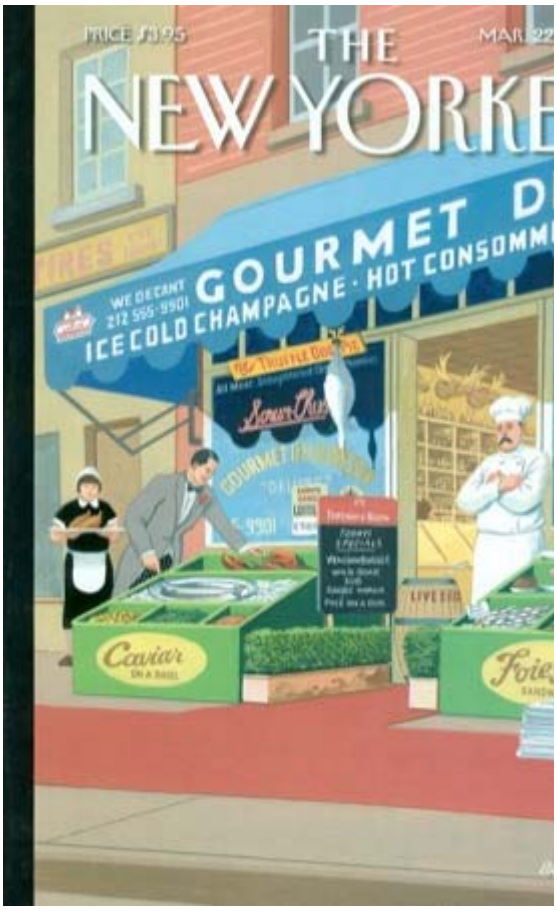
THE NEW YORKER

FICTION

PASSION

by Alice Munro

MARCH 22, 2004



When Grace goes looking for the Traverses' summer house, in the Ottawa Valley, it has been many years since she was in that part of the country. And, of course, things have changed. Highway 7 now avoids towns that it used to go right through, and it goes straight in places where, as she remembers, there used to be curves. This part of the Canadian Shield has many small lakes, which most maps have no room to identify. Even when she locates Sabot Lake, or thinks she has, there seem to be too many roads leading into it from the county road, and then, when she chooses one, too many paved roads crossing it, all with names that she does not recall. In fact, there were no street names when she was here, more than forty years ago. There was no pavement, either—just one dirt road running toward the lake, then another running rather haphazardly along the lake's edge.

Now there is a village. Or perhaps it's a suburb, because she does not see a post office or even the most unpromising convenience store. The settlement lies four or five streets deep along the lake, with houses strung close together on small lots. Some of them are undoubtedly summer places—the windows already boarded up, as they always were for the winter. But many others show all the signs of year-round habitation—habitation, in many cases, by people who have filled the yards with plastic gym sets and outdoor grills and training bikes and motorcycles and picnic tables, where some of them sit now having lunch or beer on this warm September day. There are other people, not so visible—students, maybe, or old hippies living alone—who have put up flags or sheets of tinfoil for curtains. Small, mostly decent, cheap houses, some fixed to withstand the winter and some not.

Grace would have turned back if she hadn't caught sight of the octagonal house with the fretwork along the roof and doors in every other wall. The Woods house. She has always remembered it as having eight doors, but it seems there are only four. She was never inside, to see how, or if, the space is divided into rooms. Mr. and Mrs. Woods were old—as Grace is now—and did not seem to be visited by any children or friends. Their quaint, original house now has a forlorn, mistaken look. Neighbors with their ghetto blasters and their half-dismembered vehicles, their toys and washing, are pushed up against either side of it.

It is the same with the Travers house, when she finds it, a quarter of a mile farther on. The road goes past it now, instead of ending there, and the houses next door are only a few feet away from its deep, wraparound veranda.

It was the first house of its kind that Grace had ever seen—one story high, the roof continuing without a break out over that veranda, on all sides—a style that makes you think of hot summers. She has since seen many like it, in Australia.

It used to be possible to run from the veranda across the dusty end of the driveway, through a sandy, trampled patch of weeds and wild strawberries, and then jump—no, actually, wade—into the lake. Now Grace can hardly even see the lake, because a substantial house—one of the few regular suburban houses here, with a two-car garage—has been built across that very route.

What was Grace really looking for when she undertook this expedition? Perhaps the worst thing would have been to find exactly what she thought she was after—the sheltering roof, the screened windows, the lake in front, the stand of maple and cedar and balm-of-Gilead trees behind. Perfect preservation, the past intact, when nothing of the kind could be said of herself. To find something so diminished, still existing but made irrelevant—as the Travers house now seems to be, with its added dormer windows, its startling blue paint—might be less hurtful in the long run.

And what if it had been gone altogether? She might have made a fuss, if anybody had come along to listen to her; she might have bewailed the loss. But mightn't a feeling of relief have passed over her, too, of old confusions and obligations wiped away?

Mr. Travers had built the house—that is, he'd had it built—as a surprise wedding present for Mrs. Travers. When Grace first saw it, it was perhaps thirty years old. Mrs. Travers's children were widely spaced: Gretchen, twenty-eight or twenty-nine, already married and a mother herself; Maury, twenty-one, going into his last year of college; and then there was Neil, in his mid-thirties. But Neil was not a Travers. He was Neil Borrow. Mrs. Travers had been married before, to a man who had died. For a few years, she had earned her living, and supported her child, as a teacher of business English at a secretarial school. Mr. Travers, when he referred to this period in her life before he'd met her, spoke of it as a time of hardship almost like penal servitude, something that would barely be made up for by a whole lifetime of comfort, which he would happily provide.

Mrs. Travers herself didn't speak of it that way at all. She had lived with Neil in a big old house broken up into apartments, not far from the railway tracks in the town of Pembroke, and many of the stories she told at the dinner table were about events there, about her fellow-tenants, and the French-Canadian landlord, whose harsh French and tangled English she imitated. The stories could have had titles, like the stories by James Thurber that Grace had read in "The Anthology of American Humor," found unaccountably on the library shelf at the back of her grade-ten classroom. The Night Old Mrs. Cromarty Got Out on the Roof. How the Postman Courted Miss Flowers. The Dog Who Ate Sardines.

Mr. Travers never told stories and had little to say at dinner, but if he came upon you looking, for instance, at the fieldstone fireplace he might say, "Are you interested in rocks?" and tell you how he had searched and searched for that particular pink granite, because Mrs. Travers had once exclaimed over a rock like that, glimpsed in a road cut. Or he might show you the not really unusual features that he personally had added to the house—the corner cupboard shelves swinging outward in the kitchen, the storage space under the window seats. He was a tall, stooped man with a soft voice and thin hair slicked over his scalp. He wore bathing shoes when he went into the water and, though he did not look fat in his clothes, a pancake fold of white flesh slopped over the top of his bathing trunks.

Grace was working that summer at the hotel at Bailey's Falls, just north of Sabot Lake. Early in the season, the Travers family had come to dinner there. She had not noticed them—it was a busy night, and they were not at one of her tables. She was setting up a table for a new party when she realized that someone was waiting to speak to her.

It was Maury. He said, "I was wondering if you would like to go out with me sometime."

Grace barely looked up from shooting out the silverware. She said, "Is this a dare?" Because his voice was high and nervous, and he stood there stiffly, as if forcing himself. And it was known that sometimes a party of young men from the cottages would dare one another to ask a waitress out. It wasn't entirely a joke—they really would show up, if accepted, though sometimes they only meant to park, without taking you to a movie or even for coffee. So it was considered rather shameful, rather hard up, of a girl to agree.

"What?" he said painfully, and then Grace did stop and look at him. It seemed to her that she saw the whole of him in that moment, the true Maury. Scared, fierce, innocent, determined.

"O.K.," she said quickly. She might have meant, O.K., calm down, I can see it's not a dare. Or, O.K., I'll go out with you. She herself hardly knew which. But he took it as agreement, and at once arranged—without lowering his voice, or noticing the looks that he was getting from the diners around them—to pick her up after work the following night.

He did take her to the movies. They saw "Father of the Bride." Grace hated it. She hated girls like Elizabeth Taylor's character—spoiled rich girls of whom nothing was ever asked but that they wheedle and demand. Maury said that it was just a comedy, but she told him

that that was not the point. She could not quite make clear what her point was. Anybody would have assumed that it was because she worked as a waitress and was too poor to go to college, and because, if she wanted that kind of wedding, she would have to save up for years to pay for it herself. (Maury did think this, and was stricken with respect for her, almost with reverence.)

She could not explain or even quite understand that it wasn't jealousy she felt; it was rage. And not because she couldn't shop like that or dress like that but because that was what girls were supposed to be like. That was what men—people, everybody—thought they *should* be like: beautiful, treasured, spoiled, selfish, pea-brained. That was what a girl had to be, to be fallen in love with. Then she'd become a mother and be all mushily devoted to her babies. Not selfish anymore, but just as pea-brained. Forever.

Grace was fuming about this while sitting beside a boy who had fallen in love with her because he had believed—instantly—in the integrity and uniqueness of her mind and soul, had seen her poverty as a romantic gloss on that. (He would have known she was poor not just because of her job but because of her strong Ottawa Valley accent.)

He honored her feelings about the movie. Indeed, now that he had listened to her angry struggles to explain, he struggled to tell her something in turn. He said he saw now that it was not anything so simple, so *feminine*, as jealousy. He saw that. It was that she would not stand for frivolity, was not content to be like most girls. She was special.

Grace was wearing a dark-blue ballerina skirt, a white blouse, through whose eyelet frills the upper curve of her breasts was visible, and a wide rose-colored elasticized belt. There was a discrepancy, no doubt, between the way she presented herself and the way she wanted to be judged. But nothing about her was dainty or pert or polished, in the style of the time. A bit ragged around the edges, in fact. Giving herself Gypsy airs, with the very cheapest silver-painted bangles, and the long, wild-looking, curly dark hair that she had to put into a snood when she waited on tables.

Special.

He told his mother about her, and his mother said, "You must bring this Grace of yours to dinner."

It was all new to her, all immediately delightful. In fact, she fell in love with Mrs. Travers, almost exactly as Maury had fallen in love with her, though it was not in her nature, of course, to be as openly dumbfounded, as worshipful, as he was.

Grace had been brought up by her aunt and uncle, really her great-aunt and great-uncle. Her mother had died when she was three years old, and her father had moved to Saskatchewan, where he now had another family. Her stand-in parents were kind, even proud of her. But they were not given to conversation. The uncle made his living caning chairs, and he had taught Grace how to cane so that she could help him and eventually take over the business when his eyesight failed. But then she had got the job at Bailey's Falls for

the summer, and though it was hard for him—and for her aunt as well—to let her go, they believed that she needed a taste of life before she settled down.

She was twenty years old and had just finished high school. She should have finished a year earlier, but she had made an odd choice. In the very small town where she lived—it was not far from Mrs. Travers's Pembroke—there was nevertheless a high school that offered five grades, to prepare students for the government exams and what was then called senior matriculation. It was never necessary to study all the subjects offered, and at the end of her first year in grade thirteen—what should have been her final year—Grace took examinations in history and botany and zoology and English and Latin and French, receiving unnecessarily high marks. But there she was in September, back again, proposing to study physics and chemistry, trigonometry, geometry, and algebra, though these subjects were considered particularly hard for girls. She did creditably well in all three branches of mathematics and in the sciences, though her results were not as spectacular as they had been the year before. She thought, then, of teaching herself Greek and Spanish and Italian and German, so that she could try those exams the following year—those subjects were not taught by any teacher at her school—but the principal took her aside and told her that this was getting her nowhere, since she was not going to be able to go to college, and, anyway, no college required such a full plate. Why was she doing it? Did she have any plans?

No, Grace said, she just wanted to learn everything you could learn for free. Before she started her career of caning.

It was the principal who knew the manager of the inn at Bailey's Falls and said that he would put in a word for her if she wanted to try for a summer waitressing job. He, too, mentioned getting "a taste of life."

So even the man in charge of learning in that place did not believe that learning had to do with life. He thought that what she had done was crazy, as everyone else did.

Except Mrs. Travers, who had been sent to business college, instead of a real college, in order to make herself useful, and who now wished like anything, she said, that she had crammed her mind first with what was useless.

By trading shifts with another girl, Grace managed to get Sundays off, from breakfast on. This meant that she always worked late on Saturdays. In effect, it meant that she had traded time with Maury for time with Maury's family. She and Maury could never see a movie now, never have a real date. Instead, he would pick her up when she got off work, around eleven at night, and they would go for a drive, stop for ice cream or a hamburger—Maury was scrupulous about not taking her into a bar, because she was not yet twenty-one—then end up parking somewhere.

Grace's memories of these parking sessions—which might last till one or two in the morning—proved to be much hazier than her memories of sitting at the Traverses' round dining table or, after everybody had finally got up and moved, with coffee or fresh drinks,

on the tawny leather sofa or the cushioned wicker chairs at the other end of the room. (There was never any fuss about doing the dishes; a woman Mrs. Travers called “the able Mrs. Abel” would come in the morning.)

Maury always dragged cushions onto the rug and sat there. Gretchen, who never dressed for dinner in anything but jeans or Army pants, usually sat cross-legged in a wide chair. Both she and Maury were big and broad-shouldered, with something of their mother’s good looks—her wavy caramel-colored hair, warm hazel eyes, easily sun-browned skin. Even, in Maury’s case, her dimple. (The other waitresses called Maury “cute” and “hunky,” and respected Grace somewhat more since she had got him.) Mrs. Travers, however, was barely five feet tall, and under her bright muumuus seemed not fat but sturdily plump, like a child who hasn’t stretched up yet. And the shine, the intentness, of her eyes, the gaiety that was always ready to break out in them, had not been inherited. Nor had the rough red, almost a rash, on her cheeks, which was probably a result of going out in any weather without thinking about her complexion, and which, like her figure, like her muumuus, showed her independence.

There were sometimes guests, in addition to Grace, on these Sunday evenings. A couple, maybe a single person as well, usually close to Mr. and Mrs. Travers’s age, and not unlike them. The women would be eager and witty, and the men quieter, slower, more tolerant. These people told amusing stories, in which the joke was often on themselves. (Grace has been an engaging talker for so long now that she sometimes gets sick of herself, and it’s hard for her to remember how novel these dinner conversations once seemed to her. On the rare occasions when her aunt and uncle had had company, there had been only praise of and apology for the food, discussion of the weather, and a fervent wish for the meal to be finished as soon as possible.)

After dinner at the Travers house, if the evening was cool enough, Mr. Travers lit a fire, and they played what Mrs. Travers called “idiotic word games,” for which, in fact, people had to be fairly clever to win. Here was where somebody who had been rather quiet at dinner might begin to shine. Mock arguments could be built up in defense of preposterous definitions. Gretchen’s husband, Wat, did this, and so, after a bit, did Grace, to Mrs. Travers’s and Maury’s delight (with Maury calling out, to everyone’s amusement but Grace’s, “See? I told you. She’s smart”). Mrs. Travers herself led the way in this making up of ridiculous words, insuring that the play did not become too serious or any player too anxious.

The only time there was a problem was one evening when Mavis, who was married to Mrs. Travers’s son Neil, came to dinner. Mavis and Neil and their two children were staying nearby, at her parents’ place down the lake. But that night she came by herself—Neil was a doctor, and he was busy in Ottawa that weekend. Mrs. Travers was disappointed, but she rallied, calling out in cheerful dismay, “But the children aren’t in Ottawa, surely?”

“Unfortunately not,” Mavis said. “But they’re thoroughly awful. They’d shriek all through dinner. The baby’s got prickly heat, and God knows what’s the matter with Mikey.”

She was a slim, suntanned woman in a purple dress, with a matching wide purple band holding back her dark hair. Handsome, but with little pouches of boredom or disapproval hiding the corners of her mouth. She left most of her dinner untouched on her plate, explaining that she had an allergy to curry.

“Oh, Mavis. What a shame,” Mrs. Travers said. “Is this new?”

“Oh, no. I’ve had it for ages, but I used to be polite about it. Then I got sick of throwing up half the night.”

“If you’d only told me . . . What can we get you?”

“Don’t worry about it. I’m fine. I don’t have any appetite anyway, what with the heat and the joys of motherhood.”

She lit a cigarette.

Afterward, in the game, she got into an argument with Wat over a definition he’d used, and when the dictionary proved it acceptable she said, “Oh, I’m sorry. I guess I’m just outclassed by you people.” And when it came time for everybody to hand in their own word on a slip of paper for the next round she smiled and shook her head. “I don’t have one.”

“Oh, Mavis,” Mrs. Travers said.

And Mr. Travers said, “Come on, Mavis. Any old word will do.”

“But I don’t have any old word. I’m sorry. I just feel stupid tonight. The rest of you just play around me.”

Which they did, everybody pretending that nothing was wrong, while she smoked and continued to smile her determined, unhappy smile. In a little while she got up and said that she couldn’t leave her children on their grandparents’ hands any longer. She’d had a lovely and instructive visit, and now she had to go home.

“I must give you an Oxford dictionary next Christmas,” she said to nobody in particular before she left, with a merry, bitter little laugh. The Traverses’ dictionary, which Wat had used, was an American one.

When she was gone, none of them looked at one another. Mrs. Travers said, “Gretchen, do you have the strength to make us all a pot of coffee?” And Gretchen went off to the kitchen, muttering, “What fun. Jesus wept.”

“Well. Her life is trying,” Mrs. Travers said. “With the two little ones.”

On Wednesdays, Grace got a break between clearing breakfast and setting up dinner, and when Mrs. Travers found out about this she started driving up to Bailey’s Falls to bring her down to the lake for those free hours. Maury would be at work then—he was spending the summer with the road gang repairing Highway 7—and Wat would be in his office in Ottawa and Gretchen would be off with the children, swimming or rowing on the lake. Usually Mrs. Travers herself would announce that she had shopping to do or letters to

write, and she would leave Grace alone in the big, cool, shaded living-dining room, with its permanently dented leather sofa and crowded bookshelves.

"Read anything that takes your fancy," Mrs. Travers said. "Or curl up and go to sleep, if that's what you'd like. It's a hard job—you must be tired. I'll make sure you're back on time."

Grace never slept. She read. She barely moved, and her bare legs below her shorts became sweaty and stuck to the leather. Quite often she saw nothing of Mrs. Travers until it was time for her to be driven back to work.

In the car, Mrs. Travers would not start any sort of conversation until enough time had passed for Grace's thoughts to have shaken loose from whatever book she had been in. Then she might mention having read it herself, and say what she had thought of it—but always in a way that was both thoughtful and lighthearted. For instance, she said, of "Anna Karenina," "I don't know how many times I've read it, but I know that first I identified with Kitty, and then it was Anna—oh, it was awful with Anna—and now, you know, the last time, I found myself sympathizing with Dolly. When she goes to the country, you know, with all those children, and she has to figure out how to do the washing, there's the problem about the washtubs—I suppose that's just how your sympathies change as you get older. Passion gets pushed behind the washtubs. Don't pay any attention to me, anyway. You don't, do you?"

"I don't know if I pay much attention to anybody." Grace was surprised at herself, wondered if she sounded conceited. "But I like listening to you talk."

Mrs. Travers laughed. "I like listening to myself, too."

Somehow, by the middle of the summer Maury had begun to talk about their being married. This would not happen for quite a while, he said—not until after he was qualified and working as an engineer—but he spoke of it as something that she, as well as he, must be taking for granted. "When we are married," he'd say, and, instead of questioning or contradicting him, Grace would listen curiously.

When they were married, they would have a place on Sabot Lake. Not too close to his parents, not too far away. It would be just a summer place, of course. The rest of the time they would live wherever his work might take them. It could be anywhere—Peru, Iraq, the Northwest Territories. Grace was delighted by the idea of such travels—rather more than she was by the idea of what he spoke of, with a severe pride, as "our own home." None of this seemed at all real to her, but then the idea of helping her uncle, of taking on the life of a chair-caner in the town and in the very house where she had grown up, had never seemed real, either.

Maury kept asking her what she had told her aunt and uncle about him, when she was going to take him home to meet them. In fact, she had said nothing in her brief weekly

letters, except to mention that she was “going out with a boy who works around here for the summer.” She might have given the impression that he worked at the hotel.

It wasn’t as if she had never thought of getting married. That possibility had been in her mind, along with the life of caning chairs. In spite of the fact that nobody had ever courted her, she had felt sure that it *would* happen someday, and in exactly this way—with the man making up his mind immediately. He would see her and, having seen her, he would fall in love. In her imagination, he was handsome, like Maury. Passionate, like Maury. Pleasurable physical intimacies followed.

But this was the thing that had not happened. In Maury’s car, or out on the grass under the stars, she was willing. And Maury was ready, but not willing. He felt that it was his responsibility to protect her. And the ease with which she offered herself threw him off balance. He sensed, perhaps, that it was cold—a deliberate offering that he could not understand and that did not fit in at all with his notions of her. She herself did not realize how cold she was—she believed that her show of eagerness would lead to the pleasures she knew about, in solitude and in her imagination, and she felt that it was up to Maury to take over. Which he would not do.

These sieges left them both disturbed and slightly angry or ashamed, so that they could not stop kissing, clinging, and using fond words to make it up to each other as they said good night. It was a relief to Grace to be alone, to get into bed in the hotel dormitory and blot the last couple of hours out of her mind. And she thought it must be a relief to Maury, too, to be driving down the highway by himself, rearranging his impressions of his Grace so that he could stay wholeheartedly in love with her.

Most of the waitresses left after Labor Day, to go back to school or college. But the hotel was going to stay open till October, for Thanksgiving, with a reduced staff—Grace among them. There was talk, this year, of opening again in early December for a winter season, or at least a Christmas season, but nobody on the kitchen or dining-room staff seemed to know if this would really happen. Grace wrote to her aunt and uncle as if the Christmas season were a certainty and they should not expect her back anytime soon.

Why did she do this? It was not as if she had other plans. Maury was in his final year at college. She had even promised to take him home at Christmas to meet her family. And he had said that Christmas would be a good time to make their engagement formal. He was saving up his summer wages to buy her a diamond ring.

She, too, had been saving her wages, so that she would be able to take the bus to Kingston, to visit him during his school term.

She spoke of this, promised it, so easily. But did she believe, or even wish, that it would happen?

“Maury is a sterling character,” Mrs. Travers said. “Well, you can see that for yourself. He will be a dear, uncomplicated man, like his father. Not like his brother. Neil is very

bright. I don't mean that Maury isn't—you certainly don't get to be an engineer without a brain or two in your head—but Neil is . . . He's deep." She laughed at herself. "*Deep unfathomable caves of ocean bear*— What am I talking about? For a long time, Neil and I didn't have anybody but each other. So I think he's special. I don't mean he can't be fun. But sometimes people who are the most fun can be melancholy, can't they? You wonder about them. But what's the use of worrying about your grown-up children? With Neil I worry a lot, with Maury only a tiny little bit. And Gretchen I don't worry about at all. Because women have always got something, haven't they, to keep them going?"

The house on the lake was never closed up till Thanksgiving. Gretchen and the children had to go back to Ottawa, of course, for school. And Maury had to go to Kingston. Mr. Travers could come out only on weekends. But Mrs. Travers had told Grace that she usually stayed on, sometimes with guests, sometimes by herself.

Then her plans changed. She went back to Ottawa with Mr. Travers in September. This happened unexpectedly—the Sunday dinner that week was cancelled.

Maury explained that his mother got into trouble, now and then, with her nerves. "She has to have a rest," he said. "She has to go into the hospital for a couple of weeks or so, and they get her stabilized. She always comes out fine."

Grace said that Mrs. Travers was the last person she would have expected to have such troubles. "What brings it on?"

"I don't think they know," Maury said. But after a moment he added, "Well. It could be her husband. I mean, her first husband. Neil's father. What happened with him, et cetera."

What had happened was that Neil's father had killed himself.

"He was unstable, I guess. But I don't know if it even is that. It could be her age, and female problems and all that sort of thing. But it's O.K.—they can get her straightened out easy now, with drugs. They've got terrific drugs. Don't worry about it."

By Thanksgiving, as Maury had predicted, Mrs. Travers was out of the hospital and feeling well. Thanksgiving dinner would take place at the lake, as usual. And it was being held on Sunday, instead of Monday—that was also customary, to allow for the packing up and closing of the house. And it was fortunate for Grace, because Sunday was still her day off.

The whole family would be there, even Neil and Mavis and their children, who were staying at Mavis's parents' place. No guests—unless you counted Grace.

By the time Maury brought her down to the lake on Sunday morning, the turkey was already in the oven. The pies were on the kitchen counter—pumpkin, apple, wild blueberry. Gretchen was in charge of the kitchen, as coördinated a cook as she was an athlete. Mrs. Travers sat at the kitchen table, drinking coffee and working on a jigsaw puzzle with Gretchen's younger daughter, Dana.

“Ah, Grace,” she said, jumping up for an embrace—the first time she had ever done this—and with a clumsy motion of her hand scattering the jigsaw pieces.

Dana wailed, “*Grand*-ma,” and her older sister, Janey, who had been watching critically, scooped up the pieces.

“We can easy put them back together,” she said. “Grandma didn’t mean to.”

“Where do you keep the cranberry sauce?” Gretchen asked.

“In the cupboard,” Mrs. Travers said, still squeezing Grace’s arms and ignoring the destroyed puzzle.

“*Where* in the cupboard?”

“Oh. Cranberry sauce,” Mrs. Travers said. “Well, I make it. First I put the cranberries in a little water. Then I keep it on low heat—no, I think I soak them first—”

“Well, I haven’t got time for all that,” Gretchen said. “You mean you don’t have any canned?”

“I guess not. I must not have, because I make it.”

“I’ll have to send somebody to get some.”

“Dear, it’s Thanksgiving,” Mrs. Travers said gently. “Nowhere will be open.”

“That place down the highway, it’s always open.” Gretchen raised her voice. “Where’s Wat?”

“He’s out in the rowboat,” Mavis called from the back bedroom. She made it sound like a warning, because she was trying to get her baby to sleep. “He took Mikey out in the boat.”

Mavis had driven over in her own car, with Mikey and the baby. Neil was coming later—he had some phone calls to make.

And Mr. Travers had gone golfing.

“It’s just that I need somebody to go to the store,” Gretchen said. She waited, but no offer came from the bedroom. She raised her eyebrows at Grace. “You can’t drive, can you?”

Grace said no.

Mrs. Travers sat down, with a gracious sigh.

“Well,” Gretchen said. “Maury can drive. Where’s Maury?”

Maury was in the front bedroom looking for his swimming trunks, though everybody had told him that the water was too cold for swimming. He said that the store would not be open.

“It will be,” Gretchen said. “They sell gas. And if it isn’t there’s that one just coming into Perth—you know, with the ice-cream cones.”

Maury wanted Grace to come with him, but the two little girls, Janey and Dana, were begging her to come see the swing that their grandfather had put up under the Norway maple at the side of the house.

As Grace was going down the steps, she felt the strap of one of her sandals break. She took both shoes off and walked without difficulty on the sandy soil, across the flat-pressed plantain and the many curled leaves that had already fallen.

First she pushed the children in the swing, then they pushed her. It was when she jumped off, barefoot, that one leg crumpled and she let out a yelp of pain, not knowing what had happened.

It was her foot, not her leg. The pain had shot up from the sole of her left foot, which had been cut by the sharp edge of a clamshell.

“Dana brought those shells,” Janey said. “She was going to make a house for her snail.”

“He got away,” Dana said.

Gretchen and Mrs. Travers and even Mavis had come running out of the house, thinking that the cry had come from one of the children.

“She’s got a bloody foot,” Dana said. “There’s blood all over the ground.”

Janey said, “She cut it on a shell. Dana left those shells here—she was going to build a house for Ivan. Ivan her snail.”

A basin was brought out, with water to wash the cut and a towel, and everyone asked how much it hurt.

“Not too bad,” Grace said, limping to the steps, with both girls competing to hold her up and generally getting in her way.

“Oh, that’s nasty,” Gretchen said. “But why weren’t you wearing your shoes?”

“Broke her strap,” Dana and Janey said together, as a wine-colored convertible swerved neatly into the parking space by the house.

“Now, that is what I call opportune,” Mrs. Travers said. “Here’s the very man we need. The doctor.”

This was Neil—the first time that Grace had ever seen him. He was tall, thin, impatient.

“Your bag,” Mrs. Travers cried gaily. “We’ve already got a case for you.”

“Nice piece of junk you’ve got there,” Gretchen said. “New?”

Neil said, “Piece of folly.”

“Now the baby’s awake,” Mavis said, with a sigh of unspecific accusation. She went back into the house.

“Don’t tell me you haven’t got it with you,” Mrs. Travers said. But Neil swung a doctor’s bag out of the back seat, and she said, “Oh, yes, you have. That’s good. You never know.”

“You the patient?” Neil said to Dana. “What’s the matter? Swallow a toad?”

“It’s her,” Dana said with dignity. “It’s *Grace*.”

“I see. *She* swallowed the toad.”

“She *cut her foot*.”

“On a clamshell,” Janey said.

Neil said, “Move over,” to his nieces, and sat on the step below Grace. He carefully lifted the foot and said, “Give me that cloth or whatever,” then blotted away the blood to get a look at the cut. Now that he was so close to her, Grace noticed a smell that she had learned to identify over the summer, working at the inn—the smell of liquor edged with mint.

“Hurts?” he asked.

Grace said, “Some.”

He looked briefly, though searchingly, into her face. Perhaps wondering if she had caught the smell and what she had thought about it.

“I bet. See that flap? We have to get under there and make sure it’s clean, then I’ll put a stitch or two in it. I’ve got some stuff I can rub on it, so that won’t hurt as much as you might think.” He looked up at Gretchen. “Hey. Let’s get the audience out of the way here.”

He had not spoken a word, as yet, to his mother, who now said again what a good thing it was that he had come along just when he did.

“Boy Scout,” he said. “Always prepared.”

His hands didn’t feel drunk, and his eyes didn’t look it. Nor did he look like the jolly uncle he had impersonated when he talked to the children, or the purveyor of reassuring patter he had chosen to be with Grace. He had a high pale forehead, a crest of tight curly gray-black hair, bright gray but slightly sunken eyes, high cheekbones, and rather hollowed cheeks. If his face relaxed, he would look sombre and hungry.

When the cut had been dealt with, Neil said that he thought it would be a good idea to run Grace into town, to the hospital. “For an anti-tetanus shot.”

“It doesn’t feel too bad,” Grace said.

Neil said, “That’s not the point.”

“I agree,” Mrs. Travers said. “Tetanus—that’s terrible.”

“We shouldn’t be long,” he said. “Here. Grace? Grace, I’ll get you to the car.” He held her under one arm. She had strapped on the good sandal, and managed to get her toes into the other, so that she could drag it along. The bandage was very neat and tight.

“I’ll just run in,” he said, when she was sitting in the car. “Make my apologies.”

Mrs. Travers came down from the veranda and put her hand on the car door.

“This is good,” she said. “This is very good. Grace, you are a godsend. You’ll try to keep him away from drinking today, won’t you? You’ll know how to do it.”

Grace heard these words, but didn’t give them much thought. She was too dismayed by the change in Mrs. Travers, by what looked like an increase in bulk, a stiffness in her movements, a random and rather frantic air of benevolence. And a faint crust showing at the corners of her mouth, like sugar.

The hospital was three miles away. There was a highway overpass above the railway tracks, and they took this at such speed that Grace had the impression, at its crest, that

the car had lifted off the pavement and they were flying. There was hardly any traffic, so she wasn't frightened, and anyway there was nothing she could do.

Neil knew the nurse who was on duty in Emergency, and after he had filled out a form and let her take a passing look at Grace's foot ("Nice job," she said without interest) he was able to go ahead and give the tetanus shot himself. ("It won't hurt now, but it could later.") Just as he finished, the nurse came back into the cubicle and said, "There's a guy in the waiting room who wants to take her home."

She said to Grace, "He says he's your fiancé."

"Tell him she's not ready yet," Neil said. "No. Tell him we've already gone."

"I said you were in here."

"But when you came back," Neil said, "we were gone."

"He said he was your brother. Won't he see your car in the lot?"

"But I parked out back in the doctors' lot."

"*Pret*-ty *trick*-y," the nurse said, over her shoulder.

And Neil said to Grace, "You didn't want to go home yet, did you?"

"No," Grace said, as if she'd seen the word written in front of her, on the wall. As if she were having her eyes tested.

Once more she was helped to the car, sandal flopping from the toe strap, and settled on the creamy upholstery. They took a back street out of the lot, an unfamiliar way out of town.

She knew that they wouldn't see Maury. She did not think of him. Still less of Mavis.

Describing this passage, this change in her life, later on, Grace might say—she did say—that it was as if a gate had clanged shut behind her. But at the time there was no clang—acquiescence simply rippled through her, and the rights of those left behind were smoothly cancelled out.

Her memory of this day remained clear and detailed for a long time, though there was a variation in the parts of it she dwelled on.

And even in some of those details she must have been wrong.

First they drove west, on Highway 7. In Grace's recollection, there was not another car on the highway, and their speed approached the flight on the highway overpass. This cannot have been true—there must have been people on the road, people on their way home from church that Sunday morning, or on their way to spend Thanksgiving with their families. Neil must have slowed down when driving through villages, and around the many curves on the old highway. She was not used to driving in a convertible with the top down, wind in her eyes, taking charge of her hair. It gave her the illusion of constant perfect speed—not frantic but miraculous, serene.

And though Maury and Mavis and the rest of the family had been wiped from her mind, some scrap of Mrs. Travers did remain, hovering, delivering in a whisper and with a strange, shamed giggle, her last message.

You'll know how to do it.

Grace and Neil did not talk, of course. As she remembers it, you would have had to scream to be heard. And what she remembers is, to tell the truth, hardly distinguishable from her idea, her fantasies at that time, of what sex should be like. The fortuitous meeting, the muted but powerful signals, the nearly silent flight in which she herself figured more or less as a captive. An airy surrender, her flesh nothing now but a stream of desire.

They stopped, finally, in Kaladar, and went into the hotel—the old hotel that is still there. Taking her hand, kneading his fingers between hers, slowing his pace to match her uneven steps, Neil led her into the bar. She recognized it as a bar, though she had never been in one before. (Bailey's Falls Inn did not yet have a license, so drinking was done in people's rooms, or in a rather ramshackle night club across the road.) This bar was just as she would have expected—a big, dark, airless room, with the chairs and tables rearranged in a careless way after a hasty cleanup, the smell of Lysol not erasing the smell of beer, whiskey, cigars, pipes, men.

A man came in from another room and spoke to Neil. He said, "Hello there, Doc," and went behind the bar.

It occurred to Grace that it would be like this everywhere they went—people would know Neil.

"You know it's Sunday," the man said in a stern, almost shouting voice, as if he wanted to be heard out in the parking lot. "I can't sell you anything in here on a Sunday. And I can't sell anything to her, ever. She shouldn't even be in here. You understand that?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Yes, indeed, sir," Neil said. "I heartily agree, sir."

While both men were talking, the man behind the bar had taken a bottle of whiskey from a hidden shelf and poured some into a glass and shoved it across the counter to Neil.

"You thirsty?" he asked Grace. He was already opening a Coke. He gave it to her without a glass.

Neil put a bill on the counter, and the man shoved it away.

"I told you," he said. "Can't sell."

"What about the Coke?" Neil said.

"Can't sell."

The man put the bottle away. Neil drank what was in the glass very quickly. "You're a good man," he said. "Spirit of the law."

"Take the Coke along with you. Sooner she's out of here the happier I'll be."

"You bet," Neil said. "She's a good girl. My sister-in-law. Future sister-in-law. So I understand."

"Is that the truth?"

They didn't go back to Highway 7. Instead, they took the road north, which was not paved but was wide enough and decently graded. The drink seemed to have affected

Neil's driving in the opposite way than it was supposed to. He had slowed down to the seemly, even cautious rate that this road required.

"You don't mind?" he said.

Grace said, "Mind what?"

"Being dragged into any old place."

"No."

"I need your company. How's your foot?"

"It's fine."

"It must hurt some."

"Not really. It's O.K."

He picked up the hand that was not holding the Coke bottle, pressed the palm of it to his mouth, gave it a lick, and let it drop.

"Did you think I was abducting you for fell purposes?"

"No," Grace lied, thinking how like his mother that word was. *Fell*.

"There was a time when you would have been right," he said, just as if she had answered yes. "But not today. I don't think so. You're safe as a church today."

The changed tone of his voice, which had become intimate, frank, and quiet, and the memory of his lips pressed, his tongue flicked, across her skin, affected Grace to such an extent that she was hearing the words but not the sense of what he was telling her. She could feel a hundred flicks of his tongue, a dance of supplication, all over her skin. But she thought to say, "Churches aren't always safe."

"True. True."

"And I'm not your sister-in-law."

"Future. Didn't I say future?"

"I'm not that, either."

"Oh. Well. I guess I'm not surprised. No. Not surprised."

Then his voice changed again, became businesslike.

"I'm looking for a turnoff up here, to the right. There's a road I ought to recognize. Do you know this country at all?"

"Not around here, no."

"Don't know Flower Station? Ompah? Poland? Snow Road?"

She had not heard of them.

"There's somebody I want to see."

A turn was made, to the right, with some dubious mutterings on his part. There were no signs. This road was narrower and rougher, with a one-lane plank-floored bridge. The trees of the hardwood forest laced their branches overhead. The weather had been strangely warm this year, and the leaves were still green, except for the odd one here and there that flashed out like a banner. There was a feeling of sanctuary. For miles, Neil and Grace were quiet, and there was still no break in the trees, no end to the forest. But then Neil broke the peace.

He said, “Can you drive?” And when Grace said no he said, “I think you should learn.”

He meant right then. He stopped the car, got out, and came around to her side, gesturing to her to move behind the wheel.

“No better place than this.”

“What if something comes?”

“Nothing will. And we can manage if it does. That’s why I picked a straight stretch.”

He did not bother explaining anything about how cars ran—he simply showed her where to put her feet, and made her practice shifting the gears, then said, “Now go, and do what I tell you.”

The first leap of the car terrified her. She ground the gears, and she thought he would put an end to the lesson immediately, but he just laughed. He said, “Whoa, easy. Easy. Keep going,” and she did. He did not comment on her steering, except to say, “Keep going, keep going, keep on the road, don’t let the engine die.”

“When can I stop?” she said.

“Not till I tell you how.”

He made her keep driving until they came out of the tunnel of trees, and then he instructed her about the brake. As soon as she had stopped, she opened the door so that they could trade sides, but he said, “No. This is just a breather. Soon you’ll be getting to like it.” And when they started again she began to see that he might be right. Her momentary surge of confidence almost took them into a ditch. Still, he laughed when he had to grab the wheel, and the lesson continued.

She drove for what seemed like miles, and even went—slowly—around several curves. Then he said that they had better switch back, because he could not get a feeling of direction unless he was driving.

He asked how she felt now, and though she was shaking all over she said, “O.K.”

He rubbed her arm from shoulder to elbow and said, “What a liar.” But did not touch her, beyond that, did not let any part of her feel his mouth again.

He must have got his feeling of direction back when they came to a crossroads some miles on, for he turned left, and the trees thinned out and they climbed a rough road up to a village, or at least a roadside collection of buildings. A church and a store, neither of them open to serve their original purposes but probably lived in, to judge by the vehicles around them and the sorry-looking curtains in the windows. There were a couple of houses in the same state, and, behind one of them, a barn that had fallen in on itself, with old dark hay bulging out between its cracked beams like swollen innards.

Neil exclaimed in celebration at the sight of this place, but did not stop there.

“What a relief,” he said. “What—a—relief. Now I know. Thank you.”

“Me?”

“For letting me teach you to drive. It calmed me down.”

“Calmed you down?” Grace said. “Really?”

"True as I live." Neil was smiling, but he did not look at her. He was busy looking from side to side, across the fields that lay along the road after it had passed through the village. He was talking as if to himself. "This is it. Got to be it. Now we know."

And so on, till he turned onto a lane that didn't go straight but wound around through a field, avoiding rocks and patches of juniper. At the end of the lane was a house, in no better shape than the houses in the village.

"Now, this place," he said, "this place I am not going to take you into. I won't be five minutes."

He was longer than that. She sat in the car, in the shade. The door to the house was open—just the screen door closed. The screen had mended patches in it, newer wire woven in with the old. Nobody came to look at her, not even a dog. And now that the car had stopped, the day filled up with an unnatural silence. Unnatural because on such a hot afternoon you would expect the buzzing and chirping of insects in the grass and in the juniper bushes. Even if you couldn't see them, their noise would seem to rise out of everything growing on the earth, as far as the horizon. But it was too late in the year, maybe too late even to hear geese honking as they flew south. At any rate, she didn't hear any.

It seemed that they were up on top of the world here. The field fell away on all sides; only the tips of the trees were visible, because they grew on lower ground.

Whom did Neil know, who lived in this house? A woman? It didn't seem possible that the sort of woman he would want could live in a place like this, but then there was no end to the strangeness that Grace could encounter today. No end to it.

Once, this had been a brick house, but someone had begun to take the brick walls down. Plain wooden walls had been bared underneath, and the bricks that had covered them were roughly piled in the yard, maybe waiting to be sold. The bricks left on the wall in front of her formed a diagonal line, a set of steps, and Grace, with nothing else to do, leaned back to count them. She did this both foolishly and seriously, the way you would pull petals off a flower, but not with any words so blatant as *He loves me, he loves me not.*

Lucky. Not. Lucky. Not. That was all she dared.

She found that it was hard to keep track of the bricks arranged in this zigzag fashion, especially since the line flattened out above the door.

Then she knew. What else could it be? A bootlegger's place. She thought of the bootlegger in the town where her aunt and uncle lived—a raddled, skinny old man, morose and suspicious. He sat on his front step with a shotgun on Halloween night. And he painted numbers on the sticks of firewood stacked by his door so he'd know if any were stolen. She thought of him—or this one—dozing in the heat, in his dirty but tidy room (she knew that it would be that way by the mended patches in the screen), getting up from his creaky cot or couch, covered with a stained quilt that some woman related to him, some woman now dead, had made long ago.

Not that she had ever been inside the bootlegger's house, but the partitions were thin, back home, between the threadbare ways of living that were respectable and those that were not. She knew how things were.

How strange that she'd thought of becoming one of them—a Travers. Marrying Maury. A kind of treachery, it would be. But not a treachery to be riding with Neil, because he wasn't fortunate—he knew some of the things that she did.

And then in the doorway it seemed that she could see her uncle, stooped and baffled, looking out at her, as if she had been away for years and years. As if she had promised to come home and then had forgotten about it, and in all this time he should have died but he hadn't.

She struggled to speak to him, but he was lost. She was waking up, moving. She was in the car with Neil, on the road again. She had been asleep with her mouth open and she was thirsty. He turned to her for a moment, and she noticed, even with the wind blowing around them, a fresh smell of whiskey.

"You awake? You were fast asleep when I came out of there," he said. "Sorry—I had to be sociable for a while. How's your bladder?"

That was a problem she had been thinking about, in fact, while she was waiting. She had seen a toilet behind the house, but had felt shy about getting out and walking to it.

He said, "This looks like a possible place," and stopped the car. She got out and walked in among some blooming goldenrod and Queen Anne's lace and wild asters, to squat down. He stood in the flowers on the other side, with his back to her. When she got into the car, she saw the bottle, on the floor beside her feet. More than a third of its contents seemed already to be gone.

He saw her looking.

"Oh, don't worry," he said. "I just poured some in here." He held up a flask. "Easier when I'm driving."

On the floor there was also another Coca-Cola. He told her to look in the glove compartment for a bottle opener.

"It's cold!" she said in surprise.

"Icebox. They cut ice off the lakes in the winter and store it in sawdust. He keeps it under the house."

"I thought I saw my uncle in the doorway of that house," she said. "But I was dreaming."

"You could tell me about your uncle. Tell me about where you live. Your job. Anything. I just like to hear you talk."

There was a new strength in his voice, and a change in his face, but it wasn't the manic glow of drunkenness. It was as if he'd been sick—not terribly sick, just down, under the weather—and was now wanting to assure her that he was better. He capped the flask and laid it down and reached for her hand. He held it lightly, a comrade's clasp.

"He's quite old," Grace said. "He's really my great-uncle. He's a caner—that means he canes chairs. I can't explain that to you, but I could show you how, if we had a chair to cane—"

"I don't see one."

She laughed, and said, "It's boring, really."

"Tell me about what interests you, then. What interests you?"

She said, "You do."

"Oh. What about me interests you?" His hand slid away.

"What you're doing now," Grace said determinedly. "Why."

"You mean drinking? Why I'm drinking?" The cap came off the flask again. "Why don't you ask me?"

"Because I know what you'd say."

"What's that? What would I say?"

"You'd say, 'What else is there to do?' Or something like that."

"That's true," he said. "That's about what I'd say. Well, then you'd try to tell me why I was wrong."

"No," Grace said. "No. I wouldn't."

When she'd said that, she felt cold. She had thought that she was serious, but now she saw that she'd been trying to impress him, to show that she was as worldly as he was, and in the middle of that she had come on a rock-bottom truth, a lack of hope that was genuine, reasonable, everlasting. There was no comfort in what she saw, now that she could see it.

Neil said, "You wouldn't? No. You wouldn't. That's a relief. You are a relief, Grace."

In a while he said, "You know, I'm sleepy. Soon as we find a good spot I'm going to pull over and go to sleep. Just for a little while. Would you mind that?"

"No. I think you should."

"You'll watch over me?"

"Yes."

"Good."

The spot he found was in a little town called Fortune. There was a park on the outskirts, beside a river, and a gravelled space for cars. He settled the seat back, and at once fell asleep. Evening had come on as it did now, around suppertime, proving that this wasn't a summer day after all. A short while ago, people had been having a Thanksgiving picnic here—there was still some smoke rising from the outdoor fireplace, and the smell of hamburgers in the air. The smell did not make Grace hungry, exactly—it made her remember being hungry, in other circumstances.

Some dust had settled on her, with all the stopping and starting of her driving lesson. She got out and washed her hands and her face as well as she could, at an outdoor tap. Then, favoring her cut foot, she walked slowly to the edge of the river, saw how shallow it was,

with reeds breaking the surface. A sign there warned that profanity, obscenity, or vulgar language was forbidden in this place and would be punished.

She tried the swings, which faced west. Pumping herself high, she looked into the clear sky—faint green, fading gold, a fierce pink rim at the horizon. Already the air was getting cold.

She had thought that it was touch. Mouths, tongues, skin, bodies, banging bone on bone. Inflammation. Passion. But that wasn't what she'd been working toward at all. She had seen deeper, deeper into him than she could ever have managed if they'd gone that way.

What she saw was final. As if she were at the edge of a flat dark body of water that stretched on and on. Cold, level water. Looking out at such dark, cold, level water, and knowing that it was all there was.

It wasn't the drinking that was responsible. Drinking, needing to drink—that was just some sort of distraction, like everything else, from the thing that was waiting, no matter what, all the time.

She went back to the car and tried to rouse him. He stirred but wouldn't waken. So she walked around again to keep warm, and to practice the easiest way with her foot—she understood now that she would be working again, serving breakfast in the morning.

She tried once more, talking to him urgently. He answered with various promises and mutters, and once more he fell asleep. By the time it was really dark she had given up. Now, with the cold of night settled in, some other facts became clear to her: that they could not remain here, that they were still in the world, after all, that she had to get back to Bailey's Falls.

With some difficulty, she got him over into the passenger seat. If that did not wake him, it was clear that nothing could. It took her a while to figure out how the headlights went on, and then she began to move the car, jerkily, slowly, back onto the road.

She had no idea of directions, and there was not a soul on the street to ask. She just kept driving, to the other side of the town, and there, most blessedly, was a sign pointing the way to Bailey's Falls, among other places. Only nine miles.

She drove along the two-lane highway, never at more than thirty miles an hour. There was little traffic. Once or twice a car passed her, honking, and the few she met honked also. In one case, it was probably because she was going so slowly, and, in the other, because she did not know how to dim the lights. Never mind. She couldn't stop to get her courage up again. She had to just keep going, as he had said. Keep going.

At first she did not recognize Bailey's Falls, coming upon it in this unfamiliar way. When she did, she became more frightened than she had been in all the nine miles. It was one thing to drive in unknown territory, another to turn in at the inn gates.

He was awake when she stopped in the parking lot. He didn't show any surprise at where they were, or at what she had done. In fact, he told her, the honking had woken him, miles

back, but he had pretended to be still asleep, because the important thing was not to startle her. He hadn't been worried, though. He'd known that she would make it.

She asked if he was awake enough to drive now.

"Wide awake. Bright as a dollar."

He told her to slip her foot out of its sandal, and he pressed it here and there, before saying, "Nice. No heat. No swelling. Your arm hurt from the shot? Maybe it won't." He walked her to the door, and thanked her for her company. She was still amazed to be safely back. She hardly realized that it was time to say goodbye.

As a matter of fact, she does not know, to this day, if those words were spoken or if he only caught her, wound his arms around her, held her so tightly, with such continuous, changing pressure that it seemed as if more than two arms were needed, as if she were surrounded by him, his body strong and light, demanding and renouncing all at once, telling her that she was wrong to give up on him, everything was possible, but then again that she was not wrong, he meant to stamp himself on her and go.

Early in the morning, the manager knocked on the dormitory door, calling for Grace.

"Somebody on the phone," he said. "Don't bother getting up—they just wanted to know if you were here. I said I'd go and check. O.K. now."

It would be Maury, she thought. One of them, anyway. But probably Maury. Now she'd have to deal with Maury.

When she went down to serve breakfast—wearing running shoes, one loosely laced—she heard about the accident. A car had gone into a bridge abutment halfway down the road to Sabot Lake. It had been rammed right in—it was totally smashed and burned up. There were no other cars involved, and apparently no passengers. The driver would have to be identified by dental records. Or probably had been, by this time.

"One hell of a way," the manager said. "Better to go and cut your throat."

"It could've been an accident," said the cook, who had an optimistic nature. "Could've just fell asleep."

"Yeah. Sure."

Her arm hurt now, as if it had taken a wicked blow. She couldn't balance her tray, and had to carry it in front of her, using both hands instead.

She did not have to deal with Maury face to face. He wrote her a letter.

Just say he made you do it. Just say you didn't want to go.

She wrote back five words. *I did want to go.*

She was going to add, *I'm sorry*, but stopped herself.

Mr. Travers came to the inn to see her a few days later. He was polite and businesslike, firm, cool, not unkind. She saw him now in circumstances that let him come into his own. A man who could take charge, who could tidy things up. He said that it was very sad,

they were all very sad, but alcoholism was a terrible thing. When Mrs. Travers was a little better, he was going to take her on a trip, a vacation, somewhere warm.

Then he said that he had to be going. He had many things to do. As he shook her hand to say goodbye, he put an envelope into it.

“We both hope you’ll make good use of this,” he said.

The check was for a thousand dollars. Immediately she thought of sending it back or tearing it up, and sometimes even now she thinks that that would have been a grand thing to do. But in the end, of course, she was not able to do it. In those days, it was enough money to insure her a start in life. ♦