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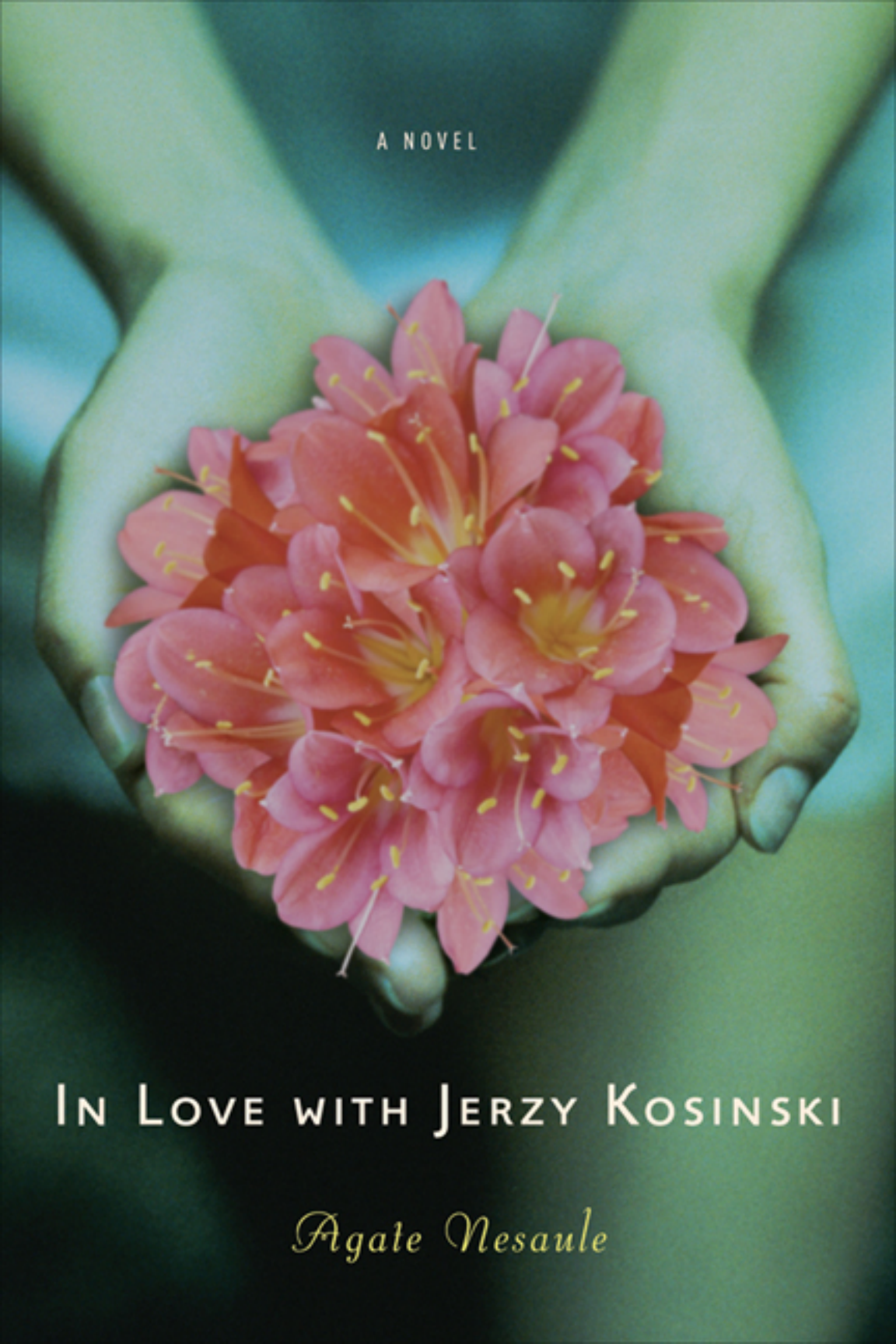

In Love with Jerzy Kosinski

Agate Nesaule

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For

JEAN LIND

and

SONIA STEINBERGER

In Love with Jerzy Kosinski

She kept her eyes on the birches that had comforted her when she moved to this isolated house three years ago. She had leaned against them and pretended she was back in Latvia; they had watched over her even on moonless nights. They were leafless now, and their white trunks glimmered through darkness like ghosts. Their slender branches reproached her. Why are you still here? they whispered as they moved in the wind.

His gaze was on a poster of powerboats out on the lake, but the lower parts of their bodies were fused, like those of Siamese twins, two women Anna had seen when she was seven, in a carnival tent near Berlin. They had three breasts and one set of enormous hips between them. A hand-lettered sign said they were married, each to a different man. The living head of a bodiless woman floated in a box near the exit, but even at seven Anna knew that was a trick with mirrors and lights. After the war people did anything to survive.

He began to move more quickly, and she hung on. It would not be long now. She tensed her thighs, clenched inward, and held. He let out a groan, and she contracted once more. She staged a few small flutters, nothing too much.

"Goddamn. That was great."

"Good," she murmured.

He patted her breast and rolled to his side of the bed.

"Going to sleep?" he asked.

"Yes," she said to his freckled back.

The stale smell of scotch was in her nostrils, and there was slime on her thighs. But it was all right, really it was. It was not so bad, and he was almost asleep. All she had to do was wait.

When his breathing became regular, she slid out of bed. She nudged the door closed behind her until she sensed wood pressing

on wood. In the bathroom she turned on the overhead lights, the shower, the fan, the tanning strip, and the seven bulbs above the mirror. She glanced at her reflection, then looked away, ashamed.

The thick strand of hair by her temple, which the sun used to lighten every summer, was streaked with gray, and her large brown eyes were dull beneath swollen lids. Her skin was softer than it used to be, and there was an almond-shaped age spot on her cheek. She was still slender, but she looked older than forty-three. Stanley was right that women aged more quickly than men. She was tempted to flick on the space heater but did not because she might not be able to stop herself from flinging it into the tub once water pooled at her feet. She put a match to the candle, but the tiny flame shivered and died.

She loosened the ivory clip and metal pins and released her hair. It covered her breasts and fell below her waist. Stanley liked it long, but it felt heavy enough to drag her down onto her knees. It might get twisted around a wheel and strangle her, like Isadora Duncan's silk scarf.

Water pounded Anna's shoulders and scalp. Her vision blurred. She resolved once more that she would not sleep with him when he was drunk. Or sober.

She watched water snake down her legs until she was calm enough to scrub. Afterward she patted herself dry and pulled on a plain white T-shirt and thick cotton underpants; they felt like bandages. He liked bikini pants that were nothing more than ruched ribbon and string, flimsy camisoles, ribbed condoms, shaved pubic hair. Menstrual blood excited him.

She listened to make sure he was still asleep and then tiptoed down the stairs to her study, which she privately called a room of her own.

She drew the blinds and turned on the light. Wishing she had a key to lock it, she shut the door of her study. She slid off the rubber bands holding together the cracked spine and loose pages of Kosinski's *Painted Bird.* She had read it so often that almost every sentence

was marked, black, purple, and blue. The book fell open to village women savaging Stupid Ludmilla for enticing their men. She believed the words on the page, but she knew that was not how it would go. It would be the men, the soldiers, who would shove a bottle between her legs and kick.

Jerzy Kosinski had been a witness to sights like these when he was a child. Now he attended opening nights in Hollywood, skied in the Alps, stayed in European hotels so opulent that his entire income from writing covered only the tips. He was married to an heiress, a woman eighteen years older than he, but he had his own apartment in New York, where he wrote his books and conducted his affairs. In one of the pictures Anna had clipped from a magazine, he wore white jodhpurs and a wicked leather belt for polo; his naked chest and arms glowed. She felt he saw only her, even though she had read that he practiced in mirrors how to stare into a lens.

She knew she would meet him. But where? And how? He would not come to northern Wisconsin to fish off her husband's pier or to stay at the rough cabins down the road. And she never went anywhere. But maybe she would. Maybe Stanley would have an accident coming home from the bars, which beckoned to him at regular intervals along the pine-scented roads. Maybe Stanley would have an affair, and then she would not feel too guilty to leave. It would not be entirely her fault then if he shot himself, as he swore he would if she abandoned him. Or maybe the house would burn down. She looked for flames leaping from the roof every time she returned from her precisely timed walks at dawn. In the late afternoons she listened for the phone to ring and announce disaster.

Jerzy Kosinski would sit down next to her on a plane; he would say they had met. They would talk about when, discuss past lives and dreams. But she knew the real reason he would recognize her: she too had been homeless during the war. She knew exactly why he had lost his voice when he was twelve. Maybe he would tell her how he got it back and where he found the courage to create the life he was living now.

She would be so tender with him. She would caress his scars with her lips; she would cheer and inspire; she would be his best muse. When he could not write, she would tell him her life. He would find words better than hers, create stories and books. He would be grateful to her. He would learn how to feel; he would fall in love; he would take her away.

But that is where she stopped. She did not want to make love with him because that always ended in the same place, in the same room, in the same bed, with Stanley. She wanted to wander the countryside with Jerzy, walk down roads lined with trembling trees, sleep in haystacks and barns. Together they would elude soldiers, smell the wet earth, hear the small sounds of rain. But for that there would have to be another war.

Julie arrived unannounced one afternoon. Anna was glad that Stanley was not home because he wanted people, her old friends especially, to call first, not just drop in. It was for Anna's protection, really it was, because they lived in such an isolated place.

Julie's companion, Karel, had an accent so thick it reminded Anna of the foolishly cheerful immigrants in striped suits on *Laugh In* back in the 1960s and of dumb Polish jokes people told Stanley in bars. Jerzy Kosinski had never spoken to Anna, but she was positive that his English was sophisticated and smooth.

The top of Karel's head barely reached Julie's shoulder, but he called her Julietta and sounded condescending as he explained Pavlov's dogs and President Reagan's trickle-down economics. Karel had told Julie's father she was in good hands and that he wanted to manage her trust fund. Julie said Karel had been a distinguished professor of law in Warsaw, but so far no American university had shown any interest in him.

"Where did you meet him?" Anna asked as soon as he went to the bathroom.

"He's a student in my English as a Second Language class." Sometimes Julie met interesting men in the lobby of the Palmer House in Chicago or in first-class lounges at airports.

"Doesn't your husband mind?" Anna asked. She was embarrassed at how naive she sounded.

"Richard doesn't know everything of course, but no. He's too busy moving into his own place."

Anna felt envy so sharp she had to wait before she could speak. "You're going to live in your house all by yourself?"

"Not for long. Karel will move in as soon as Richard gets his stuff out. That way I won't have to pay Karel's rent. His dentist's bills are bad enough."

Anna thought that if she had somebody waiting in the wings the way Julie did, she would leave Stanley next month.

Karel returned from the bathroom and reminded Julie of things she had promised to buy him when they got back to Chicago. He held out his hand for the keys to her white Saab and opened the passenger door for her.

Julie ignored him, got into the driver's seat, and revved up the engine.

"Come visit us," she said, "but don't bring Stanley. He's such a downer."

It sounded simple when she said it.

Stanley said he did not mind that Anna accompanied Marge, who at half a mile away was their nearest neighbor, to the nursing home. Anna did not have anything in common with her, but it made for an outing. While Anna was on the phone making arrangements, Stanley hunched up his shoulders and grimaced like Quasimodo. Then he lumbered around, scratching his armpits like King Kong to demonstrate how the patients would act. He tried to get Anna to laugh, which would annoy Marge, but he did not try to stop her otherwise.

Anna brushed Marge's mother's hair and rubbed her feet while Marge produced photographs of vacations and weddings and new babies. She talked about children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces, and nephews. The frail old woman did not look, but she listened compliantly enough.

The nursing home was at the end of a narrow, pitted road, and every time they drove there, Marge worried that if they had car trouble, no one would help unless it happened when the caretakers were changing shifts. But even so the nursing-home staff would be useless, she maintained, because it was made up entirely of overweight women and shifty-eyed ex-convicts.

So Anna was not completely surprised when, after some sawing and whirring noises, Marge's car came to a stop. It sighed and settled in on itself.

Marge was afraid to open her door because someone could come whizzing by and cut her off at the knees, so Anna got out. She had no idea what to look for, but the cold air felt good and the hard snow crunched satisfyingly under her boots. The pines were dark blue in the twilight. She wished they were nearer so she could rub their needles to release the scent, but she turned and glanced at the tires. She walked to the other side of the car and looked again. She was not trying to find out what was wrong; she just liked being outside.

Marge rolled down the window. "Anyway, I knew those people were crooks the minute I saw them," she continued as if they were still sitting in the car or had arrived back in her huge kitchen.

"I told Walter we should not rent the house to someone from Poland or Latvia or whatever. They've stolen my antique teaspoons and God only knows what else."

Marge had sent six letters of complaint to Latvia: one to both Berzinses themselves, two to colleagues they had given as references, one each to their respective department heads, and one to the director of the hospital that employed them.

Suddenly shots pierced the air, tied hands went limp, a blindfold burst, and blood stained the snow. Anna shook her head to get rid of

the sight that came to her all too often. She turned away from Marge, slipped on the ice, and lost her footing. She fell so slowly it seemed she had chosen to stretch out on the frozen ground. She lay on her back, her feet in the road, looking up at the sky.

Marge got out of the car and bent over her.

"What are you doing down there," she said, not expecting an answer. "That Dr. Berzins and that doctor wife of his are back in Latvia now, safe and snug in the Soviet Union and out of reach of American law. They don't care that I'm upset."

"Marge, maybe . . . maybe if you wait the teaspoons will turn up. They're probably somewhere in your house right now."

"Impossible, because I've looked," she said.

"Well then, maybe it's time for you to let it go. People lose things. They lose their possessions and their homes and their countries and their families. They lose mothers and lovers; they lose their faith in God. That's just the way it is. After a while you have to put all that aside and try to go on living." Anna was surprised how certain she sounded.

She started to sit up, but Marge was squatting over her.

"You just don't understand, Anna. Nothing like this has ever happened to me. I loved those teaspoons. Plus I'm a very determined person. I always finish what I start."

"But you have no idea what the Russians will do to them." Anna winced as barbed wire cut into the soft white flesh of a woman's arm, and she heard shots again. She spoke loudly, trying to drown them out. "They'll fire them, but they'll probably do much worse."

"Let them," Marge snapped.

Anna reminded herself that Marge always treated her well and that she was the only person besides Stanley who ever took her anywhere, but she disliked herself for not objecting to casual cruelty that sprang from ignorance. When she was still teaching, she used to lead her students gently to consider points of view different from their own.

She slid out from under Marge and stood up. Marge's husband,

Walter, did not know anything about cars and he would have trouble finding this place in the dark, so Anna was the one who walked back to the phone at the nursing home.

"Beats me why you go with that old bag," Stanley said, "but all right, I'll come and get you as soon as I finish my drink. I've had a hell of a day, but you know you can count on me. I'll always take care of you, kid."

Anna expected Stanley to groan, clutch his head, and say she was going to bankrupt him when she told him she had signed up for driving lessons at the Easy-4-U Driving School.

But he only shrugged, "Just don't expect me to take you. I love you too much to let you kill yourself."

When the instructor arrived to pick her up, Stanley sashayed and waved with a limp wrist to signal that the tall young man was a wimp and gay, but he did not block the way past her dormant flower bed.

Andrej introduced himself and motioned Anna into the driver's seat. He got in on the other side and gave a few simple instructions.

"It isn't hard," he said. "You've been learning how to drive your entire life by watching others. You don't have to be macho to drive."

Anna could not tell whether he had seen Stanley's pantomime or whether he was just making a general statement. But he looked at ease as she put the car into gear and started away from the house.

"Forgive me," Andrej said. "I shouldn't have said 'your entire life.' I know that most children don't grow up in American suburbs, with two parents and two cars, like I did."

Anna liked him for being aware of privilege, which most people were not. He must have noticed her slight accent though, and she hoped he would not question her about her childhood.

But he talked mostly about himself, probably because he was so young, thirty-three at most. He had two degrees in wildlife ecology and was working on his PhD. His ambition was to be a good steward

of the natural world and to protect all fragile and endangered things. He spent solitary evenings reading and watching the sun set over the lake from his parents' cottage, and that almost made up for his mindless job, which he needed to make enough money to go back to school. He said he had changed his name from Andrew and Andy to Andrej because he loved all things European and because he believed that older civilizations had far more wisdom than contemporary America.

"Excuse me," he said. "I shouldn't have called this job mindless. I'm saying the wrong thing because I don't usually get to meet a person of your quality."

Anna wanted to know exactly what he meant, but she did not ask because Stanley said she was always fishing for compliments.

Andrej met her eyes for a moment. Then he blushed and looked down. His eyes were deep velvet brown flecked with gold, and his shoulder-length thick hair reminded Anna of stalks of wheat drying in summer sun. He did not have Jerzy Kosinski's olive skin and raven hair, so his dark eyes seemed out of place. Had they been blue, he would have looked like a beautiful young bridegroom in Latvia.

"I'm talking too much. I'm sorry," Andrej said. "My sisters all took women's studies at the University of Wisconsin, and they tell me that's what men do, monopolize conversations, dictate subjects, appropriate verbal space, and silence women. But it's also because I'm nervous. I'd like to get to know you, but I'm afraid to ask questions because I feel you wouldn't like that. So I chatter on. I'm sorry."

Stanley sometimes said he was sorry too. Two days ago he had taken Anna to Madison for dinner on Valentine's Day. On the way back they had to wait because a car was stopped in front of them on the interstate exit ramp. Stanley cursed and leaned on the horn, but the car did not move. He floored it, pulled onto the right shoulder, and zoomed past.

A siren and red lights came on instantly.

"Oh, Stanley, I'm sorry," Anna said. "I hope you don't get a ticket."

"All right, all right, I'm sorry, Officer," Stanley said getting out of the car. "I am goddamn sorry. I'm a horse's ass."

A flashlight blinded Anna, but not before she had seen the gun and the uniform. She drew back into her seat and silently recited a *daina,* one of thousands of ancient four-line Latvian verses, about placing a great worry under a stone and stepping over it singing. She shut her eyes and tried to imagine she was floating free in the darkness above the car.

"I didn't call you a horse's ass, sir," the policeman said.

"No, but my wife did."

"Where you heading, sir?" the policeman asked so politely Anna thought he would take off his hat and bow to Stanley.

"Back up to Cloudy Lake. Took the wife out to dinner, bought her roses and stuff. Trying to do the best I can, it being Valentine's Day and all," Stanley said mournfully.

"Yes," the man in the uniform agreed. "It sure is. Tell you what, buddy, I'm going to let you off with a warning this time. Sounds like you've got plenty of troubles on your own." He shone his flashlight over Anna's rigid body again.

"Thanks, buddy, I appreciate that," Stanley said.

"Been in your place myself once or twice, pal. Drive careful now," the policeman advised.

Stanley crept slowly into traffic and kept his eyes on the speedometer.

"I wish that damn cop would quit following me," he muttered. "It's fucking hard to drive already, and now he's on my ass."

When the policeman finally turned off, Stanley laughed and pounded on the wheel.

"See what I mean? Driving's a real bitch. You'll never learn."

But now, sitting next to Andrej, Anna believed that she might. She memorized Andrej's words of encouragement so she could repeat them to herself later.

The morning after her lesson with Andrej, Anna went for her regular walk. The February air was so cold it felt like midwinter, but the bark of willows was more vivid and there were swollen places, not quite buds yet, on the highest branches of other trees. It was too early to hope, but Anna imagined silver rivulets wearing channels through black ice. They flowed into each other, embraced and merged, then meandered together through frozen earth to the living roots below.

She visualized the shoots of snowdrops and of Poet's narcissus she had planted last fall. She told Stanley that she gardened because it was good exercise, but she was excited now because she sensed that the pale tips of tightly curled leaves and buds were ready to begin their brave ascent into light. With a shock she realized she was actually looking forward to something. She had been so absorbed that she had walked a mile farther than usual.

"Where the hell have you been? You're almost half an hour late," Stanley said.

Anna went past him without replying. He stopped pacing the porch and followed her inside.

"You really had me worried, Anna. You know I have a lot of problems at the resort, and now you're making me worry about you too."

Anna poured herself some juice, set out bread and milk, and started a pot of fresh coffee.

"I'll fix myself an egg," she said.

"I don't know what's gotten into you, Anna. A man can't get a square meal around here anymore."

Stanley was right about that. It had been weeks since she had spent an entire day testing soufflés and scones, simmering nourishing soups and stews, and making sure that the fragrance of roasting chicken and gingered squash greeted him the minute he stepped inside. Julie said she had not kept an ounce of coffee or a slice of bread in her house when things started going wrong between Richard and her.

"Oh, Anna, Anna, you've really changed," Stanley said. "I don't think I can go on without having the real you."

His voice broke. She believed that he acted tough only because deep down he was sensitive and brave and that he tried to hide his wounds from her. Besides, she could not stand to see any man humiliated, so she set out another plate and cup. She cracked two eggs and apologized to Stanley.

I'm so mad at the director of the hospital I could spit," Marge called out. She had wandered into Anna's study without an invitation.

"I phoned him about my stolen teaspoons," Marge continued, "but his secretary kept saying he was in a meeting. So I got into my car and drove over, and there he was, sitting in his office, doing nothing but shuffling papers. Really, Anna, I'd rather stay in here; it's much more comfortable."

Anna stayed on the doorstep and motioned Marge toward the kitchen.

"Oh, but this is really Stanley's kitchen, isn't it? Must be nice to have a husband like yours who cooks all the meals and brings up your coffee every morning."

"Not every morning," Anna said. Stanley liked grilling steaks and slabs of ribs, which he said was more work than cooking the rest of the meal and cleaning up afterward. He brought Anna coffee in bed only after he had stayed out late drinking.

Marge shrugged and perched on the kitchen stool where Stanley liked to sit. From there he could see who was approaching on the road, and he could monitor what Anna was doing in her study.

"Anyway, the director says he's not going to get involved," Marge announced. Anna was tired of hearing about the spoons, but she did not interrupt.

"He claims that both of the Berzinses did excellent work at the hospital and participated in all the seminars, that his relationship

with them was strictly professional, that he wants to keep it that way, and that he's not about to start an international incident with the Soviets. He practically said I should forget about my spoons. Imagine that, if you can."

"You're going to let it drop now, aren't you, Marge?" It started out as a declaration, but ended as a question. Anna was afraid she would hear shots and see bloodstained snow again, but she did not. She was too startled by what Marge said next.

"I've put ads in all the Cleveland papers and neighborhood fliers because the Berzinses have an aunt there somewhere. They went to visit her at Christmas, and I bet they gave her my precious spoons. They were too clever to tell me her name, but I'm pretty sure I can find her. There can't be that many Latvians in Cleveland."

"Maybe the aunt doesn't read the papers."

It did not occur to Marge that Anna could find the aunt with a phone call or two to some common name like Ozols or Liepins picked at random because Latvians always knew other Latvians. Marge seemed to have forgotten that Anna was Latvian too; right now she was just another person from Somewhere Over There.

"Oh, I'll track that aunt down. Two detectives have called me already. They charge an arm and a leg, of course, but I'll use them if I have to. Oh my, there's Stanley coming up the road. I better scuttle."

Anna was pleased to see that Marge was almost as scared of him as she was. She found Marge's boots and helped her with her coat. Marge was in a hurry, and she was so bundled up that she did not notice that it was Andrej who had arrived, not Stanley.

Instead of the white sedan with the Easy-4-U sign, Andrej was driving his own car today, dark blue, almost the same shade as Stanley's. He explained that he wanted Anna to practice being in charge rather than looking to him for directions or waiting for him to use the dual controls.

"I think a woman shifting gears is sexy," he said and blushed.

Anna pulled into a deserted parking area and turned off the engine before Andrej told her to. The river was beyond the trees, but she could glimpse open water moving between slabs of ice. He came around to open her door, and when she did not take the hand he offered to help her out, he did not get angry but walked companionably by her side.

In the woods he touched her elbow to point out that the stores of spruce cones for squirrels were diminishing and that deer had browsed on lichen. The snow bent the boughs of firs lightly, not breaking them as it would have in midwinter. Andrej showed her the difference between white oak and red, and between siskins feasting on birch seed and finches feeding on salt. He stopped to listen for a pair of pileated woodpeckers drumming to claim their territory and announce spring. He picked a blade of switchgrass and made it sing in the cold air. Every detail was sharp and distinct, and Anna could see that the world was not dead at all. Maybe it never had been, not even during the bitter winds of winter.

He wanted to show her bald eagles nesting near Sauk City, but that was too far and would take much too long. They looked for a diner to have a cup of coffee but settled for a glass of slightly sour jug wine in a rundown roadside bar. They sat in a back booth, feeling their cheeks burn with the wine and warmth after hours outdoors. They did not talk much except about the small incidents of their walk. Together they recited the names of grasses and birds and trees. They sat close together, almost touching.

Anna's cheeks started to burn again as she headed down the walk to the house. She wanted to believe it was only because Stanley would be annoyed that she had been gone so long, but it was also because she remembered her face flaming when she first knew him, more than twenty years ago. Stanley and she had pretended to be victorious soldiers then as, arms linked, they strode down the side streets of Indianapolis. They could hardly wait to get back to his apartment before they fell on each other.

Stanley's solid body, his short, powerful arms, his rust-colored

hair, and his sunburned neck had reminded Anna of competent khaki-clad British settlers fearlessly subduing the wild expanses of Africa while their chiffon-clad wives fanned themselves on shady verandas and flitted across parquet floors at the club. She had not read enough books yet to know that was not how it was and that they had no right to be there.

Anna tried to cool her cheeks with her hands, though they were hot too. But Stanley always dimmed the lights for his cocktail hour, so he probably would not notice.

Shortly before dawn Stanley shook Anna awake. "I can't sleep because of you," he said. "You'll leave me as soon as you learn to drive."

"I won't," she assured him, but he did not believe her about this any more than about other things. He still brought up an affair he maintained she had had the last year she was teaching, and nothing she said could convince him otherwise.

"I give you everything, Anna. I try and try to make you happy. I can't imagine what else you could want. I give you exactly the same allowance as I did when you were working. I could use more space myself, but I don't ask you to move out of your study. What is it you want? More money? A bigger house? There's one for sale at the end of the point, more secluded than this."

Anna wanted a car of her own, but she did not say so because he was afraid that he would lose her.

"I want to go back to teaching," she said.

"Anna, Anna, I thought we agreed about that when we moved here, away from all the snobs and lechers at the university. You know how sick and messed up you were then. You would have died during one of your bouts of pneumonia if I hadn't taken care of you. I'm really hurt that you're starting in on me now, especially when I have such a rough time at the resort."

Stanley got angry whenever Anna was inconsistent; he exploded if

she said something he considered stupid. She bit her lip to keep from pointing out that other people were allowed to change their minds.

"I'm sorry, Stanley," she said, "but I do need to do something useful."

"You can come work at the resort." He got excited about her bussing tables, saving the money that he had to squander on bartenders, raking in tips appropriated by waitresses, and running into town for liquor or steaks whenever a delivery failed.

"We'd be together all the time, just like we used to be. We'd be like other restaurant couples, working side by side."

Stanley would call her a snob if she pointed out she had not gotten her PhD in order to wait on tables. He would say that the academic world was phony and that he would not work at a university if they got down on their knees and begged him.

"But I have to know how to drive if I'm going to work at the resort," Anna said. She tried to sound firm.

"You're cute when you're mad, baby." Stanley laughed and pulled her to him.

The sun was high by the time they got out of bed. Stanley was in a good mood because she had agreed to give up the Easy-4-U Driving School, and he had more or less promised that he would teach her himself.

Anna was dizzy, as if she had been spun around and around. She held onto the rail in the shower, and she almost stumbled on her way down the stairs. But she grasped the banister, put one foot in front of the other, and kept going. She would learn to drive, no matter what.

As soon as Stanley left for the resort, she went into her room and closed the door. Maybe if she wrote down exactly what had happened, she would understand why she had broken her promise to herself not to sleep with him. She hated herself for lying not just with words but with her body too. She tried to make a list of reasons she had betrayed herself, but she could make only jagged marks on the paper. Her hand turned into a claw, and it was impossible to write.

She crumpled the spoiled page and stared at the three birches by her window. This kind of thing happened, of course, as people got older. Anna had cried when she read Penelope Lively's *Moon Tiger*; at the end brilliant historian Claudia lost her words as she neared death. Anna was only forty-three, but she did not look forward to the future, and she could not stand to think about the past. There was nothing new to say about war anyway because Jerzy Kosinski had said it all.

Maybe she would be able to write if Jerzy imprisoned her. Willi locked up Colette until she wrote *Claudine.* He made her into a writer; she might not have done it alone. Later she fell in love with a much younger man and wrote *Cheri.* John Bunyan, Nawal El Saadawi, Oscar Wilde—they were all in prison, filling page after page. Were Anna locked in a cell, she would write on the wall. She would use the diamond in Stanley's ring to scratch images into glass, like crazed women did on windows in the nineteenth century. By the time Jerzy let her out, she would be a writer.

One Saturday a month Stanley took Anna to Madison. Before dropping her off at the university's Memorial Library, he reminded her to be grateful. He pointed out that he worshipped the ground she walked on, that he gladly took her every place she wanted to go, and that he put up with all her craziness. The only thing he expected in return was that she act cheerful and that she appreciate living on a prime piece of property on the deserted part of the lake.

"I wish you'd stop nagging me about learning to drive. You know how nervous you get. You'll let go of the wheel and shut your eyes if there's an emergency. Plus, buying another car will bankrupt us. But cheer up, kid. I'll take you to a nine o'clock movie, that is, if drinks and dinner don't take too long. Provided I'm not too tired to drive back to the Edgewater Hotel afterward."

Anna felt someone watching her as she set out her list of articles she wanted to read, her notebook, and pens. The tall, gray-haired

woman was at the same library table again. She nodded at Anna and went back to taking notes.

The woman wore a well-cut silk shirtdress in a subtle print of gray and black, gray pearl earrings, whisper-light pantyhose, and expensive Italian shoes. She did not look like a faculty member planning to have a beer-and-brat lunch in the Rathskeller, and she was too elegant to be a returning student. But she seemed familiar all the same.

Usually Anna went to the Steep and Brew for coffee. She liked to sit at one of the small tables in the back so she could study people without being disturbed by a stranger's chatter or an acquaintance's blunt questions about why she had quit teaching and what she was doing now. But today was going to be different.

When Anna got up, the woman stood up too.

"Hello, my name is Sara," she said. "We seem to be the only ones here this morning, as always. Care to join me for lunch later?" The invitation seemed so natural that Anna wished she had thought of it herself.

At noon Sara pushed her books and journals out of the way before Anna could read the titles. She shoved her notebook into a black patent-leather tote and zipped it shut. The notebook was not very big, four by six inches, but it had a dark red leather cover and was thick with folded Xeroxes, clippings, and dividers with black tabs.

Anna was nervous at first because Stanley maintained that she did not know how to talk to people. Were it not for him, he said, they would not have a single friend in the world. But talking with Sara was easy. Sara remarked that she too liked sitting at back tables, and she and Anna agreed that it was cozy and safe in Husnus on State Street.

Sara spent six weeks every year reading at the university library. She said she could take more time now that she was retired from the clothing business, but her husband got restless away from his golf cart and the familiar monotony of Sun City. She had tried to persuade him to stay in Arizona, but he could not manage without her, and she felt too guilty to leave him behind.

"I know you understand about guilt," Sara said.

Was she psychic? Or was she like the clerks in Waldenbooks, who acted as if they knew everybody? They regularly told Anna that she would love a bodice-ripper romance or a collection of inane cartoons.

"It's war that does it," Sara said. "So many of us still have our emotions all tangled up almost forty years afterward. We put up with bad treatment, we apologize when it's not our fault, and we don't contradict others when they lie. We stay loyal to people who don't deserve it. We're afraid to let ourselves be happy. And we never, ever tell the real truth about our past to others."

Anna felt herself blush. How did Sara know? Anna never told anyone how Stanley treated her in private, and she regularly apologized for things she had not caused. She did not tell anyone about her childhood during the war or about life in displaced persons camps. People had hundreds of words and gestures to indicate they did not want to hear about war or anything else unpleasant. Besides, no one would believe her anyway.

But Sara was on to another subject, the Holocaust, which was even more terrifying than war alone. Although Anna had been only three when the Germans occupied Latvia and began drafting men into the army, sometimes she felt inexplicably guilty, as if she had instituted the Nazis' forcible conscription herself.

Sara was making a map of her hometown in Poland, building by building, street by street, moving slowly through the neighborhood where she had lived until she was seventeen and out into the surrounding unknown. She had discovered what had happened to more than four hundred people, but there had been almost a thousand, so she was far from finished. She wanted to write down every name, every occupation, every family relationship, every person on the right street and in the right house in order to create a permanent record of a tiny part of the daily life of Jews in Poland before the Nazis arrived.

Anna had read in *Veļupes Krastā* (On the Shore of the River of Ghosts), by Melānija Vanaga, about cattle trains taking Latvians to

Siberia in 1941, so she understood the necessity of making a record. A mother killed her three children because they were dying of convulsions and thirst anyway and she wanted to speed them to peace. An old man took away her straight razor and wrote down the date and the names and ages of the three little boys on a scrap of paper. He added the approximate location of the train and asked the women packed in nearest to sign the document. A few of the most courageous did.

Anna wanted to tell Sara about that, but she was afraid Sara would think she was trying to compete with what had happened to her people. Anna's father had turned into a stranger because of the war, but she was afraid to imagine what had happened to Sara's parents.

"So how did you end up in Madison?" Sara asked.

"I live on Cloudy Lake now, near Rice Lake, but I was here twenty years ago, when I was in graduate school," Anna said.

She produced her standard formula next. "My father and I fled Latvia during World War II, when the Russians were coming in for the second time in 1944; we lived in DP camps in Germany for five years, and we came to Indianapolis after that. Oh, but it's getting late, Sara. I'm sorry, but it's time for me to get back to work."

She jumped up, anxious to get away before Sara asked any more questions.

"I better go too," Sara said. "I should check on my husband. But I hope we'll see each other again." She squeezed Anna's hand affectionately.

Back at the library, Anna headed straight to the card catalog to look for novels set in Poland during World War II. She wanted to know more, but she was not as courageous as Sara. She read mostly fiction, rather than history, to get glimpses of truth.

Julie showed up by herself on Sunday morning a week later. "Karel's at home, lying on the couch, moaning because he has a

toothache. He's got wool scarves wrapped around his jaw and a bottle of vodka sitting next to him. I know Stanley doesn't come home until he's good and tanked on Bloody Marys, so I decided to drive up."

Julie glanced at the receipts and employee pay stubs for the resort spread out on the dining-room table. "Making you do that too now, is he? I thought you agreed to quit teaching because you were going to write. Or take drawing lessons."

Anna was grateful that Julie did not persist. She was ashamed to tell her that she had tried and failed at writing and that she was too old and too cowardly to leave Stanley and start life on her own.

"So how's the driving going? Does Stanley go with you, or does he trust you to practice on the back roads by yourself?"

"Of course not. It's against the law for me to go without him."

"So, how often does he take you out?"

"He will. You know how busy he is."

"You need practice. Let's go for a ride right now. Come on, we've got plenty of time."

"Are you sure?" Anna asked. Julie's nephew had been in the passenger seat when someone hit his mother's car. He had been in a coma for months, and he could not walk properly yet. Anna thought that was the reason Julie did not let Karel drive.

"Of course I'm sure."

Julie smiled and held open the driver's door for Anna. She was wearing a soft gray coat and peacock green leather boots. Blue glass globes the size of cherries dangled from her ears, and her white skin looked almost translucent beneath short black curls. Anna thought she had never seen anyone as beautiful.

She wanted to tell Julie how lovely she looked, but Julie might misunderstand. Stanley maintained that people only said stuff like that when they wanted to get into someone's pants. Anna felt drab with her scraped-back hair and beige gabardine coat, and she was afraid that Julie might misinterpret her compliment as envy.

Anna tried to remember everything Andrej had taught her about shifting gears, but sometimes the car hopped like a rabbit, and at

other times it stopped altogether. She slowed down for a crossroads, but the car slid into the intersection before she could stop.

Julie did not brace herself or yell at Anna. "You'll get it right next time," she said lightly.

It must cost a lot for Julie to appear so serene, Anna thought. She wanted to say again that she loved her, but of course that was out of the question. Anna wondered why she was so emotional today. She tried to hide her embarrassment that her driving was not perfect although it was only the third time she had practiced.

"I changed the locks of my house last week," Julie announced, "because Richard wanders in whenever he feels like it. He walks right into the bedroom and starts groping around in the closet for his golf shoes or something. It doesn't matter to him whether I'm in bed with Karel or not."

"You changed the locks yourself?" Anna asked. If she were as competent as Julie, she would leave Stanley next week.

"No, I hired the young guy across the street. He got it done just as it started to rain. Richard looked like a drowned rat pounding on the door."

Anna could never humiliate Stanley like that. How did Julie dare to rob a man of his dignity? But Julie did not seem sorry for Richard at all. "Young men are great; they have lots of good energy." She laughed.

"Yes," Anna agreed.

She remembered the beautiful young man who had recited "Wild Swans at Coole" to her. They had been in Anna's secluded office under the eaves on the third floor, where the junior faculty of the English department were segregated from the famous professors. It was early on a misty morning.

"Unwearied still, lover by lover, / They paddle in the cold, / Companionable streams . . ." The soft, manly voice gave Yeats's lines an almost otherworldly loveliness. Tears rose to Anna's eyes. She would never have a sensitive man's attention and love. She was married to Stanley, and that was that.

"Love at the lips was touch / As sweet as I could bear," the young man began.

Anna wondered why he had memorized Frost's "To Earthward." The poem, with its contemplation of lost intensity, was autumnal as well, a surprising choice for someone young.

"I'll learn others for you," the young man offered. His love of poetry, his modulated voice, his dark hair and lean body made him different from the stocky Wisconsin farm boys and the descendants of Polish and German brewery workers who crowded into Anna's classes.

"But you have to memorize for yourself, not for me," she said. She had told her class that having a store of poems would keep them from going insane if they ended up in solitary confinement or in barracks girded by barbed wire. Anna's students regarded her with a mixture of skepticism and indulgence, just as they did when she asked them to write themes about what they knew in enough detail so that they could reconstruct a small part of Western culture after a nuclear war wiped out the rest. They liked her well enough, but they did not see imprisonment or wandering in a wasteland created by a war in their future. "Everyone has a right to their opinion," they told her and shrugged.

This young man sitting close to her was the only one who had actually taken her suggestion to learn poems by heart.

On the way out, he paused. "May I come again?" he asked.

They stood on the threshold, the skin of their bodies yearning to touch. They were completely aware of each other.

"No," Anna said, remembering that he was her student.

At the head of the stairs, he turned and gave Anna a long, questioning look. Then he blew her a kiss and disappeared down the stairs.

He was not in class that afternoon, and he dropped her course the following week.

Anna wondered whether she would still be teaching if she had kept every reference to moments like this to herself. But in her

desperate need for intimacy, she used to tell Stanley almost everything. She believed that by soliciting his opinion she would boost his self-confidence and heal his wounds.

Anna wanted to tell Julie about the beautiful young man who loved poetry, but she made herself concentrate on driving, which was actually getting easier.

She wished she could talk to Julie about Andrej as well, but what was there to say? He was not her lover or anything close to it, they had not made any declarations or promises, and she was old enough to be his mother. Well, almost, because there were ten years between them. She could not count on him to give her a ride or a place to stay if she left Stanley. Nor could she ask him to take her for the road test to get her license because he was probably angry with her for canceling the driving lessons.

"You know more than enough," Julie said, as if hearing Anna's thoughts. "I'd take you myself, but they don't schedule tests on weekends."

They were stumped until Anna remembered Marge. She almost laughed out loud because listening to the latest about the lost teaspoons was such a small price to pay.

"Just don't tell those Motor Vehicle guys you used to teach at the university, or they'll try to put you in your place," Julie advised. "Wear a ruffled blouse and a slit skirt from one of your suits, but leave the jacket at home. If they ask, say you used to teach kindergarten until you saw the light and quit in order to stay home and take care of your husband. They'll make you parallel park otherwise."

Think Stanley will break out the champagne to celebrate?" Marge asked when they returned from the road test. In spite of her short legs, she was in the house before Anna could stop her. Anna hoped Marge would be gone by the time Stanley found out she had her license.

"You'll be able to do some of the driving when he takes you on a trip," Marge said loudly.

Marge herself was full of plans for Cleveland, although her husband was giving her a hard time. "Walter wants to hike down into the Grand Canyon or watch four-hour-long tragedies at a Shakespeare festival rather than go to Cleveland for his two-week vacation. I keep telling him that Lake Erie is there too, but he says he'd prefer to drown in the Seine. But we can do a lot of fun things in Cleveland after we get my teaspoons from the Berzinses' aunt."

"You've found the aunt? And she has them, does she?"

"Well, not exactly. I sent a check to one of the detectives, and he'll meet us and give us her address after we get there. He won't release her unlisted phone number either until we pay his out-of-pocket expenses."

"How big a check?" Anna asked. She felt she was either rude or too emotional these days.

"A thousand even. But of course there'll be other charges, and the trip will be expensive too, what with the toll roads and gas and hotels and meals."

Anna stopped herself from pointing out that for that amount Marge could buy ten times the number of teaspoons she believed the two Dr. Berzinses had stolen in order to give their aunt a Christmas present.

"What's this I hear about a trip?" Stanley asked coming down from the bedroom. "I'm taking Anna on a trip myself. She's been bugging me about seeing her Aunt Elga in Indianapolis. But we'll go off by ourselves right after, just the two of us, and I'll have Anna all to myself then."

Anna felt a rush of gratitude to Stanley for calling her Aunt Elga. Elga had looked after Anna in the camps whenever her father acted crazy, but she was not a blood relative. It was good of Stanley not to quibble about how to refer to her because she was all the family Anna had.

"Anna is quite the queen now, what with her new driver's license.

She might just go off by herself and leave you behind," Marge said to Stanley.

Anna was shocked by what a relative stranger could intuit. She would think about that later, but first she must reassure Stanley and dispel his unhappiness.

I'd rather go to Indianapolis by myself this time," Anna said. It was difficult for her to translate back and forth for Stanley, and his feelings got hurt anyway because people continued to speak in Latvian rather than switching to English just because he was there. He wanted Anna to give them a piece of his mind and to report back that they were sorry they had insulted him.

"Are you crazy? You'll get yourself killed driving through Chicago. You'll wreck the car and then what?"

"But Indianapolis will be boring for you, Stanley. All I'm going to do is clean Elga's apartment, cook and freeze some meals, and take her on her errands. She'll want to go to church on Good Friday, and every single word will be in Latvian then."

"She can speak English if she wants to. You always say she's as sharp as a tack."

Her hearing was certainly acute for a woman in her mideighties. Stanley insisted on having sex whenever they visited her, and he was noisier at her place than usual.

Stanley woke Anna at four the next morning.

"Driving isn't child's play," he explained.

He packed his liquor case and ice chest, made up deadlines for reaching various intersections, and fretted about beating the traffic around Chicago. He got angry if Anna dawdled or wanted to go to the bathroom, but he never hit her.

They rode in silence until Stanley said, "The least you could do is talk to me, Anna. I have to do all the driving while you just sit there and relax. You don't care if I have an accident."

He was right about the accident. Anna would welcome being unconscious, but she offered to drive instead. She could not think of anything to say that would entertain him after he told her no.

Finally Stanley broke the silence. "I know why you want to go to Indianapolis by yourself," he announced. "You want to see your old boyfriends. You probably slept with half the altar boys."

"There aren't any altar boys. Most Latvians are Lutherans," Anna said, but her heart was not in it. They had had this conversation before, and she was tired of bickering.

"Hungry?" Stanley asked, and when she said yes, he took the next exit and surprised her by pulling into Denny's, which did not serve drinks.

"Waste of money to eat along these big highways, but never say I don't treat you right."

Stanley tried to engage the waitress in conversation while she attempted to take the order. He told her how many restaurants he had owned or almost owned in his lifetime, but she was too rushed to pay attention, so he turned to the man in the next booth.

"Hope that corned beef hash is as good as my chef makes at my resort on Cloudy Lake. Ever been up there?"

"No, but I'd sure like to. Did you notice my boat, the one on the hitch, out in the parking lot? That's the smallest I've got; my other's way too big to pull. I keep that at the South Shore Yacht Club in Milwaukee."

Stanley and the man exchanged information about their boats, motors, and cars while the man's wife and two children waited. He was a small man, with quick, neat movements and piercing blue eyes. His wife was smaller yet. Her short, dark hair was sprayed stiff, her eyebrows plucked, and her pancake makeup would crack if she cried. The twelve-year-old boy stared at his plate, but his younger sister smiled ingratiatingly whenever Stanley glanced in her direction. Their clothes were spotless; even their T-shirts had sharply ironed creases. They all carried matching green windbreakers with "Harry's Bar" and white shamrocks stitched on them.

The man finished listing his possessions and made a big show of leaving a five-dollar tip. His wife and children walked three feet behind him to the door.

"That man beats his wife and children," Anna said. "They're terrified of him." She did not know what had come over her.

"There you go, getting crazy again," Stanley said. "Everyone else can see that he's a nice guy."

"He likes to brag," Anna said. She had lost all sense of self-preservation because she added, "Like you."

"I knew it. I knew you'd start in on me the minute you got your license. You don't give a damn that I wait on you hand and foot. Nobody appreciates what I do." His voice quivered just enough for Anna to know he was hurt.

"I *am* grateful, Stanley," Anna said quickly, "but please, I'd like to drive, just until we get to West Lafayette."

"Go ahead, if you think you're so smart. You don't have any idea how to pull out into interstate traffic without crashing into the first thing that comes along. I'm not getting into that car for you to kill me."

Stanley threw the car keys at her, but then grabbed them out of her hands in order to get his liquor case, ice chest, and clothes from the trunk. When he had everything out on the pavement, he flung the keys on the ground. They skittered under the car as he strode back into the restaurant.

Anna got down on her hands and knees to retrieve them. Then she got into the car, locked the doors, and started off. She passed the ramp to the interstate and continued for about ten miles on a winding country road. She was not afraid of a crash on the interstate, but she could not just zoom off. She could not abandon Stanley like that, out in the middle of nowhere. He would be humiliated if he had to beg for a ride.

She turned around and drove back to the restaurant. Stanley did not act surprised to see her. He finished talking to the waitress, took the keys from her extended hand, and they continued as before.

Anna had rarely been in church in the last twenty years. The hand-carved and amber-studded candelabras, the modest pews, and the painting of Christ anguished and praying alone in Gethsemane were the same yet different from what she remembered of this modest building owned by the Latvian Lutherans. The altar was draped in black for Good Friday, and there were no flowers. There was no choir either, just mournful hymns and a beautiful cello solo.

Anna and Elga sat close together, feeling each other's warmth. Elga wiped tears surreptitiously during the music, and she moved her lips when she prayed. Everything would be easy, Anna thought, if she could believe in God like Elga did. Well, maybe not everything, because Elga was old and frail, and she too was frightened of being alone. Neither of them had a family like normal people did.

Stanley sat quietly on Anna's other side. He did not keep checking his watch and saying, "Seen enough?" as he did when he took her to the movies. Both of them were chastened because they had come so close to parting.

In the vestibule people crowded around Elga, and a few told Anna that they were pleased to see her and that she should come to Indianapolis more often. Anna tried to include Stanley in these exchanges, but no one switched to English for his sake. Stanley looked glum as he drove Elga home.

Silvija, Anna's friend in high school, hugged Anna and shook Stanley's hand formally when they arrived at her house on the north side of town. A huge basket of white cyclamen rested on a stand in the entryway, and vases of fragrant daffodils and pale pink tulips lined the mantel and two windowsills. A long table covered with starched linen held sumptuous platters of meats, vegetables, potatoes, and sweet-sour rye bread. Full bottles of vodka, cognac, and wine were grouped in the middle and at both ends.

Silvija's cousin Zigis, who had gone to a different high school from Silvija and Anna, sat down next to Stanley and matched him

drink for drink. Zigis rarely attended Latvian events, but he looked very much at ease. He and Stanley seemed to have plenty to talk about. Their heads bobbed in unison, and there were identical expressions of disgust on their faces. They were probably agreeing that all Latvians were hopeless snobs because Zigis's American wife had not been welcomed by them either during his brief marriage.

Silvija motioned Anna into the bedroom. She smiled shyly as she showed off awards she had received for choreographing folk dancing for the Latvian Song Festival and the Indianapolis Folk Fair. Silvija spent every Saturday at the Latvian Community Center, teaching six- and seven-year-olds dances, riddles, and songs. She knew a lot of Americans, but not one was included in her circle of friends.

When Anna returned to the table, Modris, who was a year older than she, slid into the empty seat next to her. He began to talk in an urgent half-whisper about Laimonis, a boy who had ridden to high school with him and Anna. Laimonis had had some kind of breakdown at the Indianapolis Art Museum. He had tried to climb a bare wall and screamed that the Russians were pursuing him and that they were going to pull out his fingernails. The police had eventually subdued him, and the last time Modris had visited Laimonis, he had been fat but placid on medication. But Laimonis had killed himself last year, on June 14, the Latvian day of mourning for those deported to Siberia in 1941 and afterward.

"Older Latvians maintain that adults suffered the most during the war, but I don't believe that anymore. No way. Not after Laimonis," Modris said. "Did you know that of the six of us in the carpool, you and I are the only ones left alive? I'm tough as an old bacon rind," Modris laughed.

Several people stood up to propose toasts and to make funny speeches, and then everyone sang. Anna did not have another conversation, but she felt she had talked and listened and been understood. Forgotten words came back, and all the jokes were familiar.

Stanley did not nudge her to leave until well past midnight. He wove a little on the way to the car, but that did not interrupt his

oration on how ridiculous the Latvians were and how differently they would treat him if they had any common sense. Anna hoped this inexhaustible subject would keep him from starting in on her. All she wanted was to get back to Elga's apartment and go to sleep.

Stanley started off in the wrong direction, and when she pointed that out, he made several sharp turns but ended up going in the same direction.

The car was low on gas when they came to a dead end. The lights of the city had disappeared, and there was barbed wire on both sides of the road.

"You don't know where you are," Anna said.

"All right, all right, you drive," Stanley said. "You've been hounding me about that all night anyway."

The space was narrow, but Anna managed to turn around the car. They were near Fort Benjamin Harrison or some other military installation, but she thought she could find her way back to a street that was familiar.

At the first red light, Stanley opened the door and jumped out.

"You're cutting off my balls, Anna, you know that? You've been doing it for a long time," he shouted.

She felt as if searchlights had caught her with a knife in her hand. She called after Stanley to come back until angry horns blared behind her.

She drove around the block looking for him. Most establishments were closed and had bars on the windows, but loud music poured from a few. Men crowded under darting red arrows and signs for liquor; others were smoking and passing bottles back and forth. If there were any women, Anna did not register their presence.

She was terrified for Stanley. It was dangerous for him to be wandering around drunk in this neighborhood. Jerzy Kosinski knew how to glide unobserved on the dark streets of New York from one sex club to another; he knew how to find safe hiding places wherever he went. The boy in *The Painted Bird* carried a "comet" made from a tin can, with burning coals in it. He always had his own light and

warmth, and the comet could be used as a weapon as well. But Stanley was not as clever. He was out in the cold night, in the midst of strangers, and she had hurt him by being tactless.

She circled the block again, hoping desperately to see him. Men were beginning to point and stare. She was a woman alone, in an expensive car, looking for drugs or sex or trouble. Two started purposefully toward her, and she shot through a red light without hitting anyone.

She drove straight on for several blocks, trying to work up her courage to go back. She could not abandon Stanley in this neighborhood full of menacing strangers, without a car or anyone to protect him. She forced herself to drive down the same street once more, but he was nowhere in sight. Finally she could think of nothing to do but to leave.

Elga was waiting on the sidewalk in front of her apartment. She looked small and vulnerable in her robe and slippers. Stanley, glass in his hand, was outlined in the open door behind her.

"Thank God," Elga said. "I was worried about you, Anna, my dear little heart."

Anna was ashamed of making her old friend worry, but being called dear little heart warmed her.

"Stanley says he had to take a taxi because you pushed him out of the car. Did you?"

"No."

"I didn't think you did. I had no idea you two were having problems. You always act like you're happy to be with him."

Act was the right word, Anna thought. She tried to make herself invisible as she tiptoed up the steps. Stanley turned away before she came face to face with him, and she heard the bedroom door slam.

"I've made up a place for you on the couch," Elga said. "I can sleep on the comforter on the living-room floor."

"Oh, no, you take the couch, and I'll sleep on the floor. It'll be like old times."

Elga's sheets had tiny sprigs of flowers, and her blue blanket and white comforter were soft yet firm. Anna felt almost safe, as she had on a thin straw mat and old army blanket next to Elga's bunk in the barracks. She had tried not to bother Elga when her father only muttered to himself, but she ran to her whenever he tried to seize her by the arm and drag her along with him. She could hear him calling after, begging her to come back.

Her heart contracted with pity for him as she ran. How would he manage without her? How soon could she go back to him? When would he stop mumbling about the break he had found in the barbed wire, which was wide enough for them to crawl through? They should creep on their bellies to the woods. They should find a tree with branches sturdy enough to hold their suspended bodies. It was the only thing left for them to do because they were garbage and nothing good would ever happen to them.

It was late on Easter Sunday when Anna returned to the house on Cloudy Lake. She had not worried about how Stanley would get back as much as she had expected. She had driven by herself all the way from Indianapolis, through Chicago and past Madison, without the disasters predicted by Stanley. She had not had a nervous breakdown, and she had not been beaten unconscious by motorists outraged by her mistakes.

The bed covers gave too easily, and she realized Stanley was not on his side. She tensed instantly. It was her fault that he was not home. She was responsible for his unhappiness. He was twisting and turning on a stone-hard seat in an airport, or he was shivering by a muddy field off Interstate 65. She had done that to him. Stanley said people were too paranoid to pick up a solitary man hitchhiking and that perverts roamed the roads looking for blowjobs. Anna wished she had given Stanley the car keys and made her own way back here somehow.

She turned on the light to look at the clock. She was sure that her guilt would keep her from sleeping, but she turned the lamp off anyway. She adjusted the blanket until it was snug around her, closed her eyes, and concentrated on her breath as it moved lightly in and out.

The sun was high when she woke. She could tell without looking that Stanley was in bed. The smell of scotch was familiar, but the perfume, unsophisticated and sweetly floral, like something a young woman would wear, was not. Here, finally, was a reason she could leave without unbearable guilt.

Anna tiptoed down the stairs and outside. The sky had been washed clean by Easter. She cut three branches of forsythia, carried them indoors, and arranged them in a clear glass vase. She found a green clay bowl for the eggs she and Elga had dyed the old-fashioned Latvian way, with birch leaves and the skins of onions and beets. The eggs had subtle swirls and patterns because each had been individually wrapped in vegetable peels or bits of cloth, some with grains of barley pressed against their delicate shells. Elga had scratched stylized suns and fir branches into the darkest ones.

Anna wanted to sit and just look at the forsythia and the eggs, but she poured herself a cup of fresh coffee, put a pale green egg into her pocket, and walked outside again. The lake was more blue than gray, and she tried to memorize its exact shade. She turned toward the house and systematically visualized every corner and every windowsill, every cupboard and closet, so that she could reconstruct them later, the way she did Stabules ("The Flutes"), the country house in Latvia where she had lived until she was six.

White blossoms danced above the dark green leaves of snowdrops, and the buds of the early narcissus were plump. Anna ate the egg and tried to convince herself that she would be better off if she left. Not having a home in America was bound to be different from being a homeless refugee in Europe. Between the ages of seven and twelve, Jerzy had survived without a family and without anyone else who loved him.

Indoors the eggs were nestled safe in their bowl, and the slender branches of forsythia rested peacefully against the glass rim. Anna heard Stanley go to the bathroom and get back into bed. She made herself walk upstairs to face him.

"I'm going to leave," she said. "I'm sorry, but I have to."

When he raised his hand but did not strike, she went on. "We aren't good for each other, Stanley. Something terrible will happen if we stay together."

She expected Stanley to plead with her not to go because he had always told her that he could not live without her, but he did not.

"All right," Stanley said and held out his hand for the car keys. Seeing Anna hesitate, he picked up the phone and called the resort. One of the busboys would bring the old pickup used to transport the mower and trash.

"I'll have to try to get along somehow without that truck. It's been with me a long time," Stanley said, effectively stirring Anna's guilt even about this. He held out his hand again, and she dropped the keys to the car into it.

Anna was dazed that he was letting her go so easily. He had sworn he would die if he lost her. He had promised he would sacrifice everything he owned just to be with her. He had said he would always protect her because it was a big, bad world out there. But he did not look upset now. Anna heard him begin to whistle, then stop midbreath.

She packed some books and clothes and a blank journal. As an afterthought, she added a sketchbook, although she doubted she would use it. Stanley still did not ask her where she would go, he did not press money or advice on her, and he did not grab her and hold on.

He handed her the keys to the pickup and locked the kitchen door behind her. Anna felt something tear all the way through as she walked past her flower bed. She had lived in this house for three years, longer than anywhere except her first six years in Stabules in Latvia. It was the only place she had felt settled enough to start a

garden. Now she was a DP again, a displaced person, as millions were called after the war.

When she was sure she could not be seen from the house, she pulled over. She had trained herself not to cry, but now she used up a small packet of Kleenex, and she had to wipe her face on the hem of her gray skirt as well.

The sun was warm as Anna drove south. By the time she started thinking about a place to spend the night, she was in Lake Geneva. Most of the large Victorian guesthouses for summer people were still closed, but she found one open just off Main Street.

"Miss or Mrs.?" a tired-looking woman asked. She pushed hair away from her ear and tilted her head toward Anna.

"Mrs.," the woman concluded when Anna did not answer. She led her up the stairs and into a shabby but pleasant room with a large bay window. There was a small TV on a stand covered with plastic lace, a four-poster bed, and white towels on a sagging armchair. She pointed to the bathroom down the hall.

"Is there a phone?" Anna asked. There was not, and she had no one to call, but Stanley must be frantic by now. Maybe he would figure out where she was and call her and beg her to return.

Anna flicked on the TV, stretched out on the bed, and tried not to think. After a while she noticed it was dark, and for no reason at all she remembered the isolated house behind the motel in *Psycho.* She got up, turned the deadbolt, and put on the chain for additional safety. She changed into a pair of apricot silk pajamas, which she had hardly worn, because Stanley hated the complicated buttons and sash, and she stared at the TV again until she thought she might be able to fall asleep. She found her soap and toothbrush and picked up a towel.

The deadbolt turned easily, but the chain was wedged firmly into its groove. She tried to free it with her fingers, with her nail scissors,

and with the heel of her shoe. She knocked loudly on the door to attract attention, and she tried the scissors again. She had nowhere to go, but she did need to use the bathroom. And she could not stand it that she had imprisoned herself in the very first place she had come to.

Anna sat down on the bed and cried a little. Stanley was right that she could not manage. She would always get into trouble in just a couple of hours away from him.

She was surprised how angry she got when she imagined him taunting her. She took off her shoe and pounded on the door, and when that produced no results, she pried the window open and looked out. It was ludicrous to start yelling onto an empty street.

A car pulled up just as she was about to cry again. It was a battered old Mercury, but the man who got out was quite young.

"Help," she called, and he looked up.

In a few minutes he was upstairs, trying to open her door. The landlady, who appeared to be his mother, talked without pause while he worked. She said she had been watching a movie on TV and that there was a lot of loud singing in *Carousel* and that if Anna would just slide the head of the chain to the end of the track, the door would open right up, exactly as it had for everybody else who had ever stayed there.

"I'll go get the ladder," the young man said. "We'll have to take the chain off from the inside."

He was gone before she could say she was sorry for spoiling his evening.

He removed the screen and leaned into the window. "I'll go back down and hold the ladder so you can climb out. There are a couple of bathrooms on the first floor." He spoke as if stepping through windows and creeping down wobbly ladders in the dark were things Anna did every day. Her legs trembled, and she knew she looked ridiculous.

"Keep going," he said. "You're more than halfway down already."

When her feet were on the ground, he opened his arms to hug

her. In the circle of lamplight, she could see that he was exactly as tall as she and that his smile was kind. He wore a black leather vest and a tiny diamond earring, and a recent scar ran across his cheekbone and disappeared into his hair. She drew back from him sharply. Stanley said that people acted nice only when they were out to get something.

She was sorry later that she had not hugged the young man. He had helped her for no reason at all, and he had not accepted her offered ten-dollar bill afterward. Maybe other people were kind too without expecting anything in return. She wished she had stepped into the young man's arms, just to see what would happen next.

In the morning, over French toast and thick slices of bacon, the landlady questioned Anna. Why was she in Lake Geneva, where was she going, and what did her husband do? As soon as Anna felt it was polite to rise from the table, she sprinted upstairs to get her things. She did not want to stay where she had made a fool of herself. Besides, anyone could take the ladder once it got dark and climb into her window.

She started to give the landlady a credit card but handed her some bills instead. Stanley always inspected her receipts, though the card was in her name. But if he had closed the account, Anna did not want to know. She was not ready to give up the illusion that he loved her and would not want to make her destitute.

Anna locked the door of the pickup and counted the remaining bills and change in her wallet. She would have to be very careful with money until she found a job. To save on lodging, she considered calling Marge and asking to stay with her for a few days. She would not mind hearing about the teaspoons, but she knew that Marge would tell her that all couples had their differences, that marriage was hard work, and that Anna should make up with Stanley because he was crazy about her. Anna did not want to impose on Julie because Karel was there and she was in love with him. She did not want to worry Elga more than she had already, and she did not want

to go to Indianapolis either, where she would be the subject of constant gossip, which the older Latvians indulged in. She did not know Andrej well enough to send him a postcard, let alone ask him for help. But most of all she did not want to go back where she had come from.

"Miss or Mrs.?" a bored young woman asked as Anna signed in at a motel down the street.

"Doctor," Anna said and felt herself blush. It was not a lie because she did have a doctorate, although it was in literature rather than science, let alone medicine. Stanley always said that using "Doctor" or "PhD" or "Professor" was pretentious and that only snobs with cushy jobs in universities did that. She put her hands over her ears to shut out Stanley's voice, but it continued to yammer inside her.

"Stop, Stanley," she whispered. "Please, please stop."

Suddenly she remembered that she had wanted to be called by her own name, Anna Dūja ("Dove") even when she was wild about him. "Mrs. Stanley Krieger" had made her feel like she had a bad permanent and was wearing a faded housedress.

The young woman behind the counter beamed at Anna. "You'll want to take a look at the baby," she said. "We brought her home from the hospital just last week."

She returned with a stethoscope and a sleeping baby. "Marcie was born with a hole in her heart," she said proudly. "But it's amazing what they can do nowadays. Here, take a listen."

Anna put the rubber tips into her ears and placed the scope on the baby's chest, which was so tiny that missing the heart was impossible.

"Good," Anna said and nodded.

She spent the next four hours in the public library, watching whitecaps on Geneva Lake through the large picture windows and reading the want ads in the Milwaukee and Madison papers. She tried writing in her journal and actually managed to put down a sentence or two about her flower bed.

Then she set out on the path that circled the entire lake. She walked for an hour before turning back. She was windburned and chilled and hungry, but supper in an imitation 1950s diner off Main

Street tasted good, and she fell asleep easily in the lumpy bed at the motel.

Anna woke at two in the morning, terrified that the baby was not breathing. What if she had to revive Marcie? What if Marcie died because Anna had misled her mother? Could she be imprisoned for impersonating a doctor? Would her picture be in the paper? How would Stanley jeer?

She considered calling Stanley, just to let him know where she was, but instead she took two aspirin from her overnight case and studied the list she had made of job openings in Madison. She did not really know anyone there, but that had been true everywhere since she left Latvia.

Anna imagined the baby taking one light breath after another. Her perfect little fingers rested on the edge of the blanket, and her transparent eyelids were sealed above the delicate curve of her cheek. Her tiny heart kept beating, and Anna's settled into a quiet rhythm as well. The baby slept, and Anna did too.

The sun was bright when Anna went outside, but it had not melted the thin layer of ice on the windows of the truck. The door on the driver's side flew open, and she realized she had been too distracted to lock it the night before.

She was afraid to see what had been stolen, but when she looked, her satchel of books and her suitcase were still there. Nobody valued books enough anymore to steal them, of course, but everything else was safe and undefiled. Stanley would laugh at her for being superstitious, but this felt like a sign that the worst did not always happen. Maybe she would get a job, make a few new friends, and find a place to live that she could call home.

"I might have known you'd end up on the politically correct East Side," Stanley said when Anna told him that the apartment she had rented in Madison was at Sherman Terrace.

Anna kept her eyes on the road leading away from the house as she continued washing dishes and cutlery. The kitchen was filthy after her weeklong absence.

"I wish you'd told me you wanted to be in Madison so bad. I would've bought me a decent condo on the West Side. I wouldn't have to give an arm and a leg to the Edgewater Hotel every time I took you down there to your precious library. It would've been a terrific investment."

Anna decided to wait to tell him that she had found a part-time job in Waldenbooks and that she might get a few classes to teach as a limited-term employee at the university in the fall. She concentrated on scrubbing the counter so that she would not have to feel anything about yet another way she had disappointed Stanley.

"Should we take the bed?" one of the men who worked for Stanley at the resort asked. "There's plenty of room in the pickup."

"Might as well," Stanley said. "She's taking every other damn thing."

"No," Anna said. She did not have the money for it now, but buying her own bed excited her. She did not care that she would have to make do with the short sofa, which Stanley called a love seat, until she could afford one. Her bed would be narrow and smooth, and she would cover it with crisp white cotton sheets and a very light blue wool blanket. She would spread out her books and papers next to it, and she would leave her journal in plain sight without fear that Stanley would read it.

"I'd like to take this though," Anna said, pointing to the huge, old clivia in her study. She had started the plant from a single tiny offset twenty years ago, shortly after she got married.

"That is, if you don't mind, Stanley," she added.

Stanley shrugged, rolled his eyes, and tapped his temple to indicate she was crazy. His helpers maneuvered the pot, the size of a half barrel, onto a dolly and out of the house and up the walk. He handed them a beer each and opened one for himself before getting into the battered pickup holding Anna's possessions.

"Be careful, Stanley," Anna called after him. She hated that he drank beer while driving, even though he knew how to talk his way out of a ticket. She was not really worried about her things. But she was suddenly terrified that he would hurt her clivia.

She walked through the house, which looked mostly undisturbed except for her study. It was hard to believe that she had made so little difference in the three years she had lived here. She told herself she should feel something, but it was as if everything was happening to someone else.

When Anna parked Stanley's car at Sherman Terrace in Madison, he was standing in the bed of the pickup, glaring down at the young man who managed the apartments.

"Don't get your balls in an uproar," Stanley said. "All I did was drive across the so-called lawn. It's not as if it's in decent shape anyway."

The manager turned to Anna. "That's not how we do things here," he said.

"Please, Stanley, move the truck," she said. Standing below him, her eyes level with his crotch, she felt humiliated, as if she had been forced to kneel in full sight of the neighbors.

"Please, Stanley," she repeated.

Stanley took his time getting down and starting the engine. Finally he pulled around to the paved area at the back door to Anna's apartment.

You've ruined my welcome, Stanley, Anna wanted to say, but it had been generous of him to help her move, and she did not want to start an argument in front of her new neighbors.

"I'll be dead tired tonight, that's for sure, after all I've done for you, Anna. I won't get a good night's sleep either, sleeping single in a double bed," Stanley sighed.

Anna was angry with him, but her heart still contracted automatically with pity and guilt.

The first week in Madison, Anna felt as if she had escaped from a cage. She could stay late at the library, go out for a cup of coffee, and buy a newspaper whenever she wanted, without having to justify herself to Stanley. She walked to Picnic Point on the path along Lake Mendota and listened to a free lecture on Zora Neale Hurston in the Wisconsin Historical Society auditorium. When she turned on the lights in her apartment, the better to enjoy the empty space around her, she knew that concerts, parties, and plays went on elsewhere. Exciting things happened close enough for her to reach, the way they had near her father's apartment on Elizabete Street in Riga.

Whenever Anna's father had brought her from the country to stay with him for a few days, he was always home by dusk. He leapt from the chauffer-driven limousine, bounded up the stairs, and swept her up in his arms. He went with her to visit her dolls and stuffed animals, and he listened with apparent interest to what this motherless family—two bears as father and brother, and three dolls as sisters—had done during the day. While she put the dolls and bears to bed, each in a separate room in her elaborate dollhouse, he retreated to his study. He looked up and smiled at her whenever she joined him.

They ate dinner together, just the two of them, at opposite ends of a long table. While innumerable courses were discreetly set down by a maid, he told her the plots of operas and plays: brave men risked their lives for their native lands and for the women they worshipped, beautiful women sang as they were dying for love, and passion was worth every cost. The fringe of her father's silk scarf brushed Anna's cheek as he bent over her bed to kiss her goodnight before he returned to the thrilling life of the city.

Anna enjoyed wandering around Madison on her own, but she knew that if she wanted to make friends, she would have to try to meet people. Stanley's dire prediction that no one would like her buzzed in her ears as she tried to work up her nerve to call an acquaintance who had been in the Madison Feminist Literary Collective with her in the early 1970s. Now, in the 1980s, women no

longer met to discuss books written exclusively by women, and consciousness-raising groups had disappeared as well.

The groups of the 1960s and 1970s had had profound effects. Several of Anna's women friends had gotten divorced, and one of Anna's male acquaintances still blamed CR groups for the newly found lesbianism of his wife. They had transformed Anna's professional life but not her marriage to Stanley.

Anna had attended her first CR group in Whitewater, where she taught at Wisconsin State College while working on her PhD at the university in Madison. She had been excited by the invitation. This group was going to be different from the Faculty Dames at Whitewater, who sponsored snobbish teas and 1950s-style dances, and whose name alone made Anna blush.

Anna and Julie shared an office in the basement of the library with another woman from the English department. The three had been exiled there by Dean Wells so that their presence would not distract or corrupt their male colleagues. Anna had tried to resign from the Dames, only to be told that all wives and all women faculty were automatically members and that resignation was impossible. Dunning letters for dues and scolding phone calls for failure to bring brownies continued to arrive.

In preparation for their first meeting with the new group, Anna and Julie read the assigned articles in the new *Ms.* magazine and reviewed designated chapters of *The Feminine Mystique.* Discussing books with women of various backgrounds was going to be fun. It was bound to be entirely different from the competitive staging of opinions and the aggressive disagreements in graduate seminars. The invitation said that "other feminist tomes would be perused" in the future and suggested that they "come prepared to bond."

The meeting was already in progress when Anna and Julie arrived. Just as Anna had been ready to leave home, Stanley had developed a stomachache that he was sure would turn into appendicitis, and they had had to wait for Julie's first husband, Ed, who claimed

he was at the Brass Rail having martinis only because she had never mentioned that she would need the car.

Thirteen women, all sitting cross-legged in a circle on the floor of Gloria's living room, looked up simultaneously as Julie and Anna entered. Gloria, who had issued the invitations, was standing over them, conducting a survey.

"How many of you here are married? Is there anyone, and dare I say it, cohabiting with a man without benefit of clergy? I need an accurate count of how many are living with the enemy. We have to maintain a clear majority of women who are not willing slaves to the patriarchy."

Julie and Anna raised their hands sheepishly, along with three or four others.

"It looks OK. Not great, but acceptable," Gloria said, her Indian-print tunic billowing and her bell-bottom pants swinging. "The next item on our agenda is bonding. We'll go around the circle, and each of you will recount your most embarrassing moment having to do with the fact of being female. Take a minute to think about it. Here are a few hints. The attitudes toward menstruation in this culture are designed to make women feel ashamed of their bodies, and male gynecologists' offices are the place where women see most clearly the unequal power relations between men and women. Let's start with menstruation. You first, Jody."

Alarmed, Anna looked around. Marissa, her favorite student and the only middle-aged woman in her classes the previous semester, had distinguished herself by outspoken opposition to the Vietnam War. But now, eyes firmly fixed on the floor, she looked anything but brave. All that stood between Anna and her turn to speak was Marissa and an eighteen-year-old who sat in the front row in Anna's freshman English class.

Gloria nodded sagely as Jody finished her blood-on-the-white-skirt account. Another middle-aged woman from Whitewater, whom Stanley had alternately threatened to sue and to punch in the

nose when she refused to rent an apartment to him, was gazing at Anna expectantly through heart-shaped glasses.

Anna did not know the word for menstruation in Latvian, her mother tongue, and had it not been for the wordless but effective assistance of Elga, she might have continued trying to keep a wad of newsprint between her legs. But the prospect of a conversation about books with other women was not enough for her offer up this experience to a current student, a former student, a possible ill-wisher, or anyone else for that matter.

"I wish we could leave, Julie," Anna whispered.

"Right," Julie nodded.

"Got to go," Julie stood up, interrupting Gloria's directive to take a minute to hold hands and to thank Judy for sharing.

"Fierce migraine," Julie muttered. "Anna, you better come too."

Disapproving murmurs followed them as they ran down the front steps and into the street. They collapsed in helpless laughter once they were in Julie's car.

"At least she didn't make us roll up our slacks to prove we haven't been shaving our legs," Anna said.

"Or our pubic hair." Julie, always the bold one, laughed.

Over the years, as Anna participated in other feminist groups, she knew that she should not have left so precipitously. Gloria had been courageous; it mattered less that she had made others feel awkward. Anna's negative reaction had not been entirely her own anyway because she had already been shaping the experience into an anecdote that would please and flatter Stanley.

Soon the slogan "the personal is the political" appeared everywhere, but it did not transform Anna's life inside the four walls of her home and her marriage. She was not unique in this; other women too modulated their angry voices and backed away from authentic insights as soon as a man entered the room. Yet the possibility of courage and transformation, which Anna did not focus on her obedience to Stanley, continued to draw her to women's groups and feminist activities.

She was brave in her professional life: she risked being fired for working to abolish strict dorm curfews for women students, for pregnancy leave for faculty, for the Health Center to offer free birth control to students, and for women's studies courses as well as a women's center at the university. She attended rallies in support of lesbian rights, encouraged students to report sexual harassment, and in the privacy of her office occasionally loaned money from the clothes allowance Stanley gave her to students in need of abortion.

She had been really scared only the first time she had acted in support of women. Women in American Culture, the controversial first course at the university in Whitewater focusing on women, one that Anna had developed, met in a seminar room with a glass panel in the door and directly across from a busy elevator.

Kim, who hoped to be admitted to medical school, finished giving a rather bland paper on Margaret Sanger, reached under the table, pulled out a shoe box, and dumped its contents on the table. A sea sponge, packets of birth-control pills, diaphragms, and a douche bag landed with a plop, as Kim picked up a condom, stretched it, and blew it up into a balloon in order to test it. Disparaging the current myth in the women's dorms that douching with Coca-Cola would prevent pregnancy, Kim began to work the condom around a small zucchini.

Anna encouraged her shiest students to ask questions while she wiggled her toes and tried to appear calm outwardly. A hostile faculty member or administrator could come by any minute, look through the glass panel, and see that Anna sanctioned this display in her classroom of objects that could not be pictured in women's magazines or sent through the United States mail. Only sixteen years later did the Wisconsin state legislature declassify them as "indecent articles."

Gradually Anna calmed herself. The worst that could happen was that she would be fired. But she did not go on to consider what could be the worst if she hurt or upset Stanley.

Anna searched the Madison phone book for names of women from the Madison Feminist Literary Collective. Love, gratitude, and

admiration for these highly articulate, brilliant academic women welled up in her. She had first read *The Yellow Wallpaper, The Quest for Christa T., The Girl,* and *A Room of One's Own* in their company. She had learned a lot from them and had come to startling insights of her own in their company. They had helped her transform her somewhat perfunctory teaching into deeply meaningful work.

She had felt at home with them, even though in retrospect some of their assumptions had been oversimplified or wrong: nurture, not nature, accounted for all gender-specific behavior; no inherent differences existed between women and men; lesbian relationships were always superior to marriage and to romantic encounters with men; all women shared common goals regardless of class and race; women who treated other women badly did so only because they had been damaged by the patriarchy; sisterhood was all powerful; and any woman who suffered or killed herself for the love of a man was a fool.

Anna decided that the women in the group would not want to have anything to do with her because of the choices she had made in the last twenty years. She had put her marriage before her career. Then, unable to sustain the contradictions between her public and her private self, she had gotten dangerously ill three years ago. Like a character in a nineteenth-century novel, she had rested on a daybed between deep coughs and high fevers instead of facing the terrors that kept her tethered to Stanley. Her acquaintances in the Feminist Literary Collective would scorn her.

Anna closed the phone book and dialed the number of the apartment that Sara sublet when she was in Madison.

She was surprised to hear Sara pick up.

"Anna, how lovely. And how fortuitous. I'm here for only three more days. Then I'm off to Arizona because my dear husband needs me."

Anna had meant to tell Sara that she had left Stanley, but Sara's loving reference to her husband made her feel ashamed. She had failed at marriage just as certainly as she had failed in her career. Sara

probably thought a woman was foolish to abandon a husband just because she wanted a life of her own. Instead of inviting Sara to her apartment, which would make the situation clear, Anna suggested they meet on Sunday afternoon at the Elvehjem Museum, to hear a free concert by the Pro Arte Quartet.

Chopin and Brahms still sounded in Anna's head while Sara ordered coffee and small, delicate pear tarts at the Sunprint Gallery. Anna could not believe how lucky she was: she had listened to chamber music and was now sharing a table with a friend near the window in a café. It was almost like being in Europe.

"At least the Europe I imagine," Anna amended. "It wasn't like this after the war."

"It certainly was not," Sara agreed. "Nor during the war either. But the fragrance reminds me of the bakery I hid in during the war. It wasn't this rich mixture of vanilla and chocolate, of course, but plain dark-rye bread smells lovely too. The smell of baking always makes me feel safe."

The week after Sara had graduated from high school, the doorbell of her parents' apartment rang late one night.

"I have false papers for you," Katerina announced.

Sara was too surprised to say anything because Katerina was not a friend; she was just a former classmate. The two girls had not been friends even when they sat next to each other in a class on the history of Poland. Sara was not included in Katerina's birthday parties, and she was never invited to her house to eat or to play. It would have been unthinkable for Gentiles to socialize with Jews like that. And Sara had lost touch with Katerina completely after Jews were ordered to go to a separate school.

"I'm doing this because I am Christian," Katerina said as she handed Sara an envelope. A forged identity card, ration cards, and a thin stack of bills were inside.

Katerina's cheeks flamed with fever in her thin face as, between wracking coughs, she told Sara the names of the saints that she especially loved.

"If Jesus were alive today, he would be taking all kinds of risks to help the Jews," Katerina said. "It's true that I can do only this one small thing. But I will pray every night to God and to the saints to preserve you."

Katerina was gone before Sara could find the right words for a goodness she sensed was beyond girlish notions of martyrdom.

With the false papers in hand, Sara was able to get a job in a knitting factory. She moved in with other women who were employed there and who lived right on the premises. The work was fine, sometimes almost satisfying, but in a week or two the owner started looking at her suspiciously. One evening he told her to get out; he did not want any trouble for himself.

An elderly couple who owned a bakery let Sara sleep on the floor behind the oven as long as she left early in the morning, before their assistant arrived. She managed all right during the day because she knew that a safe place awaited her at night.

Encountering a Polish acquaintance on the street could be as dangerous as being stopped by the German patrols. Sara was constantly afraid, but she forced herself not to show it and to walk as if she were in a hurry to get somewhere, like a secretary sent on an urgent errand or a married woman rushing home to cook dinner.

By then Sara had only one pair of shoes suitable for the city: black suede, with very high heels, pretty but hard to walk in. To sit on a park bench to rest for longer than a minute aroused suspicion, and even then she had to perch on the edge and pretend to be looking for something in her purse. Her feet and ankles hurt all the time, and her heels throbbed with blisters and running sores. Cramps wrenched her calves at night, and the pain that traveled up her hips and back was so bad that she had to bite her hand to keep from crying out loud.

She wore a hat with a wide brim, but the sun and wind still got to her face, and she was afraid that someone would notice how tan she was. That could only mean one thing, that she was out on the streets all day, trying to hide in plain sight.

The old people were kind. They left a warm meal for her every night, and sometimes they added a few coins. Sara bought flowers whenever she had a little money, and she carried them ostentatiously to a Christian cemetery. She pretended she was visiting the grave of an aunt or an uncle. She had memorized names and birth and death dates on several gravestones, so that she could change her story and her destination if she ran into a dead person's relatives.

It was shady under the trees, and the large statues shielded her from view. There were a few benches she could sit on and still keep an eye out for someone coming toward her.

One day she stretched out on the grass beneath a stone angel. The pedestal hid her from passersby, and the shadow of its wings protected her from sunburn. She felt surprisingly peaceful and safe as she fell asleep.

A man in black rags shook her awake.

"Get out of here, woman, before you give all of us away. You'll have the blood of children on your hands."

She was too terrified to object or to ask questions, but a few days later she heard that the Germans had rounded up Jews hiding in crypts and that they had started regular patrols of all the other cemeteries as well.

"Thank you for telling me," Anna said after a long pause. She knew her words were inadequate.

"But what about you, Anna? What happened to you and your family?"

Anna had not even mentioned leaving Stanley, so to talk about the war and its aftermath was out of the question. But Sara's warm interest softened something hard inside her; Sara's questions excited her. She wanted to speak as directly and simply as Sara, but for that

she would have to be as fearless as Jerzy Kosinski. Only later did she realize that in her agitation she had forgotten to ask Sara for her phone number in Arizona.

Anna knew better than to mention Sara to Stanley when she met him at the Ovens of Brittany the following week to go over details of their separation. He would scoff if she told him that she had made a new friend. Or he would say that what had happened to Sara was not so bad. Soon Anna wished she had not mentioned her new job at Waldenbooks either.

"I like spending my afternoons among books," she said.

"Don't lie to me, Anna. I know what you really like, and that's being away from me. You don't care that it's another disaster for me. Everything's wrong since you took it into your head to leave me. The resort is going down the drain too."

"Should we order dinner?" Anna asked to change the subject.

"I don't know. Is this place still run by the Moonies? That waitress must be one of them. Look at all that hair, and she hasn't even bothered with lipstick."

Anna's long hair was severely pulled back, and her oval face was untouched by makeup. To her knowledge there were no Moonies in the Ovens of Brittany on State Street, so she let that comment pass.

"She'll never get a man for herself," Stanley observed. "The world's full of middle-aged divorced women who know how to please a man. That's what this single guy who comes into the bar tells me anyway. He says he went to see some woman he met through an ad, and she came to the door wearing nothing but those funny high-heeled shoes, with feathers and no back. Know what I mean, Anna?"

"Mules," Anna said automatically.

"That's right. Bare-ass naked and feet stuffed into mules. There he was, ready to spend some time, take her out for a drink first, and she opens the door looking like that."

Anna supposed that Stanley himself was the single guy he was hiding behind, and pity washed over her. But surprisingly it was for the woman rather than for Stanley's loneliness.

"How are things otherwise?" she asked.

"I told you, the resort is losing money left and right, and not enough bookings for the rest of the summer either," Stanley said.

He pushed a brown envelope from the Internal Revenue Service toward her. Anna's heart began to race.

"I'm doing everything I can to save the place. Here, Anna, sign this. I have to pay the bills double quick, or they'll close the place on me. We'll lose the equity in the house too if that happens."

Instead of a letter spelling out penalties or court dates, it was a refund check made out to them jointly for twelve thousand dollars for last year's business losses.

Stanley whisked the check out of Anna's hands and turned it over. "Sign right here, honey," he said.

Outside on State Street three police officers were converging on a man. In spite of the raw April day, he was naked from the waist up. His muscular shoulders and paint-stained jeans made him look like a painter or a roofer on his day off. But then Anna noticed his jerking movements and matted hair.

The policemen pushed the man up against a squad car and frisked him. They patted even his exposed shoulders and bare arms. The man bowed his head and meekly held out his wrists. Anna could not stand the submissive way his shoulders collapsed as the handcuffs were snapped into place.

The Russian soldiers used rope instead of handcuffs. They tied a length around Anna's father's neck, the way someone would leash a runaway dog.

"Stay here and wait for me," her father had said. "It's all right. I'll be back soon."

He did come back, but it was never all right. He was clutching a muddy blanket over his stained underwear, and they had taken his suit and his shoes. But they had done something else to him too

because after that his hands trembled and he flinched whenever he saw anyone in uniform. Nothing Anna did could make it up to him.

"Anna?" Stanley pushed the check toward her.

Anything you want, Stanley, Anna almost said, as she had for more than twenty years. She would do anything so a man could keep his dignity. But she had to pay Julie the money she had borrowed for her security deposit and first month's rent, and she wanted a bed in which she could stretch out to her full length.

The policemen shut the door on the crazed man and got into their cars. Stanley tapped the check.

Anna's vision split as the doors slammed. Stanley certain that she would follow his orders, her father humiliated by soldiers, and the naked man submitting were no longer superimposed on each other. They were linked but separate, like panels in a triptych of suffering saints. Each had a separate story even though all she could see right now was ill-assorted fragments. She would have to sort them and make sense of them eventually.

"I'll sign after you give me a check for a thousand dollars," she heard herself say.

"Oh, Anna, Anna, you've gotten hard as nails. You used to be so generous. I don't know how I can go on living without the real Anna." Stanley sighed.

Anna did not know how she could live without his good opinion either, but she forced herself to sit still until he wrote out a check for a thousand dollars and handed it to her. Waves of pity lapped at her feet, but she put his check into her purse instead of handing it back to him.

She was elated because she had negotiated on her own behalf. Only later did it occur to her that she should have asked for six thousand dollars, the half rightfully hers. Maybe everything would be different now if she had started speaking up years ago.

Stanley was out of town, and Anna was back at Cloudy Lake to do her part in getting the house ready for sale. The blossoms of her tulips and daffodils had turned into hard pods, and weeds crowded their yellowed foliage. She wished she had at least asked Stanley to cut off the spent blooms because now there would not be any flowers next year.

She put tending her flower bed at the bottom of the list of chores Stanley had left for her to do, and she spent the next four hours cleaning the house. She felt guilty about the neglect and dirt, but when she got to Stanley's office, choking anger assailed her. Stanley had always maintained that running the resort was important to him, yet his desk was covered with unpaid bills, spilled drinks, and smudged glasses. The floor was invisible beneath a foot-deep jumble of folders, unwashed clothes, and copies of *Sports Illustrated, Playboy,* and *Milwaukee Singles.*

She decided to leave the mess on the floor for later and to start on the bills on Stanley's desk. His black pocket calendar, which he always carried with him, had been set deliberately out on the base of a lamp, apart from everything else, right where she could not help but notice.

She was trying to decide whether to violate Stanley's privacy by opening it when a man telephoned about buying hunting rifles Stanley had advertised.

"I drove by and saw you this morning by the trash cans," he said, "but you were in too big a hurry to say hello. By the way, I collect cuckoo clocks. Here, take a listen."

Dozens of mechanical birds imprisoned in tiny wood houses were making inane sounds in the background. Before Anna could figure out why that made her so uncomfortable, he added, "Saw you in those white shorts, great legs and everything. I sure appreciate the way you're keeping yourself in shape."

"I've got to go pick up my husband," Anna said. She could barely stop herself from piling on other lies, that Stanley would be back in five minutes and that he was going to stay glued to her side for the

entire week she had agreed to stay here. But at least she had drawn some kind of line by hanging up. At least she was not as pathetic as the naked woman in mules.

She told herself she was opening Stanley's calendar only to check the date of his return, but she knew she would have looked into it anyway. The pages for the three months since Easter were filled with women's names and telephone numbers. Next to each was a code consisting of a circled number from one to ten followed by a few letters like "bj" or "na" or "gh." The week ahead was filled with the names of bars and times.

The circled numbers looked like an evaluation of some kind, appearance probably, but she was not sure about the letters. Did "bj" stand for a blowjob or "na" for a nice ass? What about "gh" and half a dozen other combinations? Anna studied the calendar as if it were some demonic crossword puzzle. She did not want to feel what she knew she would: grief because Stanley had said he would always love only her, and betrayal because he had exacted her promise that she would not "date" until their divorce was final. By claiming that he was so heartbroken that he needed to get away for a week's rest, he had tricked her into taking on his responsibilities at the resort as well. But maybe he would not be obsessed with finding other women if she had not made him feel so unloved. The familiar guilt surfaced, then receded.

Anna wanted to walk down to the lake and watch its constantly changing surface, but she had to go to the bank to get change for the restaurant and bar. She was halfway out the door when the cook called to say that the meat delivery had not come and that they were out of hamburger and steaks, probably because Stanley had not paid the bills.

Anna was sweating as she drove to the grocery on the other side of the lake. She emptied the meat case of thirty or so packages of hamburger and loaded them into the cab of the truck. It was a hot July day, and the air-conditioning stalled but started up again as she continued into town to the two supermarkets there. After she had

made a clean sweep of their coolers, there was enough ground meat sitting next to her to make a human corpse. That did not include the dozens of steaks stacked up behind her either.

Anna told herself the meat was only from cows, but cows had trusting eyes and soft breath. She wanted to get out of the truck and put her hand on a tree to steady herself, to draw strength from an oak or clarity from a birch, but she was afraid the air-conditioning would stall again. She managed not to throw up until after all the meat was safely stowed in the refrigerators at the resort.

Stanley had left a list of things that Anna should sell, so she was glad when a man came to look at the boat lift. He went down to the pier, but he came back every ten minutes or so to ask for a drink of water, a wrench, a screwdriver, the telephone, and information about where Stanley had bought the lift and how much he had paid for it. The man had silver hair and a fit body, and his tanned skin glowed in the late afternoon sun.

He stood just outside the screen door and told Anna that being a corporate lawyer and living in a high-rise condominium on Chicago's Lake Shore Drive was "soul-destroying." He loved coming up to Wisconsin, but his wife always invited too many people, so he could not find the peace and tranquility he needed "to center himself." He agreed immediately to the price Anna named for the lift but said he had to check on something before he could move it.

He came back carrying a bottle of expensive white wine. In the hour that he had been gone, he had removed his wedding ring.

Anna was annoyed with him for being such a cliché, and she did not invite him in because she did not want to act like a whipped dog licking the hand of anyone who offered to pet it. But deep down, she was grateful to him for desiring her.

Anna closed the drapes long before dark and made sure that the doors were locked. She turned on lights all over the house so that it

would look full of people if the man with the cuckoo clocks drove by again. She opened a can of tomato soup for dinner and tried to settle down afterward to read. She heard cars going by too slowly, and she imagined stealthy steps on the walk. Eventually the wind rose, and the patter of rain obliterated other sounds.

She was still awake at midnight when she had to go to the resort to close the dining room, check receipts, pick up the cash, calm any angry employees, and lock all the doors. It was raining so hard by now that her windshield wipers could hardly keep up.

About five miles from the house, Anna's headlights swept across a woman carrying a child along the side of the road. It was always a shock to see anyone walking on the empty country roads at night. But between sheets of rain and in the harsh lights, the woman looked bluish white, like a dead person escaped from a grave.

Anna drove on, trying to convince herself that she had not really seen her, but she turned back after a mile or so. Only terror and desperation would send someone out on a night like this. She could not just leave the woman and child, though part of her hoped she would not find them. Why should she take responsibility for a stranger when no one was helping her? The woman would get the seat all wet, the child would whimper with cold because there was no dry blanket in the car, and they would need much more than a ride. They would have to have food and a safe place to stay and human comfort and encouragement.

Anna drove slowly along the stretch where she had last seen the woman, wishing she had floodlights to help her see into ditches and over fields. Finally she trained her eyes off the road and saw what looked like a huddled human figure. She got out of the car, her legs trembling. But it was only garbage bundled in black plastic. She was soaked clear through in less than a second. She stood on the narrow shoulder shivering violently, but the ghostlike woman was nowhere in sight.

The only place she could have gone was back to an unpainted farmhouse at the end of a long gravel drive. Anna had often mused

about the sad lives of the people in that isolated place. She considered pulling in, pounding on the door, and demanding to see her. But what if the woman was hiding in the barn or had just sneaked upstairs, past a brutal husband passed out at the kitchen table?

Anna said a little prayer to no one in particular for the child, but she was too angry to include the woman. How could she go back like that to certain humiliation? Did she do it because of her child? Did she fear or love the man who tormented her, or did guilt and pity keep her chained to him? Why did she not pull herself together and start taking care of herself? And by the way, Anna thought suddenly, what was she herself doing out here in a storm, in the middle of the night, carrying out Stanley's responsibilities, afraid of being robbed in the parking lot at the resort and raped before she got back into the house?

Paint cans and two-by-fours were stacked against a wall, and sawdust was ground into Julie's light green rug. Petals littering the floor below a vase of wilted chrysanthemums were so dry it was impossible to tell their original color. Julie's black curls had lost their shine, and her skin looked blotchy.

"Have you seen a doctor, Julie?" Anna asked. "Something's wrong if you've been like this for six weeks."

"No," Julie said lifelessly, "there's no point."

A drill started to whine somewhere on the floor below, followed by a dull thud. The answering machine picked up voices speaking in Polish.

"What about your therapist then?" Anna asked.

She hoped that was the right word because in the seventeen years she had known her, Julie had consulted Freudian and Jungian analysts, Gestalt psychologists, marriage counselors, massage therapists, spiritual and medical intuitives, rolfers, reflexologists, astrologers, herbalists, and palm readers.

"I'm too depressed for therapy," Julie said. "I thought when I let Vlad move in too that Karel and he would finish remodeling the basement in six weeks. But summer's gone and they're still at it. Now Karel's sleeping downstairs with Vlad, and all the two of them do is talk about Polish politics and American naïveté."

Karel and another short man backed into the living room carrying a single board between them. It was only a two-by-four, but they were panting as if they were maneuvering the trunks of ancient trees. Beautiful Julie, Snow White and her Two Dwarfs.

Karel whispered and nudged the other man forward. Anna caught her name and "doctor" and "professor" and "Madison."

"May I present Vladimir?" Karel asked.

Vladimir's face looked pock marked, but that was probably acne: surely smallpox was eradicated even behind the Iron Curtain. He grabbed Anna's hand and kissed it.

"Much honor," he said. Karel nodded approvingly, and Vladimir clomped down the basement stairs.

"Julietta." Karel sighed as he motioned to unopened mail and dirty cups.

"Quitting already?" Julie asked.

Karel scooped up a sweater and some underwear and dropped them again. Julie stretched out her shapely legs, one at a time, so that there was no room for him or anyone else on the couch.

Vladimir came up the stairs, thumped a bottle of vodka on the kitchen table, and grinned. He took out his handkerchief and wiped off two chairs and then the mouth of the bottle. He filled four shot glasses, picked up one, and winked at Anna.

"Vlad hopes there's another well-situated woman dumb enough to take him in," Julie said. "He thinks all American women are desperate for men and sex. Don't look so embarrassed, Anna; he doesn't understand English. He doesn't have a green card, and he doesn't know anything about remodeling either, just in case you're considering it."

Vladimir lifted his glass, saluted Karel, and the two of them drank. Vladimir's Adam's apple, under a couple of days' growth of beard, bobbed unpleasantly as he swallowed. He sat down and motioned urgently toward the two full glasses remaining.

The phone rang and voices in Polish erupted from the answering machine. Vladimir started to stand up, but Karel pushed him down and refilled their glasses.

"Big doings at the Polish Community House tonight," Julie said. "These two will be too tired tomorrow to lift a nail, let alone a hammer."

Vladimir downed another shot of vodka, shuddered, put his hands on his groin, and winked at Anna again. She looked away, pretending she did not understand. She wished she could float up to the ceiling, out of everyone's sight. Was this what she had been reduced to now that she no longer had a husband?

"I know that Stanley's bad for me," Anna said to Julie as soon as Karel and Vladimir left, "but I can't stand being so alone. I'll try it for another three months, but if it doesn't get any better, I'm going back to Cloudy Lake."

"Why?" Julie asked as though it were not obvious. If all Julie could get was Karel, what chance did Anna have of finding someone to love?

"Oh, Julie. I'll get sick, I'll be old, and I'll be all alone. I'll be in a nursing home, and they'll tie me into a wheelchair or to the railing of the bed."

"Why?" Julie said. Anna could not believe that Julie still did not get it.

"I'll have cancer all through my body. They'll have to amputate my legs. Who do you think will come see me then?"

"Me," Julie said promptly.

"Stanley," Anna said. "He'll bring roses and chocolate and champagne. He'll open the windows; he'll joke with the nurses; he'll make all of them laugh. He'll get them to fluff up my pillows and put on

clean sheets. He'll tell them to get down on their hands and knees and clean the dust balls out from under my bed. He'll tease them and pinch them; they'll giggle and squeal. Stanley's good at that kind of thing."

"Tell me more about your fantasy," Julie said.

"Fantasy?" Anna was outraged. "It's not a fantasy, Julie."

"Of course it's a fantasy. Listen to mine. You'll be a spry old woman of ninety, living alone in your own house. I see you digging around in your flower beds, sketching tender buds and full-blown roses, musing about your lovers, writing your memoirs."

"That's impossible," Anna said.

"No more than giving yourself cancer and cutting off both your legs in order to stay with Stanley. Don't mutilate yourself, Anna. I care too much about you," Julie said.

For a moment Julie looked like her old self. In spite of Julie's depression, in spite of Karel and Vladimir ensconced in the basement, Anna wished she were her. Julie knew how to change things, and she would do so, just as she always had in the past.

Anna no longer went out on weekend nights. Madison had lost its brief promise of a rich, friend-filled life. She felt exposed sitting alone in an empty row at the movies, or she ended up next to couples cuddling and kissing. Lovers gazed into each other's eyes in restaurants, and happy families joked around picnic tables in parks.

She did not leave her apartment after dark even to do her laundry in the basement of the building across the narrow lawn. The corpse of a woman strangled by her ex-lover had been found behind the washers the previous summer. A woman had died also, in the bedroom of Anna's apartment, a few weeks before she moved in. The death in itself did not bother Anna; people had to die somewhere. But the woman's body had not been found for five days, and Anna imagined that her own corpse would lie undiscovered for weeks.

Sometimes she thought she could smell the dead woman in spite of new carpeting and fresh paint.

Anna settled seven bulbs of paperwhite narcissus on dry soil in a blue dish, worked some more soil between them, and pressed down. When they were snug but steady, she watered them carefully until she sensed a moist and fertile space beneath them for their roots to expand. Clusters of white blossoms would rise between the straplike leaves six weeks from now. They would glow in the gray winter light, and their fragrance would perfume the chilly air.

With the exception of the DP camps after the war, Anna had never lived anywhere this cold, not even with Stanley in northern Wisconsin. The shady, six-unit brick buildings of Sherman Terrace near Tenney Park had been pleasantly cool when she signed the lease in the spring, and their solidity had reminded her of a single block in Berlin that had miraculously escaped bombing.

But the people who built these apartments in the late 1940s had known nothing about cold. Or maybe they had been naively optimistic and believed that fuel would be plentiful forever just because one war was over and done with.

The heat vents were up near the ceiling, so Anna's feet were always cold. Most of the buildings did not have basements but, like Anna's first-floor apartment, were set on cement slabs. The front door of the living room was barely adequate, but the back door, which opened directly from the back parking lot into the small dining area, let in moisture and drafts. A tiny single-glazed window greenhouse was built into the back wall too, letting in more cold. No plant could survive there for an hour in the winter, and summer heat would shrivel leaves and roots in a single afternoon.

Chilly darkness pressed in as Anna set down her bowl of paperwhites, but the window across the narrow lawn radiated warmth. A woman stood by the stove, dreamily stirring something. Her peaceful movements suggested the kind of calm self-possession and pleasure in being alone that Anna wanted. But then a man entered the tiny kitchen, put his hands on her breasts, kissed her neck, and buried his

face in her hair. Anna could almost smell the fragrance of tomatoes and basil, baked apples, and crusty bread. She imagined she could see plump beads of moisture poised to travel down the glistening panes. The window glowed like gold.

Anna closed her drapes, turned up the heat, and poured herself a civilized sherry. She listened to Brahms's Cello Sonatas while she heated up soup and made herself a simple salad. Tears rose to her eyes as she lighted a solitary candle. She told herself she could invite one of the single women from work or she could reread May Sarton's *Journal of a Solitude,* but it did not help.

Anna wanted Jerzy Kosinski to come toward her through the autumn woods, the leaves damp and soft underfoot. His dark hair would curl above a frayed collar; his spare body would look relaxed in faded jeans. But she knew he would never wear clothes like that. He moved restlessly from one late-night jazz spot to the next; he flitted in and out of bathhouses where naked bodies cast writhing shadows on walls. The most urban of men, he would not go tramping around in Cherokee Marsh or in the Blue Mounds unless he was on the run.

Anna wanted someone to cook for, someone who would linger at her table after dinner was over. Together they would step outside at midnight to look at the stars. They would blow on each other's fingers to warm them when they came in.

Rain began to whisper, and Anna looked again at the apartment across the way. The woman had served her meal and turned out the lights. Now she lay in the arms of her lover, talking softly with him as they drifted into dreams.

The wind rose, and small needles of ice invaded the rain. They beat insistently against the windowpanes while Anna counted her breaths, hoping to fall asleep.

Anna rose early the following morning. She must get out of the apartment and force herself to talk to someone, anyone, before she had to be at work at Waldenbooks in the late afternoon.

It was an effort just to get dressed. Her closet, full of blacks and grays and washed-out beiges, looked like a soggy graveyard in November. The rare splotches of color—an emerald green silk shirt, purple ankle-high boots, and an old burgundy sweater—were not enough to change the dismal atmosphere.

She pulled on black tights, faded jeans, and a gray turtleneck. All she needed was an unbleached wool fisherman's sweater and she would be wearing a Madison uniform, versions of which could be seen on people walking in the UW Arboretum or listening to chamber music at the Elvehjem Museum on Sunday afternoons. She put on the worn burgundy cardigan and searched for a pair of rose-colored socks to give her courage. This was the day she must try to change her life.

Anna loved the Saturday Dane County Farmers' Market, which was different every week. Bouquets of columbines, bunches of red and white radishes, and heads of green lettuce were arrayed on the stands early in the season. In July the fragrance of basil enveloped the entire corner of State Street with its view of Bascom Hill and the university. Bright red gladioli, defying an early frost, blazed under the yellowing leaves of the stately trees around Capitol Square in September.

The light frosts of early October did little harm, but last week's hard freeze had killed off tender vegetables and showy blossoms. This morning there were fewer stands and lots of empty spaces beneath bare branches, and the crowd was sparse. Small, dry snowflakes floated indecisively, and the flower beds were mulched for the long winter ahead.

But overall the mood was happy. Customers carried steaming mugs of coffee, and farmers removed mittens to bag acorn squash and brussels sprouts and to hand back change. They blew on their fingers to warm them and joked about temperatures below zero, windchill factors, and record snowfalls.

Anna bought onions, turnips, carrots, and beets. Red cabbages were arranged in a pyramid on a stand, and she impulsively bought one of those too. Maybe she would make borscht later, or she would

try to recreate the nourishing winter soup Elga knew how to cook with fish heads and bones. The cold was energizing; suddenly everything seemed possible.

Anna bit into a Russet apple, its subdued green skin flecked with brown, its dense flesh tasting slightly of pear. A small, very old woman, wrapped in layers of black and gray wool, waved to her from behind a stand.

"You're here," she said, as her hands hovered above beeswax candles, jars of honey, and packets of dried rose petals. She had confused Anna with someone else, yet Anna could not help feeling she had recognized her.

The old woman's face had hundreds of fine lines, and her eyes were faded to palest blue. A dozen vigorous hairs sprouted from her chin. She had not bothered to shave and wax and tweeze and pluck these signs of age, and she was strangely beautiful precisely because of that. Why, she must be more than eighty years old and out here by herself on a cold day like this.

"Cold enough for you, Granny?" a man walking by asked. Anna knew Granny was the wrong name to call her even before she saw the slight flicker of contempt on her face.

"I have something for you," the old woman said to Anna.

Anna had no intention of buying any of her wares. She did not have any interest in potpourri, and she was not going to waste money on candles. She already had six white ones from a sale at Pier 1, and she had to remind herself to light one for her solitary dinners as it was.

Strips of gray and black wool were wrapped around the old woman's palms and wrists. With gnarled but agile fingers she lifted and replaced jars of honey and searched among packets of petals. She bent at the waist as easily as a young woman to rummage in a large, old-fashioned wicker basket on the ground.

Anna's breath quickened with anticipation. The woman's knees, outlined under the long, stained wool skirt, looked fragile, but her large feet, encased in sturdy black men's shoes, were planted

assertively on the earth. She muttered to herself as she sifted through more packets wrapped in tissue paper and strips of cotton.

"Here it is," she said. "You have to have this."

The sixteen-inch-long package was wound with cloth so worn that the colors were muted, but the outlines of flowers, lilies and roses perhaps, were faintly visible.

"Open it," she commanded. Sounds of other shoppers grew muffled and everything receded as Anna unwound the swath of material. Three beeswax candles, the color of light crystallized honey, gleamed dully in her hand.

"I brought along three especially for you because one or two aren't enough. You should always light three."

"Yes," Anna nodded. Latvians liked multiples of three too, and she had a dark wood candelabra that would be just right, packed away in a box in the back of her closet. Carved by a Latvian artist, decorated with amber and silver, it was a present Elga had given her to light her long winter evenings. It was too festive and too elaborate, out of scale for Anna's small apartment and uneventful life, but she could see that the beeswax candles would be perfect in it. Their color would blend with the circles of amber, and their glow would soften the severe geometric design.

It had been a strange encounter, so it did not seem right to Anna to ask how much the candles were and then, based on price, decide whether to buy them.

"Thank you," Anna said. "May I pay you for these?"

"Of course you must pay," the woman said and looked straight into Anna's heart. It was absurd to feel that something more than a simple market transaction was taking place, but shivers ran up Anna's arms anyway. The woman was old, ancient in fact, but she had amazing presence, even power. Stanley was wrong that all women past sixty were either little old ladies in tennis shoes or ugly old hags.

"All right," Anna said, trying to bring the conversation back to an everyday level. "How much did you say they were?"

"Seven dollars. No, twenty-one. But they're worth it."

It was an outrageous price for three candles. For that Anna could buy a dozen or more at Marshall Field's. Of course, these were beeswax and handmade, so perhaps that was the standard price for candles like these. But Anna's hands were already loosening the cord of her bag and opening the tightly closed compartment where she kept two twenties tucked away for an emergency. Anna offered her everything, unlooked at and uncounted.

"Good," the old woman said.

Anna suspected that she had handed over twice more than the high price asked, but she thanked her profusely anyway.

"Have a nice day," the old woman said.

The banality of the phrase broke the spell.

Anna walked to the Café Europa and automatically ordered bread and coffee and sliced fruit. Through the steamy windows, she stared past people hurrying toward the market, and only when her food was before her did the strangeness of the encounter begin to dissipate. It had been just an old woman from one of the surrounding farms, near Spring Green perhaps, selling goods someone else has made, a daughter or a daughter-in-law. Yet Anna could not help feeling that she was magical. It was almost as if the old woman had given her a glimpse into the future, almost as if she had said outright that life was not over at forty-three.

Anna took a sip of her coffee and opened the paper. She tried to pay attention to articles about petty thefts, accidents, and the endless controversy about the new Frank Lloyd Wright Convention Center on Lake Monona. But her feet carried her back to Capitol Square as soon as she was done eating.

She passed the herb seller, who had only packets of dried herbs this morning rather than pots of rosemary, thyme, and lemon-scented geraniums, and she passed the stand with red and yellow and purple potatoes. She walked as far as the sad-eyed young man who always brought a bunch of roses along with his vegetables. But the old woman was not there.

Anna turned and walked a few steps in the other direction, though on this side there was not enough space for a card table between the large displays of breads, cheeses, and exotic vinegars.

"Did you see an old woman selling candles?" Anna asked the young man as soon as he had finished collecting money for turnips and kale.

"No . . . yes . . . ," he began, but then another customer lifting a bunch of beets required his attention.

"An old woman, dressed in black? About eighty or more? Selling beeswax and rose petals?"

"I think so." He sounded more positive.

"She was here; I know she was. I don't know where she could have gone." Anna was embarrassed that she sounded half-desperate.

"Yes, I did see her," the young man said. "She was here earlier. But she must have left. It's pretty cold."

He selected a pink rose from the few frost-touched stems in a Folgers Coffee can and, in a gesture respectful yet intimate as a lover's, handed it to Anna.

"Here, this is for you."

The rose was short-stemmed, shell pink, with two curled, partially browned outer petals, but it was perfect otherwise. The fragrance was a complex blend of jasmine, honey, and clove.

"No," he said as Anna fumbled for money. "Don't bother, just take it. It's the last rose of summer."

And then he too broke the spell.

"Have a nice day," he said and waved her on.

This must be your lucky day," the receptionist at the Salon Flamour said an hour later. "We just had a cancellation, so if you can wait until this bunch clears out, Flamour can do the cut himself."

The name sounded foreign and vaguely erotic to Anna. She assumed it was French, a language she had never learned in spite of the

six years that she and her father wandered around Europe, first as refugees and then as DPs.

Flamour's white poet's shirt with flowing sleeves made Anna think of flute music silenced by volleys of gunfire in some small town square in Central America, but he looked American otherwise. He was young and energetic, and scissors, clippers, and dryers dangled like guns from his black leather holster, pointing down to his intricately stitched Western boots. His wavy upswept hair and discreet sideburns reminded Anna of Elvis Presley, in his dreamier portraits anyway.

Flamour's employees, all women, were part of some daydream as well—young, slender girls dressed in skin-tight pants and tops revealing bodies perfected by diets and tanning booths. They moved gracefully between the chrome and glass shelves overflowing with expensive shampoos and conditioners and the rows of slightly threatening hair dryers.

"Do you accept checks?" Anna asked. She had spent her cash on the beeswax candles, and she worried that she might not have enough in her account to cover a check. Only after the receptionist told her the price did she relax and turn her attention from the glittering mirrors and blazing lights to the soft mauve surfaces of the waiting room.

The place was so full of women she could hardly get in, with every seat taken on a white leather sofa and two straight-backed chairs. They chattered in a language that sounded like Spanish but fell silent as soon as Anna looked at them, then jumped up like abashed schoolgirls. With whispered words and repeated gestures, they urged her to sit. They watched her, as if a great deal depended on her good will, until she did.

Anna was not used to such uniform politeness from young women, and there was nothing unusual about these women's thin bodies and dark hair. Only their foreign speech and their determinedly American clothes suggested other places and other times. A dress with a snugly fitting light blue top had a bottom of ugly checked black and brown flannel, a gathered aqua polyester skirt

had a six-inch-wide insert of a faded flowered print near the hem, and sleeves of a thin white cotton blouse covered with embroidery peeked out from under a worn T-shirt with "Don't mess with Texas" printed on it. The women's shoes were startling in their variety and ugliness—black suede spike heels, split-at-the-seam running shoes, scuffed sandals. These surface details spoke of exile and poverty as eloquently as words.

Anna was afraid to look into the women's eyes, and when she finally did, it was as bad as she had expected. They all had exile eyes: eyes that had lost everything and seen the unspeakable but were determined nevertheless to keep looking, eyes that remained wary and disillusioned even during shy smiles and suppressed giggles. Anna had seen those eyes before: in photographs of Latvian women and men who had survived Siberia, and on TV as two Rwandan girls were being questioned by a journalist. A Hmong woman passing on a Greyhound bus, the Chilean woman doctor who used to clean Marge's house, and Anna's father—they had all had eyes like that.

Flamour beckoned one of the women to his station, and the rest trooped along, surrounding and protecting. He studied her hair and her face, asked questions in their language and his, and made suggestions. He waited patiently as the women consulted among themselves before he snipped so much as a single hair. Under his skilled fingers crudely chopped-off tresses took on a lovely, sleek shape.

Anna had never seen a man as gentle as Flamour as he urged other women to the chairs of his employees. She could see now that he too had those eyes. He too must have been a refugee or an illegal immigrant because he knew or he could imagine exactly what had happened to these women. So he waited for their consent, even invitation, before he cut. He smiled at the young woman getting up from his chair, and she smiled back at him. To show she liked her new haircut, she twirled around and made a playful little bow, but her eyes did not change.

Anna had gotten her hair cut when she was younger, at the age of twelve, the year she and her father came to the United States.

She had been alone in the dingy dining room that served as a beauty shop in the Indianapolis slum. She had no mother to accompany her, Elga was still in the camps, and it was unthinkable to ask her father to come along. He hardly spoke in those days, which was good enough for working at Kingan's Meatpacking but for little else. Anna preferred silence to his obsessive whispers about soldiers and ropes and branches sturdy enough to hold their stiff bodies.

Anna was desperate to get rid of her braids. She believed that short hair would change her life: it would make her less different from the girls at school, and she would begin to belong.

The woman holding the scissors hesitated.

"I don't want any trouble from you foreigners," she said. "I'm scared your brothers will come and beat me up."

Anna pleaded with her that she had no brothers, that her father did not care that much about her, that Latvians did not have superstitious beliefs about women's hair, and that she would never tell who had been the one who cut. When the woman finally agreed, Anna closed her eyes and prayed for transformation—from worthless to valued, from rejected to welcomed, from exile to home.

Anna did not envy the women at Flamour's now for getting far more elegant styles than her frizzy permanent and for being together instead of alone because she knew the things that lay ahead.

They would have to get the clothes right, of course, but after that they would have to learn English and how things work here, find jobs, try to get their educations accredited or start all over, make friends, find lovers or husbands among the few people from their own country or face suspicion and hostility from American families. They would have to learn not to mind when they were criticized for speaking English with an accent and in their own language among themselves. Their names were going to be mispronounced or arbitrarily changed, their foreignness mistaken for ignorance and laziness, their longing for home confused with ingratitude to America. They were going to be asked perfunctory questions to which people could not stand hearing honest answers. They would have to show a

positive attitude while mourning their dead parents, destroyed homes, and devastated country. And in the unlikely event that they could return home, it was inevitable they would no longer belong there, just as they did not really belong here.

Anna hoped they did not suffer from nightmares. She hoped they did not cling, as if they were drowning, to the first person who showed an interest in them. Above all, she hoped they did not grow silent and compliant, the way she had.

"Dreaming?" Flamour asked. He loosened Anna's pinned-up hair, ran his fingers through it, lifted it, and then let the wavy strands settle.

"Beautiful," he murmured. "Are you sure?"

"Yes," Anna said. Flamour's admiration and gentle voice almost made her change her mind, but she could feel her hair weighing her down. Stanley loved it long, but he wanted it to be coiled and restrained during the day. Like flimsy camisoles and Shalimar perfume, loose hair was for nighttime pleasure only. Anna had started pinning it up about the same time that she took to wearing beige and black, though Stanley never explicitly demanded it. Finally she did not have spirit enough to put a dash of lipstick on her scrubbed face or to tuck a flower behind her ear.

She studied herself in the mirror as Flamour considered, caressed, and cut. The old woman's recognition and the young man's gift of the pink rose had changed something because suddenly Anna liked the way she looked. Stanley used to say that no one else would love her, but her high cheekbones and olive skin seemed attractive enough. She no longer believed him that five feet nine was too tall for a woman or that piercing the pink tips of her ears, which were beginning to emerge from all the hair, would be ridiculous.

"You'll look like an African savage," Stanley had said when she mentioned pierced ears once. "Might as well clamp metal rings around your neck too and stretch it so it's two feet long and wobbles."

Flamour blow-dried Anna's hair until it swung like heavy silk above the collar of her gray turtleneck. They were alone on a small island, surrounded by billows of hair, and Anna almost asked him

for advice about piercing her ears. But the young women who worked for him surrounded them, applauding Anna's new haircut, and she decided she had accomplished enough.

Bette, whom Anna had known slightly in the Madison Feminist Literary Collective in the 1970s, waited by the Xerox machine in Memorial Library while Anna copied the last article in Doris Lessing's *Golden Notebook* for a lecture for her Monday-night class. Bette was the only person Anna had talked to since her haircut a week ago who had not commented on it. Anna felt foolish for minding. Bette was an admirable woman, who had made a success of divorce. She had transformed herself from a faculty wife into an independent woman, a lawyer, a PhD candidate, and finally into an assistant professor in the English department.

"How's it going?" Bette asked after a few remarks about the thrilling challenge of living alone.

"I'm still not used to it," Anna admitted. "Tell me, Bette, have you ever . . . I mean . . . would you ever. . . . Anyway, how would you go about meeting a man?" Anna's new haircut had made her light-headed.

Bette frowned. "There's a book you should read. It's pretty basic, but it would help you a lot. Why do I think I'm nothing without a man?" she boomed.

It took Anna a moment to realize that Bette was giving her a title instead of pronouncing judgment.

"Some others are *Women Who Love Too Much*; *Men Who Hate Women and the Women Who Love Them*; *Smart Women, Foolish Choices*; and so on. Of course you understand that none of these has the correct political analysis, which is that we live in a patriarchy where men have greater economic resources and therefore privileged access to the bodies of younger women. The writers basically scold women for making dumb choices and for being too picky at the

same time. Otherwise we'd all be married, God forbid. But the examples of awful relationships are really terrific; they'll cure you of ever wanting a man."

"Oh," Anna nodded, abashed.

"Our old Feminist Literary Collective would have straightened you out," Bette said. "The book group tonight isn't feminist, but they're savvy about Madison politics and what's going on at the university. Everyone says we're living in the postfeminist era, so we have to keep up with the times."

"You'll enjoy the Rebels and they'll be happy to have you," Bette added kindly. "They're wonderful women, and the discussions are great."

Kathleen, the hostess, threw open her front door and surprised Anna by kissing her on the cheek as if she were a long-lost relative.

"Anna, was it? It's good you're here early. Let me show you the house," she said after she had exchanged comments with Bette on furniture stores, shades of paint, unsatisfactory cleaning women, dishonest contractors, and custom-made doorknobs—all of which Kathleen had dealt with during a recent update of the vast area she referred to as the great room. Kathleen and her husband were evidently the only occupants of the seven-bedroom house.

Anna could not think of anything to say as Kathleen pointed out which antiques she had inherited from which of a dozen relatives and which had been in her husband's family. She was relieved when the doorbell announced the arrival of others.

After greetings, introductions, and more kisses, the women settled down on oversize couches and chairs. They asked Anna about her children's ages and careers, smiled sympathetically when she said that she did not have any, and went on to exchange detailed information about theirs.

Anna did not mind; she was used to being an outsider during

discussions of family. After she knew these women better, she might meet some of their children, and she might be interested when their names were mentioned. Nevertheless she was glad when the conversation turned to the abundant dips, cheeses, grapes, chocolates, and wine.

Kathleen was praised for her skill in buying rather than cooking. Tips about new products and new restaurants were interspersed with compliments.

During the "check-in," which began the formal part of the evening, everyone had a turn to talk about what was going on in her life. Newly acquired condominiums, home-remodeling projects, trips to resorts, and quests for mother-of-the-bride dresses took up the next forty-five minutes. Those with grandchildren used more time than others to pass around stacks of photographs.

The lawyers were beginning to excuse themselves with early-morning court dates, and the grandmothers with the exhaustion that followed a day of babysitting, when Bette finally mentioned *The Age of Innocence,* which had been chosen because of the recent movie. Everyone liked Michelle Pfeiffer's clothes and the rich interiors of mansions, and all agreed that Daniel Day Lewis was a dish. Patsy, a full professor in the English department, in contrast to Bette's assistant professorship, delivered a minilecture on the importance of the setting in novels.

Anna tried to catch Bette's eye in the hope that the two of them could guide the discussion to something specific about the book.

"I was interested in the limited options for women in the world that Wharton describes in *The Age of Innocence,*" Bette said staunchly.

"Oh, yes, now you're talking feminist criticism. One of my grad students wanted to write a historical thesis on it, but I told her theory is where it's at," Patsy said.

Bette blushed but listened with apparent interest as Patsy moved on to divorces and infidelities among her colleagues in the English department.

"Perhaps we could talk about the importance of marriage in *The Age of Innocence,*" Anna offered. Bette smiled gratefully but glanced at Patsy and said nothing.

No one else took up Anna's suggestion either, and everyone agreed pleasantly that morning came early and that tomorrow was another day.

Anna was happy to spend the following Saturday evening with Molly, the young woman in the apartment across the way. The man Anna had seen in Molly's kitchen two weeks ago had not been her lover, but just one in a series of disappointments. Molly's eyes sparkled and her blonde hair bounced when she danced in her living room to her aerobics video, but the nice fellows were not lining up at her door. The men she met mostly through ads turned out to be emotionally needy but afraid of intimacy, angry at their ex-wives but obsessed with them, and sexually aggressive but impotent. They lied about their height, weight, income, work, and almost everything else. They all claimed to be professional, but that could mean anything—undertakers, porn-shop owners, sperm salesmen. "Sell it for cows during the day, give it away free at night," one of them had told her.

Molly did not dare tell them she was the manager of Victoria's Secret because they went berserk when they heard the word "lingerie." They believed that meant demi-bras for sucking and black lace thongs for poking. They demanded she wear four-inch heels, tie them to her bedpost with silk ropes, and tickle their private parts with a feather boa.

She said that Catholic Singles at St. Patrick's was no better. Only one man had showed up at the last meeting, and a dozen women had tripped over each other to load up his plate with casseroles and homemade pies. They sat at his feet like Mary or Martha, Molly could never remember which was which, and gazed up at him while he gave his opinions on the new bus routes.

Molly poured Anna a glass of red wine and told her to toughen up. Anna should ignore nasty epithets applied to women who searched for male companionship because every one of those had been thought up by women for the sole purpose of limiting the competition.

"You have to be persistent, Anna, if you want to find the love of your life. This isn't like the movies where men fall madly in love and pursue you. Men don't send diamonds and pearls or scale buildings and kill gorillas to impress women. They don't get down on their knees to ask for your hand in marriage. In real life it's always women who find men. Always. So let's get busy."

The radio was tuned to *Prairie Home Companion* and Garrison Keillor talking about the Danish woman he had met at his high school reunion.

"See, it can happen. He's completely head over heels," Molly said. "But she didn't just sit home waiting for him to show up. She dolled herself up, flew here all the way across the ocean, and kept her antennae out at the reunion."

Molly hummed, "Love is lovelier the second time around," and read aloud personal ads from *Isthmus,* Madison's weekly newspaper. She generously instructed Anna on content and style. Phrases like "tired of the bar scene," "looking for a caring, sharing relationship," and "comfortable in jeans or heels" were too boring to use but giving height, age, marital status, and race was essential, even in progressive Madison.

She lit a joint for herself and poured Anna a second glass of wine for inspiration. "Write DWF for divorced white female, 43, 5′ 9″," she dictated.

"European born, seeking a Prairie Home Companion, friend, and lover," Anna continued on her own. "Enjoys conversation, classical music, movies, nature, food, fiction, and the farmers' market. Looking for an intelligent, sensitive man who has similar interests and likes women."

The envelope was sealed, stamped, addressed, and in the mail before Anna had a chance to change her mind and before they started on Molly's tuna-and-lettuce salad with low-fat dressing.

More responses arrived than Anna would have thought possible. Married men with sensual natures and stable marriages had differing needs from their understanding wives but required her absolute discretion anyway. Three handsome, highly motivated, innocent men, who were unjustly imprisoned in the Waupun Correctional Institution, knew exactly how to make her happy. An engineer with enough positive attributes to fill four single-spaced computer-generated pages expressed no interest in the person he was sending them to. A professor thought women in Madison were ill educated and shallow but was willing to give her a try because his doctor had told him he needed to learn to relax. A photographer, impressed by the sexually liberated attitudes he had observed on a two-week trip to Sweden, wanted to start his very own collection of nudes. An architect, too discreet to include his name, hoped she was not a feminist and asked for her height, weight, photo, and bra size.

A few of the letters were low-key and friendly, and without exception they came from men ten or more years younger than Anna. Maybe the young women in her Monday-night class were right when they blithely announced that age was no longer a problem for women. That may have been true in the "olden days," but like everything else, "it's all been changed now." Lots of women had young lovers: they had read about it in *Cosmo.*

The letter Anna liked most came from a man who loved nature. He said he was working to save hundreds of species from extinction by predatory man and that he used the word "man" deliberately because unfortunately it was predominantly members of the male sex who despoiled and exploited. He valued integrity and personal

growth, and to him she sounded like a very complete woman. He hoped their age difference was not an obstacle, because it certainly was not to him. He loved her allusion to *Prairie Home Companion,* and at the risk of being considered a name-dropper, he wanted her to know that Garrison Keillor was an old friend of the family. He suggested three times and places where they could meet.

He had not signed his letter with his full name either, his diction was a bit stilted, and the name-dropping embarrassed Anna in spite of the disclaimer, but then not everyone was an English major. Not every dashed-off word was a revelation of character, was it? No one like Jerzy Kosinski had written of course, but on the other hand, this young man was completely different from Stanley. Molly had told Anna that women unconsciously chose men similar to their ex-husbands, and Anna was determined not to repeat the last twenty-five years. She could not help but feel hopeful about meeting this young man who had signed himself only with a discreet "A."

It was snowing when Anna drove to the Irish Waters Restaurant and Pub. She was embarrassed and worried. Would the man actually be there? How would she identify him? Would she have to walk up to strangers in a crowded bar and ask if they loved nature or if Garrison Keillor was a friend of the family? Or would he inspect her from afar, decide she was unattractive, and leave without revealing himself? What was she going to say to him if she did find him? What if he had invited a dozen other women for a group interview? What in the world did she think she was doing?

"It *is* you," a soft male voice said as she entered the dim bar.

Standing in front of her was Andrej, her former driving instructor, shy and smiling.

"I was looking for someone tall and intelligent, but I was daydreaming all the time it would be you," he said. He did not seem at all angry with her for canceling her driving lessons last February.

Under the twinkling lights strung much too early for Christmas, his pale hair shimmered and his dark brown eyes were flecked with gold. He was even more beautiful than she remembered.

They fidgeted, delighted to meet again and embarrassed at being found out. It was not surprising that she would have to resort to an ad, but Anna wondered why he had.

"There aren't many women in my classes," he said as if reading her mind. "Believe me, I've never answered an ad before, but I really liked yours. You said you liked music and books and I do too."

"Who's your favorite writer?" Anna blurted out to fill the silence between them. She blushed because the question was as corny as asking him to write a theme about his summer vacation.

"Jerzy Kosinski. *The Painted Bird* is awesome."

Anna was stunned by the coincidence.

"I wish you'd been in my class. Most of my students hated it," she said. She regretted almost instantly that she had called attention to the difference in their ages and experience.

"Well, some of the things the boy sees while wandering alone through Eastern Europe are pretty gross." Andrej chuckled. "Like the miller gouging out the plough boy's eyes and the way they just lay there on the floor, like eggs in a frying pan, before the cats started playing with them. Or Ewka having sex with the goat. Or when Garbos tortured the boy by suspending him above Judas, the dog who's like a wolf."

Anna thought of the boy losing his voice after being flung into a pit of human excrement, which was the part that spoke to her most deeply, but she did not say so. She had never read that part aloud to her students because she knew that her voice would tremble.

"My students blamed the boy for the terrible things others did to him. It was hard to convince them that war was responsible for what happened," Anna said. "They'd come up with the most ingenious but implausible strategies that he should have used to be safe. They hated him instead of his torturers."

"Exactly," Andrej said, getting very animated. "Americans don't

have a clue about war. They believe their station wagons and their ranch houses will save them from nuclear attack. They think they're superior to everyone, that they're richer than the Russians and smarter than the Red Chinese."

"It's an amazing coincidence that you like Kosinski too," Anna said. She did not want to act like a schoolteacher by pointing out that not all Americans were alike.

"Yes," Andrej said, "but it's more than a coincidence really. I feel we were destined to meet."

To have found him again seem fated to Anna as well.

They stood smiling and looking at each other, unable to think of what to say next.

"I better confess. I've met Jerzy Kosinski," Andrej brought out shyly.

"Really? You must tell me about it," Anna said. She was almost dizzy with excitement. A dozen questions rose to her lips.

"Oh . . . I'd rather wait until I know you better. It's very painful to talk about it," Andrej said, shutting off her questions. "Jerzy used to be a friend of the family. We saw him regularly when we went to New York. But then, all of a sudden, Jerzy wouldn't have anything to do with us. But that's typical of Jerzy. He drops all his friends and finds new ones every two years. But I'm afraid it still smarts."

Anna bit her lip. They stood looking at each other, uncertain what to do. Andrej gulped his drink and went to the bar to order wine while Anna found an empty booth. Beneath his gray cashmere sweater, Anna could see a lovely deep line running between the muscles of his shoulders and down his back, and she liked the respectful way he thanked the bartender before picking up their glasses of red wine.

"So, you're divorced now, Anna?" Andrej asked as he slid in across from her.

"Not quite," she said, blushing for what suddenly seemed like a huge deception. "I filed at the end of July, but the hearing isn't scheduled yet. I'm sorry."

"It doesn't matter; you will be," Andrej said. "We can tell each other our divorce stories anyway."

"I didn't know you were married," she said. Was he going to be obsessed with his ex-wife, as Molly maintained all divorced men were?

"You know about divorce stories, don't you, Anna?" Andrej asked. "Those one-minute-long, carefully edited, balanced-sounding appraisals that we have to have ready for public consumption? Problems existing in the marriage from the start, a mature admission of a few faults of one's own, significant growth following the divorce, regrets that the ex is still stuck in the same old patterns, and general relief that the marriage is over. You've got one, haven't you?"

"No," Anna said, impressed by his analysis of life among the divorced. She could not possibly fit Stanley's intensity or her compliance into a box like that.

"I'll tell you mine then. That is, if you don't mind," Andrej said.

"No, of course not. I'd like to hear it."

"It was a mistake for me to get married in the first place," Andrej began coolly enough. "I was far too young to know what I wanted, but Laura had already had a bad experience just living together with another man, and I wanted to be fair to her. I was working for the Department of Natural Resources, and she was beginning a veterinary practice near Rhinelander when we met. She was no raving beauty by any means, but she was the only well-educated single woman up there. We were introduced at a picnic given by the few local Democrats, so I thought we had a lot in common—love of animals, respect for education, an interest in progressive politics, and so on. But she'd only gone to that picnic to enlarge her practice and boost her income."

On the way to his wedding at Luther Memorial Church on University Avenue, he was the beautiful young bridegroom dressed in a white jacket, a pale pink rose in his lapel, surrounded by his sisters. Olivia, the eldest, who was so much like him she could be his double, was in the driver's seat. Her pale lilac dress stirred in the breeze of a

perfect day in June, and the corsage of tiny white roses fastened at her wrist trembled as she gripped the steering wheel. She reached behind her to the backseat with the other hand, and Andrej, understanding without words, handed her his white cambric handkerchief.

"Don't marry her, Andrej," Olivia said, dabbing at her eyes.

"Please, don't," his two younger sisters echoed.

Olivia offered to drive on, past the church, out of Madison, and away from Wisconsin. She would take Andrej to Canada or Mexico if necessary, to save him from certain anguish.

"No," Andrej said, "I've given my word, you see, and I cannot break that." His sisters were still begging him to change his mind when one of the ushers opened the car door, and parents and uncles and aunts and cousins and friends surrounded him. Andrej stood up, took his handkerchief from Olivia's hand, and kissed her cheek. Then he straightened his shoulders and walked to the altar, to wait for the woman in the shadows who would hurt him.

More than a year later, Andrej uneasily watched his wife Laura, who sat awkward and sullen by the fire in the house he had built for her with his own hands. Solar heat, ecologically correct insulation, and wood fires kept the A-frame structure snug and warm, and this New Year's Eve there were friends and laughter and champagne and flickering candles. Suddenly Laura jumped up and ran out into the night. She was dressed in nothing but a bare, shimmering dress and strappy shoes; she would freeze to death out there. Andrej ran after her, but she hurried down a low bank and disappeared between the snow-laden reeds. He was frantic that he would never catch up with her, but she stumbled and fell on the rough ice of Cherokee Marsh.

"Thank God," he said. He tried to put his arms around her and pull her to him to warm her, but she struggled against him. She pounded on his chest with her fists and tried to strike his face.

"Why, Laura? What have I done?" he asked.

She did not answer, only flailed and clawed. She grabbed the front of his jacket and twisted it so viciously that buttons clattered on the moonlit ice.

"Why, Andrej?" Anna asked. "What was she so angry about? Had you done anything to upset her? Had she had too much to drink?"

"Beats me. It's just the way she was. Sweet one minute, furious the next."

"But surely . . ."

"Believe me, Anna, I tried my best to make her happy, but instead I lost everything I'd worked so hard for."

Anna could see that it was difficult for him to say more, so she did not persist.

After a silence, Andrej said, "But tell me, Anna, how did your marriage break up? Please, I want to know exactly what happened. I want to know why people don't stay in love. How can someone who loves you just leave? I don't understand it; I never will."

"It *is* confusing, but there always are reasons, for both people. I think now that it's never just one person's fault," Anna said as gently as she could. She used to believe that the responsibility for Stanley's happiness was hers alone, that she had to tell lies to him and to herself in order to protect him, and she came to resent him for it.

"Do you really think so, Anna? Then you're wiser than me, because I don't have a clue why Laura left. I wish you'd teach me," he said.

"I can't," Anna demurred. "I don't know Laura." But she was flattered that he wanted to be her student.

"What is it like to be right in the middle of a war?" Andrej asked, changing the subject so abruptly it left Anna breathless. "I sense that's something you know, but it's another thing I don't understand. My father has scars all over his body from World War II, but he never talks about it. He gets angry if I only look at his bare back when he's shaving. All I could think to do out of respect for him was to register as a conscientious objector and do some draft counseling at the St. Francis House during Vietnam. But I want to learn. So that I can be an instrument of peace," he concluded awkwardly, without acknowledging that the phrase belonged to St. Francis.

His phrasing was clumsy, but Anna was deeply moved nevertheless. No one could know what war was like who had not actually been in one, but no one had asked her about it in such a way that she could give an honest answer. That Andrej's father was damaged by war, just like hers, seemed weighted with meaning. If she could ever bring herself to tell Andrej about the past, he would understand. He would empathize when she said it had been excruciating to try to comfort her father and to fail again and again.

A tiny alarm went off on Andrej's watch, and he frowned. "I'm sorry, I've got to run. But we have to see each other again. It's more than a coincidence that we met like this. It wouldn't be right just to say good-bye."

Anna could tell that he was attracted to her. He was an intelligent, sensitive, and handsome man, very different from Stanley, and he liked her.

"May I see you again, Anna? On Sunday? We could get out of Madison for a bit, tramp around in the woods, see how the small creatures are surviving the winter," Andrej urged, as if she needed persuading. "It's probably not what you're accustomed to. You deserve better, I can see that. But I'm afraid it's all I can afford. I lost my house and everything else in the divorce. I'm just a poor student, living back home with my parents, right now."

"I'd love to," Anna said, wishing she could ease his shame about his poverty.

"Great." Andrej's face lit up like a small boy's, but his dark eyes were adult and mysterious as they said good-bye in the snowy parking lot.

Andrej arrived an hour late because of car trouble.

"Please don't be angry with me, Anna," he said. "I couldn't help it, really I couldn't. You can call the garage if you like; they'll tell you my car wasn't in any condition to drive. I'm sorry."

He was so apologetic, and she was so happy to see him that she overlooked how anxious she had been when he had not called. She thought she understood his being worried that she was angry: she had whispered and tiptoed around Stanley for twenty-five years because his rage was always just on the edge of erupting. Laura's inexplicable fits of anger must have made Andrej uncertain of himself too.

"It's all right," Anna said. "We can take my pickup."

Andrej got into the passenger seat, leaned back, and sighed contentedly. He did not criticize her or act like her driving teacher in any other way either. Except for giving occasional directions, he did not say much as she drove west, toward the gently rolling hills near Spring Green. But the silence felt companionable and safe.

The Blue Mounds were covered with snow, and dark trees clustered together in the somber white expanse. Isolated gray farmhouses and a few red barns dotted the hillsides, and the valleys were shadowy in the late afternoon light.

Andrej asked Anna to stop in front of a small white church on top of a hill.

"I used to come here to be alone when I was married," he said, "especially after Laura started her affair."

So there *was* a reason for the divorce, Anna thought, but why the affair? Why would Laura want someone else when she had a husband like Andrej?

"I loved this little church," he said, "because it's so simple and so direct. It comforted me that people could once express their feelings honestly. It was something to hold on to when Laura started lying to me."

The door was unlocked, and they went in. The unpainted wood pews were dusty but undefaced by graffiti. The last entry in the visitors' book was from over a month ago, and signatures went back more than seven years.

"Look." Andrej pointed to the name of a cellist they had both heard play at Mills Hall.

"Another coincidence." He grinned, delighted.

They were starting to collect coincidences, the way lovers do.

Andrej took out a beautiful blue and gold pen and wrote their names in the book. "It's the beginning of our historical record," he said solemnly. He connected the names with a plus mark, drew a heart around them, and added an arrow piercing it.

He was so young.

"Thank you for letting me do that," he said.

And he was so polite.

Anna wanted to take his cold fingers in hers. She wanted to kiss them and guide them inside her coat and warm them.

A pickup made its way up the winding road and passed them.

"Dump the DNR: Damn the Department of Natural Resources!" a sticker on the rear bumper commanded.

"That slogan is pretty mild," Andrej said. "There used to be others. Do you remember the one that said, 'If you can't shoot it or fuck it, what good is it?' All these guys wearing feed-mill caps and hunting jackets and carrying guns had them. They hated us at the DNR because we had to enforce the law and that meant they couldn't slaughter everything they wanted every day of the year. One night, as a threat, someone left the bloody head of a deer killed out of season on the front steps of my cabin."

"Oh, Andrej, how terrible for you," Anna murmured. Already she wanted to keep him safe from harm.

"No more terrible than being married to a guy who has signs like that plastered all over his truck. Would you ever sleep with someone like that?"

"No," Anna said, "at least not now." She would value a tender lover now, but she also remembered her body tingling when Stanley pinned her down on fallen leaves in the wooded hills of Brown County, Indiana. She had read in a gossip column that Jerzy Kosinski picked up black prostitutes and humiliated them. Maybe he engaged in sadomasochistic sexual athletics with other women too; his protagonists certainly did.

But Anna did not expunge Jerzy from her heart for that. She believed that he would not degrade or betray her because they were soul mates; under his amoral, even cruel mask, he hid his gentle and compassionate soul. The war had scarred him and forced him into fantasies of revenge and control.

"You saying that means a lot to me, Anna. Laura had an affair with a macho guy like that. I couldn't believe that she'd have anything to do with him, but I was so naive. She thought I was a wimp compared to him. Women prefer the crude and masterful."

"Not always," Anna said, blushing at the memory of Stanley's self-assured, ruthless kisses. Jerzy Kosinski was sexy, but he would never be crude, and Anna did not want to sleep with him anyway. She loved him because he had been humiliated and hurt, but he had survived, and he was thriving.

"Thank you, Anna," Andrej said effusively. "Women have to start loving men who are gentle and sensitive. Otherwise there will be more rapes and wars and destruction of the environment. It's really all up to women."

"But men have to change too, Andrej, not just women," Anna said. She did not want to disturb the intuitive understanding between them, but she was determined to be honest.

"You're right," Andrej said, surprising her. Stanley got angry whenever she had an opinion different from his, even about small things like movies, restaurants, or the degree of happiness of other married couples. He argued or shouted or sulked until Anna said she agreed with him.

"I'm ashamed of it now, Anna, but I used to follow Laura when I was married," Andrej said. "She'd meet this guy in the K-Mart parking lot, and they'd tear down the road to Barneveld. They'd sit in the kitchen of his trailer, smoking and drinking shots. I could smell it on her when she got home. They kept the lights on when they went into the bedroom for sex. It was terrible for me."

It could not be that simple, Anna thought. Something flickered

at the edge of her awareness, but instead of paying attention she rushed to reassure him.

"You must have been a wonderful husband," she said.

"Exactly. It's too absurd to even speculate about what she saw in him. He was so ordinary. If he'd been someone outstanding, I wouldn't have liked it, but at least I would've understood. But he was just a farmhand, a crude fellow with a beer belly and a bald patch. She was fooling around with him, and then one day she just left. She stepped off the porch, shut the screen door behind her, and she was gone. It was as quick and as final as that."

"But didn't you talk to her about it afterward? Didn't she tell you what went wrong?"

"I couldn't. She used to taunt me . . ."

"Yes?"

"About . . ."

"Go on."

"About sexual things. Sorry," he said and turned away as if to hide tears. "It's still a raw spot, I'm afraid. But I feel you understand. You're the only one who could."

Anna started toward the driver's seat, but Andrej touched her elbow.

"I wanna hold your hand," he sang in an awkward but endearing imitation of the Beatles.

"Seriously though, Anna, why don't I drive? I'm more used to shifting."

Anna handed him her keys and got in on the other side.

After a while he took her hand and squeezed it. He lifted her palm to his cheek and held it there.

By the door of her apartment, Andrej did not say good night but stepped forward, his eyes questioning.

Anna paused too. She trusted her own judgment that Andrej was not dangerous; he was not a psychopath who would slash her or steal from her. But Molly said that divorced men expected sex on a first

date and that a woman's offer of a cup of coffee was an invitation to bed.

"Would you like to come in for just one glass of wine?" Anna finally said. She was embarrassed because she sounded ungenerous.

"Thank you, I'd like that," Andrej said. "I won't stay long," he added.

Anna was grateful that he had let her know he understood her hint.

Moonlight silvered the surfaces in her living room, and the fragrance of the first bowl of paperwhite narcissus filled the air.

"It's beautiful in here," Andrej said when she flicked on the light. "I like the way you do things, Anna."

He put an arm around her shoulders, inhaled deeply, and bent toward her. He stopped just short of kissing her.

"But I know these people," he said, his voice full of wonder as he pointed to a framed print. "I've seen them before. Who are they?"

He could not possibly mean the models who had posed for the painting a century ago.

"Echo and Narcissus," Anna said, surprised that someone so intelligent did not recognize a common myth. But she was charmed by this gap in his education. There were so many things she could teach him.

"Yes, yes, but what about them? They're familiar. I know I know them." He fixed his gaze on Narcissus studying his reflection in a pool while sad-eyed Echo yearned for him.

"Tell me about them. What's their story? What happened? I have to know," Andrej insisted.

Anna wished he would kiss her instead, but she said, "Narcissus was such a beautiful child that his mother was afraid that he wouldn't live long. A prophet told her that he would, but only if he did not come to know himself.

"Narcissus was part boy, part man, and both women and men fell in love with him. But he rejected them all. Echo the nymph loved

him too, but she couldn't tell him because she had been doomed to repeat the words of others rather than speak her own mind. Treasuring and whispering his every word, she followed him in secret. One day she accidentally came face to face with him. She opened her arms in welcome, but Narcissus turned from her in disgust.

"Ashamed that she'd been so forward and in despair that he found her repulsive, she wasted away until only her bones remained, and finally even those turned to stone. But of course her voice lives on.

"Narcissus continued to despise everyone who desired him until he caught a glimpse of himself in a pool and fell madly in love. He tried to reach, to embrace, to merge with the beautiful boy in the still water, but the image vanished whenever he touched it. He pleaded and yearned, but the boy eluded him. Narcissus had come to know himself, just as the prophet had predicted.

"Narcissus lost his will to live, and he died soon after that. His grieving sisters searched in vain for his body. All that remains of him is a fragrant flower, with a cluster of white petals around a yellow center. But Narcissus himself sits by the pool in the underworld this very minute, crazy with love for himself, while his sisters weep, and Echo repeats the words of others."

Andrej tightened his arms around Anna, and she rested her forehead against his chest. But she could tell that his eyes were still on Narcissus behind their reflections in the glass.

"I'm sorry," he said, lightly kissing the top of her head. "I must go. I'll see you next week."

It was a Friday night, but Anna headed to the university library instead of staying in her apartment and wallowing in loneliness. She did not feel the least bit pathetic as she walked down State Street, the only person alone among friends laughing and couples holding hands. Andrej had made her feel independent and pretty.

The large undergraduate reading rooms were mostly deserted,

but graduate students absorbed in their work occupied a few brightly lit carrels in the dim stacks. Rumors about a crazed man with an axe terrifying women had circulated recently, so Anna looked for a spot that was not totally isolated but not so close to others as to make them feel uncomfortable.

A thick brown envelope from Stanley rested on top of the papers she planned to grade. She had been carrying it around unopened because she knew that its contents—legal papers, bills, and Stanley's scrawled accusations that she was crazy and that she had ruined him financially by leaving—would make her feel terrible. Stanley had somehow appropriated all their savings and the equity in the house, but nevertheless his resort was deeply in debt, and she was responsible for half of that as well as for all the other debts he had incurred.

Anna wished that she had the courage to pinch her nose shut, pick up the envelope by one corner as if it were a piece of soiled toilet tissue, and drop it into the trash. But she was afraid she would miss something that it was her duty to attend to.

This time there were only clippings. Stanley had never been interested in her preoccupations, literary or otherwise, yet he had systematically collected recent articles from newspapers and magazines about Jerzy Kosinski. He had printed, "See what your idol has done now!" on the first, and he had underlined and added exclamation points in red to every "lie" and "stolen" and "plagiarism" in the rest. Anna had read a few of the articles before, but taken together they almost justified Stanley's angry scrawls.

Jerzy Kosinski had become his own painted bird. As a child separated from his parents during the war, he had been rejected and tormented, like one of the birds captured and painted with bright colors by Lekh. Finally released to rejoin its flock, the bird would fly toward its mates, its heart fluttering in happy anticipation. But the other birds, ignoring commonality under surface markings, would cruelly peck it to death.

Jerzy was being accused of manipulation, deception, and lies. Although his books had won prestigious prizes and millions of devoted

readers, he supposedly could not write even minimally acceptable English. The CIA was said to be responsible for the ease with which Jerzy, a newly arrived immigrant, had found a publisher for his two sociological studies, gained admission to the graduate program at Columbia University, and met and married steel heiress Mary Weir. He was said to have used unacknowledged translators and editors for *The Painted Bird* and to have exploited starving writers and unemployed academics to produce his other books. The articles claimed he had practically imprisoned them in the apartment he shared with Kiki, his elegant European companion, and he had forced them to sign sworn statements that they would never tell.

Even *Being There,* his best-selling novel later made into a successful movie, was said to be so close an adaptation of a Polish classic as to constitute plagiarism. A graduate student had typed up *Steps,* the novel for which Jerzy had won the National Book Award, submitted it under different names to seventeen publishers, and received rejections from one and all. This old hoax was cited as additional evidence of Jerzy's dishonesty rather than of the difficulties of publishing a first novel or of graduate students having too much time on their hands.

A photograph of Jerzy that Anna had never seen before was among the clippings. Dressed in a thick gray cardigan over a white shirt and black tie, he held his arms protectively across his chest, which was so thin it seemed concave. World-weary and worn, he was more like the elder brother or even father of the vigorous man in white jodhpurs in the picture Anna kept folded inside her copy of *The Painted Bird.* He looked at Anna expectantly.

She skimmed through the pile, searching frantically for his response to the accusations. He would explain that all of it was a mistake. He was thoroughly competent; he would make everything all right.

But he had not confronted his accusers. He had only commented that he loved the First Amendment and that journalists had the right to write what they pleased. He claimed the attacks on him had been

engineered by his political enemies, brutal Soviet thugs and dull Russian bureaucrats lusting for revenge. He had made fools of them by escaping from Poland, and they had been trying to destroy him ever since. They planted negative items about him in the press, and mysterious men in raincoats showed up regularly at his apartment to beat him up.

Anna's father used to wake screaming from nightmares in which FBI agents were at the door, ready to hand him over to Stalin himself. Or Russian soldiers set fire to the house on Elizabete Street, stripped him naked, bludgeoned him, and forced him into a cattle car headed to Siberia. But three-fourths of that did not happen. His were nighttime terrors shared by others who had watched American and British authorities turn pleading women and men over to the Russians after the war.

With a shock, Anna realized that she had never believed that Jerzy's shadowy enemies existed; she had assumed the dangerous men at his door were imaginary creatures, inevitable specters haunting the long aftermath of war. But if he had exaggerated one danger, had he lied about other things as well? Anna was at a loss to explain why Jerzy had not vanquished his attackers. Could he actually have done some of the things they were accusing him of? He did have a dark side, which he used to create his vengeful and sadistic protagonists.

Other doubts nagged at her. Had Jerzy Kosinski done something to his wife, Mary Weir, for instance? The wealthy socialite had hired him to catalog her books when he was a recently arrived immigrant struggling for a foothold in a strange country. Like Desdemona with Othello, Mary Weir fell in love with Jerzy because of all he had suffered. She was eighteen years older than he, but she healed him more tenderly than a mother. He loved her, he married her, and he dedicated *The Painted Bird* to her. She in turn made a luxurious, leisured writer's life possible for him.

Surely Jerzy was not Tarden, the vengeful and supercompetent protagonist of *Cockpit.* Tarden exposed Veronica, a beautiful model who had rejected him, to radiation as she happily posed for him in

front of the cockpit of his plane. She died a horrible death from cancer. Mary Weir had died of cancer too.

Anna had always insisted that her students make distinctions between author and character, life and books, truth and lies, but she was more and more confused herself about Jerzy. He had published *The Painted Bird* as fiction, but in interviews and dinner-party conversations, he claimed the boy's experiences were his own. Was Jerzy sensitive and compassionate, like the boy, who felt the pain of people and animals before his wartime experiences robbed him of the capacity to love? Or was he as cruel as the boy after the war, who shot a harmless dog, derailed a train full of innocent people in order to take revenge on a stranger, and broke his brother's arm?

She studied Jerzy Kosinski's photograph again. She ran her fingers over his black hair, beaklike nose, and hollow cheeks. His eyes were sad beyond words. He had exile eyes, like Anna's father, like the young women getting their hair cut at Flamour's, like countless others who lived with pain, long after the guns were silenced and the treaties signed.

Anna had to believe in Jerzy as a compassionate idealist hoping to end war by writing about its horror and the ever-widening circles of suffering in its aftermath. Otherwise there was no hope. She would stay loyal to Jerzy. She would not slander him even in her thoughts. She kissed his photograph, tamped down her doubts, and concentrated her whole self on his well-being.

Wind howled across Lake Mendota and drove needles of snow into unprotected eyes and skin. It banged the ill-fitting door in the front hall, wailed outside the thin windowpanes, and pressed rudely to get in. Newscasters warned of frostbite and marveled as temperatures plunged to ten, then fifteen below.

Anna kept her forehead and mouth covered with a long scarf, but the bridge of her nose felt as if it were going to shatter into

slivers of ice as she carried in bags from the Seafood Center, the Jenifer Street Market, and the Wine Shop. Salmon and avocados and even raspberries, small miracles in December, not bloody steaks or fat pork chops for darling Andrej. She crumpled the receipts without looking.

She plugged in her new space heater, bought as much for making a cozy nest for Andrej as for herself. When the bathroom was no longer frigid, she stepped into water scented with jasmine oil that Julie had given her. She kept her eyes on her cut-glass soap dish shaped like a seashell, listened to Kathleen Battle singing Mozart arias in the background, and felt the chill gradually leave her body. She dressed slowly, enjoying the touch of soft cotton and lamb's wool on her skin. She wished she had cashmere and satin and silk because Andrej always noticed and commented on what she wore. His sisters had probably taught him that. That he had been loved by his sisters made him more lovable.

Cooking for Andrej was a pleasure. Anna refused to think about the resentment she had heard in the voices of women who had to shop and clean and prepare meals after long days at work. She did not feel anxious as she used to when Stanley expected dinner to be on the table the second he arrived from the resort. Besides, Andrej and she would probably cook together when they knew each other better. But for now she wanted to spoil him, just a little bit.

As soon as she heard his tentative knock, she opened the door wide. His leather coat crackled with cold, his white silk scarf was disarrayed by the wind, his pale eyebrows lightly frosted with ice.

"Is everything all right?" he asked as soon as he arrived. "Are you angry with me?"

"No, of course I'm not angry," she reassured him. She wanted to call him darling Andrej, to take his face in her hands, and to kiss him full on the mouth, which was just a little bruised looking. But she let him take the lead.

"Let me help you with dinner, Anna," he offered. "Tell me what I can do."

He opened the bottle of wine she handed him, swirled the pale gold liquid in a thin glass, and drank it down with such intense sensual appreciation that it almost made her dizzy. He poured some for her, and she raised her glass to him and said his name before she let the slightly smoky taste fill her mouth.

Andrej grinned when Anna suggested he slice mushrooms and tear up the romaine lettuce for salad. "Great. These are just the kind of simple teenage tasks I'm good at."

He was willing but clumsy in the kitchen, so she sent him to pick out music, while she finished the mushrooms and made the salad. She was completely happy. She was not even irritated that Stanley had taken her sharpest knife and best bowl.

Andrej sat down on the floor and began to go through her records and tapes, exclaiming with satisfied delight every time he came across something he recognized. He marveled at Anna's taste in music and said that he hoped to hear everything she owned. He asked good questions about composers and genres and musicians, most of which she did not know how to answer.

He wandered over to her bookshelves and returned with an anthology of poetry. He read aloud to Anna while she stirred dill into cream for a sauce for the salmon. He praised Robert Service and William Butler Yeats in the same breath, but Anna was entranced by his innocent sincerity. Poetry was one more thing she would teach him.

Finally he stepped into the kitchen and stood very close to her. He lifted a strand of her hair and kissed it. She could feel him tremble.

"I'm so glad I touched you that day we went to the Blue Mounds. I go over it again and again in my mind," he whispered. "It is so hard, it is the hardest part, to want to touch the other person and to be so afraid. Touching someone really is breaking a taboo."

Anna longed to embrace and kiss him, but he was shy and she wanted him to gain self-confidence. Besides, she enjoyed their leisurely dinners with music and talk. She liked his quick intelligence, his almost European formality, his good manners, his even temper,

and the way he consulted her about the details of outings rather than willfully proceeding on his own. Most of all she was grateful to him for taking the time to get to know her, which was in sharp contrast to the immediate sexual coupling that Stanley and Molly said was the norm among the recently divorced.

Andrej washed Anna's dishes, carried out the trash, kissed her sweetly, and then he was gone.

Anna was oblivious to others around her as, reliving her dinners with Andrej, she waited in line at the University Book Store. A long blue scarf swept past her, and a flaring dark gray coat settled over high black boots. A coat cut full like that probably did not exist in the whole of Europe during the war, when every centimeter of material had to be hoarded and stretched and stitched for warmth. Nor had such a deliberate, defiant declaration that the war was over been possible for years afterward.

It had been several months since Anna had seen her, but she would have recognized the tall, dignified figure anywhere.

"Sara!" she exclaimed.

"Anna? How wonderful! I tried to call you, but the number I had for you at Cloudy Lake had been disconnected. I thought I'd lost you."

"I was hoping to see you too, Sara. But I didn't think you'd be back before summer."

"We're here unexpectedly so that my husband can consult eye specialists at the Davis Duehr Dean Clinic, but there are some other medical things for him too," she said sadly. "Look, why don't you come home with me and have dinner with us? We're subletting the same place. It's just two blocks away, a little way up Langdon Street."

Anna hesitated. What if Andrej called and she was not home?

"I'm a good cook," Sara urged.

Sara wound her long scarf around and around, and they headed

out into the dark. They walked fast, without talking, and Anna could sense urgency greater than the simple wish to get out of the cold. Sara ran the last few steps.

"What are you doing out here, Albert?" she asked the large man hovering just inside the foyer. She grasped his hand and pulled him into the apartment.

He was craggy and handsome, an aging Gregory Peck, even taller than Sara, who was close to six feet herself. His stretched-out sweater and scuffed slippers did not detract from his upright bearing, which was like that of a military officer.

Sara adjusted his collar, rearranged his sweater, and buttoned it. Her movements were gentle, but her voice sharp.

"Were you going to go outside, Albert? Were you? I told you not to. The last thing I said before I left was that you should stay inside. Remember? It's much too cold for you to go out today."

"I was looking for you, Sara," Albert said. "You were gone too long."

"You have to wait for me indoors when I'm at the library, Albert. You promised me you would. Remember? Anyway, this is Anna. She's the friend I told you about."

He looked Anna up and down. "Your friend? I don't think so," he said.

Anna could feel his hostility. But perhaps it was not directed at her personally; perhaps he was only envious that she was free to go where she pleased with Sara while he had to stay home.

"Yes, yes, she's my friend from Latvia," Sara said. "Remember? She was only a little girl, but she was in Europe during the war too. I told you how happy I was that I met her last spring. She and I had lunch together at Husnus."

"That's not Anna. You're wrong there, Sara. That's Eleanor. Eleanor Roosevelt," Albert said. His smile was innocent, but his need to hurt unmistakable. He glanced slyly at Sara to see whether she would take his remarks as praise for Mrs. Roosevelt's courage and intelligence or if she would remember the endless jibes about the ugliest First Lady in history.

Anna's fragile, new self-confidence wavered, dipped, and died. Did she really look matronly? Was her waist as wide as her hips, did her stomach protrude to form a shelf for drooping breasts, did her eyes pop? Did men inevitably think of their mothers and grandmothers when they glanced at her?

"That's not a compliment, Albert," Sara said. "It isn't kind to say someone looks like Eleanor Roosevelt. Especially when Anna doesn't resemble her."

"But there's nothing wrong with looking like that," Albert insisted. "I don't understand why you're angry, Sara. I meant it as a compliment. Eleanor Roosevelt was a great American."

"Tell Anna you're sorry," Sara said.

"But she's the one making trouble. She's the one who's choosing to take it the wrong way. She should be flattered," Albert persisted.

"Go on, Albert. Please say you are sorry."

"Sorry," he muttered. Not brave enough to hold out against Sara, he was not honest enough to apologize sincerely. A small, spiteful smile continued to play around his lips.

"Thank you, Albert. That's better," Sara said as she settled him in front of the TV.

Anna was relieved to follow Sara into the kitchen. Sara pounded thin slices of veal, set water to boil for buttered noodles, and efficiently chopped precooked onions and beets. Rising steam obscured the tall, uncurtained windows protecting the two women from darkness and cold. Their conversation went rapidly from small talk to nineteenth-century Russian novels to European politics.

Anna felt comfortable with Sara the way it had taken her more than a year to feel with Julie. She doubted that only the fragrance of comforting food on a winter night was responsible. Was faraway Europe the reason? Or did all exiles automatically recognize and respond to each other like this? Did a complex past unite people even when they did not talk about it?

Sara was clearly pleased that she was here, but Anna reminded herself not to get exhilarated. She had made a friend, but she must not count on Sara for companionship. Sara had a husband, a home

in faraway Arizona, and a life of her own. She would leave, and Anna might never see her again.

Though stung by Albert's hostility, Anna felt something like compassion for him as she watched Sara cut up his food and tactfully remind him to eat. Sara did her best to include him in the conversation with remarks about the weather and with detailed questions about a battle scene he had been constructing with toy soldiers.

Occasionally Albert was fully present as he tried to grasp a memory.

"We had onions and beets all the time that winter in the second-floor apartment, Sara, didn't we?" he said, and Sara smiled, delighted.

"What a courageous and intelligent woman you are, Sara," he said, kissing her hand. "It is a great privilege to know you."

Recognition and approval, words precious as pearls. Anna had longed for her father to tell her that she mattered, to praise her, if only for washing and pressing his clothes. She had tried to please him by learning perfect manners from books, getting straight As, and doing her best not to upset him. Just so he would call her a good girl. Just so he would not say she was garbage. But after the Russian soldiers, he noticed little and he spoke less.

Anna was humbled by Sara's patience and loyalty. Had she been wrong to leave Stanley? If she had tried harder, would she too have arrived at a place where nothing mattered but gratitude and love?

Stanley was the first person who said "I love you" to Anna. He had intuited her desperation and loneliness the very first time they met, and he had comforted her.

On the evening after Anna's father's funeral, Stanley strode across Park Avenue in Indianapolis and stepped onto the porch of the dilapidated building packed with recent Latvian immigrants.

"Thought I'd come over and say hello," he said, "offer my condolences and all that."

Anna had been aware of him surreptitiously watching her while he tinkered with the motor of his car. Only rich Americans owned cars, and only the supercompetent knew how to fix them.

"I heard that was your father who died," he said. "I'm sorry."

He extracted a pack of Camels rolled up in the sleeve of his T-shirt. "Cigarette?" he offered.

Anna shook her head.

"Dumb of me," he said. "I should have known you're too much of a lady to smoke. Mind if I sit down?"

He kept his eyes on Anna's face and listened attentively as she told him things people had said to console her: her father had suffered too much, he had been very unhappy, and mercifully he was now at rest. She hoped that if she repeated these phrases often enough, she would come to believe that it was all right that her father was dead.

"Give it time," Stanley advised. "I guarantee you'll feel better."

Anna stopped her obsessive flow of words and looked at him. He was entirely sure of himself. He was at least ten years older, he understood adult problems, and he knew how things worked in America. Maybe he was right that grief could end.

Stanley offered to drive her to visit her father's grave in distant Floral Park Cemetery whenever she wanted. He would take her wherever she wanted to go.

"All you have to do is whistle," he said. "You know how to whistle, don't you? Just put your lips together and blow." She recognized these sentences later, when she saw her first Humphrey Bogart movie. After they were married Stanley continued to use them as a shorthand reminder that he was crazy about her.

"So, what about you?" Stanley asked Anna the next time he came over, thus raising the question that everyone else avoided. Latvians had been kind to her after her father collapsed carrying a carcass at Kingan's Meatpacking Company, but as newly arrived immigrants they were desperately poor themselves. Even so they had contributed enough money for his burial plot, and they had provided an

abundant meal after the funeral in the basement of the rented church on Twenty-second Street.

Elga was still in the camps, and no one had spoken to Anna about her future. Barely a month over eighteen, Anna was too old for a family to take in as an extra child and too young to be certain she could support herself. Her panic about being totally on her own was second only to her grief.

"I don't know," Anna said. "My boss said I could have some extra hours at the soda fountain in Hook's Drugstore while I look for a full-time job, cleaning or waitressing or something."

"You're too classy to wash dishes and wait on guys," Stanley declared, though as part owner of a small cafeteria near Broad Ripple, he himself did exactly that. "Go to the movies, do you? You're just like Pier Angeli and Inger Stevens," he said, naming two European actresses who would later commit suicide.

"No wife of mine is going to work," Stanley told Anna. "She'll have her picture in the women's section of the *Indianapolis Star,* holding a tennis racket or a golf trophy, looking like a million dollars. She'll outclass everybody who didn't give me the time of day in high school." He had big plans, for resorts, restaurants, houses, and bars.

"Don't worry, kid, I'll always take care of you," he promised when Anna cried after she stayed overnight in his apartment on Thirty-eighth Street. He had moved to a better neighborhood just so Anna could meet him without the whole Latvian community watching and gossiping.

He was as good as his word. He cheered Anna on as she got a job filing in an office and enrolled in a night class at the Indiana University Extension. To take Anna's mind off a miscarriage early in their marriage, he told her to add another course or two. As they moved into increasingly luxurious apartments, Anna's university credits started adding up.

He was good to Anna in other ways. He held her when she woke terrified from nightmares, he brought her bouquets of lilacs he stole from nearby yards when she looked sad, and he tried, without much

success, to duplicate dishes served at the rare Latvian social events they attended.

At first Anna did not notice the startled expressions of her fellow students at Stanley's occasional lapses in grammar. She resolutely paid no attention when they rolled their eyes at his boisterous declarations that he was a self-made man and proud of it. She did not object when he said they were spoiled brats who had not done an honest day's work in their lives. He loved her, he was the only one who did, and she needed him.

Anna knew that her fellow students would have looked down on her father for his clumsy English, his rough hands, and his overalls stained with blood and grease. They could not possibly imagine him at the Foreign Ministry in Riga, gracefully switching from Latvian to French, from Italian to Swedish, from Russian to German. Only after the war did his ability to learn languages diminish, the same way that skill at operating tables gave way to shaking hands for Latvian surgeons in exile.

Her classmates would not understand why her father had spent almost an hour scouring his body as soon as returned from Kingan's or why he wore a white shirt and a black tie on Saturdays and Sundays even if he never left the single room that constituted their entire living space. The immaculate, carefully pressed clothes Anna had ready for him when he came home from work and the scent of soap and shaving cream made everything seem briefly all right. It did not matter that the seat of his suit was shiny with wear and that the broad, deeply lobed lapels of the jacket were out of fashion. He did not mingle with Americans, a separation easy to maintain because neither side wished to know the other.

But Anna could not keep her fellow graduate students and Stanley apart forever. A week or so before the execution of Caryl Chessman, Stanley silenced lively chatter at a dinner party by announcing that he approved of capital punishment. Anna retreated behind her vague I'm-not-even-hearing-this look as Stanley asserted, "Irregardless, that bastard deserves to die."

That everyone around the table had marked "irregardless" as a gross illiteracy and "bastard" as inappropriate diction on freshman themes was the least of it. Anna's colleagues, united to a man in opposition to capital punishment, countered with logic, statistics, and moral outrage. Stanley was half-shouting, but so were they. Contentious argument, though somewhat more polite, was a staple in academic circles.

Anna prayed to be transformed into a mute and solitary birch tree, so desperately did she want to avoid the full recognition of something she had always known.

Stanley was not very smart.

It was not just that he did not have the education and the class privileges of Anna's fellow students, or that he knew different things from them, or that he was intelligent in ways that academics could not appreciate—rationalizations that had worked before. He simply was not capable of understanding abstractions, making fine distinctions, entertaining the opposite point of view, recognizing fallacies, and effectively marshalling logic and evidence.

A deep blush, more like a burning rash, spread over Anna's entire body. She was ashamed of Stanley and ashamed of herself for her shame. She had no one to blame but herself. She had married him. She had promised to love him, and he needed her admiration and love. She was his wife, and he was her family. She would be loyal to him. But she could not respect him the way she had respected her father even at his worst. She would have to live the rest of her life without being proud of her husband.

On the way home from the party, Anna cried for the last time until twenty years later. Stanley bristled at first and tried to get her to agree that all degenerates and murderers should be fried in the electric chair. He shouted that her fellow students had plotted to show him up because they had the hots for her, they had insulted him, and they had made him feel less than a man. But eventually his uneasy self-confidence collapsed. No one liked him, no matter how hard he tried, he said with his voice breaking. His teachers had kept

him from getting his high school diploma by accusing him of cheating, and rich kids had repeatedly rejected him simply because he was working class and poor.

Anna felt searing pity as she reassured him and promised her loyalty. It would kill Stanley if she merely hinted that she saw his limitations. He seemed as vulnerable as her father had when he returned barefoot and streaked with filth from wherever the soldiers had taken him. It was her duty to comfort and to cheer. She would give up socializing with her colleagues in order to protect Stanley. It was a simple enough sacrifice to make because he was all the family she had. They would live, just Stanley and she, turned in on each other, sufficient to themselves.

Sara too had no family other than her husband. She would never have gotten to the United States without Albert. He had loved and protected her. He had brought her with him from gray, bomb-damaged Berlin to glittering and safe New York.

Like other events in Sara's life, their meeting was the result of chance. After the armistice, Germany was suddenly full of young Americans. Well-nourished, healthy men in uniforms were everywhere. Sara and her younger sister, Wanda, went to movies and dances and clubs with the officers. The Germans next door called the sisters *Amiliebchens* and worse, but the two young women did not care. Sara knew that she and her sister would be dead if it had been left up to their neighbors.

Sara and Wanda had missed out on having fun. They did not know what it was like just to go somewhere, for no other reason than to enjoy themselves, or to sit in a public place and talk and laugh out loud and not care if someone at another table overheard them. They were all very young, Sara and Wanda and the soldiers also, but they did not know it. The war had gone on for so long, and they had seen so much that they all felt like mature adults.

One night Sara was sitting at a table in a nightclub with Americans, and she must have had too much to drink because she started telling them some of the things she had had to do in order to get food and find places to hide so that she would not be taken to the death camps.

They did not want to hear. "Forget it," they said, "the war is over. Why open old wounds? Have another drink. Listen to my joke. Where's your sense of humor? Laugh and the world laughs with you. Keep on smiling, baby. Every cloud has a silver lining. Kiss me, it'll make you feel better."

One of the men grabbed her and started to bend her over backward, the way they had all seen the sailor do in the famous photograph of VJ Day celebrations in New York.

That was when Albert stood up. Sara had not paid much attention to him before, but he tapped the man on the shoulder, apologized, and asked Sara to dance.

"I'm Jewish," he said when they were on the other side of the dance floor.

Sara did not believe him at first. She thought there were no Jewish men left anywhere in the world. There could not be because they had all been killed. Certainly there could not be someone her own age, right in front of her, with his arms around her. But finally she took his word for it.

Albert was a good dancer, as was Sara. They stayed out on the dance floor for several numbers, and he did not escort her back to the same table afterward. They went outside for a breath of air and a cigarette, talked about music and books, and then they danced some more. It was after curfew when he walked her home on the eerie, rubble-strewn streets. By the time they arrived at the basement flat below the canteen where Sara and Wanda worked, he had asked her to marry him.

Just like that.

Sara did not say yes right away. She was not in love with him, and she did not love him by the time she married him either, but

eventually she agreed. Her parents had brought her up to be married, and her sister, Wanda, was already planning her own wedding. An officer from Indianapolis had proposed to her, and she was ecstatic. He was not Jewish, but he would take her to America, where she would eat whatever she wanted, buy pretty clothes, have a wedding in a huge Episcopalian church, and live in the best part of town.

There was nothing left for Sara in Europe. Wanda was the only member of the family still alive, and Sara had no idea how she would earn a living once the Americans left and their canteen closed, but those were not the real reasons for her decision. She had survived during the war, and she knew she could do it again if she had to. But she did not want to live in Germany, and she could not imagine going back to Poland after both Poles and Germans had hunted her there.

Albert got through all the red tape, and they married in a quick civil ceremony. But trouble started as soon as Sara arrived in New York. At first Albert's family refused to believe her that she had not been in a concentration camp. They accused her of trying to hide the terrible things she had done there because she would not be alive otherwise. They said that she had torn bread out of the hands of the sick and the dying, that she had licked the boots and private parts of the Nazi guards, and that she had pushed other Jews into ovens. She tried to convince them that she really had hidden outside, but they created new accusations right away. In that case, she must have searched for, hunted down, and betrayed other Jews. She must have laughed with money in her pocket as they were dragged out of their houses and shot. Albert's relatives were afraid of her. They avoided her as if she could give them TB and syphilis and infect them with madness and crime.

Things got so bad that Sara had to leave. She found a job and a room of her own, and she told Albert he would have to choose between her and his family. Albert did not take her side right away but asked for some time to think it over. He came around eventually, but not before she had lost some of her respect for him. He moved into her place, and they came to an understanding that he would

believe her and that he would always put her first. Very slowly, Sara came to love him. She felt responsible that he too had lost his family because of her. And because of the war.

Sara had found a good job in the clothing business, and she kept working after Albert and she started living together again. She could just look at a dress or a suit by a famous designer and make a copy afterward. She had always loved colors and textures, and she liked the work because she did not remember or think about anything else while she was looking and sketching and making patterns. The financial side did not interest her, or she could easily have had her own business. But she did well enough working for others.

She was retired now and free to travel from place to place. She could follow any lead she chose in order to search for the lost people of her devastated town. More than four decades had passed, but some nights she still woke in a panic that someone had stolen her papers or that a truck was idling outside her door, ready to take her away. Albert held her in his arms and caressed her forehead and her hair until she remembered that she was in the United States, not in a Europe poisoned by suspicion, betrayal, and death.

"Oh, Sara," Anna said when Sara stopped talking. She was crying for Sara, but something was opening and getting clearer inside her as well. Sara's story was as painful as Jerzy Kosinski's, but Anna did not doubt a single detail of it.

"So you see, I owe everything to Albert," Sara said, "and he's as alone as I am. I didn't give him children to replace the family he gave up for my sake. I didn't want to bring children into a world where they would have to go through the same kind of horrible things I did.

"It's impossible for me to live a normal life. Probably it's like that for you too, Anna. It's like that for everyone who has been through something terrible. You're like a train that gets knocked off the tracks by a bomb or like a pendulum of a clock that's smashed by an ax. After the blows, you can't just automatically right yourself and go on as if nothing has happened, although people expect you to. Everything is completely changed. And you keep getting struck by other

blows because you aren't where you're supposed to be. You feel like a freak most of the time. More things keep happening to you than to others. Your judgment isn't good. You can't distinguish an exploiter from a friend. You put up with bad treatment, but you're too suspicious to make new friends. You don't think like others. You can't live like others. You can't even stand being with others for very long.

"But it's not necessarily easy to speak with other people who have had terrible experiences. There's too much competition about suffering. Others say to me, 'So, is that all that happened to you? Listen to what happened to me. You were never in a camp, you don't have numbers tattooed on your wrist, your badly knitted bones don't ache, you don't have slash marks across your belly from their experiments, you don't keep smelling burning flesh, you didn't have to watch when your parents were killed. So how dare you complain?'

"But sometimes a small miracle happens and you meet someone who's been through something world-shaking too, not exactly the same thing, not even a war or the Holocaust but some other hard thing. Someone who has suffered and become aware. And suddenly you want to talk because the other person listens and hears and understands. Just one person like that can keep you going. Like you, Anna."

After a late-night dinner, Andrej settled Anna on the love seat, handed her a cup, and insisted on cleaning up the kitchen. He whistled "Tea for Two" as he ran the water. Anna felt uncomfortable because he had told her the song was his mother's favorite. But soon he was singing "If I Had a Hammer," and Anna relaxed. He danced into the living room to ask where she kept the clean towels and where to put a pan.

"Come and inspect, please. This kitchen is spic-and-span." He grinned. "It's the least I can do for you, Anna."

He insisted on taking out the trash. He returned carrying his

shaving kit. "Forgive me for being so forward," he said. "I'll go if you want me to. But I'd like to stay with you tonight, if I may."

A deep red blush spread over his face when Anna looked directly at him.

"I mean . . . we don't have to do anything . . . like . . . like . . ."

"Make love," Anna said.

"Thank you for saying it," he whispered. "You're the only adult I know."

He brushed Anna's eyes with his fingertips, as if to close them, and began massaging her temples. He kissed her cheeks, her earlobes, and finally her mouth.

"Promise me you won't regret this," he whispered. "We aren't going to do anything wrong; I swear we're not. It's beautiful and natural. Please promise that you won't blame me afterward."

He was even younger than she thought if he was so anxious about making love. Her hands moved over his body as lightly as mist. She felt great tenderness for him. She would protect and delight him. Her love would heal his wounded pride and make him whole.

"Darling Andrej," Anna whispered as his sensitive fingers traced the outline of her breasts.

In the dark bedroom they helped each other undress by touch alone. Her bed was narrow, but there was just enough room for him. His hair smelled like birches and newly mown hay, and it was softer than its strawlike appearance would suggest. He kissed her as deeply as she had longed for.

They brushed against each other, caressed, and then moved a little awkwardly until he fit into her. His whole body was rigid with the strain to get even closer. The absolute rightness of it thrilled her. Their bodies found their own beautiful rhythm and stayed with it for a few seconds.

And then, suddenly, it was over. He shuddered and collapsed against her.

"I'm sorry. I am so sorry," Andrej whispered. "I'm no good, you can see that I'm not. Laura used to . . ."

For a split second Anna wanted to pretend that she had had an orgasm too, just to make him feel better, but she stopped herself. She would not lie with words or with her body again, the way she had to Stanley. She covered Andrej's lips with her fingertips. She sealed his eyelids with kisses and cradled his head against her breast, the way a mother would a child.

"It's all right," she said. "Don't be so hard on yourself; it is all right. There's so much more to making love than that anyway."

He was so vulnerable and so dear.

"I love you, Andrej," she whispered in spite of having vowed not to be the first to say it.

"Thank you," he said. "That is very nice."

He rubbed his warm feet against her cold ones, and she felt valued and needed in spite of failed passion and missing words of love. He spread out her fingers on his chest and sighed contentedly as he held them there.

"You are so good to me, Anna."

All he needed was a little patience and a lot of tenderness, Anna thought, and she had more than enough for them both.

He was her lover, but they fell asleep like brother and sister, like Hansel and Gretel, like two children lost in the woods.

Anna loved having Sara in her apartment. The neighbor whom Sara had hired to keep an eye on Albert might call, but meanwhile they would eat and talk. Anna beamed as she served fish soup fragrant with dill for the first course. She was more relaxed with Sara than with Andrej, but preparing any meal now bore no resemblance to her frantic activities in the kitchen at Cloudy Lake. There she had spent hours reading recipes, tracking down exotic spices, and chopping and kneading just for practice. She had believed that if she could only get the food right, something would change by itself in her marriage.

"Are those your parents?" Sara pointed to a faded photo. Some United Nations Refugee Relief Association official must have taken it to record DPs standing in an orderly line, waiting for food. Anna's father and Elga were in the foreground, next to each other. Elga looked hopeful and attractive in spite of her checkered scarf tied babushka style and her far too short coat. Anna liked to think that Elga was pleased because, having no documents to prove otherwise, she had just taken ten years off her age and felt ready for youth-worshipping America. Anna's father, his rough sweater in jarring contrast to his wide-legged, formal pin-striped pants, looked remote.

"No, that's my father and Elga. My mother died shortly after I was born."

"What a handsome couple. Were they lovers?"

The impossibility of Anna's father loving anyone was too obvious yet too vast to explain. "No," she said, "but Elga sometimes looked after me."

"A distinguished man," Sara concluded.

Anna felt a rush of love for Sara for seeing past his terrible clothes and haunted eyes.

"What happened to him?"

"He died of a heart attack in 1955."

"I'm sorry. I guess hearts get damaged by war, like everything else. But I meant before that. What did he do in Latvia? What happened to the two of you during the war?"

Anna talked easily at first about her father taking her to the puppet theater and to Brīvības Piemineklis ("Monument to Freedom") in the center of Riga, and she mentioned the succession of young women hired to take care of her in the country. They were all affectionate and easygoing, letting Anna dig potatoes in muddy fields, splash in barrels of rainwater, and sleep in the hay. But Anna lived for her father's weekend visits. Together they made tiny boats from wood chips and brown paper, sailed them in the stream where they trapped crayfish, and walked through pine woods looking for blueberries and mushrooms. He taught her to say the names of flowers,

to climb into the low branches of apple trees in the orchard, and to hide there to watch insects and birds.

"And then?" Sara asked.

Carts drawn by refugees, incomprehensible languages, trains so jammed that it was hard to breathe and impossible to reach a bathroom. The screaming of terrified horses in the background as soldiers shoved Anna and her father back from the last wagon to leave the station. The sense of impending doom overcoming the faint hope that if they could not escape they could hide.

Sara knew about hiding and escape. She was out on the streets during the day, trying to hide in plain sight, and she worried constantly about what she would do when it got colder. One morning she rounded a corner and came upon three men in uniform. They were laughing and smoking and only half watching the street. She recognized one because he was from her old neighborhood, and of course he would know her too.

It was too late for her to back away unnoticed, and she would attract their attention if she ran.

She ducked into a courtyard because they would not follow her there. The Nazis did not enter courtyards unless they were in big groups. They were scared of being ambushed, and they did not take risks unless they were sure they had the advantage.

Sara went into a hairdresser's and had her hair washed and curled. She worried whether she had enough money to pay, but luckily she did. She hoped the two sentries would be gone by the time she was finished, but they were still there. They were watching the entrance, evidently waiting for her to come out. They would arrest her the instant she stepped into the street.

She did not know where else she could go because she had no more money. It was impossible to just sit in a café without ordering or to linger in a shop without buying something. But she had to do

something, so she went into a small stationer's shop on the second floor. The owner had another customer, who was taking his time, and she was grateful when he asked to see additional samples because that gave her a few more minutes of freedom or maybe of life itself.

She discovered that if she pressed herself against the wall, she could just see the entrance to the courtyard. One of the guards glanced up at the window, but she drew back quickly enough.

Finally the man ahead of her paid, and the owner turned to her. She thanked him in German, which she sometimes used as one more way to deflect suspicion. Pronouncing a single word in Polish with an inflection slightly different from gentiles could betray that she was Jewish. She took a long time selecting paper and envelopes. She thought of ordering engraved invitations for her wedding, but the owner would suspect something because she was alone. She should have her parents or her fiancé or another family member with her for that, and she could not think of a single name that she could put down as her husband-to-be because only Jewish names occurred to her. Dozens and dozens of names of men who had disappeared or had been killed struck her heart with every beat. Finally she did think of a German family name, and she ordered fifty invitations to a birthday party in one of the big hotels.

"It's a surprise celebration for my mother," she said.

She started fumbling with her purse because she knew the owner was waiting for her to pay. She felt him studying her.

"It's all right," he said. "You can do that when you come pick them up. I'm about to close anyway."

She did not know how he had guessed because he went on very quietly, "Would you like me to show you the back way out?" He unlocked a door that led to a stairway and then to an exit into the alley, out of sight from the guards.

She had escaped, but that did not mean she could do it the next time.

The elderly couple told her that night that a neighbor had complained about hearing noises coming from the storage room of the

bakery and that she would have to leave. She did not blame them. She would have done the same thing.

After several nights of sleeping outside, Sara found another place, a huge dreary Quonset hut. Dozens of women bent over sewing for long hours every day, and they slept on the floor there at night. By this time Sara's sister, Wanda, needed a place to stay too, and Sara got permission for her to join her. The manager was so far behind in his quotas for repairing army uniforms that he did not ask any questions.

Wanda was their parents' favorite. Blonde, chubby, and what Americans would call cute, she was very different from her tall, dark-haired, and classically beautiful sister. Sara was only two years older, but their parents expected her to look out for Wanda as if she were a baby. They punished Sara if Wanda got hurt, but they let Wanda have the same privileges, like staying up until ten at night or wearing silk stockings, as soon as Sara got them. They gave Sara a bicycle for her twelfth birthday, but she had to let Wanda ride it half the time. Not only that, but Sara had to teach her how to do it, and she was the one who was blamed whenever Wanda fell and skinned her knee.

At the first sign of trouble, they sent Wanda to stay with a rich landowner in the country, but they kept Sara in town. If Katerina had not come with the false papers, Sara would not be alive. Sara herself had to find places to hide and she had to rely on the kindness of strangers.

Nevertheless, Sara was determined to keep her promise to her parents that she would look out for her sister. For several weeks the sisters worked together, sponging blood from uniforms and patching holes made by bullets. But then the manager told them to move on.

They ended up on a train taking Polish women to work in munitions factories in Germany. The women in the wagon started taunting the sisters as soon as the train pulled out of the station. They said that Sara and Wanda were not Polish, that they were Jewish, and they could always tell the difference.

Of course the sisters were as Polish as their tormentors. They had both been born in Poland, and they had lived their entire lives there,

as had their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents. Sara named the towns where everyone was born, but the women called them Jewish whores anyway. They would turn them in as soon as the train got to Berlin.

"Watch me and do exactly what I do," Sara whispered to Wanda when the train slowed. "I don't have time to explain."

She did not know if she could count on Wanda. Her sister got hysterical when she was scared, she had little experience of being on the run, and she was terrified now. Sara would just have to see what happened.

The station was dark because of the air raids and power shortages, but a few smoky fires burned here and there in the rubble, and they could see where some of the great glass panels in the roof had fallen and shattered on the platform. The station must have been a showcase once, but now it was as if the war had already ended and they were in a world where wild animals roamed and savages huddled around fires at night.

Sara went to the door of the wagon, with Wanda right behind her. She scrutinized the people on the platform, looking for someone who might do. Suddenly there he was, a Nazi officer, big and fat and full of himself. Sara could tell he was very drunk because he was too careful as he tried to put his feet in a straight line and to hold himself erect. He had two huge German shepherds on leashes, each one weighing more than Sara. They were more like wolves than dogs really.

"Trust," Sara whispered. She did not know where the word came from because she knew of nothing and no one she could count on.

And she leapt.

She landed beside the Nazi, with Wanda on the other side. The dogs whirled as the sisters threw their arms around the man's neck.

"Dear Uncle, dear Uncle, how kind of you to meet us," they cried in the careful German of Polish schoolgirls. They hugged and kissed and stroked and patted. He stank of brandy and cigars, and his eyes darted about uncertainly. He was even drunker than Sara had surmised.

The dogs barked, saliva dripping from their teeth, and he jerked on their leads, shouting and cursing.

Sara looked only at him, but she spoke very loudly so that the women in the wagon would hear. "Thank you for meeting our train, dear Uncle. It's good of you to take the trouble. Mother sends her greetings. She says to tell you again how much she enjoyed your visit at Christmas. But she'll never forgive you if you don't come to us at Easter."

"My favorite uncle," Wanda snuggled and squealed. She bent down to his fleshy hand and kissed it, and she tried to put her arm around his bulk. She was doing better than Sara had dared to hope.

Two soldiers came toward them, and Sara's heart hammered so loudly that she thought they could hear. They stopped, clicked their heels, and saluted. The Nazi handed them the leads of the dogs and dismissed them.

Sara could tell he was still trying to figure out who the sisters were. Behind his little pig eyes, that cognac-soaked brain of his was calculating as fast as it could. Did he really have two grown nieces and a sister who was fond of him? Had he come to the station to meet them, or was there something else he was supposed to be doing? He looked Wanda up and down, and a lascivious smile appeared on his lips. She was very pretty, blonde and dimpled, and still a little plump because the place she had been hiding before the uniform factory had been the country estate, where there was food.

"Hold on to my arm, girls," he barked to show he was in charge although they were clinging to him already. Sara put her hand on his forearm, Wanda slipped hers through his elbow on the other side, and they strolled along the platform. They could have been in a grand ballroom, with the Nazi leading the polonaise and Chopin playing in the background. But Chopin was the one who said, "For such pigs I do not play."

Sara and Wanda chattered about apple orchards and *pfefferkuchen* and a cat named Mimi and their mother's health as they walked up and down. Only when the whistle blew, ordering them back on

to the train, did Sara allow herself to hope that they would actually get to finish their performance before he struck them, set the dogs on them, or turned them over to the soldiers and ordered them to their deaths. Or he could shoot them in the temple right there and then.

By the steps to the wagon, he made a great show of taking out his wallet. He gave them a banknote each and kissed them. His mouth was wet, but dried spittle was caked in both corners. He pinched Wanda as he helped her up the steps, and he slapped Sara on the buttocks, as if she were a filly, his to ride or set free.

The women inside had watched the whole thing. They did not apologize, but they looked at the sisters with envy and new respect because they had a relative who was a high-ranking Nazi. They cheered up for their own sake. If the nieces of a German officer were going to work in a munitions factory, it must be a respectable place and the work must not be too hard.

Sara and Wanda leapt off the train when it slowed on the outskirts of Berlin. Once the Nazi sobered up, he would realize that they had made a fool of him. He would telegraph ahead about Jewish vermin on the train who constituted a grave danger to the Fatherland. Sara did not trust the women either because they might make trouble out of envy. And she knew that Wanda would not be able to lie her way through any questioning.

The sisters stayed together for the last year of the war. They went through terrible things side by side, but that did not bring them closer, and it did not keep them connected afterward.

Wanda married her American and settled down in Indianapolis. Her husband was ambitious, and he soon changed his mind about studying theology and going into the ministry. His family had money to support him in politics, so he ran for every board and every office in the city and the county. He did get to Washington for one term, only to become one of the congressmen permanently embittered because they believe that they really belong in the White House.

Soon after her marriage, Wanda started making excuses and putting off Sara's visits. She had not told anyone in Indianapolis she was Jewish, and she especially did not want Sara there when her first child was baptized in an Episcopalian church.

Everything came to a head because of their Uncle Benjamin, the youngest brother of Sara and Wanda's mother. It had taken Sara two years of phone calls, letters, and arduous trips to piece together the fate of her parents, of the rest of the family, and of Katerina.

Everyone was dead.

But she continued to believe that her Uncle Benjamin might be the only one who had survived. So after she and Albert were well settled, she tried especially hard to find him. Finally she traced him to Israel. He was not very old, but he was in poor health, and he wanted to come for a visit with what was left of the family. He said that he did not care if he died on the way.

Wanda told Sara not to bring him to Indianapolis under any circumstances because it would be too hard for her to explain who he was. Fine, Sara said, but in that case she would not go there herself and Wanda need not bother coming to New York to see her.

And that was that.

Wanda's fears that their uncle would expose her turned out to be all for nothing because he died before he could make the trip.

Wanda was the only one who knew many of the things that had happened before and during the war, but Sara never saw her again. Albert was all the family she had now.

Sara leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. Her face was gray with exhaustion. Anna saw that it had been a huge effort for Sara to talk about her past.

"That was brilliant, Sara," Anna said softly. "You are more resourceful and more courageous than anyone I know."

"But I can't take the credit," Sara replied. "It was pure chance that I wasn't captured. I did what I could, but it still might not have worked. I could have gone into a different shop, or the stationer's assistant could have been there instead, or the woman washing my

hair could have noticed I was shaking and betrayed me, or the man who helped me could have simply decided not to take a risk that afternoon. And pretending the Nazi was our uncle could have gone wrong in a dozen ways."

"Yes, Sara. But you kept your head, you willed yourself not to show you were terrified, you assessed the situation, you planned what to do, and you succeeded. You should take credit for your escapes. You should tell the world. Jerzy Kosinski does."

"True, but he was a boy. His parents probably didn't insist that he be modest and self-effacing the way mine did."

The boy's intelligence and willpower saved him from death many times, and Jerzy Kosinski had said *The Painted Bird* was based on his own experiences. Of course, Jerzy had sometimes escaped by pure chance too. He had been going to stay at Roman Polanski's house the night that the Manson gang broke in, slaughtered five people including Polanski's eight-months-pregnant wife, and wrote "pig" and "Nazi" in blood on mirrors and walls. But at the last minute he decided to stay overnight in New York to let his luggage from Europe catch up with him. But other escapes required planning and courage. When he was nineteen, he figured out the convoluted Soviet bureaucratic system, wrote his own letters of recommendation, and cleverly forged an entire correspondence to get permission to come to the United States.

"Kosinski is different from me," Sara said. "I can't tell others what happened to me. We're all different. Every story of war is similar, yet different, too."

"And precious," Anna said. "Thank you for trusting me, Sara."

Sara's courage and her story echoed in Anna's mind when she was awake and hovered on the edge of her dreams when she was asleep. But Andrej, work, and other mundane concerns took up most of her time.

Anna was embarrassed because Christmas scared her, as if she were a child instead of an intelligent adult and an independent woman, however recent the latter. She could not imagine getting through the holidays without the delirium of cooking according to both Latvian and American traditions: goose and pork *and* turkey, red cabbage and dried peas *and* squash, saffron bread and a torte with a delicate mocha glaze *and* fruitcake and pie. Stanley's business contacts and employees would gather for eggnog and brandy, neighbors would stop in for champagne and cold shrimp and tiny open-faced sandwiches, and the resort would host dozens of parties, some of which Anna would have to attend.

Late on Christmas Eve, Stanley and she would open presents: monogrammed shirts of Egyptian cotton, golf clubs more expensive than the year before, and hundred-dollar bottles of cognac for him; French perfume, gold chains, and sheer nightgowns for her. The wind howling over the frozen lake, the crackling fire, the twinkling lights on the tree, and the mounds of presents, elaborate ribbons, and expensive torn paper made her feel privileged and safe.

Except for a quick dive into the Hilldale Mall to buy small gifts for Elga and Julie and Molly, Anna had managed to avoid Christmas. But that one time the ringing of Salvation Army bells and the sappy instrumental music had almost undone her. She missed Stanley more sharply than she had ever thought possible, and her heart contracted with pity for him because he was going to be lonely at Christmas.

"What do you do at Christmas?" Anna asked Andrej, trying to sound casual.

"Oh, it's all Midwestern and pretty corny: tree trimming, cookie making, caroling, church on Christmas Eve, too much shopping and too many presents, a huge family dinner on Christmas Day with the whole cast of characters, and *The Nutcracker* at the Civic Center a few days later. Norman Rockwell and American consumerism rolled into one." Andrej sighed.

"That sounds nice actually."

"Does it? Believe me, Anna, you'd be bored out of your mind. I wouldn't want to put you through that. I can hardly wait till it's over."

Anna knew it was too early to expect to meet his family, but she and Andrej had made love, and should that not count for something? He did not offer to spend part of Christmas Day with her, and she did not want to appear needy so she did not ask. But she did not believe him when he said that he only wanted to save her from boredom.

"Let's have our own Christmas, Anna, shall we? Just the two of us," Andrej suggested. "That is, if you can fit it in between your other festivities."

"Hardly that. I'll be alone a lot," Anna said, trying to keep self-pity out of her voice.

"Believe me, Anna, you'll be so busy you won't even miss me," Andrej said, and her throat constricted, the way it often had when she was with Stanley.

The fleshy stalk of the deep red amaryllis thrust upward, the first of its five lily-shaped blossoms was almost open, and the light green tips of leaves were just beginning to emerge.

Anna kissed the half-open blossom before she wrapped the pot in white tissue paper and secured it with a slender gold ribbon. Andrej would think of her whenever he glanced up from his work and saw the dark velvet throat of the flowers. He would recognize that the two tiny hearts she had drawn on the card were like the ones he had inscribed in the visitors' ledger in the small church in the Blue Mounds, and he would be pleased by her subtle reminder. One of the many reasons she loved him was that he did not miss much. And she was pleased with herself for having found a gift that was memorable but ephemeral, lovely but inexpensive, and one that would not embarrass him because she knew he could not afford much himself.

Anna twisted the three beeswax candles from the farmers' market into Elga's amber and silver candelabra and set it in the center of the table.

"Anything wrong?" Andrej asked when she opened the door. She could not help but notice that he was empty-handed.

"No, but I was getting worried. I had dinner ready almost an hour ago."

"Believe me, I couldn't help it, Anna," he said. "I tried, I really tried, but I just couldn't get away. I had to meet with my professor."

"What? At seven-thirty on a Sunday night?"

"You can call him if you don't believe me. He'll tell you I was with him. Go on, call him."

It was a suggestion a child would make. "Of course I won't. I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing."

"Or call my sister Olivia. She'll tell you I didn't do anything wrong. I had to stop by her place, but just for a minute. Here, I'll dial for you."

"That's ridiculous, Andrej. I am not going to check up on you."

They sat without speaking, edgy and disappointed in each other for the first time.

Andrej was the first to speak. "I'm sorry you're so reasonably upset at my unavoidable lateness, Anna," he said formally. "I offer you my sincere apologies."

Anna imagined she could see tears behind his downcast eyelids as he whispered, "Do you want me to go?"

He was so sensitive and so sad.

It was up to her to be generous.

"Of course not, Andrej. People don't part from each other just because of one tiny disagreement."

Anna handed him the amaryllis, and he inspected it with tender curiosity. He grinned at her when he looked at the card.

"But how perfect, how very, very right, Anna," he exclaimed. "You are so thoughtful."

Anna tried to convince herself that it was selfish to expect

presents. Maybe it was selfish to give them as well. It *was* a way of claiming space in the lives of others. But still, he had not even given her a card. She was embarrassed at how childish she was, but the line drawing of the weeping toddler from the advertisement for the Empty Stocking Club flashed into her mind and stayed there.

"Anything wrong, Anna?" Andrej asked for the second time as Anna whisked the beeswax candles off the table and set them unlit on top of her bookcase. Love and intimacy were not going to flower, and she was not going to waste them.

Andrej put his hands on Anna's shoulders and drew her to him.

"Yes, of course there is. I can sense what you feel."

He groped in his pocket and produced an unwrapped, already opened cassette. "This is for you," he said. "I almost forgot. I'm sorry."

"Thank you," Anna said, shifting the little plastic box from hand to hand.

"I apologize that it's not gift-wrapped. You deserve better. I know other men give you expensive things, but I can't compete with them. I refuse to compete. Competition is the bane of American society," he said. "My sister Olivia is the one who has money for anything she wants. She buys lots of tapes and makes copies for herself, and then she gives me the originals. But I got this one especially for you."

He put the cassette into the player, and the single chords of George Winston's "Winter" lifted into melody.

"Listen," he said. "This is exactly what I hear when I think about making love with you."

Anna swallowed her tears and smiled at him. Powerful, rich old men blustered and ruled the world and took whatever they wanted, but young men did not have any money. Anna was too generous to measure love in dollars and cents. She was on the side of the young.

Anna had to work at Waldenbooks on the afternoon of Christmas Eve, so she did not go to see Elga or Julie, and she declined

Molly's invitation to visit her family in Iowa. She had resisted Stanley's pleas to meet him for a "wild and wooly time" at the Pfister Hotel in Milwaukee. But at the last minute, she lost her nerve about spending Christmas alone and accepted Marge's invitation to Cloudy Lake.

She drove five miles out of her way so that she would not have to pass the house where she used to live. She was afraid to see some family's ordinary happiness through brightly lit windows.

"Well, if it isn't the oh-so-liberated Anna," Marge said as she opened the door. She sounded a little surprised, as if she had forgotten inviting her.

Massive candles, red bows, and swags of fir lined the mantelpiece, and the house smelled of turkey and apples and cloves.

"What's it like then to be single again?" Marge asked as she took Anna's coat. "Must be exciting. Have you met a lot of interesting people? You couldn't help to in Madison. I bet you go out every night. Is the campus still as crazy as it was in the sixties? I know there's some of that left. How's your apartment? Nice and warm and cozy, I bet."

Anna tried to say something, but when she realized that Marge was capably answering all her own questions, she became curious about how long she could keep it up. Would she notice if Anna started to cry? Would she stop talking if Anna fainted and fell down at her feet?

Finally Marge ran out of questions. "By the way, Walter and I had a terrible time in Cleveland," she announced. "The detective gave us the number for the Berzinses' aunt, and she invited us over the minute I told her I'd heard from them. But my teaspoons weren't on the dining-room table or in the glass-fronted hutch, where they should've been. Not in any of the drawers either, because I peeked as soon as she left to make coffee. I had to come right out and ask what the Berzinses gave her as presents when they visited, and she said an amber pendant and some hand-knitted mittens. She wouldn't say another word to me after I told her the Berzinses had stolen my teaspoons. Just opened the door and waited for Walter and me to leave."

"So now what?" Anna asked in spite of herself.

"One of the Berzinses' kids must have traded them for drugs, but I'm not chasing after drug dealers. It's too dangerous.The teaspoons are gone, and that's that. You told me last winter to accept it and think about other things. I'm just sorry that it took me so long to learn. But come and meet everybody, now that we've had a nice chat."

Marge seated Anna next to an adolescent nephew wearing earphones and an earnest young woman talking about diaper rash. Anna listened and nodded when necessary. She wondered if she would have felt less lonely in her apartment. She came close to crying only once, when the young woman's husband kissed her hair as he poured her some wine, but she swallowed hard and managed to look composed.

Anna reminded herself that Marge's intentions were kind and that Marge had loyally remained her friend when Stanley tried to isolate her. She made herself pay close attention to the food and to stay for thirty minutes after the dessert dishes were cleared. On Anna's way out, Marge presented a container of homemade cookies and a Christmas cactus in full bloom.

Tears of gratitude rose to Anna's eyes, and she hugged Marge with genuine affection. The midnight drive to Madison on empty moonlit roads was very beautiful.

On Christmas Day, Anna called Elga and Julie and Molly. She wished she had asked Sara whether she preferred to ignore the holiday, which might be an ironic reminder of cruelty she had suffered at the hands of Christians, or whether, on the contrary, she especially wanted to be remembered then. Anna spent the afternoon reading. Only at dusk, when she took a brisk walk through Tenney Park, did she allow herself to think.

"Why are you all by yourself at Christmas, Anna?" Julie had asked. "Why isn't Andrej with you? Where is he? I don't trust him,

the way he comes and goes, the way he's manipulated you into not making any demands and not calling him at home. It's like having an affair with a married man. Is that it, or is something else going on?"

February was worse. Layers of dirt-encrusted ice lined the sidewalks, temperatures dipped below zero, mornings were overcast, and darkness came much too soon. Grim-faced people, their coats pulled tight around them, drew back into hoods and slogged determinedly to and from work. The number of social occasions dwindled, and brandy sales rose. The *Wisconsin State Journal* reported that phone calls were flooding crisis-intervention hotlines and that the offices of therapists were jammed.

In spite of her space heater, Anna was cold most of the time. She felt close to Andrej when they were together, and she was delighted by his intuitive understanding of everything she told him, yet she could not rely on him for companionship. She saw him every week, but they did not go to movies, lectures, or concerts together. They did not stop for a bowl of soup at the Ovens of Brittany or spend a quiet forty minutes on a Sunday morning reading the *New York Times* at the Sunprint Gallery.

Anna had not introduced him to the few new friends she had made or brought him along to social occasions at the university either. It seemed ridiculous now that she had once worried whether people would be taken aback to see her with someone so young or that she had tried to convince herself that they could not help but like him. She had told herself they would begin including him in invitations and that she and Andrej would gradually come to be regarded as a couple.

It had not happened. Andrej was serious about his work, and he had strict deadlines for research projects and seminar presentations so that he was hardly ever free on weekends. Anna remembered what

graduate school was like, and she did not want to put more pressure on him by asking to be taken places. He inevitably thanked her for being understanding and for giving him space. She was flattered when he said that his work was going amazingly well because talking it over with her made him see connections he had not noticed before. She wanted Andrej to think of her as a capable, independent woman with an interesting life of her own. But deep down she knew that she did not make demands because she was afraid to lose him. She would never meet anyone else as sensitive and intelligent who wanted to be with her.

Friday nights felt lonely to Anna again, in spite of knowing that Andrej was out there somewhere and that he had promised to come over if he got a chance. She wanted to call him, just to hear his voice, but what if she got his mother instead? She picked up the phone, then set it down. The last time she had worked up her courage, his mother had answered. She had said that Andrej could not be disturbed, and Anna had felt like a clumsy junior high girl pestering the most popular boy in the class.

She was about to risk it anyway, when the phone rang.

"How about if I come over, Anna?" Stanley said. "I just happen to be in Madison."

"No, Stanley." She stopped herself from saying that she was sorry.

"Oh, come on, Anna, let's just get together, for old times' sake. I'll take you to dinner at the Edgewater after we have a drink at your place. I have some of that champagne you like."

"No, thanks."

"I can tell that you want to. Nobody's more attractive than the ex. After all the fighting is over and done with, you remember what brought the two of you together in the first place. Remember how hot it used to be, baby? Come on, Anna, I'm freezing. It's bloody cold out here. I know you're all by yourself."

"I am not."

Anna thought she sounded convincing, but Stanley laughed.

"Liar, liar, pants on fire," he said. "I have to hand it to you, Anna,

you keep going on in spite of everything. Must not be easy. It's a tough old world out there."

After some more wheedling, Stanley hung up, and Anna stomped around her apartment like a crazy person. Where had Stanley been when he called? Was he watching her windows from the phone booth by the abandoned grocery at the entrance to the apartment complex? A skinny, disheveled man hovered there some evenings. The last time she had seen him he had wheeled around as she came abreast and forced her to have a full view of his slightly bent, pencil-thin penis.

Was Stanley standing in the very same spot now? Or was he watching her back door from his car? He would see her if she stepped outside, and he would surmise exactly what she was doing if she turned off the lights to look. The solid walls were suddenly insubstantial, and the locked front door would yield to one good kick. Anna's skin prickled.

Damn it. Damn Stanley and damn being alone on a weekend night and damn Andrej for being so stingy with himself. Anna opened a drawer, shoved it shut, and slammed the closet door for good measure. She paced the narrow passage from the living room to the bedroom and back again until the big old clivia, the one Stanley had said she was crazy to move, caught her attention.

Several new leaves, lighter and more vigorous than the rest, had risen high above the rim of the huge pot. They announced that buds had formed at their base and were ready to emerge. Anna had always liked the sumptuous clusters of individual orange and cream blossoms, each shaped like a tiny lily, but she had never felt this excited about their impending arrival. Last winter she had been too listless to pay attention, and some of the buds, doomed to darkness between constricting leaves, had rotted before they had had a chance to rise.

Now Anna pressed apart the straplike leaves to release the buds from their grip so that they could open into the light. She was almost delirious with anticipation.

She wanted Andrej to see the clivia in bloom, so she found her sketchbook and tried, without much success, to draw the stately clusters from memory. She was afraid he would miss this marvelous sight because he was going to an academic conference next week, and he had already warned her that he would have more work than usual when he got back.

But more than producing a picture to show Andrej, Anna wanted to capture her own joy. She wanted to have an image of the clivia and a record of this unfamiliar feeling of pure delight. Other people might experience bliss regularly, but it was a feeling new to Anna.

"Come see my clivia bloom," she wrote, and other lines flowed unto the paper almost on their own. "It won't last into May / So come to me today," she concluded.

The fourteen lines were a poem. Not a sonnet in spite of its rhyme scheme, not great, not even good, Anna thought, but she had actually written something. She had found words that fell into a satisfying pattern, which pleased her and would illuminate an experience for someone else. She had forgotten all about Stanley while she was writing, and her longing for Andrej had dissipated as well.

In spite of the disappointing first meeting with the Rebels, Anna continued attending the book group. Bette could be counted on to move the discussion to something interesting, subsequent meetings had been more enjoyable, and Anna was making friends with the few women who were not completely tied into their marriages and who occasionally went to movies and lectures without their husbands.

Anna had not expected to be asked what book to read next, and she had impulsively suggested Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery.* The book had been world changing for her. She had learned a great deal about posttraumatic stress, the condition shared by soldiers and civilians who experienced war, survivors of genocide and other atrocities, victims of rape, abused children, and people tortured physically

and emotionally by spouses and lovers. Judith Herman had indirectly validated Sara's, Jerzy's, her father's, and even Anna's experience. Anna was looking forward to discussing the book with intelligent and well-educated women.

Tips on shopping and compliments on food and wine took up the usual amount of time, and the check-in proceeded smoothly until it was Cary's turn.

"Geez, I don't know who picked this because I hated it," she said, flinging the book down so that it landed dangerously close to an open bottle of chardonnay. "I need something relaxing because Christmas was a nightmare, and I've had the worst time at work." A malicious Xerox machine, a disrespectful secretary, and a lost earring had brought her close to a breakdown.

Others chimed in that their Christmases had been awful too because of arduous shopping, delayed flights, too many family visits, and too many parties. But Kathleen would not let these complaints simply pass. Her Christmas, she insisted, had been much worse than anyone else's. The pipes in her house had frozen on Christmas Eve, and not a single plumber had come to help her. Some had not bothered to call her back, and others had said they would leave their family celebrations only for a real emergency. If having a house full of guests and only three working bathrooms out of seven was not an emergency, she did not know what was. Patsy immediately countered that it had been an even harder time for her: she had not been able to have Christmas at all because she had eighteen term papers to grade and grades were due the following day.

Anna watched with amazement as Sara's serious observation that survivors of extreme experiences compete about suffering was being enacted, almost parodied by the women around her about something as inherently pleasurable as Christmas. Only slowly did she realize something else.

No one wanted to talk about the book. Consciously or not, they were all doing their best to fill the air with words about anything but that. Anna's immediate reaction was anger: these privileged women

knew nothing; their comfortable lives had made them obtuse. But she could not stay there. Everyone who lived suffered. Surely some of the women had had painful experiences already, and all the others would too as they moved in increasingly lonely steps toward old age. Perhaps they simply could not contemplate anything unpleasant without the reassuring distance provided by fiction.

But no matter how Anna tried to rationalize their behavior, it felt as if they had silenced her as effectively as if they had declared that Sara's, Jerzy's, and her father's experiences did not matter. They had closed their hearts to her and to millions of others.

"I'm sorry, Anna," Bette said, interrupting the ongoing competition about stress. "We haven't discussed *Trauma and Recovery* at all. Let's put it on the agenda for next month, shall we?"

"No, let's not," Cary said. "I refuse to read it. Anna, you can summarize the most important points."

"Yes, Anna, go on," Patsy urged. "We can use tips for dealing with daily traumas in our lives." She laughed uneasily, as if she sensed she had trivialized the concept of trauma or maybe only that her joke had fallen flat.

Anna felt a burning rash rise from her chest to her cheeks to the top of her head.

No, she wanted to scream, I will not summarize. But she could not form the words. She could only shake her head and hold onto her copy of *Trauma and Recovery.* The women had inadvertently shown her something much larger than that competition went on even about inconsequential difficulties. She understood why people who had starved never really trusted those who had not. She saw why the tortured went mad rather than reveal their wounds while others similarly afflicted pointed to their scars, exaggerated, asked for pity, and shouted to get attention.

Anna stood up abruptly and left the room. She was and always would be the outsider. She could not wait to step outside and look up at the stars.

Molly's company was a balm. Anna did not trust herself to talk about the Rebels without crying, but she did not have to pretend cheerfulness either.

In response to Molly's tactful questions, Anna said, "Andrej never tells me when he's going to call or come over, and then I drop everything whenever he does."

She felt disloyal. She had never criticized Stanley behind his back, not once, and yet here she was, telling Molly that Andrej was not perfect.

"You know what Ann Landers says, don't you?" Molly said brightly. "'If you're better off without him, throw the bum out. Otherwise accept him as he is. Remember that no relationship is perfect.'"

Anna was glad she had not mentioned other things that were beginning to bother her, like the way Andrej claimed personal acquaintance with celebrities and used striking phrases without acknowledging that they had been coined by others. She hoped these small dishonesties were due to his youth and that he would outgrow them. She would feel stingy if she complained that she was the one who shopped and paid and cooked and kept the truck full of gas even as she worried about paying her own bills and half the debts Stanley had run up by mismanaging the resort and everything else.

Nor did Anna like being the one who reestablished intimacy by words and small gestures. Andrej and she would part with great tenderness, but the next time they saw each other he was as remote as if they had just met. Andrej's sexual difficulties continued, but maddeningly, every joke she heard these days was about the sexual vigor of young men. The coincidence reminded her of how in the weeks after her miscarriage, every woman she had seen had seemed to be pregnant.

She did not want to examine the physical side of her relationship with Andrej too closely. It was enough that he held her tenderly

when she had her period rather than pushing himself on her, like Stanley used to. Andrej was comfortable with all things female. Once he had even produced a Tampax from his glove compartment and offered it to her in an offhand, unembarrassed way.

"You should give him more space," Molly, Anna's expert on contemporary masculinity, advised. Andrej used the same phrase whenever he thanked her for not putting pressure on him.

"Men disappear the second you hint that you expect decent treatment, let alone commitment," Molly continued. "There aren't other men out there with his great looks, his intelligence, his sensitivity, and his future earnings potential. I haven't met him, of course, but he sounds perfect to me."

Hearing the wistfulness in Molly's voice, Anna was ashamed of herself. She relied on Molly for reassuring phone calls, companionable cups of coffee, and the comforting sense that if something really awful happened, if she broke her ankle or lost both of her jobs, Molly would help her. But she had not introduced Andrej to her. That Molly had tactfully avoided running into him herself made Anna sadder yet.

"By the way, your last haircut looks great," Molly said, touching Anna's hair, which was getting shorter with every visit to Flamour's. "Have you thought about coloring it? No? Then you should, Anna. Otherwise some young woman will throw herself at Andrej and trap him into marriage, and that will be that." Molly always held unscrupulous young women responsible for men leaving perfectly suitable relationships and stable marriages.

"But I like the gray," Anna said. "It makes me feel . . . I don't know . . . powerful somehow."

"Gray hair reminds men of their mothers, Anna. I just read that somewhere. If their eyes pop open while they're making love and they see gray, men think they're in bed with Mom. They're terrified that their fathers will cut off their you-know-whats. And the next thing you know they're out of bed and out of the house and living in condos, doing primal screams into pillows, drumming at

Wild-Man sessions in the woods, and sleeping with all the young women they can find—waitresses, students, daughters of friends, granddaughters . . ."

Anna did not want to hurt Molly's feelings by laughing at this simplistic Freudianism, so she said quickly, "But what about love, Molly? A man might discover his own capacity for deep feeling and learn new things about love at forty-five or fifty-five or even seventy. He might feel tenderness as never before; he might find parts of himself he's closed off or see possibilities he's never considered." Anna was aware that she was describing her own love for Andrej.

But all her earlier uncertainties vanished when she returned from Molly's place and found Andrej waiting for her. She ran to unlock the door and usher him in. She handed him the bottle of champagne she kept chilled, just in case.

He popped the cork, filled two glasses, and drained and refilled his before he handed one to Anna.

"Terrific," he said. "Thank you, Anna. You are so good to me."

Anna relaxed. She had pleased him, and his gratitude would bind him more closely to her.

He took another sip, sighed with pleasure, and began to talk about things that Anna had not learned because of the war and the camps. He knew how to play the piano, tennis, and bridge; he could read music, ride a bicycle, ski, swim, golf, and sail. The only thing he had had trouble with was kayaking because he could never get his long legs out through the narrow opening when the boat tipped over. Two parents, three sisters, and a dozen uncles and aunts had doted on Andrej, which meant he was lovable. He was Anna's link to normal life. He was her hope for the future.

"I'm sorry I kept you waiting," Anna said. "I had to go pick up Molly's keys."

"Where's she going this time? To visit her parents in Iowa or somewhere else?"

She loved him for being interested and for remembering everything she said. He was avid for details of the lives of her friends.

"Yes," he murmured whenever Anna mentioned Julie or Molly. "Yes, that's very interesting. Yes, I see, that's just what I would have predicted." Things seemed to fall into meaningful patterns simply because he paid attention.

"Is this key chain with the peace dove hers?" Andrej asked, pointing to Molly's keys. "It looks more like something you'd own, Anna. Oh, by the way, I'd be happy to house-sit for her. I can take in her mail and water her plants, so you wouldn't have to bother."

Were he to stay at Molly's, they could have dinner together every night. Anna would not have to worry about when she would see him next.

"No," she said, surprising herself.

"Why ever not, Anna? You know how difficult it is for me at home." He had told her he felt humiliated because his parents treated him like an ineffectual teenager instead of a man. They asked him where he was going, and they expected him to appear on time for family meals. In order to have any privacy he had to stay late at the library and make phone calls after the student lounge cleared.

"It's impossible for me to get any real work done at my parents'," Andrej said. "The TV is on all the time, the phone rings, and my younger sisters run in and out, slamming doors and playing inane music."

Why ever not, Anna asked herself also as she ran water for pasta. Was she so insecure that she believed he would take one look at Molly's pert smile and cute figure and run off with her? Was she afraid that Molly, her loyal friend, would betray her?

"We'd be together all the time, Anna. Believe me, that's the most important consideration for me. Why don't you ask her right now?"

He untangled the cord and handed her the phone.

Anna touched the first six digits of Molly's number and deliberately misdialed the last. Somewhere in a stranger's apartment, a phone rang, unanswered.

"She's not home," Anna said.

"But she was there just a minute ago."

"Well, she must have gone out," Anna said. She was angry with herself for lying. But she realized she felt too protective of Molly to introduce Andrej or to dial the right number.

Anna's table was set, the salad made, a complicated dish of chicken and artichoke hearts and olives was simmering in the oven, and Andrej was late again.

After waiting for an hour, Anna opened a bottle of wine, poured herself a generous glass, and drank it down. Fussing with napkins and cutlery, she thought of the last bowl of paperwhites in bloom by her bed. They would look perfect next to the beeswax candles, which she planned to light. Their brightness would reestablish honesty between them; their soft glow would lead to intimacy and real passion.

Anna sensed something was different as soon as she entered her bedroom. The darkness felt concentrated and ominous. She stood still until she realized that it was only something blocking the faint light from outside, maybe a board propped against the window by maintenance men or a piece of cardboard plastered against the glass by the wind.

It was too painful to think that Andrej was late because he was not excited about seeing her, so she gave way to irritation. What did he expect her to do while she waited? Take up knitting? Cook a second meal to replace the one drying out in the oven? Get absorbed in literary theory? Keep grading papers even though she was ravenously hungry?

Anna poured herself more wine, took a couple of big swallows, and pulled on her boots. Time would pass more quickly if she did something. Maybe his car would pull into a parking space the minute she stepped outside.

The moon was still visible, but the air was full of moisture, promising snow. If Andrej stayed for a while, they would get snowed in. They would have good unhurried talks; they would fall asleep as

large, wet flakes softened the harsh outlines of buildings and posts; they would wake up happy and rested; they would feel close to each other again. After a leisurely breakfast, they would spend the entire day together.

But Andrej's car was nowhere in sight, and Anna tramped grimly to the side of the building. A ladder was leaning against her bedroom window. In the narrow shaft of light coming from where the tops of the drapes did not quite meet, it looked battered and clumsy. Surprisingly heavy when Anna tried to lift it, it was an unlikely item for workmen to lug around on routine jobs.

Anna set the ladder in place and climbed the first two rungs. In a flash she understood. Through the three-inch-wide gap, anyone standing here would have an unobstructed view of her bed and the rest of the room, where she dressed and undressed, walked in naked from the shower, and lay entwined with Andrej. The ladder was not here by accident; it had taken planning and purpose to bring it here. Someone had stood on it, more than once, watching, with only the thin panes in between, invading Anna's life, wishing her ill.

The man with the crooked penis could have climbed up here and masturbated instead of waiting for her in the phone booth. Stanley had probably been spying on her too. She bent down to inspect the trampled snow, expecting to recognize Stanley's footprints.

A shadow fell over her, and someone grabbed her from behind.

Anna tried to scream, but no sound came. She turned, twisted, and hit, surprised that she was not paralyzed by fear.

Her fingers snagged on a button.

"My God, Anna, what's wrong with you?" Andrej's voice cut the air.

He pulled her to him, hard.

"Calm down," he ordered.

He loosened his grip slowly and stared into Anna's panic-stricken face. He felt her forehead as if she were delirious from a high fever.

"Let me help you indoors," he said with quiet authority. "Let's get you warm first."

He settled her on the sofa, wrapped her paisley wool shawl around her, and brought her a full glass of wine. He urged her to drink it while he massaged her shoulders and neck. He took off her socks, rubbed her feet, lifted his shirt, and pressed the soles against his hot body. When they were warm, he massaged them with her lotion scented with lily of the valley.

They speculated, but only briefly, about who could have set the ladder by the window. Anna voted for Stanley, while Andrej was sure it was a "sicko" stranger.

"You gave me quite a turn," he said when her trembling had stilled.

"You too."

"I'm still reeling from it, Anna. Look, do you have any brandy?"

"I don't think so. I never drink it."

But then Anna remembered a bottle of French cognac, which Stanley had forgotten the night he backed the pickup across the lawn. It had to be here somewhere.

"I'll find it," Andrej offered. "To tell you the truth, I'm upset only because I don't know what I would do if something happened to you."

Andrej's efficient search made Anna think of Jerzy Kosinski seeking out hiding places on his first visit to the homes of new friends and acquaintances. Andrej lifted and replaced every bottle of seltzer, Diet Coke, and wine. He moved aside pots and pans, peered into boxes and bags, and set them back in precise straight lines on her shelves.

"Here it is." He grinned as he pulled a fancy dark green and black box from the living-room closet. He slashed the transparent wrap with his Swiss army knife and drew the cork without stopping to remove most of the seal around the neck of the bottle. Dark amber liquid splashed into a glass, and he gulped it before it had a chance to settle. He poured more slowly the second time, and when Anna declined, he drank that too before replacing the bottle in its box.

"May I ask you something, Anna? You say you've had this bottle for more than half a year, and you never drink it. You don't even like hard liquor, right?"

"Right."

"So, I'll take it. Okay?"

"No," Anna said. She did not understand why she was denying him something she did not want herself.

"I wouldn't ask, Anna, but it's just that I'm going to a party tomorrow. It's not for fun; it's an obligation, pure and simple. Believe me, I'd rather stay home and work. But these are people from my graduate seminar, and my professor will be there too. It's not a fancy party or anything, just a bring-your-own. I thought this bottle of cognac . . ."

She gave him more than she could afford all the time, so why did she not just say yes? She disliked herself for making him ask again.

"So, I'll take it off your hands," he said.

"No."

"I'm afraid I don't follow you, Anna. Why not?"

"I can't explain it. It's just that it makes me feel uncomfortable . . . used almost." She expected him to understand as quickly as he did everything else.

"That makes no sense whatsoever, Anna. You never drink it, and you know I don't have any money. I'm ashamed I'm poor, but there it is."

Somewhere behind Andrej, Anna's father, his head humbly bowed, began to count out change from a small green plastic coin purse while the impatient grocery clerk tapped her fingers. She whisked away the loaf of bread when he was a penny short.

Take anything you want, Anna almost said.

"Is it because you're not coming to the party, Anna? Believe me, I'd take you, but it's not the kind of thing you'd enjoy. Just some boring graduate students, mostly male, mostly immature, gossiping about professors and grades. I'm going alone, really I am."

He could not have told her more clearly that he was taking someone else, someone younger and prettier, and that there would be other desirable women at the party. If Anna did not give him what he wanted, he would not come back.

"No." It took all her courage to say it.

"All right, Anna, if that's how you want it." Humming a sad little tune, he retreated to the kitchen, all his vividness gone.

"I'm sorry, Anna," he said as he returned a few minutes later with more wine. "I was out of line. Please don't tell me that you don't want to see me again. You know how I feel about you. I love you. I've loved you since the first time I saw you."

Love. I love you. Three magic words that Anna had heard only from Stanley.

She put a match triumphantly to the beeswax candles, and amber and silver sprang to life. Shadows receded, and a circle of light closed around them.

The chicken was dry and the artichokes were browned a long way past a delicious outer crisp, but they hardly noticed. The wine had made them loquacious. They talked about Mozart's sunny temperament, hikes they would take together in the summer, Stanley's barely contained rage, recent incidents in the lives of Julie and Molly, a woman professor Anna's age with whom Andrej had briefly been involved, and high school crushes.

"How many times have you been in love?" Anna asked. She wanted to know everything about him. She wanted all barriers gone.

"Just once," he replied.

"With whom?" She was half afraid but curious to learn more about his ex-wife.

Andrej stared mesmerized into the flames.

"My sister Olivia," he said.

Anna had to grasp the edge of the table to stay steady.

"She's four years younger than me, but we've always been close," Andrej said. "When I was sixteen, the west side of Madison wasn't the ugly urban sprawl it is now. We could ride our bicycles to the edge of town and be out in the country any time we wanted. We'd look for tadpoles and insects, and we'd bury all the dead animals we could find. She wasn't squeamish like other girls. It was great fun to have her tag along. She was terrific.

"So, after I got divorced and she broke up with one of her boyfriends, we spent a lot of time together. We'd gone up north to look

at the leaves and to walk in the autumn woods, and that's when it happened."

Anna could see it all as he talked.

Andrej and Olivia walked side by side on a path golden with trembling aspen, which led to a small cabin on the edge of a lake. The resorts were mostly closed, but they preferred the single cabin isolated among pines. Dragonflies still circled lazily over quiet water at noon, and tiny white asters danced above a layer of damp red and bronze leaves, but the nights were cold enough for heavy blankets and for a fire in the fireplace. Stars glimmered in a sky unpolluted by city lights, and everything seemed thousands of miles away—society, rules, taboos, everything.

Olivia lit a lamp and pulled down the shades, while Andrej brought in logs and small, sharp twigs. She stepped into the shower, forgetting to close the door tightly behind her. The sound of cascading water soothed and lulled. The scent of her pear soap floated out to him, and soft clouds of steam blurred his vision.

Olivia dried herself quickly, wrapped a white towel around her wheat-colored hair, and pulled on a loose red silk robe. She smiled down at Andrej kneeling by the fire. Her sunburned hands reached toward him at the very same instant that he reached for them. He rose and opened his arms, and she came into them. She kissed him full on the mouth and drew him to her breasts, which were naked beneath the red silk. It was the most natural thing in the world.

Anna toyed with her empty wineglass in order to hide her shock.

She already knew, but she asked anyway. "Did you sleep with her?"

"Well . . . I did, actually. But it was something both of us wanted."

"Just once? Or often? Are you still sleeping with her?"

Among all her conflicting emotions, Anna felt a stab of jealousy. She would never matter to him as much as Olivia. He had known Olivia all his life; she was his sister and lover and best friend.

"Just a couple of times. She changed afterward, you know. She started saying she didn't feel right about it, that we'd done something

terrible, that we shouldn't even see each other. She went into therapy, and she got involved with all kinds of women's groups. She began to hang out at the Lysistrata Restaurant and the Rape Crisis Center, and, believe you me, those women always made it real clear I wasn't welcome. But it doesn't matter anymore. She's engaged to be married. I hardly ever see her now."

"But are you in love with her?"

Andrej leaned back in his chair, out of the circle of light.

"No," he said carefully, "not anymore. It was just something we did because we were both so lonely. We didn't hurt anyone, really we didn't, Anna. To tell you the truth, it wasn't very significant."

She wanted to believe him, more than anything.

He stood up, unbuttoned his shirt, and drew her to him. He pressed her cheek to his chest, which was smooth and beautifully muscled.

"I've never told anyone because no one else would understand. But I can tell you everything, Anna. You're so sensitive and so sophisticated. You're truly unique," he said.

His skin was deeply tanned even in the middle of winter. He took a tender hold of the back of her head and moved it so that her lips brushed against his nipples.

"I've been longing to feel you with me like this," he said as his nipples grew erect.

He kept his hand firmly on her as he blew out the candles.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I like the dark."

Anna tried to concentrate only on Andrej; he was here and with her. He was not with his sister, and he was not with his ex-wife. She was the one to whom he had entrusted his secret self. She was special to him and she always would be.

In the bedroom his movements were self-assured and his caresses no longer tentative. His new confidence was thrilling, and Anna felt powerful and sure of herself too. She kept her movements small at first but let herself go once she could tell that he would stay inside her. His whole body continued to be beautifully tensed as they slowed to kiss and caress, speeded up and playfully slowed again,

then thrust hard against each other. They were perfectly in rhythm until Anna felt him bloom inside her like a rose.

She allowed herself to dissolve. Her face was wet with her tears and his. She had healed him, and he was hers. She had tried and failed to help Stanley and her father, but she had succeeded with Andrej. He had dispelled her fear that she was undesirable, and he had helped her break her fidelity to Stanley.

Everything was utterly changed. Anna wanted to kiss Andrej's feet in gratitude. She wanted to crown him with vine leaves and weave red roses into his gold-flecked hair. She wanted to open the ice-encrusted window and tell each snowflake and every icicle that love had triumphed over remoteness and loneliness. She wanted to shout to the hidden moon that she was completely happy.

By morning drifts reached up to the windowsills, the sharp outlines of streets and sidewalks had disappeared, sounds were muffled, and it was still snowing. Anna and Andrej were in a warm world of their own. The ache of last night's passionate lovemaking swirled and echoed in Anna's body.

It was not the end of the world that Andrej had made love with his sister, she told herself. Levanter, the protagonist in Jerzy Kosinski's *Blind Date,* had caressed his mother's breasts. That must mean that Jerzy had imagined the possibility of making love to his mother; Jerzy might have slept with his sister, had he had one. People probably broke taboos far more often than Anna knew. She told herself not to be so judgmental.

Andrej grinned up at her as she handed him coffee with real cream. "Tell me that it's snowing and that I can't possibly go anywhere this morning," he said.

"That's right. It's still snowing, and it will be hours before the plows come."

"Good. Tell me that I can sleep under your soft flannel sheets all

day. Tell me that I can stay here forever and ever. And then jump back in here and tell me the very first thing that comes into your head," he said, making room for her.

"The first thing? I want to ask you about Olivia," Anna said.

She felt him stiffen, but she pressed on. "When you made love with her . . ."

"What!" Andrej moved violently away from her. "Did you just say, when Olivia and I made love? Did you?"

"Yes."

"I . . . I'm speechless. I don't know where you got a weird idea like that. I can't believe you'd come up with something so abnormal, Anna . . . something so perverse . . . so sick really."

"But you told me yourself."

"Oh, Anna, Anna, I'm disappointed in you. I never expected this from you."

"But you said . . ."

"No, I did not. I'd never do something so unprincipled, so lacking in integrity. I always look out for my sisters. It's up to me to protect them. I've given my father my word on that."

"But you said so," Anna persisted, though she hated this childish you-said-I-said.

"Then you must have misunderstood me. Changed the names around, done something like that. I was telling you about high school, I remember that. But I never said anything so vile about myself. Or Olivia."

Dear Andrej. He was ashamed of what he had told her, and now he was afraid it would change her opinion of him.

"But it isn't vile, Andrej, that's just the point. It's about you, and I want to know and understand everything about you."

"Really, Anna, I hate to say this, but you must have had too much to drink."

"But I remember distinctly . . . ," she said while surreptitiously counting her glasses of wine. Two while waiting for Andrej to arrive, one or two while calming down after being frightened, and one more

during dinner. That made five. Did she pour herself another in order to appear unruffled while he talked about Olivia? Did she drink some out of his glass?

But Anna knew that even so much wine would not cause her to invent the lazily droning dragonflies, the white towel around Olivia's wheat-colored hair, and her loose red silk robe. And for that matter, how many glasses of brandy and wine did Andrej have? *In vino veritas.* Wine revealed the truth rather than obscured it.

"Right. You did have a bit too much," Andrej said. "That's the explanation. You're just a little confused, what with the wine and all. But it's okay. It's no big deal."

He got back into bed and reached for her.

"How wonderful you look this morning, Anna, with that tousled hair and oversized man's shirt. Like a dear little boy," he said and opened his arms.

Anna hesitated, but then she moved into them and lost herself again.

It was dusk by the time he left. She checked whether the gap between the drapes was completely closed with the safety pins she had used, and she straightened the still-warm tangled sheets. As she bent to kiss the imprint of Andrej's head on her pillow, she caught the faint fragrance of cognac, or perhaps wine. Tears rose to her eyes, and she felt completely open to everything.

Olivia rode her bicycle on a sunny country road; her hand was in Andrej's as they watched sandhill cranes briefly return to Cherokee Marsh. He balanced on a rock to reach a cream-colored water lily in Lake Wingra for her. His shoulder brushed hers in pine-scented woods, she bent over him in the firelight, and he opened his arms to her. Their lithe young bodies were barely distinguishable from each other as they shimmered and moved and wove together. They were lovers who would always be more than lovers.

Rain was coming down in sheets, areas of the unevenly paved parking lot had turned into shallow pools, and the newly leafed-out branches of trees bent submissively. Anna did not try to shield herself. She did not mind her shoes squelching and her skirt clinging. She liked water in her hair and on her scalp. She even liked the way the tips of her ears, which she had just gotten pierced, tingled and smarted. She was alive on an intensely green twilight in May.

She had gotten through the winter. Sara was her friend, and Andrej was her lover. Most of the time Anna succeeded in pushing away the image of Andrej and Olivia entwined. He had told Anna that she was the one he loved now, that no one else mattered to him, and she believed him. She was no longer alone.

She turned the key, but the back door to her apartment stayed closed. Her sense of well-being vanished as she tried again. The parking lot itself was empty, but anyone could be watching from one of the abandoned cars by the old lilacs.

Finally the door did open, and she realized her mistake. She had been locking rather than unlocking. Somehow, in spite of all her care, she had forgotten to lock up properly this morning.

The small light on her new answering machine glowed quietly instead of flashing its cheerful signal that someone had called. But everything else seemed to be all right. Nothing was stolen; no one was hiding in the closets or behind the shower curtain. The unlocked door was only a benign reminder that she should pay attention to what she was doing instead of daydreaming about Andrej.

She got out of her wet clothes, toweled herself dry, and pulled on soft gray sweats, prolonging her anticipation. Andrej had promised to write from his research site in northern Wisconsin, and his letter might be in her mailbox right now.

But when she reached for the front door, it swung open before she touched the knob. She had forgotten to lock this door as well. In fact, she had not even closed it properly.

More than a reminder, the two open doors were a warning.

In spite of a sweet letter from Andrej under her pillow, Anna had trouble falling asleep. She turned and stretched and tried to settle herself, but she failed again and again. Finally she dreamt.

She was living in the same neighborhood in Indianapolis where Stanley had jumped out of the car and left her to find her own way. Crushed cans, torn posters, and used condoms littered the street; rusted chains stretched across abandoned storefronts, and iron bars guarded dusty windows displaying sleazy goods. Anna's living room was jammed with battered bureaus and gray Formica chairs, and ugly beige linoleum was clumsily nailed to the floor in the narrow passage.

But it was all right, really it was. Molly lived nearby, and Anna had an inner room with jasmines and calla lilies thriving on a low shelf. A violin rested on a music stand, and orderly shelves of books and records lined the walls.

Half a dozen dangerous young men were gathered at the end of the street. They watched Anna as she ran across to Molly's place. Their faces were impassive, but their bodies were poised for attack. A kicked milk bottle careened onto the sidewalk, and shards of glass scattered around her bare feet. She sensed rather than saw the flash of a knife.

Anna stayed in Molly's place for only a minute, but her rooms were empty of furniture when she returned. Smashed records, broken spines of books, and exposed roots of flowers were ground into the ugly linoleum. A pile of soiled, bloody rags in a corner suggested a pathetic attempt to clean up after mutilation or murder. Sawdust was scattered over everything.

The young men had done this, but Anna knew she too was to blame. She had known they were watching her, but she had not locked her door. They had gone on to their next rampage, and it was too late to confront them now.

A melancholy fog drifted down the street, and there was a slight movement behind a dumpster. Red lining flashed inside a black

cloak, and Anna expected to see Stanley. It had to be him. He was the one who had abandoned her here, he was the one who had secretly siphoned off money from the resort and their joint account, he had stolen from her, and he had lied. He had made her homeless once more. In spite of his facile words of love, he did not wish her well. He was the movie vampire with powdered white cheeks, lurid red lips, and black eyebrows pasted across throbbing blue veins.

But the fog billowed and shifted, and Andrej, as beautiful as always, came toward her.

"Are you angry with me?" he asked, opening his black cape for her to step inside. She struggled to stay unmoving, but her hand reached for him in spite of herself. He turned away abruptly the instant her fingers touched his chest. He eluded her and disappeared into the swirling fog.

"I swear I'll never go shopping again," Julie said as she kicked off her shoes and dropped her purchases from T.J. Maxx on the floor of Anna's living room. Julie's hand had inevitably gone to the few discounted elegant items jammed into rows of dime-store-quality goods, and Anna was beginning to develop Julie's knack as well. She could not wait to wear the airy wisteria blue skirt and top she had bought for far less money than she had spent on a single severe blouse when she was married.

"I love your place, Anna," Julie sighed. "So self-contained and peaceful. Thank God, Vladimir is back in Poland, and Karel's finally moving out next week."

Anna took Bibb lettuce and lamb chops from the refrigerator, set out two silver-rimmed white plates, and reached below the counter for the special bottle of burgundy she had been saving for Andrej. But she saw only seltzer water and soft drinks behind her large pan.

She lost track of what Julie was saying until she heard Andrej's name. "A little odd for a man in his thirties to be living at home, isn't

it? Especially when he still owns that fancy house he built near Cherokee Marsh? Is he in love with his mother or what?"

Sister, Anna almost said.

"Have you met his mother, by the way? Or the rest of his family? No? So what do the two of you do if you never go over to his place?"

"Not much," Anna said, trying to sound casual.

"What, no clubs, no dinners, no movies, and no more famous walks to commune with sacred nature, infected, polluted, and raped by profligate man though she is?"

"We stay here mostly . . . talking . . . listening to music."

"And, I suppose, drinking your wine and eating your food and making love on your clean sheets. It's probably very sexy for him to go see his attentive, sophisticated European mistress, when he wants, how he wants. While you stay at home, peeling potatoes."

"It's not like that, Julie. I'm not his mistress. We have a wonderful, adult, mutually satisfying relationship."

"A relationship? It doesn't even meet the basic requirements of an affair, Anna! At least make him sell that house he's renting out and give you some expensive presents, some stocks and bonds, some good jewelry, a ticket to California in the spring, a trip to a spa in Europe in the fall."

"Oh, Julie. You wouldn't do that yourself."

"You're right. Lately I've been trying to rescue men too. But after Karel leaves, I swear I'll never let another man live in my house. But I don't like those speeches about integrity and ecology and sacred stewardship and earth's festering wounds that your Andrej makes and you quote back to me. God preserve a woman from having to live up to some man's principles, like Tolstoy's wife and Jesus's mother. Mark my words, he'll make you throw out your gray belt with the lizard-skin buckle next. Lizards are an endangered species, didn't you know? He'll have you padding about in rice-paper mary janes if you're not careful."

"Oh, I don't think it will last that long," Anna said, trying for a light tone.

"Oh, Anna, I can see you're mad about him. So of course you must live it through. But don't let him get too comfortable. Tell him you're going out and then do it. Leave some sexy lingerie lying about and act evasive about what happened when you wore it, and . . ."

Anna did not hear the rest because she was down on her knees, shining a flashlight into corners of the cabinet, and lifting aside the spaghetti pot again though she could see perfectly well that the burgundy was not there. The bottle of cognac that Andrej had wanted to take to the party was gone too, as were two bottles of white wine.

Her hands felt clumsy, as if someone else were directing them from a great distance. Had a stranger come in the time that she had left the doors unlocked and taken only these four bottles but nothing else? Or could Andrej . . . ?

The half-formed thought threw her into torment. Was she worthless after all? If Andrej valued her, he would not risk losing her love. He did not give a damn about her. She was ashamed to tell Julie that, once again, no one loved her. Besides, Julie would jump to conclusions. She would use words like "stolen," "sneaky," and "thief."

Andrej would not steal. He was so honorable and so principled, and giving his word was important to him. He was tender to every injured bird; he was gentle to every blade of grass. He would never, ever, knowingly cause pain.

He would be devastated if he knew she suspected him. Maybe a stranger did choose just these few bottles. Maybe she had given him the brandy and forgotten. Maybe she only had one bottle of white wine to begin with. Maybe she was losing her mind. Anna's heart pounded as she looked in the living room and the bedroom closet with no better success.

"Julie," she finally said, "how would you feel if, out of the blue, I asked you if you had taken something that belongs to me without my permission?"

"I'd tell you I hadn't, you'd believe me, and that would be that. So what has Mister Andrej taken? Your black lace bra or your Donna Karan pantyhose?"

Anna would not have minded if he had taken something so intimately personal. She would almost welcome it because it would mean that he was crazy about her.

"No, Julie," Anna said and burst into tears. In spite of her shame that no one loved her, Anna knew that Julie would even after she told her the truth.

The lilacs were fading, and the heavy fragrance of peonies perfumed the air, but Anna stayed indoors. Andrej, repairing trails in the Blue Ridge Mountains with other Sierra Club volunteers, did not call. She knew she had to ask him about the missing bottles. She wanted to talk with him about his drinking too, even though Stanley got furious if she so much as hinted at his. Andrej always looked around for something to drink as soon as he walked through the door, and he was in a big hurry to open a bottle and pour the first drink. As if sensing his need, Anna drank more with him than she did otherwise.

Maybe the only thing wrong was that Andrej had a drinking problem. He was very sensitive, and he was probably using alcohol to obliterate his pain. His war-scarred father, his failed marriage, and the sister who had withdrawn hurt too much. Andrej, while no longer perfect, needed her love more than ever. She resolved to do everything she could to help him.

But in spite of her rationalizations, Anna was depleted. She felt tethered to her dim apartment by disappointment and hurt. Curled up on the love seat, staring at the walls, she was unable to concentrate and incapable of doing any work.

She thought she smelled decay mingled with vomit and feces, and she almost gave way to nausea. But at that instant a ray of sun sliced through the shadows. Thousands of individual dust motes crowded into the light, competing to annihilate it. Suddenly she saw clearly what she must do: she must end her self-imposed isolation, and she must contradict lies rather than let herself be silenced by them.

She opened the half-closed drapes, let in fresh air and more light, and made her bed. She started to pick up and sort unread papers and mail.

"More Fabrications by Jerzy Kosinski!" announced the cover of an academic journal. This must be shocking news indeed because the print was twice as large as for the other discreet titles, and Anna had never seen an exclamation point in an academic article.

Not only had Jerzy not written his books, but it also seemed he had not lived his life either. Restrictions on travel inside Poland had eased as the Iron Curtain became less impenetrable, and researchers had been retracing Jerzy's steps during his war-torn childhood.

Jerzy evidently *was* Jewish, though he had prevaricated about that for years. He and his parents had spent the war years in a Polish village. But unlike the boy in *The Painted Bird,* whose experiences he claimed as his own, Jerzy had never been separated from his parents. He had not wandered alone and homeless over the Polish countryside. He had not been repeatedly beaten, tortured, and starved. He had not lost his voice, as the boy did when superstitious peasants flung him into a pit of human excrement. He had not been mute for years afterward. Instead he had spent the war years "in relative comfort," "eating sausages."

Anna was stunned but not totally surprised. She had already been uncertain where fact ended and fiction began with Jerzy. She tried to stay angry at the people who had exposed him. Only the extremely naive or the stubbornly obtuse, only those who knew nothing about war, could call its stench, noise, and chaos "relative comfort." It showed a complete failure of imagination to say that "eating sausages" could make up for the terror of hiding in a country occupied by Nazis. Regardless of the exact circumstances, Jerzy, like countless others, had been reminded every single day that he did not deserve to live.

The boy in *The Painted Bird,* Jerzy Kosinski, and all children in war were forced to learn the same two brutal lessons, that their parents were powerless to protect them, and that they had to lie in order to survive.

But the extent of suffering mattered. The Rebels had taught her that, if nothing else. She resolved to think more about degrees of terror instead of only the commonality of pain.

Anna showered, washed her hair, and pulled on a clean pair of soft linen pants and a crisp white cotton shirt. She made coffee, peeled an orange, and ate it before she set out for Cherokee Marsh.

She took the direct route instead of driving past the house that Andrej said he had built with his own hands, a large A-frame that bore his imprint in every detail: the site overlooking an expanse of open water and reeds, the weathered cedar shingles, the neatly stacked wood for fires someone else would build. He had to rent out the house after his divorce, so his flower beds were neglected, but the trees he had planted must be thriving. Anna had loved the coincidence that three birches stood close to his window, just as three had by hers on Cloudy Lake. But the web of parallels and synchronicities, which had once promised to unite her and Andrej on a deep level, was unraveling.

She had believed that for Andrej to move out of his house was as hard as for her to leave the apartment on Elizabete Street in Riga and Stabules, the country paradise of her early childhood. She had taken for granted that he had suffered as much then as she had when she lost uncles and aunts as well as her country, her language, and every other continuity. She had foolishly assumed that his father's healed scars were an exact parallel to her father's humiliations, periods of madness, and early death.

The rutted road at the end of Sherman Avenue took Anna to Cherokee Marsh in less than five minutes. Except for a dark blue car, which looked a little like Andrej's, the parking lot was deserted.

Anna took the wooded path past the Indian effigy mound covered with fading wood violets and the yellowing foliage of spent shooting stars. A clump of wild blue iris glimmered by the weathered boardwalk, and doves cooed in shimmering poplars. A tiny snake did not slither away as Anna passed but stayed peacefully curled on a silvered wood plank.

Anna climbed the simple platform overlooking open water. A light breeze leapt from branch to branch, and she felt Andrej's disappointments beginning to lift from her shoulders.

Radiance surrounded her. Borders dissolved between the trees and her; their leaves danced inside and above her; their trunks steadied her. She was fully herself, yet she was also part of water and air and cloudless blue sky.

Anna had experienced bliss like this when she was a child, but she had hardly glimpsed it since. She had believed that real joy was possible only for others, and she had blamed herself for thinking pessimistic thoughts and having a gloomy character. Yet here she was, feeling joy as strongly as she had in Latvia before the war. This small wilderness, which was threatened but not yet subsumed by development, had reminded her of what was possible. She would hold onto happiness.

She would give up Andrej if she had to in order to experience joy again. She would miss him and worry about him, she would lose her chance to have a family and a normal life, and she would be alone again. But she would not die.

The sky remained a radiant blue, frogs sang, and reeds rustled as she turned toward the meadow alive with butterflies and bees. She walked slowly, aware of every small detail, and then headed back to her apartment. She would wash the dishes, air out the rooms, and clean her apartment. She would go see Sara and listen to a story of real courage and real suffering. She would begin again.

Winter was coming on, but Sara was still out on the streets every day. She tried not to haunt the same places, but sometimes, before she realized what she was doing, she found herself in the neighborhood where she used to live.

She knew it was dangerous because someone might recognize her, but she could not stop herself from walking right into the hallway of

her old apartment building. Maybe it was not true that her parents had been shoved out into the street and marched off to the train station. Maybe they had been released and had come back. Her mother would open the door, embrace her, and kiss her on both cheeks. She would pull Sara into the warm dining room, set out food, and listen to everything that she had endured. She would tuck blankets around Sara and sit with her until she fell asleep; she would watch over Sara while she slept. Sara had to clench her hands so hard that the nails dug into the palms to keep from ringing the doorbell.

At other times she walked past the hospital where her mother used to work. She saw the faces of children pressed against the windows, and she saw her mother's shadow. She knew that it was another doctor, but it was as if her mother were there too.

Sara tried not to think about where her parents were or what was happening to them. She despised herself for it, but she was angry with them: they had not sent her to a safe place in the country as they had her sister; they had stayed too long in the apartment themselves; they had not been clever enough to avoid getting caught. She lacerated herself also because she had felt nothing when she first learned that her mother and father had been taken away.

Sara was unbearably lonely when she fell in love. The old couple with the bakery had given her two addresses along with a code question that would tell her if the person opening the door could be trusted. For several frigid nights, Sara hid in stairwells inside courtyards. She knew that in her thin coat and dressy shoes she could not survive outside in the winter, but she had to gather all her strength and all her willpower before she could ask a stranger to give her shelter.

At the first house, which was far from the center of town, she sensed right away that she should not ask the brusque woman who opened the door the question in code about a stored suitcase. The woman's eyes followed Sara after she excused herself and backed away.

Only after another freezing night did Sara go to the second house, which was at a dead end of an obscure street. She climbed a

winding staircase, found the exit out onto the roof, and knocked on the door under the eaves.

The man who answered looked healthy enough to be fighting at the front. Fearing a trap, Sara apologized for misreading the address and started to walk away.

"Did you come for the suitcase you left here?" he asked. "I can see you really need those boots."

"Yes," Sara said.

He made way for her to enter, and she saw that his right arm was withered and one of his legs was much shorter than the other. She was ashamed that she had to impose her naked will to live on him.

His name was Marek, and the place had probably been an artist's studio once. An empty canvas and a few easels leaned against a wall, but another had been sawed into lengths to fit into the stove. Steam rose from a boiling kettle, and half a loaf of heavy dark bread, a dish of butter, and a glass jar of raspberry jam were set out on the table.

Marek's bed was warm. He told her to sleep next to the wall because that was the very safest place in room. He put his arms around her; his body became her shield. For three days he loved her and fed her.

"You have to go," he said on the fourth.

She got down on her knees, wrapped her arms around his legs, and wept.

She tried to believe that he was not heartless. He had not expected that she would fall in love, and he had to be ready to help the next desperate person.

He was kind to her. He gave her good boots, a pair of wool socks, a warm hat, and a heavy coat. There actually was a suitcase full of women's clothing; it had not existed only as part of a question in code. He did not order her out into the cold; he found her a place in the country.

It was on a pig farm, but at least there was food.

The farmer was fat and his mouth stank of onions, but Sara could turn her face aside when he groped her, and anyway, he never

tried to kiss her. His clothes were encrusted with dirt, his armpits were sour with sweat, and there was manure on his shoes. The stink of the excrement of pigs was the worst. She closed her eyes when he fondled her buttocks or squeezed her breasts, but she could not shut her nose. She remembered how gently Marek had touched her. She had been a virgin then, and romantic.

One day the farmer fell on her at the edge of a field where she was digging turnips. He dragged her into a ditch and pinned her down in the mud. There was no use screaming because other farms were kilometers away and the people there might jeer and clap; or they would tie her wrists before they turned her over to the authorities.

When he was finished, the farmer buttoned his pants, got down on his knees, and groveled in the mud. He prayed to the Virgin Mary to forgive him. He gave Sara a few extra potatoes and promised he would not do it again.

She was bending over the washtub the next time he assaulted her. She tried not to think about what was happening; she wanted to escape from her body altogether. She prayed that Marek would arrive and miraculously save her. But when she finally conjured his image, it blurred and shifted between lover, savior, betrayer, and friend.

Anna was still inside Sara's story as she unlocked her door. Her phone was ringing, but for once she did not run when she recognized Andrej's voice on the answering machine.

"I apologize that I didn't call you on Mother's Day, Anna. I'm sorry I couldn't phone on the significant day itself, but I'm back in town now, and I just wanted to say, 'Happy Mother's Day.'"

Oh, for goodness sake, who did he think she was? His mother? She was only ten years older after all. With her eyes newly open, she saw that their age difference, which she had tormented herself with, was suspect too. Andrej had not been old enough to do draft counseling at St. Francis House during Vietnam; his father could

not be old enough to be a veteran scarred in World War II; Andrej could not have known Garrison Keillor when he was in high school. Andrej was either too young or too old for all the details to fit. He had told her exactly the kind of lies she had wanted to hear.

"I've had trouble on the site," Andrej said when Anna picked up. "Someone stole my backpack, took it right out of my car. Remember the two books you loaned me, M. Scott Peck's *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil* and that book on synchronicity by Jean Shinoda Bolen, the one that began, 'If the student is ready, the teacher will come'? They were both in my pack, and they're gone too."

Anna noted that he did not offer to pay for the books.

"Something very strange is happening to me, Anna. Some money I left out disappeared last week too. I was planning to take you out to dinner, I was really looking forward to it, but I'm in a bit of a financial bind right now."

"It's more than a coincidence," Anna said. She was quoting his own words at the Irish Waters back to him.

"Yes, isn't it though? I feel there is something I must learn from all this and that the universe is telling me to pay attention. My creativity is blocked, there's a pane of glass between me and the natural world, and I feel cut off from everything. Do you think that these recent losses are telling me that I need to honor my spirituality?"

It was as if Andrej had observed Anna's exultation on the Marsh. He had tuned into her and found out how to talk like her soul mate even though she was changing. If she told him now about radiance and bliss, he would understand immediately and enter the conversation with ease. If she said that the horrors of war registered on Jerzy Kosinski's soul even though he was never a homeless orphan, Andrej would nod and say, "Yes, yes, of course. You are so perceptive, Anna."

"It's been happening to me too, Andrej. Things have been disappearing around here as well."

"Oh? What kinds of things?"

"Some wine. And the bottle of cognac that you wanted, the one we almost argued about."

"Well, I didn't take it," Andrej said promptly. "Believe me, it wasn't me. Better look around some more. I hate to say this, Anna, but you're a bit impulsive in your judgments. If you don't mind my saying so, you've jumped to conclusions before. Besides, you know that lost things usually turn up."

Anna almost laughed out loud. Marge had found her teaspoons in a box of seldom-used cutlery. They had been in the house all the time, as Anna had suggested, and Marge was busy composing letters of apology.

But Anna did not offer up this story for Andrej's entertainment. She was through being Scheherazade.

"I'll help you search, if you like," Andrej volunteered.

She was through being Lady Bountiful also, but curiosity, compassion, and some love remained. She could not expunge him from her heart without knowing who he was and why he did what he did. And she wanted to touch him, if only for the last time.

Anna wrote down the names of three bottles of wine she had bought especially for the occasion, and she recorded the denominations of twenty-seven dollars before she slipped them under a mug on the kitchen counter. She set out Kate Chopin's *Awakening* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* paperbacks Andrej had wanted to borrow, as well as the hefty *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry,* from which he liked to read aloud.

The doorbell rang as she was wrapping her purse in a plastic bag. She pushed it into a pillowcase and shoved the bundle into the back of the closet.

Andrej stood on the threshold, exactly on time for once. His face, thinner and deeply tanned from days outdoors, was very beautiful. He looked at Anna tentatively, then dropped his eyes and burrowed into her shoulder like a frightened child.

"Do you have anything to tell me? Is something wrong? Are you angry with me?"

He was asking, as he always had, whether she had noticed that he had stolen from her while Anna had assumed that he was interested in her emotional state and that he feared that she would change as unpredictably as his ex-wife.

"Yes," Anna said.

"I knew it," Andrej flinched, "you've met someone else. Some famous writer or musician or big professor, someone with lots of power and money."

"No, Andrej."

"You don't need to deny it, Anna. I saw your ad in *Isthmus* three weeks ago. That's why I was glad I had to go on the Sierra Club trip. It was just too painful for me to know that all the time we were together you were looking for someone else."

"Must be another woman," Anna said. She would not let herself be distracted by asking why he was reading the singles ads in the first place.

"But it sounded just like you, Anna, and there isn't anyone else like you, not in the whole wide world. I'm afraid of losing you. I love you so much," he whispered.

Those sweet, seductive words.

"I want us to be together when the weather turns cold," he rushed on. "We'll wander in the woods until dusk; we'll have a glass of red wine when we come in; we'll keep each other warm at night. If everything goes well, we'll have our own place by then too."

He was offering her a life together. Practical help. Love. Hope. Family. Belonging somewhere at last.

Anna encircled his waist with her arms and rested her forehead against his back. She disliked herself for the blow she was about to inflict.

"This will be an excruciating conversation," she said, "but we can get through it. Let's remember that we're both good people."

She felt his muscles tighten under blue cotton as soft as cashmere, but she continued, "I know you've been taking things from me."

"What things?"

"And I know how. You carried them to your car when you took out the trash or when you went to get your shaving kit."

"Yes."

She wanted to kiss him in gratitude. How Stanley would have bristled, evaded, and attacked instead of admitting what he had done. He would accuse her of being deluded and of deliberately inventing things to hurt him. They would both be analyzing her faults by now, and she would be apologizing.

"Why, Andrej?"

"No excuse, really, but I knew you didn't need the brandy. And all I took besides that were a couple of bottles of wine."

"But why didn't you ask me? I would have given them to you."

"No you wouldn't. I did ask for the brandy, remember?"

"I've tried to be generous . . ."

"Yes, yes, of course. But it's only two bottles of wine, for God's sake. I didn't think you'd get this upset."

"Have you ever done it before? Taken things that don't belong to you?"

"Just from Susan. I believe I mentioned her; she's a professor in my department. She's the older woman I was seeing before I met you. But it wasn't any big deal. She's tenured, and she's got piles of money. She knew I was taking stuff, but she wanted to have me around, so she didn't say anything. It didn't matter to her."

"Well, it matters to me, Andrej."

He shoved his hands into his pockets and stared at the floor, like a schoolboy scolded by a harsh teacher.

"I don't know what comes over me sometimes, Anna. I get lost in the dark, and I do stupid, impulsive things. I guess I've been depressed. I despise myself for my depression."

"Oh, Andrej, I know what that's like. And it's terrible to act against your true nature. Have you considered seeing someone

about it, a therapist or a psychiatrist? Depression can be treated nowadays. It's not hopeless like it was for my father after the war."

"I will, when I can afford it. I did go to the University Counseling Center once, but I was assigned to some young woman who didn't know half as much as I did. She was just a graduate student, with far less depth than me, and she blundered into the most private, sensitive areas. I thought that could be dangerous, so I didn't go back."

Anna stopped herself from reaching for the phone book to find him a therapist. She was glad her checkbook was safe inside purse, plastic, pillowcase, and closet, or she might help him pay for one too.

"I've been working really hard on figuring things out by myself," Andrej said bravely. "I see the money you leave lying about, Anna, you're quite careless with it actually, but I've never taken a single penny from you. Believe me, it was just the wine, and I've been punished for it. I feel cut off from everything. I can't feel the rain on my skin or the wind on my face. I want to be a good person, Anna. Really I do."

It was a cry from the heart.

"I'm glad we talked," he said. He looked at Anna expectantly.

She did not want him to leave, but she would not offer him wine.

"Tell you what," Andrej said, "let's take a walk. It will be our last one together. I can see you deserve better than me."

They wandered through Tenney Park, then past the huge houses on Lake Mendota, their ostentatious bulk in stark contrast to the modest Sherman Terrace Apartments.

"Maidenhair fern, bachelor's button, love-in-the-mist," Andrej recited as they passed a flower bed. He pointed out Red Velvet lilies, although their color was not showing yet, and helenium, Helen's flower, whose mahogany and yellow petals would open in late summer.

"That reminds me," he said. "I've been reading about Midsummer's Eve in Latvia, about how women wear garlands of flowers in their hair and the men are crowned with wreaths of oak leaves. I'd

braid blue bachelor's buttons and white clover for you—if we ever go there together."

In Latvia singing at Midsummer's Eve echoed from hill to firelit hill. The fragrance of wilting leaves and flowers from the make-do celebrations in the camps and in the community of exiles in Indianapolis came back to Anna too with unexpected force. How could she not love him? He knew who she was, he was interested in her past, he respected it, and he could help her recapture fragments of it.

Indoors Andrej kissed Anna's hair, and his strong hands tightened around her. His fingers moved from her face to her breasts. She touched his suntanned neck, and her fingers floated to the zipper of her gauzy wisteria blue skirt.

"Leave it on," Andrej whispered. "I like the disarray."

Anna wanted to like it too, but she did not close her eyes. Her mind stayed separate from his. Lines from the *dainas,* Latvian folk songs, about women dishonored, their wreaths trampled or cast into swiftly moving rivers, ran obsessively through her head until Andrej cried out her name and collapsed in her arms.

She had longed for him to call out to her like this, but it was not enough. She had failed to tell him how much he had hurt her, he had not said he was sorry, he had not promised he would not do it again, and they had not talked about drinking at all. The truth had seeped into dust like water dripping from cupped hands.

Andrej drew up the covers and sighed contentedly. "That's what making love must have been like once when people still believed that sex was sacred. They didn't treat it as casually as we do today," he said. "Unfortunately that's something we scoff at in the modern world."

Anna did not know whether he was quoting precisely, but she had read those sentiments in an essay or novel by D. H. Lawrence.

Andrej turned his back to her and drew into himself. He placed his hands protectively over his groin, the way Stanley used to arrange himself. Soon he was asleep.

Twilight turned into darkness, but Anna stayed awake. Finally she slid out of bed and tiptoed into the shower.

Andrej was gone when she came out. She saw that her carefully arranged books and hidden purse were just as she had left them, and the money below the mug was untouched. Relief flooded her.

But when she looked under the counter, three bottles of wine had disappeared right along with Andrej.

She reached automatically for the record of Brahms's Cello Sonatas, which had been playing when he first walked though the door. But he had taken that. Jessye Norman singing "Amazing Grace," Mozart's Clarinet Concerto, and the George Winston cassette he had given her—it was all music that they had listened to together and that he knew she would notice as missing.

She tried to delude herself one final time. He had taken only things that would remind him of her, and they were insignificant, even juvenile, things. Tapes, records, books, and wine were items a rebellious teenager might appropriate.

But even Anna had to accept the brutality of his actions. He took what he wanted; he did not care that he hurt her. In spite of his enlightened ideas about ecology, his loving words, his pose of intelligent attention, and his confident caresses, he loved only himself.

Anna dreamt that she was alone in a huge, disorderly hall, full of bunk beds. Where were they all? Where had they gone? She was terrified she was so alone.

The carts of refugees, the crowded jeeps, the wounded soldiers had all left. Guns rumbled in the east, the sky blazed red, and bombs screamed to earth quite close by.

And then she saw him, her dearest love. His beautiful light hair was dry and streaked with gray; his skin was a pale, unhealthy white, as if bleached by some chemical or malevolent light.

They heard the moan of birds in agony so far beyond familiar pain that death and torture would be kind. Their huge black bodies and bald heads writhed in an endless marsh full of twisted trees and shrubs, charred skeletons of spring. No blade of grass renewed the world, and no new leaf.

He took a gun and forced himself to shoot, a lover of all doomed things, his final act to shield, to aid, and to protect.

There was no blood; just pitchlike ooze seeped from the severed heads, fouled air and earth.

She took him in her arms. Dry, wrenching sobs brought no release. There were no words. Hours went by.

And then she felt his tears warm on her neck, and her tears flowed too on his light hair and open eyes.

They still could cry, still feel it all, a miracle too powerful and bleak, a final punishment they did not die.

The ringing of the phone woke her.

"Anna, please, please don't hang up on me. I'm sorry it's late, but we need to talk."

"Andrej? What time is it?"

"A little past eleven. Can you come over? Please, Anna, I have to see you."

Anna had promised Julie, the only person to whom she had confided that Andrej had stolen from her, that she would not see him again. She had promised herself the same thing. But she had to know: What drove him to steal? Why had he chosen her? Was she to blame for what had happened?

"Please, Anna, I beg of you," Andrej said. "It's crucial for our future together or I wouldn't ask. I'm at my parents' house, but they're gone for the night. Please."

"All right, Andrej," she said.

He gave good directions, yet another characteristic that she would have added to the long list of reasons she loved him.

"I'll be there in an hour."

"Can't you make it sooner, Anna? Oh, and by the way, do you have anything to drink at your place? There's nothing here for me to offer you. I'm afraid my parents are such straight arrows."

Anna did not fool herself that a drinking problem explained everything. No other single label would either. Her need to know a more complex truth was obsessive.

She hid her purse in the closet once more, put on jeans, and buttoned a white cotton shirt all the way to her throat. Even so, her possessions would be really safe only if she stripped off all her clothes, threw a raincoat over her naked body, and hung her keys on a chain around her neck. She told herself again and again not to trust him, no matter how sincere he sounded. She believed that he would not harm her physically, but she had been wrong about so many other things.

She scrawled Andrej's name and phone number on a piece of paper, addressed it to the police, and propped it up on her kitchen counter before she remembered that he might have a key. He had probably been inside her apartment before she came home and found both doors unlocked.

She slipped the note to the police into a stamped envelope, wrote Julie's name and address on it, and dropped it into the mail slot in the front hallway. If she got back all right, she would see about new locks first thing in the morning.

Anna left roaring trucks and confusing lights behind her as she turned off the interstate and continued toward Evansville, a small, pretty town of restored Victorian houses. Clouds scudded across the moon, and a low mist rose from ditches and billowed across the two-lane highway, which wound between meadows and fields.

She remembered the naked woman in mules that Stanley had told her about, and she thought about Molly and Julie when they were young. Thousands of other compliant women had existed then;

thousands more were living right now. For more than twenty years, Anna had been one of them.

Molly used to stay home on Saturday nights and wait for her musician lover, who had convinced her that her presence at his performances was distracting. He arrived at her place hours after the last set, drunk or stoned and demanding anal sex. Molly was not even the one who broke it off; he got bored and went on to someone else.

Between her first and second husbands, Julie accepted whatever small space a married lover allowed her in his life. Only when she went to his place while his wife was away did the tall windows facing the lake, the children's toys on the edge of the bathtub, and the well-equipped kitchen where he liked to cook side by side with his wife show her how peripheral she was. She stayed the night, but she did not leave her pantyhose under the pillow of the marital bed, as she had fantasized she would.

Anna hoped that the world had changed and that younger women were not as vulnerable. The women students in her night class confidently announced that they would demand better treatment than women received in the novels they read. But did they just speak like that in public while they complied in private, as she had?

Anna blushed. If something bad happened to her tonight, she would die of embarrassment if her students knew where she had been heading. If Andrej killed her, it would be as bad as expiring during a face-lift or a tummy tuck. They would dismiss the feminist theory she had made them read, and they would think she was a hypocrite when she maintained that intelligence and creativity were more important than trying to meet contemporary standards of beauty.

A long driveway between rampant vines and shrubs finally gave way to evenly spaced trees and a manicured lawn. The large house, with its wide wraparound porches and neat trim, exuded permanence. A light shone in two downstairs windows, but the steps to the front door were in darkness.

Andrej must have heard her drive up, but he did not turn on the porch lights or come out to welcome her. Anna smelled something

almost too sweet, a jasmine or moonflower in full bloom, as she groped past the white wicker furniture and large tubs of peace lilies near the front door. The people who lived here loved flowers and cared for them. They had known Andrej since he was a small boy, and they had watched him grow up. There was nothing to fear, Anna told herself, even as shivers ran up her arms.

She rang and waited and rang again.

"Come in," Andrej said when he finally opened the door. "I'll be with you in a minute. I'm just finishing up some field notes."

He was wearing gold-rimmed glasses she had never seen before, which made him look older. He turned back to papers spread out on the cherrywood Queen Anne dining-room table.

Audubon prints and Navajo rugs covered the walls, and Sierra Club magazines and Nuclear Freeze newsletters were stacked on low tables. An Oriental rug in beautiful blues and grays and dark reds rested on the polished wood floor. Photographs of graduations, weddings, and reunions of a family to which Anna could never belong lined the mantelpiece.

"Andrej," she said.

He looked up startled, as if he had just noticed her. "Sorry, Anna. Did you bring . . . ? Isn't there something you have to get from the car?"

Anna was tempted again by her simplistic diagnosis of a drinking problem or alcoholism, but she knew there was more.

"I'm pretty upset," Andrej said. "Laura's getting married again. She called tonight to tell me. She spoke in that crisp, spiteful voice, just like the day of our divorce. She waltzed into court then, wearing the plaid Pendleton suit I bought her, looking like a million dollars. She acted so pleased with herself, snapping her purse shut, glaring at me as if I'd committed some terrible crime. I thought things couldn't get any worse for me. But I'm afraid that her getting married again is a real blow. She has an affair and goes off and leaves me, and now she's the one who gets to live the good life. It's as if I didn't matter at all."

Anna had never identified self-pity in his voice so clearly before.

"I'm sure she'll miss you, Andrej. She'll miss your intelligence and your sensitivity and all your good qualities," Anna said. Comforting was a habit as old as Anna's long-ago childhood.

"But you don't understand, Anna. She tortured me as if I were an insect twisting on a pin. We'd spend the day together and we'd have a great time, but then she'd call me later and tell me that we shouldn't see each other again. She enjoyed taunting me."

"It must have been hard for her to say good-bye, Andrej."

Anna's compassion, so long Andrej's alone, surged toward Laura. Laura, so painfully ambivalent even when she knew she had to leave him. Laura, in her shimmering dress and strappy shoes, stumbling on the ice, too anguished to explain. What had he stolen from her? Or had he hurt her in some more terrible way?

Anna scanned the Redouté prints of yellow and white roses and the drawings of birds lining a wall.

"But enough about me," Andrej said. "What do you think of the way Laura is treating me?"

"That bird," Anna pointed. "What is it?"

"Sorry? I thought we were talking about what Laura did to me. Oh, that, that's a blue heron. Another proud bird on its way to extinction, just like the American eagle, just like so many others that I care deeply about. It's from a set of original Audubon prints my uncle gave me when I graduated from high school. We're all crazy about nature around here, I'm afraid."

"I was dreaming about birds that looked like that when you called."

"Tell me your dream, Anna," Andrej said. Suddenly he was totally focused on Anna's every word as if Laura did not matter or as if Anna possessed a foolproof plan for averting the destruction of the world.

"I need to hear it, every single thing," Andrej insisted.

Anna described the desolate shore and their hopeless tears.

"But I know that place," Andrej said wonderingly. "I've been

there. It's an abandoned field station. And those birds are herons. They *are* nearly extinct. Every week, every day as we stand here talking hundreds of species are disappearing; wild and secret places are being trampled. The earth is suffering deep gaping wounds; it's festering; it's unable to heal itself. I care about it so much, Anna. The stewardship of the earth should be a sacred obligation for everyone."

He sounded sanctimonious, not just young and idealistic.

"What about the herons?" Anna interrupted.

"They're an endangered species, Anna, and they're in agony not because of war, but because of some major ecological disaster. An oil spill, an accident at a nuclear plant, someone secretly dumping toxic waste, something like that. What else do you remember about it? What kind of trees are they? What kind of reeds? What's the lay of the land, and what's the time of year? What blade of grass foretells the spring?"

Anna grasped the back of a chair. She had to hold on in order to keep her mind from becoming entangled with his again.

"I think the dream is about us, the way everything good in our relationship has been ruined," she replied.

"Really, Anna, you'll have to excuse me, but you have an almost narcissistic tendency to personalize everything. More significant issues are at stake here than our little personal lives. I'm working hard to avoid a holocaust."

"Anyway, Andrej, I've come to say good-bye."

"Please, don't go. Let's have that glass of wine first, shall we? Oh, that's right, you didn't bring any. So what do we do now? Let me just think," he said as Anna wandered over to the photographs on the mantelpiece.

Andrej's mother, a plain and plump woman rather than the femme fatale alternately seducing and rejecting her son whom Anna had imagined, smiled from a frame. His father threw a beach ball to eight-year-old Andrej. Two girls about six, Andrej's younger sisters probably, arms linked, looked only at each other rather than at the photographer.

A twelve-year-old girl, her thick blonde hair drawn away from her face, her arms crossed protectively over her small breasts, scowled into the camera. Wearing a white dress with a high yoke suitable for a younger child, she looked frightened yet defiant. The long shadow of the photographer fell across the lower part of her body.

"Olivia," Anna ventured, and Andrej nodded.

"Are you the one who took her picture?"

"Yes, I took it."

Anna had always thought of Olivia as an adult, embracing her brother of her own free will in the cabin in the north woods, seducing him, deliberately keeping him hers, not allowing him to belong to anyone else. She had blamed Olivia for Andrej's remoteness. But that was not what had happened, and it almost certainly did not start that way. Andrej at sixteen, as tall as he was now, his body more powerful than hers at twelve. Olivia at twelve, Olivia at twenty, pinned under him, her bones small and delicate as a sparrow's. Olivia struggling to speak the truth. Olivia trying to break free. Olivia the young girl who had loved her brother and who had been betrayed by him.

"Never mind that right now," Andrej said. "I'm afraid the light isn't very good here. You can study the rogues' gallery next time. Come on, I'll show you the rest of the house."

He grasped Anna's elbow and steered her toward the back. "My parents were in a great big hurry to dismantle my room as soon as I got married so I don't really have a place of my own any more. I'm in the guest room. It's not much, I'm afraid, but it's where I live."

He pushed open the door to reveal a brass bed, a tightly tucked blue bedspread, an antique white bowl and jug on a stand, a bare floor. Except for the stereo set and floor-to-ceiling cases holding hundreds of tapes and records, Anna's probably among them, it was an oddly impersonal room.

"But where do you keep your other things?" Anna asked, and he pointed to the half-open door of the closet.

Soft cottons, discreet wools, and rich cashmeres neatly arranged in long, double rows whispered of money. He had probably been wearing one of the more than half-dozen charcoal gray cashmere sweaters the time he said he was too poor to buy Anna a Christmas present. He had probably stolen from Olivia the tape he belatedly handed to her.

"I have to keep my important papers locked up," Andrej said, gesturing toward a teak filing cabinet in the back. "Otherwise my younger sisters get into everything. They're completely impossible, always together, always whispering, always hanging on to each other. I can't pry them apart for a moment's privacy with either one."

They must sense what would happen if he caught one of them alone. Anna had to get out of this room and out of this house and into her pickup. But she needed to see Olivia's defiant face once more.

"You look a lot like her, Anna," Andrej said as she picked up the picture and studied it. "Same slender body, same cheekbones, same sad eyes. Both of you have those exile eyes you talked about. Your lovely coloring and the texture of your hair is the same too. I recognized the resemblance right away."

Anna nodded and edged toward the door.

"You're not leaving, are you? But you have to sleep in my bed tonight, Anna. Or better yet, we can sleep in one of my sisters' beds; they're all gone. In the morning I'll cook trout I caught just for you. We can go for a bicycle ride afterward. I have the details all planned."

"Thank you, Andrej, but I have to go."

"But it's so rare that I get to do something for you, Anna. Are you angry with me for talking so much about Laura? I'd be jealous myself if you went on and on like that about Stanley."

Anna watched a kaleidoscope turn, and details of his stories fell into clear patterns. Buttons clattered on the moonlit ice as Laura, understanding her husband's fierce and long possession of Olivia, hit out ineffectually at him. Snow-laden reeds bent and broke as Laura, horrified at Andrej's determined pursuit of his younger sisters, tried to get away from him. Andrej followed Laura and watched her

through the window of a trailer in the arms of her lover. Andrej dragged the heavy ladder to the back of Anna's building in Sherman Terrace and invaded her private moments, just as he had invaded her thoughts.

He stayed very close as Anna made her way out the door and down the steps. She held her keys between her fingers, praying she would not have to strike him.

Near the pickup, Andrej took Anna's hand, kissed it, and tugged playfully at the keys. Anna's body was covered with goose bumps, but she kept her breath steady.

"Just a minute," he said. "I need to say good-bye."

He tousled her hair, touched her temples, and ran his fingers over her face and lips as if he were a blind man trying to read her. His hand encircled her throat. Then in one of the impulsive, intimate gestures that Anna used to love, he let go of her throat and touched the inside of her thigh. His fingers moved slowly upward.

"How wonderful," he said, bringing them back to his lips. "You have your period. What an honor for me. Thank you for doing that. I love the fragrance and the taste. Salty, like sea, and sweet, like blood."

Red silk and white gauze, the stain of semen and blood, bandages, wounds, tears and more tears. Jumbled fragments sorted and fitted together. In spite of his gentle exterior, Andrej manipulated and hurt. She had vowed that she would never get involved with anyone like Stanley, but she had chosen his double. Only the surface details were different.

"I'll take what I want," Andrej said through clenched teeth as he forced apart Olivia's knees. "I like the disarray," he said, pinning down Anna's hands. "It is so hard, it's the hardest thing, to want to touch someone and to be so afraid. Touching someone really is breaking a taboo," he explained. "Believe me, we aren't doing anything wrong. It's natural and beautiful. It's something both of us wanted," he insisted.

"Excuse me, but I like the dark," he whispered to Olivia and to Anna both as he blew out the candle.

He had intuited that Anna would forgive anything if war was responsible for it, so he had invented a war-scarred father to inhabit his privileged Midwestern childhood. For added effect, he had sketched in Jerzy Kosinski as a family friend. It was all part of a clever but cruel betrayal.

Anna touched his cheek in a gesture of good-bye, and tenderness for him returned unbidden. She kissed the inside of his palm, wrist, and elbow. Had she had the power to dispel his darkness, she would have kissed it away. She would have kissed his temple hidden by hair, pale pink earlobe, vulnerable inside thigh. She would have gently taught him to tell the truth.

"I really loved you, Andrej," she said. "Remember that."

"Of course, Anna, of course. Only two people who are crazy about each other would face the uncertainties we do."

He did not try to stop her as she got into her pickup. She inserted the key, and the motor sprang to life.

"I'll always be with you," he said.

Anna locked the door. She tried to concentrate on driving. She forbade herself to think of his hands and face; she would not replay his loving words; she would try to remember only his actions and lies.

It was still dark when she pulled into the brightly lit parking lot of an all-night diner.

"If it's got tits or wheels it'll give you trouble" was plastered across the bumper of a pickup illegally parked in a spot reserved for deliveries. Were she to hint she was outraged about the slogan, Andrej would have been articulate. He would analyze it in feminist terms. He would say women and men should be androgynous. He would touch her tenderly.

Anna jerked her mind back to the present. Four teenage boys laughed and jostled inside the restaurant, and in another booth a sallow-faced woman fed a sweet roll to a two-year-old.

Anna's eyes were drawn to the small, yellowing bruise above the woman's cheekbone and to the thin gold chain encircling her ankle. A slave bracelet. Lots of women used to wear those in the 1950s, to

announce that they were some man's private property. Anna would not wear it now, but she wondered what had happened to the one Stanley gave her. She hoped that they were not coming back into style.

She made herself look away from the dangerous young men and the sad woman and noticed that other people were in the diner too. She would go home and sleep. Tomorrow she would call Sara, Molly, or Julie. She knew she could rely on the integrity and love of her friends.

Molly took a bite of whole-wheat toast and surveyed the breakfast crowd at Botticelli's.

"Don't look now, Anna, but there's a gorgeous gray-haired man at the table right behind you. Spill a little coffee on him as you go by. No, better make it water; it doesn't leave a stain. Then you can offer to wash his shirt and pay for his dry cleaning and give him your phone number while you're at it."

"That's not a good beginning, Molly, with me up to my elbows in soapsuds, offering to pay for everything all over again." Anna wished Molly would ease up on her theory that another man was a surefire cure for Andrej.

"You know how one of the women in the Madison Singles Club met her ex-husband?" Molly asked. "She threw her arms around a handsome stranger at the Dane County Airport and asked him if he remembered their magic evening together at La Scala. By the time he'd wiped her raspberry lipstick off his cheek and told her his name was Tom and that he'd never been to Italy and that he hated opera, they were practically engaged."

"But it's Andrej I miss, Molly. I'm not ready for anyone else."

"That's because you've left something unfinished. Did you get rid of everything that reminds you of him? Did you smudge your apartment with sweetgrass and sage like Native Americans do? I read somewhere that really clears the air after you break up with a man."

Anna did not want to parody a ritual sacred to someone else. Besides, she would have to strip off blankets and sheets, smash glasses and plates, throw out pans, break records, and burn books to rid herself of every reminder. She would have to drag her bed out to the dumpster, douse it with gasoline, and set it aflame. But Andrej would not disappear in leaping flames any more than Stanley or Jerzy Kosinski. They were all part of who she was. But they did not define her.

"Well then, get mad," Molly said. "Better yet, don't get mad, get even. Pour some sugar into Andrej's gas tank, call him every hour on the hour, order three dozen pizzas to be delivered from a dozen different places."

"Why not sneak into the Department of Wildlife Ecology and alter his grades and change his recommendations? Or pinprick his condoms so he'll get AIDS? Or expose him to radiation so he'll die of cancer?"

Molly choked on her skinny latte. "It would be better to order the pizzas," she said.

Anna had upset Molly by saying something repugnant to her good Midwestern values. She had spoken the way Jerzy Kosinski might.

"I was only joking, Molly," Anna amended. "I don't want to hurt Andrej. I loved him. I just wish I didn't keep thinking about him."

"What you need is closure," Molly said brightly. "Make him bring back your things and then you'll be able to move on."

To Anna's surprise, Andrej called her on a rainy autumn morning to suggest a long walk. He was house-sitting near Devil's Lake, where they could take a sauna afterward. He talked as if nothing final or even remotely painful had ever happened between them.

"I want you to return my things, Andrej," Anna interrupted.

There was a long silence.

"I want my stuff back, Andrej. I mean it."

"I don't understand . . ."

"Look, Andrej, I know a great deal about you," Anna said, shocked as the anger she had not acknowledged erupted. "I can make real trouble for you if I want. I can call your parents and your sister Olivia and tell them that you steal. I can tell your advisor or other faculty in your department. I can phone Susan, the professor you stole from, I can . . ."

"Anna, Anna, I'm so disappointed in you. I always believed that Stanley was the bully in your marriage, but I'm beginning to see his side of things . . ."

"I could take out an ad in *Isthmus,*" Anna interrupted, her anger escalating wildly. She was inventing scenes of revenge as far-fetched as Marge had in pursuit of her teaspoons. "Like that young woman did last week about the blond, blue-eyed bartender at Joe Hart's. It was there for all the world to read that he never told her he had herpes and that he was lousy in bed. Or I can simply quit being discreet. Madison is a small town in many ways, I know how to tell a story well, and this is a story that would travel. You have three days to return my things."

The fragrance of birches and sun-warmed hay greeted Anna as she entered her front hallway, where the light was burned out again. She had never encountered Andrej's scent out here, though it lingered inside her apartment. It was some kind of sensory hallucination, like hysterical blindness, because it was most pronounced late at night. She had washed her sheets and blankets, aired the small rooms, and changed her locks, but his scent continued to haunt her.

She tore open the thick brown envelope in her mailbox, and twenty-dollar bills spilled onto the floor. She took them inside, stacked them, and counted them. A thousand dollars. Her pleasure about the windfall, five times more than she had imagined her stolen things were worth, gave way to anxiety. He had paid her off, but she would never know how he had arrived at the amount and exactly

what he had taken. From now on, whenever she could not find something, she would wonder whether Andrej had stolen it.

"Anna: I see that you will stop at nothing to destroy my hard-earned professional reputation, which I have had to work and slave to achieve. Even though this is a particularly hard time for me in my personal life," Andrej had written. "But I was so naive. I thought you did not approve of your pal Marge pursuing those two innocent doctors from Latvia, but I see you are just like her. Notify me immediately that you are in receipt of the enclosed since I do not believe it prudent to maintain a checking account at this point in time. Andrej."

No "dear Anna," no "love, Andrej," not even "best regards." Because she had loved him, she wanted to pick up the phone and relieve him of anxiety about the cash, but she also saw the possibility, one she would not have considered before knowing him, of slipping the bills into her purse and insisting that she had never received them.

After several days Anna was calm enough to write, "Thank you, dear Andrej, for finishing this. It was such a human situation, and I think we did as well with it as we could. Love, Anna."

After that there were only flowers. A box of calla lilies, a bouquet of deep red carnations with the sharp scent of clove, and finally a single pink rose left between the screen and her back door. The rose was frozen stiff by the time she found it, and it collapsed inwardly as it thawed.

"He *must* have cared about me, Julie," Anna said as she picked through bins of spring bulbs at the Bruce Company Garden Center. "Otherwise he would have brought my things back instead of paying for them, but he wanted to keep them. He had to have something of mine. And he keeps sending me flowers."

"Probably met a woman who works in a flower shop," Julie said promptly. "I can just see him slipping florist's cards into his pocket and setting an extra bouquet into the delivery truck behind her back."

"Well, at least it all ended in such a civilized way," Anna persisted as she paid for twelve heavy, purplish bulbs. She was going to force Delft Blue hyacinths instead of paperwhites into bloom from now on. Their sweet fragrance did not have the slightly sharp twinge of narcissus, and they made for much sturdier plants. Hyacinths did not have to be turned and pampered and staked. After they finished blooming, Anna would give them to Julie, who would plant them in her garden after the ground warmed up, where they might flourish for years to come.

Anna had learned to feel comfortable going about alone. If the empty seat next to her at a movie made her sad, she reminded herself of how Stanley used to check his watch every few minutes to ask whether she had seen enough and to say that he needed a drink. At concerts, poetry readings, and lectures, she no longer fantasized about Andrej being at her side. He had never come with her in the first place, and Anna almost always ran into an acquaintance or two. In spite of a population of over two hundred thousand, Madison really *was* a small town. People who had never met knew each other by sight, gossip traveled easily, and secrets did not stay hidden.

So it was strange that Anna never heard anything about Andrej. She did not talk about him, but even so, no stray reference to him ever reached her. She did not see the names of his parents on lists of donors to good causes, and she had not run into his sister Olivia at a women's studies conference or at A Room of One's Own, the feminist bookstore just off State Street.

Nor had she seen Andrej himself, likely as it would be, by the turnstiles in the entrance to Memorial Library. She had not passed him dozing, overcome by fragrance, under the lilacs in the Arboretum. She had not met him on the silvered wood boardwalk in Cherokee Marsh or caught a glimpse of him in a passing car heading to northern Wisconsin for a weekend in the autumn woods.

Meanwhile, almost perversely, Anna happened to know that a local pianist, whose upcoming concert was advertised on the bulletin boards of the Student Union, had forgotten his black silk briefs in the car of a bodybuilder he had encountered in Elver Park. And that Melissa Muharjee, a small, proper-looking woman, who passed Anna on the stairs leading to the third-floor women's restroom, was probably wearing flamingo pink lingerie under her black pinstripe suit. That had been the color of her bra and thong when her husband walked in on her and her lover. He had confided in someone, who confided in someone else, and here was Anna, at the end of a long chain, knowing things she had no business knowing about people whom she had never met.

"Is Andrej with you?" a voice asked from a closed toilet stall, and Anna froze.

"Oh, no, he's got too much work to do, what with his graduate seminars and all," replied a young woman standing by the mirror.

She was tall and slender, with high cheekbones and sad brown eyes. But her wheat-colored hair hung limply around her face, and her taupe sweater drooped over a muddy Indian print skirt. She would be pretty if she allowed herself to be, but something had dampened her spirits and destroyed her self-confidence, not once but many times over. Anna's fingers itched to sweep up her hair and fasten it with a mother-of-pearl clasp and to gather and pull back her sweater so she could see how lovely she could look if she let herself.

"Did you ever get your copy of *The Little Prince* back, Amy?" her unseen friend asked.

Anna applied lipstick and powdered her nose slowly in order to have an excuse to eavesdrop. She removed her shoe and pretended she was checking for a pebble or flattening a nail that had worked its way through the lining.

"No, but it's weird. I go through Andrej's coat pockets when he goes out to get his shaving kit and I take back all my stuff. He knows that I know, but we never talk about it."

A flood of words issued from the stall occupied by her friend:

codependency, enabling, domestic violence, psychological abuse, addiction, bipolar depression, dysfunctional families, thief, liar, jerk, and bum.

"All he needs is just a little time and patience. He was so hurt by his divorce," the one called Amy whispered in the face of another torrent from her friend: counseling, group therapy, dream work, body work, journaling, the Women's Center, AA, Al-Anon, and other As too.

Anna slipped on her shoe and tried to look unobtrusive as she trailed behind the two young women. It was surprisingly easy to follow them because they were absorbed in their conversation. They made their way to State Street, where students and bureaucrats strode purposefully past the Espresso Royale, and conventioneers gawked at girls wearing miniskirts the size of children's aprons.

Anna dawdled near the concrete ledge of the Lisa Link Peace Park to give the friends time to say good-bye. A tiny yellow flower with daisylike blossoms, only wilder and shyer, had survived the skateboarders and teenagers with partially shaved heads and black T-shirts. Andrej would know the species of the flower as well as its common name.

Anna's surroundings began to echo her thoughts. Two boys argued in a bored way about someone named Andrej who had stolen a backpack. Their Nazi insignia did not look innocent, and their chance reference, whether to the Andrej she knew or to someone else entirely, shook her.

Anna had no plan as she followed Amy into the Steep and Brew and slid into the seat across from her. The girl glanced up, surprised and a little resentful to have her space invaded. But she did not protest.

"I couldn't help but overhear you in the restroom at the Union. About Andrej, I mean."

"Andrej?" the girl crossed her arms in front of her breasts.

"You said he was stealing from you."

"Oh, no, he's just . . . ," she said before catching herself. "Who are you?" she demanded.

"I know Andrej."

"You do? Are you related? You aren't Olivia, are you? You can't be his sister." Her eyes were wide with curiosity and disbelief.

"I used to date him," Anna said, aware of how ridiculously inaccurate the phrase was.

"You're Anna," Amy concluded after a pause. "The sophisticated European. The one who really understood him. The one who was his intellectual equal. The woman he was in love with."

If Anna had had the slightest intention of causing pain, it evaporated in the face of Amy's wounded meekness. Andrej had hurt this young woman with words, not only deeds. At least he had never taunted Anna with other women who were more interesting and with whom he had been in love. With the exception of Olivia, of course.

"It wasn't like that," Anna said. "He stole from me too."

Anna felt satisfaction mixed with shame as she took revenge. Like a cruel disciplinarian holding a scared puppy by the scruff of the neck and rubbing his nose mercilessly in urine, Anna detailed Andrej's deceptions.

"Oh my God," Amy said, "I was on my way to the bank. He's buying some land in the Blue Mounds, near that little church he loves, because he needs to get away from his parents' house so bad right now. I already gave him the down payment, but it turns out he has to have more for closing costs. I was about to go get it."

"Don't," Anna said.

"I bet he really loved you," Amy said, her eyes filling with tears.

Anna had to give her younger self something.

"It wasn't like that, Amy," she said. "It was just an affair. Hardly even that because we never lived together, never talked about marrying, never really planned a future together. It was just a May-September romance, and you know that those never last."

The phone shrilled at midnight.

"Anna? We have to talk."

"Andrej?"

"That's right. Andrej. The man you tried to destroy this afternoon. After I did my very best to meet your unreasonable demands for money, you betrayed me. I know it was you who blabbed. What do you have to say for yourself?"

Nothing that she wanted him to know.

"Exactly what did you tell Amy, Anna? She's been calling me a thief and a liar, and she won't listen when I try to defend myself. What vicious words did you use to poison our relationship? Answer me, Anna."

"I promised Amy I'd keep our conversation confidential, and so I will. You're so bright and you're so clever, Andrej, that if I tell you one thing, I know you'll get me to say more."

"I'm afraid you've done a lot of damage there. Amy is quite unstable to begin with, but I was willing to work on her problems. But you've told her a bunch of lies, and now she won't speak to me. Won't speak to the man who loves her. She's the woman I was buying a house with, the woman I was going to marry, the woman who would bear my children. She's young enough for that. Unlike you."

His shot hit the intended target. He used to tell Anna that he did not want children, that the planet was too damaged to support more lazy, fat Americans consuming a disproportionate share of the world's resources, guzzling oil, destroying rain forests, and stuffing themselves with Big Macs. It had made Anna sad: if young men like him did not want to have children, who would? But his renunciation had also reassured her about being older.

"I'm afraid I'm all too familiar with how malicious you can be," Andrej continued. "I remember the lies you invented about me and Olivia. Did you tell Amy about Olivia, by the way? You've really messed up major financial and land-ownership issues for me."

"I'm going to hang up now, Andrej."

"I might have known. You're just like everyone else, out to destroy my hard-earned professional reputation, keeping me from important work for the environment. No matter how hard I try, this always happens to me . . ."

Shaken, Anna put down the receiver. She would never know everything about him; she could never sum him up in a single word. Like Stanley, he had no conscience. But calling either one a psychopath distorted her memories of the past. Nevertheless, images of Andrej stealthily dumping acid in streams, girding white birches with barbed wire, and trampling lilies and ferns kept her awake for the rest of the night.

Raindrops streaked across the window as the tiny twelve-seat plane lifted above Madison. It was raining so violently by the time it landed at O'Hare that Anna could hardly see the entry to the terminal just a hundred yards ahead. She hoped that it was storming equally hard in Indianapolis. In that case Elga would surmise that Anna's flight had been delayed, and she would not continue pacing back and forth outside, as she did when she worried.

Anna bought coffee and found the last empty chair in the crowded waiting area, but the paperback copy of Jerzy's *Hermit of 69th Street* failed yet again to engage her. The footnotes, allusions, and crisscrossed references, obsessive in their determination to scrupulously give credit and show off erudition, embarrassed her. Jerzy must have set out to demonstrate that he knew more than enough to write his own books, but he had inadvertently revealed the opposite. Judged by this book, he did need editors, translators, and ghostwriters. Anna could not stay with it long enough to find the thread of story, let alone read it through.

She hoped he was writing an authentic book right now. He had fabricated and prevaricated and lied outright, but he had also

experienced extreme terror, unlike Andrej, whose smaller disappointments she had distorted into tragedies. Though many of the things Jerzy wrote about had not happened to him, he was a genuine survivor. In this he differed from people who demanded pity by false claims that their parents or grandparents had died in concentration camps, had fled across swamps from the Ku Klux Klan, or survived the Cherokee Trail of Tears.

Jerzy could write a definitive book that explained how living on the margins of ultimate horror led to exaggeration and lies. He had heard the silence of those who perished in the ovens; he knew that the very last chapters of those lives were beyond words. He understood the compulsion to compete about who had suffered most; he knew the courage it took to live on after genocide, lynching, or war.

Anna was composing a letter to him in her head when loud voices interrupted her. Anxiety and irritation were mounting among the tired adults and whining children jammed in the waiting area as frequent announcements promised, then delayed, departure. More and more flights were being cancelled. Finally a flight attendant, dressed in a frivolous imitation of a wartime uniform, confirmed what everyone had suspected already. No flight to Indianapolis; in fact, no flights from O'Hare anywhere tonight.

There was a stampede to the desk to find accommodations, rebook flights, and collect vouchers for free meals and reduced fares. Anna was caught in a mass of people shouting at the two women behind the counter as if they had personally set off thunderstorms, produced poor visibility, and designed planes susceptible to turbulence and lightning. Accusations were hurled at them that they had spitefully failed to notify everyone to bring extra diapers, medications, food, and alcohol. Not to mention raincoats, umbrellas, and waterproof shoes, which everyone would need for the trek to a smelly bus, should such a vehicle show up.

Anna was disappointed that her visit with Elga was going to be cut short, and she too hated the thought of standing in yet another line to retrieve luggage and of dragging her suitcase into a badly lit,

sleazy motel lobby. An inefficient clerk would make his displeasure known by moving even more slowly than usual, and dinner, served by a tired waitress, would consist of iceberg lettuce and gray lumps of meat. After a restless night in beds smelling of cigarettes and semen, everyone would have to be dressed and ready to go at 6:00 a.m., with only sticky jelly doughnuts and sour, thin coffee to sustain them.

But she was shaken nevertheless by the rage with which people voiced their assumption that they had an inalienable right not to be inconvenienced by the weather, as if the Bill of Rights and the Declaration of Independence guaranteed that to every American. They were furious when the very worst that could happen was only a night in the airport on the hard floor or in chairs specifically designed to make lying down impossible. It reminded Anna of people pushing to get across a narrow bridge leading to safety in Germany and of others grasping and screaming on the rooftop of the American Embassy in Saigon as the last helicopter lifted off.

Anna arrived in time to take Elga to the Latvian Community Center on the north side of Indianapolis for the June 14 ceremony of mourning. On that date forty-nine years ago, in 1941, more than fifteen thousand Latvians had been deported to Siberia. Startled awake by occupying Russian soldiers and local Communist collaborators, too terrified to dress or to pack adequately in the ten minutes allowed, they endured weeks of desperate hunger and thirst on cattle trains crammed too full for them to sit or lie down. Women and children were forced to fell trees, quarry stones, and eat bark in icy Siberian wastes. Seventy thousand more, out of a population of two million, were deported or executed on other days in the 1940s.

Anna had never allowed herself to feel as deeply as she did now about the deported. There had been too many of them to add to her list of those whom she pitied and for whom she already felt responsible. But her greater clarity about degrees of pain had changed that.

Feeling compassion for herself and the child she had been had actually made her more rather than less compassionate toward others.

She wiped away tears for the elderly people around her and stood up with them to sing "Dievs sveti Latviju" (God Bless Latvia), the national anthem. Her tears rose again as the Lutheran minister prayed for Latvia, a small, defenseless country still occupied by Russians almost half a century after World War II. People there huddled in fear of Soviet authorities, and poisonous clouds from Chernobyl drifted overhead.

Oddly enough, June 14 was Jerzy Kosinski's birthday and Stanley's as well. Jerzy would understand grief for the deported, but Stanley used to take it personally that Latvians had chosen this day to remember. During the only ceremony he and Anna had attended together, he kept up loud whispers: why the long faces, why the dark clothes, why such mournful songs? Why could people not act cheerful and congratulate him on his birthday?

Most of the singers in the men's choir were elderly. A few were in their eighties, which would have been Anna's father's age if he were alive. But Anna knew her father would not sing. He would remain stoic and silent while these surprisingly powerful voices recalled the eternally blue hills of Latvia. Spirits of the tortured could not find peace under Latvian birches, the men sang, the sacred bowls of ancestors were smashed, and the stars were blood dimmed. Hold onto your dear homeland, another song admonished, because otherwise you are only a reed damaged by winds on a foreign shore.

After the ceremony Anna carried plates of tiny open-faced sandwiches and slices of chocolate and raspberry torte to the table where Elga sat with her ostensible contemporaries. She was a lot livelier than they, even though, because she had taken ten years off her age, she actually was a decade older. Anna was glad to have something practical to do because her emotions were still stirred by the last song, which had seemed to be directed at her.

The old people greeted her with, "Good evening, dear girl," and "It's nice to see you in Indianapolis, Annina." The sweet diminutive

of her name and their smiles welcomed, enclosed, and began to lull her. She had made a huge mistake in marrying Stanley and leaving this community of people whose courage and pain she understood so intimately.

They talked about illnesses, doctors, and drugs first. Heart disease, considered to be physical proof of great sensitivity and a life of much hardship, was openly acknowledged, while cancer was mentioned only in whispers and hints. They compared prescriptions and exchanged pills so friends with similar ailments could try them too.

The conversation turned to food next. It was hard to find substantial bread or fruit that tasted like real fruit, and the grocery that offered both was full of Russians, someone said indignantly. One mention of Russians, and they were off.

Where were all these Russians coming from? Who was letting them in? Why had they picked Indianapolis as the city to pollute with their vulgar gold jewelry and stolen watches? Why did the women dye their ratty hair the color of rotting carrots, and why did the men look like fat cats who had been rolling around in rancid oil? God only knew what these Russian spies and the Russian Mafia would do to the law-abiding people of Indianapolis and to America itself. If a Russian tart asked an upright, moral Latvian for directions at a mall, he should send her in the direction opposite to the destination she was looking for. Good riddance if she opened a trapdoor, tumbled down dark stairs, and broke her neck.

"Not all Russians are alike," Anna said, trying to stay loyal to her beliefs, to her teaching, and to the mushrooming workshops on diversity at the university. "There's Tolstoy and Tchaikovsky . . ."

She did not get to Dostoevsky. Tolstoy was a bad husband like every other Russian, and Tchaikovsky was abnormal and loved men.

Anna groaned inwardly. But did she really have a right to criticize these elderly survivors? She probably needed diversity training herself when it came to Russians. Her body tensed automatically whenever she heard a man's voice say "Niet, niet" or "harasho." If a Russian pushed in front of her in line, she did not point out pleasantly

but firmly that actually the end of the line was somewhere else but fumed as if she had just received confirmation of a national characteristic.

The resentment in the voices of these old women and men was as familiar to Anna as their list of grievances. They condemned young American men who did not understand hard work and young women who ran around half naked, lazy bums on street corners asking for handouts, Japanese Americans getting reparations for wartime internment, and African Americans demanding monetary payment for slavery, which had been abolished more than a hundred years ago. They agreed that Latvians, hard workers every single one, would never receive a cent for what they had lost.

They turned to Anna next. Where was her husband? they demanded. She must not know how to hang on to a man or she would not be divorced. And what was she teaching in those literature classes of hers at the university? Unlike the beautiful and deep Latvian stories about nature and country life, American literature consisted of foul language and sleazy best sellers stacked near checkout lines in grocery stores. Why did she write articles in English instead of children's stories in Latvian? It was her duty to move to Indianapolis or Minneapolis and contribute to the Latvian community. She was doing nothing to liberate Latvia from godless communism.

Finally Elga managed to divert their attention, but not before Anna felt beaten black and blue. She was on familiar ground, she understood their bitterness, and she felt compassion for them, but she could not stand to be with them for long. At American gatherings she did not encounter many people whose barely concealed intention was to inflict pain. Anna could not shrug off the aggression of many older Latvians just because it was born of suffering anymore than she could now ignore Jerzy Kosinski's use and abuse of women.

In spite of nostalgia, Anna did not really belong here, among the older Latvian exiles, either. They were not her family. No matter how much she thirsted to hear the beautiful singing and to speak in her

own language, this community could not be her home. Their condemnation of her for marrying an American had driven her away, and their hostility kept her from reconnecting fully. Anna could not live with such bitterness, in herself and in others.

Silvija and Modris waved at her from another table. She made her excuses to the old people and picked up her plate. She would talk with her friends from high school until it was time to rejoin Elga. She would spend a quiet evening with her, and then she would go home, to her small apartment in Sherman Terrace. She would hear Molly's new plan for finding a husband, call Julie, and read by herself late into the night. She would think about Sara, who was alone too, except for Albert. But he had not seen many things that happened to her and he was rapidly forgetting the others.

Anna had not seen everything either. She only had fragments, like the shards of glass from the great panels in the partially burned train station. They glittered and threatened to pierce and to slash in the vast darkness where horses screamed and people stared hopelessly into smoky fires.

Russian soldiers yanked the briefcase out of Anna's father's hands, and papers, photographs, and coins landed in mud. They pushed and shoved each other; they grunted with greed as they fell upon glittery objects. Their eyes narrow with avarice and cunning, they jerked at his clothing and groped his body. His sensitive face, his hands unroughened by manual work, and his cultured accent as he spoke to them in their own language reminded them of past humiliations at the hands of rich men, landlords, and aristocrats. They were furious that he dared to reason with them.

They struck him across the face. There was blood on his mouth as he struggled with them. He shouted over his shoulder that Anna should not move, that she should wait right there, that he would be back, that everything would be all right. His shoulders collapsed

submissively when they tied his hands behind his back. They put a leash around his neck as if he were a dog.

He still had all his clothes then. That much Anna saw before they kicked her out of the way and reached for a seventeen-year-old girl who was trying to make herself invisible.

Anna hid her face between her knees, drew into herself, and clasped her hands around her knees. She tried to rise above the scream-filled darkness, and to stay there. For a few seconds at a time, she could convince herself that all this was happening to someone else, that she was looking down on a terrified seven-year-old girl.

It was a long time before he returned. Did they strip him right away to humiliate him? Or did they demand his shoes, socks, overcoat, and suit, one by one, the way they commanded everyone else to hand over whatever they lusted for?

They ordered him to work, but at what? Butchering a few cows that a farmer had managed to hide? Building fires to roast carcasses on huge spits? Cutting down trees? Digging out trucks from the ever-present mud of that extraordinarily wet and cold spring?

They would not need him to dig latrines because German soldiers had done that earlier, and the Russians would not have bothered. They defecated and urinated in parlors and kitchens, in churches and on graves. The stench of their excrement was everywhere. Maybe they made him dig graves for those who could not dig their own. Anna hoped that he still had his shoes then so the edge of the spade did not cut into his instep.

She used to think they had flung him into a pit of excrement, like the boy in *The Painted Bird.* That it was a deliberate action because he resisted, that they intended to punish him like the peasants who were furious at the boy for dropping a missal during Mass. But it was probably more casual than that. Some drunken jostling and shoving, another slap across the face, a push or two toward a deep, stinking trench. Jeering and laughter when he crawled out and rolled on the sodden grass to try to clean himself. They had shown him that he was garbage. They had taught him that he was worthless. Or maybe

he soiled himself when they put a gun to his head. When he came back, Anna clung to him and kissed his hands in spite of the stench that still choked her in nightmares.

He lost his voice, not literally like the boy, but like many others who could not talk about all that had happened. And he went blind as well. He could not see the loveliness of the world, and he could not see Anna, no matter how hard she tried to comfort and please.

It was the end of another academic year, and Anna was on her way to a reception when the traffic ahead slowed to a crawl, then stopped altogether. Long views were as rare in Madison as elsewhere in the Midwest, but for once she could see almost half a mile ahead. Nothing moved, and no ambulances or police cars screeched past to an accident that would explain the blocked road.

Slowly the impatient honking behind Anna settled into a discouraged silence. The mild May afternoon heated up with smelly exhaust from other cars and from the heater she had turned on to cool the motor. Maybe the whole city was paralyzed in one of those theoretically possible gridlocks of traffic that Andrej scoldingly predicted because Americans kept buying bigger and bigger cars.

A man ran by, his face twisted in panic, toward the back of the line, and suddenly Anna was one with him in terror. She felt the ominous silence, the sense of paralysis, the imminent danger. She could almost hear the boots of soldiers strike gravel and stone. She turned to look behind her, toward the east. A huge column of smoke coiled and leapt, scarlet flames scored the sky, and black grit threatened to turn day into night.

This could not be, yet it was happening. Anna knew she was awake rather than inside one of her recurring dreams. She tried to believe that war could not have started like this, with no warning at all. She was in America, in 1991, in Madison, in a city without great military installations or encampments for soldiers.

Anna flicked on the radio and leaned close to it, as her father used to when he strained to hear BBC broadcasts forbidden by the Nazis during the war.

A local station gave the weather and then the news. A huge fire was raging out of control in a warehouse on the east side of Madison, and traffic had been brought to a standstill in various parts of the city.

So that was it. She would have to be patient and wait, that was all. She was calming herself by taking long, slow breaths when she heard the familiar lead-in to *All Things Considered* on National Public Radio.

"Writer Jerzy Kosinski has committed suicide," a man's voice announced.

She had to listen to the announcement two more times before she believed it. Jerzy had died in the lonely hours between midnight and dawn. He had attended a party earlier in the evening, met friends, and been his usual dazzling, sociable self. He had given no indication of what he planned to do. He had succeeded in exercising as much control over his death as his friend Jacques Monod, about whose suicide he had written so admiringly in *Blind Date.*

Jerzy, Anna's beloved Jerzy.

How could he do this to her? How could he do it to everyone who looked to him as a survivor? How were they to keep on living without him?

Jerzy lay motionless in a bathtub with plastic taped tight over his nose and mouth. No more of the wiry energy with which he attracted and deflected. No more of the practiced, compelling gaze from his exile eyes.

Anna did not know how long she sat in stalled traffic while the measured, mournful voice repeated at regular intervals, "Writer Jerzy Kosinski has committed suicide."

If he had only waited, she would have tried to help. She would have done anything for him, she howled as she pounded the wheel.

But even as she formed the words, she knew they were not true. She was finally beyond doing everything he or another man might demand. She would not lie for Jerzy. She would not collude with him, the way his mother had, to uphold a false version of his childhood. She would not write his books. She would not give him her story. She would write it herself.

She knew now that she was not powerful enough to save another person. His death had been delayed by fame and by the love of women and men. But only he could have made the effort to move beyond the need to control and to take revenge. Only he could have received the miraculous grace that helped some survivors to open their hearts, to forgive, and to find peace.

Anna could already hear the explanations that would be offered for his death. Depression, aging, heart disease, lost good looks, diminishing energy, boredom with erotic adventures, money troubles, bad reviews, embarrassment over exposure, mediocre sexual performance, artistic temperament, and more. But she knew the real reason he had killed himself: he was a child during the war; he was one of the hunted; he was one of the millions marked for death.

He would never write the book she had wanted him to write that would explain why wartime lies continued for years afterward. He could have written better than anyone about the difficult road to forgiveness and peace.

Jerzy. Anna's beloved Jerzy.

Her idol, her soul mate, but not her twin.

Molly called to announce a new plan. Trying to meet suitable men through ads and singles' clubs had been unproductive, so she stood ready to track them to their natural habitats: computer classes, bodybuilding gyms, hardware stores, and other places they congregated in spite of, or because of, the absence of women.

"Guess what, Anna? There's only one other woman in my computer programming course at the university, and the instructor's pretty cute too. I wouldn't mind sitting next to him, letting him maneuver my mouse. He's a lot younger than me, but that's OK. I just read somewhere that women live eight years longer than men, so marrying someone ten years younger practically guarantees you'll always have a husband."

"But you're not really interested in computers, are you, Molly? Remember *Seventeen* magazine in the 1950s? It said that girls should talk to boys about engines and model trains and baseball scores. If you want a boyfriend, learn to be a good listener, ask leading questions, nod, and smile, but don't bring up your own selfish little concerns. And pretty soon you're married to someone not very bright who's in love with football and car engines. No, thanks."

Anna stopped herself from saying more. Molly kept her updated on popular culture, and Anna had followed her advice in the past. She had "sought closure" to her relationship with Andrej, "expressed her anger," received a thousand dollars in reparations, and taken revenge by telling Amy. She could think about him without emotion now. She knew that popular labels distorted and obscured, but part of her nevertheless hoped that her grief about Jerzy would proceed and finally dissipate in the orderly stages that Molly had outlined.

"Exercise and sports are excellent places to meet men too," Molly was saying. "I bought another used kayak yesterday, just in case I run into someone who wants to come out into the middle of the lake with me. Want to see it?"

It was only a little past noon on an overcast, warm Sunday in late October, but already darkness came early, foretelling the lonely winter to come. Accompanying Molly would take Anna away from her ungraded papers, and it might dispel, no matter how briefly, the depression that had settled over her after Jerzy's suicide. It would tire her out and help her sleep.

Molly arrived dressed in a bright red Bucky Badger sweatshirt and a green cap announcing her undying loyalty to the Green Bay Packers. Any person of the male sex was bound to notice.

"Better put on something warm," she advised. "It'll be cold on the water if we decide to take the kayaks for a spin."

She handed Anna a set of oars to carry, and they set off at a brisk pace to the old boat sheds by the Yahara River.

Guided by Molly's patient instructions, Anna was sitting in a kayak in less time than she had expected. She had actually managed to climb in, slide her legs through the narrow opening into the long nose, and push off.

"Wait, Anna." Molly waved a floppy orange object. "We have to go back to Sherman Terrace. I just realized I only brought one life preserver."

Anna was not sure she could actually guide the kayak back to shore and get out without pitching headfirst into the water. She did not want to clamber out, walk all the way to Molly's place and back, only to have to scramble in again. If she drowned, she drowned. No one would care.

"It's all right, Molly. I don't need it. Let's just go."

"At least come back here and take this one," Molly shouted. "I'm a good swimmer."

"Me too," Anna lied. She did not know how to swim, and drowning was just fine with her. It would be like falling asleep while disappointment, grief, and loneliness were washed away, layer by layer.

"Anna," Molly yelled and shook the life preserver.

"I know all about boats, Molly. I used to live on Cloudy Lake, remember?"

Finally Molly shrugged and leapt into her kayak with a grace that Anna could only envy.

The narrow boat reminded Anna of a sarcophagus for a tall and exceptionally skinny Egyptian queen. It wobbled and dipped, turned half circles, and shot off in surprising directions. She tried to

appear relaxed and in control as she barely avoided ramming the opposite bank of the Yahara River.

"Don't worry, Molly," she shouted. "I'm just a little out of practice. I'm all right."

And so she was, once she had successfully maneuvered the boat under two low bridges and out into Lake Monona. The water was still, its surface undisturbed except by a flock of small black ducks here briefly in their migration to warmer places. They bobbed up and down in a way that would have made Anna laugh had she been in better spirits. But at least the kayak had settled down and was more or less obeying her as she started across the lake.

"The other side is too far," Molly said, drawing abreast. "Let's just hug the shore for a bit and aim for Olbrich Gardens."

Molly pushed ahead, her green cap and red sweatshirt the only bright colors against mostly bare trees, gray lake, and cloudy sky. Anna tried to match the beautifully regular rhythm of Molly's oars, but she could not get rid of the seductive image of lying peacefully at the bottom of the lake, weeds and flowers streaming through her hair.

She tipped the boat tentatively, just to see how close she could come to reposing in water, arms serenely crossed over her breasts, like Ophelia in Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet.* She righted the kayak, then rocked it again, a little farther this time.

Suddenly something shifted so abruptly that she did not have time to understand what was happening.

Anna was upside down, suspended in stinging cold, her head toward the weedy bottom, and the backs of her legs facing the sky. The kayak had not deserted her, however; in fact, it seemed to be attached to the lower part of her body.

To get out of the bitingly cold water, Anna told herself that all she had to do was wiggle out of the kayak and climb back in. If she could not right it and pull herself into it, she could paddle ashore somehow while holding onto the end of the boat. She moved her legs tentatively, then more vigorously, to free them from the narrow nose. But she was wedged in as firmly as if she were caught in a vise.

The water, while frigid, was seductive. Slender green weeds wove and beckoned to her in the dim light, and everything else seemed soft and velvety. It was a perfect place to die. She was inside a narrow coffin already. This would be her watery grave.

She could not have chosen more perfectly if she had planned it. Unlike Jerzy, she did not need to take difficult-to-acquire drugs, twist a plastic bag around her head, and slash her wrists. Nor did she have to wander in the woods looking for the sturdy branch to hang herself from that her father had always wanted for her. Chance rather than intention, accident rather than suicide would end everything. Never again would she have to hide her shame at being different. Never again would she have to pretend to be cheerful when she was depressed and ashamed of it.

No one would miss her. No one would have to live with the terrible guilt and anger that suicide inevitably exacted from survivors. Molly would call Elga and Sara. Both would be sad, but they would be all right. They had lived through much worse. Julie would take care of Anna's affairs, and Molly would bury her body.

But Molly, oh dear God, Molly. She was the one wearing the life preserver. Julie would ask her what Anna was doing out on the lake without one and why Molly had selfishly taken the only one. Elga would hold Molly responsible too because she had not bothered to find out that Anna could not swim. Sara would reprimand Molly for not being more resourceful once the kayak overturned. Elga and Sara would stand at Anna's graveside, white heads bowed in grief and just a little ashamed that they were worrying about who would drive them home and whom to call when they needed help.

At that instant Anna remembered Andrej. In spite of his devoted father, athletic uncles, expensive summer camps, and expert private teachers, he could never learn how to handle a kayak. No matter how many times they had freed him and encouraged him to try again, he was helpless in dark water.

Andrej could not take care of himself, but Anna could. She could, she must, and she would, for the sake of others and for

the fragments of stories she alone could arrange into illuminating patterns.

She became aware of her overwhelming need for air. She fought against the impulse to clutch her legs to her chest and to curl up tight like a bud. She forced herself to extend them farther and keep them very straight. She grasped the edge of the kayak, willed all her strength into her arms, and maneuvered her body backward in the narrow opening, inch by slow inch, and over the rim.

She was out and up. Air rushed into her lungs, and her hands automatically held onto the kayak. She gulped air, feeling her chest and belly expand. Air coursed through her body and into her limbs. She rested her face against the wet surface of the boat as if it were the reassuring body of a lover. Or like the huge bladder that Jerzy had imagined for the boy in *The Painted Bird* to float on when he was thrown into an ice-choked river.

"Thank God," Molly said. "I was just getting ready to dive in after you."

Together they managed to right the overturned kayak. After a single clumsy try, Anna gave up the attempt to climb back in, but, with Molly's help, she pushed and shoved the boat toward the shore. After minutes that seemed like hours, Anna's foot touched the soft, weedy bottom of the lake. Another exertion or two, and Anna was standing on solid ground in Starkweather Creek.

Olbrich Gardens, its orderly flower beds mulched for the winter, was ahead of her. She was shivering with cold, but her sight was clear. She had never seen tiny red fruit dance so joyfully on the bare branches of ornamental fruit trees.

"How long was I under?" Anna asked as Molly helped her dry off with rough brown paper towels and toilet paper in the bathroom.

"Not long. Less than a minute, but it must have seemed longer," Molly said. "I knew you'd figure it out, but I would have come in after you if you hadn't. I'd never let you drown, Anna."

Molly stripped off her red Bucky Badger sweatshirt and handed it to Anna. "Here, put this on or you'll catch your death of cold."

"I just read somewhere that colds are caused by germs," Anna said, regretting it immediately. Molly's loyalty and good heart deserved better than being teased about her method of gathering information.

"That may be," Molly said, "but in the meantime why don't you sit down on the floor and turn on the hand dryer to get warm? I'll go make a phone call at the information desk. My computer instructor drives a nice size pickup. I wouldn't dream of calling him under ordinary circumstances, but this is an emergency. He won't mind giving a ride to my friend who almost drowned, and then he and I can get the kayaks back to the sheds and have a drink afterward."

On a cool September evening the following year, Sara and Anna drove out to the American Players Theater near Spring Green. They made their way slowly to the picnic area on the hill. Sara held herself very erect in her elegant and dignified way, but she needed to stop and rest frequently as they climbed the slope.

Around them people were popping champagne corks, laughing, and talking in anticipation of seeing *Twelfth Night.* Anna spread a starched white tablecloth, and Sara began to set out their combined picnic of tiny radish roses, cucumbers in sour cream, sliced cold chicken, Swedish limpa bread, unsalted butter, and apple torte with clotted cream.

"What are you reading in your new book group these days, Anna? Are things different on the east side of Madison?" Sara asked.

"Not entirely, but it's all right, I love them." Anna laughed.

At the last meeting, the hostess had led them out to a back porch, past a luscious-looking bundt cake with one piece cut already. But she had not served the rest of the cake or any wine either. Instead she spoke of her devotion to the Buddha and said that she could no longer countenance the group's spiritually undeveloped interest in wine and cheese. Anna was glad that she did not actually have to eat a piece of cake so soon after supper. Nevertheless, she was hopping

mad that none was offered and was getting ready to quote Sir Toby's question to Malvolio in *Twelfth Night,* "Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" Another group member cut short the talk about the Buddha leaving his wife and family in order to search for truth. All she had to say to him was, "Mr. Buddha, get a job." Meanwhile, the only member from the west side continued practicing "power poses" designed by her "personal trainer" to help her lose weight. She spent the entire meeting flat on her back, her arms and legs raised straight in the air, like an overturned table or a helpless turtle.

Bette, who had defected from the Rebels shortly after Anna, restored calm by bringing in wine she had bought for another occasion and started an excellent discussion by saying simply, "Let's cut the chatter and talk about Ann Michael's *Fugitive Pieces.* It's a beautiful book and I learned a lot from it."

Sara and Anna were still laughing when Anna glanced past her to the parking area below. And then she saw him. Dressed in a white linen shirt with long sleeves, like those young men in Latvia used to wear on Midsummer's Eve, Andrej strode purposefully across the expanse of grass. He was carrying Anna's cooler, which she had looked for in vain and which she had blamed Stanley for appropriating.

A short, plain woman, a little older than Anna but helpless looking in spite of her age, hurried after him. She wore red shoes with open toes and kitten heels, pretty but useless for walking outdoors, on rough terrain, on a cool September night. A librarian or a junior high teacher probably. Andrej would tell the various women who came next that this one had been "no raving beauty by any means," that she was the only well-educated woman in the area, and that she had eventually hurt and disappointed him.

Anna told herself that she should not be surprised to see him. He was probably living around here if he had managed to hold onto the house near Spring Green that he had bought with Amy's money for a down payment.

Their eyes met briefly, and they recognized each other, then looked away. Whatever darkness he struggled against had not marred him. He was still very beautiful. Except for the slight shock of the unexpected and the brief flare of anger ridiculously centered on her cooler, Anna was glad to see him. But she had no desire to speak to him. Were she to ask him a hundred tactful questions, she might find some embedded, infected, but healed-over splinter of glass from childhood that would seem to explain his lies, but then everything would shift again.

During the first act of *Twelfth Night,* the moon rose, silvering the trees. The small sounds of animals in the woods surrounding the open-air theater grew indistinct as Anna lost herself in the story of the twins, Sebastian and Viola, brother and sister, separated, disguised, exiled, and far from home.

Unwilling to break the magic created by words on the stage, people spoke in hushed tones as they streamed out for intermission. Sara and Anna found a comfortable spot to sip the surprisingly delicious coffee.

"Andrej is here, Sara. I just saw him," Anna said.

She pointed discreetly to Andrej, who was talking earnestly to his companion. Anna knew she could watch her, follow her into the bathroom, and tell her to hold onto her purse. The woman would draw back startled, as if Anna were one of the chronically mentally ill, drugged, and dazed street people who occasionally begged for change on State Street or muttered angrily as they arranged and rearranged their tattered possessions on Library Mall. But Anna would not repeat herself. This woman would have to figure Andrej out for herself.

"He *is* beautiful," Sara said. "Do you still miss him?"

"No. But I'm not really sorry I knew him either, Sara. I discovered how deeply I could feel, and I started to write while I knew him."

"He makes me think of a pretty but irresponsible young girl who makes an old artist suffer," Sara mused. "But you know, Anna, the

artist would have painted without her anyway. He only imagined he had to have a young thing for a muse."

"Yes," Anna agreed. "Though occasionally I hope . . ."

Anna was not sure how to complete the sentence. Sometimes she still longed for a man to love.

"That you had someone?" Sara asked. "It *is* hard to be alone, but I chose this final solitude. I longed for it even when Albert was alive. Then again, maybe I deserve it because I never cried when they took away my mother and my father. I was angry with them for letting themselves be caught, and then I felt nothing."

"You deserve admiration, not punishment, Sara," Anna said firmly. "You did better than anyone else would have in your place. You survived."

"Which is not an unmixed blessing," Sara said dryly.

"What are you working on now, Sara?" Anna asked after a long pause for Sara's words to sink in.

"I'm still at it, trying to find everyone in my hometown. I go from one library to another, from one town to the next. I never stay in any one place for long. I read and I take notes and then I move on. I want to know everything. I want to relive everything. I am terrified, but at the same time I want to feel what happened to my parents and to all the aunts and uncles and cousins and friends and neighbors, to all the people in the shops and concert halls and theaters and bookstores, to all the women who cooked the food and the men who cleaned the streets, and to all the ones who did nothing useful at all.

"Sometimes I think I'm crazy for digging into old scars. I wish I could stop. I'd pray to stop if I could pray. I'm afraid I'll never finish because one thing always leads to another. As soon as I know what happened to the man who sold tickets for the merry-go-round, I have to find out about his wife and their children and his wife's sister who lived with them and the shy young man who courted the sister for one sun-filled summer and the woman whom he eventually married instead of her."

"What will you do with your notes, Sara? Write a book? Give them to an archive? What exactly?"

"I'm not going to write. Publishers don't want to print more, readers can't stand to read any more, and archives and libraries are full already. If I had children, they wouldn't want what I've collected. And anyway, I'm not a writer. I'm not an educated person like you, Anna, because I missed out going to the university."

"But Sara, you know far more than I do."

"You have to write about it; that's why I've been telling you. I don't have a right to write about myself. I wasn't killed, and I wasn't in a concentration camp. The real survivors wouldn't stand for it; they'd tear me limb from limb."

Competition. Here it was again. Anna could laugh now about the Rebels' rivalry over whose Christmas was more stressful, but competition about real suffering between survivors was excruciating. Jerzy's need to compete had probably led him to assert that the things he imagined had actually happened to him. Since then a dozen other writers had falsely claimed that their novels about the Holocaust and other extreme experiences were really memoirs.

Anna could not know all the reasons for lies that damaged the soul, but the inattention and outright dismissal by the rest of the world were reasons to exaggerate and make false claims.

"It isn't true that I have no hope," Sara was saying. "People in my generation are too damaged, but we are passing away; we are dying; all of us will be gone soon. Maybe the young will have compassion for all of us, for those dead and alive, for those in the camps and those outside, and for everyone who has to live on in the aftermath of war. The young will have their own horrors, of course. Children will continue to be lined up and shot; young men and women will come home damaged from foreign wars; others will have to move rubble to find and bury the dead. And every single one of them will have to learn how to go on afterward. But maybe stories can help. Maybe those who have suffered more will listen to those only on the

margins of the great horrors. Maybe all will be able to rest in the compassion of others. Maybe instead of clashing and competing, all the stories will weave together into a great tapestry, each thread part of an intricate, somber pattern. Maybe tenderness will prevail."

"Maybe," Anna agreed wistfully. Sara's generosity in telling her own story and listening to Anna's had made a new life possible for her. Sara had validated Anna even as she contemplated those who had endured the unspeakable before they died. It mattered whether one was burned alive in the center of a conflagration, escaped after being choked by black smoke, or was only singed. Sara had compassion for those on the margins as well as those in the very center.

Anna's heart was full of love and gratitude as the two women returned to their seats to watch as the brother and sister in *Twelfth Night* were reunited after separations and storms. Recognition and understanding were as precious as love, for Sebastian and Viola, for Sara, for Jerzy, and for Anna herself.

A slight breeze made Anna shiver, and a man behind her tapped her on the shoulder and offered her his jacket. He looked like the gorgeous man Molly had pointed out in Botticelli's, and Anna's curiosity and excitement about the coincidence surged.

The lights behind him flickered, so that for an instant his head seemed to be wreathed with jasmine and white roses, which she alone knew how to braid into a crown. But then her vision cleared, and she saw that the man's apparent halo was his hair, the same texture as hers and streaked with gray. That he was her age did not mean that he had her awareness or depth.

Anna felt her own solidity and Sara's warmth. She smiled into the man's eyes to thank him, and then she gently drew back her hand.

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