

Breed

Early September 1962

Evan was sipping Coca-Cola on the sidelines of his first history department party at the southern university, intimidated by the booming voices and prolific bourbon consumption, when something hard slapped his shoulder and nearly knocked him down. Flipping around, he saw his chairman, Ashton Goddard, clucking his tongue and gruffly guffawing.

Sniffing Evan's drink and shaking his large brown-bearded head, he reached inside his crinkled jacket for a silver flask and poured in what remained. Ashton frowned when Evan daintily sipped, so he gulped instead, nearly choking on the pungent fluid.

"Come out to the farm on Sunday," Ashton commanded as the alcohol burn slowly subsided, leaving Evan sick to his stomach. "Pick you up around three."

Evan had planned to spend Sunday finishing up the lectures for his nineteenth-century French history survey and hanging the prints he'd brought with him from New York, but refusal might nix his chance of tenure.

As two-thirty crept toward three that Sunday, he gazed out his living room window, wondering which passing car might contain his chairman and tying and untying the tie he wasn't sure he should be wearing.

A big white Cadillac slowed down in front of the house but sped right past like it was toying with him, and it was almost three-thirty by the time a Volkswagen Bug pulled up into the driveway. Evan retied his tie and dashed outside to find Ashton Goddard squeezed into the driver's seat, "Aren't we formal this afternoon, Mr. Cohen?" his only greeting.

The chairman rambled easily on as they climbed up and down the hills that lay between the southern university town and the Goddard farm, explaining what Evan had already heard about single hires being invited out for Sunday dinners during their first semester, then slipping back to the past to explain how he ended up teaching Confederate history, the childhood in a West Tennessee still recovering from carpetbaggers.

Evan learned that Ashton and Elizabeth had three sons and that while two of them had wed decent local girls, the third had married a stand-offish Catholic from Baltimore who was closing in on thirty without

producing offspring. Which was really just as well as the other wives had produced six grandchildren, and the “business of grandfathering” was a “snare and a delusion in these lenient times” as the “undisciplined little cretins” ran wild around the house.

But what really excited Ashton—his deep voice resonating through the car, his milky gray eyes growing wild and intoxicated—was his dog, Stonewall Jackson, Jackson for short.

After his mother had passed in his tenth year, his father had brought home a mongrel. Part golden retriever, part Irish setter, the lovely bitch ran off into the woods only two years later, and Ashton had never stopped missing her.

“Until the stork brought Jackson by,” said Ashton, explaining how he’d bred one himself for his sixtieth birthday the year before, once he’d gotten hold of a prime Irish setter stud and a quality golden bitch.

At the farm, Ashton ignored the blond children horsing around in the weeds and the tall woman with shocking white hair setting up the picnic tables and yelled immediately for the dog. A distant rustling, then panting, gradually picked up volume until a striking red and yellow dog burst in from the woods bearing a large broken branch proudly in her mouth. She bounded up to Ashton, tossed it at his feet as an offering, and sunk her body into the grass.

Once her master had taken off toward the grill smoking near the house, she came over to Evan. She shook her body seductively but growled sharply when he tried to stroke her, clamping down so hard on his right thumb that a thin line of blood sunk all the way down into his palm.

He stuck his hand into his pocket to hide it, but blood leaked into his khakis.

Skimming away from the growling dog, past the sturdy blond Goddards milling around the front yard, Evan’s eyes landed on a pensive brunette whose pixie haircut and brooding good looks made his heart skitter.

The standoffish daughter-in-law paid Evan no attention, but the woman with white hair, Ashton’s wife, Elizabeth, walked over and introduced him around. Affable enough, the Goddards shook his left hand and asked him questions about New York City, where he’d recently been in graduate school, and Judaism, from which his last name derived. Brought up nominally Presbyterian by his mother and stepfather in Malibu, Evan could only make educated guesses about holidays, yarmulkes, and that certain boy surgery too delicate to be called by name.

Warily, they peered at his hand in his blood-drenched pocket as if it were some disturbing Jewish custom.

Every Sunday thereafter, a different vehicle bearing a different Goddard pulled up at Evan's house and spirited him to the barbecue, but the days in between were muddled and dull. His ruddy undergraduates, not particularly warming to the internationals and communes of the French nineteenth century, suspected him of supporting those modern red menaces in Cuba and in Russia. The girls would whisper and giggle while the boys, still reeking from last night's bourbon, would shuffle uncomfortably in their seats and drift in and out of sleep with their heads on their desks. When he'd lightly shaken the chair of a handsome blond repeat offender, the strapping fellow had risen suddenly to his feet, his hands balled into fists, but sat down again and put his head back on his desk, sparing Evan a scuffle that would not have gone well.

After his aunt and uncle had sat him down and counseled him that summer, Evan no longer filled notebooks with unsent love letters to his curly-black-haired ex-girlfriend. But in the weekly desolation between Sunday barbecues, she kept cropping up in his mind, particularly as Joanne, Ashton Goddard's dark-haired daughter-in-law, refused to warm up to him.

Joanne only smiled when William Wanderforce, another junior member of the faculty, whispered amusements into her ears. The haughty Wanderforce—pasty-faced and steadfastly Bostonian—shouldn't even have been invited, as it was well beyond his first semester.

Thankfully Wanderforce was not in attendance on the last Sunday in October, which concluded the outdoor barbecue season. It was the height of Indian summer. A warm breeze blew down from the hills, and the Goddards were amiably attending to the grandchildren and carrying platters of food out to the picnic tables in front of the house.

Not sure what to do with himself, Evan sat down at an empty one and stared idly down at the onion grass under his feet.

Until he heard a faint fluttering nearby, caught a whiff of some subtle perfume, and looked up to find Joanne sitting across from him. After checking carefully around her to make sure no one was eavesdropping, she whispered something urgently under her breath about "Gerde's Folk City in Greenwich Village, New York."

Evan was about to explain that he was more of a Philharmonic man, but her penetrating dark eyes sent him lying.

"Best acts in town," he murmured, worried his callow-sounding voice might betray him. "I was a frequent habitué."

He turned away from Joanne, afraid he'd sounded pretentious, and desperately searched his mind for more useful information for her.

Gazing past the various other Goddards now arranging silverware and attending to the grill, his eyes locked hold of Stonewall Jackson, who stared curiously back at him while crunching down on a big misshapen bone that must once have been part of a deer. She wagged her tail for a moment before growling ferociously as if she'd just remembered that Jewish junior professors were known bone thieves. Her prominent canines didn't look right on her long narrow snout, and Evan wondered for the first time whether what his chairman had so carefully bred himself had something prehistoric in its makeup.

Joanne delicately prodded his arm, impatient to get his attention back. She'd just read an article about Greenwich Village in *Life* magazine and was desperate for more information about the place.

"I lived on Morton and Bleeker," announced Evan, though he wasn't even sure if they intersected, as he'd stayed on the West Side after Columbia and rarely ventured downtown.

Fortunately, his curly haired ex-girlfriend had carried on enough about Bob Dylan for Evan to remember to call him the "voice of tomorrow" and claim to have been impressed by his performances at Gerde's.

Occasionally, Joanne turned her head around to check on her dull blond husband, roughhousing with her dull blond nephews, and grazed Evan's arm with her hand.

Joanne looked rapturously into his eyes and was about ask more questions when Evan abruptly excused himself to dash off to the Gents before his ignorance revealed itself.

But she clung to his mind all week as he carried on about his idol, Proudhon, in his graduate seminar, fried hamburgers and boiled potatoes for dinner, and waited impatiently for sleep to overcome him in the drafty bedroom of his furnished apartment.

Evan spent the following Saturday afternoon taking notes about folk singers from magazine articles he found in Alderman Library and Sunday morning familiarizing himself with the information so he could easily recall it. After munching distractedly on a grilled cheese sandwich at midday and contemplating how to occupy himself until three when his ride was due to appear, his heart started pounding and his hands suddenly shook, as the prospect of talking to Joanne was inducing an attack of the nerves.

Gulping down several small glasses of the good Madeira his aunt had sent down with him from New York made him feel a bit better, but

when three slid into three-thirty heading toward four with no sign of his ride, he went back inside his apartment and collapsed his logy, disappointed body on the moldy red couch. While swaying toward sleep and imagining Joanne Goddard slipping out of an Empire dress, a car beeped from outside. A moment later, someone knocked sharply.

He staggered towards the door, his hair tousled, the taste of nap on his breath, and nearly doubled over to see Joanne, herself, on his threshold. Her blouse was rumpled, her hair tangled, and her face was distant and distracted.

She slammed the car into gear once they'd climbed inside and careened out the driveway without saying a word, and he had to wait until they were out of town to learn what was wrong.

"Jackson," she announced, stifling a sob. "The girl's run off."

Ashton had been smoking his morning cigarettes on the front porch before picking up his mother-in-law at church when Jackson, sitting at his feet as usual, had growled sharply, her fur standing on end. The undergrowth in the woods in back of the house had been fluttering.

She tore toward the woods but stopped and reluctantly turned around when Ashton called her back. After pulling her inside by the scruff of her neck, he'd taken off to Zion Crossroads.

"He shouted in to Elizabeth and told her what he saw," said Joanne, annunciating each word like Evan might not believe her. But Elizabeth had been too busy cleaning up after breakfast to hear him, and when the dog started clamoring, she let him out.

"But you can't let dogs out with foxes," Joanne pronounced. "They chase them so far they lose their bearing. They mate with other dogs along the way. I'm sure that's what happened with Ashton's childhood stray."

When the chairman came back and found Jackson gone, he'd stumbled frantically around the house, then charged out into the woods.

"You come back here," he'd demanded as if she were just nearby being obstinate. "You come back here, girl."

Once he'd yelled himself hoarse, he'd groaned like he'd been kicked in the gut. After that, he got angry, circling the kitchen like a marauding bull and taking his shotgun out from its rack inside the garage.

Joanne slipped down to her knees and said a Hail Mary, but he had already slipped out the back door. Soon they heard shots, Ashton letting off steam by shooting up the woods.

He returned an hour later, covered in brambles, came right up to where Elizabeth was preparing the ham, and shook his fists in her face.

Then he grabbed the bourbon from its place in the kitchen cupboard and climbed up to his study.

The event left her quivering in the kitchen, but Elizabeth still sent Joanne into town to get Evan, as she didn't want the poor boy left in the lurch.

They were now approaching the house, too late for Evan to excuse himself from the miserable sight of Goddards huddled silently around the dining room table, chewing distractedly until Ashton dashed down from his study, grabbed Elizabeth's dish, and threw it food-first onto the floor, then caught Evan's eye and gravely shook his head like this had to be the fault of the Jewish junior professor whether he'd been there when it happened or not.

Evan's phone rang late that evening. Elizabeth had checked his schedule and found he wasn't teaching the next day. Neither was Wanderforce.

Nearly two dozen vehicles were parked on the sides of the Goddard's long driveway, and the scene he and Wanderforce encountered the following morning reminded Evan of the estate sale he'd been taken to when he'd come into town to interview the year before, country people milling around a man with a megaphone.

Who wasn't an auctioneer this time, but a bleary, hung-over Ashton Goddard dividing the fifty-odd people Elizabeth had assembled into search teams of four apiece and explaining which section of the neighboring country they'd been assigned.

Elizabeth sat at a big wooden desk, which must have been dragged from inside, passing out sheets of paper with the names of teams and maps she'd stayed up all night drawing.

Evan's team leader was a brown-toothed old man with a greasy overcoat and a foreign accent who spat wads of tobacco into a Maxwell House can. Evan's heart jumped when he realized Joanne was on his team but sank when the fourth member turned out to be Wanderforce.

While the old man led them down the driveway, Wanderforce and Joanne lagged behind, amusing each other along the way, the treble pitch of her laughter stinging Evan with envy. When they stopped in front of a rusty red pickup truck, the two of them jumped in the back, leaving Evan to reluctantly climb into the tobacco and old-man-sweat stinking cab.

Soon after hitting the highway, they turned onto a service road with an almost vertical grade. Only managing a few miles an hour in second gear, the engine groaned in protest, and Evan gritted his teeth, fearing the brakes would give out. Peering anxiously behind him, he saw that

Wanderforce had grabbed hold of Joanne by the waist to keep her from falling.

The road stopped climbing and started twisting, the hills and trees spinning deliriously by, until they came to a sudden stop at a plateau where it disappeared into the undergrowth.

The old man got out of the truck and pulled three choke leashes out from his coat pocket. Evan shuffled toward Joanne when she jumped down from the back, but she looked away when he tried to engage her eyes.

The old man kept a leash for himself, gave one to Evan, and handed the last to Joanne and Wanderforce to share. After sending Wanderforce and Joanne uphill, he looked at Evan and pointed down.

“Leaving in two hours with or without you boys,” he concluded, making a quick walking stick out of a nearby sapling and starting to bushwhack forward.

Evan plunged desolately downward. Dark woods soon surrounded him, vines and gnats sticking to his skin and his clothes.

Each time he yelled for Jackson, birds flapped through the trees, possums or snakes rustled through the underbrush, but nothing sounded loud enough to come from a big dumb dog.

Since there wasn't any path, all he could do to keep himself from getting lost was align himself with the trees on the horizon line. Each step forward brought perils and nuisances, thorny vines nearly scratching his eyes, tiny sinkholes nearly capturing his ankles, sudden movements on the ground that might be rattlers or copperheads.

He knew he was expected to storm forward, covering as much ground as he could, but the woods were menacing and no one was watching.

After yelling one last time for the dog, stretching his vocal cords until his voice echoed through the trees, he pivoted around and headed back the way he had come, tromping slowly up the hill, grabbing branches to steady himself. His heart pounded worryingly, and he tried to push his father's early death from angina out of his mind.

But just at the point at which the vegetation should have begun to thin—the road coming into view—the woods thickened instead. Desolately, he peered in each direction at the trees, vines, and gnats that were all he saw. If he couldn't find the road fast enough, he'd probably just get abandoned, as Goddards would hardly organize a search party for a junior professor.

The problem at hand, having gotten himself somehow lost, took on greater and greater gravity as he continued to consider it. Both of his more hopeful assumptions—that there was plenty of time (at least a half

an hour) to find his way and that the road couldn't be that far—were not particularly verifiable.

More and more panicked, Evan started to charge back and forth through the woods. He tripped on roots, scratched himself on needles, and by the time he'd finally lost his breath and collapsed against a tree, he felt farther from civilization than ever.

Inhaling and exhaling as slowly and calmly as he could, he tried to collect himself. He needed to be more scientific. Carefully, he noted the curved branches of the particular tree under which he stood and decided to walk seventy-seven paces (one of his lucky numbers) in one direction and, if he did not see any sign of the road, return and try another direction and so on until he found his way.

More briskly and optimistically, he strode sixty-three paces, only to find himself about to slip into a dark gully probably inhabited by snakes and spiders.

He turned exactly around but when he reached his sixty-first, sixty-second and, indeed, sixty-third stride, the same branches did not reveal themselves, and his eyes welled with tears.

He did not plan to yell for help. There was nothing he could do about the sounds erupting from his mouth. Each time he yelled he winced in embarrassment and tried to cover for himself by also calling the dog.

“Help!”

“Jackson!”

“I've lost my way!”

“Come back here, girl!”

When he heard the rumblings of a vehicle, he stopped yelling and started running, falling and righting himself several times until he finally stumbled out from the woods and onto the road just in time to catch the old man's truck.

Where he was met with stony silence by Joanne and Wanderforce, who evidently mourned the missed opportunity to abandon him in the woods.

That Joanne shared a bed with her husband and presumably performed her conjugal duties upon it didn't particularly bother him, but her fondness for Wanderforce made his blood boil. Peter balled up his useless notes about folk singers later that evening and tossed them despairingly into the rubbish bin.

His usual roast beef dinner in his hand, Evan had been searching for a solitary spot in back of the university cafeteria that Friday when he stumbled upon Wanderforce at what he'd thought was an empty table.

With practiced neutrality, Wanderforce signaled his permission to sit down. Taking a considered sip of the black coffee he drank at all hours and adjusting his necktie, he solemnly shook his head. Evan braced himself for envy-inducing news about Joanne, but what he said did not concern her.

“Four days,” he glumly declared instead. “Every corner combed.”

Then, after a silence in which several bites of their meals were carried from their forks into their mouths, he went on.

“Terrible over there, you’ll see.”

At the next Sunday dinner, Ashton sat stonily silent next to Elizabeth at the head of the table. Drinking his bourbon neat and concentrating on his plate, he occasionally raised his head and glared at his wife.

Toward the end of the meal while carrying an apple pie in from the kitchen, Elizabeth suddenly stopped short. Turning her back to the family so as not to attract their attention, she clutched her chest, moaned, and fell delicately to the ground.

Risking Ashton’s fury, Joanne rushed toward her.

Evan worried she was having an attack of angina like his father’s, but when she allowed Joanne to help her up to her feet and smiled an embarrassed smile at the family soon surrounding her, he realized she’d only fainted, her recent distress having knocked her off her feet.

On her way back to the table, Joanne’s arm accidentally brushed Evan’s thigh. Her musky perfume penetrated his nostrils.

Smiling reflexively, he attempted a hello with his dry lips.

Which made her pause for a millisecond and shake her head; he was an irrelevant junior faculty member distracting her from this darkest of Goddard family moments.

January 1963

Evan idled away the short days of his Christmas break in the overly heated former maid’s room of his aunt and uncle’s midtown apartment, then returned two weeks early to the southern university town and took driving lessons. The Volkswagen Bug he purchased was dinky like Ashton’s.

His classes began before his lectures were completed, and he had to work deep in the night to catch up.

While carrying a tray of desiccated university cafeteria roast chicken and looking around for a table on the second evening of the new semester, he caught his first glimpse of Wanderforce since December. Desperate for Goddard information, he trod quickly over to his table.

Wanderforce actually smiled at him, as he was glistening with news. Stonewall Jackson had just been found. One of the Goddard sons had called him late that afternoon. A famished dog picked up along a country road in Goochland County had comparable markings.

“By now,” said Wanderforce breathlessly, “they must have got her home.”

It was no longer his first semester. It was not even a Sunday, but Evan had to see this for himself.

“We’ve got to get there,” he told Wanderforce. “We’ve got to see this.”

Wanderforce chewed his thumbnail. He shook his head.

Evan took an authoritative last bite of chicken, rose to his feet, and demanded to know if Wanderforce was really going to make him go alone.

The perplexed junior professor looked dubiously down at the ground, then helplessly around the cafeteria, his resistance sloughing away.

They found several vehicles in the Goddard driveway when they pulled in about half an hour later, but no one answered when they rang the bell. After the fourth ring, Evan banged the door. Unlocked, it opened upon impact.

They briefly touched hands for reassurance as they crept through the long foyer into the empty kitchen, the cavernous sound of the silent house gradually giving way to a strange whistling in the far distance, soft and high-pitched.

The sounds grew closer and more pronounced as they approached the living room. From just outside the door, they could see Elizabeth rocking in a chair facing the wall in the far corner of the room, a sickly smile frozen on her lips, wordless wails radiating from her mouth. Every other Goddard stood in the center of the room focusing on a scene that Wanderforce and Cohen could only see for themselves once they’d irrevocably crossed the threshold.

A dog, the spitting image of Jackson but dusty and emaciated, submitted at Ashton’s feet, whining and whimpering, while Ashton looked impassively down at her.

“No,” he intoned as the poor mangy creature howled pathetically. “Not the same damn dog.”

A moment later, Evan felt his wrist being firmly grabbed. His heart leapt when he recognized Joanne but sank when he saw the exasperation on her face and realized she was shooing them from the house.

The thought of Joanne made Evan's teeth hurt. Ashton had surely turned against him too after his intrusion on the farm. At least his time at the southern university would be short, as his unruly students had to be complaining about his lectures, and his research had ground to a halt.

That Saturday night he consumed an entire bottle of cheap Chablis and woke up Sunday with a piercing hangover, the sound of the phone ringing unpleasantly in his ears.

"Forty-five minutes," barked Ashton Goddard when Evan finally picked up.

Evan's head throbbed as he tried to sort out what this possibly could be about. Could a junior professor get fired in the middle of the semester? Was Ashton bringing his shotgun with him, the one he'd used to shoot up the woods?

Evan locked the front door, descended the rickety stairs to the basement, and sat shaking on its dirt floor, watching crickets creep around in the shadows. Less than thirty minutes later on the Cartier watch his uncle had given him for his last birthday, Evan heard ferocious banging on the front door. He couldn't believe his luck when it finally stopped, but within seconds there was an even louder sound, his chairman busting through the flimsy door. Remembering the coffee on the stove and the half-eaten toast on the kitchen table, which suggested that he was somewhere inside, Evan rose to his feet, shook off the dust, and climbed up to face the music.

A moment later, he ran into Ashton in the kitchen. His chairman grabbed Evan's car keys from the kitchen table and pulled Evan brusquely outside. He shoved him into his own car, and then spoke to him in fits of nonsensical words.

"Only a few days," he said, as they sped away in Evan's car, "not much to ask."

"Don't like a man to fib, but the thing's got to be done."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Cohen, but the thing has to be done."

Even if the dog wasn't an imposter, she'd been "ruined" in her time away like a girl whose virginity had been taken. Ashton had to start from scratch. He had to breed himself a new one.

"You get dealt a bad hand," he winked, "you start a new game."

Someone in the English department owned a decent male setter, but the old lady in Waynesboro with the only acceptable golden retriever bitch didn't want it bred, said it was no life for a dog.

“Bitches,” complained Ashton, not meaning dogs but wives who let them out with foxes and retriever owners who wouldn’t let you breed them.

Several miles down the highway in the direction of Waynesboro, Ashton laid out the carrot, how they would be “seeing a lot more of you after this.” The second semester prohibition on junior faculty (except Wanderforce) at the house would be lifted, which might help him redeem himself with Joanne.

The whip came out of nowhere as they were entering Waynesboro town limits, how it was “right hard for a fellow to go on the market a second time.” Which meant that Evan wouldn’t get tenure if he did not comply.

“Not always so friendly around these parts,” added Ashton, hinting at darker consequences should Evan refuse his bidding.

Which was to adopt the golden retriever bitch himself, and keep her until Ashton was ready to bring her out to the farm and breed her with the setter.

Evan’s moments of succor over being chosen over Wanderforce vanished once he realized he was probably just easier to push around.

“Tell the old lady you don’t have a family,” said Ashton. “Tell her you need the company.”

They passed an old courthouse with an oak tree out front, a silver diner, and a pharmacy closed on Sunday. A left past the gas station took them down a wide avenue with large Victorian houses in varying states of disrepair.

After they parked in front of a green one with a sagging front porch, Ashton clamped his hand on Evan’s shoulder, slipped him a wad of cash, and pushed him out the door.

“Meet you down the block,” he told Evan as he drove Evan’s car away. “Take a right out the door once you’ve got the dog.”

Evan peered warily up at the old green clapboard house with its paint and plaster falling off in chunks and its flimsy columns barely balancing the rickety porch. The fecund odor and the buzzing insects came from the rotten fruit fallen from the knobby old pear tree around the side of the house. Carefully ascending the collapsing stairs, he banged gingerly on the flimsy screen door. When no one answered, he banged harder, peering back at the street where Ashton Goddard was long gone.

Soon, he was knocking vigorously, the porch shaking under his feet, but nothing seemed to be living in the forsaken house. Desultorily, he walked down the stairs but climbed right back up, as there was no way he could face Ashton without the retriever bitch.

After pushing open the creaky door, he stared tremulously down a murky hallway, inhaling dust, decrepitude, and decades of fried food.

Finally, distant footsteps shuffled slowly from the back of the house, and a shriveled little woman emerged from the shadows. She had striking blue hair and wore a rumpled flower print dress. There was sweetness in her round cheeks but toughness in her hooded eyes.

“Sir,” she mumbled weakly, “what can I do for you?”

Nothing came out of Evan’s mouth when he tried to explain, and she looked the stranger who’d wandered into her house up and down suspiciously like he was drunk on a Sunday morning or some sort of mute fool.

His words, once they finally got started, came out backwards. How he taught nineteenth-century French history at the southern university, but “his folks didn’t live in these parts,” his attempt at the local vernacular. How he was lonely and in want of companionship and had seen the ad in the Waynesboro paper. How he had the fifty dollars she was charging for the dog.

“No breeding,” said the old lady.

“Don’t breed the bitch,” she repeated austerely.

“No,” said Evan Cohen. “No ma’am.”

The young golden retriever that she summoned from the backyard eyed Evan nervously and cocked her head. The thought of her being mounted by some big red dog made Evan wince. How pitifully that small stray spaniel had yelped and yowled, Evan couldn’t help but recall, when she’d been taken from behind by one of his stepfather’s Dobermans. The old lady was right to try and protect the bitch.

Who Evan inexpertly dragged down the street using the choke leash the lady had given him. Soon Ashton Goddard drove by and crammed her into the backseat with him. After handing Evan the keys, he demanded to be driven home.

The dog whimpered mellifluously once they hit the road, a higher-pitched sound than the false Jackson, as the golden was barely past puppyhood. About halfway to the Goddard farm, Evan heard snoring in the back and saw the dog panting at nervous attention in his rearview mirror while Ashton was deeply asleep.

She slept herself the moment she was brought inside Evan’s house and stayed asleep until well in the afternoon, hoping against hope that she might wake up back in Waynesboro.

Evan sat watching her: worried about sharing his small quarters with this large, unhappy creature, who opened her eyes, bore her teeth, then wagged her tail.

That evening she shat on the floor, nibbled distractedly at the food Ashton had provided for her, then started to pace around the small apartment, a slow steady circuit from room to room.

In the morning, the dog woke up hungry and finished the kibble Evan left out for her as well as stealing a piece of sausage from his breakfast plate. All day, she shadowed him from room to room, whimpering quietly to herself. Sometimes she made guttural sounds like an old man, rolled onto her back, and looked him soulfully in the eyes.

After several glasses of wine Tuesday night, he christened her Euphrasie after Proudhon's seamstress wife.

Wednesday morning while Euphrasie was delicately burrowing her head into the small of Evan's back, the telephone rang, probably Ashton threatening to take her to the Goddard farm.

The sound of his aunt's voice from Manhattan left him gasping with relief, and when their conversation was over, he left his phone off the hook.

His watch read 9:15, only forty-five minutes until his seminar. As he wet and soaped himself in the shower, a high-pitched sound echoed through the room that had nothing to do with the old pipes, and when he opened the door wearing only his towel, the dog bounded into his arms.

His stepfather's California Dobermans growled at him from a distance, and the yipping, shitting lapdogs of the Upper East Side filled him with disdain, but Euphrasie's instant adoration wiped away the taste of Joanne's indifference.

She followed him from place to place as he rooted around for his pants but had disappeared by the time he was searching for the tie he'd left on the corner of the bed only to return bearing it proudly in her mouth. Evan couldn't resist tying it loosely around her neck so she looked like Oliver Twist.

As it was damp with drool and all his other ties were wrinkled or stained, he had no choice but to call the departmental secretary, pinching his nose and announcing that he'd just come down with a dreadful cold.

Which gave him the day to enjoy with the dog.

When he released her at the end of the block where the city disappeared into the woods, she romped around in a joyous circle, vanishing into the underbrush and reappearing again. Back home after their adventure, she chewed his slipper, rolled on her back, and fell deeply asleep. Soon, her front paws started circling desperately around as

more high-pitched whimpers screeched from her mouth. Her puppy-hood traumas were terrible to contemplate, and now she was expected to submit to the real-life nightmare of being bred with Ashton's setter.

By the end of their idyll that day, her devotion far exceeded that of any woman Evan had ever known, even rivaling the real Euphrasie's dedication to Proudton, and Evan's hero would never have given up his wife because his chairman demanded it.

Until the "wee hours of the morning," like the Frank Sinatra song, he drank wine, stroked the dog, and considered the situation. There was no way he was getting tenure in any case, and Ashton wouldn't really shoot a junior professor.

Evan woke up with his head pounding and his stomach gurgling. After he'd vomited in the bathroom and washed his face in cold water, his errand came back to him. Each option—driving the dog back to Waynesboro, finding another home for her secretly in town—seemed more lily-livered than the next.

His heart smashed harder and harder as he drove closer to the Goddard farm, and he tried to talk himself out of what he planned to do. Joanne would scorn him forever, and he would be run out of the English department if not the whole town.

But frightening images of the brown-bearded Ashton impelled Evan forward: shooting up the woods with his gun, shaking his fist at his cowering wife. Evan placed his foot valiantly on the gas, soaring at seventy miles per hour down the country road. Rolling down the window, he felt the wind blowing through his curly hair and heard melodramatic, Western-style film music in the back of his head. He wasn't Gary Cooper in *High Noon*, but it was closer to that than he'd ever thought he'd get.

The Goddard estate hardly resembled itself with its grass winter brown, its trees absent of leaves, and no one playing outside. He saw for the first time that the house tilted slightly to the left, the years having yanked it out of alignment. The gray paint was falling from the facade, and the screen door at which he stared while gathering courage was ripped and bent.

Ashton's Bug was parked next to a Buick station wagon and a red pickup truck, so he knew the chairman was in residence.

As his hand approached the knocker, he heard growling coming not from Stonewall Jackson, who had been sent out to pasture, but the Irish setter stud selected to brutalize poor Euphrasie. An image of him approaching her menacingly from behind lodged itself in his mind.

He knocked mildly on the door, then more firmly, and was about to walk right in as he'd once done with Wanderforce when Joanne opened the door.

Instinctually, she clutched her belly with her hands, then removed them because there was really nothing to hide. She wasn't going to take off to Greenwich Village, however appealing *Life* magazine made it sound. She was going to follow the path of the other Goddard daughters-in-law and produce unruly children.

"I need to see Ashton," said Evan, surprised by his own firmness.

"He's occupied," Joanne replied. "You should drop by his office hours."

"I'm not his student. I have something to tell him."

Sighing dubiously, she agreed to go look for him, but when Evan stepped forward into the house she closed the screen door on him.

And disappeared. Evan waited and waited until the thought of Euphrasie abandoned at home had him opening the door.

Keeping his eyes fastened to the floor and ignoring the sound of nearby growling, he walked through the parlor into the kitchen, which smelled of sugar and apples. Looking up for a moment, he saw Elizabeth and Joanne kneading dough. Joanne glared sharply and rose to her feet but couldn't stop him from striding through the kitchen and up the stairs to Ashton's study.

Where Evan found him engaged in a mid-morning nap at his desk, his burly head leaning on a pile of student essays.

"Dr. Goddard," Evan announced, firm but nonchalant, "I'm keeping the bitch."

He took out the fifty dollars he'd brought with him, the amount Ashton had paid the old lady in Waynesboro for Euphrasie, and threw it down on the desk. Then he turned around and left without giving the half-asleep Ashton a chance to object.

When he was halfway down the stairs, he heard a muffled roar, anger too primal to be wrangled into words.

"Stop him, stop that boy," Ashton managed to growl moments later.

Elizabeth greeted Evan at the bottom of the stairs with a quizzical smile.

"Can you wait just one minute?" she asked, filling the opening between the living room and the kitchen as best she could with her narrow frame.

Defly, Evan picked up the pace and tried to push past her, but she grabbed hold of the back of his shirt like a vise and only let go after a terrible banging echoed from the back of the house, Ashton stumbling down the stairs from his study.

Evan was running furiously toward the front door when he saw that Joanne—flushed, sweaty, and a great deal more pregnant than he'd realized—was blocking his way.

"I guess I won't be seeing you at Gerde's," he told her, surprised at the venom in his voice, the disappointment that had fermented into anger.

Flicking away a tear that had lodged itself in one of her eyes, she waved her hands helplessly in front of her face and made the sign of the cross.

A moment later, Evan heard strong footfalls coming from the back of the house, not Ashton nor Elizabeth, but one or both of their sturdy sons.

"Just let me go."

"No," Joanne replied, quiet but firm. "No sir."

In his aunt and uncle's spare bedroom over Christmas break, how often he had imagined pulling Joanne greedily towards him, but now, when he did so, he did not sink his lips into her bosom nor grab her bottom with his hands, but seized her shoulders and shoved her roughly out of his way. Only in movies, he hoped as he charged out the door towards his car, did knocking pregnant women down make them miscarry.

Euphrasie greeted him like a long-lost hero after he'd made it home, which was just about how he saw himself. He took her quickly around the block to relieve herself before double-locking the front door and putting the phone back on the hook so he could call the police when Ashton and his sons pulled up his driveway.