The surprise to her is not how large the mountain looms but that it is, on the 21st of June, entirely covered with snow. The light is failing as Mr. and Mrs. Morris Merkle arrive at last at the little station in Flagstaff, Arizona. They see dimly that it is a grubby town, but behind it stands a most awe-inspiring sight, an eloquent chapter in pre-human history: the San Francisco Peaks. It is not a chapter they have ever read before, or even conceived of, living in St. Louis.

Relieved to escape the train, they stumble across the platform, searching for their luggage and the Hedquists. Morris Merkle is experiencing some trouble breathing. Jane, his wife, has a headache but hardly notices. It is cool, almost cold. Only a handful of people have gotten off the train, some of them just to stretch their legs. The station building is lit up inside. It is made of brown stone with a wooden trim painted white and turquoise. In the distance, high up against the darkening sky, a few gaudy neon signs advertise hotels—the DuBeau, the Downtowner, the Monte Vista. Fleabags, surely, thinks Mrs. Merkle.

Suddenly Morris calls out, "Dotty! Dotty, darling! Over here!" and walks quickly in the direction of a long-legged woman wearing a pair of dark slacks and a short canvas coat. Her face resembles his, her long graying hair is rolled in a bun in a way that nevertheless fails to make her look schoolmarm-ish. Jane Merkle has no recollection of this particular Dotty Hedquist. It has been two years since they last saw one another and her memory of her sister-in-law is less complimentary, less womanly. In fact, in a shallow recess of her mind she wonders if there has been some change, some rearrangement in relationship perhaps, some affection or appreciation coming to Dotty from a quarter not connected to her marriage. These things have been known to make a dour woman glow. But it seems so preposterous she decides to think no more about it, and goes to join her husband and the Hedquists.

"Jane, dear," says Dotty, and with great effort gives her sister-in-law a stiff hug, followed by a peck on the cheek. Jane feels almost as if she has been bitten. Dotty holds her at arm’s length. "What a lovely dress you have on. Quite the fashion, I imagine, though out here nobody
pays much attention to any of that. There are so many other, more important things to think about. But don't you look lovely. And to think you've been traveling for two days! You look so fresh!"

Oliver Hedquist heartily shakes Jane's hand, as he always does, and suggests they round up the luggage. The train whistle sounds and the trainmen beam their lanterns under the wheels, while the conductors hop aboard and pull up the metal steps in slow motion. The cars rumble by, gaining speed, shaking the ground, until the last one passes and there across the tracks lies the other half of town.

There are three bags on the platform. One of these is a large leather suitcase belonging to Morris Merkle, who, though he is not prone to thoughts like these, finds it almost an act of magic that he can pack shirts and shoes and trousers and socks and underwear and a good jacket or two into a defined rectangular space in St. Louis, Missouri, and without much attention to the process on his part, the whole lot arrives in Flagstaff, Arizona and awaits him on the platform. He begins to walk away with his retrieved belongings. His brother-in-law points him toward the car. But young Mrs. Merkle is not so caught up in the magic as her husband, for she has discovered that of the three items on the platform, one belongs to her husband and two to a short, wheezing fellow whose acquaintance they made on the train, a fellow from Chicago by the name of McCann. He has a rank aroma and is poorly dressed—evidence of a lackluster relationship to grooming, hygiene or a change of clothes. Yet his are the remaining pieces of luggage, two rather large suitcases at that. She who has packed a footlocker full of her favorite dresses and skirts and fancy blouses, and her good hairbrush with real sow bristles and a monogrammed silver back, is left in this new land with what she's wearing and the contents of her purse. This is the sum of it and it will have to do until she finds a shop, which will surely not be this evening, or perhaps anytime soon. And as for borrowing clothes from Dotty, she quickly decides she would rather throw herself beneath a train. Jane Merkle has never believed in slacks beyond the confines of the home, except in winter when she has to shovel snow, and she strongly suspects, from earlier comments, that slacks are all poor Dotty's got. And yes, her sister-in-law cuts an impressive figure in them these days, but Jane does not, she's certain she does not, and she won't look a fool for the sake of conformity. When in Rome remember you're from St. Louis—that's her motto.
After much apologizing on the part of Oliver Hedquist for the loss of Jane Merkle's wardrobe, though in what way he might be responsible even he can't figure out, they pile into the Chevrolet and head off to find, in his words, "something to chew on." Jane Merkle hopes it won't be anything too old or tough or spicy. There are a few Chinese restaurants along the main road, which is the famous Route 66, Oliver informs them. Jane wills the car not to stop at these places, which are dimly lit and steamy, each with an old Oriental woman sitting by the window, gazing out. The car goes on, and finally they come to a Howard Johnson's. Oliver Hedquist pulls into the empty parking lot and Dotty says, "It's too cold for ice cream, Oliver." To which he responds, "I'm afraid I've got my heart set on fried clams."

They hurry inside and Jane, who hasn't had one in years, orders a chocolate milkshake. Dotty has a chicken sandwich and iced tea. The men order clams, followed by pie and coffee. Finally Oliver says, "Well, you two must be tuckered out, and we've got a drive ahead of us. Shall we?"

Jane dozes in the back seat and wakes to the swerving motion of the car and the dreamlike sight of two deer caught in the headlights, leaping across the road. Morris sleeps upright with his head against the window. She takes his hand and he snuffles like a piglet and gently begins to snore. Later, in the Hedquists' home, in the bed she must share with her husband, Jane lies awake and considers the strangeness of having arrived at last at the Grand Canyon and found to her great surprise there was nothing to see, nothing but darkness. Despite the hour, Oliver had not driven them straight home but to the lodge on the rim where he and Jane walked the few steps out to the edge of the canyon itself, which might have been the edge of the world. And behold! A great nothing! She must have expressed her disappointment, to which he replied, "Well, of course. There's no moon. You can't expect to see anything. But there's no wind tonight, so you can hear it."

"Hear what?" asked Jane.

"Listen."

She listened. She struggled and strained to listen, and heard nothing. "I'm afraid I don't hear a thing."

"But you do," he encouraged her. "You've never thought of it as sound. You've thought of it as the absence of sound. It's that ringing."
She prayed to hear something ring. She wanted to please the old man. And just as she had given up and was about to lie—a little white lie—by saying, "Yes, of course. That ringing," she did hear it. How extraordinary. As loud as a swarm of mosquitoes, but set in a higher octave, and continuous. One continuous, clear, high-pitched silver ringing. The sound of the Grand Canyon. She laughed, and he did too. He placed his hand on her elbow, turning her in the dark, and without another word they walked back to the car.

The next morning her husband is not in the bed—it's a large bed and she checks it twice. She walks through the house and finds him in the kitchen, trying his hand at coffee.

"Morris?" She tries not to sound incredulous.

"Ah, dearest, good morning. I'm just...creating something here."

"A mess," she says. "I can see that."

"Well, yes," he laughs self-consciously. "I'm a few over par in the cocina, I must admit, but you, my lovely wife, were asleep, and the Hedquists seem to have gone out, and--"

"Cocina?" she asks.

"It means kitchen."

"It means kitchen?"

"Yes it does," he says firmly. "In Spanish."

"You, Morris, have taken up Spanish?"

"I have. I mean I haven't, but Dotty has. She keeps the book right here by the sink so she can...let's see. So she can lavar and," he searches the page, "so she can lavar and apprender at the same time. There!"

Jane Merkle is beyond astonishment but she keeps it to herself. She gives her husband the task of making toast while she organizes the coffee. She looks for eggs but finds none. There is almost nothing in the ice box, and little to eat in the cupboards. She finds some old jam and a tub of margarine, and places them on the table. Morris burns the toast but remains optimistic and cheerful. "Nothing a bit of scraping won't take care of," he announces. She covers her ears. She can't bear the sound of scraping.

The Hedquists return as Morris Merkle is washing up the plates. "Lavar, lavar, lavar," he says to himself. Repetition is the only way he can learn anything. He is feeling good this morning, alive and feisty--like a somewhat younger man. He's full of energy. No wonder Dotty's
having a go at another language. It's the air, perhaps. He's never been in air so thin, so unoppressive. It melts, that's what it does. Unlike Missouri air that thickens as it touches the skin, this Arizona air seems to vanish as one passes through it.

The Hedquists seem surprised to see him at the sink. "I've sent Jane off to get dressed," he explains. "She has nothing to wear."

"Well, she must borrow some of my clothes," says his sister, brushing past him, charging down the hall. "And Moose," she calls back, "for heaven's sake, leave those dishes."

"All done!" he announces brightly, looking around for a towel on which to wipe his hands. And there it is, towel rack and towel located conveniently at hip level, close enough to the sink to be useful, yet not so close as to obstruct movement or catch one in the groin. The logic of domesticity suddenly overwhelms him. How is it he's never noticed it before, never surrendered himself to its calming influence? The pair of plates clean and drying upside down, the washed utensils, glasses, coffee cups. It astonishes him, the simple pleasure of doing. Has he traveled all the way to Arizona to find a sort of meek salvation in women's work? He has a sudden great thirst for tasks today and says to Hedquist, "I feel fit as a fiddle, Ollie. Point me the way to the mower and I'll have a go at your lawn."

Hedquist laughs and says, "You're not in Missouri anymore, Morris. Come have a look at my lawn. Come now." He motions Merkle to join him at the window.

And there is a certain jump in Morris's pulse as he stands and beholds the differentness before him. It is a different differentness than the barren tableaux he saw from the train: the land loping off in all directions, frighteningly dry, easily snapped and broken, or lifted and blown by the wind. He had shuddered through Oklahoma and Texas, gritted his teeth through New Mexico. And of Arizona he had expected the same. He had prepared himself for an awful dread. He'd seen little of the state in daylight and that suited him fine. By the time he arrived at the Hedquists' the night was inky black so he'd thrown in a lawn or two, some hedges to buoy his hopes, a sense of civilization amidst desolation. But now, as he gazes through the pine woods and small oaks that occupy and define the Hedquists' yard, and lead in some mysterious way toward an opening, becoming themselves pillars along many avenues of light, he cannot be sure whether his heart races with the unexpected vision of beauty, or with relief. To be sure he feels relieved. The trees give him a feeling of home, of Missouri, though they lack the lushness he
loves. He thought he might, for the next fortnight, have to do without flora altogether, but it seems Arizona can grow a thing or two. Oaks and pines. Perhaps Dotty has a garden. Hedquist seems less interested in the intervening characters of trees than in the opening they point to, and says, "Out there, my friend, that's what whupped the Conquistadores."

"Whupped?" asks Morris.

"Whupped," nods his brother-in-law. "Man called Cardenas, Garcia Lopez de Cardenas, parked his horse, fell to the ground, had a kind of epileptic fit right then and there. Plans ruined. Invincibility shaken if not destroyed. Seven golden cities, a dream, only a dream. Hopes for a Spanish world dashed to smithereens. That's what did it," points Hedquist. "That right there."

"What right where?"

"See it through the trees?"

"I don't see anything," Morris admits.

"People come here expecting a mountain," grumbles Hedquist.
Oliver Hedquist has plans this morning to introduce his brother-in-law to the wilds of Grand Canyon by putting a butterfly net in his hand. He can't imagine a more exciting adventure than a stroll down the South Kaibab trail, looking for Behr's hairstreaks or the Sara orangetip. The painted ladies will be flying, of course, and a variety of skippers, and with great good luck they may see a ringlet or two on the rim. Or a Riding's satyr--now that would be a find! He waits until the groceries have been carried in and the perishables put away before he suggests such an outing.

He doesn't know Morris Merkle well, has spent little time with him over the years--geographical distance has ruled that out. They were back east for the wedding, he and Dotty, and what a gloomy affair that was! St. Louis was veiled in drizzle, the bride's brother, who gave her away, the father having passed on some years earlier, got rip-roaring drunk and relieved himself on the pastor's habit or cassock or whatever it was. The cake, a four- or five-tiered thing, was raw, the champagne flat and tequila non-existent. Of course. No one drank tequila. No one but vaqueros and desperados, and the entire population of Mexico. And Oliver, when he had a chance--he tended to overdo it, he wouldn't be the last to admit. Oh, it was ghastly! He and Dotty had a bit of a tiff, something about the bride being too young. His response, regretfully, was that perhaps the groom was too old. That didn't help matters. He liked to get along with his wife, it was so much easier than being at odds with her, though he'd become quite accustomed to the odds over the years and had learned to approach her at these times like a man swaddled in bandages.

Oliver quite likes his sister-in-law, Jane. In the five years since the wedding she's grown up and come forward a bit, though she's still extraordinarily shy. She is, of course, young enough to be his daughter, or Dotty's, or Morris's, a situation that must make her feel lonely. She has a habit now of biting her top lip after she speaks. Has she been chastised for having opinions? He finds himself suddenly relieved that soon enough Merkle will be on his way home and Jane will stay on indefinitely. He senses an opportunity in that girl. She's a sweet girl, nice to look at, a forehead not too high, with good strong straight hair the color of Brazil nuts (but just below the ears? why doesn't she grow it out?) and eyes (he's hopeless at eye color) a piercing blue (they're
green, actually), and a small mouth that could be larger. And then the rest is a bit of a mystery. The first time they met she was draped in bridal attire, all those billowing layers upon layers that shroud the body, advertise virginal tendencies or some such thing. And this time he's seen her only in the dark, wearing what he recalls to be an unflattering--though understandably comfortable--dress. No, he assures himself, she's no old-man-bait. She's got an old man already and seems a bit restless with him. The opportunity, he feels, lies away from the vicissitudes of sex, in a place he can only identify as her curiosity, the wideness of her eyes and her entrancement with this land. This place. This canyon that first entranced him as well, years ago. And in she comes, just at this moment, dressed in Dotty's clothes yet wearing them in a way that Dotty never has and never will because she can't. This is youth. Youth in denim. How is it that these ordinary coverings take on such a splendid voluptuous look when youth resides within?

Merkle says, "Why, you look like a cowboy, Jane." He laughs irritably. "Is that all Dotty could come up with?"

"Oh," says his wife. "I think this will do, Morris. I'm comfortable enough and grateful to have clothes at all. Dotty's been more than patient. See, she even basted the hem of the blue jeans." She rolls up her pantleg to show him, but he's settling into a sodden darkish mood and she adds, meekly, "They were too long."

"A success!" says Oliver with as much gusto as he can muster. "You look Western, indeed, my dear, and out here in the West we like that!"

"We've made things fit," says Dotty brusquely. "That's the best we could do and we've done it."

"Done it, and done it well!" cries Oliver, then wills himself to calm down. He doesn't want to scare the girl. He coughs to gain control of himself and makes this announcement: "Plans for the day include a picnic at Yaki Point and a foray over the edge for those willing. Willing to what? Willing to foray!" (Now, don't be an idiot, he warns himself.)

"The edge?" asks Merkle.

"The edge, yes. Precisely."

"The edge of what?"

The edge of what? Oliver inwardly groans. He says, as directly and informatively as possible, with just the slightest trace of exasperation, "The canyon, Morris. Grand Canyon. For
here we are, meters away from one of the seven wonders of the natural world, and to fail to begin our exploration of it willy-nilly while the sun shines and the temperature remains pleasant and the invertebrates creep and fly with new spring vigor, to fail to run out there right now and take a look at it and bring a net or two, why...why, what would we be, Dotty?" His wife gives him a blank look so he answers himself: "We'd be dotty!"

The girl laughs. Jane Merkle laughs. He would say she laughs merrily. And then she asks a surprising question—he would have called it dumb in anyone else. But she asks it without hesitation, no fear whatsoever of appearing ignorant: "What's an invertebrate?"

"Oh," says he. It's been years since he's had to think about what an invertebrate is, not that it requires thinking. He has to express the definition of invertebrate, which is no longer automatic to him because he hasn't come across anyone for quite some time who hasn't known it. Though he has, of course, but in the blindness of passion he assumes everyone knows what an invertebrate is, what an insect is, what an arachnid is and an arthropod and a true bug. Of those with whom he converses who don't ask Jane's question, including the turnip-shaped woman who punches the cash register at the store, and the prune of a lady whose title is Postmistress of Grand Canyon, and the walleyed wrangler who runs the mules, he makes the rather wild assumption that they possess a working knowledge of invertebrates, which is why the question never arises. "Well," he says, removing his glasses, polishing them up a bit and returning them to his face, "invertebrate means, simply, 'without a spine.'"

"Like a jellyfish?" asks Jane.

"A jellyfish is an excellent example of an invertebrate."

"But not one that creeps and flies."

"Seldom," Oliver agrees.

"And not here at Grand Canyon."

"Oh, yes," says he. "Very possibly. Five hundred million years ago they were plentiful enough, propelling themselves through the sea." He adds excitedly, "This was a sea, my dear. Imagine it! A vast sea all around us, beneath us, above us, the great weight of it pressing down, creating mudstone. And jellyfish, or their ancestors, fanning their way through it, living and dying, falling to the sea floor as boneless piles of protoplasm. But, kind enough to leave trace fossils. We're not sure how they did it, but it seems to be the gas. The gas within, creating a
little pocket of...well, gas, a bubble around which the sediments formed and were subsequently cast by time and pressure. Any of this make sense?" The girl nods and he wonders aloud, "How in the world did we get onto jellyfish?"

"Spinelessness," says Dotty with a little barbed wire fence of a laugh. "Oliver's specialty."

He laughs as well, a sign of greatness, or at least great manners, thinks Jane Merkle.

They sally forth, picnic packed, sweaters draped over shoulders, feet variously shod. The Hedquists have sturdy brown hiking shoes, Morris wears loafers, and Jane sports U. S. Keds. Off they go in the Chevrolet to Yaki Point, a short drive east along the rim of Grand Canyon. Dotty drives. Her brother sits up front with her and Oliver sits in the back with Jane. The road comes so close to the edge sometimes, Jane finds herself leaning away from that fathomless chasm toward the safety of the forest on the other side of the car, though between her and those magnificent pines--some of them as big around as Missouri trees--lies her brother-in-law's formidable shoulder. Known for a certain Scandinavian boniness, Oliver Hedquist gives the impression of solid angularity wrapped in skin, like a worn paper bag of baseball bats. It is against this redoubt that Jane Merkle plunges in her flight from vertigo, only to realize that a dizzy spell is preferable to the strange experience of arriving alone on the uninhabitable shore of her brother-in-law's humerus. He, on his part, is not the least bit fazed by it, by her plunging and launching. He tries to steady her by leaning ever-so-slightly toward her, and at the same time resists putting an arm around her--even an avuncular one. Dotty, in the front seat, is pointing out the sights. "Moose--" says she.

"Where?" cries Jane, her heart fluttering in anticipation of a creature the size of the car, gangly and cartoonish.

Her sister-in-law laughs. "I meant your husband, silly. See the temples everyone? There's Zoroaster, Shiva, Brahma, Buddha. And over there, Wotan's Throne. It's a regular rollcall of infidels, isn't it?"

Jane feels carsick but interested, and peeks out across the vast space, bluish with haze. It is the first real look she's allowed herself, her first sight of the canyon in daylight. It's wider than she thought it would be. Somehow she imagined a slice, a sharp cut in the earth, but this is a ragged opening, full of what her in-laws call "temples," great vertical slabs of rock, flat-topped
mountains, some of them tree-covered, others bare, rising up like sky islands. And everywhere a
great convolution of land folds. Everywhere the spidery dry pathways of water, etching their way
downward in dark lines. If she half-closes her eyes she can see a great blue cloth, a heavy linen
cloth folded upon itself in the blue haze, a lover's dress, a lover's cape flung to the floor. And the
sky a blade of blue above it all, and the snow shining on the northern shore (of course it's a rim,
but to her it's a shore), the far shore of a river of air and light suspended in space, suspended in
spaciousness, for goodness sake! Not one bit like the river she grew up with, the muddy,
shrieking, crowded, busy, bustling, big-shouldered, stevedored, hot, steamy, frozen, churning,
legendary Mississippi. No, nothing like that. Suddenly it's all too much for her, the grandness,
the majesty, the sheer size, the arousing sense of all that rock, sinuous rock--oh, it's too much. It
overwhelms her as thoughts of death do, or the universe, which has no end anywhere, no edge.
She closes her eyes and hears Oliver Hedquist say, "Ten years of looking out at that miracle and
still I never see it to my satisfaction. Do you, Dotty?"

"What an odd question," says Dotty. She pulls the Chevrolet into the parking area at Yaki
Point. It’s a large car, and her confidence brings to mind the captain of some river barge. They
choose a suitable tree, a stunted pine called a piñon, which Morris recognizes right away as a
Spanish word, and plop their picnic down in the shade. Dotty unwraps a meager feast of crusty
bread and a bright orange spreadable cheese that looks suspiciously like war rations, while Jane
admires the tablecloth with its pattern of wildflowers and bees.

"It's just an old sheet," laughs her sister-in-law. "Can you imagine sleeping with all those
bees? I never did get used to it."

"Morris is afraid of bees."

“Afraid? I should say so,” Dotty replies. “You would be too if you had his condition.”
Jane looks at her blankly. "Why, don't you know, dear? Hasn't he told you? Shame on you not
telling her, Moose. Since he was a little boy, he’s been allergic to bee stings."

Lunch leaves Dotty with a rare (for her) affliction: bad gas. And her brother, light in the
head, due to the elevation of 7,000 feet and a lumpish heart, feels an overwhelming need to lie
down and nap. Oliver, with a net in each hand, stands before Jane. "Madame," says he, with an
almost imperceptible bow. "Your weapon awaits you. Mightier than pen and sword combined,
faster than a moving ringlet, if used well. Made of broomstick and bridal veil—the cross-
pollination of virgins and witches. May I introduce you, Mrs. Merkle, to your future calling.

Hark!" He cups his ear, charming and ludicrous man. "What do I hear? Is that your future calling? No, it's the dry cleaners. Your husband's suit is ready to pick up. But don't go!" he cries.

"Resist! What we promise you here is the adventurer's life, guaranteed no money back, no money at all! You can be penniless, for heaven's sake, and enjoy every minute of it!" He calms his voice and says sadly, "It's not a useless profession, Jane, simply a misunderstood one."

"Oliver," says Dotty from where she lies beneath the piñon, knees to her chest, trying to get some relief, "you'll scare the poor girl. Stop talking and get going." No sooner said than a great rumble erupts from somewhere near her hip, and Oliver and Jane move off swiftly in the direction of the South Kaibab trail.

At first she isn't any good at all. Oliver shows her how to hold the net with both hands, but she feels too encumbered. Her sweeps are awkward and way off the mark. She has only slightly better luck slapping the net down and catching things on the ground. The targets, he informs her, are *Vanessa cardui*, otherwise known as painted ladies. "These butterflies," she pants, after one of her more dazzling sprints and misses, "stand a very good chance."

"One in ten," he laughs.
"One in ten?"
"Only one in ten is captured."

"I'm not surprised. But there must be dozens of nincompoops like me to balance out sharpshooters like you."

He is quite marvelous with a net and she watches as he leaps and swings and pirouettes and swings some more. An old man! He rarely misses. He's airborne most of the time, and his wrist seems made of many moving parts--his whole arm does. It's like watching a delicate machine in flight, a delicate, deadly hunting machine. "You're a bird!" she cries in admiration, and he was but moments ago a doddering old fellow. He swishes his net. Like the tail of an angry cat, it makes a slicing sound in the air. Then she sees it. She sees the very thing he's doing that she's not, the source of his unhinged acrobatic joy: he's got only one hand on the net! He's twice as long that way, his reach is doubled, and he can sweep and slash unhindered, he can miss and turn and try again on a backswing. A backhand, that's what it is! As luck would have it, she herself has a formidable backhand and a fifty-five mile-an-hour serve, and the moment she sees how these might be used, it's a sad day for butterflies.
NO TRACES

She cannot remember if the young man's name is Earl or Ewell, and this bothers her to the point where she's kept awake by it, a terrible night, not one wink of sleep. Pulling on her blue jeans in the morning she wonders if Ewell is even a name, and if so, is it spelled Ewell or Yul or Yule? Not Yule, she decides. Might as well call a boy Christmas.

She has grown quite attached to her blue jeans, which she purchased against Morris's will on her seventh day in the West. She and Dotty drove to Flagstaff, where they had lunch at the Weatherford Hotel. They sat on the upstairs balcony with a charming view of the train station to the south, that fearsome mountain to the north. It was a surprisingly hot day and Jane wanted something cool and slightly wicked to drink, so she ordered a beer. "A beer!" whispered Dotty. "I didn't have any idea you drank beer."

"I never do," said Jane. "I thought I'd try it."

It was, in fact, the first time in her life she'd ever ordered an alcoholic beverage at lunch, and she wasn't prepared for the wooziness she felt for most of the afternoon. But it made the shopping interesting. And Dotty became more fun. There was an underwater feeling to the day which Jane quite liked. Nothing seemed very important. There was a sodden dullness to the world, and it was restful. Had she not had that beer, she wondered later, would she have felt comfortable enough to equip herself with an almost entirely Western wardrobe? Probably not. She chose four new pairs of blue jeans and three Western shirts, one in red and two in white. She bought an untooled brown leather belt and a silver buckle to go with it, and a long loose red cotton skirt. A flame of a skirt! That, she would wear to the party. For Louis Schellbach, the park naturalist, and his wife, were having a party to which she, Jane, was invited. Along with the Hedquists, of course. Morris would be gone by the weekend. She needed a jacket of some sort and Dotty recommended a black wool riding jacket, cut straight just below the waist, with wide lapels and a small slit up the back--very caballera, she called it, whatever that meant. They picked up socks and bras and underpants at Babbitt's, though the underpants, in their sheer lack of material, resembled nothing Jane had ever worn before. "Why, there's nothing to them!" she puzzled. Dotty cocked her head and passed along her decision: "There's enough."

The icing on the cake was a pair of jet-black cowboy boots, pointy and shiny, yes indeed, to be worn with the red skirt, Dotty explained, or to dress up the blue denim trousers. "Blue
"You get with it," Dotty chuckled. She seemed to be enjoying herself as much as Jane. "Now, one last thing. We need a hat, dear."

"What kind of hat? I loathe hats. Oh Dotty, Dotty, don't make me wear a hat!"

"Why, out here, a hat is your best friend. A hat is your Saint Bernard, your salvation--"

"I can't. I won't."

"It's a must, my dear, an absolute not-to-be-done-without. You'll perish, it's as simple as that, if you step outside without your hat. Oh, I'm not talking about a pillbox, Jane. Or a beret, for goodness sake. Or one of those terrible tams my mother made me wear to school. I wore a pillbox to church, poor me. Can you imagine, me, little Dorothy, in her dark blue pillbox hat and her little white gloves? Oh, I never was much of a believer, I'm afraid. Maybe I would have been if Mother hadn't believed so strongly in starch. I think she believed in starch the way I was meant to believe in God. I sat, every Presbyterian Sunday, in a good bit of pain as a result. I don't think one is susceptible to abstractions when one is in pain, do you, Jane?"

But Jane had formed a question of her own. "Was Morris a Presbyterian?"

"Well, of course he was."

"He's always said he was an Episcopalian."

"An Episcopalian! How very odd. What does he know about Episcopalians?"

"Nothing, I imagine."

"Does he go to church?" asked Dotty. "Well, of course, you were married in a church."

"We aren't much for church," said Jane. "I don't know why we got married in a church. A park would have suited me more, a meadow by a stream. But I suppose a church is expected."

"Yes, when it comes to marriage, many things are expected." Dotty forced a little laugh.

"Children, for example."

"Yes," sighed Jane.

"Now, you would tell me, wouldn't you, if there was a bun in the oven?"

"I would," said Jane.

"I could never, frankly, imagine Morris with a child."

"No."

"But you, dear?"

"Well, I'm married to Morris."
Dotty cocked her head. "Where there's a will there's a way, that's what I say. To every problem there's a solution."

"Oh, I don't know that it's a problem--"

"Not at this moment, perhaps."

They wandered down Beaver Street after that, saying very little, looking in shop windows. An inexpensive yet well-made straw hat was what they were after, and what they soon found. Dotty used the word handsome to describe it, and it was, in fact, a handsome hat for a man as well as a stylish hat for a woman. It had a slight crease in the crown and a wide-ish brim and the hatband was a simple leather cord that came down to tie under the chin. It was made of pale straw, a blond straw that complemented Jane's dark hair. They bought it at a small shop on Route 66 that sold hats to tourists, and at the time of their transaction it was crowded with a whimpering, redfaced group for whom it was already too late. "You see," Dotty poked Jane in the arm. "Cooked lobsters! That's how you know who's from here and who's not."

Jane was startled by a sudden feeling of wanting to be "from here"--perhaps brought on by the sight of these human crustaceans. The feeling passed, but the shock of it lingered. Hadn't she but a week before been unequivocally, if not happily, from St. Louis?

She thinks of this again as she dresses. It must be very early still, the sky is just beginning to lighten. She knows now how quickly the light comes when it comes, here in Arizona, an avalanche of gray-becoming-white, a sudden opening of the day which doesn't happen in the same way back east. Also, here there is a sky. And such a blue one--a turquoise one! Oh, for heaven's sake, she thinks, my ring! Where on earth is my turquoise ring? She hasn't had it on or thought of it since she took it off on the train. She bought it at the station in Albuquerque from an old Indian woman selling jewelry on the platform. The woman had a blanket draped across her shoulders, and she leaned across the table and put the ring on Jane’s finger herself. Suddenly, quite irrationally, she’s afraid it’s somehow gone back home with Morris. But of course it couldn't have. It's here somewhere, she has it, she must. Take a deep breath, she commands herself. Now, think. A likely place for it would be...?

She’s tempted to throw herself into action, to search the small room from top to bottom, but she makes herself try and remember. The few things she brought from the train.... Sometimes she wonders where her clothes have ended up, in what drear lost-and-never-to-be-
found, or given to the poor of Oklahoma City or Albuquerque. Oh, she's glad to be rid of them! What did she bring from the train, then, besides her purse. Her purse! That must be where it is. It's in her purse. She remembers now tucking it away in the inner pocket of her purse. But where is her purse? It's not on the bureau where she has been in the habit of leaving it. It's not on the chair by the door. She had it last night at the party, certainly she did, yet she has no memory of leaving the Schellbachs' house with it, no memory at all.

She had, in fact, felt a strange lightness which she attributed to the wine, a lightness of limb and mind as she returned by car with the Hedquists. She sat in the back seat looking directly at the back of Dotty's head (her hair was in its usual social bun) and felt tingly and light all over, a feeling which stayed with her all night, she now realizes, which was the reason for her wakefulness. To think that leaving one's purse behind gave one one's freedom! She will absolutely not indulge in the thought that sending one's husband home might do the same. She tries to imagine the contents of the purse, and all she can come up with, besides the hidden ring, is a rather too red lipstick, some nail scissors, a pack of Chiclets and a small hankie from her maiden days, monogrammed with her pre-Merkle initials. Of course there must have been money, her coin purse at least, and a few odd dollars. Oh, and of all things, quel horreur! the pocket-size notebook in which she jots the names and identifying features of those she meets and wishes to remember—Unsightly Wen, for example, or Spits When Speaking. It isn't malice but simple necessity that drives these laconic asides. She has a terrible time with names, and creating visual prompts has greatly helped her in social situations in the past. But now, she fears, she's done herself in. Oh, my goodness, what if her purse and its contents have fallen into the hands of Rust Spot On Collar or Ears That Protrude or Jewelry Not Fit To Pawn? Her hope, this morning, is that Mating Habits Of Tarantulas, who spent most of the evening in earnest conversation with Insect Rape!, is now in possession of her purse, or Insect Rape! himself, as they are the two least likely to examine its contents for fear they will come across something feminine and unseemly. They are both young men at the age of embarrassment, she believes, a period of life in a man's early twenties. Insect Rape! is a scrawny redhead whose name she can't recall, and Mating Habits is a more mature-looking, dark-haired fellow with very white teeth and a squint that gives the impression of intelligence—or suspicion, or sleep. His name is Earl or Ewell, the name she puzzled over in the night, and she has several reasons to remember him.
First and foremost, he’s a dead ringer for the Duke of Windsor, despite the obvious age difference. Jane Merkle is much taken with the Duke of Windsor, though she frankly mistrusts that carpetbagger, Mrs. Simpson, and imagines her capable of inexhaustible bossiness. A second reason is that all the while *Mating Habits* huddled with his good friend *Insect Rape!* he held a plate of Swedish meatballs in one hand, each meatball speared by a toothpick, each toothpick decorated with a lively pink ruffle. It seemed to Jane, herself no more than a few years older than this young man, that she was watching someone right smack in the middle of wildest youth, to whom small pink-tailed birds flocked. At one point, the hand holding the plate imperceptibly drooped—a small shift of angle to be sure, but enough to encourage a greasy drip of meatball juice to leap out onto the toe of Earl-or-Ewell's boot. The hand shifted again, causing the drip to become a trickle, and suddenly, with the noise of liquid spattering the hard black linoleum of Ethyl Schellbach's floor, the young man seemed to awaken and adjust, as bewildered as he could be to have fallen into a world of plates and consequences.

Something childlike about him, then. That's the reason he impressed her. A boy who did not want to be king, who wanted instead to chase down tarantulas. And beetles, as this scrap of conversation revealed. She had eavesdropped shamelessly, and was able to recall it almost in its entirety:

*Mating Habits*--I was out at Rowe Well last Thursday, just about dusk, and all around in the rabbitbrush these little darkling beetles were having a group grope.

*Insect Rape!*--A what?
An orgy, ferrethead. They were doing it. In *multiplicate*.
It's called lekking, you know.
No, I didn't know. Lekking? Sounds like what you lek in brains, you make up for in imagination.

Mock me if you want, Charles, but it's right there in *Jaques*.
Don't call me Charles.

If you studied a bit, you know, put your nose in a book instead of wandering around watching beetles buggering each other--

Buggering's interesting. To everyone but you.
It's interesting to me. But I'm old-fashioned and sentimental and silly, I guess. I prefer *Homo sapiens*. I'm a little less keen on the bumping and grinding of insects. Theirs is a world of rape, Charlie. Now get on with your sordid tale.

The darkling males were completely indiscriminate, trying to breed with anything and everything they bumped into--

*Invertidos!*

Worse. I dropped my cigarette butt and one of those boys climbed on and tried to hump it.

Ah! They don't call them Lucky Strikes for nothing.

Silly boys, thinks Jane Merkle. Funny boys. She slips into the left Ked, then the right, takes one last look at herself in the long mirror behind the door and tiptoes through the house to the kitchen. It's too early for Dotty and Oliver to be up, and for this reason she likes this hour. The house which doesn't belong to her nonetheless seems to be hers, and she goes about toast and coffee with the confidence of a resident.

She is staring into her empty coffee cup when Oliver enters the kitchen. "Oh, hello," says he. "Looking for minnows?"

"Minnows?" asks Jane.

"In your cup."

"No," she laughs. "My fortune."

"I had a lady read my tea leaves once. Said I was going to live a long and happy life. Then she poked around, just like some old '49er sifting for gold. Sifting for gold and turning up bear turds. I should have known the bad news was coming. They save it for the end, after the long and happy."

"Goodness! What was it?"

"Blindness."

"Oh, how awful! Blindness? What a terrible thing to say! They shouldn't be allowed to say things like that. Not if you pay them."

"I asked her how blind and happy went together."

"Sit down," says Jane. "I don't like this story at all. Can't I get you some coffee?"
"She said if I looked around while I still had my sight, I would see not one happy man who wasn't blind."

"Good heavens! What sort of person was this?"

"Happiness demands blindness, said she, but if I wished to explore a different sort of satisfaction I might see clearly for the rest of my life, and on into the future."

"Gosh."

"Those were her very words."

"She sounds like a gypsy, Oliver."

"Dotty's Aunt Gretchen? She was a Communist."

Jane has never heard of Aunt Gretchen. Probably dead, she thinks. She knows so little about Morris's family. He's never spoken of a fortuneteller. Or a Communist, for heaven's sake. Good lord! Is he a Communist too? It's certainly possible. He's not been entirely forthcoming about certain things. He's a Presbyterian, isn't he? Isn't that what Dotty said? And all this time he's presented himself as an Episcopalian. It's very possible, likely in fact, that he, her husband of five years, is a Presbyterian Communist, and she, nothing but his unknowing dupe of a wife. It's unbearable, suddenly. She feels alone on an island in a sea of barracudas. She watches her brother-in-law pour himself a glass of orange juice and then, to her astonishment, he kneels down and reaches into the cupboard under the sink and pulls out a bottle of something. He adds a generous dollop to the juice. At first she believes it's Lestoil and gives a little cry of protest, which she regrets.

"There's nothing to fear, my dear," says he. "Hair of the dog, bit of tequila. Ah, forgive me. I didn't even offer." He waves the bottle at her and cocks his head.

"No, thank you," says Jane nervously.

"Chacun a son gout and all that," he shrugs. "Call it my different sort of satisfaction. Possibly not the one Aunt Gretchen had in mind--though she was a dragon-wrestler, she was. Born the day Robert Lee signed away the South at Appomattox. Five days later Lincoln took the bullet. Some of us, my dear, have unrest in our veins. That one did."

He caps the bottle and tucks it back under the sink, behind a frail wall of sponges and soap powders. He sits down across from her at the little table and says, "I know almost nothing about your habits. That seems a darn shame."
Habits? Jane can't think of any habits--except, according to Morris, she clicks her teeth in her sleep. There's one. And she's caught herself picking at a rough place on her elbow, fearing it will become a wart. There's another. But that's not the kind of thing he needs to know. She offers something unincriminating: "I read," she says.

"Ah! Whom?"

"The French at the moment."

"*Vive* the French!"

"There's just so much Bloomsbury one can endure."

"Yes," says he, "but thank God the Brits don't write the way they cook. puddings, puddings and more puddings. The French do, don't they? In my opinion it makes better eating than reading."

She nods, though she's not sure she agrees, or whether agreement is expected or necessary. Oliver's face seems fat all of a sudden, fat and full of holes--mouth, eyes, nostrils all agape.

"I'll tell you who I like," he says. "I like that Mr. Tolstoy. Anna Karenina. Now there's a gal with spunk."

"Oh, I wouldn't call it spunk, would you? I'd call it a tragic fate."

"Women have their own words for things."

"But not spunk."

"She's a rebel, dear girl. She's led by her passions--doomed passions, to be sure, but passions nonetheless, leading her--"

"Leading her around," says Jane, "like a harnessed mare, the promise of a good trot ahead of her, a long fine trot through exquisite country, pulling a well-made wagon."

"That's not far off," says he.

"But without choice, Oliver."

"What would she choose, then? How much choice does she require?"

"She would choose what you and I would."

"And what's that, young lady?"

"Why, no harness. No traces. No wagon."

"I wouldn't choose that," he says bluntly, "and neither would you. Anyway, in her case,
it's either out there in the wind or back in the barn. Two important choices. It's the wind she chooses."

Dotty, at that moment, appears in the kitchen wearing a housecoat so old and worn it might better serve as compost in her garden. "Good morning one and all," she says cheerily. She favors cheer at this hour.

"Jane and I have been engaging in the most fascinating conversation," says Oliver. "Fascinating," he repeats, shaking his head. He stands up and excuses himself, taking his orange juice with him.

"He's in a rare mood," says Dotty. "He hasn't been fascinated for years." She looks around the kitchen. "Now what do I want for breakfast? Meatloaf! That's what I want. Have you ever heard of such a thing? Cold meatloaf on a nice white bun with mustard and a slice of apple? Oh, this will impress you, Jane."

"Dotty, I need some help," says Jane.

"Help, dear? What is it?"

"I've misplaced my purse. I had it last night and don't seem to have it this morning."

"You don't think it was a prowler, do you?"

"A prowler? In the house?"

"It's terrible to think of," says Dotty, "but perfectly possible. Why, every year or two Babbitt Brothers is broken into. They take canned goods and such, because of course there's never any money left in the till overnight. Now, you'd think whoever does this would learn there's no cash to be had, and they should just quit and get an honest job."

"Maybe the food is what they want."

"Oh, it can't be worth it to them. The risk is so great. Besides, Jane, it's not food they want, it's...I hate to say it...drink. The Indians have a terrible time with it."

"These are Indians, then, these prowlers?"

"I'm afraid so. They've never been apprehended, but it's the work of Indians. They're very stealthy, very crafty. They leave no trace of themselves and move like noonday shadows. Oh, if they weren't engaged in unlawful acts we might admire their skill. It's no ordinary break-in, dear. They enter and leave the store through locked doors. They really are the closest thing to ghosts."
Dotty starts constructing her breakfast and Jane experiences a sudden yearning for her turquoise ring, wondering if she will ever see it again. "I don't think it was a prowler," she says. "I'm quite sure I left it at the Schellbachs'."

"Well, that's a relief," says Dotty. "Why don't you take the car and go on over."

"I might just walk. I feel like a little exercise."

"Take my bicycle! There's an idea. Oliver thought I needed a bicycle, but frankly, it hurts me down there and I can't see the point of riding around on one's bottom when one can walk on one's own two feet. We'll pump up the tires and send you off! What fun!"
THE MYTH AT HOME

As Jane Merkle pedals along the road to the village, and through the village, past Babbitt Brothers, the post office, the train yard where the train is in, disgorging dozens of French tourists chattering like phlegmy squirrels, Louis Schellbach is having a difficult morning. He has already anticipated, with the arrival of a certain personage to the park, a difficult afternoon. It's a Saturday, and to his great dissatisfaction he does not go to work on Saturdays. Nor Sundays. And he is simply not the myth at home that he is in uniform. He would like to be a family man but finds domestic life full of annoying little knots he cannot untie. He feels at times disrespected by his son Donny and overlooked by his well-meaning wife Ethyl. As a result, he has fashioned a little laboratory for himself consisting of one long table at the back of his study. At one end of the table is a microscope, a large bottle of formaldehyde, an enamel pan containing surgical tools, and half a dozen boxes of Lepidoptera (butterflies, moths, skippers) or Hemiptera (true bugs) or Odonata (dragonflies and damselflies). It is nothing more elaborate than this, but the presence of the table allows him to feel mythical, which in turn allows him to do his work. This morning he has tried, unsuccessfully, to interest Donny, age fourteen, in the variations in wing venation in dragonflies, and he has shown him a green darner, *Anax junius*, one of the largest and most terrifying looking dragonflies, under the microscope. Donny, his eye to the scope, has commented that "This whole business of bugs is sort of sick, Papa, and you're obsessed." At least he has not run away in tears as he used to, crying to his mother who would in turn scold Schellbach for frightening the child. The difference between the green darner and the very odd looking creatures from "outer space" that Donny has begun to draw and write about eludes Louis Schellbach. He can only hope their similarity will dawn on the boy some day soon.

It is in this mood of glum rebellion against fatherhood that Louis Schellbach answers a faint knock at the door. Ethyl has gone shopping and Donny has either locked himself in his room or run away from home to throw off the burden of an obsessed father. Where the devil does the boy learn these words, words like obsessed, pervert, paranoid, deviant, delinquent? When he was a lad, thinks Schellbach, he was busy learning the secret names of plants, animals and invertebrates, the Latin names, the names of living things known universally in a dead language. He knew then where he was headed, as Donny does not. Unless the boy has set his
sights on psychiatry or some kind of philosophy of the aberrant. Oh, he is a complicated young
man alright. One of the annoying little knots of domestic life.

Jane leans the fat-tired blue Schwinn up against the low rock wall enclosing Ethyl
Schellbach's garden. Apparently her brother-in-law Oliver has never ridden a bicycle, or has
limited knowledge of them, because the bicycle he bought for Dotty is not equipped with two of
the more practical elements involved in transport: basket and kickstand. With an unexpected
case of nerves she walks to the door, and finding no doorbell, knocks on it. There seems to be
nobody home. She readjusts her hat, which she has grown quite fond of, and knocks again.
Inside, a dog starts yapping. She doesn't remember a dog from the night before. She guesses it's
long-haired and under five pounds and its eyes leak and it has a flattened nose that looks like a
culinary mistake. A man cries, "Reginald! Reginald! Reggie!" Footsteps approach. The
yapping approaches as well. The footsteps stop, followed by a bout of coughing. The yapping
continues and little nails scratch at the inside of the door. The coughing grows louder,
accompanied by horrible gasps. "Goodness," she thinks, "he may be dying! While I stand here
as useless as Reginald!"

She turns the doorknob: nothing. She leans her shoulder against the door, preparing to
knock it down if necessary. It is at this moment that Louis Schellbach recovers himself and
opens the door from within, and little Reggie bursts forth to administer sharp nips to the ankles
of the unexpected visitor. Jane Merkle suddenly finds the top half of herself in the arms of the
park naturalist, while the bottom half is severely buffeted by the park naturalist's pug. There is a
brief confused readjusting among the humans, a straightening of the tie by Schellbach, who is
seldom seen without a tie, and a rearrangement of the hat by Mrs. Merkle. The dog is told to
Stop that, Reginald! and made to sit, which he's poor at. Finally he's banished to the back of the
house.

"My deepest apologies," says Schellbach, wheezing ominously. Jane hopes to heaven he
won't start in again with that wracking cough. "It's the dog," he manages to say. "Allergic," he
gasps.

"Is there anything I can do?" asks Jane.

He shakes his head. Finally he's able to speak again and says, "Annoying little fellow,
isn't he? Ethyl's dog, really. Ethyl's watchdog. Takes his job rather seriously, I'm afraid. Now, I
think we better have a look at your ankles. Little devil's been known to break the skin."

"Oh," smiles Jane, with effort. She's determined to keep her ankles to herself. "Oh, no no no. They're sharp little teeth alright, but no harm done. I have a dog myself," she adds. "It's Morris's dog. They're useless, aren't they?"

"Useless?" Schellbach raises an eyebrow. He has a long, comical face, a neatly trimmed mustache and gray pouches under his eyes.

"Did I say useless?" asks Jane.

"You did."

"Useful is what I meant."

"Useless may be more accurate," says Schellbach, winking at her. "Shall we go inside?"

"Oh, well. I don't know about that. You're probably busy and I--"

"Nonsense. It's true, I'm up to no good, but you might find it interesting." He sweeps her down the hall into a room that smells of tobacco. There are several large windows covered with shades, two tall shelves of books and a desk with a cow skull hanging over it. This must be his study, though the skull seems as poor an invitation to sit and think as Jane can imagine.

"The truth is," says Schellbach, leading her to a long table at the back of the room, "I've forgotten your name."


"Of course you are." He motions to the table. "Here lies a dilemma."

What Jane sees is puzzling, to be sure. A stole. In the middle of the table. It's a dull fur, obviously an inexpensive one or poorly cared for. It must have been left behind by one of last night's party-goers.

"I have no more understanding of what killed this fox than I do of my son's preoccupation with anomaly," says Schellbach. "Do you have children, Mrs. Merkle? Oh, dear," he adds suddenly, "I always assume marriage. Forgive me. Ethyl tells me it's an insult to a lady. It makes her feel old."

Jane laughs and says, "But surely 'Miss' may be taken as an insult as well, a sign of undesirability. It's a fickle world, Mr. Schellbach."

"Louie," he says quickly.

"Jane," says she. "I don't have a child, but the fact is, if I did it wouldn't be your child,
would it?"
   "I must say, we've only just met."
   "Oh, my goodness, I wasn't implying--" She is hideously embarrassed. "What I meant was, no two children are alike in their particular peculiarities. My child would not be like your child. However, Mr. Schellbach--"
   "Louie."
   "Louie. From what I've heard, your son's preoccupation with anomaly may well be inherited from his father. I hear you're quite taken with the variations in wing patterns in dragonflies. To see the odd and unusual can be a kind of perception passed on in the blood. I certainly don't have it. If anything I have the opposite."
   "Which is what, may I ask?"
   "I take great comfort in the familiar, I'm afraid. At least I always have. The familiar and universal. The ways in which we are the same."
   "Well, what could be better than that?" pronounces Schellbach. "Room for both, I say. This fox, for example. Come around here and have a look-see. I've opened her up, gullet to gizzard, and what you see in there ought to look pretty darn familiar. Stomach, liver, kidneys, the old ticker. Her...thingamajig. She's carrying kits, isn't she? No sign of trauma to her body. She wasn't shot or hit by a car or mortally wounded by a coyote. I suspect poison. But have a look at this, Jane. The much maligned intestines. Three meters of small intestine alone. Can you imagine all that intestine? Packed in there like a nest of nematodes. It's a marvel, isn't it? An absolute marvel."

   This fox, thinks Jane, is beginning to smell. Under the fruity fragrance of pipe tobacco she detects the sweetish smell of death. She is suddenly dizzy, dizzy and sick to her stomach. "I--" she begins. "I'm afraid I must go."
   "Of course," says Schellbach. "I've bored you, and I apologize."
   "No no," says she. "It's been very interesting."
   "A bit of forensic science to start your day."
   She nods agreeably, wondering what on earth that word means. Forensic. She's got to sharpen her mind. It's a fat and lazy mind at the moment. It's been idle too long, sitting with its feet up in St. Louis. Schellbach leads her back through the house. She's aware of a radio playing
in the distance and wonders if Ethyl has come home, or the son. Or perhaps it's for the dog. She
knows a family in Missouri whose dog needs music in order to sleep. A bulldog, apparently,
though it looks nothing like a bull. It's hideous and fat with the face of an English queen--or a
fallen souffle.

She can't bring herself to call him Louie so she calls him nothing at all. She thanks him
for his hospitality and it isn't until she's mounted the bicycle that she suddenly remembers the
reason for her visit. Good lord, she thinks. What is the matter with me? My mind is a muddle.
Schellbach answers the door once more, and once more Reggie applies himself to her ankles.
This time she discourages him with a few discreet kicks, overlooked by the park naturalist.

"I'm so sorry to bother you again," she says, "but I believe I left my purse here last night."

"Purse," says Schellbach carefully, as if exposed to the word for the first time. "I don't
know of a purse. What kind of purse would this be?"

"Oh, nothing the least bit unusual. A brown purse. A brown leather purse. It has a long
strap that can be shortened."

"A long strap."

"An adjustable strap."

"Yes, I see. So it might in fact be a short strap at the present moment. In our search for
your purse we should not overlook straps long or short, is that right?"

Jane nods.

"Well, Ethyl's the one in charge of purses. I would have to speak to Ethyl."

"Of course."

"We'll find it," he assures her, and closes the door.
THE PERFECT CONFIDANTE

Ethyl Schellbach is seldom satisfied with the quality of beef at Babbitt Brothers. She often buys pork or chicken instead. She has, on odd years, bought a whole spring lamb from Neez Charlie, but as soon as she makes space in the freezer Louie fills it up with his dead rattlesnakes and birds. Today there was a nice smoked ham that beckoned to her, and as she drives home she's trying to decide how to do the potatoes. Donny likes potato salad with pickles, olives and onions, but Louie likes good old-fashioned mashed. He's not a fussy eater. An omnivore, he calls himself. Whereas Donny is as picky as the day is long, declining this and that, demanding something else. Who, thinks Ethyl, would it be wiser to coddle? Her irascible son or her extremely even-tempered husband? Potato salad it is, she says to herself, and just then she spots Dotty Hedquist's sister-in-law bicycling up the road.

She toots her horn and waves. The sister-in-law, whose name she can't remember, waves back. But what a coincidence, thinks Ethyl, the very person I need to see. She drives onto the shoulder of the road and stops, expecting the sister-in-law to stop too. But the sister-in-law is traveling in the opposite direction at quite a clip. She has the proverbial devil on her back, thinks Ethyl. She turns the car around and comes abreast of the bicycle and gives another little wave to demonstrate harmlessness and good intentions. "Hello," she says, but the window on the passenger side is rolled up. She stops the car, leans over and rolls it down and says, "Hello again. Ethyl here. Ethyl Schellbach."

"Ethyl," says the girl sadly. She really is quite young. "I've lost my purse."

"I know you have, dear, but you can stop your worrying, it's been found."

"Found?"

"By a very nice young fellow by the name of Hugh. Don't know his last name."

"Hugh? Hugh! Insect Rape!" cries the girl.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Oh, I'm relieved."

"He promised to bring it by today," says Ethyl. "I said today was far too busy, I'm expecting someone from out of town, an important someone, and I thought he might as well talk to you, it was your purse."
"That's right."

"So run on home. He may have left it there already. I told him you were staying with the Hedquists. Hope it's no secret."

"Of course not."

"Well, you never know, dear."

In fact, when it comes to secrets, Ethyl knows more than most. If she hasn't seen it all she's certainly seen the lion's share, including Dorothy Hedquist's various transgressions over the years, though Ethyl, whose mind is sharp and tongue is not, the perfect confidante, has never judged them to be more than misadventures. One thing she's learned is that the bearer of a secret is often the last to know its true nature. There's an innate innocence, a blindness that shields a person from woe, and as this drops away like childhood, and the terrible weight of a wrongdoing makes itself felt, the bearer of a secret is as close as she will ever come to a self-inflicted death. Indeed, Ethyl has talked more than one individual away from the brink. Sometimes she wishes she did not live in such an easy place for death, that Louie was stationed in a peaceful valley. But he is not, and she who is at heart a nurse in the trenches, has found a way to be useful.

Her prescription for the guilt-ridden, remorseful and brokenhearted is to take themselves into the trench itself, to walk into the canyon and lie down among the shattered bones of deer and bighorned sheep, grateful for their own kneecaps, shinbones and thighbones that carried them there. To hike their own lucky bag of appetites and excretions over the trail from Hermit Creek to Indian Garden, and on to Grapevine, Cottonwood and Hance, while gossip and ill-intentions run their course on the high ground like a bunch of skinny coyotes howling. If only the words were as harmless, thinks Ethyl, whose private opinion is that employment in the government regularly sends people upside-down over the precipice. To live and work in a place dedicated to the preservation of nature is, in her mind, the highest calling, and to find that place riddled with competition, rumormongering and a fraudulent self-serving chumminess is, to put it bluntly, a disappointment. But fifteen years of disappointment have not been wasted on Ethyl Schellbach. She walks among the disappointed like a swami, like a saint. Saint Ethyl of Disappointment has a good nose for where trouble lies—an uncanny nose. In fact, her presence is ever-so-slightly suspect, for wherever she goes, trouble and disappointment are not far behind. The truth is, they're already there. They're everywhere to begin with.
So Jane Merkle pedals home in her temporary state of grace thinking only of her imminent reunion with her turquoise ring. Nothing of the chance encounter with Louis Schellbach's wife troubles her. It strikes her only as felicitous and she arrives at the Hedquists' in a very good humor. The young man, Hugh, has not come by, but he has left a telephone number where he can be reached in the evenings and on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Well, thinks Jane, it's a Sunday, isn't it? Oliver has gone back to bed and Dotty is rooting around in the garden. She stands in the den, which since his recent retirement has become Oliver's study, and dials the number of a young man on whom she feels her happiness depends. But the telephone rings in an empty house, or perhaps it fails to awaken the sleepy fellow. It isn't yet afternoon, she reasons, though it's pretty darn close. And then there's the question of what is afternoon? To some it means a lengthening of shadows, a certain quality of light, to others it's what follows the stroke of noon, or the drowsy period brought on by lunch. To Jane it's a feeling, usually an unpleasant one. It's the time of day when she feels dulled to all around her, wrapped in gauze, like Siam (which Morris's friend George Runge once described as a kingdom of cocoons, where every bed in every hotel is draped in mosquito netting). She decides to take her mind off the extraordinarily pokey passage of time and read her book.

One thing that may be said about Jane Merkle is that she is a diligent reader. She is working diligently through Madame Bovary at the moment, but she is not in love with the woman. And this is the problem. The book and the woman are, to her, the same. She cannot help but compare it to Anna Karenina where Anna's personality and circumstances are only one tragic strand of what Jane feels to be an uplifting story. Hadn't Kitty had her baby at the end? Tolstoy might have done in the baby had he wanted to create a tale of unmitigated woe. She turns the pages of Madame Bovary with apprehension, feeling quite dreary, as if she too must take to her bed--or take to Emma Bovary's bed. The bed looms so large in the novel, Jane begins to consider it a sort of protagonist. She reads distractedly until lunchtime when she joins the Hedquists for tunafish sandwiches outside on folding chairs.

Oliver is wearing a wet towel on his head, turban-fashion, and is terribly out-of-sorts. Dotty tries to ask the right questions about Jane's morning, but when it comes to a dead fox in Louis Schellbach's study she can hear no more. "A smelly old thing like that in the house, with a party going on! Oh, it's too much, it really is."
"It wasn't that smelly," Jane lies.

"Of course it was," snorts Oliver, who up until that moment seemed to be napping in his chair. "By the time things get to Louie they stink. That's the nature of the job."

"The butterflies don't," says Jane quietly.

"I'm speaking of the flesh, dear girl, the flesh."

"Please!" cries Dotty. "Not another word about it!"

Jane glances at her sister-in-law with some alarm. Dotty has gone pale and sits staring in front of her, her mouth twitching in an awful way, as if the words are hammering at her lips from the inside, unable to force their way out. In the silence that follows, Jane is aware of many things which she later recalls in detail: the caramel smell of the pines, the narrow plank of shade where the Hedquists have placed their chairs, the warmth of the sun in her lap, as if a cat has been sleeping there, the taste of mustard on the inside of her teeth, the sound of a jay calling, which reminds her of Missouri. Dotty finally gets up and gathers the plates, wondering if anyone would like dessert. Oliver would, Jane would not. The telephone rings far away in the house, too far away to bother with--until she remembers her purse, the young man, her happiness. She runs off to answer it.
At 11:23 a.m., Elzada Clover consults her watch and announces to her companion, “We’re running a few minutes late.” Miss Lois Jotter laughs and says, “Calm down, Elzie. The canyon will be there.”

“It’s not the canyon I worry about. It’s Louis Schellbach.”

“Mr. Schellbach will be there as well.”

“You’re an optimist.”

“I’m nothing of the sort. I’m a pessimist, as you well know.”

“He’s a very busy man, my dear.”

“Who is anxious to see you.”

“I hate to keep him waiting.”

“Two minutes, Elzada!”

“We’re now four minutes behind.”

“You’re impossible, as usual!”

“I’m not,” says Miss Elzada Clover, briskly dusting the knees of her trousers. “I’m nervous. Quite a different kettle of fish.”

She sighs and leans back in her seat, trying to relax. But the movement of the train is so jarring. It never used to be. What has happened? she wonders. Is it a change in her or in the railroad bed? She sees they’re approaching Red Butte. Not long now, not long. They cross into piñon-juniper country, a distinct line on the landscape which she calls to Miss Jotter’s attention.

“See, it hasn’t changed,” she says. “Twelve years later—”

“Thirteen.”

“—Thirteen, then, and still no transitional zone whatsoever. The abrupt shift in species. Highly anomalous. What purpose does it serve? And does grazing affect it? The uplift of the plateau? We must put our minds to it. That’s another mystery I’d like to solve before I die.”

She glances at her watch again, her father’s gold pocket watch. “We’ve made up some time.”

Miss Jotter regards her skeptically. “How in the dickens do you know?”

“Do I know what?”

“Whether we’re two minutes late or four?”
“Red Butte is a landmark, of course, as well as the piñon-juniper, and that outcropping there--it has no name--that’s precisely twenty-two minutes from the South Rim station. We’re due in at 11:45, and it’s 11:26 at the moment, so forty-five minus twenty-six equals nineteen, minus twenty-two puts us at negative three, or three minutes late. It’s simple math.”

“Yes, I see!” laughs Miss Jotter.

“Nothing to it.”

“You once told me that about playing the harmonica. Do you remember? Easiest thing in the world, you said.”

“What I said was, it’s no more difficult than kissing. No need to blush, Loie. What ever happened to that fellow you were so taken with on the Nevills expedition? What was his name? The actor from San Francisco? Gibson? Bob Gibson?”

“Bill. And I wasn’t taken with him. He was an artist, not an actor. I don’t trust actors.”

“Oh, he didn’t know what he was. Handsome, though. A good-looking boy.”

“I wouldn’t know,” shrugs Miss Jotter. “I paid no attention to his looks.”

“Too bad. He was really quite attractive. Pleasing. So few people are.”

“Why, that’s not true. Good looks are a dime a dozen.”

“Ahh, perhaps among the young.”

“I’m no longer young, Elzie.”

“Yes, my dear, I know. But you don’t yet rank among the ancient.”

“You don’t either.”

“I do, in fact. Fifty-two. It makes one shudder.”

She can remember, and takes this moment to do so, the last time she might have called herself young. She was thirty-nine, a few years older than Lois is now, a rose past its bloom, to be sure, but before her lay a tremendous adventure. She was to become, or attempt to become, the first woman to successfully run the Colorado River through Grand Canyon. Only one other female had braved it, and she’d disappeared, presumed dead. Elzada was not the sort to let someone else’s poor luck deter her, and besides, the opportunity for collecting was unprecedented. No botanist had traveled the river before. The flora of Grand Canyon was virtually unexplored, unrecorded. A fellow by the name of George Vasey had been memorialized by his friend John Wesley Powell, who gave the botanist’s name to a marvelous gushing
spring—Vasey’s Paradise. But Vasey himself had never set foot in Grand Canyon, much less sampled there, which was Elzada’s highest priority. And to this purpose she brought along her teaching assistant from the University of Michigan, a girl named Lois Jotter. Elzada had the utmost admiration for Miss Jotter. She possessed intelligence and physical fortitude, she was young and pretty and had even rowed a boat before! And indeed, it had been a memorable expedition in every way. She’d gotten an exciting paper out of it, a groundbreaking paper, she and Lois. Which had enabled Lois to move up in the world of botany, to choose a research position anywhere she wished. It had been Elzada’s hope, of course, that the girl would continue on at Michigan, where with university funding they might explore the world together, go here and there collecting cacti, or establishing the relationship between pollinators and desert plants. There was so much to study! So little was known about desert flora. So few had ventured out into the wilderness with their collecting bags. They were operating instead out of old books, defending dry theories. The historical information—so much of it was untested! And in Elzada’s mind, there was no test better than experience. As she said to Lois time and time again as they stayed up into the wee hours of the Nevills expedition, listening to the river and filling their plant presses with the day’s collections, “Let the old pedants sit in their classrooms spouting bombast ‘til they’re blue, the fact remains, it’s difficult to dispute the sample in one’s hand.”

But Lois had had to sow her wild oats, hadn’t she? One could hardly blame her. Elzada—not herself an oat-sower—nevertheless understood the necessity of the phenomenon. It saddened her. She had in one fell swoop lost both companion and friend. But here they were again on a different sort of expedition, one that required no sampling bag. Their old acquaintance Emery Kolb, who had joined them those thirteen years ago on the river, was in a bit of hot water. The call came to Elzada from Louis Schellbach, a man she’d met only once, though she had known his predecessor, Eddie McKee. Schellbach asked for her help and her strictest confidence in the matter, which he called “delicate” and “highly unfortunate,” but beyond that she had only an inkling of what might be required of her. She had, at the last moment, sent word that she was bringing along Miss Jotter, and if Mr. Schellbach disapproved of that she certainly hadn’t given him time to say no. Which, right now, seventeen minutes from him, made her nervous. Not that she regretted her decision—she never did, any decision—but she wished it to go smoothly for all of them, and she did not want Lois to feel like an afterthought. She was, in fact, anything but an
afterthought, though Elzada had kept that to herself for years and intended to continue to.

As a teacher, she had always had strict rules about conduct with students. She was, of course, drawn to many of her students. So many of the young women were intelligent and attractive. Lois, however, had never been a student of hers. She had arrived as a teaching assistant, a brilliant one, and this immediately posed a possibility and a problem. Miss Clover was thirty-seven years old, Miss Jotter twenty-two. Fifteen years separated them, as well as a good many other things, including Miss Jotter’s sincere, albeit naive, attraction to those of the opposite sex. Miss Clover was not and had never been one to wear her heart on her sleeve. She did not believe that was what the sleeve was intended for. The sleeve was created to cover up, not to display. She expressed her feelings for Miss Jotter to no one, for she felt it was no one’s business but her own. Occasionally, however, after a glass of wine in the evening, she wrote in her diary, in prose unlike any she had ever used elsewhere in her life, entries that later embarrassed her, but because they embarrassed her she didn’t destroy them. They were mortifiers, humiliators, deterrents to any future pecadillos. The entries acted as the stocks had in Puritan America—though in Miss Clover’s case she added effort to insult by having constructed the diabolic contraptions herself.

The train rattles fiercely along, swaying, thinks Elzada, like a drunken bride. Where that image came from she has no idea. She reports it to Lois who laughs and says, “Well, it’s common enough, I suppose. I was a drunken bride.”

“You weren’t.”

“I was. I was drunk as a skunk. You would have been ashamed of me.”

“Ashamed?” Elzada purses her lips. “No.”

“You might have been. I wobbled up the aisle to say ‘Yes, yes’ and ‘I do, I do.’ Just the kind of thing you hate.”

“I don’t hate it. Why would I hate it? Agreements are noble if they’re sincere.”

“Sincere!” Lois laughs. “Sincerity and cherry brandy hardly cooccur. None of it made sense to me. Nothing I did that day made sense at the time. I couldn’t wait to get out of my costume. I was dying for a swim somewhere, a long, cool swim.”

“But it did make sense. It has made sense.”

“Is that a question?”
“An observation.”
“It’s true.”
“And why should it not be true?”
Lois looks at her lap. “I expect it offends you, marriage.”
“It does nothing of the sort,” says Elzada crossly. “Silly girl.”
She had, in fact, been offended on the occasion of Lois’s wedding for the simple reason she had not been invited. Perhaps this is why the girl remains Miss Jotter in her mind, when in fact she has become Mrs. Cutter. But no matter. As Norm Nevills, the great river runner, used to say, it’s all upstream now. It’s behind them. She sighs, thinking of Norm, gone from the world, he and his wife Doris in their plane, the Cherry II. Almost two years ago. Dropping out of the sky. Icarus. She shudders and turns toward the window and blinks back a tear. Upstream, she reminds herself. That too, upstream. And she had been lucky to know the man, after all. The way he stood with his hands on his hips, his weight on one foot—the right foot—looking out at his beloved Colorado River….

“Elzie.” Lois has a hand on her shoulder. “Elzada. There’s Mr. Schellbach. Isn’t that he?”

The train is no longer moving. How can that be? The moment of arrival has come and gone and she’s missed it entirely! She looks at her watch, sees that they are two and a half minutes behind, which puts them at somewhat less than that to the station, though of course she has no accurate data, which is as good as having none at all. Asleep at the wheel, Elzada! Ah, the crepuscular years. Will she nap through her fifties and on into her sixties, she wonders? Will she live that long?

Mr. Schellbach is quite difficult to miss. He’s a tall lean fellow with a dark mustache (he must dye it) and an efficient gaze which searches the platform, regards each passenger as he or she steps down onto terra firma. The misses Clover and Jotter gather their bags—they are used to traveling lightly and carry only a change of clothes and shoes and a few toiletries and reading material, all of which fills one valise apiece. They descend the train. Miss Jotter is wearing a thin summer dress the color of peach skins. Elzada sports trousers and a long-sleeved blouse which makes her feel boxy and mannish. Lois is a solid girl herself, but somehow she flows, thinks Elzada. And just at that moment the wind catches the skirt of the peach-colored dress and
sends it spiraling upward. “Goodness!” cries Miss Jotter, laughing and batting at her clothing. “The darn thing’s alive!”

Alive indeed. She looks like a lily. *Hemerocallis*. A daylily. The kind Elzada’s mother used to grow in great rowdy bunches. A jungle of hungry blossoms filling the summer yard to bursting. One day there, the next day gone. Ephemeral, unsubtle, gaudy, and perhaps fueling Elzada’s passion for their opposite, those prickly, resourceful individuals whose bloom is hard-earned and all the more glorious—the cacti. Mr. Schellbach is upon them. He removes his hat and shakes Miss Jotter’s hand. The mustache is certainly dyed, Elzada observes. The hair on his head is thin and gray. “Dr. Clover,” says he, and the hand comes out once more. “We meet again. So glad you could come. And how was your journey? Come this way, please. Let me get your bags. This can’t be all you have for luggage.”

Lois says, “We’re river runners, Mr. Schellbach. We’ve learned to economize.”

He laughs, finding this charming for some reason, and Elzada feels a pang of jealousy run through her, a bolt of jealousy barbed and swift. “Yes,” says she. “Miss Jotter and I used to travel the world together. We developed a habit of simplicity that’s hard to break.”

“Well, I don’t know about the world, Elzada. We did a bit of traveling, it’s true, but never what I would call—”

“We planned many trips.”

“Yes, we did.”

“And we accomplished one or two of them.”

“We did, yes. We certainly did.”

“It made us good travelers.”

“I suppose it did.” There is a silence, then Lois asks, “Do you travel much, Mr. Schellbach?”

“I’m afraid I don’t, though Ethyl and I hope to visit Hawaii someday.”

“Hawaii!”

“Ethyl is my wife.”

They make their way across the tracks to Park Headquarters. Elzada wishes she had her hat, which is in her valise, which the Park naturalist is carrying. She’s quite forgotten how hot the Southwestern sun can be, the noonday sun that casts no shadow save a small gray pool at
one’s feet. Miss Jotter and Mr. Schellbach carry on a conversation about the weather. The rains have arrived early, to everyone’s relief. Even Miss Jotter, who has never given a moment’s thought to the rains, is relieved. Elzada follows along behind, feeling dull and unattractive, unable to reconcile the Elzada Clover of the present moment with the University of Michigan’s most distinguished professor of botany. She wonders what in the world she is doing here, why she has made the trip, whatever possessed her to try and recreate the past. Emery, she reminds herself. There’s the matter of Emery. And at that moment, as if reading her mind, Schellbach turns to her and says, “I would rather introduce the business here in the open air than in my office, which has ears.” He stops, sets down the luggage. “I sincerely hope you are prepared for a bit of nastiness, Dr. Clover. And you as well, Mrs. Cutter. For it seems our old friend Emery Kolb has— There is no way to put it delicately. Mr. Kolb has very probably…er…committed murder.” The misses Clover and Jotter gasp in unison. “Yes, yes, I know,” continues Schellbach. “It’s quite a shock. But we have recently been made aware of a body, a skeleton at this point, stashed in his garage.”

“No!” breathes Lois.

“And how does he explain it?” asks Elzada.

“He doesn’t,” says Schellbach. “He simply laughs. The seriousness of the situation seems to elude him. Which is why I’ve called upon you, in the hopes you can talk some sense into him before we’re forced to take legal measures, which might include,” Schellbach lowers his voice, “house arrest. It would be very disruptive to the community, and we’re trying our darnedest to avoid it. But we haven’t much time. Already the rumors are flying, as you can imagine. It won’t be long now before the whole grisly business explodes, and then we’ll have a scandal on our hands. Bad for revenue,” he adds. “The parks, I have discovered in my time here, are about revenue, alas.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” says Elzada. “It might be good for revenue. Scandal draws the curious, the lonely, and practically everyone else. Which is beside the point, of course. It’s Emery we’re concerned about. House arrest wouldn’t suit Emery. But tell me,” she goes on, “why have you called upon me? May we sit down somewhere, Mr. Schellbach? I’m afraid I have rather painful varicose veins.”

“Yes, of course. I’m so sorry. Let’s wander over to the office. I have my car there and
I’ll take you to the house. That way you’ll have a chance to settle in.”

“Settle in?” asks Lois.

“Ethyl is expecting you.”

“Oh, we wouldn’t think of it! That’s very kind of you, but Elzada has made arrangements for us at the hotel. I’m sure we’ll be comfortable there and we won’t be underfoot. And besides,” she touches his arm, “Elzie snores.”

Schellbach appears embarrassed. Clearly he doesn’t care for the intimate turn the conversation has taken. He clears his throat and says with effort, “Doesn’t everyone snore?”

“Not like Elzie.”

“It’s true,” smiles Elzada. “I’m an immoderate snorer.”

“It’s been years since I stayed at the hotel,” Lois goes on, clapping her hands girlishly. “We’ll make the most of it! We’ll have a chance to be tourists!”

“Well, you must take a few meals with Mrs. Schellbach and myself. The car’s right over here. Why don’t I give you a lift?”

That seems agreeable to everyone. As they walk, Schellbach says to Elzada, “My sister-in-law has varicose veins.”

“Does she?”

“Yes. A terrible situation.”

“One lives with what the genes dictate. Although,” she adds thoughtfully, “there will come a day when we turn that around, when we dictate our own genetic makeup.”

“But surely you don’t believe that. Human beings are not corn, Dr. Clover.”

“Why, Mr. Schellbach. It’s common botanical practice, as you point out, and being human, we can’t stop there, can we? We won’t. Who knows what we’ll try next? Cows and fireflies—”

“But what would be the point?”

“Livestock that glows in the dark!” cries Lois.

“Yes,” says Elzada. “A great boon to ranchers. No more tracking, just wait until the sun goes down. And from there it’s a simple step to applying these practices to humans. To us. Selecting genetically.”

“Simple?” asks Schellbach. “How simple, Dr. Clover?”
“When we crack the gene molecule—and we’re very close, scientists in several different countries are working on it now—when we finally understand the configuration of DNA and the way mutation occurs, it will be a simple step from cows and fireflies to humans. Methodologically simple, but morally tremendously complex.”

“I should say so. It may be a long time before those veins of yours become a choice.”

“The fact is,” says Lois, “we’re not so different from cows and corn, and that’s difficult for people.”

“To me,” says Elzada, “it’s a great comfort.”

“But we are different,” says Schellbach.

“We can reason,” says Lois. “We’re capable of love and murder. Is this your car, Mr. Schellbach?” He nods. “Oh, it’s good to stop thinking and talking sometimes, isn’t it, and just go for a drive?” Silence. “Well, I think it is.”

They drive around to El Tovar and Schellbach stops in front, nods at a bellhop who comes and collects the two valises. When the boy has gone he turns to Elzada and says, “To answer your question, Dr. Clover, the question of why we have called upon you in this unpleasant matter involving Mr. Kolb, I can simply report that he asked for you.”

“Emery did?”

“He told both Superintendent Bryant and myself, in two different interviews, that you were not only sensible, knowledgeable and a friend, but that you…,” he looks out across the canyon at the North Rim where afternoon rain clouds are gathering, “…that you…now, I don’t believe this, of course, I simply pass it along…he seems to feel that you might…how shall I put it…?”

“Might what?” asks Lois impatiently.

“That Dr. Clover might, impossible as it seems, know, or rather, well, yes, know, something about the body.”

“Good lord!” exclaims Elzada. “Why didn’t you say so?”

“He did,” says Lois, crossing her arms. “He certainly took his time about it, but now he’s said it. And it sounds to me like Emery’s up to his old tricks. Come on, Elzada. We don’t need to sit here and listen to any more nonsense and gossip. Let’s go in and freshen up and leave all this until another time.”
“I wouldn’t give it another thought,” says Schellbach quickly. “And I know Ethyl will be very disappointed, as will I, if you won’t join us for supper tonight. She’d like to make a fuss over you.”

Lois opens her mouth to speak but Elzada says, “Supper will be fine, Mr. Schellbach. What time?”

“Six o’clock. Shall I come for you in the car?”
“’We’ll come on our own two feet,” growls Lois.
“We’ll be ready to be picked up at six,” says Elzada. “We’ll wait right here.”

He drives away and the women watch him go. Lois says, “That fool, Emery. I knew we couldn’t trust him.”

“’He does have a rather enlarged ego.”
“It’s center stage or he won’t play.”
“Yes, but we knew that about him from the start.”
“’To store the evidence in his garage!”
“What would he want with the body?”
“I’m nervous, Elzie.”

“You mustn’t be, my dear. They’ll sense it. They’ll smell it, like sharks to blood. And we have very little to worry about, except Emery. My reputation protects us. In their eyes I’m a tower of good intentions.”

“A tower of good intentions whose interest in genetic manipulation is no longer a secret. My goodness! I thought you’d never quit!”

“It didn’t stop you from adding your two cents, did it?” laughs Elzada.
“I’m not used to hiding my opinions, I’ll admit.”

“Never mind. Nothing to hide here and now. Come, Loie. We need to elongate our horizon.”

They climb the front steps of the hotel and Elzada first, then Lois, turns to look at the great painting hung in the open air beyond the porch, the enormous canvas that changes as they watch, as the clouds darken and descend and rain visibly lashes the far rim. It is a painting beyond price, a canvas few are lucky enough to glimpse, and the effect on the two women is one of overwhelming relief. They are here at last. Scandal, dirty business and mystery swirl about
them, but they are meaningless, as are most things, in the face of what lies here before them. The great canyon opens and offers up bars of sunlight, columns of rain, as if the sky exists below, inside it. Then a sudden crisp flash of lightning, hollow thunder. The misses Clover and Jotter jump and clutch one another and laugh, and Elzada, leading Lois by the hand, walks out under the expectant sky and waits there, until finally the rain comes hard and sharp, lashing their upturned faces and pouring in endless rivers from the roof of the hotel.