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She heard seagulls.

She looked up. Where are they?

Children onshore whining, carried over the ice?

No. Women, wailing.

No. Seagulls, crying.

She looked down at Melissa. "Do you see—?"

Melissa shook her head, put a finger to her lips, pointed another finger down.

The ice on the lake was heaving, like a sleeping person's chest—ice breaking up down there, crying out in the twilight, like seagulls, children, women, snow beginning to come down, lightly.

The stout man wearing the snow mask still stood on the porch of the defunct fog house, under the black horns, hunched over, looking out over the lake, his head still moving, as if searching for someone out there on the ice that heaved and sank, cracked, cried.

A tall woman suddenly appeared—wearing an open, elegant brown coat, hatless, stepping up onto the observation deck, as if onto a stage, with the air of a person aware that people are often glad to see her coming, impressed by

the very sight of her. She seemed to think she was alone, stood erect against the subzero wind chill, gazing out over Lake Ontario, awed, smiling sublimely.

Do you hear the cries yet? Carol surprised herself that she had spoken to the lady, as clearly as if aloud.

The lady looked up at the sky, filling up with swirling snow.

To get her face out of the scalding wind, Carol reached out for Melissa's hand and helped her walk over yesterday's compacted snow back to the light-house wall.

Her watch declared that she would get home late again, her husband, Jack, would already be on his way home—from wherever he had gone—one of his Saturday activities.

Up against the white wall, a long sealed crack, Carol looked around the curve of the tower to gaze at the woman's profile, skin tanned or naturally dark, hair jet black.

Carol smiled. The hope of experiencing rare moments such as this was what had made her scoop Melissa up and go out to the car and hit the highway.

She watched the lady's flowing gestures. Not a performance. Not even a focused event for this tall lady, but out of a natural flow of her confidence and energy and everyday good humor.

Carol was glad she had come, as if she had set out to watch this lady in this place. Her sudden excursions when her husband was out were not to watch, but simply to go, to be gone, going anywhere, as far away as any given free time would allow. As palpable as the cold wind, she felt how different this excursion was, watching a strange woman being herself, a woman on her way somewhere, probably not back home, even though it was late for starting a trip, a woman who was not getting away from the house, who always did exactly what she wanted to do, even when it was necessary.

Toss your hair back again.

Like that.

The lady took a short step forward, flinging her coat back to free her hip where she rested the back of her hand, one arm akimbo, then a bigger step backward. In the other hand her keys hung—a little shake just now, as if eager for the ignition again, to get going again, but not impatient, content for the moment to anticipate.

Carol saw that her first impression, that the lady was about her own age, was wrong, maybe the black hair was dyed, but not a wig—no, not wig-looking, even if it were a wig. Once natural black, complementing the skin that had

always been olive. Greek? No. Possibly Italian. Probably not. Maybe Turkish, Istanbul. Most likely Argentinean. Long legs. High heels.

The look of her was of a woman who could carry off any whim, but not a woman of mere whim, a purposeful woman, most of the time, a career woman, not a housewife, except when she wanted to play that role, too. Maybe even a churchwoman, too, but one who surprises fellow parishioners that she would take time off to participate in routine church affairs.

She is turning, no, she is pivoting, like Jack showing Tim how soldiers do an about-face—no, Jack, *you* get out of this picture!—and she walked or strode, as if going down a hallway to an important meeting with her subordinates, who were always pumped up for her entrance, to the opposite side of the observation deck with a direct look toward Canada.

An instant intuition made Carol feel as if she knew this lady, had known her a good long while, had at least seen her sometime, somewhere, before.

Turning away from the wind that stung her face, pulling Melissa closer, watching the snowflakes become larger, she gazed in her mind upon the after-image of the stylish lady's walk, so confident, enhanced by the high heels.

Carol imagined how this lovely lady would look turning away from Canada, walking toward *her*, and, as she got closer, redolent of Shalimar.

One more actual look before she lifted Melissa up into her arms and must go back to the house, hoping to beat Jack.

The lady was swinging her body, her coattails swirling, coming down the icy steps on high heels. Here she comes, here she comes right toward me, not seeming to see me.

Carol stepped back, as if to make room for the lady against the white wall.
“Mother! I cut myself! It's blood!”

Carol turned left, setting to the side of her own life the tall lady's vibrant image, and leaned down to look at Melissa, who'd thrust out her thumb.

She sucked off the blood, seeing even in the dim light it was a minor cut, made by the already broken kaleidoscope Melissa's chilled red hands had dropped in the snow. “All better?”

“All better.” Melissa whimpered theatrically.

Carol turned back around, to catch another, last glimpse of the lady.

The observation platform steps were vacant.

Where did she go?

Where is she?

Where are you, Lady?

Desiring one more look, Carol lifted Melissa and turned toward the vacant lighthouse keeper's cottage and the driveway—the lady was not walking over there.

The pickup parked there when she drove up was roaring down the curve onto the narrow road, making new tracks in the snow, tires squealing in the icy slush, shooting onto the road into the blowing snow that now darkened the lake.

The man who wore the snow mask was not standing under the black fog-horn on the porch of the defunct fog house.

Behind Carol's old Oldsmobile, snow almost had disfigured what looked a little like a Mercedes.

She yanked the back door of the Oldsmobile to shatter its seal of ice and lifted Melissa inside, closed the door, and hurried back up to the lighthouse, walking in the woman's original footsteps.

Hoping the woman would be leaning there, that she would turn and smile, Carol walked around the tower. Having walked around the tower again, she walked around the foghorn house, past its porch.

Lady, you did not know that a man wearing a snow mask stood on the porch behind you.

"My pistol is aimed at your back, Lady. Don't say a word. Turn around and look at the pistol. Walk quickly to that pickup in the driveway and get in. I am right behind you."

Suddenly aware that she had been talking aloud, as if directly to the lady, Carol spoke to her more deliberately, more clearly in her imagination. You did not panic. You did as he told you, at first, walked to the pickup truck. The shock of his body, full length and force of it—a sudden blow up against your back. His knees connect with the backs of your knees, make you buckle, in the same instant his left arm smacks your windpipe, you gasp, a tight, sharp gasp, his other hand over your mouth, smelling of old grease, because no matter how often he washes them, he can never get that smell out of the seams of his palms or his pants, his shirts, he whirls you around to shove you into his pickup, the door cracked open, ready, and you react so quickly, it is *he* who is most startled, by *you*, who looked to him older than the other women, more vulnerable, easier to handle, even though he did notice the power in your athletic grace, thought he was ready for what it might do to his method, and your elbow stabs his ribs, but he's all muscle, and takes surprise blows like maybe in a karate class, and he does not imagine you will do what you do next, dip deeper in the knees, thrust your right leg backward between his legs, stick

your right foot behind his left foot—he's wearing boots—and twist, pivoting inward on your left toe, just like those Chinese women in the cheap martial arts videos my husband is addicted to, that's when he knows he has to slug your handsome face or abort, but it's you who takes karate, can take a punch, even so, it knocks you off balance, your back slams up against the truck bed, you kick at his groin but misfire, he shoulders you on *in*, through the door, and you splay out on the floorboard, the passenger seat ripped out, kicking, trying to strike his shin, trying to find his groin, but he slugs and slaps you again and again, stuns you, turns you over and, just as you think you can press your knees against the floor and thrust yourself upward, he gets a grip on your left arm just above the wrist, you feel something tighter than a hand, ice cold, hear a rattle of steel, know it's handcuffs, bitch! bitch! cunt! erupts from deep in his chest, you can't jerk loose of some kind of anchor—an eyebolt in the floor, the other handcuff locked on it, you feel parts of his chest, arms, legs slipping off your body, dimly see his body backing away, the door slams, shuts you in. You hope someone has been watching. I wish now I had been watching. My six-year-old distracted me.

Realizing she had been standing stock still too long, she hurried back down to the driveway to look inside the lady's car. I should have looked there first.

Standing by the car, she again imagined, felt the lady being seized, lifted, shut up in the truck.

She brushed the snow off the Mercedes window on the passenger's side.

The lady's briefcase lay on the seat, upright, slightly tilted.

She tried the door handle. Locked.

Running up the driveway to her own car, she wished she had brought the cell phone her father had given her for Christmas. "For emergency use, Carol."

She looked into the Oldsmobile backseat. Melissa was still there, a slouched, deeply asleep rag doll, the broken kaleidoscope in her lap.

Seeing the image of the pickup truck shooting out of the parking lot, she told Melissa to buckle herself into the child restraint, and jumped behind the wheel.

She set off in pursuit of the snow-masked man's black pickup truck, now white with snow, like all vehicles now, slowing down for BLIND CHILD AREA.

"Too fast again, Mother."

Thick snowfall got her attention again, and she realized she was driving recklessly.

In an intuitive rush, Carol felt, in her very bones, her very spirit, that if she imagines what is happening to the lady, imagines how she is reacting, and if

she keeps on talking to her, she will somehow be helping her feel, do, and say what will help her gain time, escape, survive.

Like everybody else, especially women, Lovely Lady, you have been watching the news for the past six years, seen the late breaking news when they show the police cars parked on the bank of the river under the International Bridge, the big trucks whizzing by on the long two-lane span above, the ice mobiles whirling in and out and among the Thousand Islands, so you know where he is taking you, but you hope he doesn't take you there immediately, you hope you have some time, because they are still looking for the last woman abducted from Watertown last week.

Do not scream. That's what he wants. You know that their screaming thrills him. He shuts them up instantly by showing them the gun, maybe the buck knife, maybe only the biggest fist any woman ever drew back from. Found with their throats cut—all six of them, Watertown women. You have watched the news, leaning forward in your chair, as I have. Watched the bossy man on the TV who shows you what you must do to protect yourself, unless you're up against men who can do to you what he just did.

You are older than the others, but you have the same youthful vitality because of the kind of woman you are. You not screaming will get his attention, that you are not the same as the others. You know that he will expect you to behave the way he always daydreams it, that the others have not disappointed him, but he did not let them scream long because he took them from the middle of the city in broad daylight, had to act fast. Not screaming lets you think. You think—he has changed who, where, and when he strikes. He has taken you not from the city but from a remote place at land's end, on the edge of nowhere at twilight.

"Slow down." Melissa's deeper voice from the back seat. "Slowohdown."

He keeps looking over at you to see why you do not scream. Handcuffed to that eyebolt driven into the floorboard, you can only kneel, but you are tall, and he sees that you are not lying down into yourself, that you are up on your knees, your back straight, and when he quickly turns his head sidewise to check on you, your face is directly beside his, a foot away, as if you're saying, Look at me, look at my face.

He does look, into your eyes, then looks away.

You do not smile. Not yet. You know what your smile does to everybody. Even though it's natural for you, you know how it affects people. Dazzles. Save it, later.

On a stretch with no houses, Carol heard the ice breaking up, crying. No, didn't her window shut out the sound?

Passing through the village of Cape Vincent, she saw no trucks or cars ahead, none coming toward her.

In the village of Clayton, she pulled over to Lost Navigator Tavern.

"Why're we stopping here?"

"Just be still a second and let your mother think."

"I'm not hungry."

"Be still. Be still. . . . Be still."

Why *did* I stop here? Why here and not someplace else?

"You said let's go for a ride. It's not a ride. Nothing's to see *here*."

"Mommy needs to think."

"Well, are you thinking now?"

Yes, there's a pay phone inside.

As she waited for the Alexandria Bay police station to answer her ring, she realized that a patrol car would come to the house to question her and that the neighbors would ask her husband about it, that Jack would demand to know what she was doing with his six-year-old thirty or so miles west of Alexandria Bay on the edge of Lake Ontario in the blinding snow at the scene of a crime, and she knew she'd eventually get entangled and stuck in any web of lies she might weave.

Anonymous. Okay. Anonymous.

"Alexandria Bay Police Department. How can I help you this evening?" She recognized Frank's voice.

"A woman has been abducted at the Tibbetts Point Lighthouse." Would Frank recognize her voice?

"You need to call the Cape Vincent police, on that."

"Oh, I didn't know they had one. But, listen, act fast, call them yourself—and the highway patrol."

"Okay. Name, please."

"No, I am anonymous."

"Okay, on that. Then please describe the vehicle."

"A pickup."

"Color?"

"White—I mean, black, covered with snow."

"Any distinguishing marks?"

Like a birthmark? "No, all covered with snow."

"Describe the driver for me."

"I *can't* describe him for you!"

"Only natural you're afraid of him, on that, but we—"

"No, it's because I didn't actually see him. He wore a snow mask like a lot of people around here." She and Melissa would have worn masks, too, had the excursion not been impulsive.

"Where are you calling from, ma'am?"

"A public phone."

"Location?"

Carol hung up.

She drove up and down the few streets of the village, keen-eyed, on the lookout, passing a Clayton patrol car, lights flashing, talking silently to the lady in her imagination. You almost ask, Where are you taking me? But you don't, because that'd put the Thousand Islands in his head where he displays the corpses.

You say, Where are we going?

Sure enough, that makes him turn his head, and your eyes are right there looking into his. Where are *we* going, like you are saying to him, You and I are in this together—I am not the only one in a state of crisis.

None of your business, he says, and you almost laugh at the irony. He does that quick turn and looks and sees your smile this time, but it's not the smile that will disarm him, so to speak. Save that for exactly the right moment.

He says, You think this is funny?

The smile was a mistake, so you change the subject, with something he will not expect.

I wish I had one of Jreck's subs. I am so hungry, I could eat a horse. Are you hungry? Let me buy us a juicy sandwich, loaded.

"Who you talking to, Mother?"

"Was I talking?"

Bet you could be a black belt, but tonight you were clumsy, weren't you?

I'm not usually clumsy.

I could tell that by the graceful way you went for my nuts, you bitch.

He plays with words. That's your opening. You wanted to know, and now you know, that you can talk to him. Get him talking and keep him talking. But all the others were talkers, too. The head nurse. The yoga instructor. The advertising executive. I forget the others, I am ashamed to say. And now, you. Maybe he likes to talk. Or maybe he hates that. Be careful, Lady.

Will we have something to eat where we're going?

Shut up.

You shut up and look around.

Bitch, he says, like an afterthought.

Keep down on the floor.

The sound of the tires on the highway snow at sixty miles an hour makes you feel you are getting near the place he planned, you feel panic coming on, you stop talking.

What makes you think I might got food where we're going?

We, he said. Good.

We—you say—we could go some place where there's food and something to drink.

I *got* something to drink, he says, and takes a swig, goes *Ahhhhhhh*, the way men love to do.

Gimme, why don't you?

You raise up as straight as you can and lean sideways toward him and lift your chin, hoping he doesn't kiss you.

He tips the bottle. You take a deep swig. Two people drinking together in a pickup on the highway in thick snowfall at first dark.

You think you can drink me under the table?

Maybe. You give him a husky half laugh.

We'll never know.

"At least you got him to saying *we*."

"What?" As if Melissa heard more than Carole was saying.

"Nothing."

"It's the lighthouse again, Mother."

Absorbed in talking to the lady, Carol was surprised to realize that she was back at Tibbetts Point Lighthouse so quickly. To make certain.

The lady's car was still there, shapeless under the snow, all four doors forced, flung wide open.

The Clayton police car, light still flashing, was parked almost bumper to bumper. Two flashlights moving among the one, two, three lighthouse buildings.

Carol turned around and headed for her own house.

He takes you past WELCOME TO ALEXANDRIA BAY, THE HEART—a red heart—OF THE THOUSAND ISLANDS—which freeze and thaw each year.

He stops the pickup.

Oh, is this the old thorn grove? One of my very favorite places. All those boulders to climb over. I recognize that old blighted birch tree.

Hell, the place is infested with river rats big as foxes, woman.

Yes, but I used to sit on that very stump over there, and my favorite uncle sat beside me and told me whoppers about his fishing.

Yeah, sure, you know what they say about uncles and nieces.

Yes, but he was different. He never hurt anybody. You would have liked him.

How the hell would *you* know who would like me and who wouldn't? I'm talking too much.

One cannot talk too much.

One? One what?

You and me.

Hey, Lady, don't you smart women read the goddamn newspapers or watch TV?

He gets out and opens your door. Oh, a gentleman. A gentleman armed with a pistol and probably a knife, concealed.

You hope somebody will come by, somebody pull over and look down into the thorn thicket, some vigilant trucker with a cell phone.

But *I* am the only one who sees you. You don't *need* me, but I am here, making things go the way they are going. This is the way it *is* going, I know it, I know it. Well, going well. And you and I will make it end well.

His whole routine so far is not going as it always does. Six times before is not always, but six is only how many they have found, and DNA is a slow procedure.

You are one of a kind. He can tell. He's frustrated maybe, but he's just plain interested. Like me, like me.

But I must focus on *you*, not him.

You don't even have to think of what to say or do. You have a way of acting natural in all circumstances, anyway.

His fly is open.

You do not look away.

Your fly is unzipped.

He looks down.

Then you are looking into his eyes.

He looks up, shuts his eyes, zips his fly.

He sits on the floor, his back against the frame at the open door, his feet outside, and looks at your face quickly and looks away quickly, then back and forth slowly. He must think you are bold. It's not that he does not think you are afraid. He knows you have to be—under the circumstances. But he can't see it in your face, your eyes, your shoulders—not cringing—you aren't trembling or shrinking away from him.

He has broken his routine. They were all like you, vivacious, successful, but just vulnerable enough that they reacted as any abducted woman would react. But they were younger, under forty, you are older and different, you would never look vulnerable to anybody. Your failure to show fear disorients him. I'm not sure myself how you can look so cool and still be terrified, naturally, deep inside where he cannot see.

He reaches out to touch your hair. You do not cringe.

Dyed, ain't it?

Says *ain't* deliberately, to make you correct his grammar so he can get mad at you.

Only the few streaks of gray.

How the hell old *are* you?

I'll bet this is the first time you have ever asked a lady that question.

He stares at you—sees more clearly you *are* a lady, a little surprised.

Why don't I just leave you sitting on that rock over there, maybe handcuffed to that dead birch tree?

I've never had to fight off a coyote. But I guess there's always a first time.

He laughs.

You got him to laugh.

You laugh with him, louder, so the truck cab is full of it, and he can't help but feel it vibrate in his head. He stops, abruptly. So do you. But he's still looking at that smile.

On Highway 12, Seaway Trail, again, Carol passed shoals of sharp wire, the corrections facility.

As she hit that stretch named POW MIA HIGHWAY MEMORIAL, she saw the Alexandria patrol car coming at her. As it passed, she knew that Frank sat behind the slow windshield wipers of the Alexandria patrol car that was passing her, the New York State Highway Patrol car following him too close.

You watch him take out a cigarette, pop it in his mouth, the way he must have practiced as a kid starting to smoke. Before he can light it, you request

one for yourself. He sticks that one in your mouth and takes out another one for himself and lights yours—the lady first—it falls out of your mouth, so he frees your right hand.

I'm left-handed.

He re-cuffs your right hand and un-cuffs your left hand.

Thank you.

You politely blow your smoke away from him.

He lights his own cigarette and blows the smoke away from you.

You can't help but cough, because, with that self-control of yours, you quit smoking years ago.

He looks at you suspiciously.

But you are a *you* to him now, not a bitch-cunt-*thing*. He relaxes with *you*, even in this near-zero cold. He looks as if he has not relaxed, really relaxed, like this in months. I guess that's my problem too. I haven't been able to relax in years. Distractions, distractions, always distractions! All the way to Alexandria Bay, I have had that image of the two of you relaxed in that vehicle, not relaxing doing this and that, just relaxed, not moving much, like a photograph so real it seems to move a little, vibrate.

I liked the hell out of the way you walked up on that observation deck, platform.

Thank you. I haven't really watched *you* walk.

I don't even know if I *have* a walk.

Well, shall we walk?

In the snow? In those high heels?

I love to walk in the snow, and not the first time in high heels.

This is not a good place.

You think, he's thinking that those searchers on ice mobiles might come ashore here.

We could go some place else, where there is a path.

Do you know a place like that?

Yes, many. But *you* choose.

Yeah, I know a place, too, just past Chippewa Bay, with a view of Dark Island and that Singer Castle in the river. I want to see you walk and smoke a cigarette with me and laugh. But you better not laugh too loud. I liked it when you laughed. I'm going to leave that hand free.

He cuffs your left hand to his right. So he's a left-handed smoker.

East of Chippewa, one mile below the lighthouse and the red lighthouse keeper's house, you will see a sign up ahead, BLIND BAY.

I will stay with you all the way, Lady, talk to you all the way.

"What lady?" Melissa was sounding aggravated now.

"Did I say something about a lady?"

As Carol turned up the steep hill and into the driveway, Melissa said from the backseat, "That ice on Lake Ontario sounded like a little girl crying in her sleep."

Like the lady. Like all his victims. Like my mother. The ice heaving like the chest of a human being, sleeping.

He isn't exactly taking *you* somewhere. You are going there together. To take a walk together at night, the wind still now, the sky clear, the moon full, so you will be able to see. You have done just what a woman who looked the way you did striding up to that platform, climbing those steps that way, smiling, and starting down again, *would do* under such circumstances. You fought him, but when he subdued you, you started slowly but surely to behave normally, as if you were not afraid of him. You did not look away, but looked him in the eye, to show you weren't looking at his face to testify against him, as if instead you were going along somewhere *with* him. Everything you did and said broke the pattern of the others, how they reacted. You have disoriented him, and he has had to relate to you until you became two people in a pickup smoking and then deciding together to go somewhere walking in a secluded place.

How many women could have done what you did, after watching the news and reading about the abductions, one by one, over the past six years?

Oh, listen! Hear the owls?

He looks startled. You think, Not because he has never heard an owl hooting at night but because no one ever asked him in that tone of voice to listen. He listens, his mouth open. You even dare to tell him to shut his eyes to hear better. He does.

It stopped. A tone of disappointment.

Maybe it will call out again.

You think, Beauty taming the beast. He is big, but, listening to a bird, he looks smaller. Even so, you know he may turn at any moment, anything can trigger them.

Like the outdoors woman you are—that natural tan—you are walking naturally in the woods, somewhere off a county road, in the hills, in a forest of stones.

I used to hunt in these trees and rocks. He seems really to want you to know that.

I used to hike this same trail. Alone, sometimes.

So this is not a just bizarre place where he intends, *may* harm you.

One handcuff dangles and jangles as you walk. He has not fastened both hands together, but has not taken the cuffs off.

You do not look for a way to break away from him, because you know he could run you down and you might even win the fight, but you are already winning *this* way, or at least, everything is all suspended, yes, suspended.

He walks alongside you, he does not even keep a few steps behind you. You are two people taking a cold, moonlight walk on the snow in each other's company. He seems to see it that way. That's what you want. And then you want to be able to walk away. If not that, he will take you somewhere else.

What did you hunt?

Bear. The way he laughs makes you think he would seem a charming man to unwary, trusting women. He gained the confidence of the other confident women, the police say— the FBI profilers. But don't worry, I'll protect you. You can't see whether he is sneering. Wildcats, too. Sorry, no snow snakes. Alligators though.

He holds up one of his boots to show the alligator skin.

He kicks the dirt and throws rocks when he talks, and when you say certain things, he shrugs his shoulders or comes to a full stop. Ask yourself why, and watch.

I like to fish, though.

Yeah? Me, too.

He stumbles a little on a root. Watch your step.

This is no place for high heels, but you walk as gracefully as you can, not vivaciously.

He keeps looking at you, as if he enjoys being with you, not as a man who will attack you at any moment. You are handcuffed together, as if holding hands.

Naked, Carol stepped up to her mother's antique tub, salvaged from one of the "cottages"—mansions—that burned on one of the little islands. "No, Lady, you have no way to step into a tub, so I won't either."

An hour after Carol was in bed, Jack came in dead tired, having been made a member of the search party, he said—out on the ice, among the islands, searching for the seventh young woman.

Jack's changed *his* MO, too. A searcher now, no less.

Even so, he was still cynical about the possibility of a catching “the Daylight Serial Killer.”

Is the fox leading the chase? No woman in Watertown or Alexandria Bay can keep from wondering. Just as no woman can help but be watchful, wary.

After Jack fell asleep, Carol got up, drawn to the window overlooking the bay—her lifelong view of fabled Boldt Castle, fully lit, on Heart Island.

And you, Lady, are coming within view of Singer Castle on Dark Island.

I’ve never walked in the woods with a woman before, not even in the daytime.

You chose a good place for it.

Do you need to rest a while?

Could we?

No problem.

Let’s look for a good place to sit.

There’s that big house I remembered, out there.

He cuffs your hand to his hand. You are handcuffed together, as if holding hands.

He takes you back to the truck.

He parks the truck behind a deserted stone house, in a corner that blocks the view from the sharply curving road.

Part of the floor of the stone house has caved in, its planks pulled up, exposing the earth, black from campfires. Watching him start a fire, you see, imagine, him here other times.

You do not tremble, having a sure sense that he has brought you here only to be here with you and talk, or not talk. He suspects that when he talks he may lose his hold on you. But he craves hearing *you* talk. You control your usual vivacious way of talking, so not to overwhelm him.

Both of you are amazed that he has not forced anything, except at first, muscling you into his pickup, and maybe you have made him forget even that.

You let the night silence of the bay and its hills sink in. You do not call his attention to the sight through the trees of Singer Castle on Dark Island.

Lying on her back, her elbows supporting her uplifted, limp hands, thumbs, and forefingers lightly touching to frame the image, Carol watched the lady appear suddenly at the platform, go up the steps, and stand and look out over Lake Ontario, listen to the ice breaking up, and then start down again, again and again, even after she couldn’t keep her eyes open any longer.

You wake up—first light glaring off the snow outside—in the stone house.

You've made it through one night, Lady.

You watch him stir, then wake up. You know he knows he could be in his warm bed in what the profiler on TV says is probably a comfortable house in a middle-class neighborhood.

He looks at you. He can't turn his head away from that smile.

All night—even dreaming—and all morning long, I have imagined it every which way, so that I can go with you, talk to you, and I *have* been with you, ever since that first moment I saw you, even the moment he took you, the moment I missed, imagined.

His nostrils flare suddenly, as if he is remembering things.

Keep quiet, keep still. It will pass, whatever it is.

Tim passed Carole's bedroom door.

"Wait a second, Tim. Do you hear that sound?"

"What sound?" Tim stood in the hall just outside the bedroom.

"Listen. . . . That sound. Ticking sound."

"Mother, that's icicles melting."

"But it's so loud."

If his nostrils flare like that after you say something, just say something very positive, or make some charming gesture to distract him.

And his eyes and that mouth. What do they tell you about him at any given moment? Like now, that look he just gave you.

I hope you didn't say something that sparked that look. Or is he remembering? Or did something just come over him that mystifies him?

Toast melting in her mouth, she realized that this was the first Sunday of the month and that in ten minutes or so the sacrament of the Lord's Supper would begin.

"I'm going to church."

Alone.

"Alone."

They're looking at me. Strange behavior. Service will be almost over. But there's still Communion, and that's really what I want.

Carol walked alone in a gentle swirling of snow, over uneven dirty ice, past Saint Cyril's Catholic Church, dark like a hillside fortress, her childhood fear of it lingering still.

You are aware that you are the eighth to get taken, the seventh one not yet found. You are remembering that the rapist dumped his first victim in Thompson Park, near the zoo, in Watertown six years ago, you remember the

TV newscasts about the discovery of the second victim in Alexandria Bay among the rocks in Keewaydin State Park, then the third victim, the fourth victim, the fifth victim, the sixth victim discovered on six islands in the Thousand Islands, all young women from Watertown, even though he took the sixth young woman from Alexandria Bay while she was visiting her grandmother here, and all were linked by MO and DNA to the same unidentified suspect.

But I feel it in my bones, Lady, that you will be the only woman who will escape and be found alive.

Climbing the Church Street hill past the grim, former jail building, Carol watched her church on Rock Street come, steeple to door to steps, into view. At the end of the long block, before she turned left, she envisioned the rock outcropping in the basement of her church, Alexandria Bay United Methodist, built 130-something years ago on Rock Street across from the stark Dutch Reformed Church, with whom the two now combined some activities.

Looking up at the Methodist steeple, she felt drawn to that basement rock, hearing her mother's voice explaining to her when she was six or so that the foundation of the church was cut into a single solitary immense stone. Secretly, she had sought it, along passageways, through doors, and seeing it, rushed toward it, upon it, touched it with both palms, hungering.

Taken later with her class to look upon the rock in the dank basement as a Sunday-school demonstration of what Jesus meant when he renamed Simon, Peter, the rock, on whom he built his Church, Carol had felt in her bones, I know, I know.

She imagined a voice saying, Rumor has it that Carol Helvy Seabold's new career change goal is to become an historian.

The greeter—Mrs. What's-her-name—was nicely surprised. "Good morning, Carol. Glad to see you back."

After missing six months of Sundays in a row.

Carol stood at the back.

Joan Blackwell was at the left-hand pulpit, this Sunday's reader. "A reading of the word of the Lord. Luke 19:40, 'I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.'" As if she knew I was coming, what was on my mind.

How do they do it? Preachers. They always choose verses that apply to your own life, no matter what.

Lady, I must be with you, I will be with you, where you are, right this instant. I will it. So do not be afraid. I am with you every single moment. Like

a movie in my head, a video, I can hit PAUSE, but don't worry, it won't be for long at a time.

Now, she was acutely aware, under the pew she shared with neighbors—of the rock. The rock among so many, very many such rocks in this region. “As many rocks in Alexandria Bay Village as there are islands in the Saint Lawrence River,” her mother once whimsically estimated.

Is it the rock or the ritual that draws *me* back, that *I* hunger for? The rock the church rises upon or the ritual conducted between the rock and the steeple spire? Or both, in some odd combination she felt no need to verbalize?

You will survive. You *will* survive. You have the *will* to survive. They will find you in time.

No, you will suddenly appear on your own. You do not need those men zooming over the ice, searching among 1,800 islands to find that seventh young woman and now you, too. But you are not like the other women. You will not be discovered on an island in a luxurious summer cottage or mansion, propped upright, displayed in an easy chair. You will overcome him, or you will persuade him to let you go.

They missed me, my brothers and sisters. They aren't asking me why I have been away. They don't pry. They are good people. I miss them, too, Lady. I miss, through them, that sense of the Holy Spirit in this place.

Listening to Pastor Fredrika Sensibar's first sermon, I thought, You are not Reverend Neilson, and I missed him so much that for a long time in this place, I had to try very hard to feel one with the body of Christ, my brethren, and failed.

For six months, she had stayed home, as if on indeterminate vacation, because one Sunday morning she had found the house of the Lord vacant, spiritless.

She was conscious of being more aware now of the polished hardwood walls and the warm, white-oak, curved pews, the ceiling's three apexes, the curved altar, the old Scripture pulpit on the left, the new sermon pulpit on the right, the mammoth organ at the back between the pulpits, the large old-timey Christ-head painting to the left, the stained-glass Civil War memorial window for the Grand Army of the Republic to the right, all, since infancy, as familiar as her mother's kitchen, now her own.

Just in time. Well, both of us. Because Reverend Fredrika Sensibar, having already preached at Redwood Methodist Church this morning, double duty, had just now arrived, stepping up to the Lord's Supper.

Yes, that's what I had to come for. “Ritual time,” Reverend Sensibar often called it. “When we partake of the Lord's Supper the first Sunday of each

month, it is as if we are there, at the last supper when He first spoke those words. May we be full of an awareness that as we hear those words, others are hearing them from church to church, house to house, state to state, time zone to time zone, throughout the world, from minute to minute, day to day, year to year, era to era, unbroken, forever and ever—a single breathing. Listening.

“In the same night in which he was betrayed, Our Lord took bread—” Reverend Sensibar turned to the table and took up the loaf and in one graceful motion pivoted toward the congregation “—and when he had given thanks, he broke it—” she broke the bread in two “—and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take, eat. This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ Likewise, after supper he took the cup”—she turned and took up the cup and turned again to Carol and her fellow Christians—“and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink ye all of this, for this is my blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me.’”

“Amen.” We all speak together in a single voice, Lady.

Leaning forward, Reverend Sensibar said, as if for the first time, “In the Methodist Church, we use the ancient method of intinction, whereby you dip the bread lightly in the wine—” I like this woman “—so that you may partake of both elements at once.”

Out of uniform, Frank was in an attitude of prayer. He does not see me looking at him.

Carol watched each familiar back rise and turn, watched each profile move sideways into the aisle as the ushers invited them to the table, row after row.

I love you all.

I wish I could.

She remembered seeing a yellow-rimmed hole in the snow. A pissing deer, or a coyote, or a bear pissing. But no footprints. Why had the snow not covered it over, too? Remembering seeing it below the porch of the defunct fog house sent a chill up her back and over her scalp again. Here, only a moment ago, did the man in the snow mask piss from the porch?

He senses now that you need to go. So he steps away.

You hope he cannot hear you go.

But you hear him, loud, aimed against the scaling wallpaper of that deserted stone house, and you can't help imagining that vicious weapon dangling small and vulnerable, pudgy.

You walked up to that observation platform like walking up to a place you owned. To make an inspection and give orders to the hired help. It was the way

you did it. And the clothes you wore. The clothes you are wearing now. High heels in the snow, walking up to the lighthouse. Bizarre in that place, but with class. A stride, not a walk. Your profile, standing there, Lake Ontario before you. Not like a queen. No, like a real person, a very real person. You were so real. *Are. Vital. Vigorous.*

In the empty space beside her, Carol imagined her mother sitting. As a child, she'd always wanted her mother to sit with her, her father on one side, her mother on the other. But her mother sang in the choir. Even so, when her mother sang solo, Carol was proud almost to tears. "That's my mother," she said to her father more than once.

"Yes, I believe she is."

She often turned to whoever happened to be sitting on the side where she wanted her mother to be sitting. "That's my mother."

"Is that your mother? Isn't that nice?"

Then she would stand up until her mother sat down.

But that time her father told her to sit back down. she knew why. For almost a year, she had been feeling too tall, conspicuous.

Even after her father had set the jar of ashes on the mantle, she had ever after heard her mother's voice rising up out of the choir.

"Can you hear her, or is it just me?"

"No, I can hear her."

Carol was glad her father had lied. "In every lie, lies a fraction of truth." Did Father say that?

"Just you and me." Back then, Carol believed everything Father said.

Her father still lived in Watertown, maybe grading papers at this hour, with wine.

The picnics with her mother at the lighthouse, just the two of them, were always a summertime, weekday event. No ice breaking up, crying. She had never heard that until last evening.

Looking left at the folding door that led to the fellowship hall and to the toilets, Carol wondered whether other women here were suffering her need—oh, yes, they are, about half are turning their heads slightly left.

Reverend Sensibar's benediction verged on the cryptic. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

After church, her fingers on the ignition, her mother always declared, "I feel restored," in a musical voice.

Then her mother would have to go to work the next evening in Watertown, on the night shift, passing Carol's father's car as he was coming home, a briefcase full of student papers, tests.

The hospital odors were in her hair as her mother bent to kiss her awake, seeming to know Carol was only pretending to be asleep.

Then she would carry Carol into the kitchen, where her father was stirring up the fumes of breakfast.

When Carol got older, her mother called her to come to the table.

She always waited until her mother appeared in the bedroom doorway to open her eyes.

Her mother leaned against the doorjamb, kicking off her shoes, until Carol came to her, and they would walk hand in hand into the kitchen, mother's feet cooling on the cold floor.

"Now *there's* a pretty picture." Her father always stopped fixing eggs or griddle cakes to point his spatula at them as she and her mother came through the doorway.

But at the table and in the living room and all around the house and out on the front porch, they said very little, in motion or at rest, bodies, voiceless.

Carol rose with others in her row, stepped into the aisle, and led the others toward the altar.

Frank is looking at me. But he has liked me, from our Sunday-school years all the way through our high-school days. Not my voice, I hope. He is not just a small-town cop. He's a cop's cop. That time when we were kids, about nine, fiddle-fucking around. Did he seduce me, or me him? I forget.

Carol took the bread from Reverend Sensibar's hand and dipped it in the cup Kyle Breedon held out to her. Kneeling at the altar, she looked up at the cross, closed her eyes, pushed the bread between her lips. As she slowly chewed, she felt the Holy Spirit suffuse her body and mind, steeped in ritual time.

God, Abba, I pray it is your will that the stalwart lovely lady returns safe. Dear Jesus, I pray she is talking to you now. Holy Spirit, I pray you are comforting her in her trial, her tribulation.

Holy Spirit, I am not, I know, telling *the* story, but *a* story. It is *your* spirit who moves in *the* story. But I pray you will mingle your spirit with mine and hers, to save her. Even if she has died quickly as the others died, or even if she has already escaped, didn't our mingled spirits comfort her or help her to overcome? Amen.

Lady, I am with you always.

Snow falling, Carol walked over the ice downhill and over to Market Street, past the venerable old library building, converted into the Chamber of Commerce, to Dockside Pub, resenting these anchors in the actual.

Walking away from the dogsled race yesterday, reaching out to touch as she passed the blind woman who won, an impulse to go to the lighthouse had swept her uphill to the car, and off to the highway, Melissa, as always, buckled into the child restraint.

Aware of the OPEN YEAR ROUND sign in the window—big deal around here, so few places are—she entered the liveliness of Dockside Pub.

You turned with one vigorous motion and stepped off the platform, your rich brown leather purse hanging from a strap over your shoulder. *Yours. Your* purse. *Your* high-heeled shoes. *Your* successful career woman earth-brown winter coat. Tan skin. Athletic. Tennis. Not from lying in the sun or in a tanning bed. Jet black hair. Okay, dyed, maybe. Vital just standing there. Vital in motion. Decisive.

When she looked up at the doorway to watch people come in, bright light from the sun on the snow turned her neighbors into silhouettes.

In, as she expected, came Jack, then Melissa, then Tim. Searching for your missing cook? She asked Joan to bring a Saranac root beer for Tim, who once said he could taste its history, since 1888.

As her “family unit” sat down, Carol got up to go to the restroom.

The spoken word “missing” turned Carol around and back into the pub proper where she saw the lady’s dark face, a glamorous photograph, “Glenda Hamilton” spelled out beneath it.

What gets my attention, Glenda—now, Lady, I can call you by name—is that you have that look about you that tells the world, I am *it*, I have done it, I can do more, too, watch me go, and don’t distract me.

Then there she is on film, walking toward Carol in a business suit, coming out of some art gallery in Watertown.

“The fifty-six-year-old arts advocate was last seen getting into her burgundy Mercedes for the long drive to New York City to visit her husband, who is undergoing a series of treatments for lung cancer.”

Police say you are not considered missing until twenty-four hours have passed.

“But that she left her car behind, however, raises concerns . . .

"If you have any information about Hamilton's whereabouts, you are urged to call police at 315-783-2283. You need not give your name."

Jack, Tim, and Melissa insisted that Carol walk "with the family" back home.

"Look! A wolf!" A woman leaving the Catholic church pointed toward Heart Island, Boldt Castle. In the wintertime, wolves, they say, get into the tower and make a lair of it.

Turning completely around in a circle on the ice-crusted sidewalk, Carol did not see a wolf.

"Where?" Jack wasn't even looking around.

Melissa stared as if she saw it.

"Out there on the ice, heading for Wellesley Island."

"We gonna see all kinds of critters out there now that the river's frozen over."

"And more bodies."

Tim slid on the sidewalk ice to Jack's side. "Maybe the wolves will gang up on him or coyotes or maybe somebody will mistake him for a deer and shoot him between the eyes."

In the house, talking to Glenda, Carol walked from room to room, avoiding Jack and Tim, winking when Melissa crossed her path.

Can I tell you a secret, something personal about myself?

I'm listening. But make it short.

Yes, now you can go to work on him, because now you feel he knows you are truthful, that you don't fake it with him.

Well, I told my daughters I was going to visit my husband in the hospital. It's a 360-mile, six-hour trip.

What you want to tell me a lie like that for?

You don't recognize me, do you?

Why *would* I recognize you?

Haven't you ever seen me on television?

Don't try to tell me you're some kind of a movie star.

No, on the news over the years, for this and that, but recently when I ran for Watertown city council, and sometimes in feature stories, and on public television. Now, do you know me?

Sure, I used to work in the art museum—as a sanitary engineer. Yeah.

You did? Small world, huh?

Well, just that one week. I tend to drift from one job to another.

Glenda, you don't want him to tell you too much personal information about himself.

Then you may know that my name is Glenda Hamilton, and that I am the wife of Dr. Denton Hamilton of Good Samaritan Hospital in Watertown.

You can call me F, for the highest grade I ever earned.

Sure, F. Well, I set out to visit my husband in the hospital in Manhattan. He has very serious, inoperable lung cancer and is undergoing the most powerful series of radiation treatments. Or that's what I told my daughters I was setting out to do. But I had a plan.

So did I.

He laughs.

Laugh with him.

Yes, we both had plans. Mine was to visit him one last time and then withdraw all the money from a secret account I have in a bank on Staten Island and just keep right on going—out of the country.

Let that sink in.

You can almost *hear* it sink in.

His face shows he believes you, but he is speechless.

A few minutes later, he is falling in with it.

They'll be looking for you at the hospital. Do they know you're coming? When was you supposed get there?

You need to worry he will see it in your eyes, if you lie.

Wednesday. I always take my time—visit my housebound aunt on my mother's side halfway, in Troy.

Yes. F believes you. You could have won awards for lying. You hope it hits him like a miracle—all that money, maybe to go to someplace like Venezuela, "The Gateway to South America," my mother once said, "Little Venice," my father one-upped her. Or the Amazon, or some such place else, even Greece, even Sweden, get away from all of them who are looking for him now. As far away as Outer Mongolia. But the thought of such money does not make him pant.

Did they move Manhattan to Canada?

I wanted Melissa to see the lighthouse where *my* mother took me on a picnic that time, just us, because this time next year, I may not *be* here. Tell F the same thing, Glenda.

I wanted to see the lighthouse where my mother took me on many picnics one last time. Shall we go to Staten Island?

A lint ball under the dining room table made Carol feel certain that lint balls lay under and behind every piece of furniture.

She saw herself down on her hands and knees, moving throughout the house, downstairs and up, inspecting.

Not to keep the house spotless, but to find out what things the house was keeping from her.

"This just in. This afternoon at three p.m., Police Chief Mitch Phillips announced that even though Glenda Hamilton is not yet officially a missing person, a search began just moments ago."

She walked into the family room, where, on Jack's theater-scale, family-budget-busting screen, she saw a picture-postcard view of Tibbetts Point Lighthouse in Spring time.

"The first twenty-four hours are critical."

Glenda, I want you to know that I do not accept the first twenty-four-hour rule.

"Because Tibbetts Point Lighthouse is located within about thirty miles of where the bodies of five of the six murdered women were found, the search has begun in that area.

"After searchers found the fifth body in January on Heart Island, a small island in the Saint Lawrence River at Alexandria Bay accessible by ice, the police, expecting that the killer would eventually leave another body on that island, searched Boldt Castle's six stories and one hundred and twenty rooms, and found nothing."

"Ask me, and I'd say they're still over there, lying in wait for him, hoping he'll think they're all gone now."

Tim happened into the room when Jack said that. "Dad, how do you know these things?"

"I'm your father, son, that's how."

"A black pickup, about ten years old, make and model unknown, covered with snow, was seen speeding away from the scene, reported by an anonymous caller. Preliminary forensic examination of the Hamilton Mercedes has revealed nothing to indicate foul play, much less any connection with the murders of the six young women, three of which have been linked so far by DNA to the same unknown male. A search has already been under way for a seventh missing woman, Kathy Donovan, also of Watertown."

Would they some evening report that an anonymous, rather nondescript woman was seen standing huddled up against Tibbetts Point Lighthouse,

hugging her six-year-old, sucking on a broken kaleidoscope cut in her thumb, on the edge of nowhere?

They are showing you giving a speech when you ran for the city council last year.

They showed the chief full figure, Boldt Castle tower over his shoulder. “We think maybe what he does, he walks or drives a truck across the ice to an island and leaves the body inside the cottage and covers his tracks somehow, going out and coming back.” He spoke in a high-pitched monotone, looking up, as if scolding somebody in an attic above him. “Or the snow does it for him. That’s how we have a little bit of trouble finding his victims. We have almost a hundred snowmobiles, ice boats, power sleds, what have you, hovercrafts, Polarises out there, including some folks from the snow mobile rally and some folks from the Thousand Islands Sled Dog River Run. And we approach each island, each cottage with great caution, because we don’t know how long he stays with his victims.”

The self-confident young red-haired woman anchor seemed to be broadcasting an affinity for Glenda. “Glenda Hamilton is well known and respected as an arts and preservation activist who ran in a hotly contested race for city council last year and lost by only a few votes.

“A former high-school art teacher, Hamilton has served on numerous boards as a civic leader and won many awards on city, state, and national levels. Hamilton is the wife of Dr. Denton Hamilton, a surgeon at Good Samaritan Hospital in Watertown, who is being treated for lung cancer in a Manhattan hospital.”

The chief came back on, only a talking, sleepy-eyed head now. “The search is only a precautionary measure. At this juncture, we have little or no reason to conclude a crime has been committed. We join the family in hoping that Glenda Hamilton will return safe and sound.”

So now, I know where I saw you before, on TV a lot, saw that same confident, vigorous walk. I knew it, watching you doing good work and getting honored for it, a successful career woman. Wife of a doctor. Rich probably. The police spokeswoman at the microphones reported your age as fifty-six. And then there—in the photograph your daughter Paulette held up—was that smile I had already imagined.

And that smile in the photographs she showed would make anybody think you—no matter how old you are—know how to talk to people and win them over to your side in any situation.

And you are certain that you are going to get out of *this* situation. Because your daughter's words are the words for what I saw when I was watching you. Only for a few minutes.

It's on his mind too. You an executive? Those clothes you wearing.

I've been involved in the arts all my life.

Born artist, huh?

I began professionally when I was twenty-one as an educator in the arts. What were you doing when *you* were twenty-one?

None of your business. His tone has shifted to wary. What do you do as an educator? Principal? Whipping kids' asses?

I'm a painter, but I get involved in various projects having to do with all the arts and with preservation. Before I retired, I was a high school art teacher.

So, you been correcting my grammar in your head the whole time, like *all* teachers.

You haven't talked that much.

I *don't* talk much. I can tell jokes okay, I guess. Seems there was this stranger from Mississippi, tourist, driving between Clayton and Cape Vincent, sees big, flat area covered with snow, asks this man walking along the road, What all kind of stuff do you all grow in that there field? Man looks where the driver's pointing, says, Lake Ontario.

That *is* funny.

I can eat, too, if I had something to eat.

Me, too. Coffee, anyway. I—

Carol's father, suddenly appearing in the doorway, interrupted.

Why did Father bring his briefcase into the house, and it Sunday, too?

So I would know who he is?

Even sets it right by his foot. The same foot that kicked in the front door the night he lost his keys.

Misplaced them, as it turned out.

Oh, they'll turn up sooner or later.

Coming home, off her shift, her mother had given the busted door a little push with the toe of her white nurse's shoes.

Meanwhile, how do we keep robbers out of my house? To remind him that she had bought the house with her own money before she married him.

"Remember the time you kicked in the front door?"

"Remember the time I did what?"

"Kicked in the front door."

"What is your mother talking about, Melissa?"

"The time you kicked in the front door, Grandfather."

"Your daughter is a bright one."

"Skip it."

Glenda, I think I'll come right out and ask my father whether he has any ongoing secrets.

Father, do you have any ongoing secrets? Is your past dark, Father?

Maybe I'll ask him tomorrow or the next day.

Maybe never.

"Daddy, I'm dying to know . . ."

"What?"

"Nothing."

"No, what, what?"

"No, I was just wondering whether you put both socks on before you put on each shoe, or whether you do a sock and a shoe, a sock and a shoe."

"I'm a psychologist, daughter, not a theologian."

"Your socks don't match, Grandfather."

But the main point, Glenda, is that there Father sits, and has been sitting longer than usual. As if he *needs* to come over here, after class or office hours, and sit with us, rarely though it is, and even though today is only Sunday—for some reason, or no reason. I guess love means not having to say anything.

"You know what Jack calls this village?"

"Yes." Her father seemed delighted she'd asked that question.

"Shitsville."

"And with variations. Such as Shitsburg. I once said to him, 'Well, Jack, if you think *you're* too good for this town, then it must be worse than you think.'"

"Did he laugh?"

"Didn't laugh."

"Did he even get it?"

"Don't think he did."

"Jack said he once aspired to something higher."

"Did you ask him, 'Do you think of yourself as a multitude of one, or as one of a multitude?'"

No, but I will.

Realizing that she had not really noticed Gordon's birch tree lately, she deliberately looked out the window at it. Late one night, as a surprise, before they got married, Gordon planted a tree in her mother's yard, and she had

watched it grow. A positive image for twelve years, even after the divorce and she married Jack. After the great ice storm last winter, it seemed to die. But her father trimmed it and the tree revived in the spring.

"Father, do you think Gordon's tree will come out this year?"

"Yes."

"No." Melissa pretended to be contrary.

Maybe.

You've got to admit, Glenda. This is very odd. My father comes and sits for what is a very long time for him and then leaves when Jack's mother and father come in the door from their retirement cottage in Clayton on one of their rare visits, without an occasion for an excuse.

And now there *they* sit. Distractions.

She rummaged around in her mind for questions and comments that have something to do with housekeeping so her mother-in-law will not feel such a stranger and for something to ask or say about life insurance to make her father-in-law feel welcome.

Not that I think I am too good to talk to them, Glenda, but that I would rather be talking exclusively to you.

"Mother Seabold, I saw Crystal Light on sale, two for one, at the Big M."

"I betcha *our* Big M in Clayton is bigger than *your* Big M. Ha. Ha."

Father Seabold always knew when his wife would offer no reply.

"Do you miss the insurance business, Father Seabold, now that you are retired?"

"Him retired? Not on your life. Him retired?" Mother Seabold set herself off bouncing in silent, feigned laughter. "He's still in it, up to his eyebrows."

"My mother worked almost every day or night of her life." She saw her mother in white, walking down an endless corridor, green as water.

"I couldn't live the way your poor mother did."

Mother couldn't either.

Using both hands, Father Seabold scraped his bald pate decisively.

"I like to keep my hand in."

"See my toy?" Melissa knew the effect of such a question from past visits. "It's broken, but it's still beautiful if you hold it against the light, just right. See my wound?" She ripped off the soiled Band-Aid.

Now all I need is for my brother Jason to show up, just passing through, from somewhere—stops, just like Jack, at the refrigerator, sticks his head inside, looks at almost everything in it before he backs up, straightens up, slams the

door, just as he did all through his teenage years, disappointed—on his way down to Buffalo. Same-o, same-o, he always says, to make contact with our common past.

You know, I try very hard, I really try to make contact with Jason's wife, on her rare visits, and might succeed if Faye would stop talking. Well, she does, if Father walks into the room, knowing he will ask her what she means, exactly, every other sentence she utters.

Faye showed up the day I returned home from surgery, as if Jason had sent her ahead as his representative, and next morning, Jason himself showed up, kissed my cheek, told me, "You gonna be fine," then sat beside Jack in front of Jack's theater-sized TV for the endless overtime game between the greatest this one and the greatest that one. "We gonna have to go, Carol," was one of his longest speeches.

Bye.

Jack came in, said hello mom, hello dad, dad do you want a cold beer, yes son, believe I do, went to the refrigerator, came back with a cold beer (there being hardly any such thing as a hot beer), caught himself, asked, mom, and you? nothing for me, dear, came back armed with two beer bottles, held down by the neck as if about to toss World War I grenades like the ones his old fishing buddy Hobart used to collect, "murdered," Jack said, by friendly fire in Iraq last month, sat down.

I'm certain if you were a guest here, Glenda, you could get us all to talking to each other, and, starting with your warm elegant gestures and laying on of hands, even get us to touching as we talk.

Carol felt the house go empty, as it was before she was born, when Wayne Harrington broke in, his vacant home place, and slept on the floor in the sleeping bag before his wife came knocking at the door, a surprise.

He's in the house, now—his finger on the trigger, those few minutes of his future ahead of him.

Melissa looked all around, as if she had read Carol's mind.

Tim came in and sat down.

Carol stood up and sat right back down, blushing, and Glenda kicks in the door. "I'm back."

My last picture of you was you stepping off the observation platform as if over a threshold, and that was when my six-year-old distracted me, like I told you before.

Why, I do not remember.

You have this aura that's kept him from even touching you. He is probably not much older than your oldest daughter and you have so confused him by being older than the other women but beautiful from a distance and in the twilight snow light by the lighthouse. He hesitated too long, giving you time to talk, sensible talk, but charming in the *way* you talk.

I suppose why I jumped in the car and shot off in pursuit, once I realized you must have been taken, was because when I was seventeen, I was standing at a truck stop on Highway 12 with the kids I ran with, and I happened to look up out of our circle at a huge semi truck pulling out onto the highway, and heard a girl's voice yell, Help me! and strained to hear it again, but didn't, so I turned and asked the others if they heard somebody yell from the truck, but they all said no, but I was sure, even so, I didn't say anything, didn't do anything, but I never forgot the way hearing that voice made me feel. So, do you suppose that was it? What started me off after his pickup truck?

"Who took my Greek washcloth?" Her only memento from the winter she crossed northern Greece solo on her bicycle to prove to herself that she was not by nature vulnerable.

Nobody answered.

"God is in the details." Tim's latest all-occasion toss-off line triggered a response this time.

"Not in all of them."

Such as coming into a room where Jack has just left a smell even a dog would not inflict, or Jack comes into the kitchen, which the world supposes is my domain, and cuts loose as if I am not there. I know we are married eleven years and all that. But even so. I always get up and leave the room when *I* feel the urge.

He does it in the truck and you laugh and do it too because you have held it in until it's just too painful and maybe he has too and you're lucky that he laughs too. It could have made him mad, you laughing. I don't think it's funny. But I am here to help you stay alive, so whatever you have to do, do it.

She saw herself assembling her bike in the Athens airport and in the dead of winter setting out across Greece, with very few things in her panniers, and on to Venice and Rome. Even though she had escaped sixteen years ago from under the brandished baton of a blind date's half-erect penis, his very attempt was so traumatic she had known she had to take control of her life in some fearless act. Taking pictures only in her head, all dim now, along with her self-confidence. Watching that young blond photographer looking compassionately

at, and then focusing in on, an old lady, a black, fringed shawl over her head, a large wicker basket of pears in her spread lap, and before she could speak to him, he leapt on his bicycle and was far ahead of her before she could follow.

No one ever knew—except my lover James years later—about that event, that trip, this aftermath.

I am an eyewitness, but all I saw of him was his snow mask and his black pickup truck, parked ahead of my car and yours. The news said it was a white pickup, reported by somebody else who also said she saw it, speeding out of Clayton. So I am not telling you I *saw* him grab you and witnessed your struggle. I heard no scream, but then you would not have screamed, not you, you would just have struggled fiercely or known not to resist the gun pointed at your head or the knife at your throat. But they say, do not, do not, above all, *do not* ever, *ever* get in the car with them.

My husband's trying to get in from behind. Sneaky, aren't they? Don't they know they will wake you every time? Like just now. Unless you're drunk, which I was that one time only. When I realized I not only didn't remember what I had done that night, but imagined what might have been done to me—one of the few parties I went to when I was a freshman at Syracuse—it turned me off drinking much. You being drunk gives them the idea they can come in from behind and you won't even know it. And they get that idea from when you pretend to be asleep because you don't want to get involved. The way I'm doing now. Is it the pussy or the sneakiness that appeals to them most? And why in the middle of the night? Near miss in a wet dream?

She recalled Jack crawling into bed on their first night smelling of wood shavings, oiled tools, eye-stinging glue, and marine paint, masking any sweat, and his breath smelled of the Wild Turkey Carol had sipped with him. "Promise me, you will tell me if it hurts." He was as shy coming into her as when she had noticed him coming into Dockside Pub that first sight of him.

Shyness shot with steel, Glenda, a quiet man who puts things together to make a boat all day long appealed to a young woman who had come apart, bit by bit over two years. I remember only vaguely the way he was, this man that I see, hear, smell, and taste so vividly now.

What irritates me tonight is not him fumbling back there—not *into* my behind, Glenda, only with James that one time, experimenting—but the fact that I will not be with you. Not being fully awake—and it three in the a.m.—I can't control my thoughts of you, and so things could go wrong now for you more easily.

Carol turned to him and took his cock into her hand, disdain mingling with pleasure anticipated.

BRIDGE FREEZES FIRST.

There's a shabby little summer cottage FOR RENT up ahead.

He will break in through the back door. Furnished—twin beds like a motel setup. Good. Good. But only if . . .

Fear strikes you, like your husband suddenly realizing he must die. Imagine you have gone home, to your childhood home. Yes, do that when fear strikes, or be an alien from some far-off country without a name, that none of this, not even the lighthouse and the ice on the lake, has ever been in your life.

Do not let him see that night sweat, Glenda. It will remind him of how you two came to be in the same room.

I am an eyewitness, but except for what I told Frank, as an anonymous person on the phone, I am no help to Jack and the other men bouncing over the ice among the islands in an off-key chorus of revving motors and airboat fans, looking for two women now. No help to the police spokeswoman standing stiff and at a loss for words before the local and network microphones.

But I *am* a witness for you, Glenda, to help keep you alive—talking to you, thinking positive thoughts, with what I see you do and say.

Not that you desperately need my help, *any* help. Because watching you, what I still feel in my bones is how on top of the world you looked, even there at the end of the earth on the lake. How you could out talk anyone. How you could even overpower anyone. I have faith in you, and I have faith, I pray, and that's power, too. Not to ask God to change His plan—if He *has* one. I am only helping God keep you in mind. The story I am imagining may not actually be your story, but any story that keeps you alive will somehow, in the realm of the spirit, help you.

Not my thoughts exactly. The images. Like a movie. I see you like you are in this movie. You're the star, and he, whoever he is, is, of course, the villain. Some villain. Well, he did do what he did to the others. But they weren't *you*. Vital. Vigorous. I see you talking him out of it. I even see you persuading him to surrender and face the consequences. If not, I see you overpowering him. You think, If I can just get behind him when he nods off like that, I can throw my handcuffs over his head and choke him. Vital. Vigorous.

He has met his match.