

Saul and Patsy Are Pregnant · *Charles Baxter*

A SMELL OF SPILLED GASOLINE: when Saul opened his eyes, he was still strapped in behind his lap-and-shoulder belt, but the car he sat in was upside down and in a field of some sort. The Chevy's headlights illuminated a sky of dirt, and, in the distance, a tree growing downward from that same sky. Perhaps he had awakened out of sleep into another dream. "Patsy?" he said, turning with difficulty toward his wife, strapped in on the passenger side, her hair hanging down from her scalp, but, from Saul's perspective, standing up. She was still sleeping; she was always a sound sleeper; she could sleep upside down and was doing so now. The car's radio was playing Ray Charles' "Unchain My Heart," and Saul said, "You know, I've always liked that song." His voice was thick from beer and cigarettes, and he knew from the smell of the beer that this was no dream because he had never been able to imagine concrete details like that. No: he had fallen asleep at the wheel, driven off the road, and rolled the car. Here he was now. A thought passed through him, in an unpleasant slow-motion way, that the car was tilted and that the ignition was still on; he switched it off and felt intelligent for three seconds, until the lap belt began to hurt him and he felt stupid again. No ignition, no Ray Charles. His mind, often anxiety prone, was moving slowly down a dark narrow alleyway cluttered with alcohol, fatigue, and the first onset of shock. Probably the car would blow up, and the only satisfaction his mother would receive from this accident would come years from now, when she would tell people, when they were all through reminiscing about Saul, "I told him not to drink. I told him about drinking and driving. But he never listened to me. Never."

"Patsy." He reached out and gave her a little shake.

"What?"

"Wake up. I rolled the car. Patsy, we've got to get out of here."

"Why?"

"Because we have to. Patsy, we're not at home. We're in the car. And we're upside down. Come on, honey, wake up. Please. This is serious."

"I am awake." She blinked, twisted her head, then looked calm. Her opal earring glittered in the light of the dashboard. The earring made Saul think of stability and a possible future life, if only he would normalize

himself. Patsy smiled. Saul thought that this smile had something to do with guardian angels who, judging from the evidence, flew invisibly around her head, beaming down benevolence. “Well,” she said, turning to look at him carefully, “are you all right?”

“Yes, yes. I’m not hurt at all.”

“Good. Well. Neither am I.” She reached up for the ceiling. “This isn’t fun. Did *you* do this, Saul?”

“Yes, I did. How do we get out of here?”

“Let’s see,” she said, speaking calmly, in her usual tone. “What I think you do is, you release your seat belt, stick your arms straight up, then lower yourself slowly so you don’t break your neck. Then you crawl out the window, the higher one. That would be yours.”

“Okay.” He held his arm up, then unfastened the clasp and felt himself dropping onto the car’s ceiling. He pulled himself toward the side window. When he was outside, he leaned over, back in, and extended his hand to Patsy to help her out.

As she was emerging through the window, she was smiling. “Haven’t you ever rolled a car before, Saul? I have. Or one of my boyfriends did, years ago.” She was breathing rapidly. She dragged herself out, dusted her jeans, and strolled a few feet beyond the car’s tire tracks in the mud, as if nothing much had happened. “Beautiful night,” she said. “Look at those stars.”

“Jeez, Patsy,” Saul said, jumping down close to where she stood, “this is no time for being cosmic.” Then he gazed up. She was right: the sky was pillowed with stars. She took his hand.

“Are you really okay?” she asked. “My God, feel that. You’re shaking like a leaf. You must be in shock.” She wrapped her arms around him and held him for half a minute. “There,” she said, “now that’s better.”

“We could have died,” Saul said, his mouth dry.

“But we didn’t.”

“We *could* have.”

“All right. Yes. I know. You can die in your sleep. You can die watching television.” She watched him in the dark. “I wish I had been driving. It’s so warm, a spring night, I think I would have been singing along to the radio. ‘Unchain My Heart’—I would have been singing along to Ray Charles and we’d be home by now.” She leaned over. “Smell the soil? It’s loamy. You know, Saul, you should turn the car’s headlights off.”

“Patsy, the car is *wrecked!* Look at it.”

“Don’t be silly.” She studied the car with equanimity, one hand raised to her face, the other hand cradling her elbow. Patsy’s equanimity was otherworldly and constant. Her psychic economy, combined with her beauty and persistent unexplainable interest in Saul, was the cause of his love for her; he loved her desperately and addictively. He had loved her this way before they were married, and it was still the same now. “Saul, that car is fine. We might be driving it tomorrow. The roof will have a dent, that’s all. The car turned over slowly and softly. It’s hardly hurt. What we have to do now is get to a house and call someone to help us. We could walk across this field, or we could just take the road back to Mad Dog’s.” Mad Dog was the host of the party they had come from. He was a high school gym teacher whose real name was Howard Bettermine. He looked, in fact, like a dog, but not a mad dog, as he thought, but a healthy and sober golden retriever.

“Patsy, I can’t think. My brain has seized up.”

“Well,” she said, taking his hand, “I happen to like these stars, and that looks like a nice field, and I’d rather stay away from highway fourteen this time of night, what with the drunks on the road, and all.” She gave him a tug on his sleeve, and he almost fell. “There you are,” she said. “Come on.”

As Saul walked across the field, hearing the slurp of his shoes in the spring mud, he saw the red blinking light of a radio tower in the distance, the only remotely friendly sight anywhere beneath the horizon. The fact that he was here at all was a sign, he thought, that his life was disordered, abandoned to chaos among Midwesterners, connoisseurs of violence and piety. He smelled manure, and somewhere behind him he thought he heard the predatory wing of a bat or an owl.

Sick of cities, Saul had come to the Midwest two years before from Baltimore as a high school history teacher, believing that he was a missionary of some new kind, bringing education and the higher enlightenments to rural, benighted adolescents, but somehow the conversion had gone the other way, and now he was acting like them: getting drunk, falling asleep, rolling his car. It was the sort of accident Christians had. He felt obscurely that he had given up personal complexity and become simple. He was like those girls who worked in the drug store arranging greeting cards. They were so straightforward that two seconds before they did any-

thing, like give change, you could see every gesture coming. He was becoming like that. As a personality, Saul had once prided himself on being interesting, almost byzantine, a challenge to any therapist. But he had lately joined the school bowling league and couldn't seem to concentrate on Schopenhauer on those days when, at odds and ashamed of himself, he took the battered Signet Classic down from the shelf and glowered at the incomprehensible lines he had highlighted with yellow magic marker in college. When he did understand, the philosopher no longer seemed profound, but merely a disappointed idealist with a bad prose style.

"Saul?"

"What?"

"I've been talking to you. Didn't you hear me?"

"Guess not. I was lost in thought." He stumbled against a bush. He couldn't see much, and he reached out for Patsy's hand. "I was thinking about girls in drugstores and Schopenhauer and the reasons why we ever came to this place."

"Oh. That. If you had been listening to me, you wouldn't have stumbled into that bush. That's what I was warning you about."

"Thanks. Where are we?"

"We're going down into this little gully, and when we get up on the other side, we'll be right near that farmhouse. What's the matter?"

He turned around and saw, across the field, the headlights of his car shining on the upturned dirt; he saw the Chevy's four tires facing the air; and he thought of his new jovial recklessness and of how he had almost killed himself and his wife. He said nothing because he was beginning to feel soul-sick, a state of spiritual dizziness. He was possessed by disequilibrium; he felt the urge to giggle, and was horrified by himself. He had a sudden marionette feeling.

"Saul! You're drifting off again. What is it this time?"

"Puppets."

"Puppets?"

"Yeah. You know: the way they don't have a center of gravity. They way they look. . . ."

"Watch out for that stump."

He saw it in time to avoid it. "Patsy, how do you live in the world? This is a serious question."

"Stop it, Saul. You've been to a party. You're tired. Don't get meta-

physical. It's two in the morning. You live in the world by knocking on the door of that farmhouse, that's what you do. You ring the doorbell."

They walked up past a shed whose flaking red door was hanging open, and they crossed the pitted driveway onto a small front yard with an evenly mowed lawn. A tire swing, pendulating slowly, hung down from a tree branch. Saul couldn't see much of the house in the dark, but as they crossed the driveway, kicking a few stones, they heard the bark of a dog from inside the house, a low bark from a big dog: a farm dog.

"Anti-Semites," Saul said.

"Just ring the bell."

After a moment, the porch light went on, yellow, probably a bug light, Saul thought; and then under the oddly colored glare a very young woman appeared, pale blond hair and skin, very pretty, but under the effect of the bulb, looking a bit jaundiced. With her fists she was rubbing her eyes with sleepiness. She wore a bathrobe decorated with huge blue flowers. Saul and Patsy explained themselves and their predicament—Saul was sure he had seen this young woman before—and she invited them in to use the phone. When they entered, the dog—old, with a gray muzzle—growled from under a living room table but did not bother to get up. After Patsy and the woman, whose name was Anne, began talking, it developed that they had met before in the insurance office where Patsy worked as a secretary. They leaned toward each other. Their voices quickly rose in the transfiguration of friendliness as they disappeared into the kitchen. They seemed suddenly chipper and cheery to Saul, as if a new party had started. He had the impression that women enjoyed being friendly, whereas for men it was an effort; at least it was an effort for *him*. He heard Patsy dialing a number on a rotary phone, laughing and whispering as she did so.

He was left alone in the living room. Having nothing else to do, he looked around: high ceilings and elaborate wainscoting, lamps, table, rug, dog, calendar, the usual crucifix on the wall above the TV. There was something about the room that bothered him, and it took a moment before he knew what it was. It felt like a museum of earlier American feelings. Not a single ironic sentence had ever been spoken here. Everything in the room was sincere, everything except himself. In the midst of all this Midwestern earnestness, he was the one thing wrong. What was he doing here? What was he doing anywhere? He was accustomed to asking himself such questions.

“Mr. Bernstein?”

Saul turned around and saw the man of the house, who at first glance still seemed to be a boy, standing at the bottom of the stairs. He had his arms crossed, and he wore a sleepy but alert look on his face. He had on boxer shorts and a tee-shirt, and Saul recognized, underneath the brown hair and the beard, a student from last year, Emory . . . something. Emory McPhee. That was it. A good-looking, solid kid. He had married this woman, Anne, last year, both of them barely eighteen years old, and moved out here. That was it. That was who they were. Saul had heard that Emory had become a housepainter.

“Emory,” Saul said. The boy was stocky—he had played varsity football starting in his sophomore year—and he looked at Saul now with pleased curiosity. “Emory, my wife and I have had an accident, over there, on the other side of your field.”

“What kind of accident, Mr. Bernstein?”

“We drove off the road.” Saul waited, his hands in his pockets. Then he said the rest of it. “The car turned over on us.”

“Wow,” Emory said. “You’re lucky you weren’t hurt. That’s amazing. Good thing it wasn’t worse.”

“Well, yes, but the car was going slow.” Saul always sounded stupid to himself late at night. The boy’s bland blue-eyed gaze stayed on him now, not moving, genial but inquisitorial, and Saul thought of all the people who had hated school, never liked even a minute of it, and had had a low-level suspicion toward teachers for the rest of their lives. They voted down millages. They didn’t even like to buy pencils.

“How did you go off the road?”

“I fell asleep, Emory. We’d been to a party and I fell asleep at the wheel. Never happened to me before.”

“Wow,” Emory said again, but slowly this time, with no real surprise in his voice. He shrugged his shoulders, then bent down as if he were doing calisthenics. Saul knew that his own breath smelled of beer, so there was no point in going into that. “Do you want a cup of coffee? I’d offer you a beer, but we don’t have it.”

Saul tried to smile, an effort. “I don’t think so, Emory, not tonight.” He looked down at the floor, at his socks—he had taken off his muddy shoes—and saw an ashtray filled with cigarette butts. “But I would like a cigarette, if you could spare one.”

“Sure.” The boy reached down and offered the pack in Saul’s direction. “Didn’t know you smoked. Didn’t know you had any vices at all.”

They exchanged a look. “I’m like everybody else,” Saul said. “Sometimes the right thing just gets loose from me and I don’t do it.” He picked up a book of matches. He would have to watch his sentences: that one hadn’t made any sense. On the outside of the matchbook was an advertisement.

SECRETS
OF THE
UNIVERSE

*** see inside ***

Saul put the matchbook into his pocket, after lighting up.

“Were you drunk?” the boy said suddenly.

“No, I don’t think so.”

“Teachers shouldn’t drink,” Emory said. “That’s my belief.”

“Well, maybe not.”

Saul inhaled from the cigarette, and Emory came closer toward him and sat down on the floor. He gave off the smell of turpentine; he had flecks of white paint in his hair. He rubbed at his beard again. “Do you remember me from school?”

Saul leaned back. He tried to think. “Sure, of course I do. You sat in the back and you played with a ballpoint pen. You used to sketch the other kids in the class. Once when we were doing the First World War, you said it didn’t make any sense no matter how much you read about it. I remember your report on the League of Nations. You stared out the window a lot. You sat near Anne in my class and you passed notes to her.”

“I didn’t think you’d remember that much.” Emory whistled toward the dog, who thumped his tail and waddled over toward Emory’s lap. “I wasn’t very good. I thought it was a waste of time, no offense. I wanted to get married, that’s all. I wanted to get married to Anne, and I wanted to be outside, not cooped up, doing something, making a living, earning money. The thing is, I’m different now.” He stood up, as if he were about to demonstrate how different he had become or had thought of something important to say.

“How are you different?”

“I’m real happy,” Emory said, looking toward the kitchen. “I bet you

don't believe that. I bet you think: here's this kid and his wife, out here, ignorant as a couple of plain pigs, and how could they be happy? But it's weird. You can't tell about anything." He was looking away from Saul. "Schools tell you that people like me aren't supposed to be happy or . . . what's that word you used in class all the time? 'Fulfilled'? We're not supposed to be that. But we're doing okay. But then I'm not trying to tell you anything."

"I know, Emory. I know that." Saul raised his hand to his scalp and touched his bald spot.

"Hell," Emory said, apparently building up steam, "you could work all your life to be as happy as Anne and me, and you might not do it. People . . . they try to be happy. They work at it. But it doesn't always take." He laughed. "I shouldn't be talking to you this way, Mr. Bernstein, and I wouldn't be, except it's the middle of the night, and I'm saying stuff. You know, I respected you. But now here you are, smelling of beer, and I remember the grades you gave me, all those D's, like you thought I'd never do anything in life except fail. But you can't hurt me now because I'm not in school anymore. So I apologize. See, I apologize for messing up in school and I forgive you for flunking me out."

Emory held out his hand, and Saul stood up and took it, thinking that he might be making a mistake.

"You shouldn't flunk people out of school," Emory said, "if you're going to get drunk and roll cars."

Saul held on to Emory's hand and tried to grip hard and diligently in return. "I didn't get drunk, Emory. I fell asleep. And you didn't flunk out. You dropped out."

Emory released his hand. "Well, I don't care," he said. "I was sleeping when you came to our door. I don't go to parties anymore because I have to get up and work. I sleep because I'm married and working. I can't see anything outside that."

Saul suddenly wanted Patsy back in this room, so that they could go. Who the hell did this boy think he was, anyway?

"Well, none of this is anything," Emory said at last. "I don't blame you for anything at all. Maybe you did me a favor. I had to do something in my life, so I got my mom and dad to buy us this farm, which we're paying them back for every month, every dollar and cent, even though we aren't farming it. But we might. I'm reading up on horticulture." He pro-

nounced the word carefully and proudly. “You want to sleep on the floor, you can, or in the sofa there. And there’s a spare bed upstairs, you want it.”

“Sorry about the bother,” Saul said.

“No trouble.”

“I appreciate this.”

“Forget it.” Emory patted the dog.

“But thanks.”

“Sure.”

The two men looked at each other for a moment, and Saul had one of his momentary envy-shocks: he looked at this man, this boy—he couldn’t decide which he was—his hair standing up, and he thought: whatever else he is, this kid is real. Emory was living in the real; Saul felt himself floating up out of the unreal and rapidly sinking back into it, the lagoon of self-consciousness and irony.

In a kind of desperation, Saul looked up at the wall, where someone had hung a picture of a horse with a woman beside it, drawn in pencil, and framed in a cheap dime-store frame. The woman was probably Anne. She looked approximately like her. “Nice picture.”

“I drew it.”

“You have real talent, Emory,” Saul said, insincerely examining the details. “You could be an artist.”

“I *am* an artist,” Emory said, staring at his old teacher. He picked at a scab on his calf. He turned his back to Saul. “I could draw from when I was a kid.” A baby’s cry came from upstairs. Emory looked at the ceiling, then exhaled.

“What kind of horse is that?” Saul asked, in what he vowed silently would be his final effort at politeness this evening. “Is that any kind of horse in particular?”

Emory was going back up the stairs. Then he faced Saul. “Every horse is some horse in particular, Mr. Bernstein. There aren’t any horses in general. You can sleep there on the sofa if you want to. Good night.”

“Good night.”

Whatever happened to the God of the Old Testament, Saul wondered, looking at Emory’s house, the God that had chosen Israel above the other nations? Why had He allowed this scene to take place and why had He allowed Emory McPhee, this dropout, to make him feel like a putz? The

Red Sea had not parted for Saul in a long time; he felt he had about as much clout with God as, perhaps, a sparrow did. The whole evening was a joke at Saul's expense. He heard God laughing, a sound like surf on rocks.

When Patsy and Anne came out of the kitchen, announcing that an all-night towing service was on its way and would probably have the car turned over and running in about half an hour, Saul smiled as if everything would be as fine as they claimed. Anne and Patsy were laughing. The flowers on Anne's bathrobe were laughing. God was, even now, laughing and enjoying the joke. Feeling like a zombie, and not laughing himself, but wearing the smile of the classically undead, Saul hooked his hand into Patsy's and went back outside. Some nights, he knew, had a way of not ending. This was one.

"How was Emory?" Patsy asked.

"Emory? Oh, Emory was fine," Saul told her.

On the days following, Saul began to be obsessed with happiness, an unhealthy obsession, but he couldn't get rid of it. His feelings had always been the city of dreadful night. He was ball-and-chained to his emotions. On some days the obsession weighed him down so heavily that he could not get out of bed to go to work without groaning and reaching for his hair, as if to drag himself up bodily for the working day.

Prior to his accident and his meeting with Emory McPhee, Saul had managed to forget about happiness, a state that had once bothered him for its general inaccessibility. He loved Patsy; that he knew. Now he believed that compared to others he was actually and truly unhappy, especially since his mind insisted on thinking about the problem, pouring over it, ragging him on and on. It was like the discontent of adolescence, the discontent with situations, but this was larger, the discontent with being itself, a psychic itch with nowhere to scratch. This was like Schopenhauer arriving at the door with a big suitcase, settling down for a long stay in the brain.

Patsy wasn't ordinary for many reasons but also because she loved Saul. Nevertheless, she was happy. Early in the summer he stole glances at her as she turned the pansies over in their pots, tamping them out, and planting them in the flowerbeds near the front walk. Blue sky, aggressive sun. She was barefoot, because she liked to go barefoot in the summer — her tom-

boy side—and she was squatting down in her shorts, wearing one of Saul’s old flannel shirts flecked with dirt, and the sleeves rolled up to the elbows. Her brown hair fell backward down her shoulders. From the front window he watched her and studied her hands, those slender fingers doing their work. Helplessly, his eyes took in the clothed outlines of his wife. He was hers. That was that. She liked being a woman. She liked it in a way that, Saul now knew, he himself did not like being a man. There was the guilt, for one thing, for the manly hobbies of war and the thoroughgoing destruction of the earth. Patriarchy, carnage, rape, pleasurable bloodletting and bloodsport: Saul would admit a gender responsibility for all these, if anyone asked him, though no one ever did.

Patsy wiped her forehead with the back of her hand, saw Saul, and waved at him, turning her head slightly, tilting it, as she did whenever she caught sight of him. She smiled, a smile he had gladly given his life away for, a look of radiant intelligence. She was into the real, too; she didn’t ponder it, she just planted flowers, if that was what she wanted to do. Beyond her was the driveway, and their Chevrolet with its bashed-in roof.

Saul turned from the window—it was Saturday morning—and tried to think for a moment of what he wanted to do. Taking a Detroit Tigers cap off the front hall hat rack, he went outside and with great care put it, from behind and unannounced, on Patsy’s head. “Save you from sunburn,” he said, when she turned around and looked at him. “Save you from heat-stroke.”

“I want a motorcycle,” Patsy said. “I’ve been thinking about it. We don’t need another car, but I want a motorcycle. I always have. Women *can* ride motorcycles, Saul, don’t deny it. Oh. And another thing.” She dropped one hand into the dirt and balanced herself on it. “This morning I was trying to think of where the Cayuse Indians lived, and I couldn’t remember, and we don’t have an encyclopedia to check. We need that.” She put her hand over her eyes, to shade them. “Saul, why are you looking like that? Are you in a state?”

“No, I’m not in a state.”

“A motorcycle would do wonders for *both* of us, Saul. A small one, not one of those hogs. Do you like my petunias? Should I have some purple over there? Maybe this is too much red and white. What would you think of some dianthus right there?” She pointed with her trowel. “Or maybe some sweet william?”

“Sure, sure.” He didn’t know what either variety looked like. Flowers seemed so irrelevant to everything. He looked down at her bare feet.

“Where *did* the Cayuse Indians live, Saul?”

“Oregon, I think.”

“What do you think about a motorcycle? For little trips into town.”

“Sounds okay. They aren’t exactly safe, you know. People get killed on motorcycles.”

“Those people aren’t careful. I’ll be careful. I’ll wear a helmet. I just want to do it. Imagine a girl—me—on one of those machines. Makes you feel good, doesn’t it? A motorcycle girl in Michigan. The car’s silly for small trips. Besides, I want to visit my friends in town.”

It was true: Patsy already had many friends around Five Oaks. She belonged here, but she always seemed to belong anywhere. Now she stood up, dropping her trowel, and put her feet on Saul’s shoes and leaned herself into him. The visor of her cap bumped into his forehead. But she embraced him for only a moment. “Want to help, Saul? Give me a hand putting the rest of these flowers in? And what do you say to some dianthus over there?”

“Not right now, Patsy. I don’t think so.”

“What’s the matter?”

“I don’t know.”

“You *are* in a state.”

“I guess I might be.”

“What is it this time? Our recent brush with death? The McPhees?”

“What about the McPhees?” he asked. She had probably guessed.

“Well, they were so cute, the two of them. So sweet. And so young, too. And I know you, Saul, and I know what you thought. You thought: what have these two got that I don’t have?”

She had guessed. She usually did. He stepped backward. “Yes,” he said, “you’re right. What *do* they have? And why don’t I have it? I’m happy with *you*, but I—”

“—You can’t be like them because you can’t, Saul. You fret. That’s your hobby. It’s how you stay occupied. You’ve heard about spots? About how a person can’t change them? Well, I *like* your spots. I like how you’re a professional worrier. And you always know about things like the Cayuse Indians. I’m not like that. And I don’t want to be married to somebody like me. I’d put myself to sleep. But you’re perfect. You’re an early warn-

ing system. You bark and growl at life. You're my dog. You do see that, don't you?"

"Yes." He nodded.

After he had kissed her, and returned to the house, he took the matchbook he had pocketed at the McPhees' up to his study. At his desk, with a pair of scissors, he cut off the flap of the matches, filled in his name and address, and wrote a check for six dollars to the Wisdom Foundation, located at post office box number in Cincinnati, Ohio. Just to make sure, he enclosed a letter.

Dear Sirs,

Enclosed please find a check for six dollars for your SECRETS OF THE UNIVERSE. Also included is my name and address, written on the back of this book of matches. You will also find them typed at the bottom of this letter. Thank you. I look forward, very much, to reading the secrets.

Sincerely,
Saul Bernstein

He examined the letter, wondering if the last sentence might not be too ironic, too . . . something. But he decided to leave it there. He took the letter, carefully stamped—he put commemorative stamps on all his important mail—out to the mailbox, and lifted the little red flag.

He thought: I am no longer a serious person. My Grandfather read the Torah, my father read Spinoza and Heine and books on immunology, and here I am, writing off for this.

On his trips into town, Saul began to take the long route, past the McPhees' house, slowing down when he was close to their yard. Each time that he found himself within a mile of their farm, he felt his stomach knotting up in anxiety and sick curiosity. He felt himself twisting the coils of something like envy, but not envy, not exactly. Driving past, at evening, he occasionally saw them out in the yard, Emory mowing or clipping, their baby strapped to his back, Anne up on a ladder doing something to the windows, or out in the garden like Patsy, planting. They could have been anybody, except that, for Saul, they gave off a disturbing aura of unreflective happiness.

The road was far enough away from their house and the flaking shed so that they wouldn't see him; his car was just another car. But on a particular Friday, in early June, after work, he drove past their property and saw Emory in the front yard, in the gold twilight, pushing his wife, who was sitting in the swing. Emory, the ex-football player, had on his face (through Saul's binoculars) a solemnly contented expression. The baby was in a stroller close by. His wife was in a white tee-shirt and jeans, and Emory himself was wearing jeans but no shirt. She was probably proud of her breasts and he was probably proud of his shoulders. Anne held on to the ropes of the swing. Her hair flew up as she rose, and Saul, who took this all in in a few seconds, could hear her cries of delight from his car. Taking his surreptitious glances, he almost drove off the road again. Of course they were children, he knew that, and that wasn't it. They gave off a terrible glow. They had the blank glow of angels.

They lived smack in the middle of reality and never gave it a minute's thought. They'd never felt like actors. They'd never been sick with irony. The long tunnel of their thoughts had never swallowed them. They'd never had restless sleepless nights, the urgent wordless unexplainable wrestling matches with the shadowy bands of soul-thieves.

God damn it, Saul thought. Everybody gets to be happy except me. Saul heard Anne's cries. The sun was sweating all over his forehead. He felt faint, and Jewish, as usual. He turned on the radio. It happened to be tuned to a religious station and some choir was singing "When Jesus Wept."

"It's your play, Saul."

"I know, I know."

"What's the matter? You got some bad letters?"

"The worst. The worst letters I've ever had."

"You always say that. You whine and complain. You're such a whiner, Saul, you even whine in bed. You were complaining that time just before you spelled out 'axiom' over that triple word score and got all those points last winter. You do this act when we play Scrabble and then you always beat me." Patsy was sitting cross-legged in her chair, as she liked to do, with a root beer bottle positioned against her instep, as she arranged and rearranged the letters on her slate.

Saul examined the board. The only word he could think of spelling out

was “paint,” but the word made him think of Emory McPhee. The hand of fate again, playing tricks on him. Glancing down at the words on the board, he thought he saw that same hand at work, spelling out some invisible story.

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K E Y D
Y

Saul always treated Scrabble boards as if they were fortunetelling equipment, with the order creating a narrative. Patsy had started with “moon,” and he had added “beam” onto it. When she hung a “mild” from the moonbeam, he spiced it up with “lust,” but she had replied to his interest in sex with “murky,” hanging the word from that same moonbeam. “Mild” and “murky” came close to how he felt. His mother, Delia, had said so on the phone yesterday. “Saul, darling,” she said, “you’re sounding rather *dark* and *mysterious* lately. What’s gotten into you?” He had not told her about the accident. She would have been alarmed and would have stayed alarmed for several months. She was a fierce mother, always had been. “I’m okay, Ma,” he had said. “I’m just working some things through.”

“You’re leaving Five Oaks?” she asked hopefully.

“No, Ma,” he had said. “This town suits me.”

“All that mud, Saulie,” she had said, dubious as always about the soil. “All those farms,” she added vaguely. “You didn’t have a *seeder* this year, did you?”

“No, Ma. I told you we didn’t.”

“You didn’t open the door for Elijah? When you were a little boy you loved to do that. When it came time in the service, you always ran for the front door and held it open and you—“

“—Saul,” Patsy said. “Wake up.” She shook him. “You’re woolgathering.”

“Just thinking about my mother,” he said. He looked up at Patsy.

“What are all those deer doing on our Scrabble board?” he asked. “Give me a swig of your root beer.”

She handed it to him. He appreciated the golden color of the fine hairs on her arm in the lamplight. “I think I saw some, as a matter of fact,” she said. “I thought I saw, what would you call it, a herd of deer, far in back, beyond our property line, a few nights ago. If you ever go back up to the roof, honey, give a look around. You might see them.”

“Right, right.” He couldn’t put all five of his letters for “paint” on the Scrabble board. He removed the ‘t.’ Pain. He held the four letters for pain in his hand, and he added them to the final ‘t’ in “lust.”

“Funny how ‘pain’ and ‘lust’ give you ‘paint,’” Patsy said. “Sort of makes me think of the McPhees and the heady smell of turpentine.”

They glanced at each other, and he tried to smile. A fly was buzzing around the bulb in the lamp. He was thinking of Patsy’s new blue motorcycle out back, shiny and powerful and dangerous to ride. The salesman had said it could go from zero to fifty in less than six seconds. The hand of fate was ready to give him a good slapping around. It had announced itself. Saul felt a groan coming on. He looked at Patsy with helpless love.

“Oh, Saul,” she said. She clambered into his lap. “You always get this way during these games. You always do.” He saw her smiling in the reflection of his love for her. “You’re so cute,” she said, then kissed him a long time.

At ten minutes past three o’clock, he rose out of bed, half to get a glass of water and half to look out the back window. When he did, he saw them: just about where Patsy said they would be, far in the distance, beyond their property line, a herd of deer, silently passing. He ran downstairs in his underwear and went out through the unlocked back door as quietly as he could. He stood in the yard in the June night, the crickets sounding, the moon dimly outlined behind a thin cloud in the shape of a scimitar. In this gauzy light, the deer, about eight of them, distant animal forms, walked across his neighbor’s field into a stand of woods. He found himself transfixed with the mystery and beauty of it. Hunting animals suddenly made no sense to him. He went back to bed. “I saw the deer,” he said. He didn’t know if Patsy was asleep. During the summer she wore Saul’s tee-shirts to bed, and that was all; her arms were crossed on her chest like a Crusader. “I saw the deer,” he said again, and, awake or asleep, she nodded.

Two days later, the letter containing the secrets of the universe came from the Wisdom Foundation in Cincinnati. Saul sat down on the front stoop and tore the letter open. It was six pages long and had been printed out by a computer, with Saul's name inserted here and there.

Dear **Mr. Bernstein,**

Nothing is settled. Everything is still possible. Your thoughts are both yours and someone else's. Sometimes we say hello to the world and then goodbye, but that is not the end and we say hello again. God is love, **Mr. Bernstein**, denying it only makes us unhappy. Riches are mere appearances. **Our thoughts are more real than hammers and nails.** We can make others believe us, **Mr. Bernstein**, if the truth is in us. Buddha and Jesus the Christ and Mohammed agreed about just about everything. Causing pain to others only prolongs our own pain. A free and open heart is the best thing. Live simply. Don't pretend to know something you don't have a clue about. You may feel as if you are headed toward some terrible fate, **Mr. Bernstein**, but that may not come to pass. You can avoid it. **Throw your bad thoughts into the mental wastebasket.** There is a right way and a wrong way to dispose of bad thoughts. Everything about the universe worth knowing is known. What is not known about the universe is not worth knowing. Follow these steps. Remember that trees will always be with us, mice will always be with us, mosquitoes will always be with us. Therefore, avoid mental cleanliness. Never start a sentence with the words, "What if everybody. . . ."

It went on for several more pages. Saul liked the letter. It sounded like his other grandfather, Isaac, the pious atheist, an exuberant man much given to laughter at appropriate and inappropriate moments, who offered advice as he passed out candy bars and halvah to his grandchildren. This letter, from the Wisdom Foundation, was signed by someone named Giovanni d'Amato.

Saul looked up. For a moment the terrifying banality of the landscape seemed to dissolve into geometrical patterns of color and light. Taken by surprise, he felt the habitual weight on his heart lifting, as if by pulleys, or, better yet, birds of the spirit sent by direct mail from Giovanni

d'Amato. He decided to test this happiness and got into the dented car.

He drove toward the McPhees'. The dust on the dirt road whirled up behind him. He thought he would be able to stand their middle-American happiness. Besides, Emory was probably working. No: it was Saturday. They would both be home. He would just drive by and that would be that. So what if they were happy, these dropouts from school? He was happy, too. He would test his temporary happiness against theirs.

The trees rushed past the car in a kind of chaotic blur.

He pressed down on the accelerator. A solitary cloud—wandering and thick with moisture—straying overhead but not blocking the sun, let down a minute's worth of vagrant rainbowed shower on Saul's car. The water droplets, growing larger, actually bounced on the car's hood. He turned on the wipers, causing the dust to streak in perfect protractor curves. The rain made Saul's car smell like a nursery of newborn vegetation. He felt the car drive over something. He hoped it wasn't an animal, one of those anonymous rodents like mice and chipmunks that squealed and died and disappeared.

Ahead and to the left was the McPhees'.

As usual, it looked like something out of an American genre painting, the kind of second-rate canvas hidden in the back of most museums near the elevators. Happiness lives in such houses, where people like Saul had never been permitted. In the bright standing sunshine its midwestern gothic acute angles pointed up straight toward heaven, a place where there had been a land rush for centuries and all the stakes had been claimed. Standing there in the bright theatrical sun—the rain had gone off on its way—the house seemed to know something, to be an answer ending with an exclamation point.

Saul crept past the front driveway. His window was open, and, except for the engine, there was no sound: no dog barking. And no sign, either, of Anne or Emory or their baby, at least out here. Nothing on the front porch, nothing in the yard. He *could* stop and say hello. That was permitted. He could thank them for their help two weeks ago. He hadn't done that. Emory's pickup was in the driveway, so they were at home; happy people don't go much of anywhere anyway, Saul thought, backing his car up and parking halfway in on the driveway.

When he reached the backyard, Saul saw a flash of white, on legs, bounding at the far distances of the McPhees' field into the woods. From

this distance it looked like nothing he knew, a trick of the eye. Turning, he saw Anne McPhee sitting in a lawn chair, reading the morning paper, a glass of lemonade nearby, their baby in the crib in the shade of the house, and Emory, some distance away, in a hammock, reading the sports section. Both of them held up their newspapers so that their view of him was blocked.

Quietly he crossed their back lawn, then stood in the middle, between them. Emory turned the pages of his paper, then put it down and closed his eyes. Anne went on reading. Saul stood quietly. Only the baby saw him. Saul reached down and picked out of the lawn a sprig of grass. Anne McPhee coughed. The baby was rattling one of its crib toys.

He waited for a minute, then walked back to his car. Anne and Emory had not seen him, and he felt like a prowler, a spy from God. He felt literally now what he had once felt metaphorically: that he was invisible.

When he was almost home, he remembered, or thought he remembered, that Anne McPhee had been sunning herself and had not been wearing a blouse or a bra. Or was he now imagining this? He couldn't be sure.

Patsy nudged him in the middle of the night. "I know what it is," she said.

"What?"

"What's bothering you."

He waited. "What? What is it?"

"You're like men. You're a man and you're like them. You want to be everything. You want to have endless endless potential. But then you grow up. And you're one thing. Your body is, anyway. It's trapped in *this* life. You have to say goodbye to the dreams of everything."

"Dreams of everything."

"Yes." She rolled over and made designs on his chest with her fingers. "Don't pretend that you don't understand. You want to be an astronaut and a Don Juan and Elvis and Einstein."

"No. I want to be Magic Johnson."

"Whatever. But you want to be all those people. You want to be a whole roomful of people, Saul. That's kid stuff." She let her head drop so that her hair brushed against him.

"What about you?"

"Me? I don't want to be anything else," she said sleepily, beginning to

rub his back. "I don't have to be a great person. I just want to do a little of this and a little of that."

"What's wrong with ambitions?" he asked. "You could be great at something."

Her hand moved into his hair, tickling him. "Being great is too tiring, Saul, and it's boring. Look at the great ambition people. They're wrecking the earth, aren't they. They're leaving it in bits and scraps." She concentrated on him in the dark. "Saul," she said.

"Your diaphragm's not in."

"I know."

"But."

"So?"

"Well, what if?"

"What if? You'd be a father, that's what if." She had turned him so that she was right up against him, her breasts pressing him, challenging him.

"No," he said. He drew back. "Not yet. Let me figure this out on my own. There'd be no future."

"For the baby?"

"No. For me." He waited, trying to figure out how to say this. "I'd have to be one person forever. Does that make sense?"

"From you, it does." She pulled herself slightly away from him. They rearranged themselves.

The following Saturday he drove into Five Oaks for a haircut. When his hair was so long that it made the back of his neck itch, he went to Harold, the barber, and had it trimmed back. Harold was a pale, slightly bland-looking Lutheran, a terrible barber with a nice disposition who was in the same bowling league with Saul and who sometimes practiced basketball at the same times that Saul did. Many of the men in Five Oaks looked slightly peculiar and asymmetrical, thanks to Harold. The last time Saul had come in, Harold had been deep in a conversation with a woman who was accusing him of things; Saul couldn't tell exactly what Harold was being accused of, but it sounded like a lovers' quarrel, and Saul liked that. Anyone else's troubles diminished his.

By coincidence, the same woman as before was back again in the barber-shop with her son, whose hair Harold was cutting when Saul rang the bell

over the door when he entered. To pass the time and achieve a moment's invisibility, he picked up a newspaper from the next chair over and read the morning's headlines.

SHOTS FIRED AT HOLBEIN REACTOR

Iranian Terrorists Suspected

Shielded by his paper, Saul heard the woman whispering directions to Harold, and Harold's faint, exasperated, "Louise, I can do this." Saul pretended to read the article; the shots, as it turned out, had been harmless. Even though there had been no damage, some sort of investigation was going on. Saul thought Iranians could do better than this.

There was more whispering, which Saul tried not to hear. After the woman had paid for her son's haircut and left, Saul sat himself down in Harold's chair.

"Hey, Saul," Harold said, covering him with the white cloth. "You always come in when she does. How do you do that?"

"Beats me. Her name Louise?"

"That's right. The usual trim, Saul?"

"The usual. Harold, this time try to keep it the same length on both sides, okay?"

"I try, Saul. It's just that your hair's so curly."

"Right, right." Saul saw his reflection in the mirror and closed his eyes. He felt like asking Harold, the Lutheran, a moral question. "Harold," he said, "do you ever wonder where your thoughts come from? I mean, do we own our thoughts, or do they come from somewhere else, or what? For example, you can't always control your thoughts or your impulses, can you? So, whose thoughts are those, anyway, the ones you can't control? And another thing. Are you happy? Be honest."

The scissors stopped clipping. "Gosh, Saul, are you okay? What drugs have you been taking lately?"

"No drugs. Just tell me: are your thoughts always yours? That's what I need to know."

The barber looked into the mirror opposite them. Saul saw Harold's plain features. "All right," Harold said. "I'll answer your question." Then, with what Saul took to be great sadness, the barber said, "I don't have many thoughts. And when I do, they're all mine."

"Okay," Saul said. "I'm sorry. I was just asking." He tried to slump down in his chair, but the barber said, "Sit up straight, Saul." Saul did.

Days later, Saul is asleep. He knows this. He knows he is asleep next to Patsy. He knows it is night, that cradle of dreams, but the earth's mad companion, the moon, is shining stainless steel beams across the bed, and Saul is dreaming of being in a car that cannot stop rolling over, an endless flip of metal, and this time Patsy is not belted in, and something horrible must be happening to her, judging from the blur of her head. She is being hurt terribly thanks to the way he has driven the car, the mad way, the un-American way, and now she is walking across a bridge made of moonlight, and she falls. The door, Saul's door, is being kept open for Elijah, but Elijah does not come in. How will we recognize him? Saul's mind is not in Saul's head; it is above him, above his yarmulke, above his prayer shawl, his tallith. Patsy is hurt, she lies in a ditch. Deer and doubt mix with the murky roar of mild lust on the Scrabble board. And here, behind the barber chair, is Giovanni d'Amato, sage of Cincinnati, saying, "You shouldn't flunk people out of school if you're going to get drunk and roll cars." Saul, the child, is speaking to Saul the grown-up: "You'll never figure it out," and when Saul the adult asks, "What?" the child says, "Adulthood. Any of it." And then he says, "Saul, you're pregnant."

Saul woke and looked over at Patsy, still sleeping. He groaned audibly with relief that she hadn't been hurt. What an annoying dream. He had never even owned a tallith. After putting on his shirt, jeans, and boots, he went downstairs, and, taking the keys off the kitchen table, stepped outside.

The motorcycle felt quiet and powerful underneath him as he accelerated down Whitefeather Road. He had driven a motorcycle briefly in college—until a small embarrassing accident—and the process all came back to him now. This one, Patsy's new machine, painted pink and blue, 250 cc's, was easy to shift, and the machine gave him the impression that he was floating, or better yet, was flowing down the archways of dark stunted Michigan trees. His eyes watered, and bugs hit him in the face as he speeded up. He felt the rear wheel slip on the dirt. He didn't know what he was doing out here and he didn't care.

He turned left onto highway fourteen, and then County Road H, also dirt, and he downshifted, feeling the tight, close gears meshing, and he let the clutch out, slowing him down. On the road the cycle's headlight was like a cone, leading him forward, away from himself, toward something

more inviting and dangerous. In the grip of spiritual longing, a person goes anywhere, travelling over the speed limit. The night was warm, but none of the summer stars was visible. Behind the clouds the stars were even now rushing away in the infinity of expanding space. Saul felt like an astral body himself. He too would rush away into emptiness. In the green light of the speedometer he saw that he was doing a respectable fifty. Up ahead the wintry white eyes of a possum glanced toward him before the animal scurried into the high grass near the road. Saul wanted to be lost but knew he could not be. He knew exactly where he was: fields, forest, fields. He knew each one, and he knew whom they belonged to, he had been here that long.

And of course he knew where he was going: he was headed toward the McPhees', that house of happiness, that castle of light, where everyone, man woman and child, would be sleeping soundly, the sleep of the happy and just and thoughtless. Saul felt blank, gripped by obsession, simultaneously vacant and full of shame.

He looked at his watch. It was past midnight. Their house would be dark.

But it was not. On the road beyond their driveway, Saul slowed down and then shut off the engine, holding on tightly to the handlebars as he stared, like the prowler he was, toward the second floor windows, from which sounds emerged. From where he was spying, Saul could see Anne sitting in a rocking chair by the window with their baby. The baby was crying, screaming; Saul could hear it from the road. And, in the background, back and forth, Saul could see Emory McPhee pacing, the all-night walk of the helpless father. An infant with colic, a rocking mother, a pacing father, screams of infant misery, and now the two of them, Anne and Emory, beginning to shout at each other over what to do.

Saul turned his motorcycle around, pushed it down the road, then started the engine. He felt better. He could have gone to their front door and welcomed them as the official greeter of ordinary disharmony. I was always just as real as they were, Saul thought. I always was.

On the left the broken fences bordering the farmland quavered up and down and seemed to start bouncing, visually, as he accelerated. The lines on the telephone poles jumped nervously as he passed them until they had the rapid and nervous movements of pens on graph paper marking an erratic heartbeat. Rain—he hadn't known it was going to rain, no one had

told him — began falling, getting into his eyes and falling with cold precision on the backs of his hands. He felt the cloth of his shirt getting soaked and sticking to his shoulders. The rain was persistent and serious. He felt the tires of Patsy's motorcycle slipping on the mud, nudging the rear end of the bike off, slightly, thoughtfully, toward the left side. Then the road joined up with the highway, where the traction improved, but the rain was falling more heavily now, soaking him so he could hardly see. He came to a bridge, slowed the bike, and huddled in its shelter for a moment, until the rain seemed to let up, and he set out again. Accelerate, clutch, shift. He wanted to get home to Patsy. He wanted to dry his hair and get into bed next to her. He couldn't think of anything else he wanted.

A few hundred feet from his own driveway, he looked through the rain, only a drizzle now, and he saw, looking back at him, their eyes lit by his headlamp, the deer he had seen before, closer now, crossing his yard. They stood there, on his property. But this time, there was another, a last deer, one he hadn't seen before, behind the others, slightly smaller, as if reduced somehow. It was an albino. In the darkness and rain it moved in a haze of whiteness. Seeing it, Saul thought: Oh my God, I'm about to die. The deer had stopped, momentarily frozen in the light. The albino's eyes — it was a doe — were pink, and its fur was as white as linen. The animal flicked its tail, nervously hypnotized. Its terrible pink eyes, blank as stars at the center, stared at him. Saul turned off the engine and the headlight. Now, in the dark, two brown deer bounded toward the west, but the albino stood still, staring in Saul's direction, a purposeful stare. He gripped the handlebars so hard that his forearms began to knot into a cramp. The animal was a sign of some kind, he was sure — only a fool would think otherwise — and he felt a moment of dread pass through his body as the deer now turned her eyes away from his and began to walk off into the night. He saw her disappear behind a maple tree in his backyard, but he couldn't follow her beyond that. He was trembling now. Shivering spasms began at his wet shoulders and passed down his chest toward his legs. The dread he had felt before was turning rapidly into pure spiritual fright, alternating waves of chill and heat rushing up and down his body. He remembered to get off the road. He pushed the motorcycle into the garage, kicking down its stand, and by the time he had crossed the yard and had reached the back door, he felt that he knew one thing, which was that he would not despise his own life. He had been told not to. The rain

picked up again and sprayed into him as the wind carried it. In his mind's eye he saw the deer looking back at him. He had been judged, and the judgment was that he, Saul, was only and always himself, now and onward into infinity. His boots were wet. They stank of wet leather. Outside the back door, on the lawn, he took the boots off, then his wet shirt and his jeans. It occurred to him to stand there naked. With no clothes on he stood in the rain and the dark, and he fell to his knees. He wasn't praying. He didn't know what he was doing. Something was filling him up. It felt like the spirit, but the spirit of what, he didn't know. He lay down on the grass. One sob tore through him, and then it was over.

He felt like getting up and running out into the field in back of the house, but he knew he couldn't break through his self-consciousness enough to do that. In the rain, which no longer felt cold, he sensed that he was entering a condition that had nothing to do with happiness because it was so far beyond it. All he was sure about was that he was empty before and now was filled, filled with both fullness and emptiness. These emotions didn't quite make sense, but he didn't care. The emptiness was sweet; he could live with it. He hurried into the house and dried off his hair in the dark downstairs bathroom. Quickly he toweled himself down and then rushed up the stairs. There was a secret, after all. In fact there were probably a lot of secrets, but there was one he now knew.

He entered their bedroom. Rain fingernailed against the window glass. Patsy lay in bed in almost complete darkness, wearing one of Saul's t-shirts. Her arms were up above her head. He could see that she was watching him.

"Where were you?"

"I went for a ride on your motorcycle. I couldn't sleep."

"Saul, it's raining. Why are you naked?"

"It's raining now. Not when I started."

"Why are you standing there? You don't have any clothes on."

"I saw something. I can't tell you. I think I'm not supposed to tell you what I saw. It was an animal. It was a private animal. Patsy, I took off my clothes and lay down on the lawn in the rain, and it didn't feel weird, it felt like just what I should do."

"Saul, what is this about?"

"I'm not sure."

"Try. Try to say."

“I think I’m pregnant.”

“What does that mean?”

“I think it means that whoever I am, I’m not alone with myself.”

“I don’t understand that.”

“I know.”

“Come to bed, Saul. Get in under the sheet.”

He climbed in and put his leg over hers.

“I can’t quite get used to you,” she said. “You’re quite a mess of metaphors, Saul, you know that.”

“Yes.”

“A man being pregnant.” She put her hand familiarly on his thigh. “I wonder what that means.”

“It’s a feeling, Patsy. It’s a secret. Men have secrets, too.”

“I never said they didn’t. They love secrets. They have lodges and secret societies and stuff—the Fraternal Order of Moose.”

“Can we make love now, right this minute? Because I love you. I love you like crazy.”

“I love you, too, Saul. What if you make *me* pregnant? It could happen. What if I get knocked up? Is it all right now?”

“Yeah. What’s the problem?”

“What will we say, for example?”

“We’ll say, ‘Saul and Patsy are pregnant.’”

“Oh sure we will.”

“Okay, we won’t say it.” He had thrown the sheet back and was kissing the backs of her knees.

“Are you crying? Your face is wet.”

“Yes.”

“But you’re being so jokey.”

“That’s how I handle it.”

“Why are you crying?”

“Because. . .” He wanted to get this right. “Because there are signs and wonders. What can I tell you? It’s all a feeling. In the morning, I’ll deny I said this.”

She was kissing him now, but she stopped, as if thinking about his recent sentences. “You *want* to make me pregnant, too, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“So you’re not alone in this.”

“That’s right.”

“One more little ambassador from the present to the future. That’s what you want.”

“Sort of.” He moved up and took her fingers one by one into his mouth and bit them tenderly. Patsy had started to hum. She was humming “Unchain My Heart.” Then she opened her mouth and sang quietly, “Unchain my heart, and set me free.”

“I’ll try, Patsy.”

“Yes.” They often talked while they made love. A moment later, she said, “This won’t solve anything. There’ll be tears. People—babies—you know how they cry.”

“Yes.” And even now Saul felt as though he heard someone wailing softly in the next room. Still he continued. Then he had a thought. “Patsy,” he said, “the window. We should stand by the window.”

“Why?”

“To try it.” He disentangled himself from her, stood, and brought her over to the window. He opened it so that droplets of rain blew in over them. “Now,” he said. There was a bit of lightning, and he lifted her to him. She held on, her arms clasped behind his neck. He felt as though a thousand eyes, but not human eyes, were looking in on them with tender indifference. They were and were not interested. They would and would not care. They would and would not love them. Finally they would turn away, as they tended to turn away from all human things, in time. Saul felt Patsy begin to tremble, a slight shivering along her back, a rising in tension before release. More rain came in, warm June rain on his arm. He felt Patsy’s mouth on his curls, the ones recently cut by Harold; she was panting, and so was he, and for a split-second, he understood it all. He understood everything, the secret of the universe. After an instant, he lost it. Having lost the secret, forgotten it, he felt the usual onset of the ordinary, of everything else, with Patsy around him, the two of them in their own familiar rhythms. He would not admit to anyone that he had known the secret of the universe for a split-second. That part of his life was hidden away and would always be: the part that makes a person draw in the breath quickly, in surprise, and stare at the curtains in the morning, upon awakening.