

# The Massachusetts Review



H. Zinn, *Civil Rights and the Colleges*; Gabriel Celaya, *Lorca*; M. Ratner, *Malamud's Fiction*; J. C. Levenson, *Veblen*; Robin Skelton, *Britannia's Muse*; H. Mishkin, *Bach*; \* Stories, Poems, Reviews: Paul Goodman, H. Peyre, M. Q. Sibley, W. Heath, B. Ruhm von Oppen, W. V. O'Connor, John Haines, R. Sward, T. Cade; Letters: John Brown, Jr. and The Haymarket Martyrs  
\* Charles Wells: Sculpture and Prints \*

SUMMER 1964

## AT SARANAC

The wind blew up on the other side of the lake  
As quickly as desire. "Look!" we cried  
And stood transfixed while what was tranquil sheen  
Knifed, like a curtain dropping, darkly toward us.  
Two lakes, a dark liquidating the light  
With razor-sharp compulsion toward us moving.  
"Slowly," we prayed, "more slowly," as onward, onward  
—One-half, two-thirds—it came; a visible future.  
Like seasoned lovers in the act, we knew—  
Once over, there'd be nothing more to do.

## H. T. Fitzgerald

### A Sign, and a Smile

YOU COULDN'T ALWAYS TELL where you were. Along long stretches of the highway it looks almost all the same, and late on a day late in winter it's also cold and grey all the way, and you drive until you're not sure you care where you are, or even remember why you're out there when everyone has gone somewhere else, but what pushes you on, what matters, is to get to that somewhere else from this nowhere under a sky sagging down, heavy with snow. I thought of other places to be, places and people that might have been, are yet, still wait for me, even now. Had the Foundation not taken me in years ago, there never would have been all the other places that were, places that led to still other places, which led to this morning, to this noon, to this now, nowhere. Must it then be *this* here and this now because all roads and turns in the roads have led as if by one road to a particular here at any particular now, abandoned on a highway, fleeing before the snow?

#### NEXT. EXIT—FREMONT

I must have missed a turn. Driving alone, wandering among one's thoughts, you may miss the word, the moment out there. Then must follow the slow haste of more grey miles. Yet it's easy not to get off the road once you're on, it's easier instead to keep going, gliding, flying, falling down a long chute. I wondered if I should try to turn around and go all the way back. I don't make this trip very often, only before the annual report is due, so I couldn't quite remember the way back. Deciding and redeciding, all the time I was moving further away, until at last it was too late to decide. The day had been lost.

Anyway, no more interviews today. I was glad to admit I wouldn't be able to talk to another of our selected panel of consultants. From these individuals, carefully, randomly chosen and within certain minor, predictable limits of error, we at the Foundation were to learn what the rest of them were thinking. We would put all of their thoughts together and build a statistical model of the One that was the Many. We knew, of course, that they didn't easily give up their true thoughts. Their real selves were sometimes concealed or disguised, and sometimes they themselves didn't know what they knew. Skilled interviewing techniques, experienced interpretation, interest and energy were needed to cut through the pulp of appearances to the pit of belief. But I wasn't up to it today. Or on many other days recently. It seemed to be taking longer to cut through all the layers, and I was never sure anymore when I had reached the real core, the heartwood. Instead of leading to one great, glowing underground cavern, the labyrinth of tunnels and passages led instead around and around, or back into each other, or merely outside again. I wasn't even sure if what I wanted to know, to find, was the same as that which the Foundation wanted to know. Not only were we not asking the right questions, but the answers didn't come to much either. When the figures were all in, summed and taken apart and reconstituted again, they didn't resemble real people, but more the grey, faceless shapes that passed occasionally on the opposite side of the road.

On a day like this, nobody would want to talk about, say, perceptions of inter-group identities. They would rather talk about—what? I had reached the intersection and saw a sign with an arrow pointing. Deciding it was better to be somewhere than nowhere, I turned in and followed the narrow blacktop as it crossed the frozen fields. I had never been to Fremont before, in fact, I only knew of the place because I had seen the name on the roadmap. But the town had been there all the time, a circle around a dot on a stippled red line with the figure "16" between it and the cutoff. The lights would be on by now and they would be inside and warm.

By the time I reached the outskirts, I realized how tired and hungry I was. There were first the usual stiff and square houses, a couple of gas stations, the main street as a long double row of red brick fronts of shops, a small bank, a barbershop, the last of a snow heaped off the slanting sidewalk. I saw a big yellow 1880 on the pediment of a hall which was closed and shuttered, I drove over an iron bridge with wooden planks for a roadbed that banged as I crossed the river. I passed a feed and grain elevator, a set of railroad tracks, a tavern. There must be a place to eat here, perhaps a place to sleep, but already I was on my way out of town with nothing much in sight ahead. The only alternative was to turn around and stop and park and get out and walk and find someplace and ask. Then I saw, DR UG S printed in gold leaf on the tall mullioned windows of a store. When I came closer to the windows, I could see inside they were filled with a lot of bottles and cardboard signs. The door had a latched handle and showed the sgraffito of years in its green paint. Inside, I could feel and smell the warmth of an oil stove. There were cabinets of dark brown wood with glass doors built up to the ceiling, but it was hard to see what was behind them. A lamp was lit over a sort of soda fountain, and further back in the store, another light showed a white-haired man behind a high counter.

"May I help you, sir?"

I hadn't seen her. She was in that instant blue eyes, a clear pure blue, and in the instant that crowded behind, she was the turning of one eye in towards the other and in upon me. Strabismus. Staring at her, I wanted to say something, say any number of things, such as, "Lovely!" or, "You could get that eye muscle repaired for a few hundred dollars." But I was tipped off balance, not ready for her, and I had taught myself not to say what I wanted to say, or what first came to mind. Instead, I asked for a cup of coffee, was there any?

"Sure, but I'll have to heat it up."

She blurred the "sure" sound, making it more with the lips, and I noticed when she turned that she was slender and wore a sort of smock which was too long for her. Finally,

"This is a nice little town you have here."

"Haven't you ever been here before?"

"Just once or twice. I usually go by way of Clara, up by route 23."

Silence. I saw she had broad hands and fan-shaped nails.

"It looks like a pretty quiet little town."

"Well, most people have gone home for dinner by now."

"Is there any good place to eat around here?"

"There's a grill downtown. They . . ."

Her face was oval, around a loose mouth that looked slightly foolish when she smiled because of that crazy cocked eye. She leaned in and angled her head when she talked, the way that cross-eyed people sometimes do. Her closely focused gaze held me, yet I couldn't look enough at that face to assemble it as one image, it all kept sliding around, over what wonders hidden beneath—

"Yes, thanks, I guess I could drink another cup. Do . . .?"

We talked. Trivial talk like almost all talk, something to fill up the space between us, around us. She asked me what I did "for a living." I told her I sold dental supplies. The other was too hard to explain, and worse, would intimidate her. I was tired of myself and my job anyway, but it was too late now to change either. And it didn't matter—I could just as easily have sold dental supplies. I tried all the agreeable and plain topics that I thought might interest a girl. I used my best false cheer. The talk was hard to keep going, we didn't have any subjects. She was polite and pleasant and perhaps glad for the interest on a dull afternoon, while I, for my part, had been somehow touched down inside by that fond and shy and foolish face. I flowed from myself, I became full and open, charmed and changed, outside of time, as it grew dark there in that magic cave. Finally, the old man came out and pulled the strings to turn on the other lamps.

"Almost six o'clock. Time for me to go pretty soon."

"Can I drive you home?"

"I'm not going home right now. I'm going over to my girl-

friend's. She promised to do my hair. She's taking a course by mail on how to be a beauty operator. She lives near here."

"You have nice blond hair."

"Oh, that comes out of a bottle!"

"You should wear it behind your ears. You can't tell sometimes if a girl has ears because they're all covered up."

She didn't say anything to this, just looked at me. It felt kind of flat after that, so I smiled as best I could and said something about dropping in again to see her. When the old man came up with some jugs of syrup for the soda fountain, I got up and went back outside. I didn't care about dinner by then, but there wasn't anything left to do.

All that week, I found more difficult than ever listening to all the tiresome people who took so long to say what little they had to say. I scarcely saw the figures tabulated on sheets, spread out on my desk. I only wanted to be left alone to catch and embrace the images that leaped through my head. I thought of the vacant blue of her eyes that might have come from long looking at the open sky. What was she really like? Would she like me, was I too old for her, was it too late, was there someone else? I knew these were foolish thoughts, so I tried thinking about that particular configuration of features that had such a peculiar effect on me, that made me want to lose myself there, as if to drop into a deep pool of peace, down below where the sunlight shone. I wanted to know everything about her, to own and study her, to break into the secret of whatever ravished me so. Her very sweat must be sweet. I wore out her face, rubbed it smooth, looking at it until I could see it no more, except in flashes when I wasn't looking, and then just as quickly it was gone again.

By the next Friday, I couldn't think about the report or anything except going back there. I had to see again so as to remember so as to know. I made some excuse at the shop and another to my patient Edna and left after lunch. I drove until mid-afternoon, traveling all the time to that memory of a drugstore on the edge of an almost forgotten town. I would

say and she would say. Miles of that. When I finally reached the store, only the old man was there. I sat down, weak with disappointment. I asked him for a malted milk, not because I wanted one, but perhaps because it was more trouble to make. When he brought it, petulantly, in his unsteady hand, I asked him if I didn't remember seeing a girl working here, a blond girl with a little accent.

"She still works here. Wanted to take off early to go down to do some shopping. I figured I could do without her for a while at this time of day so I let her go. Used to run it all by myself before my back give out. Been going to this chiropractor and he has this machine. . . ."

I drove downtown, out into another long week without having seen her, another week alone, tired of myself, even more tired of everyone else. I drove up and down and around and around, lacing through the side streets and the Friday afternoon crowd in the main street. All these people, shopping and stopping to talk in the timid sunshine, knew each other and knew this girl for whom I searched so much better than I, who could appreciate her best.

Then I saw her, coming out of a store with a shoe box under her arm. Dressed in a shapeless coat and tied under a kerchief, she looked like everyone else on this street. For an instant I wanted to run away and I asked myself why I had come so far for so little.

"Can I give you a lift?"

A blank; caution; an unrecognizing stare.

"Remember me?"

"Oh sure, you're the man who goes around and sells things to dentists!"

"Hop in. I'll drive you home."

But when she was in I convinced her that this time she was the one who looked cold, and it was my turn to provide the hospitality. So she directed me to a drive-in, where we sat cozy in the privacy of the car and drank coffee from paper cups. She modestly accepted a cigarette from me. We tried various new things to talk about, slowly warming to them and to each other,

finding whatever we could to agree upon. When she unbuttoned her coat I could see the clothes she wore underneath, her clothes, and I knew again I wanted to be there with her. I suppose it showed because she was flattered by my interest, and we got along well for people who didn't know each other at all. Little by little she became substance as forms and details emerged in relief. She lived with her mother who was twice widowed. Her name was Marguerite. She had a mole on her neck, and she hadn't liked high school because of the "stuck up crowd." She admired my car, but she didn't own a car herself. She—

"What time is it?"

When I told her, she said that she had to go home. Her world had come back for her, and I resented it.

"Let's go somewhere, have a drink or something to eat."

"I really shouldn't. She'll be expecting me soon for dinner, and to help around the house."

"I've looked forward to seeing you again, and talking with you."

A long pause and the peculiar intensity of her gaze. The exquisite moment when, without guile, she chooses you and decides to manipulate the truth to others for you, when she quietly decides to do what she wants to do. Innocence wrapped around deceit, and wrapped beneath that, a hidden pearl of innocence, and in that pearl—

"I'll call and see. Got any change?"

I bought a lot of barbecue and french fries and rolls and more coffee and we drove up to the lake to eat it. There was a country park running along the side of the lake which had formed behind a check dam. No one was there and the picnic tables were stacked in an open pavilion. She spread the food on paper napkins on the dash and the seat between us and we had our first meal together in our little house. After we had eaten, we felt confident enough to go outside for a walk. The crust of ice on the surface of the lake was starting to crumble and I realized that Easter was only a week away.

"Do you ever stop and see Dr. Shreck here in town?"

"No. He's not in my territory."

"I should go to him again. I got a tooth that hurts whenever I eat anything real sweet. Do you know anything about teeth?"

"A little, I guess. Where is it?"

I leaned over her and looked in. I didn't see anything except her tongue and her uneven teeth, but I couldn't really focus on anything because the light was poor and because I was so close to her. Then I looked at her eyes as they merged upon me, so I took the chance and brought my mouth down over hers. It surprised me again, and it once did, as I had forgotten, how they weren't as surprised as they should be, as if it were natural. I felt grateful, almost reverent after that, and told her I had better take her home. I told her I would see her again in a couple of weeks when I let her off, a block away so her mother wouldn't see the car drive up.

I knew I shouldn't return next weekend, although returning was all that was important to me. Trying to pass off myself (without the self I had withdrawn) to the others at the office with vague excuses of not feeling well, made me as strange to them as I was to myself. I had not realized all of them were so much around me, that we watched each other so. What they saw of me now was an empty, abstracted face; what they wouldn't see was the churning and wringing inside, as I thought of the two weeks that seemed so long, and were so long that our little life together would starve and die. I finally called her at the drugstore, but it wasn't any good, it didn't come through. So I told her I would be up, but she said it would have to be Saturday. I had to accept.

The house was three stories trimmed with dormers, turrets, cupolas, and a circling porch. Some of the balusters on the porch were missing and the paint was faded and flaking. There was an iron hitching post out front and on it a sign that said,

APT  
FOR RENT

The door opened and she came out, closed the door behind her. This time she wore a blue dress under a blue jacket, and on her

feet a new pair of high white heels. I suppose the blue made some connection with her eyes, and the shoes made her appear taller, her legs longer, her gait more precise as she came smiling down the walk, a girl stepping out from a highway billboard, but analyzing doesn't do any good. She was all at once there, and she had changed again. When she came nearer, I noticed too that she wore her hair behind her ears.

Miles and hours later, we sat in the car, far out in a maze of dirt roads, parked under the still-bare branches of some trees, dappled in the moonlight white and bright, drinking canned beer. We drank and listened to the radio, music from Boston and Pittsburgh and New Orleans. As we listened and drank and passed the hours, we moved away; we found ourselves lost in that no place and only place. For long minutes we were so close, not one really, but two so close the edges of self became blurred, scarcely touching nose and mouth, breathing each other's breath, breathing life in and from each other, a soft, so delicate taking, sharing, absorbing, using. And there was all that touching too, and finding and exposing and shame and new knowing and helping and sharp hereness, the trembling closeness, warm together there under our dark shell, lost far out in that night, sheltered under the trees, hidden from the arisen God.

"I'd better go out and check the rear tire."

"I'll go with you."

"No, silly, you stay here."

I agreed, but when she was outside, I couldn't keep myself from looking out the window to see her, crouched with cricket legs akimbo, reflective, vulnerable yet proffering without fear to the face of the earth on placed white pumps, gleaming in the moonlight. I felt the pressure growing inside my head behind my hungry eyes, and I was led outside, and she looked up at me as she stood up, but said nothing when I reached her and slobbered kisses all over her.

That holy hour of illusion was not to be repeated, but I needed to experience again at least the gradually fading illusion

of the true illusion. I went to see her almost every weekend through the spring and into the summer. Going off like that, of course, involved me in a list of lies to the people I knew in and out of the Foundation, and to Edna, and to my innocent and corrupt Marguerite. But then, I could almost believe my lies: they could just as well have been true, instead of the fable in which I was living.

What did we do for all my lies on those spring and summer nights? We sat for hours and drank in all the bars and grills and taverns for miles around. Sometimes we drank bar whiskey, and sometimes we drank beer. We also drove down river to a place where we could dance as well as drink. There she taught me the new steps, the shuffling and stomps and rounds her generation did so easily. No matter what the place, it was the same. In only a short time and with only a few drinks, I could feel filling my head and flowing, flowing down to the base of my spine and out to my hands and feet, that wonderful loosening and opening, swelling and heightening, until I was off and aloft, slipping sideways, floating and passing through, detached, cut free, out of reach, away. My dear drinking buddy, my girl of the fair, sweet, crooked face, what did she think, what did she feel? I'd guess she was happy, as well as she knew how. And when we left at closing time, and went away by ourselves to play under our tent of skins, she was so affectionate. It's not possible, I know, to look through machicolations upon *their* outside, but I sometimes wondered what it was like to *be* her, there, when she looked up at me, and what it all meant to her. Should it be coded on the card as "romance"? Did she think it was expected of her as her part in a steady and generous arrangement? She didn't want to talk about it; she became embarrassed and put her finger over my mouth. But of no matter if I knew what she knew, or if we felt the same tenderness toward each other because I needed and enjoyed her. Yet the question further back was why she loved me at all, if love me she did, because the me she knew didn't exist. She loved a nest of lies. She embraced a suit of clothes in a shop window; the real me was locked up inside my dead dummy face. And al-

though she was real enough on the outside, I sometimes felt as if I had bitten into a chocolate rabbit, or, after listening for an evening to her chatter, that she wasn't exactly hollow inside, but filled with a lot of watchworks like a crazy cuckoo clock.

She did tell me some details about herself, as much as there was to tell (for she wasn't very much) and as much as she could tell (because she was shy, even in thinking about herself). Her mother had grown up in Moravia and after her first marriage had come over to join the many Czechs who had already settled in the area. She had married Marguerite's father, an older man who had been a bachelor, and who had for years worked his farm alone. Marguerite remembered liking the farm, especially the animals, which she said had "personalities" almost like people when you got to know them. After the father died, her mother had sold the farm because she was unable to run it by herself. She took the money and bought the house they now lived in so that they could have the income from the apartments and rooms upstairs. I met the mother the first time I visited the house. "Met" isn't exactly the word as she didn't get up from her overstuffed armchair when Marguerite let me in from the bottom of the stairwell that smelled of dust and cats. She just said, "Hallo," and went back to reading the evening paper. From the time I first saw the mother, I recognized that Marguerite had a bulbous sort of nose that I had not noticed previously.

Marguerite also took me to meet her friends. I spent hours at the bowling alley with those incomprehensible people, while they were incomprehensibly involved in that trivial, mechanical game. Her fat girlfriend who did her hair went with a welder in a farm equipment repair shop. He liked to drink shots with beer chasers and to say when he bowled, "Keep 'em rolling!" and the girlfriend would laugh. After the bowling and rolling and after we ate again, and that long evening together was over, I wondered what the two of them did after we went our separate ways. Was it possible? And was that, also "love"? Once in a while, I still thought in terms of questionnaires.

Other times we spent in even simpler amusements. Nights

when I arrived at her door, when she said, "Why not stay in tonight, I think I'm catching cold, I don't feel too much like going out." Or some other reason. She had a collection of records to which she continually added as those who had been in favor were dropped and new ones became popular. We sat in her small bedroom where she kept her record player, and played through stacks of these throbs, cries, bleats and calls, all the extremities of sounds that gave other people (like us?) in other unknown places pleasure or pastime, three minutes at a time. We also played checkers. She greatly enjoyed this, and played well. Her father had taught his little divka the game to keep him company on winter evenings. Her mother would sit there, drinking beer and reading the paper or cracking and eating peanuts, or crocheting an endless bedspread. I would drink beer too, but Marguerite would only drink soda pop at home, five or six bottles of cherry or orange or grape. Her cousin came over one night, and while she worked on a scrapbook of pictures of movie stars she cut from magazines brought home from the drugstore, he and I talked about cars. It was friendly, but I hated it. Or perhaps then I didn't, but there I was in that basement, sitting on the couch with Marguerite leaning familiarly against me, and I wasn't sure who I was. At last, when the mechanic or whoever else had dropped in, had left, the old lady would finally give up. She would push herself out of her chair with a sigh but hardly a word, and go back into her bedroom. We waited quietly until after we thought she was sound in her sow-like sleep. Marguerite was thin, almost frail under her skirt. It was a disgusting sort of business really, despite what everyone says, but to some extent I suppose that's what one enjoys about it. Then we would sit up again and smoke one last cigarette together between us (this was sweet), and she would return me to the door and kiss me some more. When she had kissed me enough, she sent me out into the night.

\* \* \*

One Saturday afternoon, Edna came out on the sunporch while I stood looking at the garden through white net curtains.

In the green shadows, the sprinkler slowly tossed lean arms toward the roses in endless circles like a tireless, drugged dancer, and the roses seemed to want to reach in to be stroked by a wet, long-fingered hand. Each time as the arched arms passed across the water in the birdbath, the image of the sky reflected purple on its surface was momentarily broken, scattered, then recomposed, only to be broken again. The days were once more growing short, and I knew I couldn't hold my dear illusion together much longer.

"I had my hair done today. How does it look?"

"Fine. How much did it cost?"

"Not as much this time. I didn't have it rinsed. Might as well admit I'm getting gray."

"Well, it's up to you."

The dancer on the grass turned, twirled, whirled.

"I came back in time to bake an angel's food cake for dessert."

"I've told you I don't want to eat that sort of thing. I'm supposed to watch my weight."

"You're not going out again tonight, are you?"

I didn't answer, but went out into the wet green shadows to turn off the sprinkler. She knew I was going, and why, even if she didn't know the irrelevant details of where and with whom. I was tired, but I was going. In fact, I had to leave earlier than usual. Marguerite and I had planned, for a change, to have dinner at an elaborate place halfway across the state. I used to go there, before all this started, whenever the study took me to that area. The restaurant was well known, and on the road to Fremont, I worried whether anyone I knew would be there by chance and see us.

For the first time, her mother let me in.

"Margie is still dressing. Sit, sit here in this better chair. Soon she will be finished. Can I get you maybe one beer?"

"No thanks, we have quite a drive ahead of us."

"You drive a lot? You sell something?"

"Yes, dental supplies."

"Must be good business, hah?"



The door to Marguerite's bedroom, down the hall, opened. She was all made up. She wore earrings which I hadn't seen before, held gloves, and carried a handbag over her arm. The legs looked as graceful and well-placed as before up from the white shoes, but the shoes didn't go with the new dress, and besides, it was too late in the year for them. Behind her beamed the girlfriend. I stood up, of course. I could feel them expecting me to say whatever should be said. The best I could do was to tell her she looked very nice, but it came out flat and I couldn't make my face go along with it. They had tried so hard to please me, yet how could they have known?

We arrived at the height of dinner and followed the *mâitre d'* into the great panelled room, through the opulent rustle of service and feeding and talk, under the golden lamps, past the lustre of uplifted, well-cared-for faces, down to a table glittering of silver, crystal and white linen. We were seated and looked across at each other. I had never discovered the secret of whatever it had been about her that had ravished me so, and now I never would, because it wasn't there anymore. The whole affair now seemed so improbable.

"Would you and the lady care for a cocktail before dinner, sir?"

"Yes, a couple of martinis, please."

"I haven't ever had a martini before. Are they any good?"

After that, I insisted on wine with dinner, but she wouldn't drink it when it arrived. She did enjoy the relish tray, and ate a quantity of pickles and rolls. The roast beef was too rare for her, she said she didn't like to see the blood running out, so I sent it back. For dessert, she had ice cream, while I had a cheese, soft and fragrant, mottled with mold. When dinner was completed, we had no feeling of amplitude, of well-being, of ascent. Instead, our evening had never left the ground, but lay as a flaccid balloon on the table before us, distasteful to look upon.

To try to save something out of whatever was left, we departed and drove back, back across the dark counties. She didn't sit close to me as she usually did while I drove, but leaned

back on the far side of the seat. At dinner she hadn't looked well, and talked and moved in a tired sort of way. She had circles under her eyes; now she said she felt ill. The spring had run down, the works were worn and used up. It pleases no longer, it is only chipped and sad. Some times, this is the time they step forward and hang it heavily around your neck, while she looks up at you, through you, past you.

On the road not far from Fremont was "The Lone Pine," where we had had good times in the past. She was indifferent about going there now, but I refused not to try again. Weekend nights were always big nights at these places. We walked into a blast of music, noise, smoke and the smell of beer, people in work clothes and dressed-up clothes, everybody making it or trying to, being themselves or what they thought they were or wanted to be, good or poor thing that it was. A group of them waved to her as we came in, then saw me, overdressed. I led her to a corner table where I hoped they were too drunk to remember to bother us until after we had caught up and wouldn't care, when we would be part of all that crude cheer. But by closing time, we were still only watching it. She didn't smile at me or them, nor especially seem to see me among them. Last Call was announced at last, and I went to the bar for beer to take along in the car. When I returned with the package, I saw someone leaning over the table, talking to her. He had a red face and long sideburns; his eyes were greedy, even when he smiled. He was still smiling as he looked up and held out a big hand to me. My obvious dislike didn't bother him. He didn't flinch from hostility, as I did, but regarded it with amusement and as a challenge. He was not inclined to leave, but took a seat and continued talking to Marguerite while I stood by. Finally, he gave up and watched us go. In the parking lot, in the car, I demanded to know if she knew him.

"I went out with him once or twice last year."

"What did you ever see in trash like that?"

"He's not, he's lots of fun and full of jokes and always up to something."

"I bet he was up to something."

"There you go again. Don't you like any of my friends? I don't think you even like anybody."

"You know I like you."

"Well I don't think I like you. I'm not going with you anymore. I decided. I'm going back inside."

I told her I wouldn't let her go, not yet. I wanted to keep her from shutting me out. I grabbed at her then, to force her down, and I almost succeeded but she fought me off, screamed, "I won't let you, I won't let you!" and when my fingers broke through the fabric of her dress, she kicked at me and fell out of the car. For a moment I glimpsed her on her hands and knees as she got up, and ran back to the tavern. I started to follow, but I saw him and a couple of the others come out, still holding their bottled beers. One yelled, "Hey you, we want to talk to you. . . ." I doubled back to the car and jumped in. I started the engine. A beer bottle hit the car. I heard them cursing me as I tore out of the lot and down the road. I pushed the accelerator down so that the car trembled and I drove that way until I was sure they weren't following.

I kept driving until the sky began to show a little light. There was a woods not far ahead, so I pulled over beside them to rest. Then I saw it on the floor. My only souvenir. I picked it up and turned it around and looked at it. I ran my finger along the swelling curve of the arch. I cupped my hands around it, as it had so often held her foot. The shoe was bulged out of shape, the lining was worn through in places, and the heel had been run down. The white cloth covering was spattered with mud and had not been cleaned. I kissed it anyway. Then I put it under my coat and got out of the car and walked through the scrub and into the woods. When I was far enough inside the woods I found a stump and placed the shoe on it. Then I knelt down in front of it and took a rock and pounded the shoe until it came apart in shreds and pieces of white and brown. When that was done, I got up and went back to the car. I drove a long time after that, into the suffusing pink of the dawn. I don't

know how long I drove, it felt better driving again, fleeing, falling down the long chute.

Later, I saw a sign up ahead. It said,

NEXT EXIT—ALTMONT

Then later, I saw another sign with an arrow, pointing, and it said,

ALTMONT—22 MILES

And the thought occurred to me.

I had never been in Altmont.



MR