad stepped backward. “What?” .

“I fell asleep. Did those fuckers draw on my face again?”

My father looked from Tommy to the man. “*I see your face before me,*” Dad sang, “*crowding my every dream.*”

“No singing,” Tommy said. “Remember?”

The drunk stumbled off. He called out over his shoulder, “Fuck all of you.”

I tried to lead Dad to an empty booth in the back, but Tommy half-pulled him to the bar. “Faster service here,” he said, and he helped Dad onto a stool. I tugged off Dad's coat. Tommy turned to me. “You can get this can't you? You've got a job.”

“Of sorts.” I sat on the stool between him and Dad. I nodded toward the drunk, still weaving from group to group. “You know him?”

“He goes to my church.” Tommy ran his fingers through his hair and laughed.

Recently Tommy had started attending The Reformed Church of Golgotha. The church building had once been a package liquor shop—a box of whitewashed cinderblocks in the middle of a crumbling strip mall. The Golgothans had put a picture of the crucified Jesus on the old liquor store signboard, its top trimmed by an arrow of flashing lights, and they'd spelled out in black plastic letters *This Blood's for You*.

"I need my pills," Dad said.

His pills. I'd forgotten, but the pills were the one thing Dad never forgot. "When we get home," I said.

I wanted to believe that the born-again might turn Tommy around, but I was still evaluating the evidence. "Your church," I said, "is making my life hell. They want to defenestrate Darwin."

At last Tommy took off his sunglasses. "Don't even get me started on science," he said. I tried to study his pupils, but the darkness of the bar made it impossible. "You want to think everything's all rational and shit, but it's not. The world's mystery. It's enigma."

In Tommy's mind, he was a misunderstood artist living an alternative lifestyle. He had studied literature in college for a year before dropping out, and he still wrote poems. They were strong, if unintelligibility is a strength.

The jukebox began to play "Brown-Eyed Girl." I ran my fingers across the cigarette-scarred black lacquer of the counter. Behind the bar, sky-blue waters flowed endlessly on a lighted Hamm's sign. My father watched it, mesmerized.

"We see things different," Tommy continued. "I'm a poet and you're a scientist."

"So you think Darwin should go, too?"

"We've got souls, that's all I'm saying."

I thought about my father. Everything one might call his soul—his character, his sense of humor, his memory—was sliding away. In my youth, when he'd worked as a freelance electrician, he

would quit a job at the slightest insult. At home, in the evenings, he'd shined his boots. He'd kept a pressed white handkerchief in his back pocket. Now I had to force him to bathe and change his clothes. What pride did he have left? What sort of soul doesn't outlast the body?

The bartender's red hair was piled high in a bun. She stood wiping beer mugs at the sink. She wore black capri pants and a tight, low-cut blouse. It was only when she came to take our order that I noticed crinkles around her eyes and loose flesh at her throat. "Hey, Tommy," she said. "It's my birthday."

"Chrissy! Happy fucking birthday," Tommy said. "Are you legal yet?" He ordered a double of Wild Turkey.

"I'll have a beer," I said. I looked to my father, who continued to stare at the lighted bar sign as intensely as he watched television. "What do you want, Dad?"

"I want to go back to Empyrean," he said.

"Honey," the bartender said, "this is Empyrean. It's sad, but it's true."

"What do you want to drink?" I asked him. "A beer?"

"Yes," he said. "Good." He watched Chrissy walk away, and then he turned to me. "I'm worried about your mother." These few obsessions he held onto: Mom. His health. Singing. Tommy.

Sometimes it was hard to accept that this man was my father. His memories were vanishing one by one. Someday soon he'd be pissing and shitting himself, forgetting even our names. Already it was dangerous to leave him alone all day. The gas burners on our old kitchen stove ignited with a whoosh that singed the hair from my knuckles. If Dad didn't burn down the house, he might leave on the gas and asphyxiate himself.

I'd asked Tommy to come over tonight so I could discuss selling the house to help pay for a nursing home. But I knew that houses in Emphyrean didn't sell for much, and ones as tumbledown as ours went for less still.

I turned to Tommy. He took out a Kool Filter King and tapped its butt end against the pack. I tried to speak softly. "It's time we found a home for Dad. Maybe we can sell the house. That would be a start."

Tommy shook his head. "That house is mine."

I knew it wouldn't be easy to get Tommy to give up on his share of the inheritance. I'd doled out a lot of cash to him over the years, and I knew his selfishness all too well. "We need the money now," I said. "I'm only a teacher for Christ's sakes."

"Fuck that." Tommy struck a match and lit his cigarette. "Dad's leaving me the house. Ask him." He took a long drag. "Not that he'll remember. But I've got a copy of the will."

It was the first I'd heard of a will. I turned to my father. He still stared at the Hamm's scenarama. "Is that true, Dad?"

He turned to me.

"About the house," I said. "Are you leaving the house to Tommy?"

He seemed to register what I was saying. "Tommy needs it more than you do." He looked back to the sign. "You're more settled."

Chrissy brought our drinks. She slid my father's beer in front of him, and he touched her hand. "It just keeps on going," he said, nodding toward the sign.

I knew my father was sick, I realized he wasn't rational, but the unfairness of it hurt. Tommy had caused him nothing but grief. "Tommy gets everything?" I tried to keep my voice level. "And I get nothing?"

Chrissy pulled her hand away from my father and retreated.



I turned to Tommy. “So I just pay for everything?”

Tommy tried to blow a smoke ring. “You shouldn’t get pissed off about a fatted calf.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?”

“The prodigal son.” He flicked the ash from his cigarette onto the floor. “You’re all pissed off ‘cause I’m getting the best robe and the fatted calf.” He looked as if the analogy pleased him.

“You think you’re the prodigal son?” I took a swallow of beer and banged the mug back on the counter. “But the son changes, right? He doesn’t keep on being prodigal. Maybe you missed that part of the story.”

“That’s the thing, J.P.” He leaned forward and spoke confidentially. “I’m changing, too. I’m getting myself straightened out. I don’t touch the H anymore.”

Even if Tommy had stopped using heroin, his blood chemistry was surely filled with a surfeit of other substances. If it provided a kick, I was willing to bet that Tommy’d taken it. How many times had we been through detox with him? Half-hearted attempts at rehab?

Tommy clicked the bottom of his shot glass against my beer mug. “Prosit!” He downed the double and gestured for another.

One more drink on my tab, I thought. On the jukebox, Aretha Franklin sang, “Chain of Fools.” I pushed my beer away. “What’s with the music? Is this the bar that time forgot?”

“You are wack,” Tommy said. “That’s a fucking great jukebox.”

“The old songs were romantic,” my father said. He took a sip of beer and closed his eyes. “*In the wee small hours of the morning,*” he began.

“Don’t sing, Dad.”

“Tommy,” I said. “Be reasonable. He can’t be left alone anymore. I can’t stay at home with him.”

“That’s just the thing. That’s what I’ve been thinking about.” He picked up my beer and took a swig. “I think you should go back to Chicago. I’ll stay home with Dad.”

My father leaned toward us. “What are you talking about?”

“Nothing,” I said. “It’s nothing, Dad.”

“Don’t worry so much,” Tommy said. “You hate it here. Go home. I can look after Dad.”

“I’m a grown man,” Dad rapped his knuckles on the bar. “I don’t need anybody to look after me.”

Chrissy brought another shot to Tommy. Someone had written *happy birthday* across her décolletage. She held out a marker to Tommy. “You want to sign my birthday card?” She bent forward.

Tommy took the pen. “It’s a big parchment,” he said. “I could write an epic poem.”

I thought about what Tommy had said. *Go home*. It was all I dreamed about. I’d have happily let them deal with each other, Dad and Tommy, senile dementia and juvenile Demerol. “What about money?” I asked Tommy. “You don’t have a job.”

Tommy drew two large ovals on the tops of Chrissy’s breasts. “I was thinking I could borrow a little against the house.”

And suddenly I suspected Tommy’s plan. Because I’d hardened my heart to his pleas for money, he’d thought of a new source. He’d move in with Dad and run through a second mortgage on the house.

He turned to Dad. “How’s the beer?”

“More.”

Tommy printed *birthday balloons* across Chrissy’s chest, running lines down to the edge of her blouse. “Another round.” He turned to me. “You don’t trust me. I understand that. But I’m

changing, J.P.” He reached into his trouser pocket and then moved his hand surreptitiously to the pocket of my jacket. “Here,” he said. “A sign of good faith. Keep these away from me.”

“What are they?”

He smiled. “They are way too fucking nice, that’s what they are. And they’re hard to get. So just keep them away from me.”

I reached into my pocket and felt a plastic bottle. “This is bullshit,” I said to Tommy. “If you want to get rid of these, go flush them down the toilet.”

“I’m changing.” He downed his shot. “You’ve got to have a little faith.”

Was there anything I wanted more than to believe him? I needed to get away. Lately I’d caught myself half-hoping that Dad would follow Mom’s lead. Better to collapse. Better to go all at once. Some mornings, when Dad didn’t wake up early, I imagined him lying dead in his bed. “What if Dad doesn’t want to take out a mortgage? You know he hates debts.”

Tommy took out another cigarette. “Thing is, he doesn’t have to know. I’ve got his power of attorney.”

This was another revelation. “Since when?”

Tommy tugged on my jacket sleeve and pointed to Dad. Our father had leaned forward, laid his head on the counter of the bar, closed his eyes. “Listen,” Tommy said, his voice low. “When I see Dad like that, I know how much he needs me. He’s like a little kid now.”

I studied Tommy’s face, trying to read him.

“Dad always believed in me,” Tommy said. “He always took care of me. Now I kind of want to repay him for everything.”

“Do you really think you can you look after him?” I asked.

“I need this, J.P. Please.”

I again fingered the smooth plastic bottle inside my coat pocket. "I'm going to the john." I slid off my barstool and made my way past the padded vinyl booths, past the tattered pool table, and to the men's room.

The toilets were as bright as the bar was dark. A turbid puddle filled the middle of the floor, sodden toilet paper around it. I made my way to the cleanest-looking stall and closed the door. Then I took the bottle from my pocket and looked at the label. Palladone. A prescription in someone else's name. A deep drink from the river Lethe.

Could Tommy really change? I had watched him self-destruct for so many years that I'd almost developed an immunity to it. Years ago, we'd laughed when our parents had warned us that drugs would fry our brains. And yet I'd still been frightened. Unlike Tommy.

I uncapped the bottle and looked inside. A few blue capsules left. I shook them into my palm and studied them. Twenty-four milligrams of hydromorphone each.

How was it that I'd grown to hate and love the people around me? One moment I wanted to cry for my father, the next I wanted to scream at him. And what could one do with someone like Tommy? What but to build a wall around oneself? I wished for my life back, a life free from the both of them.

I considered dropping the capsules into the toilet, but instead I poured them back into their vial. I twisted the cap back on and moved the bottle to my trouser pocket.

The jukebox was playing Santana's "Black Magic Woman" as I entered the darkened bar. I stood by the pool table and looked across the room. Tommy sat on the barstool next to Dad. Chrissy leaned over the counter, laughing. I came closer. Tommy held a felt-tipped pen aloft and sang along to the jukebox, "*Got a black magic marker. I've got a black magic marker.*" I walked up behind him. Tommy had drawn a dick on the side of Dad's face.

Chrissy noticed me staring. She walked to the far end of the bar. Tommy turned to me and smiled. “Oh, come on, J.P. It’s a joke.”

I shook my father’s shoulder. He awoke with a start. “Let’s go home, Dad.”

He looked around, bewildered. “Where am I?”

Tommy stood up and whispered in my ear, “He doesn’t even know. Jesus Christ. Don’t be so self-righteous.”

I helped Dad into his coat. “The will and the power of attorney won’t hold up in court,” I said. “He’s not competent.” I threw some bills on the counter and began to lead Dad toward the door.

Tommy hurried beside us. “You’re so perfect, aren’t you? Everybody can rely on J.P. How many fucking times do you think I’ve had to listen to that crap?” He grabbed at my shoulder. “You do love to play the martyr, don’t you?”

I stopped and turned to face him. “Actually, that’s a role that’s been forced upon me.”

“You think you’re some kind of fucking model for how to live?” Tommy raised his voice, almost shouting. “You won’t do shit to help me.”

I opened the door and held it for Dad. “I flushed your pills,” I said.

At home, I found some pumice soap under the sink. I carried a bowl of warm water, the soap, and a tea towel into the living room. My father sat on the couch. I knelt in front of him and gently rubbed at his face with the soapy cloth. He jerked away. “What are you doing?” he asked.

“Nothing. Just washing your face.” I scrubbed lightly, in circles. His skin had become thin and slack with age. “Hold still.”

“You’re hurting me,” he said.

“Just a second.” I dipped a corner of the towel in the water and rinsed his face. The ink was indelible; the outline of the penis remained, slightly blurred and faded.

He touched his face, still red from where I’d rubbed at it. “Your mother hasn’t phoned, has she?”

I rose and turned away and carried the washcloth back to the kitchen. I hated the thought of reacquainting him with his grief.

“My pills,” he called after me.

In the kitchen, I took down Dad's medications from the cupboard above the fridge. I rummaged through them for the ones he took at night, not only memantine and vitamins for his Alzheimer's, but Lipitor and ACE inhibitors and anticoagulants. I doled them out onto a saucer. Six different pills of various sizes and colors.

These were what the doctors prescribed for my father, but how much sense did it make to keep his cholesterol balanced, his blood pressure lowered, his blood thinned, so that the Alzheimer's could slowly ravage his brain?

I flicked the Lipitor and then the anticoagulant into the sink. Two fewer.

I carried the saucer to where Dad sat and placed it in his hands. He said, “Maybe we should phone your mother.”

What kind of life did my father have? What dignity did he still possess? “I don't think we can reach Mom,” I said.

He studied the pills in the saucer. “I'm missing two.” He pushed the tablets from side to side with his finger. “There should be six.”

I put my hand into my pocket and touched Tommy's bottle. It would be so simple. Two pills to ease my father into a sleep from which he wouldn't awake. Served with a beer, even one

could be fatal. The Palladone capsules were time-release, but I knew that they would dump their full dose if mixed with alcohol.

I took the saucer and turned back to the kitchen.

“Why did we have to leave the bar?” I glanced back at him. His eyes were rheumy. Or was he crying? “I wanted to see Tommy.”

In the kitchen, I opened a can of beer and poured it into a glass. I took Tommy’s bottle of pills from my pocket, uncapped it, and shook out a couple of the Palladones. I placed them on Dad’s saucer, two blue capsules among the beige and the white tablets.

Would there be an inquest? Probably not, but even if there were, his death would be ruled accidental. Tommy gave the pills to me. My father, in his confused state, found the pills and swallowed them without a thought.

I carried the glass and the plateful of pills back into the living room. I placed the beer on the coffee table, but I held onto the saucer. I looked into Dad’s eyes and thought I recognized a sadness there. I sat next to him on the couch. “Tommy can’t take care of you,” I said. I could hear the shake in my voice. “You love Tommy, but he only loves himself.”

“My pills,” Dad said again.

“I want what’s best for you.” I put the saucer into his hand.

He balanced the plate in his lap and studied it. He stretched out his right index finger and rolled one of the blue Palladone capsules beneath his fingertip. “These look different.”

Why keep his body alive to be derided by Tommy while the intellect withers away? I slid off the sofa and knelt on the floor in front of my father. “You know I love you, don’t you?” I could only whisper the words.

He picked up one of the capsules and then dropped it back on the saucer. “Why are they different?”

It's the humane thing, I told myself, but still I began to cry. I covered my eyes with my hand. "New formula."

He nodded and picked up a pill, a light-brown vitamin. I handed him the glass, and he washed the tablet down with a swig of beer.

"Dad." I reached out and touched his hand. "Daddy." His hand felt cold and bony, hardly human.

He pulled his hand away and reached for another pill.

There were so many things I wished he could tell me. "You love him more, don't you?"

Although the television was switched off, my father focused his eyes on its screen. "Tommy?" he asked. I didn't really expect an answer, although I wanted to understand. At best I expected him to say what he'd always said—*I love you both equally*. But instead he said, "Tommy has spirit."

"And me?" I looked at him. His eyes briefly met mine. "Were you proud of me?"

"Why are you crying?" He picked up the white memantine tablet for his Alzheimer's and put it on his tongue. He took a sip of beer, choked, and took another swallow.

"And me?" I asked again.

He looked back to the television set. At last he said, "Tommy knows how to have fun."

"I've done everything for you." I could barely say the words. "Why was that never enough?"

He picked up the first of the blue capsules. He raised it to his mouth.

"Don't take that, Dad." I reached out and grabbed his wrist. "I made a mistake."

He struggled to pull his hand free from mine. "Let go," he said.

I held his wrist fast. Even now I couldn't stop crying. "Dad, do you ever feel that the good life is gone forever? That the new world is shit?"



“It was always shit,” he said. He kept his fingers wrapped around the pill in his fist. Still I held him.

Slowly he relaxed his arm, but he kept his fingers clenched over the capsule. I put my hand on top of his.

He began to hum. It took a moment, but I recognized the tune as the one he’d sung early in the evening, when Tommy had first arrived. *Grab your coat, and get your hat.* Dad reached his free hand up to his cheek, spidering his fingers against the fuzzed outline of the penis. He hummed, and in my head, I supplied the lyrics: *Life can be so sweet/On the sunny side of the street.*

## The Good Heart

Zeynep tossed her backpack on the floor and scooted her chair against the back wall of the library. Her friend Marie shoved a folding chair into the space next to her. They and their classmates were the only high schoolers in attendance. An army of gray and blue clad sixth-graders surrounded the storyteller.

Marie stared at Janet *hanım*, their teacher. “I can’t fucking believe she’s doing this to us.”

Janet *hanım* had stood before their class, her eyes blinking behind thick lenses, and mumbled that it might be fun to hear the Irish storyteller. The storyteller, as they all knew, was here to speak to the youngest grades; but whenever there was a visitor anywhere on campus—or an assembly or a recital or a game of handball—their class went. In the past, Zeynep had always liked English best, but in this, her 11<sup>th</sup> grade year, Janet *hanım* had stolen the pleasure of books from her. So dull was the class that somehow Zeynep had even stopped reading much on her own.

Zeynep caught sight of Cengiz, another of their classmates, standing by the library door. Cengiz was tall, thin, slump-shouldered and hollow-chested. His head seemed always to loll forward. He looks like a question mark, Zeynep thought.

Marie must have caught her staring. “He’s gross,” she whispered.

Zeynep crossed her legs and felt her skirt ride up on her thighs. She tugged it back down. She’d had her school uniform tailored into something far clingier than the dress code envisioned. Marie wore a black bra which showed through her mandatory white blouse. These were small acts of rebellion that the two shared. They’d met only at the start of this school year—Marie had just arrived, the only American at a Turkish school, and Zeynep had just returned from Ireland—but they’d bonded through their common discontent.

The storyteller sat on a three-legged stool in the midst of the middle schoolers. His face was wrinkled and leathery, and his silver hair was cropped close to his skull. He wore a bolo tie around his neck. “Top o’ the mornin’ to you lads and lasses,” he said in a shaky voice. It was the worst attempt at an Irish accent that Zeynep had ever heard. After two years in Dublin, Zeynep knew that she herself had picked up a lilt to her English; now back in Turkey, she assumed she would lose it soon enough. The storyteller’s accent, though, was Hollywood Irish if ever she had heard it.

The middle school students talked and laughed and shoved one other. “Ah now,” the storyteller said. “Hush, wee ones.”

Marie mimed retching. She whispered to Zeynep, “Get me out of here.”

The storyteller began again. “Shhh,” he said. “Come here to me now, and I’ll tell yiz a story.”

The middle-school children chattered to each other. Zeynep was certain they didn’t understand the storyteller’s put-on brogue. Most had only begun to learn English this year, although they would be expected to take most of their courses in English from now until the end of their time at Beygir Academy. This was the point of the school: to provide a Western education to Turkey’s elites.

“Now, once upon a very long time ago, to be sure,” the storyteller said, raising his voice to be heard over the children’s conversations, “in a wee village in the south of Ireland, a young lass was on her way to the Well at the World’s End.”

The middle schoolers continued to talk.

Sweat rolled from the storyteller’s forehead, and he wiped it away with his bare hand.

“Hey!” he shouted. The room grew quieter.

“Okay,” Marie whispered. “Fuck this. Prepare for the Day of Rage.”

Zeynep looked at her. “What are you planning to do?”

Increasingly, Marie's conversation was filled with the threat of violence. Zeynep believed it to be idle talk, but still she wondered if she should be worried. Marie's latest fascination was Krav Maga, an Israeli martial art, designed, Zeynep assumed, to pulverize Palestinians. "The idea," Marie had told her, "is that if you're attacked, you counter-attack as quickly as possible. Anything goes—head butts, crotch blows, eye gouges."

The storyteller rubbed his hand over his shaved head, looking pale and unwell. "You see," he said, "I'm just after screwing up. I forgot to mention the girl's mother and the sieve."

"He's the worst mother-fucking storyteller I've ever heard," Marie said, hardly bothering to whisper.

A boy coughed. The middle schoolers shifted around on the floor in front of the storyteller. "The girl didn't get on with her mother, not at all, and so her mother sent the lass to fetch a sieve-full of water from the Well at the World's End." He stopped and took a drink.

"I can't take it," Marie said.

On the wall above the storyteller was a portrait of Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey. It was Atatürk who'd changed the alphabet from Arabic script to Latin, created a secular republic, insisted upon education for women. Zeynep knew she owed him a debt of gratitude, but the ubiquitous pictures on the wall—mustachioed, his eyes staring straight at her—had turned her against him.

"When the girl reached the Well at the World's End, she didn't know how to fill the sieve with water. She sat, and she cried, and as she cried a frog came and spoke to her. 'I can tell you how to fill the sieve,' he said."

"This is bullshit," Marie said half-aloud. She stood up. "The Day of Rage begins now." She stepped over a child and headed toward the door.

Zeynep hesitated, and she grabbed her backpack and stood, too. She looked at the storyteller and then at Janet *hanım*. Zeynep shrugged her shoulders and gestured toward Marie. “She’s ill,” Zeynep said. “Sorry.” She followed Marie out the door.

Marie was already at her locker when Zeynep caught up with her. Marie had a new poster taped inside her locker’s door. In the picture, a young woman held an assault rifle; she stood against a background of red and a stylized seven-headed cobra.

Zeynep nodded to the poster. “Who is it?” It reminded her of the cover of Madonna’s *American Life*, although she thought better than to share this opinion with Marie.

Marie removed a black beret from her locker. “Patti Hearst. When she was with the Symbionese Liberation Army.”

Zeynep shook her head. The name sounded vaguely familiar.

“Nobody believes in revolution anymore,” Marie said.

Zeynep didn’t really believe Marie to be dangerous. Marie’s revolutionary activities so far had been tame and carefully calculated. The black lingerie, for example, stayed in the dormitory; she never wore it home on the weekends. But at times Zeynep felt certain that Marie really would like to be the one holding the gun.

“Look at the Weathermen,” Marie continued. “They believed in something. The rich fucks at this school, what do they believe in?”

On the inside of her own locker door Zeynep had affixed an index card with the heading *J'accuse*. Under that she kept a running list of the accused, rank-ordered by blameworthiness. Although the list had evolved throughout the school year, it was headed still, even above her prime minister and George W. Bush, by her English teacher, Janet *hanım*.

Why, she sometimes wondered, had the woman chosen a career she was so obviously ill-suited for? Janet *hanım* was awkward, shy, withdrawn, yet she had a job which required her to speak in public every day. Janet *hanım* didn't seem to care for books, but she taught English literature.

Marie tugged the beret onto her head. She took two fat magic markers from her locker and held them up for Zeynep to see. "Come, comrade." She banged shut her locker. "The revolution begins."

After Ireland, Zeynep had felt at sea in Turkey, unmoored. It was why she'd befriended Marie. Like Zeynep, Marie had spent her life of the move. Marie's parents were proselytes, converting heathens around the globe. Zeynep's parents were bankers, missionaries for mammon.

In Dublin, Zeynep had often missed Turkey. Now back in Istanbul, she wondered what it was she had missed. When the national anthem was played at the start of school assemblies, Zeynep watched uneasily as her classmates rose to their feet and roared out the lyrics. She wondered if there was a line that separated national pride from nationalism. She and Marie had taken to singing nonsense words to the anthem. What good were anthems but to make good soldiers? To separate us from them?

She was sickened by the cult of Atatürk, his framed picture in every classroom and every office. Early this school year, she'd told her then-boyfriend Burak that the pictures reminded her of Big Brother, and he'd threatened to report her to the dean—it was against Turkish law to disrespect Atatürk's memory. That had been the end of their relationship, but she and Marie had grown closer.

In short, Zeynep was tired of nations. But then hadn't she and Marie formed their own island nation? At lunch, they always rushed to the cafeteria to get one of the small tables, one that just they could share, knowing that if they were even a few minutes late, they'd be forced to sit on one of the long benches surrounded by girls who didn't like them.

\* \* \*

Zeynep hurried to keep pace beside Marie. “What are we doing?”

“Wait and see.”

Marie led her down the hall and past the art rooms. She stopped by the stairwell. The bulletin board here was decorated with the heading *Our Faculty* in letters cut from yellow construction paper. Below that, photos were tacked up of all the teachers. Marie handed a magic marker to Zeynep and gave her a close-fisted salute. “Your first mission.”

“We’ll get in trouble.”

Marie shrugged. “So we’ll get in trouble.”

Zeynep looked up and down the hall. She glanced again at the board. She found Janet *hanım*’s picture, an acne-scarred close-up. Zeynep uncapped the marker and added fangs and antennae to Janet’s face. She considered her work and then turned the eyeglasses into bug eyes.

“My turn,” Marie said. She wrote the words *Symbionese Army for Anarchy* across a broad swath of faculty photographs. “That’s us,” she said.

“What do we do now?”

Marie checked her watch. “Let’s get some cheese-toast before Art.”

On the way to the snack bar, Marie stopped at a bulletin board filled with student notices. She took out the marker and wrote in large block letters, *Help to raise our school’s average IQ. Kill Janet hanım.*

The windows were open in the art room, but the paint fumes still gave Zeynep a headache. She and Marie gathered their portfolios from the desk at the front and moved to a small table at the back of the classroom. Marie picked up a marker from the table, uncapped it, and held it underneath her nose.

“You’re murdering brain cells,” Zeynep said.

“A few.” Marie recapped the marker. “I’ve got plenty.”

This year, Art had become Zeynep’s favorite class. She and Marie worked on the pieces they wanted at the pace they chose. They could sit together, talk while they worked, even listen to music. Their teacher asked to be called Susan, not Miss Martin or Susan *hanım*. Sometimes Zeynep suspected that the freedom Susan gave them was just apathy in disguise, but it didn’t matter.

Susan stood at the front of the classroom. “You don’t need all your materials out,” she said. “Today is critique day.”

Marie groaned audibly.

They wouldn’t be drawing today. On critique days, they were supposed to “peer conference,” to meet with other students to discuss the strengths and weakness of their works. Zeynep and Marie invariably critiqued one another.

You know the drill,” Susan said. “Grab your portfolio and find someone who can give you some feedback.”

“This fucking sucks,” Marie said. She took out the charcoal sketch she’d been working on and placed it in front of Zeynep. “Here’s a major piece in my oeuvre,” she said, “one that I call ‘Neslihan takes Flight.’”

Zeynep already knew the story behind the sketch, and she had watched the drawing take shape, but this was how they played the game. She would pretend to listen while Marie pretended to explain. And, she supposed, while Susan pretended to care.

Susan squatted by their table. “We’ve got an odd number today. Can Cengiz critique with you two?”

“Of course,” Marie said. To Zeynep, she whispered, “Fucking hell.”



Cengiz carried his tattered leather satchel toward their table. His parents must have money, Zeynep thought—everybody who goes to Beygir comes from money, unless, like Marie, some institution picks up the tab—but you wouldn't know it to look at him. Cengiz's clothes were the standard uniform, not tailor-made. His trousers were ill-fitting, too big at the waist and cinched tight with a thin leather belt. He kept his shirt collar loose and his tie slack. As usual, his hair was uncombed.

"What's with his name?" Marie whispered. "It sounds like Genghis Kahn."

"That's where it comes from."

"How appropriate," Marie said.

Cengiz sat next to Zeynep. "You two had better watch out," he said. He kept his head down, hardly meeting Zeynep's eyes. "Janet *hanım* is pissed off. I saw her in front of the faculty bulletin board, and she was shaking."

Marie showed him her charcoal sketch. "This is a study," she said, "for what will be a gigantic mural in the tradition of Diego Rivera."

Cengiz picked up the drawing and examined it. "What is it?"

"It's Neslihan," Zeynep said.

Cengiz rubbed a hand across his stubby beard. "That's kind of in bad taste, isn't it?"

The inspiration for the sketch was Neslihan's attempted suicide last week. Neslihan had tried to jump from the Bosphorus Bridge, the huge one connecting Europe and Asia. The bridge was closed to pedestrians, so Neslihan had rolled out of a moving taxi. She'd run across traffic but was struck by a car before she could reach the edge. She'd been knocked to the pavement, both legs broken, but she'd still tried to crawl to the railing. In Marie's drawing, however, Neslihan, having leapt from the railing, swan dived toward the Bosphorus, her back arched; her arms spread like wings.

Marie stared at Cengiz. "It's a *tribute* to Neslihan. What's wrong with that?"

Neslihan was a senior, someone Zeynep and Marie had hardly spoken to, but Marie was convinced that Neslihan had chosen the Bosphorus Bridge for its symbolic weight. Zeynep was less certain, but she played along with the idea. It seemed important for Marie, the metaphor of being between worlds.

Cengiz picked up the drawing again and studied it. “A tribute to what, exactly?”

“She made a statement,” Marie said. “She showed this fucking school that cultures can’t be bridged. When you’re caught between East and West, the only place to go is over the side.”

“Yes,” Cengiz agreed. “Or maybe she’s just fucked-up.”

“Of all the ways to kill herself, why would she try to jump from a bridge that spans two continents?”

“Because it’s tall?” Zeynep said. She realized that this was a small act of betrayal; that she ought to be in her friend’s corner.

“Jesus Christ.” Marie grabbed the drawing back from Cengiz and tucked it into her cardboard portfolio. “Some people don’t know symbol when it bites them in the ass.” She looked away.

Cengiz pulled a few grubby pencil sketches from his satchel. “Mine are shit,” he said. “I do them quickly so I can get back to my book.”

Zeynep studied him. He still didn’t meet her eyes. “What are you reading?”

He pulled a book from his bag and fumbled it around to show Zeynep the cover. *The Dharma Bums*. She considered telling Cengiz what *bum* meant in Ireland, but she decided he looked ill enough at ease already.

There was something almost flirtatious in his shyness, and Zeynep wondered if he might have a crush on her. This last year, she hadn’t felt very attractive. Except for Burak, no one had

expressed much interest in her. “You’re beautiful,” her mother told her. “It’s just cliquishness. Don’t let it get to you.” But it did get to her.

Even with Burak, she had been made so often to feel as if she was an embarrassment. On one of the first days of school Janet *hanım* had asked Burak to introduce himself. “My father is a sheep owner,” he’d said.

“Does he own a flock?” Janet *hanım* asked. “Or a ranch?”

Burak looked confused, and Zeynep had stepped in. “No, Ma’am. He means to say a ship owner. His father has a fleet of yachts.”

The class had laughed, and Burak had been furious with her. But Zeynep was uncertain what she had done. Would it have been better to let Janet *hanım* think Burak’s father was a shepherd?

Cengiz returned his book to his bag. He took out an Ipod, slipped his earbuds into place, and tapped in his selection. Zeynep could hear a hiss of tinny music.

“What are you listening to?”

He pulled out one earpiece. “What?”

“What’s your music?”

He took out the second earpiece and offered them to her. She slipped them in place. She could tell it was an old recording. There was a discordant crash of instruments; a saxophone soaring above them, taking notes at full speed. “It’s jazz,” Zeynep said.

“It’s not just jazz. It’s Bird.”

Zeynep didn’t know anyone who listened to jazz, at least no one her age. Some of her classmates liked *arabesk*. She and Marie looked for new bands from the U.K. or Canada or America—obscure things that didn’t get much airplay.

Cengiz lowered the volume a little. “Charlie Parker,” he said. “Yardbird. The Beats loved him.”

Zeynep listened some more, trying to make sense of it. “It’s fast,” she said.

“They played the head fast on purpose. They didn’t want people to dance to the music. They wanted people to listen.”

The bell sounded. Zeynep pulled out the earbuds and handed them back. “Thanks.”

She and Marie put their portfolios back. Cengiz walked out the door ahead of them. “He creeps me out,” Marie said.

“I think he’s kind of interesting.” But Zeynep realized that although she and Marie were considered nerds and outsiders, there remained a pecking order even among the outcasts.

On the ground floor Marie stopped in front of a bulletin board covered with college recruitment posters. “Our next target,” she said. “The guidance office.”

The pictures all looked the same—young people, pleasant and affluent, showed their white teeth on tree-lined campuses. The posters were all from small private colleges looking for full-pay foreigners.

Already Zeynep was writing personal statements for her college applications, and she wasn’t even a senior yet. It seemed to her at times that her life was preplanned. No one, she thought, realizes the way we’re forced into a path. You had to keep your grades up, play an instrument, participate in a sport, all so you could get into a good college and then start a good career. This year, Zeynep’s father had insisted that she join speech and debate—not because she might enjoy it, but because it would look good on her college apps.

Marie took out her black marker and scrawled across the posters *Eat the rich*. Sometimes Zeynep forgot how much it bothered Marie. She had stood out as the poor girl in every foreign school in which she had been enrolled.

From behind, Zeynep heard Janet *hanım*. “More decorating, girls?” There was a tremor in her voice.

“Shit,” Marie said.

Zeynep turned. Janet *hanım* stood uncertainly, as if she was deciding between fight and flight. She clutched her arms to her chest. Tears ran down from behind her glasses. Janet *hanım* took a step closer. “Why do you hate me?” She could barely get the words out.

Marie didn’t turn. Still facing the posters, she said, “Because you’re a stupid cow.”

To Zeynep’s surprise, Janet *hanım* rushed forward and spun Marie around. “Listen!” She pinned Marie’s arms to her side and gave her a shake. “You can’t talk to me like that!”

Marie stared at her, but Janet *hanım* held her tight. “Let go of me,” Marie said, but Janet *hanım* kept Marie’s arms pinned. Marie shrugged, and then she tipped back her head. Zeynep registered the crunch as Marie head-butted Janet *hanım*, smashing her forehead into the bridge of their teacher’s nose. Janet *hanım* fell to the floor clutching at her face. Marie rubbed her forehead. “Fuck. That hurt *me*.”

Janet *hanım* held her nose. Blood trickled into her hand. She rose to an unsteady crouch. Zeynep knelt beside her, but Janet *hanım* pushed her away. Remarkably, she had stopped crying now. She began to grope around on the floor. “Help me find my glasses.”

The glasses had split in two, right at the bridge. Zeynep picked up the pieces and handed them over. Janet *hanım* stood up. She fingered the symmetrical halves.

“Can I help?” Zeynep asked.

Janet turned away. She waved her arm dismissively behind her, and she walked out the side door and out of the building.

“We are fucked,” Marie said.

Their French teacher loaded a DVD into the player. Zeynep looked at Marie. She knew they were both waiting for the same thing: the summons to the Dean’s office would come, their parents would be contacted, and they would be suspended at the very least, perhaps even expelled. Zeynep wondered how much it would help her case that she hadn’t struck the blow.

The teacher lowered the blinds and turned off the lights. The film was *La Belle et la Bête*.

“Not another goddamned fairytale,” Marie whispered.

But Zeynep didn’t respond. In the semi-darkness of the class, she allowed herself to forget for a moment the disaster that lay ahead. She sensed magic in the film. From the opening shots of Beauty’s country home, she felt as if she had wandered into a painting filled with light and shadow and texture. And when the film moved to Beast’s castle, Zeynep knew she had entered the realm of dreams. Beauty glided down a hallway filled with living statues. The Beast was magnificent, leonine.

“This is stupid,” Marie whispered.

Zeynep tried to tune her out. The film possessed something that Zeynep wanted to be a part of. There was a whole world contained within it, a world apart from, and better than, the one in which she lived. It was a land of art and of beauty and of symbol.

The phone rang, breaking the spell. The teacher picked up the receiver, and Zeynep looked at Marie. He spoke in a low voice. Zeynep could feel her heart pound. But to the class the teacher said only “Excusez-moi.” He left the room.

On screen, the Beast appeared at Beauty's door, dressed in silk but still bloody from his kill. "I have a good heart," he said. It seemed so right to Zeynep—to have a good heart and to still surrender to brutality. The Beast was torn between love of Beauty and self-loathing.

The camera focused in on the Beast's face, and Marie called out, "Here kitty, kitty, kitty."

Laughter from the class.

Shut up, Zeynep thought. But with the teacher away, Marie had started something. Other students called out to the screen. "This is shit," someone said. Others meowed.

"Shut up," Zeynep said aloud, but it did no good. The magic was lost.

"Oh, come on," Marie said to her. "It is a pretty dumb film."

Marie, Zeynep realized, wanted only to rebel against what is—she wasn't looking for anything to take its place. Zeynep knew that a bond had been broken, perhaps just now during the film, and that she and Marie would never be friends in the same way again.

Zeynep didn't wait for Marie after French class. It was lunchtime, but she didn't head to the cafeteria to grab a table. She wandered outside.

The air tasted more of summer than of spring, and Zeynep knew that the school year would soon be over. She walked around the building. The fields beyond the track and the tennis courts were already in bloom with thistle and poppies. Soon Marie would leave, swept along to wherever her parents' church sent them next. Zeynep's own future seemed no more certain, and she felt a knot of fear in her stomach as she considered what her parents might say. If she were expelled, all their plans for college would be ruined.

On a bench in the shade, the Irish storyteller sat holding a book. He waved her over.

"You're not Irish," Zeynep said.

“My grandfather.” His accent was flat and American now. “On my mother’s side. But the Irish storyteller sounds better than the Missouri storyteller.”

Zeynep sat next to him on the bench.

He closed his book. “I don’t blame you for leaving. I wasn’t having a very good day.”

“Sorry,” Zeynep said. She searched for what to say. “I didn’t get to hear the end of your story.”

“You can probably guess the end,” he said. “The girl has to do what the frog tells her. He demands that she take him to bed with her.”

Zeynep looked up at the storyteller, and he laughed.

“Yes,” he said. “That’s probably sexual. A lot of fairy tales are. And then the frog orders her to chop off his head. He turns into a handsome prince.”

“Like in *Beauty and the Beast*,” Zeynep said.

“The animal bridegroom,” the storyteller said. “It’s a common theme.”

Zeynep thought again of the film. She had felt connected to something while she watched, something that wasn’t to do with money or nations. There had been magic in the story. And yet when the Beast did turn into the prince, she had been disappointed—his charm vanished; he became ordinary. “Beasts are more interesting than men,” she said.

The storyteller smiled. “Yes,” he said. “Beasts are more interesting.”

Zeynep looked out at the fields beyond the fence. Transformations were real, she decided. Spring became summer. A friend vanished. An entire life could change from one day to the next. She thought of Cengiz, of his books and his music and the question mark of his body, and she wondered if he might be an interesting monster. She thought of Marie’s day of rage and of the penalty that would have to be paid. And she thought again of the Beast, gory from his kill, smoke rising from his bloodied hands, professing his good heart.



## In the Middle

I'm sitting at Tierney's desk because Tierney is in my place by the window, typing on the office's sole computer. The window is open at the top, and a small green lizard is making its way from right to left across the glass—at last, after a long winter, spring has come to Istanbul. The fields that surround the school have, as if in a time-lapse film, erupted into a bloom of wildflowers. In the office, the stacks of papers that cover Tierney's desk now rustle in the breeze and might blow away if not weighted down by heavy books. I glance down at *The Riverside Shakespeare* that sits open in the middle of his desk, and a line from the first part of *King Henry IV* catches my eye—"Honor pricks me on." I like that.

Today is April third. In order to finish my teacher certification, I need to submit all my paperwork to Hillmont Christian College by the first of May. In less than a month, I need to meet ten times with my mentor and to write a journal entry about each interview. The problem is that Hillmont has decided that my mentor here at Beygir Academy should be the Head of English, Jake Tierney. Although I've been trying since the beginning of the semester, I haven't yet managed to conduct a single interview with him. At first, Tierney scheduled appointments that he'd later break, but recently, since he's found out that he's being let go, he has no interest in helping me.

Tierney stares intently at the monitor as he types. His face is soft and round; he seems always to have two-days' stubble. Recently, I've been trading desks with Tierney a lot. He has a tip from a friend about an opening at a small school in Bangkok, and for the last few days, he's spent hours at the computer, revising his résumé and cover letter. Apparently it's not easy to explain getting fired for putting one of your students in a chokehold.

Tierney stops typing and rests his hands on the keyboard, and I decide to take a chance on interrupting him. “Tierney, I need mentoring. I need to interview you about your philosophy of education.”

He glances up from the monitor and notices the lizard on the glass. “Summer is Icumen in,” he says, and then he half-rises from his seat, trying to get a better view of something below. He slumps back in his chair and swivels to face me. “Hey Brett,” he says, “know the difference between a teacher and a pedophile?”

I have a feeling I know where this is going, but I shake my head.

“Pedophiles *like* children.” He says this as if it’s a joke, but there’s no sparkle in his eyes. Tierney’s eyes are green, and there’s a sharpness to them that’s in opposition to his soft body. Too often I see fierce intelligence in them but not kindness.

I get up from Tierney’s chair and slide through the narrow aisle, past Janet’s desk, to the window. I have to lean over Tierney to get a clear view—down in the courtyard, I can see Peter Drake talking to one of his sixth graders, a boy I’ve seen before but don’t know. Drake has his hand on the boy’s shoulder. I step back, and lean against Janet’s desk.

“Tierney, enough,” I say. “Lay off. Drake’s a nice guy.”

If I had known how awful it was going to be with Tierney, I would have begged Hillmont to let Peter Drake be my mentor. Drake is an excellent teacher, and our director, Dr. Debbie, has already announced that he’s going to be Department Head next year. Drake teaches sixth and seventh grade English, and he’s a great believer in the writing process. Tierney, on the other hand, doesn’t care about writing at all. His students’ essays pile up on his desk for weeks until he gets around to grading them. Once he asked me to grade a set for him. Once he threw a stack in the trash and then told his students that he’d lost them.

“You know what I need you to do,” he says.

“I can’t.”

“You’re the only person I know who goes to his *lojman*. Just sneak it out.”

“It’s his laptop, Tierney. With his personal files.”

Tierney may still be Department Head until the end of the year, but what he’s asking puts me in a terrible position. It’s morally wrong. It’s misguided. It’s true that Peter Drake is affectionate with his students—he might pat a boy on the back or squeeze his arm—but he’s no pervert. Somehow, though, in Tierney’s imagination, Drake is wrong to show his students some affection, while Tierney envisions himself a good guy, even though he’s closed his fingers around a student’s throat.

Tierney swivels back to the computer and ejects his disk from the drive. He’s careful, as always, to put the disk in his shirt pocket. When he turns to me again, his eyes are piercing. “Brett, it’s no joke. I think he’s greeking those boys.”

I want to defend Drake, but it’s difficult to stand up to Tierney. “You’re wrong about him,” I say after a moment. “He’s a really good teacher. He loves kids.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of.”

Tierney stands up, towering over me, and rubs his lower back with both hands. “You can have your chair back,” he says. He squeezes past me, back to his desk. Once there, he picks up a towel from the chair, rolls it tight, and then slides it behind the hollow of his back when he sits down.

“I’ll make a deal with you,” he says. “I’ll talk philosophy of education if we can take turns.”

“Really?” I sit down at my desk and rummage through the hanging files in my bottom drawer until I come to the one that says, “Education Mentoring.” I pull this folder out and find the list of prescribed questions from Hillmont College, *First Interview: Teachers and Administration*. I put this sheet on my clipboard, take my pen from the top drawer, and swivel to face Tierney.

I glance down at the first question, and then look back up at Tierney. He is, technically, following the school's dress code, which requires all male teachers to wear a shirt with a collar and a tie. Tierney has on a casual short-sleeve with broad vertical stripes; his buttons pull where the shirt rides across his fat belly. His tie, loose at the collar, is askew, and he's printed on it in bold letters with magic marker, "Question Authority." He's wearing a pair of shorts—the dress code doesn't explicitly mention trousers, perhaps because no one imagined the combination that Tierney could put together. I look down at my question sheet and read aloud, "How do you see the relationship between faculty and administration?"

"Antagonistic," he says. "My turn."

"Could you maybe expand on that? Please, Tierney, I've got to write this stuff up."

He leans forward in his chair. "Listen, if Dr. Debbie and all the deans fell over dead tomorrow, do you think anyone would even notice? The administrators are just parasites."

I scribble this down as fast as I can on my notepad, but as I do so, I wonder if there's any way that I can rephrase this for Hillmont Christian College. This, I'm sure, is not the kind of mentoring they have in mind.

"My turn," Tierney says. His eyes are on me again. "Have you never noticed the way Drake closes the lid of his computer when someone comes near?"

"You click your letter down to the taskbar whenever I try to read it," I point out.

"I'm lying in order to get a job. That's different," he says. He smiles, but there's not much warmth behind it.

Tierney looks down at his toes and wiggles them. He's wearing sandals, even though his toenails look as if they have an advanced case of fungal infection. "It's your serve."

I read the next question, "What can teachers do to support their administration?"

Tierney snorts. "Fuck the bastards."

I'm no prude, but I don't know why he has to curse so much. "Please, Tierney," I say. "Help me a little."

He shifts in his chair, and repositions the towel behind his back. "If you want to be a good teacher, you've got to make a choice. The administration is happy so long as you don't raise any objections during their endless meetings and do all the new asinine paperwork they've invented. So what do you do? Do you work for the kids or do you work for the administration?"

I scratch down this answer, too, on the notepad, but I can't help but wonder if Tierney can see himself at all. What right does he have to talk about doing what's good for kids? How can he make insinuations about Peter Drake when Drake is caring and competent?

I look down at my list of questions. There are more, but I have a feeling I have simultaneously heard too many of Tierney's thoughts and yet will never be able to hear enough to write the journal Hillmont expects. "Thanks," I say. "Maybe that's good for now."

"My turn already?" He softens his tone a little. "Brett, I'm not asking you to steal the computer. If you could just borrow it from his *lojman* we could take a look-see."

"Tierney, I go to church with him," I say.

"You go to *church*?"

Tierney knows that I go to church. I don't know why he has to act so superior.

Sometimes I want to explain to him that I went to a Christian college because I got a scholarship, and my mother didn't have a lot of money after my dad died. But I also wish I could tell Tierney that I'm not ashamed to believe in God—it's obvious to me that there's goodness in the world, and I think our lives should be built upon that goodness.

Instead, all I say is "Excuse me," and I get up to leave the office.

\* \* \*

In the hallway, I wonder what to do. If Tierney is right about Drake, it's a terrible thing. And yet I can't help but feel that this is some sort of vendetta on his part, a desire to get even with the man who took his job.

Although class is in session and the hallway is empty, there's still a lingering smell of body odor in the corridor on this hot day. I walk down the hall to Drake's new office. Two days ago, we watched as the movers shifted the Xerox machine into the hallway and then maneuvered a desk into what had been the copy room. "I can't believe the little prick is getting his own office," Tierney said. But it seemed fitting to me. Drake isn't even officially Head of Department yet, but already he's achieved something Tierney never could.

When I reach his door, I see that a brass plaque has been affixed to it, "Peter Drake, Head of English," and remembering Tierney's anger, I wonder if Drake wouldn't have been wiser to wait until the fall to put it up. The door is cracked open, so I rap and push it open.

Drake is at his desk, typing on his laptop. When he sees me, he shuts the lid and stands up. "Brett!" He smiles broadly and he seems as if he's truly pleased I'm here. "Come see the new office."

I walk in and let the heavy door close behind me with a thud. When Drake comes around his desk to meet me, I notice again that there couldn't be any starker contrast with Tierney. Drake is short and trim. He's wearing penny loafers and a pair of khaki trousers. His face is lean and clean-shaven. Even though he's sweating a little in the heat, Drake's tie is snugged-up tight in a half-Windsor.

He sweeps his arm. "What do you think?"

The room's not huge—there was barely enough space for the copy machine and the paper supplies before—but it looks comfortable compared to the tiny office Tierney and I share with two

others. The walls are bare, but there's a *kilim* on the floor, the desk is near the window, and there are two bookshelves. A huge box of books sits on the floor next to the shelves.

The sound of the door closing echoes in my mind. "All the other offices have glass in the doors," I say.

Drake walks over to the box and grabs a handful of books, throwing them onto the shelf. "It was a storeroom," he says. "They'll probably switch the door over the summer. The important thing is to get moved in as soon as possible."

I tell him, "Tierney's really fixated on you."

He pauses and then continues to shelve his books. "Today I'm starting to hold writing conferences," he says. "I'm going to meet with all of my sixth and seventh graders before the end of the year. I could never hold conferences in the old office."

I want to tell Drake to watch out for Tierney.

"A lot of their creative work is coming out of the journals they've been keeping," he continues. "You'd be surprised at what good little writers they've become."

I watch him as he arranges the books. "That's exactly the kind of thing I'm interested in," I say. "Why does Tierney have to be my mentor and not you?"

He gives me a sad smile. He reaches down into his box of books and pulls one out. "You probably know this book," he says, "but read again what Atwell says about writing conferences."

I'm about to tell him what Tierney wants me to do when there's a knock. A small boy pushes the door open, the same boy that I just saw Drake with in the courtyard. He seems surprised to see me.

"My first conference," Drake says.

I take the book and leave. I don't say anything more about Tierney and the laptop.

\* \* \*

When I walk back into the office, Tierney notices the book under my arm. He nods his head toward it and asks, “What are you reading?”

“Drake lent me *In the Middle*.” I show him. “It’s about teaching middle school English.”

Tierney starts to laugh. “That’s perfect.” He wipes the sweat from his forehead with his hand. “Humbert Humbert had a book on his shelf called *Know Your Child*. Drake has *In the Middle*.”

“It’s a good book, Tierney,” I reply. “You should read it.” I make my way through the aisle to my desk.

One of Tierney’s students, Zeynep, knocks on the glass and pushes the door halfway open. “Can I come in,” she asks.

Zeynep is a senior, and I am in love with her. She thinks of herself as a rebel and dresses the part, which I don’t like—her uniform is too tight, and I think she’d be more beautiful still if she didn’t look a little slutty—but she’s captivating. And she’s nice. I don’t teach her, but she always looks at me and says hello.

I sit down at my desk and pick up *In the Middle*. I turn my chair so that I can see them as I pretend to read. I watch over the top edge of my book as Zeynep perches on the edge of Tierney’s desk, sending a stack of papers to the floor. He doesn’t pick them up.

As Zeynep crosses her legs, I can see the birthmark just above her knee, a small patch of dark red skin on her inner thigh. There’s something about this small imperfection that magnifies her beauty. I watch her as she pulls a tattered paperback out of her backpack. “Sir, have you read this?” She holds it up and I can see its title, *The Soft Machine*.

“Is that the one where the man teaches his asshole to talk?”

I must have moved because Tierney glances my way and says, “Sorry, Brett.”

I sit quietly and continue to stare at *In the Middle*.

“Can I talk to you about it?” Zeynep asks. “Sometime this week?”



I watch as she points down to Tierney's desk drawer, the one where he hides his bottle of whiskey. She makes a motion as if she's drinking a shot, and then she looks at him enquiringly. Tierney shakes his head and jabs his finger my way. Zeynep nods, gathers her backpack and leaves.

When she's gone, I put down my book and reflect on what I've just seen. The thought that Tierney would give alcohol to a student sickens me. Tierney is more monster than mentor. I hate him for pressuring me to steal Drake's property and to violate his privacy.

I feel like I need to protect Zeynep from Tierney, but I don't know how.

And then I have a thought that makes me uncomfortable. I wonder if I should steal the disk that Tierney saves his letter and résumé on. If he's lying about what happened here, maybe Dr. Debbie should intervene and tell the Bangkok school the truth. I know I probably won't do it, but there's a part of me that feels it would serve Tierney right. And I think that I could protect more kids like Zeynep from him.

There's a sound like a gunshot in the room, and Tierney and I both jump. I swing around to see that Thompson has just come in, letting the door slam in the draft from the window. The glass in the door is still vibrating—I'm amazed it hasn't broken—but I don't think Thompson even knows what he's done. He's older than Methuselah and stone deaf.

He walks slowly to his desk. "Gentlemen," he yells, "good morning."

Tierney ignores him, but I can't do that. I say, "Good morning, Mr. Thompson."

Thompson stops beside his desk. He looks at me, nodding.

"How are you?" I ask. I project the words loudly and clearly.

Thompson looks as if he's thinking it over. "Yes," he booms, "a real scorcher." He sits down at his desk.

I wish there were someone I could talk to at this school. I don't know where to turn for advice. Here, in the middle of nowhere, I feel cut-off from the world.

“I need evidence,” Tierney says. He looks at me with his green eyes. “Will you promise to think about it?”

“Okay,” I say, “I’ll think about it.”

It’s about seven in the evening when I finally decide that I have to get to Köpekköy to make some phone calls. I know I need to call Hillmont and talk to them about the situation with Tierney. I can’t escape the feeling, though, that when they learn what this school is like, they’ll insist I redo my student teaching closer to home next year. I also want to phone my mother and ask her advice about Drake and Tierney.

I walk down the steps from my balcony and start walking from the *lojmanlar*, the teacher housing, to the gate. Since I’m an intern, they’ve given me the worst *lojman*, and I don’t even have a phone. Sometimes I ask Drake if I can use his, but since he’s a topic of conversation tonight, I’m heading to the village. I’ve written down on a scrap of paper the numbers for the AT&T operator and for Hillmont’s Education Department.

Beygir Academy is out in the sticks, and, without a car, it’s not easy to get anywhere from campus. Once I reach the main gate, I can cross the road and try to flag down a minibus to Köpekköy, but the buses come irregularly, and sometimes they’re stuffed to bursting. So I’m happy to take the ride when Tierney pulls up beside me and shouts out his window, “Want a lift?” Tierney’s driving a tired Şahin, once white, but now patches of brown rust have taken over the doors. The roar of the exhaust makes me think the rust has gotten to the muffler, too.

Tierney grabs some books from the passenger seat and tosses them to the rear. The door creaks on its hinges when I climb in. Tierney gives the car some gas, the rumble of the exhaust grows louder, and we pull away from the curb. Cans of Efes beer, some empty and some full, roll around on the floorboard near my feet.

Tierney points to the cans. “Want one?”

“I don’t drink.”

He looks shocked. “Not at all?”

“I’m not a prude,” I say. “I just don’t like the taste.”

“Aren’t you just out of college?” he asks. “When I taught at university, it seemed like most of my students were majoring in drinking.”

“I went to a Christian college.”

We stop at the gate, where Mehmet, a small, thin guard, stands on duty. His khaki shirt flaps in the wind, and his belt is drawn tight to keep his trousers up. Mehmet gives us a mocking salute. “*İyi Akşamlar*, Jake Bey. Good evening.” He squats down by Tierney’s side of the car and then hands something in through the open window. Tierney shows it to me. It’s a flake of rusted metal from the side of the car. The guard says, “*Çok güzel oto*, Jake Bey. Very beautiful car.”

Tierney returns the salute, gesturing with his middle finger. “*İyi Akşamlar*, Mehmet Bey.” He points to me. “My bodyguard.”

Mehmet laughs and walks away to the gate. He raises the bar shouting, “Be careful Mister Bodyguard. Watch out for Jake Bey.”

Tierney pulls out of the drive, turns left toward Köpekköy, and the exhaust roars again from underneath the car. “God help us if we ever need these guards to protect us,” Tierney says. “I call that one Barney Fife. I’m sure they make him keep his bullet in his pocket.” He drives slowly, steering around potholes where he can, but sometimes slowing down and wading through them when they’ve spread across the entire road. The windows of the Şahin are down, and the evening air blowing in is cool and fine. It feels like freedom to be outside the gates of the school.

There are things I wish I could tell Tierney. I want to tell him about my writing. Sometimes I write poetry, and sometimes I jot down ideas for stories, but most often I record what’s happened,

what I've thought and felt. When I sit down at the end of the day with my journal, I can sort out what matters and what doesn't. That's the reason I want to teach writing.

I want to tell Tierney about my dad, about how he died of a massive heart attack when I was seventeen. He had mowed the lawn and gone in to take a shower. When I found him, he was slumped on the floor of the tub and the water was still running. I tried to give him CPR. I pounded on his chest and gave him mouth-to-mouth. I can still remember how his beard felt against my lips and the taste of his stomach bile in my mouth. It was my first kiss, and it was given to a dead man, my father.

I try to force this thought from my mind.

I want to tell Tierney that I'm in love with Zeynep.

But I won't tell him these things because I know that he will scorn them. I look at him now as he drives, and I wonder what's on that disk that he's so protective of.

Tierney steers the car through the traffic on the road to Köpekköy. Heavy trucks honk their horns. They try to overtake each other, but they're so laden that their tarpaulins bulge above them and they can barely move. Motorcyclists weave in and out of this confusion, also sounding their horns.

Tierney glances over at me. "Are you still thinking about it?"

"Drake?" I ask. "I'm thinking about it." But I want to change the subject, so when I see Tierney shifting in discomfort and notice that he again has a towel rolled up and stuck behind him, I ask, "Is teaching such a pain in the back?"

He takes his eyes off the road for a moment and glances at me. "Brett," he says, "I'm like the old lady who swallowed a fly."

I shake my head. "What do you mean?"

“One thing leads to another. My cholesterol was high, so I started running. Then, while I was running for my health, I tripped in a pothole and wrenched my back.”

I laugh. “That’s not so bad.”

“Oh, it gets worse. About a week ago, I went looking for a massage center to get some therapy for my back.”

I have a feeling that this going to be one of Tierney’s long, rambling stories, but to be polite, I say, “Go on.”

“Well, I found the place, got undressed and lay on the table. But it wasn’t a masseur who came in. I got this dumpy blonde in a black skirt and fishnet stockings, and she definitely wasn’t Turkish. ‘What kind massage you want?’ she asked. ‘My back,’ I said, and showed her where. ‘Because we only do normal Swedish massage,’ she said, ‘not erotic massage.’ ‘That’s what I want,’ I said. She said, ‘Lots places in Stambul do erotic massage, but we don’t do that,’ and then she started massaging my chest. ‘I understand,’ I said. ‘Although we do offer that flexibility,’ she said, and she ran her hand down to my dick.”

He looks over at me, as if to see how I’m reacting. “Tierney, you didn’t,” I say. I can’t believe he’d be so stupid.

“Like I said, one thing leads to another. And so now every time I go to the john, it feels like I’m pissing napalm.” He looks at me, enquiringly. “What do you think, Brett? Do you think there could be some sort of Black Sea Clap that can eat its way through a Trojan?”

“You should get a blood test,” I say. I can’t believe the casual way he’s talking about this.

“So now you see. I caught the clap trying to fix my back,” he says, “but I don’t know why my cholesterol’s high. Perhaps I’ll die.”

“Tierney, you could have AIDS,” I say. “You really need to see a doctor.”

“Do you think?” he asks. His face is expressionless, but as I watch him, I think I see a twinkle in his eye, and I suddenly wonder if this isn’t all a joke. Is he just trying to get a rise out of me? I ask, “Is any of this true?”

He shrugs. “Like all stories, there must be some truth to it.”

Köpekköy isn’t much of a village—there’s a mosque, a general store, a few houses, and a restaurant. When we arrive, Tierney swings across the road and parks in front of the restaurant, a gas station where they serve rotisserie chicken and lentil soup. There are a few plastic picnic tables set up out front, and a string of Christmas-tree lights hang between the porch and a pole. Tierney sits down at a table.

I tell him that I have to make a few phone calls, and I walk across the street to the call box, which smells of urine when I push the door open. I dig the paper with the phone numbers out of my pocket and pick up the receiver. Nothing. I click the hook a few times, but there’s still no signal.

I walk around the block to Köpekköy’s other phone booth, but it’s the same—no dial tone.

Even more than phoning Hillmont, I wanted to talk to my mother. I usually speak to her just once a week, since it’s so hard to phone, and I feel guilty. She’s all alone now.

I walk back to the restaurant. “The phones are dead,” I say.

Tierney calls the waiter over and asks in his pidgin Turkish, “*Telefon var mı?*” He mimes holding a receiver to his ear.

The waiter closes his eyes, tilts his head backwards and clucks his tongue. The Turkish sign for no.

Tierney tries again. I think he’s trying to determine whether it’s the restaurant that doesn’t have a phone or whether there’s none in the village. The waiter speaks quickly and I can’t follow it. I’m not sure how much Tierney understands, either, because he keeps saying, “*Yavaş,*” slow down.

Finally Tierney turns back to me. “He says that gypsies have stolen the phone cables. They’ve taken up all the lines between here and the relay station.”

I can’t believe it. I sit in amazement. “Why would they steal the phone cable?”

“For the copper.”

I wonder at this. I feel, once again, that I am shut off from the world.

Tierney lifts up a can of Efes. “Are you sure you won’t have a drink? They’re cold and good. It’s true, though, that they give you a metallic hangover.”

I shake my head. I wish I could talk to Tierney. We sit there in silence until I say, “Tierney, have you ever noticed the birthmark on Zeynep’s leg?”

“Zeynep? Beatnik Zeynep?”

“She’s broken up with Cengiz, hasn’t she?”

He fixes me with his bright eyes. “Don’t even think about it. You can get a copy of the yearbook and jerk off to her picture. But that’s the limit.”

Tierney has an incredible talent for taking everything that’s pure and turning it into something base. I stare at him with contempt, and I think again that I want to get my hands on his disk and read that letter.

In the morning, Tierney storms into the office, furious. I’m sitting at my desk reading the book Drake gave me and Janet, the quietest member of our department, is grading papers. I can feel Tierney’s anger. He doesn’t bother to say hello to Janet or me, but instead spits out, “Sixth-grade boys are lined up outside his office.”

Janet keeps grading her papers. “Writing conferences,” I say. “Drake’s meeting with all of his students about their portfolios.”

He gives me an incredulous look. “Does he have to hold these conferences with the door closed?”

Tierney acts as if there’s some sort of demon in him, as if doesn’t seem to know what to do with himself. He pushes past me to the bookshelf. He shuffles through his books but doesn’t seem to find what he wants. Then he turns and takes a piece of paper from the printer. He asks “Can I use your desk for a minute?” Then he leans over me and prints on the page *my Dixie wrecked* in anonymous block letters. He squeezes past me again and puts the paper square in the middle of Thompson’s desk. Only then does he seem to relax.

Tierney sits down at his desk and begins to search through the papers which cover his desktop, and I wonder if he’s looking for his floppy disk. I wonder this because I know where the disk is. When I came into school this morning and turned on the computer, I received a message, *boot error*. Tierney’s disk was in the drive. I ejected the disk and rebooted the computer. But then I clicked the disk back into the drive, where it still sits.

Zeynep pushes the door of the office open and says, “Knock knock.”

Tierney motions her in, and I pick up *In the Middle* and flip it open to a page at random. I try sitting sideways so that I can get a good view of them from the corner of my eye, but Janet is just in my sightline, and I have to scoot my chair back to see around her. When Zeynep sits on Tierney’s desk, I again catch a glimpse of the port wine stain above her knee. She takes *The Soft Machine* out of her backpack and says, “Sir, help!”

“Burroughs is tough,” Tierney says. He’s distracted, still looking through the papers on his desk. Finally he looks to Zeynep and says, “You know about the cut-up technique?”

She shakes her head. She has beautiful straight dark hair.



“Burroughs would take a story that he was working on and he’d cut it up into squares. And then he’d take another text, a newspaper say, and he’d cut that up, too. And then he’d put all the pieces together and he’d starting typing up a new story, jumbling everything together.”

“He shot his wife in Mexico,” Zeynep says. She looks fascinated by the thought, and I think again that I should protect her from Tierney.

“Part of what his books are about is the way that we construct our own realities. We see a little bit of this and a little bit of that, and we create our own stories.”

“How could he do that?” she asks. I think she must be talking about killing his wife. “What kind of person was he?”

Tierney shrugs his shoulders. “Like Lady Lamb said about Byron, I suppose he was ‘Mad, bad, and dangerous to know,’”

“I know he was on drugs,” she continues, “but how could he live with himself?”

“Despicable people can be good writers,” Tierney says. I wonder if this is true.

He reaches into his top desk drawer and pulls out two well-worn paperbacks. “If you’re curious about Burroughs’ ideas, take a look at this,” he says and hands her a book whose title I can just make out—*The Job*. “And if *The Soft Machine* is too difficult, try reading *Junky*.” He gives her this book, too.

I can’t believe that he would give her a book called *Junky* to read. I put down my book and say, “Tierney, do you think that’s appropriate?”

They both look up at me. “What would you recommend instead?” Tierney asks, and I can see the angry glint in his eyes.

He’s caught me by surprise. “It just seems like there are so many life-affirming books out there.” I think for a moment. “When I was in high school I really enjoyed *Travels with Charlie*,” I say.

Tierney and Zeynep both look at me, and then they begin to laugh. “Well, I’m sure Zeynep will keep that in mind,” Tierney says.

Zeynep gives me a wave as she leaves, and all I can think about is the disk that’s sitting in the computer. I haven’t yet read Tierney’s letter, but I keep thinking about it.

I’m still debating what to do when Thompson toddles into the office, and I turn around to watch him. He moves slowly to his seat, and when he finally arrives, he takes notice of the paper in the middle of his otherwise bare desktop. He’s curious, I can see. He picks it up and studies it, holding it at various distances from his face.

Tierney catches my eye and winks. “Who has plans for the weekend?” he asks.

Thompson booms out, “My Dixie wrecked.”

I can’t see Janet’s face, but she lifts up her head and tilts it like a puzzled dog. I laugh; I can’t help it. I raise my fist to my mouth and try to disguise it as a cough.

Tierney remains poker-faced. “What’s that, Thompson?”

“My Dixie wrecked,” Thompson bellows. “I don’t even know what that means. ‘My Dixie wrecked.’”

Janet shifts her chair back so she can see both Tierney and me. It’s the first time I’ve ever seen her laugh—she’s giggling, holding her hand up to her mouth. She asks quietly, “Why is he saying that his dick’s erect?”

“Pay no attention to him,” Tierney says, “He’s a dirty old man.”

Thompson still looks confused. “Can somebody help me with this? ‘My Dixie wrecked.’”

“I know somebody who can,” Tierney says, “but I’m not sure it’s worth it.”

Thompson stands there, considering. “Maybe it’s a book that one of my students wants,” he shouts. He turns and totters back to the door. “I’ll find out.” He opens the door, and I can see the corridor is still filled with students. He walks out into the hall, still clutching his mysterious paper.

I look to Tierney. “You can’t let him ask his students about that!”

Tierney shrugs his shoulders. “It sounds like a good book.”

I slide through the space between the desks as quickly as I can and run out the door after Thompson. I know at that moment that I have to stop Tierney, and that I will use the disk that’s in my computer, waiting.

Out in the hallway, after I’ve managed to get the paper away from Thompson and to shepherd him back into the office, I look down the hallway to Drake’s office. There, sitting on the steps outside his door, two boys wait. I walk down to them.

The door to Drake’s office, the door without a window, is closed. I say to the boys, “Waiting for your writing conferences?” They nod in response, but don’t speak. They sit there, morose, and although I know that they’re probably just not very interested in English class, there’s something about their look that upsets me. I wonder again if Tierney could be right about Drake. I don’t believe it—I know Drake too well—but the uneasy feeling I have won’t go away. I wish the boys good luck and walk back to the English office.

When I enter, Janet and Thompson have left for class and Tierney sits at his desk, looking now through his top drawer. He’s still smiling, pleased with himself, I suppose, for the joke he’s played on Thompson. I don’t speak to him, but go quietly to my desk and sit down.

“Mentor Time,” Tierney says. “Philosophy of education.” He’s trying, I think, to make it up to me for having to chase Thompson down the hall.

“Sure,” I say. I turn to look at the monitor, and I click on the “My Computer” icon. I drag the all the files on the A drive to a new folder I’ve created on the C drive, copying them. I name the folder “Insurance.” Only when I’ve done all of this do I reach down to my bottom drawer and look through the hanging files for the one labeled “Teacher Mentoring.”

I pull out the folder, and when I've looked through the pages, I decide to skip to Interview Four: Writing. I turn around to face Tierney and read the first question, "How do you handle process writing in your classroom?" I wonder if Tierney can see the hatred in my eyes.

Tierney looks contemptuous. "What kind of gobbledegook is 'process writing'?"

"You know," I say, trying to keep my voice light, "having the students keep journals and brainstorming ideas. Letting them write drafts and having them peer-edit each other. That kind of thing."

Tierney smiles his condescending smile at this. "The longer you're in education, the more you'll realize that there's always a new trend."

"Drake says that his students' writing has really improved this year." I'm angry at Tierney, but when I say this, I think about the boys waiting outside Drake's office.

Tierney waves his hand dismissively. "Brett, every teacher wants to believe that his students are learning because he's doing something great. Drake's students write better at the end of the year than they did at the start, so it must be because he's used the writing process, or whatever the fuck it is."

I write some of this down on my notepad, not worrying any longer about getting down all of Tierney's thoughts. I think about Drake. "But don't we have some effect on our students?" It's not a question on the sheet.

"The truth is that if they write better, it's because they've read more, or because their brains have had another year to develop."

I stop taking notes. "Then why do we bother, Tierney?"

He must hear the note of pleading in my voice, because he looks me in the eyes, and for once I think I can see compassion there. "Listen, if you want to have an effect on your students, try

to get them interested in things,” he says. “That’s the best thing we can do—make them want to learn things on their own.”

Tierney says this, but I’m not really listening to him. I keep thinking about the boys outside Drake’s office, and the wooden door, and the boy in the courtyard. But I think, too, about Zeynep and the birthmark inside her thigh, just above the knee.

“Why me, Tierney?”

He looks at me, puzzled.

“Why not go to Dr. Debbie? Why not to the police?”

“Do you think I haven’t tried?” He glances down at his desk. “Drake is Dr. Debbie’s fair-haired boy. And what police do you have in mind? The Köpekköy militia?”

I draw a deep breath, and then I say, “This Sunday, when we go to church, I can get the computer to you. But there’s a condition.”

Tierney looks back up at me. He seems amused by my attempt at bargaining.

“I don’t want you to meet with Zeynep anymore. I want you to stop giving her books that are inappropriate.”

Tierney looks at me with something like surprise and something like horror, as if I’ve asked him to sign the devil’s black book. “Brett,” he says softly, “I’m not doing anything to hurt Zeynep.”

“I don’t want you giving her drinks,” I continue. “I don’t want you to meet with her.”

“You expect me to tell her that she can’t come in to the office any more? Am I allowed to tell her why?”

“Just stop polluting her mind.”

Tierney stares at me, and I’m not sure if it’s a look of disgust or of anger or of simple incomprehension that’s on his face. I eject the disk from the floppy drive and take it over to him.

“You left this in the computer,” I say.

He sits for a moment and then sadly recites a line of poetry that I recognize, a line from Burns, “O wad some power the giftie gie us to see oursels as ithers see us.” Tierney still seems lost in thought, but to my surprise, he nods his head. “I hope you realize what you’re doing.”

On Friday, when I see Zeynep in the hall, she comes straight to me and says, “You are a self-righteous little prick.” She says this out loud, with other students around.

I try to lead her down the hall where we can talk more privately, but she pulls her arm away when I touch her. “I’m trying to help you,” I say.

“Why don’t you keep your fucking nose out of my fucking business?” I don’t need to look around to know that a crowd has gathered around us. I can feel my cheeks burning.

Zeynep looks as if she’s on the verge of tears, and I say quietly, “When a teacher is behaving inappropriately, it’s everybody’s business.” I try to sound sure of myself, but I don’t know what to do. I’ve never had a student challenge me like this, and I don’t know whether to send her to the Dean’s office or whether, because it’s Zeynep, to try to help her.

“Don’t you know that Tierney is the only decent teacher in this school?” Her voice is more pitched, and I wonder if this is hysteria. “I’ve learned more from him than from all the others combined.”

I start to explain my actions, but she turns and walks away. She hasn’t walked five steps, though, before she turns to face me again. “Prick,” she yells.

Later in the day, I find a note on my desk that says, “Kick is seeing things from a special angle. Kick is momentary freedom from the chains of aging, cautious, nagging, frightened flesh.” There’s no signature, but the quote is attributed to W. Burroughs, in *Junky*.

\* \* \*

On Sunday, I walk to Tierney's *lojman* with my hymnal and Bible in my hand. I climb the steps and find Tierney sitting on his front balcony; a pair of binoculars lies by his feet. I turn around and realize that he has a view of Drake's front door from here. Looking across to Drake's *lojman*, I'm sickened by the thought of what I'm about to do. I turn back to face Tierney.

He reaches down and grabs a can of Efes. "Beer?"

"I don't drink," I remind him. "Come down when we're getting into the car."

He lifts the ring on the Efes and pulls the tab. "I know."

"I'll leave the window open in the spare room." I wonder if Tierney feels any of the same regret I feel, but I see that he's calmly putting the pull-tab inside his can of beer. I say, "Remember to put the laptop back inside if there's nothing on it."

"I know."

I walk down Tierney's steps, across the road, and up to Drake's *lojman*. When I knock on the door, I remember the old folk stories about the devil, how he can only go where he's invited. I stand on his porch and flip through the pages of my hymnal.

Drake opens the door. He's wearing his church clothes—a blue suit and a red tie. "Come on in," he says.

I shake my head. "It's a nice morning. I'll wait by the car."

I walk back to Drake's Doğan and lean against the fender. It's warm and the sun is already bright. I shuffle my Bible and hymnal. Drake has come outside and is locking up his *lojman* when Tierney comes sauntering toward the car, a book under his arm. "Good morning, church-goers."

Drake walks up the sidewalk to the car. "We've got room for you, too." He says this cheerfully, but he doesn't look too happy to see Tierney.

Tierney shakes his head. "Please. No."

I hate the thought of what I have to do next. I say, “Sorry, Peter, but can I use your bathroom?”

He tosses the house keys across the car with a quick flick of his wrist, and even before I catch them, I feel my stomach knot. I hand my Bible and the hymnal to Tierney, and walk towards the door. As I walk down the sidewalk, I can hear Tierney needling Drake. “What do you suppose today’s sermon will be on? Sin?”

I unlock the door, take a deep breath, and step in. I close the door and lock it behind me. I know that Drake keeps his computer in the spare bedroom. I walk down the hall past the bathroom and push open the door. I can see that the laptop case is sitting next to the desk. I make myself step into the room. When I pick up the computer, I’m surprised by how heavy it feels. I walk to the window, unlatch the rape-locks, and slide the window up. I put the laptop just outside on the window ledge. As I pull the window back down, remembering not to lock-up, I notice that my hands are trembling. I turn to walk out the room, but as I do, I notice Drake’s photo gallery on the wall behind the desk.

I’ve never understood people who display pictures of themselves, but these pictures are all of Drake, photo after photo. There’s one of him in cap and gown graduating from high school, and another of him in a different cap and gown graduating from college. There’s one of him in a blue tuxedo with his prom date. And then there’s a photo of him leaning against a car, perhaps his first car. He looks about sixteen, he’s wearing a leather jacket, and he’s leaning against the car, one knee up. You can tell that he’s trying hard to look suave and confident. There’s nothing at all remarkable about the picture except that it reminds me of a photo of my father. In that picture, my father’s a little older and the car is from an earlier era, but the pose is much the same—the same attempt to look cool by his new car.



I feel a cramping in my bowels and I really do want to use the toilet. I run to the john and squat, but the cramping remains. I flush anyway, and then I close up the house and walk out to join Drake and Tierney by the car.

Coming from the dark house into the bright morning sun, I'm almost blinded. I put my hand up in front of my face and walk towards the car. When I walk around to the passenger door, my eyes still haven't fully adjusted. Tierney hands me my books, opens the door for me, and I climb into the car. "Repent, sinners," he calls out as Drake starts the Doğan.

Drake puts the car in gear, and we lurch forward; he's stalled it on the clutch. He starts it again, and we drive off. Only then do I look down at the books in my hand and realize that Tierney has taken my Bible and given me instead *The Job*.

The ride to Istanbul is insufferable. The cramping in my stomach remains and I can't seem to make small talk with Drake. During the church service I can't concentrate at all—I say the wrong responses during the doxology and I almost forget to offer Drake the Peace of Christ. The ride home is worse still. Drake wants to talk about the homily, but my memory of it is so poor that I have nothing to say. As he drives, I keep thinking about Tierney and the computer. Will the files be encrypted? Will Tierney know how to open them? Will he be disappointed if there's nothing on the computer? Will he be joyous if there is something?

When we get back to campus, Drake invites me in for a cup of tea. I don't want at all to go inside, but I agree anyway. I go in because I have a hope that Tierney's put the computer back on the floor by the window, and that I can move it back to its place by the desk and refasten the rape-locks on the window.

As soon as we get in the door, I excuse myself and jog down the hall, past the bath, to the spare room. I peer in and look at the floor by the window. There's no computer. I step in to the

room and look around just to be certain, but it's nowhere. I'm careful not to look at the photos on the wall as I leave.

I don't even tell Drake that I'm going. He's in the kitchen, rattling plates, getting the tea things out, but I walk down the hall, past him. I walk out the door and let it slam.

As I walk up the stairs to Tierney's *lojman*, it's so dark that I can barely see where to place my feet. I've been up all night, trying to make sense of everything. And now, on the final step to Tierney's landing, I trip and sprawl face forward, scraping my forehead. I lie there on the balcony for a long moment, rocking in pain, until finally I fumble my way to his door and push the doorbell.

Everyone on campus knows what went on this afternoon. After Drake and I left for church, Mehmet, the guard, picked up the computer from Drake's windowsill and carried it to Dr. Debbie's office. There were files, unencrypted. Most were pictures he'd downloaded from the internet; nobody wanted to tell me too much about them. And there was a piece of writing—maybe it was a diary entry or maybe it was a fantasy, nobody could say for sure—about Drake in the boys' bathroom with a student he called "M." That was enough for Dr. Debbie.

I have to press the bell for a long time before Tierney finally flips on the porch light. He opens the door a little and leans his head against its edge. His eyes are half-closed. He's wearing a pair of boxers and a tattered t-shirt, on which I can barely make out the faded lettering, "Anarchy in the UK."

"Tierney," I say. "I'm not having a very good night."

He lets me stand here on his porch. "What fucking time is it?"

"I saw him, Tierney. I went over to his *lojman*."

Tierney must catch a whiff of my breath, because he seems at last to take notice of me. "I thought you didn't drink."

“He called you a psychopath. He said that you and I have ruined his life.” I can hear a shake in my voice.

Tierney scratches his belly. He opens the door a little wider. “You look like hell.” He seems to look past me, across the road, down toward Drake’s.

“He said he’ll never be able to get another job. Dr. Debbie has one of the guards staying with him to make sure he doesn’t kill himself.”

“Brett, stop it,” Tierney says quietly. “Think. We did a good thing.”

But I remember talking to Drake about teaching writing. I remember meals with him and the rides he gave me to church. “He said he never touched them, Tierney.”

“Brett, I read what he wrote.”

“He said that was just his imaginings.”

“I read it. He was no Nabokov.” Tierney kneads his lower back with hands.

“He said it was a fantasy. He told me he liked to think about it, but he said he’d never do it.”

Tierney seems to consider this for a long moment. At last he asks, “And you? What do you think?”

I can feel a sort of desperation building up inside me. “I don’t know,” I say. “I don’t know what to think.”

“You don’t know what to think,” Tierney repeats. He stands there with the door cracked open, studying me.

“I read what you wrote, too. I stole your disk and copied it.” Tonight, before I went to see Drake, I went to the office and read every one of Tierney’s files that I’d copied. There was a lying letter to Bangkok, like I knew there would be; but there was also a letter of recommendation he was writing for me, a letter I had never asked him for, a glowing report filled with my fictitious

accomplishments. “You shouldn’t lie for me, Tierney. It was nice of you, I guess. But I know I’m not a very good teacher.”

“I thought it might help.”

I don’t know what to say that. I don’t know what to think about Tierney. But I can’t stop thinking about Drake this evening in his *lojman*, the guard sitting calmly at the kitchen table while Drake raged at me like a soul in torment.

Off in the distance, all the way from Köpekköy I suppose, I can hear, very faintly, the sound of the call to prayer. I turn away from the porch light and look off the balcony, and yes, the light is changing. The Imam’s voice rises and falls, and then trails off. I look back to Tierney.

He’s heard it too, I suppose, because he says in a kind of reverie, “We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Shallow.”

I recognize the line, and in spite of everything that’s happened, I smile a little. Here in the early morning, as I look at Tierney in his boxers, his t-shirt stretched tight across his broad stomach, it’s not hard to imagine him as Sir John Falstaff.

Tierney pushes the door open. “Why don’t you come in and have another drink?”

I hesitate. “I don’t think I want another drink.” I try to peer past Tierney into the darkness of his *lojman*. “I could use some food, though.”

Tierney holds the door with one arm and shifts his fat body to make room for me to pass. “Come in,” he says. “Let’s look in the fridge.”

I consider for a minute longer. “Okay,” I say at last, and I step past him across the threshold.

Shakesteer's

Zoë comes into the den holding Horatio, who flaps his arms and smiles when he sees me. It's Saturday morning, but Zoë's wearing a black Burberry skirt and plaid jacket, as if she's dressed for an evening on the town.

"David, can you mind him for a bit?" she asks. Zoë has a faux-British accent. She spent one semester in Leicester when she was in college and came back speaking like Audrey Hepburn. I found this affectation charming when I first met her three years ago.

Lately, though, I've been wondering how big a betrayal of my current wife it would be to telephone Laura, my ex. I've learned from experience that cheating on your wife is only hard at first, and that's what scares me. I wonder if I'm about to screw up a second marriage.

Zoë brings Horatio over to the couch, and I reluctantly take him on my lap. "Ta," she says, and leaves me with the baby.

Horatio has two teeth up, two down: it's a jack-o'-lantern smile. He has his mother's blond hair, and his eyes look as if they might stay blue. He's beautiful. But I'm fifty-four, and I never wanted another child.

Horatio writhes in my lap; he squirms and arches his back. He hates to be constrained when there's a whole world out there to explore. Zoë has dressed him in a polo shirt, khakis, and what appear to be baby penny loafers. He's better dressed than I am, but I'm not sure how long I can afford to keep him in Ralph Lauren baby-wear. Shakesteer's isn't making money.

I look around the den. We've just bought a new television, a hulking monster that dwarfs the stand it's been placed on, and now five loudspeakers clutter the room. There are framed movie posters of *La Dolce Vita* and *Wild Strawberries* on the wall, and near the door sits an antique pop-corn

cart. The entire house is big and pretentious. There's an acre of yard that needs constant trimming, and since we've moved outside of town, no one ever drops by. I bought this house after I sold the Shakesteer's franchises because Cordelia, my daughter, insisted that it was a good investment. And now I've bought the television and the loudspeakers because Toby told me I needed home cinema.

All my children are named after characters from Shakespeare. Toby was my first, named after Sir Toby Belch. He's twenty-six. Cordelia, named after Lear's faithful daughter, is twenty. And Horatio is ten months.

Zoë, my new wife and Horatio's mother, is also twenty-six, which sometimes sounds a little sick to me, too.

I put Horatio on the floor and he immediately crawls to the television cart—the flashing displays of the DVD and the stereo are just too tempting. Before I can get up off the couch he's made his way to the jumble of power cords.

Is calling my ex-wife tantamount to cheating on my current wife? It's certainly a step in that direction. But in truth, I don't know how to reach Laura. She made a clean break—she took what she wanted and had the rest sold. She quit her tenured position at the university and found something new—a job at a teaching college, somewhere on the east coast. It was a step down professionally, but at least she got away from her son-of-a-bitch ex-husband.

I hurry over to the television cart and manage to pry Horatio's fingers away from the cord. I lift him up in my arms. Immediately, he begins to cry and kick his feet. What he desires seems so simple—he just wants to hold this fascinating new thing in his hands, perhaps to take a little taste of it—and yet I won't allow him to. This is what Horatio's life centers on: *I want*. And I feel for him, because I want, too.

I want, but I don't know what.

I pick up Horatio and carry him back to the couch. I rock him in my arms, but he's too old for rocking. He turns and explores my face with his fingers. He finally settles on my nose, which he grasps with surprising strength. I pry his fingers loose and hold him a bit farther away. I'm holding him at arm's length and staring at the monstrous television when Zoë comes back into the room. She gives me a questioning look.

"I've got post-purchase dissonance," I say.

"I told you buying this telly was daft," Zoë says. "It's too big. And you only ever watch old movies."

She's right; it is silly, but then I should be used to that. I glance through the sliding glass doors at the pool and the patio. An outdoor pool in Missouri is daft, too. It's early September, and although the pool man ran his net through the water just this morning, there's already a skim of dead leaves floating on the water's surface.

I hold out the baby to her. "Couldn't we dress him in cheaper clothes?"

She laughs. "God, you're mean," she says. When she says "mean" she means cheap. "Where do you want to buy his clothes? Wal-Mart?" She doesn't move to take Horatio, so I set him back on my lap.

"He *is* a baby," I point out. "It's not like he knows what he's wearing."

"I think he can start appreciating quality now. Who knows how early his tastes are formed." She looks me up and down as if to suggest that he might already have a genetic predisposition toward bad taste.

Zoë believes that I should replace my wardrobe of jeans and T-shirts with one of tailored suits. Last year, for my birthday, she bought me a dark Hugo Boss suit; or rather, as she charged it on the credit card, I bought myself one. When I tried it on, she ran her hands up and down my back admiringly. "You should dress like this all the time," she said. I pointed out to her that I still owned

Shakesteer's, that all my clothes were stained with grease and pickle-juice. She looked at me, disappointed. "You're a success, darling," she said. "You could buy dozens of suits and throw one away if you ruin it."

I think that's why I fell in love with Zoë, because she actually believes I'm a success. At best, I've been a reasonably wealthy failure. The thing I most wanted to achieve in life was my PhD, but I've been David Starling, ABD for almost thirty years now, ever since I gave up on my dissertation and opened Shakesteer's. I fell in love with Zoë because I saw myself through her eyes. I felt as if twenty-seven wasted years had drained away.

Why did Zoë marry me? She may love me, but I also know that if I hadn't had money, she would never have looked at me. And now Shakesteer's is floundering.

I hold out the baby again. "I've got to go in to Shakesteer's," I say. "I need to see how it looks after the renovation."

Zoë sighs. "Please, David. Can't you take him with you? Just this once?"

I put Horatio in his car seat and carry him out to the garage. The restaurant has been closed for a week while Toby organized a quick sprucing up, and even if it means taking the baby, I'm going to drive into town and see how Toby has managed. Since Zoë and I got married, I've been letting my son run Shakesteer's. It's not the best idea I've ever had. Toby's attitude towards management is *laissez-faire*. He's not too concerned with keeping track of our labor or food costs.

At Shakesteer's we serve hamburger-steaks (which we call steers) and shakes, of course, and when you order the server asks you, "Will that be to go or not to go?" There's Hamlet and Egglet on the breakfast menu, and Titus' Meaty Pies on the lunch menu. We serve beer, which we call ale, and wine, which we call rhenish.



A few years ago I sold these ideas to an entrepreneur who wanted to open Shakesteer's near five other colleges. I got a fat check, but it was a one-time thing—all the other Shakesteer's failed, and I still count on the original to keep earning money. Last year, for the first time, the restaurant didn't make a profit. Lately, although I haven't told Zoë, I've been dipping into savings.

In the front of the garage, parked where I can't get it out without moving the other cars, is my Volkswagen Beetle rag-top, fully-restored. It's the car I'd dreamed about ever since Laura and I went to see *Annie Hall*, the movie that defined for us the good life; and when money came in, I bought one. Zoë and I first dated in that car, but now she doesn't want me to drive it. She won't let me put Horatio in it because it's a convertible and there are no seat belts in the back.

Over my head, from her room above the garage, I hear Cordelia's subwoofer begin to thump. Zoë, I'm sure, will soon pound on Cordelia's door and tell her to turn down the stereo. There will be yet another fight, or as Zoë will call it, a "row," one that I will be happy to miss.

I walk past the VW and past Zoë's Jaguar, and I come to the white Volvo which I bought at her insistence. It's a big, sturdy, ugly car, the kind I hoped never to drive again. I strap Horatio's car seat into the center rear. I wish I were more certain of how the thing buckles in.

Horatio cries a little but settles down as I leave our neighborhood and pull onto the interstate towards town. I just pray that Toby hasn't screwed up the renovation. I've given him very specific instructions: restore, preserve; don't change. But he's been insistent that I not come in until the work is finished. Clean, I told him. Re-lacquer the tables where the surfaces have been carved into. "Don't worry," he said. Replace the old beer- and puke-stained carpets with new ones, but make sure they're the same burgundy color. "You've got to trust me a little," he said.

I just hope he gets it right. Part of Shakesteer's charm is that it doesn't change, it weathers. Our graffiti walls are the stuff of local legend: twenty-seven years of signatures, jokes, and quotations; there's hardly an inch of clean wall left. But the start was serendipitous: when the

restaurant first opened, there was a long stretch of hallway leading to the toilets that I hadn't decorated; before the first week was over, someone had scrawled *smoke pot not war* on one of the blank walls. I stared at the graffito. Was it an act of sheer illiteracy or a moment of brilliance? The more I stared, the more perfect it seemed, and so I left it, and I nailed up a small shelf where I put cupfuls of markers.

It's no wonder the franchises failed: the reason for our success is not the Shakespeare gags. We've beaten the competition around here because of our reputation as a cool place to hang out. And to keep that reputation, I hire the hip. It doesn't matter if they're surly or tattooed; I hire the kids that other kids tell me are cool. That was the reason I hired Zoë—because she was recommended; because she had a weird accent and a collection of obscure British bands on CD. I let my employees wear the hats they choose instead of hairnets, I don't dress them in goofy polyester uniforms, and I don't complain too much if they call in sick when they're really just hung-over. And in exchange they play the right music on the stereo and get their friends to drop by, and they lend Shakesteer's a cult following. Or at least that's the idea. Lately, something isn't working.

I exit the highway and drive into town. There's a lazy feel to a university town—even now, driving the streets at noon, you know somehow that all over the city people are just getting up and pulling on their jeans. The trees, now turned orange and yellow, canopy-over the sidewalks. It's pretty, but I never expected to still be here. I was supposed to write my dissertation and move on.

The working title of my dissertation was *Put Money in Thy Purse: A Marxist Examination of Shakespeare's Villains*. Laura and I were both graduate students then; we subsisted on ramen noodles and rented a room in a house where every morning we had to clean other people's pubic hair from the bathtub drain. When Laura got pregnant, I decided I wasn't a Marxist, not even for the sake of literary theory. I borrowed money from my parents and opened Shakesteer's. It's on the edge of

campus, and even at a glance you can see that it wasn't a purpose-built restaurant but just an old house. I knocked out the interior walls to make the L-shaped dining room.

Toby is standing in the parking lot as I pull up. When he sees me, he raises his bandaged right hand, a huge mitt of white gauze. He burned his hand a week ago, working the fryer. He was using the tongs to fish out a piece of deep-fried chicken, dropped the tongs, then reached his hand into the fryer to grab them.

I wave and park the car. Toby jogs over and opens up the rear door. He leans his face in close to Horatio's and says, "Hey, Tiger." To my surprise, Horatio doesn't recoil in fright but smiles. If Frankenstein's monster had been assembled with staples and rivets instead of sewing thread, you'd have an approximation of Toby's face: he has a stud in each eyebrow, a nose ring, multiple piercings in both ears. He's dressed entirely in black.

And yet for all his attempts, I know that Toby isn't cool. At the restaurant, it's apparent that he's a poseur in the world of hip. He's shy and introverted. Already his hairline is receding, which makes him look surprisingly old.

Toby shuts the rear door and comes and stands by the driver's side. I unbuckle my seat belt and start to get out, but Toby leans against the door. I look at him. He taps on the glass with his left hand. I touch the button and roll down the window.

"How's it going, Dad?"

"Are you going to let me out of the car?"

"I called the house and Zoë told me you were on your way."

I push against the door, but he leans the weight of his body against it. "I want to see the restaurant," I say.

He waves to Horatio in the back seat. "How's Cordelia?" he asks. I stare at him, and he fingers the stud in his eyebrow. "It's not ready," he says finally.

That doesn't sound good at all. "We're supposed to open this afternoon."

"We'll be ready. I promise. But I don't want you to see it until it's finished."

This sounds worse still. I glance again at his bandaged hand, and I wonder if I should let him run the restaurant at all. I appointed Toby as manager because I couldn't stand another day at Shakesteer's. When I boxed up my dissertation, I gave up on the thing that mattered to me. I watched Laura finish her doctorate while I learned about keg systems and carbonated beverages, grades of hamburger meat, greengrocers. It was interesting for a time, but then I realized that my intellectual life was over. I grew to hate Shakesteer's, but now I need it to succeed again.

"Just let me take a quick peek," I say. "I don't want to have to drive back out."

"Dad, you've got to learn to trust me."

This is my son who spent his time at university bouncing from major to major until his academic probation finally ran out. I hired Toby as a cook because he couldn't find a job anywhere else. I'm just glad that he's had only one week to screw things up.

"Okay, I trust you," I say. "I'll come back later."

I carry Horatio upstairs to the junk room, the room where we pile up the laundry and the ironing, and where all the boxes I've never unpacked are stacked. Although I haven't looked at it for years, I want to find my dissertation.

I set Horatio on the floor. He sits, points his finger at me and gurgles. As long as he's sitting, I can work. I go to the boxes in the corner. In one of these, God knows which, are the notes and the draft of my dissertation. Somewhere in here are three years of my life.

I take the top box down from the stack and begin to root through it. It's obviously the wrong box—it's filled with pictures. I pull one out, a photo of Laura and me standing in front of

Shakesteer's on its opening day. I'm wearing white trousers with a noticeable flare to the legs. Laura is sporting the Annie Hall look.

I feel a wave of regret: I regret never finishing my dissertation. I regret starting Shakesteer's.

My father lent me the money to open Shakesteer's, but I know it broke his heart. He ran a café in my hometown, and the only thing he ever wanted was for me get my doctorate. He died last year, and he never talked to me about the restaurant. We never once talked shop.

Laura wrote her dissertation while she stayed with the kids, getting a few words in during their nap time, a few more words in when I took them out for a walk. She wrote to the sounds of the dishwasher and the washing machine. I cooked hamburgers and french fries, and she became a medievalist.

I want to know how she is. I want to talk to her. I'll bet anything that Cordelia and Toby know how to contact their mother, but I don't want to ask them. Cordelia would happily give me the number just so she could spitefully tell Zoë that I wanted it. Toby would be disappointed in me—he likes Zoë.

I look up to see that Horatio has crawled over to me. He pulls himself to standing against the box and shrieks in delight. He grabs the picture from my hand. "No," I say. "Let's don't wad that up."

From downstairs, Cordelia calls, "Daddy!" I hesitate. I know, more or less, what this is going to be. She calls again, "Daddy, will you come here?" I carry Horatio downstairs and to the kitchen.

Cordelia and Zoë lean against counters on opposite sides of the kitchen, like prize-fighters in their corners. Cordelia, still in her pajamas in the afternoon, stares purposefully at Zoë. Zoë looks away. I can tell she's on the verge of tears.

“Will you tell her, please, that this is the drawer for the silverware,” Cordelia says, pointing to the drawer by the fridge.

“I’ve moved the silverware,” Zoë says. “And I want to use this drawer for Horatio’s things.”

Cordelia takes a pacifier from the drawer and drums it on the countertop. “Will you tell her, please, that this has always been the drawer for the silverware?”

“Can it possibly matter,” I ask Cordelia, “which drawer the silverware goes into?”

“Every time I want to get a fork, I find a drawer full of plastic spoons and rubber nipples. Why does it matter to her which fucking drawer his stuff goes into?”

“Don’t say ‘fucking’ in front of the baby,” I say. I turn to Zoë, “What do you think? Could we put Horatio’s things into another drawer?”

“You don’t understand anything, do you?” Zoë gives me a look of utter exasperation. “I’m going for a fag,” she says. She means a cigarette. She walks past me out of the room.

Cordelia sits down at the kitchen table and looks at me. “Remind me again how you chose her?”

“You could get your own place,” I point out.

She scrunches up her face and shakes her head. “This is my house, too, Daddy.”

I ruffle Horatio’s hair, and he smiles, contented for the moment to be held. So far my children haven’t turned out much like their fictional namesakes; Goneril might have been a better name for my daughter. Cordelia studies marketing. She’s learning how to sell shit—since when is that a university course of study? She’s joined the College Republicans, and I can tell she’s embarrassed to be seen with me. Can this really be the child to whom I read *Tales from Shakespeare* every night?

I know that Cordelia won't move out of the house. She lives rent free with a father who pays her bills and who doesn't care what time she comes back home. Still, I decide to fish a little. "Or you could live with your mother," I try. "You might like Connecticut."

She gives me one of her disgusted looks. "Mom lives in *Delaware*."

"Oh." This is the sort of information I need. "Where is it she's teaching?"

Cordelia's face lights up. "Do you want Mom's number?" She gets up from her seat and grabs a box of raisin bran from the cupboard and pours it into a bowl. "Why didn't you just ask for it?" She goes to get a spoon, opens the familiar drawer, and yells, "Motherfucker!"

"The baby," I say. He's frightened, and I bounce him in my arms.

"Good for you, Daddy." She rummages around in the other drawer and finds a spoon. "God knows nobody would blame you if you dumped Miss Cruel Britannia."

"Look," I say, "you've got to promise me you won't mention this to Zoë. I'm not going to call your mother. I just want to know how to contact her, in case of an emergency." The explanation sounds thin and I know it.

"Don't you worry." She spoons the raisin bran into her mouth. "I won't say a word."

I carry Horatio out of the kitchen, down the hall, and to the den. Through the sliding glass doors I can see Zoë by the pool. She's sitting in one of the lounge chairs, a cigarette in her hand. She sits there, staring at nothing. But then I see the thin white cord snaking from her ears, down her chest, to the cushion of the chair, and I realize that she's listening to her Ipod. This is her form of entertainment. I almost never see her reading.

I've been encouraging Zoë to enroll again as a full-time student, but she takes only the occasional course, preferring, I suppose, to enjoy my money. She was a Music major when I first hired her to work at Shakesteer's. Even then, before she could afford Burberry's, I could see she was beautiful.

The first night I cheated on Laura it was raining. Zoë and I closed the restaurant together. We played her CDs on the stereo and she told me about England. It was a slow night because of the rain, and we closed early. When I finished mopping the kitchen, I went out to the front, where Zoë was cleaning the soda dispenser. “How are you?” I asked.

“I’m jolly good,” she said.

I didn’t mind the affectation. In fact, it felt to me like hope, as if one’s past really didn’t count for anything. What did it matter if you were raised in Empyrean, Missouri—a hick town where everyone called you Janet? With a little imagination you could be exotic European Zoë.

One of the nozzles was stuck, and I took off my apron and went to help her. We both put our hands on the nozzle and twisted and pulled until it finally came apart. Standing close to her, I knew I could kiss her.

But I didn’t do it. Instead I asked if she was hungry. It was already late, after eleven, but she said yes. We didn’t have umbrellas, so we cut open a plastic trash bag and tried to hold it over our heads as we ran to the car. We drove in the rain, looking for an open restaurant. The Beetle’s windshield wipers could barely keep up with the downpour, and we mostly felt our way along the main drag to Bao Long.

We ran through the rain again, both soaking wet now, and collided in the foyer, laughing. I showed Zoë to a table, and then excused myself to use the phone. It’s hard to cheat on your wife the first time. I felt a knot in my stomach as I dialed our number. “It’s me,” I said when Laura answered. “We’re still closing up. We had a rush at the end. I’ll be a little bit late.”

And that was it. That was how I betrayed Laura, with a single phone call—not, rather, two weeks later when Zoë and I consummated our relationship in a motel by the stadium. After I hung up, I stood in the foyer a minute longer, surprised at how awful I felt.



And now I'm standing at the window watching my young wife lounge by the pool, but I keep thinking about my ex-wife, who's not glamorous, who's not young, and who would never sit by the pool without a book in her hands.

I slide the glass doors open and step out onto the patio. I walk over to the chair where Zoë's sitting and I stand there holding the baby. I can see that she's been crying.

After a moment, she pulls out the earbuds and lets them lie across her chest. "What?" she says.

I touch her leg. "Couldn't you try a little harder to be friends?"

"She wants me out of here, David. And you never take my side."

I don't want to take anyone's side. "I have to go back to the restaurant," I say. I hold out the baby to her. "I need to check up on things. I'll be back in the evening."

She looks at me but doesn't move to take Horatio. "Why don't you mind him for a bit longer," she says. She puts her earbuds back in, crosses her arms, and closes her eyes.

When I arrive at Shakesteer's, I'm glad to see that the sign in the door is flipped to *Come in, we're open*. I carry Horatio inside. The dark wooden booths are still standing. Toby hasn't gutted the place. But it's far too bright. Over the booths, where the funky, old, dimly-lit brass lamps used to hang, there's now a row of halogen lights, glass and stainless-steel affairs strung along metal wires running the length of the restaurant. Each booth is washed in a harsh light that doesn't say, "Come, sit, and have a drink of ale"; rather, it's a light that suggests dental surgery.

I glance around the booths. There's one couple sitting in the back. They look younger than our usual crowd, and I pray that Toby asked them for ID before he pulled their beers. They don't have any food in front of them, and I hope they're going to buy more than their two half-pints.

Two servers stand at the counter, tattooed girls with matted hair who are too busy talking to each other to look my way. Toby sits at a table up front reading a book. There has to be at least one cook in the back. I'm paying four people to look after two customers.

Toby glances up from his book and sees me. He raises his gauze-wrapped hand and jogs over to Horatio and me. "How's it going, Dad?"

"What did you do with the lights?" I ask.

He seems pleased with himself. "What do you think?"

"Just tell me you haven't thrown out the old ones."

"Don't you like them?" He looks crestfallen. "I thought these were a lot trendier."

I groan. "You did have them put on a rheostat, didn't you?"

He nods.

"Well turn them down, for Christ's sake," I say. "And you've got too many people on the payroll. Why don't you see if one of those girls wants to go home early?"

Toby looks away. I know I've hurt his feelings, but what else can I do? "Here, watch him." I hand over the baby to Toby, who takes him awkwardly in the crook of his left arm. I walk to the kitchen.

When I get to the counter, I glance down the hall to the toilets. The graffiti walls have been painted stark, glaring white. I stand there staring. Twenty-seven years of history erased.

Toby comes over, still balancing Horatio in his arm. He must read my thoughts, because he says, "Think of it as a palimpsest."

Even the first words effaced. I don't know what to say. I can feel my breathing become shallow.

"There wasn't any room left to write anything. I thought we could start over."

I pick up one of the black magic markers from the shelf, and I turn to the wall. I try to remember the exact spot where the first graffito was, and I consider re-writing it. But then I uncap the marker and write, *I wasted time, and now doth time waste me*. “Right,” I say. “Good idea.” I hope my tone will leave no doubts as to what I really think. I push through the double doors to the kitchen.

There’s a kid I don’t recognize working the fryer. He’s wearing a Captain Beefheart T-shirt, cowboy boots, and a pair of cut-off shorts. Is this look cool, or is he just a freak? I don’t even know about the T-shirt—is it possible that Captain Beefheart is hip again?

I tap my head. “You need to wear a hair restraint,” I tell him.

He shoots me a look as if I were beneath contempt. After a moment he takes a wadded beret from his back pocket and tugs it on. I watch him pull a basket of fries up, shake the grease off of them, and dump them into the warmer. He piles fries onto a plate with a pair of tongs. “Order up,” he yells and sticks the plate in the window.

I guess the big-spending minors have ordered some food after all.

“Whoa,” I say. “Wait a minute.” I grab the plate back up from the window. “How big is a serving of fries?”

He shrugs his shoulders to let me know he doesn’t give a fuck. I point to a faded, greasy sign above the warmer.

“Three ounces,” I say. “Let’s see how much that is. I carry the plate over to the prep table, put a plate on the scale and then zero the dial. I dump the fries from his plate onto the scale. Seven ounces. “See?”

He looks at me but doesn’t say anything. I slide half the fries into the warmer and then take off a couple of more using the tongs. I show it to him. “There,” I say, “that’s a portion of fries. Remember what that looks like.”

“Wow,” he says. “I really learned something. Thank you.” The little fucker.

I walk back to the office, a little nook next to the beer kegs, the soda containers and the CO2 dispensers. I sit down at the computer desk.

Would it be so terrible if I contacted Laura?

I told her about Zoë in the parking lot here at Shakesteer’s. I had planned to take Laura out to eat; I would confess to her over drinks, after dinner. I had planned to tell her in a public place, where it was less likely she’d become hysterical. But instead I blurted out my confession in the car. We sat in the Beetle with the top down. It was late summer.

I needn’t have worried about Laura’s hysteria. There was an icy undertone to her voice, but mostly she just sounded tired. She turned in the seat and looked at me.

“This is really what you want?” she asked.

Up until she asked the question, I had been sure. Still, I nodded.

She shook her head, sadly. “You don’t ever know what you want.”

“I know how I feel,” I said.

“And you think you love this girl?” The wind blew her hair across her face.

“She’s not really a girl,” I said. “She’s twenty-four, but she’s very mature.”

A note of sarcasm crept in to her voice. “Are you sure that won’t be a problem? Her being mature?”

Now, on a whim, I Google Laura. I type *Dr. Laura Jones Delaware* into the search field. Google informs me that it’s found 41,300 results in .31 seconds. I check the first page and then the second, but nothing looks like the match I want. I’ll have to wait for Cordelia to give me the number.

I swivel my chair around and look at the beer kegs. We make a lot more money on drinks than we do on food, but I’m certain Toby hasn’t been doing what I told him to do. I lift up the

extra keg, and sure enough it's empty. The sole reason I buy our beer from the local brewer is that they still ship in open-kegs. I've shown Toby how to work the system: how to pry out the bung, siphon beer into the extra keg, and then top up the first keg with water. You hammer the bung back in and re-pressurize with CO<sub>2</sub>. It's easy, and we can get four barrels for the price of three.

I walk back through the kitchen. The Beefheart Kid has taken off his beret again. "What?" he says. "It's hot." I stare at him until he pulls the hat out from his pocket and puts it back on. On the way to the dining room I stop and look again at the walls—a single line from Shakespeare surrounded by oceans of white space.

Back in the dining room, Toby is holding Horatio, bouncing him up and down. Horatio laughs and reaches out with both hands to grab at the studs in Toby's face. "You're not using the extra keg," I tell him.

"It's not right, Dad." He shakes his head. "And it's probably not legal. Let me handle things."

I look around the restaurant. It's Saturday afternoon and the dining room is empty. Maybe the word hasn't gotten out that we've reopened. Maybe business will pick up in the evening. Maybe the coupons in the student newspaper will bring in some business. But I'm not sure how much longer I can afford to keep this up.

I take Horatio from Toby and carry him back to the car.

Zoë's Jaguar is not in its place when I drive up to the house. I carry Horatio inside. "Zoë?" I call. No answer. She's obviously gone, and so my babysitting duties continue. I poke my head in the kitchen. "Cordelia?"

Then I notice the sheet of paper on the counter. It's Cordelia's handwriting, giant letters running the full length of the page, *Daddy, Here's what you wanted: mom's phone number in Delaware. Say hi from me. P.S. Don't worry, I didn't tell Her Majesty.* And then there is a number, a 302 area code.

I hold the note in my hand and feel a moment of panic. Has Zoë seen it? Or did she leave before Cordelia placed the note on the counter? I decide finally that Cordelia wouldn't have left it lying around with Zoë still in the house—she promised, and that would be vicious even by her standards.

I take Horatio's bottle from the fridge and pop it in the bottle warmer—perhaps it will keep him entertained while I look for my dissertation. I fold up Zoë's note and put it in my front pocket.

I carry Horatio and the bottle upstairs to the junk room. My box of photos sits open on the floor, and the laundry is piled high on the couch. Zoë must have just left the house because the iron is sitting on the ironing board, still plugged in.

I set Horatio down on the floor and go to the stack of boxes. The top box is light so I don't even bother to open it; I just toss it on top of the box of photos. The next one I wrestle to the floor and rip open. Jackpot. Pages of dusty notes and a series of cardboard binders. I can hear Horatio knocking his bottle against the floor. Each binder is a chapter in progress. I open one and pull out a yellowed type-written page. After years of word-processing, it's a shock to see what a page of my old typewriter's courier 12 looks like. I read the chapter heading: "Selling out Hamlet: Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and the Power of the Market."

I hear Horatio's shriek of delight, and I look up just in time to notice that he's crawled over to the ironing board. He's got both hands on the cord of the iron. He shrieks again. He tries to pull himself up to standing.

I drop the binder, run to the board, and just manage to catch the iron on its way down. I grab it with both hands, one hand finding the plastic handle, the other closing on the tip of the metal triangle. I put the iron back on the board, gather up Horatio in my arms, and jog to the bathroom.

I can already feel the burn growing hot. Holding the baby in my left arm, I turn on the tap and run cool water over my right hand. My hand radiates heat. When I take it out from the running water, I can see a brand on my palm, a bold red chevron.

Still holding Horatio around his waist with my left arm, I try to rummage around in the medicine cabinet for burn ointment, but all I can find are Zoë's creams from Crabtree and Evelyn. Horatio, frustrated, kicks his legs and shrieks. I try the drawer. I've just managed to find the ointment when Horatio kicks his leg hard into my groin. I double over; I almost drop him. His head glances off the sink as I bend over coughing.

Horatio screams. I set him down on the floor, and then I sit on the toilet seat, nauseated from pain. Horatio sits on the floor, his face contorted. He screams in displeasure, but I let him howl for a moment. I take the burn cream from the drawer and spread it on my hand, and then I find the gauze and, as best I can with my left hand, wrap some around my palm. Only then do I turn my attention back to Horatio. He's red in the face, his lips puffed-out, and he looks at me accusingly as he cries.

I pick him up and hold him to my chest and bounce him. I try to think of the songs I used to sing to Toby and Cordelia. He cries louder, and I sing to him, *Hush little baby, don't say a word, Daddy's gonna buy you a mockingbird. And if that mockingbird don't sing, Daddy's gonna buy you a diamond ring.* His crying quiets down, but even as I sing the words I realize that here's an entire children's song about post-purchase dissonance.

\* \* \*

At night, after I've finally gotten Horatio in bed, I sit in the den and roll myself a joint. It's not easy with my bandaged hand. I'm fucking exhausted from looking after the baby.

The red mark on Horatio's forehead has turned purple, and I know I'll have to explain to Zoë. In the evening, I managed to change his diaper again, and then I gave him another bottle while he lay on the couch. He fell asleep still holding it—I touched his head, but he didn't wake. He was sleeping so soundly that I was able to pick him up and carry him upstairs to his room. There was something heart-breaking in his helplessness.

At nine Zoë still hasn't returned, so I decide to put a disk in the DVD player. I choose *La Dolce Vita* from the collection. I sit on the couch and light up the spliff. It's been so long that I cough out most of my first drag. My eyes water. The second drag goes down a bit easier. When the film starts, I'm impressed by the picture on the new television—the opening scenes of the helicopter ferrying the statue of Jesus over Rome look spectacular on the wide-screen.

I take a couple of more drags off the joint and then pinch it out, pleasantly buzzed. I'm watching Anita Ekberg bathe in the Trevi fountain when Zoë finally comes in. She's carrying a leather attaché.

She scents the air. "Are you smoking dope?" She looks at me with disgust. "What is wrong with you? Why can't you grow up?"

"You once told me you'd rejuvenate me," I say. "Make up your mind."

She drops the briefcase on the floor and sits down on the couch. "What happened to your hand?"

I wave away the question. "Don't you want to watch this?" I ask.

"You know I don't like old films."

I let this pass. I can tell she's still angry about this afternoon. "How about some music then?"



She nods, but she doesn't look happy about it. I get up off the couch and switch off the television.

The smoke has made me sentimental, and I know what I want to hear. I go to the rack and search through the records until I find *The Velvet Underground and Nico*. I pull the disc from its sleeve, run the record brush along its surface, and then hand the album cover to Zoë. "Andy Warhol did the cover art."

She gives me a look of incomprehension, as if I had referenced an obscure renaissance master. "I'm taking a class," she says suddenly.

"That's good." I look at the track listing on the record label and decide that track three is the safest bet for Zoë—Nico singing "Femme Fatale."

"I bought the book just this afternoon." She upturns the attaché and a literature anthology spills onto the floor. "You *could* act pleased."

"I am," I say. I nudge the tone-arm over to the third band. "Good for you." I gently lower the needle into the groove.

"You could probably get this on CD you know." She shoves the anthology back into her case. "They've re-released a lot of old music."

"I like vinyl," I say.

"It's popping."

"Just listen." I move over to the couch and sit down beside her. When I touch her back, she stiffens. The static settles down and we hear Lou Reed's guitar—tinny, thin, slightly out of tune—begin the track. And then there are Nico's flat Germanic vocals: *Here she comes, you better watch your step.*

"What do you think?" I ask.

"I think she can't sing," Zoë says.

“Just listen,” I say again. “You might like it. Laura and I must have listened to this at a thousand parties.”

“Why do you only like old things?” She looks to be on the verge of tears.

And then it dawns on me. “You saw the note.”

“What else do I have?” She lets her accent drop. She sounds like a frightened girl from small-town Missouri. “What am I going to do if you leave me?”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” I say. “I’m not going to leave you.” But I put my hand in my pocket and feel Cordelia’s note.

She gets up from the couch and walks to the door. She turns back and says, “I thought it would be better with Horatio.”

“Everything’s okay,” I say. “Don’t worry.”

She walks out of the room. I keep the Velvets spinning, and I think about what Zoë has just said. She thought that a baby would keep us together. Could she have gotten it any more wrong?

The first side finishes, and I turn the record over. I’m listening to “I’ll Be Your Mirror” when the phone rings. I pick it up on the second ring and hope that it hasn’t woken Horatio.

“Dad?” It’s Toby. He sounds uneasy. “I need help. I hate to ask, because I know you don’t think I can do anything right, but I’m all alone here.”

“What do you mean?”

“I sent those two girls home, like you said. But now the cook’s quit.”

“Cowboy Boots?”

“I told him that he needed to put more fries on a plate, and he just walked out.”

“I’ll be there as soon as I can,” I say.

\* \* \*

I get in the Volvo and for the third time today I make the drive along the interstate, into town, and to the edge of campus. It's raining hard, and I still have a buzz on from the joint; I suddenly find myself appreciating the Volvo's reputation for safety. When I get to the restaurant, it's the dead time—after the dinner rush but before the hungry drunks start looking for something to sop up the alcohol in their stomach. I run in the rain across the parking lot.

Inside, water drips from my coat onto the dining room's new carpet. To my relief, Toby has turned down the floodlights. But not a single booth is occupied.

Toby raises his bandaged hand to me and I raise my own bandaged hand back. I walk up to the counter and glance down the hall. The graffiti walls are still bare, save my quote from *Richard the Second*. "Have we had any customers at all today?"

He shakes his head. "Not many." He looks unhappy. "I thought maybe the coupon would bring them in."

I feel for him. I know he wants the restaurant to succeed. "Maybe later," I say, "when the drunks come out."

"Will you work the kitchen?" he asks. "My hand hurts whenever I'm even near the grill."

I glance down at my own bandaged hand. "I'll work the kitchen, I say.

I push my way through the swinging double doors. I walk past the fryers and to the grill. Despite the empty dining room, the entire grill is turned on. I reach across it and turn off half the surface. Even being this near the heat causes my hand to radiate pain.

I go to the serving window and stare out into the dining room. Toby is sitting at one of the booths reading when two customers come in, a couple, probably grad students. They carry a single umbrella, and they laugh and shake water off of themselves. They hang on each other without any sense of embarrassment, his hand in her back pocket.

Their clothes are bargain-basement, not hip, just cheap, and I can tell from one look that they'll be using the coupon: two burgers for the price of one. Before they've even ordered, I go to the walk-in fridge, take out two of the small patties and lay them on the grill. I keep my bandaged right hand behind my back. I salt and pepper the patties, and then I take two buns out from the plastic sack on the counter.

"Two-fer-one burgers," Toby yells.

I walk up to the window so I don't have to shout back. "Anything to drink?"

"Two waters," he says.

I squint out into the dim light of the dining room. The couple has moved to a booth, where they sit side by side on the same bench. Their hands are intertwined on the tabletop.

I walk back to the grill; the heat is almost unbearable. The burgers have turned brown around the edges and a puddle of pink juice has formed on top. I pick up the spatula with my left hand and clumsily flip them over.

The burgers finish cooking, and I place them on their buns, dress them with lettuce and pickles and garnish the plate with a twig of parsley. I start to put the plate in the window, but then I reconsider. I walk back to the prep table and throw on a couple of handfuls of potato chips.

"Order up," I yell through the counter window. Toby looks at me questioningly when he sees the chips on the side. "Who knows," I say, "maybe they'll come back."

Toby carries off the plate of burgers. I pick up the cordless phone from its base and take it into the walk-in fridge. Toby will probably stay up front behind the counter, but the fridge is the one place where I'm guaranteed some privacy, and this is a conversation I really don't want him to hear. I carefully pull the door almost-closed behind me, leaving it ajar so that the light stays on inside.

The fridge is quiet; the light from the overhead bulb dim. Wire racks stand against each wall, a narrow aisle between them. There are three plastic barrels of pickles at the back of the fridge. I pull one out and sit on it. I lean my back against the metal rack. The cool air of the fridge feels good on my hand.

I take out the note from Cordelia. I unfold it and let it rest on my lap. Holding the phone in my left hand, I dial the number with my thumb.

It takes her a long time to pick up. "Hello," she says. "Hello?" I can tell I've woken her.

I hesitate. "It's me," I say at last.

There's a long silence, and I wonder if I should just hang up the phone. "What do you want?" she asks. It's not a friendly question.

"I never know."

She snorts. "Well, that's never stopped you from acting."

The rack to my left is filled with bags of shredded lettuce. "No," I agree, "I'm the anti-Hamlet." I try to think of what else I can say. I take a look through the lettuce, checking the use-by dates. Toby hasn't been rotating the stock. "I'm thinking of finishing my dissertation."

"Is that what you've called me?"

"I found the manuscript. Maybe you could be my advisor. I think Dr. Jenkins died."

"You want advice on your dissertation?" she asks. "My advice is to forget it. You're better at selling hamburgers."

On the rack above the lettuce there's a small box of hamburger patties, allowed to thaw so that they'll cook faster. Since business has been slow, the meat will probably have to be thrown out.

"I'm discontent. I regret starting the restaurant."

She hesitates and then says, "Don't you remember why you never finished your dissertation?"

“Because of Toby,” I say. “Because of Shakesteer’s.”

“Bullshit. You never finished it because your dissertation was crap.”

“Everyone’s dissertation is crap,” I point out.

“No. Yours was real crap. You were trying to argue things that made no sense. For every villain you could find that was driven by greed, there was another who was motivated by something else. Even your title was nonsense. *Put Money in Thy Purse*—Iago and Othello were both driven by jealousy, not money.”

“I had a fix for that. I think.”

I study the plastic tubs of mayonnaise on the shelf opposite me. There’s the sound of a fan whirring as the condenser kicks in.

“I’m not even sure if I believe in villains any more,” I say.

There’s a long pause. “People do villainous things,” she says at last.

“Do you remember the ending of *Othello*? Where Othello looks at Iago’s feet to see if he has cloven hooves?”

“I’ve seen your feet, remember?”

“That’s a real villain. Nowadays we just think people are complex.”

To my surprise, she laughs. I decide to keep on the theme. “Wouldn’t it be nice to think that some people are dedicated to evil? Wouldn’t you like to picture Bush saying, ‘since I cannot prove a thinker, I am determined to prove a villain?’”

She laughs again.

And then from outside the fridge, I hear the doors to the dining room swing open and closed. “Dad,” Toby calls out.

I don't answer. I sit still so as not to make a sound. He pushes closed the door of the fridge. I'm not locked in—there's a handle on the inside—but the light switches off, and I sit in darkness. "Dad," he calls out again.

"David," Laura says. "What do you want?" The way she says it, it's a different question this time.

I don't say anything. Through the thick walls of the fridge, I can faintly hear Toby calling out again. "Dad?" He sounds worried now. "Where are you?"

I have a memory of Toby, from when he was still small. It was Christmastime, and I had taken him to the shopping mall. I was window-shopping, and when I looked around, I realized Toby wasn't by my side. I spun around. There was no sign of him. I began to retrace my steps, but the mall was packed with people. And then I heard him calling out, "Daddy?" I pushed my way through the crowds, and when I got to him, his face was screwed up in tears. "Daddy!" he called out to me, like an accusation.

"David?" Laura says.

I sit there quietly in the dark. And then I think of Horatio this afternoon, sitting on the bathroom floor and crying after I bumped his head. He clenched his fists and puffed out his lips in anger.

Toby calls, "Dad, where are you?"

"David?" Laura says again.

I reach out in the darkness and brush my bandaged hand against the cool of the bagged lettuce. "I have to go," I say.

## Adult Education

*Tuesday*

I've printed my name on the syllabus as Elizabeth Annette Miller, not Lizzie Anne as I'm called on the show. The syllabus is three pages, stapled. At the top I've centered *Journey into Theater*, and on the back page I've included a brief résumé listing my MFA in Drama and my stage work. I don't mention the show. Instead, I've written *Extensive experience in television*.

I hand out the syllabus and ask the class to read silently. There are nine students. I flip through their index cards trying to find the name of the one non-geriatric. Steven. An engineer.

It's my first night teaching at Pin Oak Community College, and I've tried to look professional if not professorial: a wool skirt, a black twin set. I wear my hair down, of course, not in the pigtails that I wear on television.

A black woman with silver hair looks up from the syllabus. "I thought we were going to learn to act and all," she says.

"This is the history of theater." Smile, I tell myself. "If you want to take a methods class, you can."

A stooped man in bib overalls pushes himself up from his chair. He shakes his head. "You're at Pinocchio Community College." He limps toward the door. "This is adult education," he says over his shoulder. "Noncredit."

The woman rises to her feet, too. "We're just here to have fun, honey." She smiles apologetically. "I'm not working on a doctorate."

"It's personal enrichment," I say.



And my class is down to seven. Fewer than nine and the college will pay only a percentage of my salary. “Anyone else?” I ask. A grizzled man shrugs and rises to his feet. Another white-haired woman follows. “Sorry, dear. Too much reading.”

The engineer and four grannies remain, either out of inertia or fear. “Right,” I say. “Let’s get started. It all begins with the Greeks.” I take my notes to the blackboard and copy out the word *Tragöidä*.

From behind me I hear the engineer’s voice. “Excuse me.” *Don’t ask it*, I will him. *Don’t*. But he does. “Will you talk to us about MasterKidz Theatre?”

*Wednesday*

“Places everyone, please,” Phyllis shouts out. She sits in the canvas chair that she brings with her on the days we tape. *Director* is stenciled on the seatback in white paint.

Robert’s already on the set, sitting on one of the low stools. He has a long cardboard muzzle affixed over his nose in imitation of a wolf, and he wears a shiny tuxedo and a set of pointy ears. This is his costume for the play we’ll film tomorrow, but even Hollywood makeup wouldn’t transform Robert into a convincing wolf. He is big beaked, even without the wolf snout, and red-haired. He resembles some rare tropical bird. A small one, preyed upon by everything.

Sammy’s talking to the cameraman. He sets down his coffee mug and jogs toward me.

I’ve got my hair in pigtails, and I’m wearing a red cape. My hemline is too short to be entirely healthy for children’s television. Our studio audience, a handful of preschoolers, sits on the floor. Their mothers hover offstage.

Kansas City 56 is one of those no-budget local channels that you flip past looking for something better, but it turns out that your kids will watch anything. And they’re such a big market that even our show manages to stay on the air.

“I need a huge favor,” Sammy says. He’s thin and pale, and his glasses make him look like an anemic Buddy Holly. Sammy makes the cartoon Vanz Ant that we sometimes air. Each episode, Vanz, a carpenter ant, sets out with a belt-full of tools to knock together something new. The other ants tell him he’s got it all wrong—“We eat houses; we don’t build them”—but Vanz keeps right on creating. Children love it.

“They need me on set,” I say.

“It’s something evil,” Sammy whispers, in the hope that this will tempt me.

It does. “What?”

“It’s about the sponsorship.”

The station has been looking for someone to sponsor Sammy’s cartoon. It’s a great idea because with some help to polish the animation, Vanz could be really big. Soon Sammy will no longer be moving his models around in an old warehouse in Kansas City’s northland. He’ll be picked up by the networks or making films.

Phyllis stares. “Chop, chop,” she shouts. Phyllis, sixty-plus, has on tan leather trousers and a sleeveless leopard print top. She’s kept her figure remarkably well. She sweeps up her hair in a chignon, and she carefully paints in her cat eyes with eyeliner and dark eye shadow. Sammy and I call her Sunset Boulevard behind her back.

“Later,” Sammy says. “But it’s important.”

I walk onto the stage. Robert and I each choose a toddler from the audience. I pick up a little girl and place her on my knee. “No,” she shrieks. “Don’t want to.” She smells of old pee. Her diaper squishes against my bare leg. Robert picks up a boy and settles him on his lap. This is the unscripted part of the show where we introduce the cartoons.

“Roll tape,” Phyllis calls out.

“Hello, Bobby,” I say, my voice sickly-cute. I smile at the camera in a way that I hope is not fully demented.

“Hi, Lizzie Anne,” he says. Robert can’t be bothered to smile. He wants only to write our scripts, but we can’t afford to hire another actor. Each week, Robert pens another pretentious masterpiece of children’s theater for us to perform. Think Puss in Boots meets Bergman. Heavy on the Bergman.

“You look fantastic,” I say. He glares. The camera’s on me, so he knows he can. “But you’re not really a wolf, right? The children don’t need to be afraid?”

Phyllis circles her hand to say *get on with it*. The camera pans to Robert. “No, that’s right, Lizzie Anne.” His voice is flat. “I’m just pretending to be a wolf.”

I’m back on camera. “You can see this week’s MasterKidz Theatre production in just a bit.” I lean in and stage-whisper to the little girl on my lap, “But right now let’s see a cartoon.” I give my biggest, fakiest smile.

“Yay,” the girl says without enthusiasm.

“Today Vanz Ant is building a piano,” I say. “Right after this message. Don’t go away.”

“Cut,” yells Phyllis. “That’s crap, but it’ll do. Next bit.”

I put the girl down. “Where’s cartoon?” she asks.

“We don’t show the cartoons now,” I say, keeping the syrup in my voice. “They put them in later.”

Her face clouds. “I want to see Vanz Ant.”

“You can watch it on Saturday,” Phyllis says. She turns to the crowd. “Where’s her mother?”

This Saturday, when the show airs, will be my thirty-third birthday. I’ve worked with Phyllis and Robert for the last six years. After my MFA, I took parts where I could find them, and I got my

equity card. My résumé lists the productions I was in but not the parts I played: friend to Mrs. Wilson; second woman; a chambermaid. When I got the job with MasterKidz Theatre, I told myself that it was a gig to pay the bills and that I would still go to casting calls, but I haven't auditioned in years. I've always heard stories of actresses heading for Broadway or Hollywood only to end up waiting tables. But why waste the money on a plane ticket? I've found you can fail just as well right here in Kansas City.

"Christ!" Robert says. He sets his child on the floor. "Can we take a break?" Robert stands, and I see that a dark stain has spread across his trouser leg.

"Vanz Ant!" The girl has worked herself up to tears now. "I want to watch Vanz Ant."

I can't really blame her. Vanz is the best thing on TV56.

The girl begins to wail, and there's still no sign of her mother. I should pick her up, I suppose, but I walk off the set. "A quick break?" I say to Phyllis. She takes a cigarette from her purse and stares at the crying girl.

I slip past the sawhorses and *Walk gently! Animator at work!* signs to find Sammy bent over his Styrofoam set. Sammy doesn't need much space in the warehouse; he's a one-person studio. His area is cluttered with carts full of computers and hard drives. An ancient Radio Shack boom box in silver plastic sits on his desk. Above the desk, along the walls, hang his storyboards—clumsy comic strips which show in excruciating detail each shot he has to animate. Sammy sketches these out with a fat pencil on sheets torn from Big Chief tablets.

He walks to a digital camera mounted on a tripod. He looks to a monitor and switches back and forth between the current shot and his last.

Sammy is blasting old music, as he always does—The Violent Femmes playing "Add It Up." He has a cardboard box filled with cassette tapes, none more recent than this. I doubt that Sammy's

listened to anything new for years. He doesn't shop for clothes, either. He wears the same plaid shirts and Wrangler jeans and Chuck Taylors that he must have bought when he was in college.

“What’s the big favor?” I ask.

He walks back to his set and makes a tiny adjustment to Vanz's forehead. “Just a sec,” Sammy says.

Vanz never speaks. He furrows his brow or tilts his head or lets his antennae droop to register how perplexed he is by the world. Ever watched an old Chaplin film and found yourself laughing one moment and crying the next? That's Vanz's genius, too.

But the animation is sometimes rough. Sammy animates every second of it himself. He cheats when he can. His worker ants don't move their mouths when they speak. He uses stock footage of Vanz laughing and clapping. With some assistants to help him, Sammy could make Vanz look great.

“Well?” I say.

Sammy steps back from his set and checks the image on his camera. Finally, he looks at me. “Have you heard who my sponsor is?”

I shake my head.

“Timber-Wolf.”

I shake my head again.

“They’re local,” he says. “They make chainsaws.”

He motions me over to his desk. I thread my way through the umbrella lights. Sammy’s desk is cluttered with spare mouths and eyes. He points to a tiny chainsaw, just Vanz’s size.

“That's great, though,” I say. “You're on your way up.”

“Chainsaws,” he repeats. “He's a *carpenter* ant.”

He looks up and I follow his eyes to the storyboards. Exterior. Establishing shot of the house where the carpenter ants tunnel. The camera tracks forward and then sideways along the house, revealing patches of snow, before finally pushing in on a downspout clogged with ice. I recognize this as one of Sammy's timesaving tricks—by simply moving the camera, he says, you can create the illusion of movement in the film without having to animate anything.

Sammy steps back and motions me to the next section of storyboard. Vanz surveys the ice that bubbles from the waterspout. He claps his hands in excitement and picks up a tiny chainsaw. Iris in on the Timber-Wolf logo. Iris out to a wide shot of Vanz. He fires up the saw and begins to carve the ice. The worker ants approach. "Carpenter ants tunnel," they explain. "We make paths in wood." Vanz smiles and waves, not disagreeing. He puts on his safety goggles and returns to his ice sculpture. Close up of Vanz's feet as he steps on a piece of ice. Cut to Vanz in Buster Keaton fall, his feet skidding, his face registering surprise. Cut to chainsaw, spinning in the air above Vanz. Follow its trajectory downward. The caption reads GRRRR. The saw hurtles toward Vanz, now flat on his back. The saw slices through Vanz's abdomen. Shock cut to blood spurting in arterial gushes. Reaction shot of other ants, their mouths wide in horror. "I told you so," one of them says.

Even though it's only a pencil sketch, the flying blood and guts makes me queasy. It's a petulant act, I realize. A little boy breaking his favorite toy because he's been told how he can play with it. "You're not really going to film this," I say.

"I checked the contract. He has to use the saw in an episode. They don't specify how."

"You'll never get this on the air."

"That's the favor," he says.

I look at him. "No," I say.

“You do a live show next week, right? Get this cued up instead of the one that’s been previewed.”

I consider this. I know the technicians; I could get it done. “They’ll know I helped you.”

“I’ve got two weeks to show Timber-Wolf what I’ve come up with.” Sammy points to his set, already frosted with snow. “This is a preemptive first strike.”

“We’d never work in children’s television again,” I say.

“That’s the beauty part.”

“It would be like Pee Wee Herman getting caught with his dick in his hand. It would be the end.”

“I’ve been thinking that I could do something for adults,” Sammy says. “Like the Simpsons but claymation.”

“We’d get some media coverage,” I say.

“We’d get a lot of media coverage,” he replies.

### *Thursday*

I balance a Big Gulp in my lap and try to work the clutch and the stick. I reach across to the passenger seat and dig around at the bottom of my purse for my phone. These days I drive a lot. After Allison moved away, I gave up my efficiency apartment near the Plaza and rented a whole house in the sticks for less than half the price. I’ve isolated myself, and it may also have been a false economy because I now buy gas. And since Pin Oak will only pay me five-ninths of a salary, I’m probably not breaking even on the teaching.

I have Allison on speed dial, but still I have to take my eyes off the road to push the buttons. She answers, and I can hear the baby babbling behind her.

“Should I sabotage my career?” I ask.

“First you have to get one.”

“I mean in children’s television.”

“Happy birthday,” she says. “In advance. In case I can’t reach you.”

Allison has always been my closest friend, but she’s moved to Chicago. Her doctor has become her husband; she’s stopped working. Allison used to be a lawyer, but now she’s the original Earth Mother. It’s as if she had a personality transplant. Only no one thought first to screen the donor for impairments.

“I’m the wrong person for the job,” I say. “I’m not maternal.”

“You are,” she says. “You just don’t know it yet.”

A pickup with American flags mounted on the mirrors cuts me off. I brake hard, sloshing Diet Coke onto the seat cushion. “I don’t like children,” I say. I find a paper napkin in my purse and dab at the cushion.

“You’ll feel differently about your own. That changes everything.”

“What a terrifying thought. Thank you.”

“You know this is a defensive posture,” she says. “Those grapes are sour anyway.”

I haven’t seen Allison since the baby. We used to drink together. Now she worries that even a single glass of wine can find its way into her baby’s milk. I say, “I don’t even want to think about my birthday.”

“It’s a good age,” she says. “It’s the age Jesus was.” She pauses. “When he died.”

I merge onto the highway and head towards the city. “I’m not even sure what to do. If I drive into town, I can’t drink. I won’t be able to drive back home.”

“It’s the speed records used to spin at,” she says. “Back when we had records.”

“I don’t want to spend my birthday alone.”

The baby starts to cry. “I’ve got to go,” she says.



\* \* \*

The grannies don't show. Steven the engineer and I wait in uncomfortable silence. Every time we shift in our seats, the noise echoes in the tiled classroom. Finally I go to the board with my notes. "Let's start anyway." I write some terms on the board: *chorus*, *catharsis*, *ekkyklêma*, *deus ex machina*. I make a check mark next to the first term and read from my notes, "The chorus in Greek drama served as a reminder that there are forces in the world beyond the desires of men."

"Let's have class over a drink," Steven says.

I turn around. He's a Dockers kind of guy, but he's not entirely unattractive. I've seen worse. "I'm not sure that would be appropriate," I say.

"Or we could go see a film sometime."

I rub out the words I've written with my hand. "Let's call it quits for tonight. We'll see if anyone shows on Tuesday." I rub my fingers against my palm. The yellow chalk grits on my hand; it stains my fingers.

On his way out the door, Steven says, "I can take a rain check." He gives me his business card.

*Friday*

"Action," Phyllis yells.

I pull the red hood from my head. Instead of a basket of goodies for Grandma, I hold a battered suitcase with a *West Indies* sticker on the side.

The scene begins with me in a sunny field filled with paper flowers. The overhead lights are so bright that I can feel my makeup running. Water beads on my forehead. I step from the field into the forest, where the lights are mercifully dimmed and covered with blue foil. Cardboard trees

surround me. "It's dark," I say timidly. I look around. "As if a curtain has fallen, hiding everything I have ever known."

"Whoa," Phyllis says. "Ouch. What happened there?" And then she remembers to say, "Cut!"

I step forward out of the lights so I can see. "What was wrong with that?" I ask.

Phyllis takes a long drag on a Virginia Slim.

Robert, in wolf ears and snout, sits in a folding chair next to her. He shakes his head at me and then turns to Phyllis. He jerks about with short, nervous movements. "Has she even read the book?"

"Of course I have," I lie. Last week Robert gave me Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* to read. Robert always bases the skit we do on a fairytale, and over the years we've run through most of them. But, of course, Robert doesn't want to simply do Little Red Riding Hood with a girl, a wolf, and a woodsman; he wants to look for the sub-text. In our version, Red, having moved from the light of the field into the dark of the forest, falls into a depression. Her grandmother has abandoned her. Walter Wolf appears at first to be kind and sympathetic.

We were supposed to tape this yesterday. We're behind schedule, and I just want to get it finished.

"Don't roll tape," Phyllis says to the cameraman. She waves the smoke away from her face and says to me, "This time, I don't want you to read your lines. I want you to just say what your character is feeling."

This is one of her favorite exercises. I walk back to my spot in the lights of the field. I look down, trying to gather myself into character, and then I again walk from the field into the cardboard forest. I pause and look around. "I feel that this is a bunch of crap," I say. "Our audience is three to six year olds. They haven't read Jean Rhys. And they don't care about the method."

“Listen, sweetie,” Phyllis says. Her voice is sharp. “You may not care about your art. That’s your problem. But I’d like to remind you of what Lee once said to me at the Studio.”

I walk from the set and stand in front of Phyllis’s chair. She tells me this story at least once a month. “We were sitting in this little café with Marlon and Marilyn,” she begins. The dramatis personae of this tale vary. The woman is always Marilyn, but the man has occasionally been James Dean, Paul Newman, or Steve McQueen. “There was a bowl of fruit on the table, and Lee picked up an apple. He said, ‘If you give me a fake apple, it had better be perfect. But give me a real apple . . .’”

She looks at me, waiting for me to show my appreciation.

“Right,” I say. “Got it.”

Robert nods his head enthusiastically, as if he’s pecking for insects. “Just because we’re filming for children, it doesn’t mean we have to dumb down our material.”

At university, I had a professor who assured me I was the real thing. “Don’t ever forget it,” he would say. “Don’t let the world beat it out of you.” Now I’m listening to two has-beens who-never-were debate whether or not I’m a real apple.

I can’t wait for Sammy to get that tape in my hands.

In the evening, I sit with my cats on my lap. Netflix has sent me *Fanny and Alexander*. I think, I’ve become the kind of woman who shares her house with cats.

I pause the film, and I consider how to introduce Vanz Ant next week. We’ll be broadcasting live from a shopping mall. Phyllis and Robert will be expecting me to talk about an old rerun—Vanz repairing floorboards the other ants have tunneled through—but instead I’ll smile sweetly and say, *Watch closely, kids, because Vanz Ant has an important lesson on chainsaw safety*. Robert will cock his head at Phyllis, but the show will be live, and the tape will play.

I wonder how badly our departures will hurt the show. Robert and Phyllis might find someone else to replace me, someone hungry enough she won't care that the job hardly pays, but Vanz Ant will be a bigger loss. We have some other cartoons that we show—a Russian knock-off of Tom and Jerry; some old Japanese anime, badly dubbed—but nothing like Vanz.

Of course, the station might pull MasterKidz Theatre from the air. Phyllis and Robert will plead ignorance, but they might not be believed. Perhaps it would be good for them. Shock therapy. An incentive to move ahead.

The phone rings, and I check the caller ID on the handset. Phyllis. I let it ring a few times before I decide to pick up.

“Thank God you're there,” she says. “There's a problem with the tape. We have to redo Red Riding Hood.”

“But it airs tomorrow morning.”

“How soon can you get here?”

### *Saturday*

The signboard has been taken down, but the menus still bear the old Denny's logo. It's the nearest restaurant to the warehouse, a weathered blue and orange box in a failing strip mall. We've been here before, and we know to take the corner booth nearest the television. I'm in sweatpants.

Robert, sans wolf ears and snout, still wears the wrinkled tux. All of us have slept only a couple of hours on the floor after the filming and editing.

Sammy has joined us this morning, too. He's been spending nights at the warehouse. A push to finish the carpenter ant chainsaw massacre.

The waitress recognizes us and turns on the television. She brings us the remote so that we can adjust the volume. Phyllis and Robert order pancakes. I'm hungry and tired, and I decide to allow myself a short stack. Sammy orders a hamburger.

"Everything on that?" the waitress asks. She's missing an eyetooth.

"Just ketchup," he says.

Robert flutters his hands. "A bit early in the day, isn't it?"

It's funny to see Robert in the wrinkled tux. He usually takes such pride in his appearance. I look at him and notice how carefully he combs his thin red hair over the bald spot at the back of his head. I'm sure Robert's gay, but in all the time I've known him, I've never heard him mention a lover. Or even a friend.

"It's starting," Phyllis says. She turns up the volume on the television.

"I don't like to eat," Sammy says.

Robert studies him. "Here or generally?"

Robert once gave me his novel to read, hundreds of unbound pages. I read a chapter and dog-eared random pages. I returned it a few weeks later, without a note, by leaving it atop his stool on the set.

The waitress brings our food. I slide hunks of margarine between my pancakes and let them melt. Phyllis and I both reach at the same time for the Mrs. Butterworth's.

"I have a theory," Robert says, "that pancakes were invented by syrup manufacturers."

"Shhh," Phyllis says. She gestures toward the television. Robert appears on screen in wolf costume. Sammy laughs. Phyllis lifts the remote and momentarily blasts the volume. "You look fantastic," I say on screen.

"Bitch," Robert says without irony.

Sammy takes the bun off his hamburger and inspects it. "If I could take a pill once a day instead of eating, I'd do it."

Phyllis puts down her fork. She pulls her cigarettes from her purse. "Does anybody mind?" she asks, holding up the pack.

Is there any chance she really did study at the Actors Studio? Sometimes I hope she'll surprise me by pulling from her handbag a tattered photo of herself squeezed between Lee and Marilyn.

On the television, Vanz Ant tugs a strand of hair from a comb and stretches it tight to serve as a piano wire. A couple at a nearby table laughs along.

The waitress returns with a dented pitcher of coffee. Phyllis points to me. "It's her birthday," she says. "Can we get a bottle of wine?"

The waitress looks around. "We don't have a liquor license." She kneels by the table and whispers. "I can bring you some cups," she says. "And there's a quick mart over there. But don't let nobody see."

"I'll go," Sammy says. I think he's relieved not to watch his own cartoon.

Vanz Ant finishes, and Robert and I are back on screen again with different toddlers in our laps. The couple at the table next to us has resumed their conversation, no longer interested.

The waitress returns with four red plastic cups. She places them on the table and winks.

Sammy comes back into the restaurant with a brown paper bag tucked half-under his shirt. He unwraps his purchase beneath the level of the table and then flashes it at us. A bottle of pee-yellow Thunderbird.

Robert shakes his head. "At least we won't have to worry about how to get the cork out."

"That stuff turns your mouth black," Phyllis says. "You didn't know?"

"It was cheap," Sammy says. "I don't drink wine."

Robert sloshes the yellow Thunderbird into each of our red plastic cups. On screen, I watch myself carry a shabby suitcase into the forest.

“Cheers,” says Phyllis. We clunk our cups together. “To a real apple.”

“God, yes,” Robert says. “But please don’t tell us that story again. I can’t bear it.”

“Happy Birthday,” Sammy says.

A sad thought: this is my birthday, and these are my friends.

They say the cut worm forgives the plough, but I don’t believe it. Robert and Phyllis will hate me for my betrayal. Sammy has slaved away at his video, spent nights without sleep. I can hardly refuse to play it now.

I raise my cup to my nose. The wine doesn’t have a bouquet; rather it throws fumes. I take a drink. It tastes of petrochemicals. Sammy sets his cup down on the table without trying it. Robert makes a face and shudders.

Phyllis turns off the television. We divide the bill.

In the parking lot, Phyllis says, “I forgot something.” She goes back inside. The others walk toward their cars, but I wait a moment and then follow Phyllis inside. I stand in the doorway watching her. She returns to our table, picks up Sammy’s cup of Thunderbird, and pours it down her throat. Then she picks up mine and does the same. I slip outside before she can catch me watching.

\* \* \*

I stand in front of the mirror and brush my tongue, trying to get the black off it. Toothpaste splatters on my dress. It’s the same little black dress I’ve had for years, the kind everyone is supposed to have in the closet but which I rarely wear. I take a washcloth and try to dab away the toothpaste. Then I hold a string of faux pearls to my neck. I decide against them.

I've decided that I am going out for my birthday. I will walk to my local bar, a dive called Carl's, which I've never been to. But I have a feeling that I'm looking for trouble by going to Carl's alone.

I order a Latin Manhattan.

The bartender holds her hand to her ear. "What?"

"Latin Manhattan," I shout. Patsy Cline sings "Walking after Midnight" on the jukebox.

She shakes her head. "What goes in it?"

"White Rum," I say. I try to think of what else. "Vermouth. Cherry juice."

"This isn't really the place for umbrella drinks," the bartender says. "I'll pour you a beer."

She sets the beer in front of me. The bar is smoky and dark. Men in jeans and caps with unfamiliar logos cluster together in groups. I must look as if I'm from Mars, standing here alone in my black dress. No one joins me at the bar.

My cell phone rings. It's Allison.

"Where are you?" she asks. "My God, I can barely hear you."

"A bar. In Empyrean. So far nobody has tried to pick me up."

"Don't be stupid," she says. "Go home. Rent a movie. Buy a pint of Ben and Jerry's. Take comfort where you find it."

I take a sip of beer. "You're a real help."

She's quiet for a moment. "Okay," she says. "Don't then. Call Sammy."

"He's the most sexless human being I know. Phyllis calls him the world's oldest virgin.

Robert calls him the idiot savant."

"Call that guy from your class."

"You think I should?"



She sighs. “Happy birthday,” she says.

I call Steven. I’ve never been the one to call first, but I dial the numbers. “This is,” I begin, but I can’t decide what name to use. “Elizabeth Miller,” I say, wincing at how formal I sound. “Your teacher.” I hate the rising inflection in my voice, as if I’m asking him who I am. “From Journey into Theater?”

“Hi,” he says. Monosyllabic, but it’s a start.

“What about that movie?” I say. “Is the offer still good?”

“Now?” There’s a long pause. “I can’t go out tonight, but we could watch something here.”

I hesitate. I hardly know him. But then I’ve already braved Carl’s tonight. I take down the directions.

Steven greets me at the door with a glass of wine. He’s made some effort at dressing for my arrival—a button-down shirt and a pair of slacks—but still I feel overdressed. “I’m glad you called,” he says. He reaches the glass out to me, holding it by the base.

“I’m driving,” I say.

“It’s good,” he says. He wafts the glass near my nose. “Ribera del Duero.” I shake my head. Steven shrugs and takes a sip. I have the feeling he’s had a glass or two already. “What then?”

“Diet Coke?”

He leads me into a foyer. An archway leads to the living room where the television quietly flickers. Steven touches my arm. “This way.” Suddenly a small child runs full speed at me from the living room. He grabs my legs. “I’m a little bear,” he says. “And you’re a big bear.” He must be two or three years old. He wears a pair of oversize glasses that make him look serious-minded.

“I’m a big bear?” I’m not sure how to react. I don’t want to seem too cold, but neither do I want him pressed up against my legs.

“Teddy,” Steven says, “can you shake hands?” The boy steps back and limply holds out his left hand to me. I give it a quick shake. “He’s not afraid of strangers,” Steven says. “I worry about that.”

“Come on, Daddy,” the boy says. He pulls on Steven’s hand.

“He’s mine for the weekend,” Steven says. He kneels down. “Let’s go finish your cartoon.”

We walk with Teddy into the living room. Steven places him on the couch and turns up the volume. It’s a cartoon I don’t recognize, but it looks as if it’s aimed at older children. “I’m going to get your drink,” Steven says to me. “Can you stay with him for just a moment? Until he’s settled here?”

I don’t know how to refuse. I sit in the armchair opposite Teddy. His mouth opens as he watches the cartoon. I pick up a copy of *Newsweek* from the coffee table and flip through it. I find the arts section in the back.

Teddy makes a noise like a hiccup. I look up from the magazine. He’s in tears. “What’s wrong?” I ask.

He points to the TV. “Bunny crying.”

I look at the television. A cartoon rabbit sits on the riverbank with his head in his hands. He sheds great streams of tears. Teddy is crying because the rabbit is crying. It almost gives me faith in humanity. Perhaps we have some innate capacity for empathy.

“Don’t worry,” I say. “I’ve seen this one,” I say, although I haven’t. “Everything turns out okay.” I pick up the remote and flip through the channels until I find another cartoon. Teddy still cries. I move to the couch and sit next to him. I take off his glasses and dry them on my dress. I wipe the tears from his cheeks with my thumbs.

Steven pokes his head into the doorway and motions for me to follow him. I slip Teddy’s glasses back over his ears and leave him in front of the TV.

In the hallway, Steven says, "I know. It's terrible to park him in front of the television."  
He leads me to the kitchen. "But sometimes I just need the peace."

I sit on a tall chair at a butcher-block counter. The kitchen is blue tiled and cozy. Steven hands me a glass of cola. A wedge of lime sits atop the ice.

"It's my birthday," I say.

Steven sits down next to me. "Many happy returns." He clinks the base of his wineglass against the side of my tumbler. "Have you made a birthday wish?"

I roll my glass between my fingers. "My wish comes true next Saturday," I say.

He looks at me expectantly.

"I want a change."

He takes a drink of his wine. "When his cartoon finishes, I'll put Teddy to bed and then we can watch a movie."

I rattle the ice in my glass. "My career wasn't supposed to turn out like this."

He looks me in the eyes. "I've watched your show," he says. "With Teddy, I mean." He leans in to kiss me.

I pull back and offer him my cheek. "Let's talk," I say.

"Sorry." He gets up from the table and pours himself another glass of wine.

I sip my drink and try desperately to think of something to say. "Why are you taking the class?" I ask.

He brings his glass and the bottle back to the counter. "I thought adult education sounded a little kinky." He laughs. I don't react, and he hurries on. "I'm joking. I like the class."

"I wanted to finish with tragedy last time so we could move on to comedy." I click my fingernails against his wineglass. "Comedies were performed for Dionysus."

He reaches out and brushes the backs of his fingers against my hair. “You should wear it in pigtails,” he says.

It’s not the first time I’ve heard this. It seems I can’t escape from Lizzie Anne. So many guys want me to be her, some strange combination of their mother and a little girl. It churns my stomach. I stand. “I’ve got to go.”

Steven stands too. “What’s happened?”

I walk down the hallway towards the front door. “I don’t think the course will run,” I say. “The bursar will refund your money.”

“What’s wrong?” he asks. He follows me down the hall.

I open the door. “Here’s a last fact for you, though.” I turn back to him. “In the comedies, the actors wore huge red phalluses that dangled between their legs. Isn’t that interesting?”

### *Sunday*

Vanz lies on his back. A chainsaw protrudes from his gut. His eyes have been replaced by tiny Xs. A puddle of Play-Doh blood surrounds him. It’s like an *ekkyklēma* from a Greek tragedy, the cart rolled out on stage to show the bloody aftermath of a tragedy. Agamemnon’s butchered remains paraded for all to see.

Sammy hasn’t heard me come in. He roots among his cassette tapes and then slaps one into the player. The Replacements sing “I Will Dare.”

He turns and sees me. “Have you slept?” I ask.

He shakes his head. “I’m almost finished with this. Then I just need the reaction shot of the worker ants.” He punches his remote and shows me several seconds of stop-motion blood gushing.

“I can’t do it,” I say.

He looks at me. "It's a little late to tell me now."

"Kids love Vanz."

He turns off the monitor. "Kids like to be shocked," he says.

I gesture toward the ant carcass. "Maybe this is catharsis enough." Sammy looks at me without comprehension. "Vanz is the best thing going," I say. "Take the sponsorship. Compromise a little."

Sammy looks as if he might cry. "I'm supposed to have something to show Timber-Wolf next week." He takes off his glasses and cleans them on his shirttail. "I've spent all my time on this."

I walk to his storyboards. "What if Vanz were just to carve something miraculous from the ice? A self-portrait with chainsaw?" I point to the scene where Vanz first picks up the saw. "How long would it take to shoot a new ending?"

Sammy shakes his head. "Forever," he says. He thinks for a moment. "Three minutes is a hundred and eighty seconds. Over two thousand frames."

"You've got a week. I could help you animate."

"You couldn't."

"You could teach me."

"It takes a long time to learn."

"I could try," I say. "What would it hurt?"

He thinks about this. "You could try," he says at last. He sits down and sketches out a shot that I can animate. No camera movement, no facial expressions. A worker ant running across the pavement towards Vanz.

"That's it?" I say. It doesn't look like much.

"Learn how to do this first."

He goes to his desk and finds one of his worker ants. He shows me how to move the character, to twist the mechanical frame underneath its plasticine exterior. “Don’t bump the table,” he says. He shows me how to compare shots on the video monitor. “Stand behind the lights when you take the picture. You don’t want shadows,” he says.

“Go home and sleep,” I tell him. “I’ll work on this for a while.”

He hesitates and then he nods. “Don’t touch anything except the character you’re moving.”

“You’ve told me,” I say.

He turns back at the door. “Keep checking the playback to make sure your animation is lifelike.”

Left alone, I rummage through Sammy’s cassettes. I know what I want to hear, and I know he has it. At last I find it. The Pogues. I cue up “Fairytale of New York,” and I listen for the lines that have been on my mind. Shane MacGowan complains, “I could have been someone,” and Kirsty MacColl answers him, “Well, so could anyone.”

I didn’t tell Sammy of my own cathartic reaction to Vanz’s death. Last night I went online and searched through casting calls. I found a listing in Chicago: open auditions for *The Misanthrope*. A comedy, one that speaks to me. It will be expensive to fly, but I’ll go. I’ll stay with Allison. I’ll see her little girl.

I let the tape keep playing, and I begin to animate my character. Soon I understand why Sammy takes his shortcuts, creates the illusion of movement when he can. Animation takes forever. Gently move the character. Check this shot against the last. Adjust. Step away from the table. Take the picture. Do these things twelve times to get one second of film.

The tape clicks off and I turn it over. When it stops again, I check the clock. I’ve been working for nearly an hour. I remember Sammy’s admonition, and I stop to watch the playback of

my work. The animation is graceless, clumsy. The ant slowly staggers forward to take a single jerky step.

I watch the video a second time, and then I watch it again. I'm struck by the image. Sammy cautioned me to keep the animation lifelike, and perhaps that's just what I've achieved. True, my character has hardly moved, has barely stumbled toward the goal in front of it, yet what could be more lifelike than this? Like life, I think, it takes so long to get anywhere.

## Ars Poetica

Tierney glanced again at the drawing. It looked like nothing—a few squiggly lines. He hadn't expected a Raggedy-Andy kind of heart, of course, but his cardiologist hadn't even bothered to sketch the fist-shaped mass from a biology textbook. The only things that had mattered to him were the arteries stemming from the empty space in the middle of the page, each artery crossed by two harsh lines; each intersection flagged by a number, the percentage blockage.

Tierney returned the paper to his pocket. He stood waiting, but the fat maitre d' continued to study his clipboard, ignoring Tierney's presence. The Pasha's Tent, an expensive and pretentious restaurant, wouldn't have been Tierney's first choice on a usual day. Here in central Istanbul someone had built a Disneyfied Turkey inside a modern hotel—Tierney had walked through the glass and steel atrium to arrive at an enormous canopy of red felt filled with kilims and hanging lanterns.

Still looking down, the maitre d' at last said, "*Merhaba*, Sir. Good day." He scratched at his paper with a pen. "You have got reservations?"

"A few," Tierney said.

"*Efendim?*" The man looked up, puzzled. "Yes? How many peoples?"

"A friend will be joining me." Tierney took a sip from the glass he'd carried from the hotel bar, spilling expensive bourbon over its rim with each step. *Friend*. The word sounded false as soon as he said it. A former student? A potential lover? A woman laughably too young for him?

The maitre d', sweaty and swarthy and bedecked with gold chains, ran his eyes up and down Tierney. He frowned. "Today we are very busy." He looked at his clipboard and clicked his ballpoint.



Tierney took another drink. Yesterday evening he had gone for the angiogram—his groin shaved and anesthetized, a catheter shoved up his femoral artery, dye forced into his blood. Afterwards the doctor had told him to go home, to rest, to drink plenty of fluids. That last piece of advice was one that Tierney had decided to follow.

The maitre d' clicked his ballpoint. "*Inshallah*, I am call you on intercom." He clicked his pen once more. "Your name?"

Tierney glanced again into the tent. Most of the tables stood empty, and Tierney could see no reason for the snub. On another day, he would simply have walked out, but he had already arranged to meet Zeynep here. "Peacock," Tierney said. "Drew." He drained his bourbon, turned away from the tent and walked back across the atrium to the hotel bar.

The bar was airport-lounge bland—chrome sling-backed chairs and tinted glass—but at least it wasn't Ottoman kitsch. And people had gathered here, unlike the deserted restaurant. The tables were filled with foreign businessmen, upscale tourists, and rich Turks. Tierney knew he looked out of place in his tattered khakis and T-shirt. He took his same seat at the bar. "Bourbon. Rocks." He'd been ordering the good stuff, imported.

"Slow down," the bartender said. She was dark-haired and slight and pretty in the way that youth can lend itself to relatively ordinary features. She poured him a fresh glass. "It's not a race."

"If only that were true," Tierney replied.

She shrugged and sat the glass in front of him. Tierney studied her while she served another customer. How old was she? College-aged or just beyond. In *King Lear*, Tierney recalled, Kent said that he was old enough "not to love a woman for singing." Tierney sometimes wondered if he would ever feel that old. College seemed not so long ago. Nothing seemed so long ago. It was easy to think that he was still young enough to be attractive.

He glanced through the wall of tinted glass that separated the bar from the world outside, and he was struck by the unreality of the hotel. Here temperature and daylight were controlled for the men in suits—the lights dimmed; the air so cool that Tierney wished for a sweater. Outside the window, tourists in shorts wiped at their foreheads while a school-aged boy in ragged sweatpants hustled them for shoeshines.

Tierney took the piece of paper from his pocket and laid it on the counter. His cardiologist, a very young man who spoke English well, had studied the results of his angiogram and said, “Cabbage.”

Tierney had shaken his head.

“Cabbage. Coronary Artery Bypass Grafting.” The doctor had sketched out Tierney’s clogged arteries. “You can get a second opinion, of course. But I wouldn’t wait long.”

As surely as Tierney knew anything, he knew this was a death sentence. Perhaps not tomorrow nor the next day, but an ending of life. At best, how long might a bypass last? Ten years? And then what? Tierney’s own father had died of a heart attack.

A voice interrupted his thoughts. “Tierney, old boy. Good to see you.”

Tierney looked up. *The Arse Poetica*.

Or so Tierney had named him. He was never certain of the man’s real name—Scott something or something Scott. In addition to the writing of abysmal poetry, Scott seemed to make a career of hanging out in expat bars, bumming cigarettes and accepting free drinks. He sidled up to tourists to tell them about his exotic life as an expatriate poet. He certainly dressed for the part, Tierney thought, in his clothes of inky black. His white hair was tousled. His round, tortoiseshell glasses rested halfway down his nose.

“Scott,” Tierney said. “Find someone else to befriend. I teach high school, remember? No money.”

Scott laughed loudly and too long. He pointed his finger at Tierney like a gun and mimed firing a shot. “I’ll catch up with you later.”

Tierney watched him work the room, moving from group to group. He was tiny. Perhaps not freakishly short, but more than a foot shorter than Tierney. Scott was vaguely connected with Tierney’s school, and stories about his vindictiveness were legendary. A fellow teacher swore that she had once seen Scott in a fight with a one-legged man. The man’s prosthesis had come off, fallen to the floor, and every time he crawled toward it, Scott had kicked it just out of reach. All in all, Scott was the last person that Tierney would want to spy him with Zeynep.

After yesterday’s meeting with the cardiologist, Tierney had decided upon a weekend of hedonism. On a whim, he’d checked into this five-star hotel, with its pricy restaurant and spa. He’d spent the evening in the hotel bar—he couldn’t recall how he’d found his way back up to his room. This morning, after several more drinks, he had called Zeynep, something he had promised himself he wouldn’t do.

He had last seen her when she’d returned home to Istanbul for winter break. Zeynep had been a good student of literature, one of his finest, and he’d met with her to hear about her studies. They had both drunk too much. Outside the bar she’d leaned into him and raised her face to his. He kissed her, and she kissed back with open mouth. He slid his hands under her jacket, under her sweater. It hadn’t gone farther than that. Tierney had stepped back. “I can’t.” Afterwards he was uncertain of why he’d said it. Had he thought that it was wrong, or had he been afraid that he physically couldn’t? What did the porter say in *Macbeth*? That drink provokes and unprovokes. “It provokes the desire but takes away the performance.”

Tierney had thought that would be the end of it. But she’d kept sending him emails. Almost daily. Chatty notes about her classes. Reminders of when she would return to Istanbul for summer vacation. He ignored them or sent back noncommittal replies. But she continued to write.

What could she possibly see in him? He was fat; he was old. He'd begun to worry that there was something not right about the girl, and he'd been relieved when finally, a month or two ago, the deluge of emails had trickled to a stop.

But today he'd invited her to lunch. He hadn't mentioned that he had a room at the hotel. Like Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Tierney thought, he was contemplating "pleasure with women." And why not? She wasn't his student anymore. She was of legal age. She could have anyone she wanted. Still, Tierney felt relieved that the hotel was too upscale to be frequented by other teachers from his school.

Scott reappeared at Tierney's side. "What's that you've got there?" He picked up the paper from the bar and turned it from side to side. "Golf scores?"

Tierney took a drink. "Heart problems," he said.

"Oh, dear." Scott pulled out a stool and sat down. "When did you acquire one?"

"Piss off, Scott." Tierney reached for the drawing, but Scott pulled it away.

"Josling, Tierney. Don't be so sensitive." He motioned for the bartender. "Buy me a drink and let me commiserate."

The bartender looked at Tierney, questioning. He considered. Perhaps any conversation at the moment was better than none. "He'll have a beer," Tierney told her, but immediately he regretted the decision. "And bring me another."

"I'd rather have what you're having," Scott said, tapping on Tierney's glass.

"Beer," Tierney repeated. "Domestic."

Scott had once, over Tierney's objections, given a reading at Beygir Academy. "We have a talented English-speaking poet in our community," Tierney's director had said. "Why don't we make use of him?"

Tierney replied, "Just tell me we're not paying him."

The students gathered for an assembly, and Scott paraded around the stage. During one of his poems, Scott's eyes welled with tears, like the Player King in *Hamlet*. That was the moment when Tierney nicknamed him. Tierney had also begun to compose doggerel in his mind. *More poser than poet*, it had begun.

The bartender placed a glass and a can of Efes in front of Scott and slid Tierney a glass of bourbon. Tierney caught Scott's eye and gestured toward the drawing. "Yesterday I found out that my doctor wants to rip a vein from my leg and do some plumbing in my chest." He waited for Scott to react. "He's going to spread my sternum and stop my heart on the operating table."

Scott pushed aside the glass and took a drink from the can. He looked at Tierney. "*Ars longa, vita brevis.*" He took another sip of beer. "I lapse into the Latin."

"That's your commiseration?"

"That's all you get for an Efes." He sat the can on the bar. "My sympathies grow when I drink something other than cow piss."

How wonderful, Tierney thought, that this man who makes such an opera of his own feelings has so little capacity for empathy.

The intercom crackled. A voice announced, "Drew Peacock, please. Drew Peacock."

"That's me," Tierney said, happy for the excuse.

"Sorry to hear it, old man."

"I didn't think he'd really say it." Tierney counted out a wad of *lira* and dropped it on the counter. "Next time I'll be Alf Hucker."

"*Charmant.* You know what I admire about you, Tierney? Your maturity."

Tierney rose to his feet and felt the familiar tightening in his chest, a heaviness that didn't want to go away. The result of his displeasure with Scott and the effort of standing, Tierney

supposed. The pains had recently become more frequent. He headed toward the exit. “Steady on,” someone said, and Tierney was surprised to realize he had bumped into a chair. A drink had spilled.

“Sorry.”

“I wasn’t entirely joking,” Scott called after him. Tierney turned to face him. “We’re men of letters, you and I. We should live in art.” Scott stood now, showboating for the crowd. “Do you remember your Yeats?” He shut his eyes and began to recite: “*An aged man is but a paltry thing. . .*”

Tierney took a step to steady himself. “Must you close your eyes?”

“*A tattered coat upon a stick, unless/Soul clap its hand and sing.*” Scott looked at Tierney and took a small bow. A couple at a nearby table gave him a brief round of applause. The bartender laughed.

“Men of letters,” Tierney said. God but Scott had perfected the role of asinine little pseud. Tierney must have taught “Sailing to Byzantium” a hundred times; he was certain he knew the poem better than Scott, the ignoramus, did. Tierney closed his eyes in imitation. “Here’s a few lines of poesy I wrote about you.”

*More poser than poet, your verses don’t scan;  
You bellow emotion, more haircut than man.*

*More actor than artist, most needy of fame;  
You give public readings without any shame.*

Tierney opened his eyes and turned back toward the door. People stared. The room had gone quiet. He made his way to the atrium.

“You wound me,” Scott called out. Tierney could tell that Scott was trying to keep his voice light, but to his delight, Tierney could hear the anger underneath. “’Tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church-door; but ’tis enough, ’twill serve. You prick.”

Tierney could see Zeynep talking to the maitre d’. He hurried across the atrium towards her. She looked different. It wasn’t just that he was accustomed to seeing her in her school uniform; she had also changed her look. When Tierney had taught her, she’d played the part of the rebel. Now

she seemed to have settled into a style more fitting of her social status. She resembled the moneyed young people in the bar. Her clothes weren't overstated—a sleeveless blouse, a pair of slacks—but Tierney was sure they were pricey.

A hand clasped Tierney's arm at the bicep, a firm grip, not friendly. Tierney turned his head to see a crew-cut in a blue suit, vaguely simian. "Hotel security." Tierney glanced at the man's nametag: Tim Bradford. An American, Tierney guessed, ex-military—they all looked the same these guys. Tierney tried to pull away, but the man squeezed his bicep tighter and Tierney shrugged in pain. "Would you step over here, sir?" He pulled Tierney toward the side of the atrium.

"For fuck's sake! Easy." The pain shot through Tierney's entire arm. "I'm a guest at the hotel."

Bradford loosened his grip on Tierney's arm. "Sir, I want you to think of this as a warning. Do you understand me, sir? Slow down on the drinking. No more poetry recitals."

"Recitations," Tierney corrected.

The man again tightened his grip and rammed his thumb into Tierney's armpit. "Are you understanding me, sir?" Tierney tried to back away from the pain, but he was held fast. "No funny names on the intercom. No more behavior like last night's. If you can't straighten up, we'll ask you to leave."

Bradford seemed to have drilled his thumb into a nerve. "I understand," Tierney said. "Jesus."

The man relaxed his grip, and Tierney wrenched his arm free.

He smoothed out his T-shirt. He could make out the red outline of the man's fingers on his upper arm. Tierney hurried toward Zeynep, hoping that she hadn't seen. What had he done to deserve this abuse? If he had driven up in a Mercedes, the staff would treat him differently. Not only could they smell money, as pigs do truffles, but they could also scent its absence.

He again felt the pressure in his chest. He reached his hand to his pocket and felt for the drawing. Not there. He checked the other pockets. He must have left it on the bar.

Zeynep turned as he approached. She looked beautiful. She'd always been pretty, but now it was as if she'd stepped from the pages of a magazine. He kissed her on both cheeks, the Turkish manner of greeting, even among men. It shouldn't have felt awkward, but Tierney took a step back. "Hello, Darkling," he said—a joke between them, one that had sprung from her misreading of a line from Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale."

Zeynep smiled uncertainly. "I'm just here for a minute." Her accent sounded American now. "I can't stay."

Seeing her now, he wondered why he had ever discouraged her. Now he would have to work harder, so much harder. "Have a drink. At least."

She hesitated. "Just for a while."

The fat maitre d' led them inside The Pasha's Tent. Gilded poles supported a roof of red felt embroidered with golden thread. Tierney had to admit it was impressive. Luxurious. Sumptuous. This pasha had obviously known the good life that Tierney craved this weekend. The maitre d' stopped by a low coffee table, a gleaming copper platter encircled by embroidered rugs and pillows. "Your table, Drew *bey*."

Tierney looked doubtfully at the small table. He couldn't imagine sitting on the floor throughout the meal. "How about something with chairs?"

The maitre d' shrugged. "Reservationed."

Tierney looked again and saw that a shallow pit surrounded the table. Zeynep stepped down nimbly to the sunken floor. Tierney squatted, slid his buttocks to the ledge, and maneuvered his legs into the empty space beneath the table. His upper thigh ached where the catheter had been inserted, but at least he wouldn't be forced to eat his meal in cross-legged discomfort.



“One our waiters is ill.” The maitre d’ stood, towering above them. “So I’m gonna be wait on you personally.” He said this as if it were an honor bestowed upon them.

Tierney waved away the menu. He knew what he wanted; he had planned it since leaving the doctor’s office. He wanted a dish he hadn’t allowed himself in years, his cardiologist’s nightmare. “Iskender kebab,” he said. A heaping plate of sliced mutton atop Turkish bread, the meat drenched in tomato sauce and melted butter.

“*Mezes* maybe?” The headwaiter sighed, not bothering to contain his exasperation. “Maybe soup? There’s one salad that’s cheap.”

In his quest for hedonism, Tierney had managed to find the rudest waiter in all of Turkey. He wanted to put the man in his place, but Bradford’s warning was fresh in his mind. “Consider that my starter.” He turned to Zeynep. “What will you have?”

She hesitated. “I’m not staying. Really.”

“Bring an extra plate,” Tierney told the headwaiter. “And choose a bottle of red wine for us. Something good.”

The maitre d’ gave him an unctuous smile, as if Tierney had at last done something right. He turned and waddled out of the tent.

Zeynep fumbled in her bag and brought out a pack of Marlboro Lights, the American ones with white filters, not the brown-filtered Turkish variety. “I was surprised you phoned.”

“You look good.” He wondered how she could have changed so much in so short of time. What chance did he have of convincing her to stay? “College agrees with you.”

Zeynep took out a lighter—silvered, Tierney noticed, not disposable—and lit her cigarette. “I’m not sure what to call you now,” she said. She waved the cigarette smoke away. “*Sir* seems a little formal, considering.”

Tierney registered the tinge of anger in her voice. “Everyone seems to call me Tierney,” he said. He watched her drag hard on her cigarette, as if she never thought to worry about cancer or heart disease or bad skin. The invincibility of youth.

The headwaiter arrived carrying a copper tray. “I got you a nice bottle.” He knelt by the table and unloaded two glasses and a bottle of red, French, not Turkish. Tierney felt a moment of apprehension as he considered how much it could cost but then decided it didn’t matter. Today he wouldn’t worry about money. The maitre d’ uncorked the wine and offered a dollop for Tierney to sample. “Just pour it,” Tierney said. “I’m sure it’s fine.”

The maitre d’ muttered something under his breath. He rose to his feet, puffing as he hefted his weight, and left. Tierney handed a glass to Zeynep, picked up the bottle, and topped up her glass nearly to its rim. He poured somewhat less in his own glass, knowing that he needed to slow down. “*Cam cam’a değil; can can’a,*” he said. A Turkish toast, one of the few he knew—*not glass to glass, but soul to soul*. He touched the rim of his glass to hers.

Just outside the tent, The Arse Poetica spoke to the headwaiter. Tierney watched with apprehension. He would prefer that Scott didn’t see him with Zeynep, especially not after their encounter in the bar.

She took a sip of her wine. “I didn’t think you wanted to see me again.”

It took Tierney a moment to process what she was saying. He realized he was drunk. He tried his wine. Whatever else he might say about the maitre d’, the man had chosen a good bottle.

Scott entered the tent arm in arm with two white haired women; his head came up only to their sagging breasts. The women, sisters perhaps, sported the standard-issue tourist uniform for older Americans, blue leisure wear and glaring white tennis shoes. Tierney gestured toward the entrance. “Check out Scott’s *harem*.”

Zeynep turned to look. She held her wine in one hand, the cigarette in the other. “Didn’t he read poetry at our school?”

“Poetry is a generous term for what he read.” Tierney let his mind reel for a moment. “Try effluvia.”

As his party passed by, Scott called out, “It’s easy to be a critic, Tierney, but it takes courage to create.”

“Perhaps you should give cowardice a try,” Tierney answered.

Scott’s women looked at each other; one clucked her tongue. Tierney tried to recall when he’d last been clucked at. Scott led them across the tent to a table, a full-sized one, Tierney noted, with chairs.

Zeynep stubbed out her cigarette in a large copper ashtray. “You made up a poem about him.”

“A rhyme. I wouldn’t call that poetry either. I’ve been trying to remember it.”

Tierney watched as Scott seated his women and again crossed the tent towards him. This wouldn’t be a social visit—Tierney was certain that Scott was coming to surveil Zeynep. How much trouble could the manikin make for him? Enough. In the last year, Tierney had been fired from his school and then rehired at the last possible moment. He knew that his position was less than secure. Zeynep was no longer his student, but Tierney might still have to explain himself to his director.

Scott walked to the edge of their pit and crouched. He spoke in a low voice: “You really are an infuriating cocksucker, Tierney. But probably I should thank you.” He nodded toward the white-headed women. “They’re buying me lunch because they felt sorry for me.”

Tierney eyed him squatting. “Getting ready to create?”

Scott grimaced. He turned to Zeynep. “Who’s the lucky lady?”

“Fuck off,” Tierney said. “Please.”

“All right, Tierney.” He rose to his feet, still focused on Zeynep. “I can tell when I’m not wanted.” He ran a hand through his mop of white hair, seemingly to increase its disarray, and returned to the women at the other table.

Tierney waited until Scott had reached his table before he recited for Zeynep:

*You’re practiced at witty; you’ve polished obscure.  
You’ve rehearsed all the stories we’re forced to endure.*

“I remember it.” She drank her wine quickly, gulping more than sipping. “You should write poetry for real.”

“No,” Tierney said. He reached out with the bottle and refilled her glass. “I don’t hate the world that much.”

“Tierney, I want to change my major.”

He wondered for a moment if in his drunkenness he had missed a transition, but then he realized she was continuing a conversation they had begun during their last meeting. At her parents’ insistence, she had enrolled as a student of International Relations, some sort of business program focusing on foreign markets. “You should,” he said.

“I do want to study English, really, but my parents are paying for everything.”

“You were one of the most talented students I’ve ever taught,” he said. “Anywhere.” She smiled and looked away. “Don’t squander your talents.”

“You didn’t write back to me.” She took another long drink of wine and then looked back at him. “I felt stupid for writing.”

Somewhere nearby a fax machine, or perhaps a dial-up modem, began to chirrup in short twittering bursts. Tierney twisted his head toward the noise and noticed an elaborate wooden birdcage inlaid with mother-of-pearl. A parakeet sang inside. The noise hadn’t been electronic at all. What a setting this is, Tierney thought. A dream of splendor.

She picked up her cigarettes and shook out another. She looked in his eyes. “Why didn’t you write me?”

The bird trilled behind him. “I wasn’t sure it was a good idea.” His mind slipped back to Scott standing in the bar and enjoining him to live for art; to sail to Byzantium. In this tent of hand-woven carpets, gold embroidery, and wrought brass, it seemed possible to travel back in time—to an earlier Istanbul, even back to the holy city of Yeats’s poem. Not the world of the dying generations, where birds sing and lovers embrace, but a world of art and artifice.

Zeynep smiled. “I hated to lose contact with you. You mean a lot to me.”

How many times he had taught that poem? Like Nietzsche’s eternal return, the works and writers circled back to him. Shakespeare year after year. Other writers—Conrad, Whitman, Frost—had more distant orbits, and still others swirled nebulously as answers to other texts—Keats’s nightingale, which sang for emperor and clown, gyred back as the enameled clockwork bird in “Sailing to Byzantium.”

“You don’t have to worry about me.” She extended the pack of cigarettes to Tierney. “I’m tough. I just need to know that you care.”

He fumbled a cigarette from the pack. Despite the air conditioning, he felt over warm. Perhaps he should be resting as the doctor suggested. The tightness in his chest had begun again, worse than before. He felt suffocated. “Excuse me.” He struggled to push himself up from the pit. On his way out of the tent he passed the headwaiter carrying an enormous plate of Iskender Kebap, sliced döner meat overflowing the edges; red sauce spotted with yoghurt.

Tierney stumbled into the atrium and took a seat on a leather couch. The angina was stronger than he had ever felt, oppressive. He could tell that he had broken out in a sweat. Tierney held his head in hands and took a deep breath.

He knew that he could convince Zeynep to stay. He needed only to assure her of his affections. But it struck him that she was a child, really, still struggling to break free from her parents. The hoary cliché *old enough to be her father* entered his mind.

Scott emerged from the tent.

“Your friend seems young.” He sat on the couch next to Tierney.

“Perhaps I should squire one of your ladies.” Tierney’s arms felt heavy, a sensation that frightened him. He remembered another line from Yeats—he couldn’t get the goddamned poem out of his mind now—that the heart was “fastened to a dying animal.”

Scott polished his glasses against his black shirt. “If you could get me some more readings at your school, I could forget I saw you here today.” He returned the glasses to his face, carefully sliding them halfway down his nose. “I can be very forgetful.”

It wouldn’t be hard to do what Scott asked. Tierney’s director had raved about Scott’s last performance. “You’d want compensation, I suppose?”

“Tierney. You’d hardly expect me to read for free.”

The absurdity of the situation pissed Tierney off. “I’d expect you to pay us,” Tierney said. He was aware that he’d half-shouted the words. He leaned his head into his hands again, wishing the pain away.

Bradford, the security man, hurried over and stood in front of the couch. “There’s no problem here, is there, sirs?”

Scott held up his hands. “I get the message, Tierney. Say no more.” He walked back into the restaurant. Bradford stared at Tierney as if in warning.

Tierney rose to his feet and made his way to the toilet. He stood at the sink and splashed water on his face. He looked at himself in the mirror. When had he become old? In his youth, women had told him that he was handsome. No one would think that now.

Zeynep was beautiful, desirable, smart. What did she want from him? A father perhaps or a mentor. But Tierney wondered why that should matter. Why should that mean that their relationship was unequal? If he had education and experience on his side, she had youth and beauty on hers. And Tierney knew which the world valued more.

Turn off your brain, he told himself. Go back in. Flirt. Don't think. See what happens.

He made his way back across the atrium and entered the restaurant. Zeynep wasn't at the table. He turned. She wasn't in the tent.

He walked to the table. The tabletop was spilling over with flatware and hollowware, and an enormous plate of Iskender Kebab filled the center. The bottle of wine and the glasses had been relegated to the floor at the edge of the pit. At Zeynep's place, a folded scrap of paper was tucked under the edge of her plate.

Why had she left him a note? Tierney bent to pick up the piece of paper. He unfolded it and looked at the drawing of his heart.

Scott, Tierney thought. He had left the paper with Scott at the bar. He turned, but Scott was already walking towards him.

"Your playmate left."

Tierney held up the drawing. "What did you say to her?"

"I asked if there was a message, but she said she had your number. I allowed as to how she certainly did."

Tierney clenched his fist. He was certain that he could swat down Scott with a single blow. "What did you tell her?"

"Perhaps she was put off by the thought that your *petit mort* could lead to the big sleep." He smiled. "You know how young girls are funny that way."

Come a little closer, Tierney thought. And then he caught site of Bradford, the security guard, hovering just outside the tent. Tierney decided he wouldn't throw the first punch. But no one, he thought, could blame him if he were forced to defend himself. "Homunculus," Tierney whispered. "You are a spiteful little pigmy."

"Temper, temper," Scott said. He turned his back on Tierney and walked toward his table of white-haired women.

"Scott," Tierney called out, "I just remembered the ending of my poem." He began to declaim:

*When you go drinking, you cry in your beer;  
You market your heartbreak for others to bear."*

Scott turned, his face enraged. "Shut up, Tierney."

*And when this poem's finished and I've thought the thing through,  
I'll go to the mirror and pray I'm not you.*

"You fucker." Scott, all five-foot-nothing of him, charged at Tierney, his head down like a cartoon bull. "Cocksucker," he shouted, running forward. *Move aside*, Tierney thought. He took a step but put his foot down in the empty space between table and floor. For a brief moment Tierney felt himself in midair, aware of the fall to come, and he twisted and reached out to catch himself. But his outstretched arm also found the hollow ring around the table. Tierney landed chest-first on the copper tabletop.

He was aware of the sound he'd made upon impact, a tremendous *whump* that reverberated even in the fabric filled tent. For a moment, Tierney lay still, trying to assess where the pain was coming from. He couldn't breathe. He rolled to his side and a dish crashed to the floor. There were broken plates under him. He wasn't sure if he was bleeding. His shirt was covered with tomato sauce and yogurt. He tried to rise to his feet but the pain stopped him. He rolled instead onto the main floor. He looked up to see Scott standing over him.



“Are you okay,” Scott asked.

Tierney gasped for air. He tried to speak, but no words came out.

“Is it your heart?”

Tierney struggled for breath. His ribs and chest ached. His lungs seemed to have failed. A heart attack, he thought. He tried to tell Scott to get help.

Another voice. “Is he hurt?” Bradford, the crew-cut.

Tierney gasped. He rocked, holding his chest. The fat maitre d’ stood watching him, too. For Christ’s sake, Tierney thought, I’m in cardiac arrest and no one will move to help me.

“He won’t talk,” Scott said. “I think he’s having a heart attack.”

Bradford bent down. “Are you having a heart attack, sir?”

Suddenly Tierney took in air, a rusty sob of a breath. He realized that the wind had been knocked out of him, something he’d last experienced in grade school after a fall from the monkey bars. Tierney held his sides and wheezed.

“Call an ambulance,” Bradford said. The headwaiter started to waddle away.

“No,” Tierney spat out. He was beginning to breathe again. He felt tears in his eyes. “I’m just winded.”

Bradford studied Tierney’s face. “No heart attack? Are you certain, sir?” He knelt down. “Do you need medical assistance, sir?”

Tierney shook his head. “Help me up.” Bradford and the headwaiter grabbed his hands and tried to pull him forward. Suddenly he felt a stabbing pain in his ribs—“Fuck!”—and he realized that Scott had just given him a surreptitious kick. Tierney was pulled to his feet.

“Get him outta here,” the headwaiter said.

Bradford held Tierney under the armpit. Tierney was walked out of the tent and into the atrium. “I shouldn’t have bothered giving you a warning,” Bradford said. He pulled Tierney out a

side door and gave him an easy shove. Tierney felt the blast of the July heat after the cool of the climate-controlled hotel. He sank down on a step, hugging his ribs. “You can’t sit here, sir,” Bradford said. “This is hotel property. You can go around the side to get to the main square. But don’t try to come back in the hotel.”

“I have a room,” Tierney said.

“Not any more. Do you have luggage, sir? I can have it brought down.”

“No luggage.”

“We’ll charge your credit card for the wine and the food.” The door shut. Tierney looked down at the splatter of red and white, like blood and pus, across his gray T-shirt. The shirt was sopping but he had no way to clean it. He’d have to find a public toilet or a less discriminating hotel.

He rose to his feet. He wondered if he had broken ribs or merely bruised them. He limped slowly around the side of the hotel. Down the hill, heading away from the main square, he spied a girl in a sleeveless white blouse. Zeynep. He turned in her direction.

He couldn’t keep up with her pace, but he followed as best he could. Soon he had wandered away from the tourist area into an unfamiliar neighborhood. An old part of town, a labyrinth of narrow streets. Most of the women here wore headscarves and full-length blue raincoats. Sometimes, ahead of him, Tierney thought he caught sight of Zeynep’s bare arms and uncovered hair. Where could she be going? This, most certainly, was not her turf. He quickened his pace, and the pressure in his chest intensified.

The street narrowed, and Tierney tried to push his way through the crowds. A porter approached, a human pack-animal saddled so that he could carry an enormous bundle on his back, and Tierney flattened himself against a shop front.

He glanced in its window. A gray-bearded man worked a pedal-powered sewing machine. Next to him sat a boy doing handwork on a shirt. Tierney wondered if the boy was the man's son or his apprentice. They learned their trades so young here. Tierney had once seen a bent wheel rim hammered true by two boys barely old enough to wield a mallet. By the time this boy was eighteen, he would be a master of his craft.

Perhaps Byzantium was gone—no more clockwork birds of gold and enamel—but surely the crafts lived on Istanbul. And mightn't there be something noble in that? To be an expert at one's craft?

Tierney turned and glanced down the street. No sign of Zeynep. Had he seen her at all? He noticed a barber's pole opposite him; the barber sat smoking a cigarette in a folding chair outside his shop. Tierney felt strangled by the pressure in his chest. He wanted to rest. He wanted comfort. Tierney crossed the street, and the man greeted him with "*Salaam.*" His eyes seemed to take in Tierney's sauce-stained shirt, but he made no mention of it.

"A shave," Tierney said. He struggled to remember the phrase. "*Sakal tıraşı olmak istiyorum.*"

He entered the shop, a narrow room with a single chair. The counters, Tierney noticed, were marble, even in this low-rent neighborhood. He reclined in the chair and watched as the barber sharpened his razor on a leather strop. The man worked up a cup of lather with water heated in a kettle.

*Vita brevis, ars longa*, Scott had said. Life is short; art is long. But did that mean that one could find immortality in art, as Yeats desired? Or had Chaucer gotten closer to the meaning when he wrote, *The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne?*

The barber soaped Tierney's face with a brush and shaved him with short, sure strokes. After each pass of the razor, he wiped the blade on a cloth. The barber finished shaving Tierney once and then soaped his face again. Tierney could hear the scrape of the razor against his flesh.

Live in literature, Scott had advised. Another line from Yeats sprang to mind: *Nor is there singing school but studying/Monuments of its own magnificence.* Tierney had taught literature for thirty years. What else had he done but study the monuments of art? There were books he knew better than he knew the people around him. He had lived in literature but not in life. Childless, loveless. The students he cared for moved on.

Why, Tierney wondered, had Zeynep fled the restaurant when Scott gave her the drawing? Perhaps she was terrified by his frailty, as Scott had suggested. Or perhaps she had recognized the desperation in his calling her on this day. Or perhaps she, too, had seen the irony in the map of his heart—the clogged pathways to an empty core.

The barber dried Tierney's face with a towel. A boy ran into the shop to take the towel and hang it outside on the clotheshorse. The barber doused his hands with sharp, lemon-scented cologne. He leaned Tierney forward and kneaded his neck with thumbs and knuckles. Somewhere nearby, Tierney could hear the sound of an Ay-Gaz truck playing its jingle. The trucks sold containers of liquid propane gas for cooking, but their electronic music reminded Tierney of ice cream vans.

It occurred to Tierney that in all his years of teaching literature, he had written nothing but academic papers. No novel, no poetry save the odd bit of doggerel composed in his mind and never set to paper. Thirty years of singing school, but he had never sung.

The barber wrapped cotton wool around a metal rod, dipped it in alcohol, and set it alight. He brought the flaming taper towards Tierney's ears in quick motions, singeing away the hairs. Perhaps, Tierney thought, the true artist is simply a master craftsman. There was more artistry in one of this man's haircuts than in ten of Scott's effusions.

Could Zeynep be moved, Tierney wondered, if he were to write her a poem? A sonnet, perhaps. A form that he could craft. The Ay-Gaz truck passed in front of the shop, its jingle

blaring from a loudspeaker. “*Gell! Gell!*” someone shouted, helping the truck to negotiate the narrow street. Tierney began to draft some first lines in his head. *Darkling, I look for you, and I listen / for you above the music of the street.* No, he thought, that’s shit. All wrong, all wrong. It was all wrong, but he would fix it.

### Vita

James Wyatt received an A.B. in English from the University of Missouri and an M.A.T. from the University of Iowa. He has lived and taught in the U.S., Turkey, and Poland. He currently teaches English literature at the American School of Warsaw.