

Cat.002
30 pages

Far From the Green

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By Linda Frazee Baker

Anne Foster leaned further out the window of the tiny attic room Whitney Foster had just rented for them at Hotel Bloomendaal. Her fingers twitching on the smudged windowsill, she watched as a light August rain began to fall on the cobblestones of the ancient Dutch square below. The crowd of holidaymakers, which only a moment earlier had been queuing up at the vendor's carts, were now scattering hastily in all directions. Outside the cafes, black-suited waiters were piling chairs upside down on wet tables with a clatter. A scent of sugary waffles and meat being fried in palm oil drifted upwards through the humid air.

"Isn't it funny how all mid-size European cities look alike?" Anne Foster said.

"Is that why you decided to spend the weekend with me—so you could invent new cliches?" Whitney Foster said. "Silly me. I thought you actually wanted to spend time with me for a change."

Scowling, Whitney bent his six-foot frame down closer to the little mirror bolted to the wall over a small, discolored sink. His head, halfway to his shoulder, bumped up against the sloped ceiling. Holding an electric razor in one hand, he tried to start it, then realized it wasn't plugged in.

Anne turned back into the room and half-sat, half-fell into a wooden chair off that had once been painted a pale olive green. The bed, which looked like a double, was really two single beds pushed together in the manner of cheap European hotels. The faded wallpaper, dotted with yellow flowers, exuded a dispirited kitsch. Well, she had seen these rooms before in their years in Europe. Ah yes, she had seen these rooms.

Whitney found the plug and ran the razor over his three-day stubble. The drive—and not just the drive—had left him exhausted. With the August traffic, it had taken five hours to drive from Köln, where he and Anne had lived for the last six years. They had come to this particular mid-size European city just over the Dutch border—Huishoven was its name—so Whitney could attend a conference where, they hoped, he would find a job.

Whitney was an astrophysicist, a researcher of invisible phenomena. With data printouts the size of nineteenth-century dictionaries he sought to

map the dimensions of red dwarfs, white dwarfs, black holes, and other astral bodies about which Anne had made it a practice to learn as little as possible since their marriage ten years earlier. They had come to Europe because Whitney's only offer when he finished his PhD had been from the *Kölner Institut*—a second, or perhaps third tier research facility. Now his contract was coming to an end and, since he was a foreigner, could not be renewed. To his puzzled dismay, the thin blue airmail envelopes he sent to institutes all over the globe flew quickly back like wounded carrier pigeons.

Wiping his face with a stiff, small towel, Whitney squinted into the mirror, observing as if from a great distance his sunken, querulous eyes.

"Where's my tie? Goddammit, where *is* my tie? It's almost time for the conference to start. I was supposed to meet Maxwell in the lobby five minutes ago."

Anne turned and retrieved the tie from the back of the chair where Whitney had put it a few minutes earlier. Inching slowly through the narrow space between the beds and the discolored washbasin, she rested a hand gingerly on Whitney's shoulder.

He flinched.

"Please don't. It's hard enough without you doing that."

Anne blinked rapidly. Her eyes, large as moons, rested briefly on Whitney, then turned away.

"It'll be nice to see Maxwell again, don't you think?" she said. "We haven't seen him since that canoe trip down the Green River. He was with that high school teacher then—what was her name? Stacey? Debbie? Thick glasses and dyed blonde hair? He pulled us out that day we capsized in the rain, remember?"

"Oh, so that's why you came—to have a chat about the good old days with our old friend Maxwell. I thought you came because your new friend Reinhardt was in London buying antiques with his assistant Irmengard instead of you, and you didn't want to be alone."

Anne blushed.

"He's not in London."

"But with Irmengard?"

"Is that really a concern for you now?" Anne said in an unsteady voice.

Whitney opened the door and was surprised to see Anne follow him.

"Out to see the town, eh?" he said.

“See you at dinner,” Anne said. “Six at the lobby bar, right?”

And, pushing ahead, she walked smartly ahead of Whitney down the narrow, dingy hall.

Whitney slumped on a circular couch of worn red velvet in the lobby and pretended to be absorbed in the conference program. The space, complete with regulation-issue potted rubber plants, was filling up quickly as the elevator disgorged, one after another, the *gliteratti* of international astrophysics. Noisy and cheerful in their baggy, wrinkled American suits, the MIT department passed by as if on parade. And there was Maxwell, Whitney’s former office mate when they had been graduate students together at Berkeley. Short-haired now and in a passingly respectable houndstooth suit, Maxwell surrounded by a circle of fawning admirers. After three—or was it four?—post docs, each one more prestigious than the one before, Maxwell had been hired into a tenured position. Rumor had it he was next in line to be department chair despite his relative youth.

Whitney could still remember the oddly metallic taste of the grass he

and Maxwell had smoked almost ten years ago now the last anti-Vietnam demo he'd gone to, the November moratorium in Golden Gate Park. Maxwell's hair, proudly greasy and uncombed, had been even longer than Whitney's. Sitting on the top of a hill, they had taken turns trying to shield the joint they were smoking from a chill November rain.

Maxwell gestured towards the far-off speaker, a young man in a tattered pea-green Army jacket.

"Can you hear what that guy is saying?"

"Of course not. Does it matter?"

Whitney took another toke and held it. The drug tamped down the fear he always had on these occasions. It was still early now, still a time for speechifying and chanting. Later, there would be broken glass from beer bottles precipitously discarded as people ran in all directions. There would be white puffs of tear gas, too, and screams as the San Francisco Tac Squad exercised their billy clubs from the safety of the horses they were sitting on.

An older woman in a yellow raincoat and rubber wellingtons stood before him, holding out a thermos cup.

"Like some coffee?"

Whitney shook his head.

“Sure?” said the woman. “We have brownies too. It’s going to be a long day.”

Behind her stood a small group of people were holding signs. “Orinda Quakers Against Vietnam.” “Walnut Creek Quaker Meeting for Peace.” “Hey Hey Ho Ho LBJ has got to go.” All had warm coats and looked to be in their forties if not older. Several sheltered themselves from the rain under large black umbrellas. They made him realize what an amateur he was in, as they all called it, the struggle.

“My father was killed in the last war,” Whitney said to the woman. “In France. A place called Liège. He was shot in the leg and a tank ran over him. An *American* tank. I guess they didn’t see him, or maybe they did. I was adopted by my stepfather when I was five. He’s all for fighting the commies in Vietnam.”

“Of course he doesn’t have to go himself, does he?” said the woman.

She smiled in a way Whitney associated with the librarians of his childhood.

“You should be very proud,” she said. “Some other family won’t have to

suffer like yours because you came here today.”

“Maybe,” said Whitney. “Then again, maybe not.”

Just that morning he had sent his draft board his application for conscientious objector status. He and Anne had agreed to get married so she would have the right to testify at his hearing. He had felt so sure as he had watched the Manila envelope drop down into the black vortex of the mailbox. Now, as the Tac Squad prepared to fire the first tear gas canisters of the day, he wondered. The paper he and Maxwell wrote together had just been accepted at *Phys. Rev. Letters*. Would spending five years in prison change anything besides him?

He looked up now from the sagging velvet couch to see the MIT crowd moving through the crowded lobby in a slow Brownian motion. He should go over and say something to Maxwell. He should ask him for help. Yes, he should do that. After all, wasn't that what he had come for?

Whitney opened his mouth; shut it; opened it again. Sweat was breaking out on his forehead like acne. An invisible pane of glass seemed to separate him from the others. Would anyone notice if he screamed? He arranged his lips in a smile he hoped looked normal.

Oh, why he had written Maxwell that letter asking to meet at this conference? He could lose himself in the crowd now if it weren't for that. He had always liked how Maxwell's way of being equally pleasant to everyone, secretary and Institute head alike, inhibited deeper contact. He did remember that Green River trip Anne had mentioned. They had started on a splendid April day. The sparkling fields were full of fresh-smelling local greens called *ramps* that looked like but tasted more bitter than green onions. They had passed bottles of Anchor Steam from one battered aluminum canoe to another, accompanied by sweet butter and brie on the fennel-laced Swedish rye bread Anne had baked specially for the trip. Two days later, when he and Anne had capsized, it had been Maxwell who pulled them out while holding on to the rope of their canoe.

A man with a receding hair line above which was a mass of thin, curly red hair stood before Whitney. Above the houndstooth suit, the sallow face was still familiar.

Maxwell thumped Whitney on the arm.

"Hey, hey, whaddya say? Long time no etcetera."

"Aw-right," Whitney said, thumping back without enthusiasm.

When had his 60s era grad student vocabulary had morphed into just one more foreign language?

Maxwell looked around.

"Where's Anne?"

"She's meeting us later," said Whitney.

She's condescending to spend the weekend with me rather than with her German lover who—unlike me—has money and stability, he thought.

"Oh," said Maxwell. "I thought maybe you two had split up or something. Almost everybody has. What the hell. This is the Age of Serial Monogamy, right? Just like Henry VIII and his six wives only nowadays you don't have to kill them. But seriously, Whitney, it's great to see you."

"Who's split up?"

Whitney cursed himself for the edge in his voice.

"Well, Wisznewski for one. You remember his wife?"

Whitney nodded, realized he didn't, and then felt ashamed to admit it.

"She ran off last year to become a forest ranger in Yellowstone. Always wanted to be a forest ranger, apparently."

Maxwell chuckled.

"Wiszniewski was absolutely crazed for a while there. Gave her a BMW for a good-bye present when she divorced him. Can't see giving any woman a BMW, myself."

"How is he doing? Is he better?"

Maxwell gazed around the lobby.

"Wiszniewski," Whitney said loudly. "Is he better?"

He tried to suppress a weird sense that his own fate rested on the answer.

"Oh yes," said Maxwell without interest. "Much."

A young woman in a flimsy print dress walked to Maxwell and put her hand on his arm. Her blonde hair twirled smartly in the air like cheerleader pom poms.

"This is my friend Antje," said Maxwell. "I am saying that right, aren't I-- *Ant -je?*"

"Right you are," she said in a Cockney English overlaid with a Dutch singsong.

"How do you do," said Whitney, nonplussed.

"We met in the bar last night after I got in. Antje likes Americans."

She smiled at Maxwell as if he were a child with a learning disability.

"Oh yes, Americans are the best."

Whitney fought back a feeling of repulsion. It was awful to see Maxwell reduced to this. Of course it *was* one solution to the problem. Maxwell *had* been at three institutes in three countries since graduation.

"How's Anne?" said Maxwell. "I heard she was having rather a hard time."

What had Maxwell heard? He was sorry now he had made that crack about Reinhardt going to London with Irmengard. Anne had stalked off without another word, not even a good-bye when they reached the lobby.

"I don't suppose there's much for Anne to do here, is there, with her PhD in—what was it? Medieval music?"

Whitney felt sick. It was all his fault about Anne. He knew that.

What had that article he and Maxwell written together been about? Carbon lines? Homeostasis in the interstellar medium? To his chagrin, Whitney couldn't remember. At the other end of the lobby, the crowd was drifting toward the door to the plenary session. Whitney heard himself say in a near-whisper:

“Maxwell, how about meeting me and Anne for dinner later?”

Maxwell stared at the crowd as if he were looking for someone.

“Sorry, old pal,” he said.

“Then maybe a drink in the lobby bar at 6? Anne’ll be there.”

Maxwell’s head bobbed up and down like a person in the early stages of St. Vitus Dance. He looked down and pursed his lips.

“Sure,” he said. “Why not?”

No sooner had Anne left the square when the rain started up again, a light but insistent drizzle. She darted into a little boutique, not meaning to buy, but there it was: a swath of dark muslin, a shade somewhere between violet and cerise draped against a sparkling white counter. Surely it couldn’t hurt to try it on. At the very least it would help the time pass until the rain stopped again.

Quickly she slipped the dress over her head in the cramped dressing room and observed herself in the full-length mirror. A square neckline hinted

at the small breasts of which until recently she had always been ashamed. Below the bodice, folds shaped like upside-down tulip petals fell softly away. A macramé shawl, triangle-shaped and in the same dusky shade, completed the Art Nouveau effect, each fringe ending in a tiny cobalt-color bead. She held it up behind her back, one edge from the long side in each hand so it was absolutely symmetrical across her body, then let it fall. How German of her, that craze for symmetry, that imitation of Reinhardt! As she swirled this way and that before the full length mirror, the beads moved in the opposite direction, making a sound like miniature castanets. Reinhardt was sure to like it. Besides, it made her so much beautiful than tight-assed Irmengard with her gray suit and single strand of pearls. What had happened between him and Irmengard had meant nothing, Reinhardt had assured her. Besides, it was over now.

Once she had been a girl who dropped things, who refused to shake hands when everyone else shook hands, or was the only one in a group to extend a hand. Now, a European woman of the world looked back at her from the mirror. Her short brown hair, pulled back on each side by tortoise-shell combs, shone with natural highlights like an ad for expensive hair conditioner

in *Elle*. Her eyes—had they always had those flecks of hazel?—were iridescent with joy. What had happened to the hapless, naïve young girl she had been once? Would she reappear if she went back to, as she and Whitney both called it now, “the States”?

They had first noticed each other at an anti-war demonstration in '68 when they had been the only white people to stand at the singing of the Black Panther National Anthem. They had both been graduate students at Berkeley then. Whitney was a shy and quirky young man who carried a slide rule in his shoulder bag so he could derive standard formulas rather than being bothered to look them up as everyone else did. Once she had gone with him to a colloquium and been surprised to hear him pose difficult questions in a whispery, hostile voice from a perch in the last row. She had been a student of medieval poetry and music then, specializing in the 14^h century Provençal *aubade*. She could read courtly love songs in five dead languages and had picked up ancient Greek for fun. On the day they met Anne was wearing a leather miniskirt bought used that listed to one side, whether because it was defective or she was doing the tie wrong, she couldn't figure out. Whitney was wearing stonewashed jeans and regulation granny glasses. He had a scruffy

but well-groomed beard. Later on, Anne was never sure which had attracted her more, the beard or Whitney's deeply held pacifism. In their first conversation, he told her about his father, how he was going to apply for conscientious objection, how he was ready, if need be, to spend five years in an Arizona prison.

“Does the dress please Madam?”

The shopgirl's words startled her back into reality.

It was much too expensive. But if Reinhardt liked it. . . .

Outside, the rain had stopped. Once more people were wandering through the narrow, twisting streets, the hum of summer conversations ricocheting off the ancient stone. The air, still damp from the rain, was even hotter than before the storm. Anne began to walk quickly, not caring she was going.

And then she was at a cul-de-sac. A vendor selling Fanta and the inevitable currywurst looked just like the ones in Germany except that the vendor had light brown skin—a legacy, no doubt from the Dutch colonial era. Young and against the war in Vietnam, she had thought America the most evil of countries, and Americans the most selfish of peoples. Europe had taught her

better.

“*Eine Fanta, bitte,*” she said, rummaging in her bag for some Dutch coins.

The man gave her a sullen look as he handed her a can of the sweet syrupy soda. Ah, she had forgotten where she was and spoken German!

No doubt he felt the same kind of rage at the sight of her she often felt at the Germans, but in one important way the vendor was more privileged than she. As a colonial, he would have Dutch citizenship. He wouldn't need a visa to live in Europe. She would if she tried to stay in Germany without Whitney.

And now she was outside the maze, on a modern street next to a canal. A barge went languidly by, then a sailboat filled with tourists hooded in wet anoraks. Suddenly a bright late-afternoon Dutch sky opened up as if into heaven. At the end of the street, miraculously, a small garden. A *hortus conclusus*. A place for reflection and prayer. Anne unlatched the low gate and went in.

Two large-boned Dutch women sat on a bench, talking in low voices. Next to them, an old man in a stained black suit puffed contentedly on a cigar. A Siamese cat on a leash led its owner around the edges of the neat flowerbeds. In the center of the space, water splashed down the sides of a

fountain that was three concentric circles topped with a small bronze Cupid, complete with bow. What was that Latin inscription etched on the side? Ah yes, she had got it now: "For the sake of sin must man suffer: yet you, O Death, will gain no victory."

The day Whitney had told her, they had been eating lunch on campus in the redwood grove as they often did. Brown bread she made with molasses and some Jarlsberg cheese. The musty smell of the fallen redwood needles soothed; sunlight from far above slanted its way through the leaves. Even at noon when the demonstrations started in Sproul Plaza, the bullhorned voices reached them only as muffled noise.

"I got a letter from the draft board," Whitney said. "In response to my CO application."

He looked away from her.

"They've given me a permanent deferment."

"What?"

"Yes. Because my father was killed in the war."

Anne felt a sharp stab of disappointment, brief but undeniable.

It was called a "sole surviving son" deferment, enacted after World War

I, he explained. The idea was that a war widow shouldn't have to lose the family farm just because she had no man to help work it.

But Whitney had been adopted by his stepfather. He had two half brothers. There *had* been a family farm in North Dakota, but that had been sold thirty years ago during the Great Depression.

"How can you accept this deferment and still say you are against the war?" she had wanted to ask.

But she had said nothing.

That was almost ten years ago. Now she was in a very different protected space, and she was a different person. She looked up to see that the two women were gone, as were the old man and the cat. On the horizon, the burning orange ball of the sun was falling slowly downwards. Huge fluffy clouds moved across the darkening sky, their ever-changing images mirrored in the calm waters of the canal. It was time to go if she was to meet Whitney at six in the bar.

Anne took a cigarillo from the silver Art Nouveau case Reinhardt had given her from his shop, gorgeously embossed with the initials of some unknown former owner, *F.R.* Fumbling in her purse for a light, she ignored the

trembling in her hands. It would stop in a minute.

"May I?"

Anne bent over the little flame that was offered, then looked up.

He was clean-shaven, the man standing over her, in a dark blue tailored business suit with gold monogrammed cufflinks. About forty, she thought. His stare, filled with erotic curiosity, reminded her of Reinhard. At once she felt calmer than she had all day. Yes, that was what men did in one's life: why did no one explain that when one was young?

"English?" he asked.

"No, American."

"Ahhh."

"You are from this place—Huishoven?"

He laughed.

"Oh no. I am Swedish, from Stockholm."

He was a salesman. Vacuum cleaners and replacement parts. In Amsterdam for a few days to do some business. He had thought a weekend in a small provincial Dutch town would be charming. And now he had met someone unexpected, someone interesting.

“My hotel is not far away,” he said with a pleasant smile. “Very nice, four stars. Just off the main square. Shall go there and have a drink?”

To her horror, she had an impulse to say *yes*. She could arrive at the bar a little late. She could make up some excuse. She took a puff of the cigarillo, then blew it out slowly. The trembling was out of control now. Not because she thought of such a thing, but because she could think of no reason not to.

Anne clamped her lips shut, then opened them.

“I have to go now. My husband is waiting.”

The man made a noise. He looked at her with a scornful smile.

“Ah, yes. The American husband, the American Puritanism. Well, all right.”

He rose from the bench as if to give her a moment to reconsider. Anne stared at the ground and watched the cigarillo transform itself into ash.

When she looked up she was alone. Only the statue with its bow and arrow stared sightlessly back.

Anne rose and looked about for the shopping bag, which she had put under the bench. It certainly wasn't there now. Frantic, she turned every which way.

Ah, there it was, under the bench next to hers. How had it gotten there?

Well, it didn't matter. Perhaps not everything was lost.

The hotel lounge was dim, and it took a minute for Anne's eyes to adjust. Clouds of cigarette smoke drifted over the bar under yellow inset lights. Two large dark-skinned men in tropical shirts were talking over bottles of Amstel. At last she spied Whitney, Maxwell, and a very young woman at a far-off table. Waving briefly at Maxwell, Anne sat down and ordered a *genever*, then remembered that Dutch gin always gave her a vicious headache. From the long silence at the table, she had the impression that Whitney and Maxwell had discussed everything and everyone and Whitney's situation and now they had nothing left to say.

The waitress set a daiquiri glass down in front of Maxwell. It was filled with a dark liquor and meticulously rimmed with powdered sugar.

"Hey—what's this?" Maxwell said, irritated. "I ordered a Manhattan. Come back here!"

Really, Anne thought. Whitney should have warned Maxwell about European interpretations of American cocktails.

“Good to see you, Anne,” said Maxwell with a brief smile. “This is my friend Antje.”

The young woman put out a hand in a stiff, formal way, like a caricature of someone in a Hollywood movie. Stifling a giggle, Anne took the hand and shook it gently. Where had Maxwell found such a person? And why did he keep her with him? Anne looked at Whitney out of the corner of her eye. He was examining his hands with what she always thought of as his “hurt child” look.

“Shriee-ee! Ka-shriee!”

Overhead, a white-feathered bird bounded madly from one side of a cage to the other.

“Eee-ooou! Eee-ooou! Ka-shriee!”

The bird flew onto a little swing and hung upside down, looking at them with its rapidly moving eyes.

“My God, what is that thing?” Anne said. “Can’t someone put a sheet over it? Why would anyone want a parrot in a bar anyway?”

“It’s not a parrot,” said the young woman coolly. “It’s a cockatoo. It comes from Indonesia. I was born in Indonesia. In Jakarta.”

She pronounced it as three short, equal syllables: *Ja-kar-ta*.

"Where are those men at the bar from?" Anne said. "I saw a vendor this afternoon who looked like them."

"Indonesia," said Antje. "Have you been? It's very different. Always hot, always sunny. And festivals—my God so many festivals. Music with no beginning, no end. Not like here where everyone stays inside their tiny little house with its curtains open so everyone can spy on everyone else and it's cold and it rains for months and months and months."

She stared into the darkness at the dancers in their glittering costumes, the gamelon players, the warm eternal sun.

"So you grew up in Indonesia?" Anne asked.

"Ah, that would have been good. But the revolution came and we all had to leave. I will never forget the day the ship docked at Amsterdam. It was in December. I had not known it was possible for a place to be so gray, so cold."

Why was it always happiness one could not forget? Anne thought. Even now, she could go back to Whitney were it not for that.

Raising his glass of *genever*, Whitney stared at it if it contained a set of mystifying and crucial data.

"I've been thinking about Sydney," said Whitney in what he clearly hoped was a casual tone. "Or Chile? Anything doing there, do you think?"

Maxwell shook his head.

"Things are tight everywhere, man. Ah, the good old days of the sixties-- you know, 'while you're up get me a grant.'"

Anne stirred the gin and drank it down. She had forgotten how it smelled like juniper berries but had no taste. Well, at least the headache would not disappoint.

"Ka-shriee!"

The bird gave another sharp cry, then swung violently back and forth. A few feathers drifted to the bottom of the cage.

"Well now," said Maxwell. "Is oof-fum woof-ums hungry? Have we kept oof-fum woof-ums waiting long enough to eat with all this boring talk?"

Antje covered her face with a smile that did not quite reach to her eyes and lit a cigarette. Once more she looked merely tawdry.

"I'm so sorry but I have to leave now," said Maxwell. "Very good to see you, Whitney, Anne."

He held out a hand to Whitney, then hugged Anne.

As he did, Anne liked Maxwell again. It had been her fault they had capsized on the Green River. She was sitting at the front of the canoe and her job had been to read the river for V-shapes of flowing water, which meant a stone was hidden below. But it had been raining all day, it was cold, and she was bored. The boat listed to one side just as she saw the V, but it was too late. Her right foot caught in a canoe rung; terror gave her strength to free it. After Maxwell rescued them and the canoe, he made them Swiss Miss cocoa on the Bunsen burner he used as a camping stove. He couldn't save them now, but he had saved them when he could. Surely that was the most you could ask of anyone.

"I'm going up to the room to change," Whitney to Anne said as soon as they were alone. "Why don't you have another drink? I'll be back in a minute."

Feeling abandoned, Anne sat down again under the yellow lamps, watching the cigars of the men at the bar glow and dim like unstable campfires. She could not stop thinking about the Dutch girl. Was there not some element of the chocolate-box about herself and Reinhardt? To be sure, in her case the chocolates were Art Nouveau cigarette cases and trips to London in the yellow Mercedes coupe. But wasn't the same principle at work?

She pushed the thought away. After all, it wasn't Reinhardt's money she was after. No: it was that hard, genial shell he had been born with that protected him from certain kinds of pain. His sense of security. His stable, small-town, self-confident life.

Well, she had tried to make Whitney happy. She had tried.

A troupe of German tourists passed through the lobby on their way to dinner, chattering on about the awful rain, the awful food. How comfortable they looked--as comfortable as Reinhardt or Irmengard in her perfect gray suit with the perfect strand of pearls. For a moment she hated them all; then she felt ashamed.

Where the devil had Whitney gone? A moment passed; then another. Had something happened?

Anne got up and walked quickly towards the little elevator. The light was on, but the arrow stuck firmly at the third floor. She took the stairs first one, then two at a time.

At the fourth floor hallway, she began to run. A maid's cart blocked the narrow passage.

Anne pushed it to aside.

"Madam!" said a slight, dark-skinned woman coming out of a room, towels over one arm. "Madam!"

He lay on the bed fully dressed. His face was dead white, whiter than she had ever seen a human face. His eyelids fluttered but stayed closed.

"Whitney?" Anne said in a small voice.

She picked up a hand and rubbed it.

"Whitney," she said, louder. "Whitney."

Slowly she undid the top buttons of his shirt and began to stroke his chest. His heart beat erratically, a slow thump followed by a long, unpredictable pause.

To her surprise, she could feel him rising up beneath her. She hesitated, then undid his zipper, pushed her underpants aside, and lowered herself onto him. At once he began to breathe quickly through his mouth. A minute or so later he shuddered, fell back, and was still.

Anne crawled off the bed, dizzy. Supporting herself against the flowered wall, she stumbled into the hallway. In the tiny bathroom, it took a long time for the water in the tub spray to get hot. One by one she undid the buttons on her blouse like a person doing this for the first time. It seemed to her she was

some other person, a person being observed from a great distance. This other person unwrapped a little bar of brown soap, stepped into the bathtub, lathered, rinsed, stepped out, and wrapped herself up carefully in the large, thin towel.

By the time she returned to the room, the blood had come back to Whitney's face.

Hallelujah, she thought. Oh hallelujah.

He opened his eyes and stared at the ceiling. His face looked completely normal now.

"Promise you won't leave me," he said. "I think I'll die if you leave me."

Her entire body began to shake. She hated him now. This was how she felt about Reinhardt. This was exactly how she felt about Reinhardt.

Anne looked around for her purse, finally found it, and took a cigarillo out of the Art Nouveau case. For the first time she wondered who *FR* of the *fleur-de-lys* initials had been. A man? A woman? In any case, gone forever. And *FR's* life, so different from any she would ever have. Who would get this case when she was finished with it, or it with her?

"*Promise,*" said Whitney, his eyes still closed.

Anne blew a smoke ring into the room, then another. The plastic bag with the dress hung openly on the little chair with its bilious green paint. She got up and cranked the window open.

A sound of distant voices, a far-off "*Ka-schrieeee.!* *Schrieee-ya,!*" glasses being plunked down carelessly on wooden surfaces. These sounds comforted her, as if at least they could be counted on. She put one hand out the window and let it feel the desultory rain falling now on the dark, empty square.