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My friend Naomi Frechette rents the lower floor of a tumbledown mansion near the Bay Street Bridge. If it were not for the unclipped laurel hedge she would have a fine view of Selkirk Water beyond the Bamfield Park treetops. Her place is so dark that she often gets claustrophobia. Sometimes halfway through cooking breakfast she has to quickly leave the house. I've told her she should try living on the seventeenth floor of a Calgary highrise.

We met, Naomi and I, at a lecture on pre-menstrual syndrome ("Rhythm & Blues: Causes and Nutritional Support") given by a member of the Victoria Naturopathic Clinic. Besides other interesting facts—such as if a woman can feel good, really good about herself just before her period, she can get high, and very ripe bananas and fresh orange juice and exercise may help—we learned that we were of the same body type, and both addicted to caffeine. We changed our diets for a while, swore off grain, alcohol, sugar, dill pickles, and even coffee. I loaded my fruit basket with nasty black bananas. Though Naomi really does have the most awful menstrual problems, cramps, depression—far worse than any symptoms I can come up with—she insists she's used to dealing with the four or five days of misery each month, says she never thinks about it, avoids calendars like the plague.

Once, several months ago, she woke up and, even before opening her eyes, felt shut in, trapped, desperate. The birds were singing madly. It must've been spring. She dressed as fast as she could and fled the house, letting the door bang in her hurry to escape. That early morning she saw a one-legged pigeon that couldn't fly. A little further on she saw a man carrying a suitcase walking along the path through the wooded park. The floodlights from the saw mill across the water lit the trail between the widely spaced evergreens. The sun had not yet risen: the sky above the mill showed pink-streaked clouds. The man, deep in thought, hadn't seen her—not surprising since she stood in the trees, away from the path. He was handsome, slender, yet well made. Late twenties, a little younger than Naomi. She found him attractive. She especially liked his high forehead and straight flaxen hair. He had an engaging vacant look; he needed a shave; obviously he lived alone.

Every day for a week, Naomi set her alarm for five a.m. and woke feeling apprehensive. She forgot her claustrophobia. She stopped cooking meals for herself. She ate stacks of toast with marmalade, and not only for breakfast. Out at dawn every morning, she told me she was looking for the pigeon. With her hair tightly knotted at the nape of her neck, she waited through seven sunrises in the spiraea thicket beside the path on which she'd seen the bird. By the end of the week she was on familiar terms with a family of wrens living in an old hornet's nest suspended from the branch of a nearby oak. She did not see the pigeon, however, and she did not see the man.

One day, when she was waiting for the bus, she saw him. He was standing across the street in front of a billboard, right between the eyes of a fresh-looking boy of about seven who, just before grinning into the advertiser's camera, had bitten into a pear. On impulse she crossed the street and walked up to the billboard. The pear shone unnaturally green in the child's lowered hands; the man's shirt was unbuttoned to the waist, an affectation she usually found unappealing. She blushed at him, then walked on; a silly smile caught at her lips. She felt excited. His pale, hairless chest, she told me, was almost a girl's. Naomi telephoned me each time she saw the man on the street. She always smiled at him; I could tell from the tone of her voice the times when he reciprocated.

One Sunday evening, at my suggestion, we followed him to see where he lived. I ran up the steps behind him and pretended to read the names on the intercom board. Just inside the glass doors he pulled open his mail locker, shut it again. No key. Empty of course because it was Sunday.

"His name's Brian Hubner!" I called.

I watched Naomi at the bottom of the steps throw her chest forward; shoulders back, she curved her spine, then strolled away, deliberately not looking back at me or at the apartment.

"You owe me a coffee!" I shouted.

Naomi began to wear green clothes almost every day, and she confessed to suddenly finding herself unaccountably affected, often brought to tears, by telecasts of sporting events, especially gymnastics. I felt touched by her confidences, but also embarrassed. I visited her less frequently.

Brian Hubner fascinated me. So utterly self-absorbed, he compelled my attention. It was almost as if I engineered the coincidence that later brought us together.

After his accident, when I visited him in hospital and got to know him well, I felt responsible for what had happened.

"Don't know what you're talking about," Brian said. "It's nothing to do with you. The Indian made a mistake. He should've taken up the slack in the cable before cutting the rope."

"I love you," I said.

He answered with a smirk. "Get out."

"I wish you'd bled to death," I shouted. "By the way, you know who put the broken glass in your mailbox, don't you? Not your slut in Vancouver. You need me, Brian. I understand you. You're in trouble, Brian. You misinterpret the world." A nurse at the open ward door looked on disapprovingly. I could tell she was steeling herself to interfere. "You can't just ditch me, Brian, you don't want to. We're stuck with each other."

"Just get out," he said. "You make me sick. You're like a lost dog."

Nearly every morning Brian would make espresso, drinking the coffee from the Marilyn Monroe cup. At night, he'd fill the cup with ice cream and, using a tiny silver spoon, eat the dessert very slowly. He even insisted on having the cup with him in hospital. I've accused him of being superstitious, but really I like to think of him continuing these rituals.

I imagine Brian pursing his lips to softly whistle; the eerie wind-sound frightens him: he believes he's overheard by someone. He turns his back on the thin woman absurdly posturing on the sidewalk outside his window, stares into the pink-and-mustard-patterned cup before tipping it to his mouth. As he drains the melted ice cream, he catches a glimpse of the black spot on the cup bottom, spins the cup so that the spot appears in the reflection of his right cheek, slightly below the level of his lips. "Marilyn," he sighs. "You and me."

In hospital, Brian talked about when he left Vancouver, about the first morning in his new place in Victoria, drinking coffee from the Marilyn Monroe cup, his belongings in cardboard boxes piled around him; only the cup, the tapedeck, the espresso maker had been unpacked. His apartment was strange, magic, filled with the sound of rain.

He opened his cases, lifted the instruments in turn, wiped any smudges from the brass and silver, and named each horn before gently replacing it. He described to me how when the music stopped and the tapedeck switched off, he sat among his boxes and looked at a fly on the window frame. How he toured in silence the bedroom, the bathroom, the livingroom, the kitchen, noting an occasional dent in the plaster walls. How he curled up on the bedroom floor between the wall and a large tea crate full of linen. "It was obvious," he told me, "it was clear that I couldn't play a note."

Walking into town that afternoon he came upon numerous men, some in business suits, bending over, scurrying on, bending over again. Apparently, a truck containing hundreds, probably thousands, of keypunch cards had overturned on the Bay Street Bridge. Cards were floating out with the tide toward the Johnson Street Bridge. The intersection of Bay and Tyee looked as if it were under an off-white, two-dimensional version of snow.

"Each flake different," he muttered as I closed the drapes and soothed his arms under the covers of the hospital bed.

"Waking up in the new place was easy," he explained. "But after I'd vacuumed the carpets, put everything in place—I'd get nervous. I'd take out my alto flute, and my bowels would surge. Flip-flop. A physical reaction! I'd pack away the flute above the closet in the bedroom. I'd lie down on the floor and listen to a tape of myself. 'Happy talkin' talkin' happy talk, talk about things you like to do.' Know the song? Soprano sax improv. 'You gotta have a dream, if you don't have a dream, how you gonna have a dream come true?' I had an affair with my best friend's wife. Crazy! The saxophonist beds down with the percussionist-wife of the guitarist: the band dissolves. Natural progression. I don't blame Gwen for leaving me."

"Tell me about Gwen," I said.

"Not even the bassist will talk to me now," Brian said.

"Did you know her long?"

"In Vancouver," he nodded. "In Victoria I felt quite free." He lay stiff in bed, eyes closed tight. "I'd sit on the toilet so's not to splash. Sometimes there was a spider in the bathtub and I'd talk to the spider. Howdy, spider. And of course the nights passed as nights pass in a strange place. You know. The fridge whirs on and rattles off, the floors creak..."

Brian was asleep, snoring horribly. I sat still beside the bed. Imagined the floors of his empty apartment creaking, still adjusting to the furniture they supported. Imagined the air shifting with stealth under closed doors, through loose-fitting casements, spinning through the hole in the wall behind the flute case on top of the bedroom closet. Brian stopped snoring to murmur an emphatic "Nope," then resumed the cacophonous racket, which I could hear long after I left the ward, long after I reached home.

And, in those days before we met, while Brian opened sleepy eyes on his new surroundings, Naomi would be making tea for one of her charity cases. The pigeon she'd been concerned about was dead. It lay, let's say, buried in garbage at the municipal dump; crows pecked at offal a few feet above its quiet head. And, taking long strides through a tired residential district near the Bay Bridge, a blonde woman with a square chin and a rather squat body would be thinking about sliced bread. This was Marilyn. This was me. A waitress for the summer, I wore flat shoes. I still wear flat shoes. I knew that day I'd deliver to various tables a great many precut slices of white bread enclosing various repulsive fillings, and the knowledge depressed me.

The neighbourhood wore its Monday clothes. Women pushed perambulators. Women sat on steps. They chatted. They wiggled their chubby toes and watched dogs trot by. I could have torn my hair out. It's the starlings, finches, blackbirds, crows, sparrows and robins who arrange the morning's parts: in warm late spring men are desultory or absent, the women just bored or silly, or bored silly. The birds, by complex interweaving of song and flight, keep the machine humming. Click: minute claws on a fence, like pins to a magnet. I want to be in love. I hate the idea. Conventional. I quicken my pace, stare down the man looking at me; I come to a standstill and, with stretched index finger, viciously stab the WALK button. A retarded man flails past, is assisted to the other side of the street by a thin woman in green. Naomi smiles briefly at me. I pretend not to notice. The man keeps moaning. "Where are you taking me? Where are you taking me?" And Naomi repeats, "Across the street. Just across the street." I grin. Yes. The next moment I'm running. All the aphid-ridden buds on all the rose bushes in all the yards shake their heads at me.

Often, on my walk to the cafe in the morning, I saw Naomi's retarded guy. When carefully guided by her, he looked haggard and distressed, sadly manic. But sometimes I saw him alone and he wore a beatific grin. Dressed in a heavy plaid shirt and an old sports jacket, he'd stagger along the sidewalk waving his arms like a possessed windmill. Pedestrians gave him a wide berth. I wanted him to understand that I'd noticed him. I wanted to encourage his wheeling gestures. I wondered if Naomi chose his clothes. How *effective* people seem when they're alone! Though I doubt I appeared effective to others. The Marilyn of that time took delight in innuendo-filled days at the trucker's cafe! I played! A free woman can wear anything, laugh at the men attracted. I was learning to feel empty. Oh, I'd get used to loneliness, I'd wind up like the retarded guy, happily trapped in this town, grinning and drooling along the street, turning cartwheels, tra la!

But even he had Naomi. How does that begin?

Most afternoons Brian left the apartment.

His favourite walk was across the bridge to the Tally Ho beer parlour. In the Tally Ho—a working man's bar, minus the stripper—he said he felt a sense of anonymity that enabled him to relax, to sit back and concentrate on each glass cylinder of amber liquid as it left the small round table, tilted a cold rim to the bridge of his nose, touched down seconds later. With every dull thud, he felt himself retreat. "I'd look at my knuckles," he said, "white on the table, and think: I'm all by myself."

For some weeks he rarely ventured out, except to the Tally Ho. Sometimes, on the way, he stopped at Jan's Place or the Red Kettle for a coffee. He began to look forward to seeing the blonde waitress at Jan's Place. When he passed on his drunken journey home the cafe was always closed, its windows dark. He'd weave on sulkily across the bridge, along the tracks and through the park's deep shadows.

One morning he found in his mailbox a letter from Gwen and a piece of broken glass, the label side of a smashed beer bottle. I'd planted the glass very late the night before. New moon. Hush!

"A long letter. Broken glass." He groaned.

Two nurses stood smiling at something outside the ward window. They looked peaceful. In control.

"I hate the cold cloying sweetness of ice cream," he said. "But Gwen really loved ice cream. For some reason I kept up the nightly ritual of eating a cupful before bed."

I asked, "What was it like making love to Gwen?"

He described a livingroom, the two of them facing each other, the dog licking clean the empty dishes on the carpet between them. They did not speak or touch or make any movement. Had it been like this?

"Seems like years ago," he said in a far away voice. "Why the hell did she write? Bullshit letter. Such a smooth belly she had, belly like a plate. Those clear eyes of hers watched the whole ugly thing. I had to leave her, you see that? She watched Jenny and me tumble in and out of bed, chase each other around Vancouver like sick calves. Gwen and the guitarist watched me make a fool of myself. What did she send the broken glass for? Hell. I so easily pushed her away."

When Brian was familiar with my schedule at Jan's Place, he arranged his visits to coincide with my coffee breaks. He told me about his Marilyn Monroe cup, his apartment, his saxophones and flute, his favourite walk. Sometimes he met me at the close of my shift. And how did I feel about his attentions? I discovered I'd been waiting.

Summer now, on hot afternoons the home-bound traffic crawled toward the bridge and we usually had to wait to cross Bay Street. We'd wade through dust eddies in the wake of a cement truck to the opposite sidewalk, along Turner Street into the ramshackle industrial district of sawmills and scrapyards. It was so hot that I listened as he pointed out the different businesses.

"At night it's empty here," he told me, "quiet, except for the racket from the mill across Selkirk Water."

"Uh-huh," I said.

"I live over there, just across the Gorge. That bush is Bamfield Park. I live on the other side of the trees. Been there since the beginning of March."

"Uh-huh," I said. Why was I not losing interest in this man? "See that guy?"

"Crazy guy," said Brian. "Where'd he come from?"

"Oh, he's always walking around."

The man stopped waving his arms to watch us approach. His grin faded and his arms fell to his sides as we got closer. Brian stuck his thumbs in his back pockets, then pulled them out. The man gestured toward me, then at Brian; he offered a hand. Brian shifted his feet. The man looked warily at me, then spoke, shrugging his shoulders madly. When Brian touched his palm, he reached with both hands to enclose Brian's hand in a tight double grip. Brian pulled free, made a show of straightening his curled fingers; the man threw back his head and laughed. Brian grimaced at me.

"Brian? Can we ask him along? Invite him for a beer?"

"OK."

When Brian asked him his name, the guy said, "Ah!"

"Al?" I said.

"Ah!" he agreed.

"Hey, Al! Listen to that," said Brian. "The sawmill. Listen to the squeals when the saw goes through the wood—brutal, huh?"

"Brutal."

"How long have you been in Victoria, Al?" I asked.

"Brutal."

"I haven't been here long," Brian said. "I'm from Vancouver. Marilyn here's from Calgary. Al, why don't you ask Marilyn how long she'll stay?"

"How long?"

"I don't know," I said. "For the summer. I don't know. D'you live close by, Al?"

"Summer's fun . . . kids and . . . bathing beauties . . . and . . ."

In the beer parlour Al looked worried. He sat forward in his chair and studied the tablecloth. Glanced up and around, then quickly down at his big hands resting on the red cloth. "I gotta get

back," he muttered. "Na-omi be watching. She says I annoy her. Gotta get back." But he made no move to leave. He drank the beer and began to watch our faces across the table.

"Men in your life?" Brian asked me.

"No."

"What about you, Al, you married or anything?"

"Me? Married? Nah. Me?"

"I play the saxophone, Al. You know. Saxophone. Nice curves. Bet you'd like the saxophone."

"Saxo. Phone. Mary. Lyn. Marlyn. Lyn."

"Brian, don't tease him, OK?"

As the evening progressed, the beer parlour filled. The patrons eyed Al. He kept his face and hands as still as he was able, tried not to get excited.

Brian yelled out, "Hi, Al. How you doing?"

"Fine. Na-omi, she's, she's good! I gotta get back. I gotta go."

"That's all right, Al." Brian said. "That's good." He touched my elbow. "With Gwen and me I used to forget we were people, just people on the street. I closed right down till I could only see her. When I finally noticed someone else it was a shock. Ah... I think she hates men, really hates men. She always said she liked the woman in me. She used to make me sit to pee so I wouldn't splash. And I think she's maybe a little unbalanced now. Know what she sent me in the mail? A chunk of broken glass. Jesus Christ. Thing is, I've not been playing at all since I moved to The Island. I should be blowing scales at least. Maybe I'll lose my lip. It's funny, I'm not uptight about it. If you decide you can't do a thing, that there's no point in trying, then you can't disappoint yourself, can you? I've been thinking about you a lot since we met. Like we're on the same wavelength, you know?"

"You want to make love to me," I said.

"I feel safe with you. I feel safe. You feel safe, Al?"

"Yup."

"See? We're just one happy family."

"Al?" I said. "D'you like your beer?"

"Yup. Me? Yup!"

"I remember," I said, "once in Manzanillo, in Mexico—I was sailing back from Panama with friends—waking up very early to go for a walk by myself through the town. I found a mutilated goat tied up beside a grave in the Indian burial ground. It really horrified me. I suddenly felt very American, out of my element, incomplete, like I'd lost my sight or my hearing. I wanted to touch the goat, but I couldn't make myself. I decided no one should feel as safe as I did, no one should be that smug, complacent."

And this, I know now, was the turning point in my relationship with Brian. If I had not told him my Mexico story, I would not have slept with him, I would not love him. Now I see through that memory, as through clean glass, Brian's accident.

"I like you," I told Brian in the lobby. "I'll stay with you tonight. I brought my toothbrush."

He shook his head, amused.

"Beauty," Al said, brushing fingers up and down his ribcage. He was looking at my legs.

In the cab, Al fell asleep. Brian touched my neck. "You like the guy, don't you?"

I smiled at him.

He sang, "All the girls have gone, I just wanted one, I just wan-ted—"

"The most beautiful time in Mexico," I said as we were crossing the bridge, "is after it rains, and the lizards dart, rain-speckled silver, for a patch of sun."

I made my hands whisk along the back of the driver's seat away from each other.

The pigeon had stopped being pigeon: the feathers, locked in filth, some straight and kept intact by the weight of trash, waited for some future lengthy flight.

I wanted to know all about Brian Hubner, yet, perversely, I regretted his confidences, his tentative glances, his shy questions. No longer so self-contained, he was interested, interested in me.

I decided I must stop regarding myself as an object. Brian, I thought, expected me to justify his wilful potency by objectifying myself. Although I allowed myself to enjoy his lust, the attitudes behind it appalled me. I must not allow him to feel safe.

We argued. We grew sickeningly close.

"What d'you mean *male role*?" he exploded. "People are people, right?"

I don't believe in God, but when I received the call Saturday morning that Brian had been admitted to hospital and would possibly lose his foot, I experienced a sudden fracturing of my world. I was aware of the texture, a thickness in the air I'd not noticed before. It started on the bleak sunny Friday; Saturday morning shattered the dark with a light that hurt my soul. I can still smell, still taste that light. Antiseptic. Bloody.

Friday morning Brian and I opened the door to Felice's, a plush Italian restaurant on the tourist strip. Brian stood at the cash register, blinking into the sun-filled lower room. I tugged at his elbow. The owner, alone at a table by the huge rear windows, beckoned us down the stairs. I introduced the men, they sat facing each other. I walked around, looking at the pictures on the wall, listening to the conversation.

"I liked your tape. You do a lot of Real Book stuff. I caught you at the Jazz Bar last week. That place's not good for your reputation. Take my word. Too many drunk Indians, too much illegal drinking. The cops will close it down before long. And, if I were you I'd ditch the pianist—guy's lousy."

Brian sat stiffly on the edge of his chair, faced the windows, the harbour. The owner turned three-quarter profile to look at the brilliant water; waves of light adjusted his features, changing his expression subtly and constantly. He gripped a pipe in his teeth, lowered a match to the tobacco, sucking hard at the smoke. I'd told Brian I'd only met the man once, that he was really a friend of Naomi's. Brian slouched. I watched a thin spire rise straight from the pipe to whirl and dissolve in the higher draughts. The owner's lips closed; two coils escaped his nostrils. I could tell he thought he was doing me a big favour. As if alone in the room, the two men sat very still.

"Three nights a week, guaranteed," the owner sighed. "The rest of the summer. Just you and the bass player."

The Coho ferry pointed its bow toward the open water; pursued by lazy mute gulls, it steamed across the harbour. A sailboat bounced through the wash.

"Axe the guy on the piano," the owner repeated. "Eighty bucks a night each. Deal?"

Brian looked now at the room, but not at me, now through the windows, now at the owner, now at the room, now through the windows. . . . The pipe sat dead between the other's fingers and the table.

"I've never felt more desolate," Brian told me when we left. He said he was moving through a kind of black space. "You sleep with that guy?"

I shrugged. Angry.

"What the hell do I care?" Brian started across Wharf Street. I followed, aware of how many brightly clothed tourists with sweaty faces were sauntering aimlessly this way and that.

We met Al on the street and Brian invited him to eat donuts and pistachio ice cream with us at his apartment.

After changing into jeans and a torn sweater, Brian dished out the ice cream, plugged in the kettle, then sat on the floor in the shaft of sunlight that filled the doorway between the kitchen and living areas. He picked up his cup, put it down, squinted at me, and began addressing Al in a low voice.

"Women think they're terrorists, Al, think they're working for a bloody cause. They can be as false, as destructive, play as many games as they like, because they're fighting for freedom, to overcome ~~the~~ system. They believe in a new order."

Al's spoon stopped in the ice cream; he looked at the floor.

Brian went on. "They don't know we're all people, stuck in this mess together. It's not a war."

"Leave him alone, Brian," I said. "He doesn't understand. Come on, Al, I'll take you home, OK?"

"And you"—Brian stood up and began to yell—"you say, you say: 'Your attitude's not *appropriate* at the moment. Women are more *important* than men. I don't want to *sleep* with you any more. You don't know how to *treat* me as a woman. You've a lot of *learning* to do. Rethink your male *role*.' I've got a lot of learning to do! You don't know your ass from a teakettle! Christ!"

"Christ," Al repeated in a faint voice. "I feel sick. I gotta go. Thanks for the ice cream. Ah. I don't want any more. Ah."

Brian was running a bath when Al and I left. We entered a lovely summer evening. Brian threw the plastic duck soap dish I'd given him out of the bathroom window. It clattered on the apartment driveway at our feet.

Poor idiot.

Later, at Naomi's, I watched her iron a pale green rayon shirt in the fading daylight. I said I thought she should turn on the ceiling lamp. She moistened a finger, touched it to the stainless steel before resting the iron on its base, and reached over toward the switch. Between the moment she nudged the ironing board and the moment the iron crashed to the tile floor, I wondered if she ever thought of the pale man with the unbuttoned shirt.

"So you saw Al," she said. "How was he?"

"Fine. All right, I suppose. He sure talks a lot about you. Did you give him your make-up bag?"

"No," she laughed. "So that's where it is. I've been looking everywhere."

Now I think of it, Naomi and Al were the mediators of that day and the next. Angels, they traded identities; with incredible guile and gentleness they arranged the light and shadows around Brian and me until we could not take a wrong step on our converging paths.

Brian lay down to rest at nine-thirty; his gig at the Jazz Bar began at one a.m. A disturbed sleep, he kept waking every half-hour. When at last he heard the apartment door open, he realized that was the sound he'd been expecting.

"Marilyn? I'm in bed."

A tall woman wearing a green gown stood in the bedroom doorway. Brian felt a cold hand brush his chest. He gasped. Nonsense. The figure had not moved.

"Al? What the hell are you doing? You scared the shit out of me!"

The man in the doorway had on a woman's dressing gown; he was shivering. His powdered cheeks shone; in places the make-up had streaked. His smeared lips slowly moved, blurred.

"Hey!" Brian said, struggling from the bed. "You can't just break into a guy's place. Christ, Al. What's going on?"

Al hung his head, played with the green sash at his waist. "The door was open," he whispered.

"So you walk right in? Just like that?"

"Yes. Please. Oh."

Brian led him into the kitchen, made him sit down at the table. "Let me wake up a bit. What's happened to you?"

"Where's Mar Lyn?"

"Not here. Give it up. I'm not her keeper."

"Yes." Al accepted the bowl and spoon Brian handed him. Lay the spoon gently on the table and folded his arms. "Brian, I don't feel so good, Brian. I'm scared."

"Eat up." Brian wrapped a blanket around Al's shoulders. "You look terrible. Now pay attention. You can stay here if you like, but I've got to go. You take those clothes off and get some sleep and I'll be back in the morning. OK? You're safe here. Finish off the ice cream if you want. Wash your face. And cheer up!"

Brian took a cab to the Jazz Bar.

Midway through his first set he caught my eye. He'd already drunk more than he should and he blew rapid, jarring phrases around the room, screaming into his horn, reaching high into the third octave. The set ended before he'd controlled his fury.

He walked from the stage directly to embrace me.

"Passion!" he hissed. "The breath of excitement!" And he went on to tell me about Al, but was careful not to lose his exultant mood.

I tasted cheap rye, like paraffin wax, on his lips as I kissed him. A group of American sailors from the lighted EXIT looked on; the bouncer raised his eyebrows in our direction. Laughing back, I kissed Brian again: a goodbye kiss, clumsy. "Time for your next set," I said brightly.

He stumbled a little when I let him go. "I met women like you before!" he yelled. "I left two in Vancouver. What the hell! You're all adventurers. And me, I'm drinking whiskey and playing good American jazz. Tell me"—he grabbed one of the sailors—"you ever hear of a great Canadian horn man? Yeah? No? Listen. I'm blowing to the Indians and they don't care. Look at me, man. Yessir! Here I am playing with the Indians!"

After the cab ride home, I walked the line of streetlights to the twenty-four-hour Shell on the corner, bought change from the cashier for the cigarette machine. Although a slight guilty feeling, like too much coffee, turned my stomach acid, I felt very calm. In control. The pools of light on the bays around the pumps lost definition as the sky brightened. Turning from the cigarette machine's illuminated Niagara Falls, I recognized the black sailor who'd just come in to ask what time the buses started running.

"D'you know when the buses run? I gotta get to the ship before eight or I'm dead."

"I've got a schedule at home."

As we walked to my apartment the birds were singing.

"I love Canadian women, so friendly! How old are you? I figure around, say, thirty-one? I'm nineteen, but I guess you like that, huh? You lived in Victoria all your life?"

I shook my head. The morning seemed to be smouldering. A black filament spun from the sailor to outline each object as I turned my head from side to side, amazed. I allowed his hand around my waist.

"Hey, that dude you were kissing at the bar, the sax player—"

"He's crazy."

"He's pretty damned hot is what he is! He your old man?"

"No."

"Drinks too much, I guess. But he's hot. Say that much. You know I followed your cab, shadowed you to the gas station—hey, you're too smart to get it on with a loser...."

Brian and I often fight; we don't get along; I despise him. I'm not looking forward to the day—soon now—he'll get out of hospital. But we're bound irrevocably. I believe that people create their own lives, and I've bound myself to him. Our moments link together. I begin him. He ends me. *Passion*. He speaks the word not with his tongue. Some fabric like metaphysical flypaper fixes us. I recognize my fear, his boredom, as by-products. Watch the sparks fly.

That day of bonding happened. I insist: I was not there in the morning, in the park. My foot is not growing numb. This meshing fills my senses with a breathless music.

Brian walked the railway tracks home after the gig, under the Bay Street Bridge to the path through the trees lining the inlet, rather than over the bridge and along the streets. The sun had not yet appeared, but the sky was already white. Twice he tripped over a tie; the second time he set his tenor case between the rails and sat down to watch the water ripple past the little island just east of the rail trestle. Log booms skirted the old sawmill buildings across the Gorge; one barge waited at dock, half-full of sawdust, for the machines to start up again, for the spout to begin spewing its yellow shavings.... Sensing himself nodding off, Brian dragged his horn up and reeled on along the tracks; a family of quail spun wailing from the bushes at his feet. A motor launch kept him company as he crossed the disused freight yards: he caught sight of it intermittently as he followed the winding path into the eastern

reaches of Bamfield Park. Then, as he turned a bend, the launch pointed its bow toward shore and he made out the name. *Phoenix*. A dog lay asleep on a shelf against the wheelhouse glass; beyond the dog, a man and a boy stared intently forward. Brian followed their gaze. Where the path ahead dipped to within a few feet of the Gorge, a man was crouched, his chest and shoulders twisted to one side, face set in a grimace. A vessel was half-submerged at the inlet edge. The Indian, dressed in jean jacket and soiled striped pants, was adjusting a come-a-long, increasing the tension of a heavy cable connected at one end to the sunken vessel's prow, at the other to a tree alongside the path. Brian would have to step over the cable.

"Your boat?"

The Indian lifted his eyes. "Gillnetter."

"I guess you'll wait for the tide to fall?"

"Fix her this afternoon. Float her next flood."

Brian nodded. As he straddled the cable, he glanced at the grounded boat, made out the name. *Marilyn*. Looking sidelong at the Indian, he realized that although he'd read the situation correctly, some of the details established in his mind differed from the actual details of the scene. The line over which he stepped was not heavy wire but polypropylene rope—frayed and dirty yellow. But he had no sooner cancelled the cable from his observations than a real cable occurred. This cable lay slack on the ground, formed two casual loops on the path, then disappeared into the water to surface at the tilted bow to which, like the rope, it was affixed. The cable, not the rope, was attached to the come-a-long, whereas the taut rope, obviously a provisional link, was simply fastened around the tree trunk. The Indian held a knife in his left hand.

Brian could not avoid setting his foot into one of the cable loops; the Indian had just finished slashing the rope. When the man yelled, the *Marilyn* suddenly lurched backward, slid a few feet into deeper water, and stopped. Brian felt a crackle of pain circle his right ankle, mistook the Indian's shout for laughter, the pain for his answering hoot. They shared a great joke. The cable loops had disappeared, the wire dug into the red ankle. The dog in the launch laughed, while father and son came chugging closer, faces set and grim; Brian, on his knees, allowed the hot circle to rise and expand, filling his whole body. The Indian screamed in his ear. The Gorge and the trees began to revolve in a ponderous fashion; soft dirt crammed under his fingernails; a peculiar metallic smell permeated the cool air. Wheeling gulls assisted the pirouetting landscape as *Marilyn* shuddered further onto her side. Wrens ticked nervously through the mesh of leaves. On the path in front of his eyes he saw the glass shard, read each word on the torn beer bottle label; beside the glass, the pink-and-mustard cup. He dragged himself forward to peer inside: a strange insect floated on cold coffee. His fingertips ached from punching the pearl-faced keys. He heard the wild riff with which he'd ended his last set.

One other thing. As Brian relived this scene for me, I saw with absolute clarity, above the path, in the gnarled oaks, the retreating backs of Naomi Frechette and Al. The two were holding hands and Al's inquisitive head turned this way and that. Naomi wore a green housecoat. One sleeve of Al's plaid shirt was rolled up, the other flapped from his loose wrist. Around them, the wood, the grass, the criss-cross streets enclosing the park and the Gorge, sparkled in early sun.