

I cleaned up your place: he says.

She shrugs: No one asked you to.

Scuse me: says the little drunk, trying to weave past them, on his way to the door. He is holding the half-empty bottle by its jagged neck.

The thin girl catches the dangling end of the belt & pulls him toward her. He falls against her, spilling a hiccough of wine. You didn't tell me you had company: he says reproachfully.

You mean *him*! she laughs, pointing her chin at the poet: He's a poet; he's no company.

She snatches the bottle from the man's hand. & cuts her thumb. Which is bleeding slightly. She pays no attention to it. Get down! she commands: On all fours, if you want it back . . .

Wouff wouff: says the little drunk, weaving to his knees.

That's a good doggie: she laughs: That's what I like . . . Why don't you bite the poet, doggie? Bite a nice big hole in his pants.

Rrrrrrrrrrrrrrr: says the little drunk, heading for the poet's legs.

He jumps over the man & runs out. The thin girl's laughter follows him down 3 flights of stairs.

The Most Erotic Man / James Mechem

The Marquise went out at five. "Darling," she said. "Ring up Caresse Crosby and tell her I've met the Most Erotic Man." Caresse Crosby arrived punctually and the Marquise introduced her to the Most Erotic Man who proceeded to brush his lips over her White Gloved Arm.

Umbrellas for Rainy Wear & Parasols for Fair / James Mechem

I scooped up the sand by the handful and sat down beside her. She said hello. I said hello. That seemed to be that. I helped her build a sand castle. The sky overhead was very blue I noticed. I lay on my back and watched it

for awhile. Pretty soon I closed my eyes and went to sleep. When I woke up she was gone but she had put an umbrella over me. I thought I would never see her again. Then I saw her walking toward me fully dressed. She was eating from a sack of popcorn. She offered me some, gave me the sack and sat down beside me.

I closed my eyes again.

"It's time to go," she said.

I opened my eyes. She was standing beside me offering me her hand. I took it and she pulled me up. "I'll wait for you to get dressed." I got dressed. She was waiting for me.

We got in her car and she spun out of there like a mad woman. She did eighty or ninety on the straightaway. I closed my eyes and hummed. She pulled into a roadhouse. We ate and stayed for the night. We ate breakfast and filled the car and took off again like a bat out of hell.

I laughed to myself.

"What are you laughing about?"

"You."

She began to laugh with me.

"I'm running away from my husband," she said finally.

"What has he done?"

"Taken up with another woman."

"That explains a lot of things."

I closed my eyes and went to sleep. She had kept me up most of the night with her lovemaking. She was like a woman I knew once told me she wanted it every hour on the hour. I never slept with that woman. It was when I was a reporter. We were reporters together. It didn't sound like much fun, every hour on the hour, but then, you never know, I found out last night that it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be, but it was awfully tiring just the same. Every hour on the hour. I woke up. It was dark. I shuddered.

We stopped at a roadhouse and ate dinner and got a bed.

Every hour on the hour again. I was glad to see the gray morning light filter into the room. My eyes were full of sand. I went to sleep with them open I think. When I opened them, when I was aware that they were open, we were on the highway cruising at one hundred.

"I've lived a full life," I said.

"You're young yet."

"It must be horrible to be married," I said.

"It is."

"You've got the prettiest freckles."

She laughed.

"But you're a tramp."
"Why did you say that?"
"I don't know."
"Did you mean it?"
"I don't think so."
"If I'm a tramp so are you."
"I don't mind."
"Well, I do."
"You're not a tramp."
"Do you mean it this time?"
"I think so."
"What's a tramp?"
"A girl with no moral code."
"I'm not a tramp. If you must know, I'm oversexed."
"I see."
"You don't believe me."
"I believe you."
"I'm afraid I have to let you out."
"Why?"
"We can't get along."
"It doesn't matter."

She stopped the car.

I looked out at the bleak stretch of highway. "This is the middle of nowhere," I said.

She shrugged. "It's the breaks, honey."

"You've got no heart," I said, reaching in back for my bag. She had picked me up outside of town just before we went swimming. "A pretty ass, but no heart," I said, trying to play it cool.

"Get out, you lousy son of a bitch!"

I got out. A black car was approaching. I thumbed it as soon as I saw it. It was a Coupe de Ville driven by a lady in dark glasses. She slowed down and stopped for me. I got in.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Anywhere," I said.

"What do you do?"

"I'm a movie projectionist."

"That must be interesting."

"Like any other job, I guess."

"Why did they let you out in the middle of the highway?"

I told her my story.

She looked at me askance.

She didn't speak again for hundreds of miles. It was dark. She continued to drive. Finally she stopped. "Be ready at seven in the morning if you want to go on with me."

But I overslept.

The story of my life.

Four New Stories & a Last Word / James Mechem

All my early stories used to be written out of the sexist bag. That was my whole bag of tricks . . . I've still got a lot of sexist stories that I have to peddle . . . I guess I'm going to have to let them go even though my attitude has changed . . . written long ago . . . but how can I explain that to people . . . they don't know my attitude has changed . . . too bad . . . I can't be concerned . . . (from a letter to the editor)

Not Surprisingly I Awoke in the Night

Not surprisingly, I awoke in the night so chilly that I had to drag up the blankets I had pushed earlier to the foot of the bed.

The woman in the kimono was still asleep on the floor but the fire was out. I didn't want to but I got up and put one of my blankets over her.

I had told her, You can sleep in the bed with me. I won't hassle you. But she said she preferred the floor.

I think I'd have to be awfully tired to sleep on the floor. Maybe she was awfully tired. She didn't wake up when I put the blanket over her.

I couldn't get back to sleep thinking about her. Instead, I got up and began to paw through her luggage.

She startled me out of a year's growth. I turned around and she had taken possession of the bed.

I threw myself down on the floor and fell asleep. The next thing I knew she was bending over me. Was she going to stab me? No. She was telling me to get out.

She had checked with the desk and it was her room not mine.

"But how did you get out? What about the blizzard?"

"They've had bulldozers clearing away the drifts all morning."

"Snowplows?"