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Scissors paper rock

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Scissors Paper Rock

By

Barbara St. Clair

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the degree of
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Scissors Paper Rock

Barbara St. Clair

ABSTRACT

Scissors Paper Rock is based on the true story of Amy Biel, a young and idealistic American woman who went to South Africa to support the political effort against Apartheid. She worked there as a volunteer organizer during a time of great political turmoil, and was days away from returning home to the United States, when she was violently killed in a riot. While Amy's death was not an accident--four men were found guilty for taking her life--it is certainly possible to think of her death as a tragedy. Amy's idealism and belief in her power to do good, allowed her to put herself into the midst of forces over which she had no control, and which ultimately overwhelmed her.

In this novel, a fictionalized version of Amy's story, a young American woman named Miya Clare goes to the African country of Oneg Kempo in the hope of making a difference. While there, she is killed during a political action against white oppression that escalates into a riot. Although *Scissors Paper Rock* does not focus primarily on Miya's death and the events leading up to it, those elements are certainly part of the story, and are presented in the novel as testimony in an amnesty hearing for one of the men implicated in Miya's murder. But the real heart of this work is the story of Miya's life, not her death, and the main narrative of the story investigates

how she came to be the person she was. What were the complex threads of her personal history, the disparate collection of events, people, and interactions that formed her? How did they shape her world view? Why did they lead her to make the choices that she did, and to take the actions that that ultimately led to tragedy?

Miya Clare's death was an accident, but her presence in Oneg Kempo was not. She was there by choice, or rather, by a multitude of choices. What those choices were, and how they made Miya into who she was, are the engine of this story.

Introduction

I was in tenth grade, fifteen years old, uptight in my body, bored with school, boy-crazy, hungry for love, desperate to get out from under my parents' wings, and full of the complicated sugar and spice of an adolescent's psyche. It would have been a great moment to have realized that it was my destiny to become a writer, but all I was thinking about was that I hadn't eaten lunch, and I was hungry. So there I was, in front of the open refrigerator, standing inside the envelope of cold and humid air, staring at the glass shelves full of food, and trying to will myself to reach for celery and carrots instead of walking over to the cupboard and grabbing the bag of Chips Ahoy chocolate chip cookies. I remember that scene from my late childhood so vividly because it was the moment I remember thinking, for the first time, that I was always going to have a complex relationship with food. I realized then that I would most likely spend the rest of my life worrying about what to eat, when to eat, how much to eat, whether to eat—that is, that I would never escape my food obsession.

It was a staggering realization, although in hindsight it should not have been. After all, I had been struggling around food issues for years. When I was in kindergarten, my mother threatened me with the specter of shopping in the chubby department (do they still have those?) if I didn't stop eating Oreos. When I was in fifth grade, my pediatrician put me on a diet. In ninth grade I starved myself model thin, and six months later, the very refrigerator-day-in-question I am describing, I had bounced back from thin, to normal, and was rapidly approaching pleasingly plump.

So there I was, standing in the kitchen after school, looking into the reality of my future. No matter how much I wanted to rebel, I had no power. I was a prisoner of my desires. I might ignore my complex relationship with food for a while. I might say food meant nothing to me. I might shrug my shoulders about whether I was fat, or whether I was thin. I might ban all sugar from my life, or I might go on a sugar binge. But I would always have to face the facts; my complex relationship with food would be with me forever, no matter how much I might want to resist (both the relationship and the knowledge). I would not have voluntarily chosen to have such a relationship with food, but I felt myself captive to it. I had no choice.

It has been a similar experience with writing. While I have no specific writer-day-in-question, to match the refrigerator-day-in-question of my youth, the sensibility is the same. If I could have said “No,” to being a writer I would have. I certainly rebelled against it. I found a million and one distractions. For years, I avoided creative writing classes. I wrote advertising copy. I studied anthropology in college. I made fun of poets. But obsessions are by their nature intractable. You may suppress them for a while. You may pretend that you have conquered them, that they--not you--have surrendered, that you are the master of your desires. But that is not true. Obsessions haunt you forever. Like dreams of Oreos, with smooth-creamy filling, and playful advertisements for Chips Ahoy cookies, they hover out there in the airwaves, waiting for a vulnerable moment of reception. The psychic equivalent of alligators, they float in murky waters where you can't see them, and so can't guard against them. They wait, silent and still, eyes open, teeth at the ready, and when the time comes, they bite. And so, it is not an anomaly that I describe my coming to

writing in this way. For I am certain that if I did not have to do it, if the need to write had not grabbed me in its crocodile-jaws, I would not be a writer today.

It is true that I wrote as a child--notebooks full of scribbles about dragons and fairy queens when I was quite young, and then pages and pages of poetry during my salad days in junior high and high school—but by the time I got to college, I felt that I was too old for painted wings and giant rings, or perhaps I was just too distracted. Still, I was certain I did not want to be a writer. It was too painful. For one, there were too many people doing it. When I was growing up in the late sixties and early seventies in Cleveland and Ann Arbor, you could almost find a writer on every street corner. The coffee houses were full of poets and writers, each if not certain to be, then at least acting like they were the next Robert Lowell, or Sylvia Plath, Norman Mailer, or John Updike. A person couldn't walk down the street without bumping into a hopeful writer with a manuscript in his or her backpack. But all that writerly activity and writerly desire didn't seem authentic to me, and it didn't seem very safe either. I knew I was never going to be the next Robert Lowell or Norman Mailer, or Sylvia Plath, but if I could have been, did I want to? Was I willing to pay the steep emotional price such writing appeared to require? And even if I had decided I wanted to, if I felt that it was worth it, and that I had the psychic strength to do the deep and necessary work, it was clear to me that I wasn't good enough. Even if I had had the desire, I did not have the skill. Nor did I have the strength of self to tolerate rejection. I hated the fact that I could put my heart into creating something, that I could think deeply about the work, feel deeply about the work, sit down and do the heavy lifting of producing the work, trying all the while to make the work good, and then risk

having someone whose opinion mattered to me not like it, or not care, or think it was just okay, or think that it was good, but not good enough, or agree that they liked it, but feel that they liked someone else's work better. Thus, I was neither skilled enough, nor disciplined enough to develop the craft, nor was I strong enough to accept the criticism required for growth. I stopped writing for more than fifteen years.

I cannot say (because I do not know) why I started writing again when I did. All I can do is suggest--and accept--that for whatever reason, my time had come. The alligator had waited long enough. And so a few years after my son was born, and after I was well into my career as a business woman, I found myself sitting at my computer one weekend. Instead of writing presentations and proposals, I began typing a semi-autobiographical short story about my early childhood years in a quirky, left-leaning Chicago neighborhood, in the sixties. At the time, the United States was carrying out above-ground nuclear testing in the Pacific, and there was grave concern among my mother and her friends that fallout from the testing would show up as radioactive Strontium 90 in the feed-grass of the great plains, where it would be eaten by grazing cows, who would produce contaminated milk, which would then cause radiation poisoning—the logic went—in the thyroids of their kids. So my mother, a member of the Mothers Against Above Ground Nuclear Testing committee took delicious, rich, creamy, cold, refreshing milk off our table and replaced it with the powdered stuff. (Why powdered milk would not be subject to the same food-chain issues, I cannot say. I've asked my mother, and she does not recall.) But it was awful. I refused to drink it. Of course, my refusal caused strife. There

was anxiety. There were fights. And I became the dairy-phobe that, with the exception of ice cream, I still am to this day. The story I wrote, at the age of forty, about that experience, “The Real Reason Why the Morgenstern Girls Don’t Drink Milk,” was funny. In part, I am sure that was because, from the vantage point of today, the experience I was describing really was funny. I also think that I wrote the story well, which was something I was able to determine when I read it, and which also meant I had gained the ability to be at least a reasonable judge of my own work—an ability every writer must have. Further, other people believed it was a good story too. When I read it at my first ever open-reading, it earned applause and hoots and hollers. People came up to me after to say how much they liked it. I can still taste the rush of pleasure and excitement I felt when I realized that I had (finally) written something good. It wasn’t Laurie Moore or Alice Munro good, but it worked. What a liberating feeling. I wanted more.

Over the next few months, I wrote a number of stories that took place either in my old Chicago neighborhood or in that same time period. One, that I still admire, was about how the street-tough ten and eleven year-olds in my multi-racial neighborhood, whose parents supported LBJ in 1964, responded to a family who put up Goldwater posters in their windows. Here’s one scene:

"Look at that," Henry said. Henry lived around the corner. "She likes Goldwater."

"You know what Goldwater is?" I asked.

"A jerk," said Annie Gladstone. Her mother was a union organizer and an ex-Kennedy volunteer.

"It’s piss," I said.

"Is not," said Henry.

"Yes it is," I said. "It’s piss. You piss it in a toilet. You piss in a toilet and the stuff you piss has a gold color. They used to call it toilet water and now they call it gold water. And that's what it is. It's piss."

"So if Goldwater wins we'll have a pisswater for president," said Henry.

"That's right," I said. "And it'll be tough titties for us all."

I was reading authors like Amy Tan, whose linked stories read like novels, and Frank Conroy, who wrote with a voice that made my brain itch, half-wise, half naïve, both old and young, twisted and innocent, and their literary voices resonated with me. For a time I thought I would be able to build a whole series out of my Chicago stories, especially after one, "The Haircut," was published in *Pike's Creek Review*. But after writing about five or six of them I realized I had tapped that vein, and I went in another direction.

A few years earlier, I had done some research for a film on a mostly unknown, and untold story of the Holocaust—Hitler's Jewish museum in Prague. Hitler's documented purpose in building the museum was to ensure that Germans and other members of the Aryan race would be able to learn about and study the "lost Jewish race," once his extermination of that race was complete. During my research for the film project, my husband and I had traveled to Prague and visited the museum, which was housed then, and in Hitler's time, in the old central synagogue. We went in the winter, which must have made us suspicious—it was years before Glasnost—and we were followed night and day by members of the secret police. It was incredibly frightening, and when we finally left Czechoslovakia by train, and disembarked in (non-Communist) Austria, we did the thing that actors do in movies and characters do in novels, but no one believes ever happens in real life. We bent down on our knees and kissed the earth of a (relatively) free country.

Seven years later, in a single night's burst of energy, I wrote a fictionalized account of my experiences in Prague and at the Jewish Museum in a short story called "The Archaeologist's Story." In the work, the granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor goes to Prague to visit Hitler's museum of the Jews. As she discovers the artifacts stored and hidden there, the reader learns that her grandfather was the Jewish curator of the museum and she rescues his past as she rescues herself. "The Archaeologist's Story" changed many things for me. As a story, it was more complete and more powerful than anything I had written. The voice was stronger, more sophisticated, more in control. Sensory details, the plot, the dialogue, the handling of time and place, all represented a new level of mastery for me. What's more, I was not the only one who felt that way. "The Archaeologist's Story" was published in the literary journal *Kaliopé*, and the editor of the journal wrote me a personal note saying it was one of the best stories she had read in many years. Her words could not have been more important and more liberating for me. She was engaging with me as (if I was) an author. While I had thought of myself as a writer, I had never thought of myself as an author before. But apparently I was. To this day I still find mystery in this. I had created something that had a life of its own, and that, in that life of its own, had intrinsic value. Thus, while "The Archaeologist's Story" was not my first publication in fact, it was my first publication emotionally.

Around the same time, I decided to write a play. I don't know quite why, except that I was thinking about a character of a young boy crying for his older brother who had died in Vietnam, and, when I imagined the boy, I imagined him on a stage rather than inside a real landscape. So, even though I had never written a play

before, I wrote a full length, three act play called *Medina, Ohio 1965*. I was living in Las Cruces, New Mexico at the time, and a group associated with New Mexico State University organized a regional playwriting contest. I submitted *Medina* for consideration and it won. The prize was a reader's theatre performance at the University, and the play was so well received that I and the performers were invited to present it at the International Border Book Festival, where it was also very well received. There was a positive review of the play in the newspaper, an article about me as a playwright and about the play's success, and there was a photograph of me watching the play being performed. I do not think there is picture of a happier woman, anywhere. And, if my life were a Hollywood movie, the curtain would start to close and I would ride into the sunset, glowing in my success, my future as a successful playwright rosy as the red-hued New Mexico sky. But I think when you are an writer or an artist in the United States—with rare exception—it is one step forward, two steps back. Despite *Medina, Ohio 1965*'s early successes, I could not find a theatre company to champion it. I put it in the drawer and moved on. Looking back, however, the play was a milestone in the development of my craft. It was the first time I had written anything where the main characters were boys instead of girls, and it expanded my ability to bring new characters and new voices to my work.

In 1999 the workplace brought me and my family to the Tampa Bay area, and in 2001, I enrolled in the certificate program in creative writing at USF. At the time, I was reading a great deal of poetry and had just discovered (unforgivably late) the wonders of Elizabeth Bishop. So although I hadn't written any poetry since high school, I chose to take a poetry workshop with Peter Meinke as my first course in the

program. It was as if a faucet had been opened. I surely wrote thirty poems in three months, feeling the muse so strong in me that I once remember pulling over on I-4, halfway to Lakeland, in order to write down some lines for a poem. One of the poems from that wild time, "Now is When I Live I Want the Messiah," was even accepted for publication by the journal *Illya's Honey*. My favorite part of the class were the assignments to write in special forms that I had never attempted before, like the sestina, and like the abecedarian, the last two lines of which I've quoted below:

you know this memory, this Jersey shore is close as you get to the wish you call Zion.

I've included that bit of poetry here because that wish truly did become opportunity. As a student enrolled at USF, in the creative writing program, I had access to committed, skilled and supremely decent teachers and mentors willing to work with me and help me develop as a writer. Teachers who helped me focus and hone my craft, teachers who helped me find my voice. Teachers who could distinguish for themselves-- and who could therefore distinguish for me--the difference between criticism and rejection, between risk as a writer and risking of a self, and so were able to challenge the one while protecting the other. In this environment, and after ten years or more of writing everything but a novel, it was time to take that step. I had written and published short stories, written and published poems, and written a play that had been performed on stage, and it was time. I did not know if I could write a novel. The challenge seemed overwhelming, but at the same time, I felt I had to move forward. I had to try. The task was to find a story and a theme complex enough and powerful enough to sustain my interest and energy over the months and years it would take to write a book. At about the time I was

searching for the subject/theme for the novel, a good friend of mine was killed in a car accident. I had never before had to face the unexpected and violent death of someone dear to me, nor had I had to deal with the feelings such a tragedy created. I had had no practice in mourning. I was lost, full of grief. I could not make sense out of what happened. Like a character in the most stereotypical genre novel, I could not get out of bed. I buried my face under the blankets. The world had changed and was far less safe and welcoming. A few weeks later I started the book.

As it is written, the novel tells the story of a young American woman named Miya Clare, who goes to a country in Africa as a volunteer worker in the hope and with the desire of helping to bring about social change. While she is there, she gets caught up in violent political turmoil and is killed. Miya's story is based on the real life story of Amy Biel, a young American woman from California, who went to South Africa in 1994 to help with the transition from apartheid to democracy and was killed there in a riot. At the time that I chose to pursue this story as the basis of my work, I did not realize that my choice to write about the death of an innocent had anything to do with the death of my friend. It was only much later, when the novel was complete, that I saw the connection between the death of my friend and the words I put down on the page. But connected they are. And so my novel is about loss on many levels.

Initially, I thought I would write about Miya's days and weeks in South Africa (Oneg Kempo in my novel). But as I began to work my way through the writing process I realized that I was not so much interested in how my character died—that is, what happened to her once she arrived in Oneg Kempo—than in why she went in the first place. What was it, I wondered, that made someone who had all the benefits and

safeties of growing up in the United States, willing to risk all of those benefits, and all of that safety, to go to a foreign country and “try to help?” That was what was new and interesting to me. And the more I asked myself that question, the more I began to believe that getting at the heart of the answer was where my true story lay. After all, I had read many stories (and seen many movies) about what happened to the hero once they got to the strange land. Their adventures, their scrapes, their “education.” What I seldom read, or saw dramatized, was how they came to be, what happened in their formation as a self that would bring them to that place, to that moment of destiny. How did they come to be the kind of person that they were? Or to bring it back to the novel, what happened—what had to happen in Miya’s life, five, ten, or twenty years before, that set her down the path that brought her to the moment of her death? When did her story start? Who were the people and the events that impacted her? How did she respond to her experiences? And how did all of that come together in such a way that the tragedy of her death was inevitable?

If I could construct a novel in such a way that it effectively investigated those questions, I believed I would (at least potentially) have a book that was worth reading, with characters and a storyline that could sustain my interest and involvement as an author over the weeks and months, and what turned out to be years of writing. And so, that is how I began. Not surprisingly, I ran into trouble right away. There is probably a reason, or actually a myriad of reasons why there are many novels that show “what happened to the hero once they got to the strange land,” but do not try to demonstrate the incremental steps that got her “there in the first place.” Because finding an effective structure to tell that story, as I have learned, is very

difficult to do. Cause and effect, when they are separated by five or ten or fifteen years, and when they are subtle and psychological are not easily illustrated. They are difficult relationships for a writer to manage—or so I discovered, as I worked to tell the story of Miya Clare, how she became the person she did, and how she died trying to do good.

I wrote multiple drafts that today form an historical record of my struggle to find a way to structure the book effectively. I wrestled with how to tie the past and future together, how to maintain forward momentum and emplotment, how to tell the story of Miya’s life while addressing the facts of her death in Oneg Kempo. I approached the structural problem in many ways. One of the first was to write the story from Miya’s point of view as if she were a soul or a ghost looking back upon her life and listening to the testimony about her death. In another version, the events in Oneg Kempo were presented as a parallel history to the events in Miya’s life, and then tied together by Miya, again as a ghost, and also by a series of testimonies given at a Truth and Reconciliation amnesty hearing. At one point, I even considered starting over and writing the novel as a play.

In the structure I finally chose, scenes of Miya’s life move chronologically through time, from her childhood, through her decision to go to Oneg Kempo and to leave the United States. Those scenes of Miya’s life are inter-cut with testimony presented during an amnesty hearing of one of the men responsible for her death. The testimonies are also, in a sense, chronological, starting with a court officer who introduces the case, proceeding with Miya’s mother and father, and then continuing with the people who Miya spent her last days and hours with, and who describe the

story of Miya's time in Oneg Kempo. The story closes with the voice of Miya herself, as the ghost that I originally began the story with in the earlier drafts.

Despite the challenges of telling this story well, and my sense that while I have met many of my goals in this work, there are some that I have not, I think there is something very powerful and valuable in attempting to address the mystery of what makes people who they are, and what drives them to make the choices that they do, and I believe it is a worthy subject for a novel. Further, even today, after working on this novel for over five years, the story and the characters appeal to me. The fact that it ends in tragedy seems somehow truthful to my real life experience, and perhaps to what it means to be a hero in the modern world, where failure is often the bitter fruit of the day. By failure here, I do not mean lack of success. Rather, I mean the distance between what we wish for and hope for and dream of, and what we actually accomplish. There was a section in an earlier draft of the novel (since removed because it seemed clumsy) that addressed this concept. Miya's father was talking about his daughter's martyrdom and making the argument that the only difference between her and historical figures like Joan of Arc, Gandhi, Martin Luther King (to name a few) was that they would be remembered for their role in changing the world, while his daughter would be remembered—if she were remembered for anything—for sacrificing her life in vain.

As I write this, it occurs to me that that is the risk for a writer too. You throw yourself at your work in the hope of creating something good, and you do not know before you start whether you will succeed or whether you will fail. You only know that you are driven to try, and that something about who you are, and how you were

constructed, has brought you to the day when you have no other choice but to do as you are compelled.

The Horses Stamp at the Gate

The horses stamp at the gate. The water pours into the reservoir. Molten stone presses up from the earth's core, pushing at the crust. Every story begins before you really know it--the slow steady crawl of small changes, the gradual shifting of tectonic plates, the gathering of forces under the surface. Later when the mountains come we stand at their peaks to see the longest view. But it is not the mountains that are the story, not the stone and not the rock, but rather the movement that made them so. At least that is how it was for me.

And so my story begins when I was ten years old and my parents sold our house in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Two strong men came and carried the five-piece living room set my mother had bought only the year before at Hudson's Department Store down the front steps and into a blue and white moving van. Then they loaded in my father's lovingly restored roll-top desk, my blue-green bicycle and brass bed, the TV from the den, the refrigerator, an old-fashioned black Smith-Corona typewriter, a Victorian armoire, the hand-carved wooden cradle I slept in as a newborn, the over-stuffed green velvet chair from the living room, my sister Leslie's child-sized pink vanity table, Angela the baby's red wagon, and twenty-seven brown cardboard boxes full of clothes and blankets, pots and pans, and towels and toasters. The neighbors organized one last potluck to say good-bye. Kevin O'Connell, the handsome dark-haired boy from next door, kissed me on the lips and said, "I will

never forget you,” and all five of us, my parents Peggy and Orin, my two sisters, Leslie and Angela, and I, Miya Clare, climbed into our car and left the place that I had called home.

We drove west from Michigan on Interstate 80, and then turned south at Albuquerque paralleling the Rio Grande on I-25, from its narrow head waters in the north, through the Sandia Mountains lush with acacia and carob trees, and down, on into the dung-colored scrub hills of Truth or Consequences. By the time we reached the baked-clay landscape of the Chihuahuan desert we were cranky, exhausted from the drive, the glare of western sun, and the furnace of heat, despite the efforts of the air conditioner. We were ready to be through with each other, hungry to be done with the way the skin of our thighs stuck to the car's vinyl seats, done with the hard-shell crackle of the country music stations, their farm reports detailing the price of corn futures and pigs bellies, the too-cheerful promotions of the church bake sales at St. Anthony's, St. Luke's, and the Church of the Epiphany. We descended into the Mesilla Valley.

“Well, girls,” my father said. “Here’s some good news. We’re almost there.”

“We are?” I asked. “How do you know?”

“See that sign?” he said, pointing with his chin to a large whitewashed board on the side of the highway, painted with blue letters. “See what it says?”

“Hatch, New Mexico,” I answered, reading it aloud.

“Yep,” said my father. “That’s right. And not only is Hatch ten miles away from our new home in Las Cruces, it is also the chili capital of the world. They grow more green chilies in Hatch, New Mexico than anywhere else under the sun.”

“Even more than Michigan?” asked my sister Leslie.

“They don’t grow chili in Michigan, idiot,” I said, elbowing her. “They only grow in the desert.”

“Don’t poke me,” she said, ignoring my point, and happy to get me into trouble.

“I didn’t poke you,” I said.

“Yes, you did.”

“That wasn’t a poke,” I said. “That was a nudge. Don’t you know the difference?”

“Stop it you two,” said my mother, making peace. “You’re missing the view.”

I turned to look. To the right of the road a green field pressed up from the ground, rising mirage-like from the sulfur-colored rock and creosote landscape. Waves of rich emerald color extended into the horizon and melted away into the downward angle of the valley's slope. Beyond the field’s distant border stood a single ancient volcano, its barren slopes majestic and strange, lifting up from the desert like a general.

“That field out there,” said my father, “the one that goes on as far as the eye can see? That’s what I’m talking about. It’s filled with chili, New Mexico gold.”

But it wasn’t the fertile swaying acres of green that had captured my attention. Rather, it was the men and women moving inside the field, working their way up and

down the rows between the plants, their heads wrapped in bright bandanas of blue, red, hot pink and lime, their shirts and blue jeans dusty with dark red earth.

“Who are those people?” I asked my father. “What are they doing?”

“Who are you talking about, Miya?” my father said, looking in the wrong direction. “I don’t see anybody.”

“The other way,” I said. “Out mom’s window. Don’t you see them? Are you looking?”

He raised his hand to his forehead to shield his eyes against the sun light streaming in the car window and blinding him. “Oh,” he said at last. “There they are. How odd. I don’t know how I could have missed them.”

“I see them,” said Leslie. “I see them too.”

“I know you do, honey,” he said.

“Who are they?” I asked. “What are they doing out there?”

“Picking the fields, I would guess,” he answered. “Harvesting this year’s crop of chilies.” Slowly, the road brought us closer and I was able to see the people more clearly, and soon we were so close that I could count them. And I did. There were fourteen in all. Men and women and children too, some I thought, even younger than me.

“You think they’re migrant workers, Orin?” my mother asked, as the road turned east, and the field of chilies and the people working inside it slipped out of view.

“Probably,” he said.

“What’s a migrant worker?” I asked.

“People who come from places like Mexico to make a better life for themselves,” said my mother, who came from a long line of Michigan union activists. “And then they get trapped working in the fields for subsistence wages, going from one farm to another, one state to the next, with no real place to live. No health care, no schools.”

“Why do they come here then?” I asked. “If it’s such a trap?”

“Because there’s no work for them at home, Miya,” my father said. “And they don’t have skills to get good jobs here. But they come because growers need people to harvest their fields and because they want to work. It’s not perfect, but everyone gets something they need.”

With his words, the hum-hum of noise inside the car seemed to startle with silence, despite a man squawking on the radio: “Thursday, the Knights of Columbus celebrate their annual barbecue. Saturday don’t miss the Kiwanis Club spaghetti dinner, and don’t forget next weekend, the thirteenth annual Hatch Chili Festival, where our master chefs will construct the biggest chili relleno in the history of the world.”

“I can’t believe you said that, Orin,” said my mother. “And in front of the girls. You sound like some kind of talk-radio fanatic.”

“Oh come on Peggy,” said my father. “You know I don’t like it any more than you do. But that’s how it is in this part of the world, and if we’re going to live here, than the girls might as well know. We can’t protect them from reality forever.”

“The growers pay those workers a pittance and grow fat on the profits,” my mother said. “That’s what the girls need to know. And those poor people. Working out all day in the sun like that. There are children in the field, for God’s sake.”

“At least they’re making a living,” said my father. “At least they have work. A place to live. Food to eat. It’s better than the alternative.”

“That’s because they don’t have an alternative,” said my mother. “They work like slaves. And live like them too.”

"Life’s not perfect anywhere, Peggy," said my father.

"You don’t have to tell me that," my mother answered. She reached over to the radio and started punching buttons. One after another she pressed and listened, pressed and listened, and pressed and listened again. Behind us the green chili fields retreated into memory and the road began to climb.

"We always knew when we decided to leave Grand Rapids and come here that it wasn’t going to be utopia," said my father, but that was not true. He and my mother had talked about Las Cruces in just that way. Both of them. I had heard them, late at night, before they went to bed, when they thought I was asleep. Their voices like murmurs of dreams in the night. “Moving out West.” “Living in God’s country.” “An answer to our prayers.”

We pulled in front of a white brick house on Avenida Olla de Oro, Spanish for pot-of-gold, just before sunset. Despite the lateness of the day it was still scorching, the asphalt soft enough to give way under the heels of our shoes when we stepped out of the car. The sun cast long, hard-edged shadows on the ground, throwing negatives

of trees fifty feet long, and of houses four and five stories high. "This is it, ladies," said my father, unlocking the front door. "Welcome to our humble adobe." I followed my mother and sisters inside, rolling my eyes at him as I went. "What?" he asked, catching my look.

"It's brick," I said, "not adobe."

"It was a joke," he said. "You know. Adobe, New Mexico. Abode, home."

"I got it, Dad," I said, shaking my head. "Not funny."

Inside the kitchen where I found my mother and sisters, it was stuffy and over-warm, and I could smell the fragrance of roasted green chilies--a memory of the cook who had used this kitchen before us. My mother was inspecting the cupboards. "At least they left it clean," she said, peeking into the oven. "And it's a very nice kitchen. Don't you think?" She stood up, her inspection done. "So, Miya, Leslie, do you like it?" she said to my sister and me. But then she answered her own question before either of us could answer. "I do," she said. "And so does your father. We both fell in love with the house the minute we saw it. Thank God. We must have looked at thirty or more. But when we saw this one, we knew. It was just what we wanted. Bright. Cheerful. And you know what? You're going to love your bedrooms." She picked up Angela and balanced her against her hip. "Come on. Let me show you the rest of the house."

Leslie and I followed her into a large family room bright with sunlight. "Look at these windows," she said, waving her free hand toward the row of six windows that lined one of the walls from floor to ceiling. "And that pot belly stove. Your father says we can heat the whole house with that in the winter. But it never falls below

forty here, even on the coldest day of the year. That’s a lot nicer than Michigan winters, don’t you think?” Again, she didn’t wait for an answer. “Come on. Your bedrooms are this way.” Leaving Leslie and Angela by themselves, in the room that they would share, my mother and I walked down the hall, past the master bedroom, to a small square room at the very back of the house. She opened the door with a flourish. “Look at the moldings,” she said stepping inside. “They’re maple. And the high ceilings? Aren’t they wonderful? Don’t you just love them. Think of the craftsmanship.”

It wasn’t like my mother to talk to so much. In my lifetime, whenever she felt the need to be so demonstrably conversational it had always been because there was something wrong. Either she was nervous, or she was lying about something important, or she had something to hide, or something to prove, or she had done something that was making her feel guilty, like eating the last piece of my birthday cake, and hiding the pink box it came in, in the bottom of the outside garbage can, so no one would know. I was not quite sure which particular emotion was driving her talkativeness, but it crossed my mind that she was talking in order to keep me distracted, to defend against the possibility that I would hate everything about the house on Olla de Oro right from the start, and that once I had settled into hate, nothing she could do would change my mind. “Well,” she said, “what do you think?”

My bedroom in Grand Rapids had been large and airy, with a bay window hung with lavender curtains, a wide window seat, and wallpaper on three walls--purple violets on a field of white, surrounded by green leaves. This room was stark white from floor to ceiling, with one small curtain-less window at the very back, and,

while the moldings were a rich dark maple, there was nothing else I could see to recommend it. "It's white," I said, as if that summed up everything.

"They probably just painted it that way to make it easier to sell," she said. "That's what all the real estate people say to do, you know. But we can paint it. Whatever color you want. It will be lovely."

"What if it isn't?" I asked.

"I promise you," she said. "We'll make it as nice as your old room at home. Okay? Miya?" she said, when I didn't respond, "Okay?" And then she ran out of patience. "Enough," she said. "No pouting. You've been doing it since we left Michigan, and it's time to stop. You're ten years old. You're almost an adult. You know how to handle yourself. And no one likes it when you act like a martyr."

"I'm not acting like a martyr," I said.

"Then what do you call it?"

"I don't call it anything."

And that was true. I didn't. But if I had had the words, I would have told my mother that what she was seeing was not martyrdom, but rather an expression of my shock at standing in a room--a room called "my room"--that held no meaning for me. It was the unexpected filling of my throat with the acid of longing, that taste of being lost, the first tiny blink of how deeply possible it was to be lonely, and how implicated loneliness was in not feeling safe. I had not anticipated what it would be like to stand inside a place called home and realize there was no emotional truth to the words we were using. How could I? Before that day, home had been the center of everything. My life revolved around it--the people and places and patterns and

cycles--each one nestled inside the other like a Russian doll. The start and finish of school year, the beginning and end of summer vacation, Christmas Holidays flanked by Thanksgiving and Easter, school out and grandparents and cousins and aunts and uncles come to visit, the hopeful start of the weekend on Friday afternoon, when my mother would come home with a carload full of groceries for the week, its bittersweet end after TV on Sunday night. Running to catch the school bus in the morning. Dinner at six-thirty. A goodnight kiss at nine. The familiar sequences repeating themselves endlessly. That was my picture of the world, the pattern I recognized-- what my experience told me.

But now I was standing in a room that was not mine, in a house that was not ours. How could it be ours? When it was so full only of emptiness? Unrecognizable for its having nothing to do with me, or us, or our lives? There was no bed, no dresser, no desk. No clothes in the closet. No books on the bookshelves. No furniture, no pictures on the walls, no television, no piano, no stereo, no lights, no water, no electricity. My family and I had entered into a place we would have to fill, and if we did not act to fill it, I was sure the house would empty us too. And so I was afraid. Afraid for myself and suddenly afraid that my fear would be contagious. "I guess we can paint it," I said.

"Of course we can," my mother answered. "How about gold? Or kelly green? You always loved that color."

I shrugged my shoulders. "Sure," I said, although it was my mother who loved kelly green, not me.

Three days later, after the movers unloaded our worldly goods from their blue and white van, and after the our clothing and shoes, and half the dishes and linens were put away, my father finally felt free enough of the domestic chores to head over to the old boarding house in Mesilla that he had purchased to renovate as his new store, and my mother loaded my sisters and me into the car and took us to register us for school. Mesilla Elementary was two miles from our house, and deeper into the valley. Surrounded by green desert oaks, fields of chili, and cotton and onions, it was just south of where the Rio Grande, the *Madre* river, had once flowed, before the Army Corps of Engineers moved it closer to the state of Arizona. I knew that because on the way to the school we passed over the scar of the River's old route, since transformed into an irrigation ditch eleven feet wide, with earth mounded high, and a levee on both sides covered with grass and weeds. On the way back home from the school we stopped near the ditch to read a small plaque posted at the levee's edge. "I can't make out anything except the word Rio," my mother said, squinting at through the windshield. "Miya, can you?"

I opened my window and leaned out. "Something, something, to a new route," I said. "But I can't read it either. Too far away."

"Before you start school this year," my mother said, inching the car closer," we better get your eyes checked. I think you need glasses." She stopped again, angling the car at the top of the levee, between the plaque and the ancient river bed below, so that its tires rested on the slope where the gravel surface ended and the grass and sand began. "Let's see what it says," she said, turning off the engine.

“Let’s not,” I said, sinking down into the back seat of the car as if my resistance could change her mind. “I think it’s going to rain.”

“Don’t be silly,” she said. “The sun’s out. It’s a beautiful day.”

“I see clouds,” I said. “Look.”

“Me too,” said Leslie. “Over there.” She pointed toward the mountains where brown dwarf clouds were forming above distant peaks, small and dark, but far away and cartoon-like against the sharp fullness of the open desert sky.

“They’re just high desert clouds,” my mother said, shaking her head. “They’ll blow away.” She got out of the car, closing the door with a definitive thump and circled around to the passenger side to gather Angela in her arms. Then she started toward the edge of the levee. “Come on,” she called over her shoulder. “Miya and Leslie, get your butts out here and come and smell this delicious country air.” She took a dramatic breath, inhaling so deeply I could see her ribs move. “Hurry up.”

“I’m coming,” said Leslie, as she loosened her seat belt and tried to crawl over me to the door. “I want to smell the air.”

“Me too,” said Angela, already outside and safe in my mother’s arms. “I smell too.”

I opened the door for Leslie and helped her climb over me, but I stayed in the car, my head propped up against the top of the back seat as my mother walked to the edge of the levee, balancing Angela on her hip and holding Leslie, who had caught up with her, by the hand. They made a lovely and odd picture, the petite dark-haired woman with her two blond daughters standing at the edge of a place where a great river once ran. Not that you would have known from the current landscape, how, so

many years ago, water and history had been diverted. There was no longer any sign of the Rio Grande of the cowboys, of cattle drives through swollen and terrifying waters, of bank robbers on galloping horses, and of posses chasing them into Mexico. I stuck my head out of the window again. “What does it say?”

“It’s covered with dirt,” my mother called back. “See if you can find something in the car to wipe it off with.” I grabbed my sweatshirt and walked over.

“I meant a towel or a rag,” she said, when she saw the sweatshirt in my hand.

“Don’t worry about it,” I said, wiping the mud and dirt from the plaque’s surface. “I’ll wash it when we get home.” She frowned at me. “Do you want to know what it says or not?” I asked.

“Go ahead,” she answered, resigned.

“This scenic location,” I read, “marks one of the earliest known routes of the Rio Grande,” and then I stopped reading. “Some scenic location,” I said. “It’s just scrub grass, overgrown bushes and stunted trees.” Where was the magic Western landscape of my imagination, or of the movies, or the majestic one carved by nature or by God? Not on the little manmade hillock we were standing on. Later I learned that the corps had built a new Rio Grande three miles to the west, with water that flowed fat and slow, spreading its brown stain like an oil slick at the edge of town, unloved and unloving, an illegitimate memory of its true and original self. But you wouldn’t have known that either from the statement on the small plaque at the edge of the irrigation ditch. Its message did justice neither to the acts of engineering, imagination, power and ingenuity displayed before us—nor to what was lost. No ten inch plaque could tell that story. For that you’d need a billboard or a book.

“What else does it say?” my mother asked. “I know that isn’t all of it.”

“Just something about the Elephant Butte reclamation effort by the Army Corps of engineers being made possible by Santa Ana’s surrender in 1893 ‘which gave this valuable river land to the U.S. from Mexico,’” I read.

“You’re kidding,” she said.

“No,” I said, all earnest. “I’m not.”

“So it says all that? About Santa Ana? And his surrender?”

“Yep,” I said. “And then some other stuff about a feat of engineering.”

“No wonder people hate us,” she said. “It’s not enough that we beat them in battle. We have to go and rebuild their world in our image as if just to spite them. Moving a river.” She shook her head. “Who would believe it?”

But what does it take to move a river?

Thousands of men with shovels? Hundreds of men with will?

How much effort is required to transform a force of nature? To damn a southern route, to shape a new course dug from dirt and lined with rock, the body of earth reformed by the work of man, the water convinced to flow in a new direction? You could do all of that if you had tools and if you had the will. If you thought woods and valleys and mountains and riverbeds were clay to shape as you desired. If you believed in the power of human logic applied to the wild, and in making wilderness obedient to human dreams. You could widen or narrow, quicken or slow, create a new border or deny a border that once was. With enough power you could even reroute memory. Or try to. But memory has will too. Memory has desire. And water can still have its way.

So.

The clouds traveled forward from the Organ Mountains more quickly than rain clouds usually do. The wind changed. The air grew heavy. A drop of rain. A thick splash of water filled with so much warmth and presence that when it hit me on the forehead, my first thought was that I'd been soiled by a bird, but then another drop fell onto the ground, and then another, and soon there was a shower of fat, noisy drops carving craters the size of soup bowls into the sandy soil at our feet. "Girls, hurry," my mother said. "Get in the car. All of you." She dashed toward the car, holding Angela to her chest. I grabbed Leslie's hand and ran. Just as we reached the car, a flower of lighting ballooned above us, charging the earth somewhere barely distant. My mother fumbled the door open and wrestled Angela into the car seat as thunder blasted over our shoulders. I scooted Leslie inside and climbed in behind her. Another shudder of lightning flashed and my mother, drenched, slipped into the driver's seat. "You girls all right?" she asked. "My God. I thought they were just being romantic when they talked about monsoons." She turned the key in the ignition and the engine spun to life, adding its low growl to the staccato snare of rain now playing on the car's steel drum surface. A spume of warm air pushed out of the heater and condensed on the windows in a foggy gray. My mother punched the defrost button and flipped on the windshield wipers, turning up the dial so that the blades were pushing water off the glass at full speed, but the water was coming down so fast and hard we could not see anything.

"Try the lights," I said.

She flipped the switch. The halogen glow scattered and fractured against the air full of rain, turning the windows fully opaque and all but blinding us. Still, she put the car in gear and pressed on the gas. But instead of going forward the car slipped back, first by the tiniest of fractions, and then by more, propelled—in that moment it seemed--by a sudden fusion of light and cloud, followed by a bark of thunder so ear-splitting that Leslie, who had been sobbing lightly since the rain started, let out a wail. Angela joined her with a shriek, and I held my breath at the cold startle of electric charge and the noisy harangue of thunder that followed. Just as my mother braked, something hit like a bullet against the roof, with a bang so loud that Leslie put her hands up to her ears and I reached up to press mine against the car's low ceiling, feeling for the dent I was certain would be there.

“What was that?” my mother shrieked, shifting the car back into park. “A rock? Did someone throw a rock?” But then there was another whomp. “What is that? Is that hail?” she asked. We both rolled down our windows to look. “Close your window, Miya,” she said, but by then I had seen the chunks of ice on the ground, the size of small animals. A finger of lighting tripped down to the earth, illuminating the muddy ground where the wheels of the car rested, and the hail started to beat down on us religiously. Seconds later another ferocious rush of thunder came, followed by Angela and Leslie's hysterical tears. “Quiet now,” my mother said. “Both of you. Quiet down.” She shifted back into drive and took her foot off the brake. The car slipped backwards again.

“Be careful,” I said, hoping she could see where she was going and knowing that she couldn't, and aware by then, too, of a new sound, a baseline hum at the very

bottom of my brain. I thought it might be the sound of a river rising. But was that possible? Our car was parked on the edge of an irrigation ditch controlled by a pump station and flood gates. The River, according to the plaque, was fully tamed. Again, my mother pressed her foot to the gas pedal. For a moment the tires gripped and the car moved forward, but then lost traction. The wheels spun on the wet gravel and grass underneath us, and we began to slide. She hit the brakes. We stopped with a buck and a shudder, the rear of the car angled down the levee, toward the irrigation ditch. “Do you hear that?” I asked.

“Hear what?”

“That sound.”

“What sound? Are you talking about the rain?” she said. “Of course I hear the rain.”

“No,” I said. “I meant the sound of water coming up. Don’t you hear it?”

“Miya,” she said. “What are you talking about? You aren’t making any sense.”

“But don’t you hear it?” I insisted, wondering why she couldn’t. “I think the ditch is filling up and we’re slipping towards it.”

“Don’t be silly,” she said. “We’re nowhere near the ditch and it’s not filling up. It can’t be. Now hush, all of you. I have to think.” She lifted her foot off the brake pedal again, as if she could not believe what was happening and needed to test it, the way you pinch a wound after you accidentally cut yourself with a knife to see if you are really bleeding, or the way you press on a bruise to see if it really is tender or if it is just your imagination. We slid again, listing backwards, drawn like metal to a

magnet, nearer to the edge, driven not by the actions of pistons and valves but by the release of traction and the absence of friction of tire against road. This time when my mother stepped on the brake the car stopped quickly, but I could feel the pull of gravity pressing my body into the back of the seat behind me.

“If we slip any more we’re going to slide down,” I said. “And if there’s water down there--”

“No, we’re not,” my mother said, interrupting me. “And there isn’t. Now quiet.” For a moment the percussive sounds of the hail and the rain and the windshield wipers swooping against the window, along with the hum I heard of the rising water, filled the silence behind her, and then she spoke again. “We’re sliding toward the road, Miya, not the ditch,” she said. “That’s why I’m concerned. Because if a car came, the driver might not see us in all this rain and weather. That’s all. I’m not worried about rolling into any water.”

“But don’t you remember?” I said. “When you parked? The way you turned the car? So you could see the sign? You turned it toward the ditch, not the road. Remember?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“You did, Mom,” I said, pleading. “You did and now I think, in the rain, it’s filling up. I think that’s the sound I hear.”

In that instant she knew I was right. I could see it in her face. The way her eyes opened wide and her breathing stopped in her throat. “Are you sure, Miya?” she said. Almost whispering. “And you think there’s water there now? Why? How can you tell?” But there was no telling—only knowing, and somehow I knew. The water

was there, I had felt it rising, or had felt, at least, its potential to rise, from the time I had read the engineer's plaque. I knew then, in that moment that the River had simply been waiting for something to change, biding its time until it could break out, tear through its boundaries, breach its walls, push aside anything in its way and flood through, or over, all that was in its path. Was I projecting my own feelings onto a force of nature? Of course I was, but still. Did that make me wrong? Because how could the river not? How could the River not be full of desire and will, will and desire, to reach backwards in time, to turn back history, to return to the way had been before, when it had been free? I rolled down the window and got up on my knees to look out. "What do you see?" my mother asked. "Are we sliding down? Are we, Miya?"

"I think so," I said.

"Can you get out and look?" she asked, her voice quiet, the storm noisy and active behind her.

"Get out?" I asked. "In the rain?"

"To find out where we are," she said.

"I know where we are."

"But I don't," she said. "I need you to go out and look and then tell me."

"I'll get soaked," I said.

"It's only rain," she said, ignoring the hail. "But you need to do it, Miya, and then you need to tell me what's going on, because I have to know. If that ditch is filling up like you think it is, that's how people get trapped. That's how people get washed away in floods. That's what they warn you against." Her words were

terrifying, but she spoke them calmly, reporting the facts like the woman who reported the weather on nightly TV. “And if we are really sliding toward the water,” she said, “and I can’t steer us out, than we will all need to get out of the car right now and get to someplace safe. You understand me?”

“Yes.”

“Good. So, either you can get out and tell me what’s going on, or we can all get out in the rain together. It’s your choice.”

I closed the door behind me, sealing my mother and sisters inside the car. Instantly I was drenched as rain beat down at my head and at my arms. A buckle of thunder roared up behind me, and I put my hands over my ears to quiet the noise. A chunk of hail clipped the back of my neck, depositing a clammy thimbleful of ice between my skin and my shirt-collar. I dug it out, and brushed it away, and walked over to the levee. Digging my feet into the gravel for stability, I peered over the edge. The ditch that had been dry when we got there was now filled with water that had come more than halfway up the sides. I could see the white filigree on the brown fingered curls churning on its top. I could smell the fragrance of the desert soil that it carried within it, and there, along with the thrum of the rain, I could hear the sound of more water rushing toward us from the distance. I turned back to look at the car. One of its rear wheels was half splayed over the end of the levee, half resting on almost nothing but air. The other three tires, instead of being on the gravel of the road, were on the grass at the levee’s edge. The grass itself was flattened and slick from the pressure of the car and the rain.

“Miya,” my mother opened the window and called out. “What’s going on? Are you all right? I can’t see you.”

“You’re on grass,” I called back, wiping the water from my face with my wet sleeve. “You’re off the road, but not too far.” I was afraid to tell her about the wheel that was barely touching ground. A razor’s edge of lightning sliced across the sky, blinding me for half a second. “You should turn your wheels to the right,” I yelled through the sound of rain and hail and thunder. “And try to go forward.”

“To the right?” she called back. “Are you sure?”

“Yes,” I said. “Turn them.” They turned. “Give it some gas.” The car jumped, heaving toward me. I scrambled back, dodging the bumper and the body of the car behind it. “Keep coming. Keep coming,” I called, signaling my mother to keep turning, keep moving toward me. The wheels bit into the gravel, left, then right. “Straighten it,” I said. “Straighten it.”

A few minutes later when I was back in the car and we were parked under an awning at a gas station on the corner of Calle Sur and Avenida de Mesilla, the hail and then the rain stopped. As quickly as it had turned black, the sky was reclaimed by blue, and the Organ Mountains rose stately and calm in the clean air of their distance. At first, none of us said anything. We just sat there. Quietly. Listening to Tex-Mex on the radio. Angela drank what was left of her bottle. Leslie played tick-tack-toe in the moisture on the window, and I wrapped myself tighter in my sweatshirt, caked and sticky with mud from the sign put up by the Army Corps of Engineers the day they moved the Rio Grande. “Can you turn up the heat?” I asked. “I’m very, very cold.”

Opening Remarks From the Speaker for the State

Today we begin a hearing on a request for amnesty from one of the men involved in the death of a young American woman, Miya Clare, who came to our country with a desire to do good, and lost her life when, in the name of politics, some of our countrymen lost their sense of right and wrong. We have scheduled this hearing to meet the convenience of Miss Clare's parents, who have traveled from the United States to attend these proceedings. As they are unfamiliar with the workings of this commission I will simply say to them, and to you, that our purpose here is to listen to the stories that the witnesses have to tell, and then to do our best to discover the truth and to understand what happened. In doing so, we will be asked to make a determination as to the appropriate course of action in the amnesty request of Dumisani Mphebe, one of the men implicated in her death, and, who in consideration for this amnesty hearing, will speak openly and honestly and tell us in his own words, what happened to Miya Clare that day. And then we will know. And then we will decide how to rule on his amnesty request.

His future truly, and rightfully so, is in our hands.

We will begin the work of this commission with some opening remarks, of which I include these formalities. Then we will hear from Miss Clare's parents who have come to Oneg Kempo at the state's request, and have agreed to speak on their daughter's behalf. Next, we will listen to testimony from people who worked closely

here in Oneg Kempo with Miss Clare, and who knew her well as a colleague and a friend. It is our hope that their testimony will help us to see the deceased more fully and to understand what happened in the days and hours before she died. At the last, we will hear from Dumisani Mphebe himself, the man who knows the most about the fate of Miya Clare and what befell her.

So, let us proceed.

To begin then. As speaker for the state I will establish this. The facts, in general, are not in question. Those of us involved in this hearing today, and in previous legal action are in agreement about what happened. We agree on the terrible nature of the violence. We agree on the sequence of events as we understand them. We agree with the courts who have made their determination and found Mphebe guilty. We agree with the judges who have imposed their sentences.

We all agree then, yes?

Yes?

We do.

Despite all of this agreement, however, despite all of this good will about our system of justice, despite the rightness of our purpose and the certainty of our past choices, we find ourselves in argument again.

Why?

Because the new government of Oneg Kempo has created a commission of truth and reconciliation, and offered an opportunity for appeal to those who may have committed criminal acts under the guise of political purposes. That is why we find

ourselves here, responding to Dumisani Mphebe's request for amnesty. For reconciliation. For absolution.

However, in preparing to honor that request it has come to the attention of this speaker that thus far we have failed to address the most important issue of all. That is, what happened to Miya Clare? What happened that day when she died? This is still an open question, a dark corner on which we must shine the search light of truth and illumination. The reason for this darkness is simple. Prior to this amnesty hearing, the men responsible for her death, of which Dumisani Mphebe is one, have chosen to remain silent. Now, due to our consideration, Mphebe has agreed to speak.

He will tell his story.

In doing so will engage us in a sacred duty to listen. To learn. To seek. To find. To determine—not just the truth as it presents itself in facts—but also the truth as it presents itself in purpose. This duty of ours, and our decision to honor the amnesty request, however, creates a difficulty for us, kind ladies and gentlemen. And I will tell you what that is. For while we can choose to forgive, while we can extend the olive branch of amnesty to this man, we have no remedy to offer those for whom no amnesty is possible. I am speaking of course of the people who knew and loved Miya Clare, the people for whom the loss of a daughter or a beloved friend can never be allayed, and for whom truth and justice or reconciliation can never be achieved. And so I ask you now, How do we right the wrong for them? How do we provide restitution for the loss of life they grieve for? For youth unspent? For innocence broken?

If I were a preacher I would be screaming from the pulpit, demanding that we take a stand against the slippery slope down which we are sliding. "Listen to me," I would say. "Listen to me." But I am not a man of the cloth. I am a simple speaker for the state, a member of the bar, an officer of the commission. Sworn to uphold justice. Charged only with discovering the truth, determining responsibility. That is my purpose here. My charge in the days ahead. To convince you that the man who sits here in this chamber must take responsibility and answer for what he has done, even if he is given amnesty, if that is what this commission holds.

Does that sound cold hearted?

Then let it be cold hearted.

For I am a simple man. I believe in right and wrong. I believe in crime and consequence. And I am here, as you are here, for truth. I am here, as you are here, for reconciliation. But do not confuse reconciliation with forgiveness.

Let others forgive.

They will.

There is time for that, but not now, not yet. Not until we are done, not until we walk away from this room, our decision made, not until we put this story behind us and resume our lives as parents, as neighbors, colleagues, and friends. But not now. Not yet.

No.

First we have a duty. A duty not to bow our heads to the notion of forgiveness because it is more comfortable and easy. A duty not to be willing to forget. A duty

to hold accountable those who should be held. As such, Mphebe has not denied his actions. But that is not enough.

No. He must tell us his story as so many others have and will. He must do so in this place, in this public place so that we all may hear. He must do so that we all may learn the truth. That is what we require. And so, he will tell you what he was thinking and feeling. He will tell you where he grew up, what he studied in school. He will tell you how he and the others gathered together the morning Miya died. How they walked for miles and then got on the train and rode it into town, sharing their hope for a new world, and their grief and anger for the old. You will be asked to share the experiences that sealed their fate and to have compassion. As you should. He will speak and I would not deny him--but who will speak for her?

Who will speak for Miya?

That will be my job, my duty, mine and that of the other witnesses I will bring before you, her parents and her associates, those who knew her as an ally in the struggle to rebuild Oneg Kempo. It is a duty I take on gladly because I believe what happened to Miya Clare, what happened to us, is a crime against what we hold sacred. So while I do not object to a discussion of amnesty, while I do not object to reconciliation as long as it is based on truth, I do object to granting it in silence. Miya's story needs to be told.

Who here is familiar with the Biblical injunction an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth? Who among us knows what those words really mean? That they are not saying, 'You took my eye so I'll take yours? You broke my tooth and I will do you the same?' But rather, break a man's tooth because he has broken yours and you have

two men who cannot eat. No ladies and gentlemen, in a country like Oneg Kempo, where all men are not created equal, restitution is not a matter of simple collection of debt. There is no straightforward reconciliation of accounts that can restore balance in our world. Take a man's eye because he has taken yours and there are two blind men. Two cripples. Two who cannot work and that is not what the Bible demands. The Good Book is interested in productivity. The Good Book is concerned for the health and future of Abraham's progeny. Take an eye from a man in this generation, and you must give back an eye to the next. The ancients knew that if you killed a man, you destroyed his seed, his future. That is why, the only reason why our ancestors required restitution, not the taking of an eye, but the replacement of the dead with the living.

So I ask you, in all sincerity, how do we replace what has been taken from us? How do we decide the proper response to what Mphebe has done? Look at him. He sits here with bowed head. Look at the way he stares at the floor, afraid to look you in the eye. Do you not find it strange that he is here and Miya Clare is not? Does it not give you a chill that soon we will know so much about him, and yet you know so little about his victim? That you will see him every day while this commission is in session, but you will never see the woman in whose death he is implicated?

Look now at the father and the mother mourning their child. They have come here all the way from New Mexico to give testimony to their daughter's life. All they want in return is to know the truth. To know not just what happened, but to know why. And there, sitting near them, Miya's friends from Oneg Kempo, the people

who knew and loved her for the short time she was with us, in our country. They too are looking for reconciliation, desperate to know what they could have done differently, how they could have saved her. Yes, so you see, we are all here now together, participants in this tragedy.

How can we find a way to create the dead here, I ask you, when in death Miya Clare is a mystery? How do I, a limited man, make it possible for you to see and care about the woman whose life they extinguished? That is the question that has kept me up all these nights. It has woken me up from my dreams at four in the morning, and kept me awake until the sun comes up at dawn. How can I bear this responsibility?

Look at me.

I am not a hero.

I am a plain man.

A public servant.

My clothes are rumpled, my hair is thin, my eyesight is waning. Surely, I am not up for this task. I cannot give this woman, Miya Clare, to you. For that I apologize. I wish I could. But, I can give you the words of people who knew her, people who will speak on her behalf.

So listen carefully, pay attention to detail, and forgive me if I speak in a voice heavy with tears.

After that, the rest is up to you.

The Water Pours Into the Reservoir

It is odd how you never know your parents, or maybe to be more truthful, you never know what they really think. You can talk and talk and talk to them. They can talk and talk and talk to you. You can live together for a whole childhood that feels like a thousand years, and yet never find the key to them, and they never find the key to you, or if they do, or you do, the keys are flawed. Not merely slow at tumbling the locks on the doors you are trying to open, but incomplete. Clumsy. Keys that are not. Keys that only wish they were. Keys. Claves in Spanish, like the clavicle bone that rests between your head and your heart, the flute that vibrates like an instrument when you speak. The reed bone you feel when you lay your thumb and forefinger on the protrusions at the base of your throat and open your mouth to speak or press your lips together to hum. Your clave vibrating in sympathy under your fingers, amplifying and enhancing your voice, giving it the resonance of form. It is bone that makes a voice believable. It is bone that speaks with authority and history, bone that ties us to our ancestors, bone that reminds us, when we look at the skeleton of a bird or a dog or a bear, at the spacing of the ribs, or the thread of the vertebrae, or the angle of the wish bone that we are not so different, not so exalted as we think.

When we moved to Las Cruces, my parents, Peggy and Orin, without knowing it, gave me the rule of the bone. They taught me about the authority of history, the power of voice. They taught me to ask, “How is it that life unfolds?” Is it

all really random, or is there some art or some form to the chaos? Some pattern in the way each step we take leads to what comes next, the way each joint of vertebrae or rib, attaches to the one that comes before or after.

“I can’t believe it.”

We were sitting at the dinner table in our kitchen in Las Cruces. My father was speaking. My mother was distributing burritos from To-Go’s take-out. “I spent three hours on the phone today trying to track down my cabinets,” he said. “I don’t know how much more I can take.”

“Are we having burritos again?” I asked, picking up a burrito by one corner of its foil wrapper and dangled it in front of my face, before putting it on my plate. “It’s the third time this week.”

“What do you think, Miya?” my mother said. “Really. Since you have one in your hand?”

“Are you complaining?” my father asked. “Is that what I’m hearing?”

“No, I’m just saying,” I said, poking the burrito with my fork.

“I hope you’re not complaining,” he said. “You just better not.”

“Do you know what you’re father and I are going through right now?” my mother said to me. “Do you?”

“Yes,” I said, trying to appease her.

“Good then,” she said. “So you know better than to start about what we’re having for dinner. Right?”

“I’m not starting.”

My father shook his head, “What do you call it?”

“Orin, let it go,” My mother said. “She doesn’t mean anything. Tell us your story. What happened next?”

“Never mind,” he said. “It’s no big deal. Doesn’t matter anyway.”

“Come on, let it go. Tell your story,” she said. “I want to hear.”

He hesitated, as if debating which dialogue to continue, the one where he had a bone to pick with me, or the one where he went ahead and told us about his day. The key turned in the lock. “As I was saying,” he said, “I finally got connected to this jerk in shipping and he says to me, ‘Mr. Clare, the cabinets you ordered are still at the warehouse.’ So I asked him, ‘What happened to my guaranteed five-day delivery?’ and then he says, ‘That’s only for shipping inside the contiguous forty-eight, not for shipping outside of the country.’”

“You’ve got to be kidding,” said my mother, as she poured glasses of milk for my sisters and me.

“I wish it was,” my father said. “But I’m not. And so then I say, ‘Buddy, I’m in the state of New Mexico, not Mexico the country. It’s right next to Texas and part of the good old U. S. of A.’ And he says, ‘Listen, Mac, don’t go giving me a geography lesson. I know damn well where New Mexico is, and I also know damn well that Branson Displays doesn’t ship outside the Continental United States. You want the cabinets, you’re gonna have to find some private freighter to come get them.’”

I started to laugh. It was just a small chuckle, but enough to cause me to blow some of the milk I’d been drinking out my nose.

“Miya,” said my mother. “That’s disgusting.”

“Sorry,” I said.

“You think this is funny?” my father said. “Is that what you think? You think this is a joke?”

“No,” I said, trying to wipe the milk off the table with my napkin and trying even harder to keep from laughing again--not at my father, but at the man who thought New Mexico wasn’t part of the United States.

“Do you even have any idea of what’s going on here?”

“Yes,” I said, but he didn’t hear me.

“Do you know how hard your mother and I have been struggling? With this move?”

“Yes,” I said, although I really didn’t.

“I can’t believe this,” he said to my mother. “I have to put up with bullshit all day and then I come home to this kind of attitude.”

“Dad,” I said, trying to appease him, but it was already too late.

“And what’s she doing? Sitting around all day, watching TV or reading magazines and comic books, instead of doing anything to try to help us. All we ask from her is that she watch the girls, and help keep the house neat, and she can’t even really do that.”

“Yes I can,” I said. “I do that.” But he ignored me.

“She doesn’t do the laundry or make dinner or clean up,” he said, still speaking to my mother. “We’re hemorrhaging money. I’m dealing with the crazies. You’re driving up and down the pueblos all day, trying to find someone who isn’t

already under contract, to sell you jewelry at a decent price, and then you come home exhausted and try to put dinner on the table and this one,” he pointed his finger at me, “this one’s complaining that we’re eating too many burritos.”

“I wasn’t complaining,” I said. “I was just saying.”

“And she thinks this is all funny.”

“No I don’t,” I said.

“Why don’t you just apologize, Miya,” said my mother. “And we can finish dinner.”

“I wasn’t complaining,” I said.

“Never mind,” said my father, pushing his plate with its half eaten burrito away. “I don’t need this. I’ve had enough.” He stood up. “Enjoy your dinner,” he said. “All of you,” and he walked out of the kitchen.

“Orin, come back and sit down,” my mother called to his retreating presence. “Please. Come back and finish your dinner.” But by then he had walked out the house, the screen door banging behind him.

Later that night, after my sisters were in bed, my mother came into my room. “If you’re here to yell at me,” I said, “Don’t bother. I feel bad enough already.”

“I’m not going to yell,” she said, sitting down on the bed next to me. “I want to talk to you about your father. I want you to understand something.”

“I already understand,” I said. “I’m not good enough for him.”

“That’s not true,” she said, reaching out to stroke my hair. I shifted out of reach. “You know, sometimes it’s hard to be a parent.”

“It’s harder to be a kid.”

She ignored that. “Your father’s in a lot of pain right now.”

“I don’t care,” I said.

“You need to care,” she answered. “Because your father is a good man, and he loves you.”

“That’s what you say.”

“Miya, he does love you. This isn’t about you. He’s not upset with you. It’s about him. He feels like he made a mistake bringing us here, moving us from our home, where we knew people, where we had good jobs, good friends, family, bringing us to a whole new place, that’s almost like another country. And things are difficult here, harder than we expected. That’s what he’s upset about. Not you.”

“He didn’t just bring us here by himself,” I said. “You both did.”

“I know,” she said. “But that doesn’t make him feel any less responsible. And it’s creating a lot of stress for him. You have to understand. He’s your father, Miya. And he feels responsible. That’s the way fathers are. That’s what fathers do.”

But he is responsible, I thought, although I didn’t say what I was thinking. What good would it have done, except make my mother feel worse? And a moment later I was glad that I had kept my thoughts to myself.

“Your father feels like he’s put us all at risk,” my mother said. “He’s worried that if the store doesn’t open soon, if we can’t get our inventory, we could lose everything. You know, children always think that it’s easy to be an adult and to make the right decisions. But people do things all the time that have consequences they

don't expect and that they regret. And most of the time, once those decisions are made, there's no turning back."

"Why not?" I asked. "Why can't you take them back? Why can't we go home to Grand Rapids. I bet we could even move into our old house."

"No," my mother said. "We can't. And as much as anyone of us might wish we could, that's not the way the world works. You can't rewrite history. Only children get a chance to just start over, if things don't work out the first time. Once you've grown up, you have to deal with the results of the choices the best way you can. And every choice has a consequence. That's what your father and I are struggling with now. So a little bit of understanding on your part, a little bit of forgiveness, would go along way. Okay?" She leaned over and gave me a kiss on the forehead. "Sleep well," she said. "I'm sure it will be better in the morning. For all of us," I heard her whisper as she walked out into the hallway and closed the door behind her.

So?

So, from there, many things changed, and some—the ones that couldn't—did not.

The display cases were delivered to the store, according to family myth, nine days after my father told his story to the owner of La Posta restaurant, who got his uncle the Governor involved. My mother found a young Indian jewelry-maker who had family in Michigan, and who, based on that tenuous communal tie, agreed to let

my mother sell her jewelry, and I found Yolanda. Or more accurately, Yolanda found me.

It was a Sunday morning. My parents were at the store putting on the final touches for its opening the next day. I was watching TV and baby-sitting Leslie and Angela. The doorbell rang. “Who is it?” I said, looking through the peephole out at a small girl in blue jeans shorts and a white tee-shirt with sneakers and no socks on her feet. Her hair was dark and long, pulled back in a ponytail. She was skinny with bony elbows and knees and a pretty face with the big, dark, fawn eyes that most fawns outgrow.

“Can I come over and play?” she said to the door.

“No,” I answered from inside the house.

“Why not?” she asked.

“I don’t know you.”

“Can you open the door so we can talk?” she said.

“No,” I said. “Who are you?”

“Yolanda,” she answered “I live up the street. Four houses away.”

I unlatched the security chain and stuck out my head. “I’m not allowed to open the door when my parents aren’t home,” I said.

“Why not?” she asked.

“They don’t want me to.”

“I met your mother once.”

“No you didn’t,” I said. “She would have told me.”

“It was before you moved in. When she was looking for houses and I told her she should buy this one.”

“How come you told her that?” I asked, opening the door wider.

“She looked nice. I live right there,” she said, pointing across the street to an adobe house with a green tiled roof. “My mother and father like to drink. Do yours?”

“I don’t know,” I said.

“Your mother told me she’d bring you over but she didn’t. So she probably drinks. It makes people forget things you know.”

“She doesn’t drink a lot,” I said. “I would know if she did.”

“That’s true,” said Yolanda. “My mother and father drink a case of beer every day and I know all about it.” She changed the subject. “So can I come in?”

“I told you,” I opened the door the tiniest extra inch. “I’m not allowed to have company when my parents aren’t home.”

“Where are they?”

“At the store.”

“Can you call them?”

“Why do I need to call them?”

“To see if I can come over,” she said. “My father is getting slammed and working in the garden. I want to come over here and play.”

“All right,” I said, not certain what getting slammed meant, but fairly sure it wasn’t any good. “We can call from the kitchen.”

I dialed the store and my mother picked up the phone. “No,” she said, when I asked her if Yolanda could stay.

“Please.”

“What about your sisters?” she asked.

“I’ll take care of them. They can play too.” I considered saying something about Yolanda’s parents and their drinking, but decided that might be a bad idea. “I think she can be a friend,” I said instead.

“All right,” my mother said, the exasperation in her voice suggesting she was agreeing as much to get me off the phone as anything else. “Keep a careful eye on your sisters, whatever you two do.”

“You can stay,” I said to Yolanda, after I put down the phone.

“Good,” she said. “I’ll go get Alejandro.”

“Who’s Alejandro?”

“My little brother.”

“You can’t bring him here,” I said.

“Why not?”

“I didn’t ask.”

“So.” She shrugged. “Do you want to call her again? You can, you know. But I think she might get mad.”

“I don’t want to call her again,” I said.

“Then don’t worry about it,” she said. “It’s better anyway. He can play with your sisters and then we won’t have to watch any of them.”

She went home to fetch her brother and came back with Alejandro in one hand and two model horses in the other, each one clumsily painted with nail polish. “This is Sky,” she said, showing me a horse painted white, “and this one is Butternut,” pointing to her Palomino. “Which one would you like to ride?”

“You can’t ride these,” I said “They’re too small. They’re not even alive.”

“I don’t care,” said Yolanda. “It’s pretend. Don’t you know how to do that?”

“Of course.”

“Then try.”

I picked up Butternut and moved him across the carpet. “This feels stupid.”

“No, it doesn’t,” said Yolanda. She picked up both horses, one in each hand.

“Once upon a time there were two magical stallions,” she said. “And there were two beautiful princesses. And when the pirates who crossed over the desert mountains from the California sea came looking for them because they had heard how beautiful they were the princesses mounted the horses and escaped.” It didn’t matter to Yolanda, and eventually, to me, if her stories were peopled by pirates or sheiks of Arabee or dark Aztec princes who came in the night to do the princesses harm. Their wild stallions helped them run away, galloping with them across the desert, jumping over dry arroyos, wading through wide or wild rivers, racing across the night to a place where no one got slammed, and no one yelled, and no one screamed, and no one slapped them or whipped them with a belt, and they were always safe, with a thousand stars above their heads.

Here is a thought. It involves my friend Yolanda. Imagine what it must have been like for her, when we moved next door. What it meant for her to have a home to go to, somewhere to escape. A place where there was always something to eat, because there was never any food at Yolanda's house. In her life, a trip to the grocery store and a full refrigerator were acts worthy of celebration. So, instead of imagining what my life would have been like if we hadn't moved to Las Cruces, tell me, what of Yolanda's? When Angela graduated from high school, my parents sold their house on Olla de Oro to a sixty-ish couple from Texas, who moved to New Mexico so they could be closer to their grand-children in Arizona. What if that couple or someone like them had moved into our house ten years sooner? What if they had been Yolanda's neighbors instead of us? And she didn't have our house to seek refuge in every Sunday? What if this story really isn't about me at all? What if the story I think is mine is really about Yolanda and what she needed to make it through her life? Perhaps I and my whole family were instruments of her need?

I ask this now, because I always thought that I would leave my mark upon the world, that in living I could make a difference, and yet in order to believe that, I had to consider it true for everyone. If I were in this world to blaze a new trail, leave a scent, then didn't we all have to be? If not, and only some of us were in the world to make a difference, only some of us were keys to open locks, then how do you know? Or, to put it another way, who are we for?

Peggy's Testimony

Of course I didn't want Miya to come here. What kind of question is that? What mother would? Who would want their child to come to a country like this, with its danger, its violence? I begged her not to come, fought with her, pleaded. And while she was here, I never felt settled. The whole time. I never took a full breath. Not for one day of it. Not even for a minute. Every time the phone rang, my heart leaped into my throat. "Don't answer it," I would say to myself, even as I had to. And now you come looking to me to answer a mystery that I can't answer. I don't know why my daughter did what she did. I don't really know why she decided to come here. I don't. I only know what she told me. She wanted to help. She thought she could make a difference. She felt she had something to offer. She believed that she could. But even I know that doesn't explain anything. I'm her mother and in all honesty I don't understand myself, why she made the choices that she made. I have asked that question again and again and again. And then I remind myself that it's a question no one can answer. Who knows why any of us does what we do?

Why do some men become priests or some women become nuns?

Why does one person become an actress, the other a teacher?

A doctor?

It's one thing as a parent to look back on your life with your child and say, "Oh, of course. It's so obvious. My child was always interested in religion. She's

the one would beg “Mommy, can we go in there?” whenever you’d drive by a church. My youngest, Angela, was like that. If a building had a cross or a steeple or a star of David on it, she wanted to go inside. Or you might say, “I knew my daughter was going to be an actress. She was always putting on shows for the neighborhood, where she was the star.” That was my daughter Leslie. She didn’t need an excuse to play dress up and sometimes she’d put on performances where she’d act out every role. But what if she put on all those plays and then decided to become a doctor? Would I remember the theatrics? Not unless there was some reason. No, I’d remember how she was the one always putting band-aids on her dolls and that she wanted a real stethoscope for Christmas, which is exactly what happened.

We always want to make some kind of sense of things.

We always want to explain it. We want a reason why.

But I can’t. I can’t make sense of this.

And I don’t know why you are asking me to.

Because you have no right.

And it is not possible.

What mother can make sense.

Of a daughter’s death?

That’s not what mothers do.

I’m sorry. I’m not being bitter. I understand. This is about a search for truth.

That’s right? Isn’t it? That’s what you want. Truth before judgment?

So I am telling you the truth—at least the truth that I know. I only came here to speak for the sake of my family. For my husband, for my two other daughters,

Leslie and Angela, who wanted to come here too, but my husband and I said no, and for my beautiful Miya.

Perhaps you are right. Knowing who she was is part of the story. But you act like who she was is a mystery, but there is nothing secret about her. She was a normal young woman. She was special of course, but in the way all children are special and normal in the way all children are all normal. There is no magic key, to unlock the secret of my daughter. No special code that will reveal her to you.

And so don't you think I have asked myself the same question over and over again? Why? Why?

Why?

And don't you think I have looked back a hundred times to try to find the answer? That is what is so strange about all of this. It is her death that makes her special, because it is her death that makes us pay attention, to try to determine the moment where everything changed, where she started on the road that took her here to Oneg Kempo, even though neither she, nor I, nor anyone would have known it.

Miya was my oldest. And when she was young and I was a brand-new mother, I used to worry about her the way new mothers worry about their firstborns. I thought she wasn't eating enough. I thought she wasn't growing. I thought she was too sensitive, and so I worried about her. But what did I know about children? I was twenty-two years old. A child myself. And so I used to fret. After I had my other two, I realized that Miya was just fine, thank you very much, and that most little girls were just like her and that all moms worried about the same things. I also realized that what was important was not whether your child was sensitive, but whether she

was willing to go out and play when someone came by with a kick-ball under their arm, or if she knew how to laugh at a good knock-knock joke, and if there were always Oreo Cookies or Chips Ahoy in the cupboard when friends came over after school. There's no magic. No mystery. Just a tribe of kids, a community of neighbors. There was nothing I saw that told me she would choose the path she did one day.

It is true that Miya was a compassionate child. She and her friends collected canned food for the homeless every year. She'd go out of her way to protect the younger children on the block and to stand up to bullies. She put her spare change in the Salvation Army bucket and she'd always wish for world peace or an end to poverty when she'd blow out the candles on her birthday cake. Her father and I tried to encourage that. We wanted her to be a moral person. With good values. But as a parent you don't really have that much control. When we moved to New Mexico, though, she did become more aware of certain things. We all did. And her sense of who she was, and right and wrong only grew stronger. But even before that, even before we moved, I think she understood the world in a way that most children don't.

I always knew she wished her childhood had been different. She wished that we had stayed in Grand Rapids. Maybe that's why she came here. Because she loved our life there, and longed for it. She remembered it like it was Eden, but it was not Eden. A few weeks ago, I was looking through our family photographs. I found her second-grade school picture. It was one of those big, black-and-white school pictures, glossy with that shine that feels like history. All the children in the class were sitting at their desks dressed up in their Sunday best, their hands folded in front

of them. In the front row there were seven bright white faces, including my daughter. In the next rows all of the boys and girls sitting at their desks, looking clean and new and full of hope were black. And the strangest thing is that when that picture was taken I didn't even notice. It was a perfect Kodak moment where everyone knew exactly where they belonged, and no one knew what they were really seeing—not the children in the picture, not the teacher who seated them, not the photographer who took the picture, not the parents who paid their dollar and hung it on the wall—even though the truth was right there in black and white. None of us saw it for ourselves, except for maybe Miya. I have a feeling that when she looked at it, she did. She noticed things that other people missed.

There is another picture I found in the drawer, too. It was taken by a friend of the family the day we left Grand Rapids, and she sent it to me the following Christmas, along with a card, wishing us well. In the photo, Miya is wearing a black-and-white sleeveless shirt with matching white shorts. On the shirt there is an appliqué of a lobster. On her feet you can see her brand-new sneakers made of canvas dyed to look like denim. It occurred to me that she is wearing that outfit – her favorite, and those shoes that she made me buy her just a few days before, because she is excited about the move. It as if she has the idea, as I think children do, that whatever was going to happen next in her life was exactly the thing she was looking for. Maybe that's why she came to Oneg Kempo. Because she thought it was exactly what she was looking for. I wish I could ask her. About that. But how can I? Or, I can ask her all I want. It's just that she can't answer anymore. Can she? And she never will.

Molten Stone Presses Up From the Earth's Core

Lupe Ortega wanted to be my friend. Every day for a week she asked me to come over after school to play. At first I refused. I didn't like how loud she was, how pushy. But she kept enticing me with the romance of the farm animals that lived on her little ranchita. "We can play with the baby goats," she said at school on Monday. "My father said we could give carrots to the ponies," she said on Tuesday. On Wednesday, after Lupe offered to show me the sheepdog puppies, I finally relented, and on Thursday I rode the school bus home with her, to her family's two-hundred-year-old adobe house on the edge of Old Mesilla.

I had never seen a traditional adobe house from the inside and I was surprised to find a ceiling supported by row-upon-row of stout oak vigas, walls as thick as my arm from wrist to shoulder, and nichos in the walls, twelve inches deep, filled with carved statutes of Christ the savior and his saints. Lupe had nichos in her bedroom too, only hers were filled with Barbie dolls who lived comfortably alongside her own baby Jesus and his family. Lupe had a full set of both. Jesus, Mary, Joseph and the wise men, Barbie, her boyfriend Ken, her sister Skipper, and her friend Midge. "I love this one's hair," she said to me, stroking her Barbie's blond ponytail. "My cousin Aurelia has promised to give me blond hair too, as soon as my mother says I am old enough. Aurelia works at Tensha's Beauty Parlor. Do you know it? Have you been there?"

“No,” I shook my head. No one in my family even owned a set of hot rollers.

“No way, *chica*?” she said, making her statement into a question.

“Everybody knows Tensha’s? It’s on the busiest street? Right on the corner of Espina and Amador? I bet you drive by it every week.” Lupe put her Barbie back into the tableau. “Tensha wanted my sister Graciella to come work for her before she had the twins,” she said. “But now she’ll have to wait for me. I’m better with hair anyway. You’ll see.” She stopped and blinked at me like a rabbit, all bright eyed and full of ambition. “I know. Let me show you. I’ll do yours.” She picked up a comb and brush, scissors and a basketful of wire rollers from the top of her dresser. “Come on. Follow me. This will be fun.”

“I thought we were going to see the new puppies,” I said, already thinking that perhaps I should not have come.

“We’ll play with the puppies later,” said Lupe. “After I do your hair. Come on. It’s so pretty, just like Barbie’s. You should show it off. I can help you.”

Lupe tucked the comb and brush under one arm, and grasped my hand when I hesitated. “*Chica*, I’m not going to hurt you. Don’t be such a chicken. Okay?” In the kitchen, she spread a few sheets of newspaper out on the center of the floor and she directed me to put one of the aluminum-tube kitchen chairs, with red vinyl upholstery, from the dinette set, on top. “What are you waiting for, silly?” she asked when I hesitated. “You can sit. Don’t you trust me? I do my cousins’ hair all the time, and they trust me. True, their hair is black, and your hair is almost white, but who cares?” She shrugged. “Hair is hair, it’s all the same.”

Reluctantly I sat down, a bad feeling developing in the pit of my stomach with every promise that she wouldn't hurt me, every claim that I should trust her, and every "silly" or "chicken," or "*chica*," that came out of her mouth. I tried to tell myself that everything was fine, that Lupe had invited me over because she liked me, that her aggressive behavior was just her way of making friends. But there was another voice in my head reminding me that since I had come to come to Las Cruces I had felt like an outcast and that my hair was a big part of the reason why.

It wasn't simply that most of the girls in my fifth grade class had dark olive skin and eyes that were shaped like almonds with pupils the color of black walnuts, but also that their hair tumbled down over their shoulders in rich shades of black or dark and burnished brown. It wasn't only that their voices darted back and forth between Spanish and English as if their tongues recognized no distinction between the two languages, or that for them there really was none, or that the clothes I wore were ones that my mother had purchased at Hudson's before we left Michigan, while they bought theirs in Juarez, or that I was used to playing kickball at recess and they were used to playing four square. It wasn't even the difference between city girls and country girls, or between parents who went to college and those who dropped out of high school, or that my family had just moved in and theirs had lived on the same land for so many generations you ran out of fingers on which to count. No, any of those could have been overcome, I believed, if it were not for my hair which I was convinced made a claim about the nature of beauty and the value of being blond that I myself did not subscribe to.

“Your hair needs more body, *chica*,” Lupe said, wrapping a dish towel around my shoulders and spraying a big cloud of sweet sticky hairspray over my head.

“More *corazon*.” She pulled a long thin comb with four wires at one end and a plastic handle at the other from her pocket and plucked at my hair with its long teeth. It spilled through the pick, falling back against my head. “Look at that,” said Lupe, doing it again. “No body. No life. No life to it at all.”

“It’s just straight,” I said, unwilling to totally acquiesce to her description and the obliteration of my being it seemed to imply.

“No, it’s not just straight,” she said. “It is weak. With out life. I don’t know why anyone thinks blond hair is so good. Even Barbie has dark hair now. I saw it in K-Mart.” She took a handful of my hair in her hand, crunched it and then let it drop. “What a mess,” she said, and then brightly, “I know. Let’s cut it.” She hit me with another poof of spray. “You’ll look so much better with it short. I can see it in my mind already.”

“No,” I said. “No cutting. I like it long.” In another room, a door slammed.

“Oh,” Lupe groaned. “Now he comes home.”

“Who?” I asked, thinking maybe it would be someone who could save me.

“My stupid cousin,” Lupe answered, as a teenage boy smelling of sweat and mud from the fields walked into the kitchen. He was followed seconds later by another boy who looked just like him, only smaller. “Yuck,” said the older one.

“What’s that stink?”

“Look who’s talking,” said Lupe. “Tomas the king of B.O. and he wants to know what’s smelly. It’s hairspray, *stupido*, and it doesn’t stink. Does it, Miya? It smells good.” But I was too busy wishing that I could disappear to answer.

“It smells like cheap soap,” Tomas said. He opened up the refrigerator and grabbed a plastic gallon bottle of milk.

“Shut up,” Lupe said. “Just because you smell like a *campesino*. And I’m gonna tell *su madre*. Drinking out of the bottle? She’s not raising a man, she’s raising a farmworker.”

“Oh the way you talk,” Tomas laughed and handed the milk carton to his brother. “You wouldn’t be so tough if I told you I was going to tell your Mama you took five dollars out of her purse.”

“Did not,” said Lupe.

“Did too,” said Tomas.

“Did not. Don’t listen to him,” she whispered to me. “He is a liar.”

“She took five dollars?” asked Felipe.

“Now look what you started,” said Lupe.

“Don’t worry, little rat,” said Tomas. “If you don’t say anything about the milk, we wouldn’t say anything about the money.” He cuffed Lupe on the top of her head. “Nice hair on your friend,” he said. “It’s pretty.” I looked up in time to see him smile as he walked out of the kitchen.

“Yeah, well see if he can comb it,” said Lupe, lifting the strands with her wire pick. “Because I sure can’t. It won’t do nothing.” She reached for her can of spray.

“No more,” I said. “It’s sticky enough already.”

“You are right,” she said. “I’m just going to have to cut it. Maybe give you some bangs.”

“No,” I said, standing up. “I mean it.”

“You think I don’t know how to cut a white girl’s hair.” she said. “That’s why you won’t let me do it.”

“That’s not why,” I said.

“I’m not a kid,” she said. “I know a lot of shit, like how to cut hair. You just don’t like me. That’s all.” She banged the can of hairspray down on the table and I jumped. “You just think you’re too good for me, with your ‘in Michigan we do this and in Michigan we do that.’ All my friends warned me, but I said, ‘No, no. She’s probably shy. I bet once you get to know her she’s really nice.’ So I invite you over to my house and you embarrass me in front of my cousins.”

“I didn’t embarrass you,” I said. “I didn’t say anything.”

“Well that’s why,” she said. “You didn’t even have the good manners to say hello.”

“I should go home,” I said

“Oh, fine. Go home then. You think you’re so good. We’ll see who’s the good one. You better watch out. I promise you. You say anything about that five dollars and I’ll cut all your hair off for good.”

The next day at lunch, when I walked over to Lupe’s table with my cafeteria tray full of food and my heart full of hope that Lupe would forget she was mad at me, she turned her back. Her friends, Isela, Maria, and Luz did the same. “We don’t

want you to sit here,” Luz said. “And don’t bother telling us it’s a free country. We already know.”

“I wasn’t going to,” I said standing there, tray in hand, a total and vulnerable fool.

“Good,” said Isela. “Because freedom doesn’t mean you can sit where you’re not wanted.”

“But why don’t you want me?” I almost asked. “What did I do?” But I didn’t say anything. I already knew. In Lupe’s kitchen I had crossed an invisible line that put me on one side and Lupe on the other until the end of time. Lupe, whose aunt Tensha owned the hair salon where half the high school girls got their hair curled and teased for the prom. Lupe, whose sister Graciella had just given birth to twins. Lupe whose father’s sister was married to Ruben Mesa, the mayor of Las Cruces, and whose mother’s brother owned Gordo’s Propane, the only propane distributor in western New Mexico and the Western slope of Colorado. When Lupe decided she hated me--because I would not let her cut my bangs, or because her cousin Tomas smiled at me, or because I knew that Lupe had stolen five dollars from her mother’s purse--I inherited not just Lupe’s wrath, but an extended family of hate that lasted for years and that showed itself in gym class when the athletic girls would go out of their way to kick the burgundy-colored kick-ball into my unprotected stomach, and on the bus when, one-by-one, all the girls who used to sit with me refused to let me slide into the open seat beside them, or at McDonalds where Lupe’s friends would elbow me out of line if they could, or once I ordered, snatch my cheeseburger or the bag of french fries off my tray as I walked back to my seat.

Even some of the teachers at Las Cruces elementary seemed to find Lupe's wrath contagious, or perhaps it was simply that they were driven by the same demons. Mrs. Perez, who I had for sixth grade, was one. At first I thought she was just one of those mean teachers, the kind every kid gets sooner or later. But that all changed in September, barely a month into the school year, when Mrs. Perez decided to read to the class from an eyewitness account of Santa Ana's surrender. "So the blood of the men poured from their wounds," she read. "And my heart shrunk in agony knowing that soon the sun would set on this good son of Mexico." As she read from the survivor's account, each dramatic episode described in the most romantic terms, from defeat to victory, to defeat again, the other kids in the class with me, who had all heard the story many times before, started making noise, moaning or booing or cheering with each event. It didn't take long for me to join in, and soon, all of us were making noise, getting louder and louder as the battles and the story grew in intensity. Finally, when Santa Ana emptied the bullets of his pistol into the ground one-by-one, we couldn't control ourselves. A roar went up through the room and we all stamped our feet, and yelled and groaned and booed and hissed. Overwhelmed by the story of bravery and loss, we held nothing back, none of us did. I was just one among the many, but not for Mrs. Perez. She turned her attention to me.

"Miss Clare?" she asked. "Are you sure you should be booing?" The room grew instantly quiet, the other kids looking down at their desks, shrinking their bodies as much as they could, to get themselves off her radar. But I wasn't there yet. I

didn't know why she was asking. I looked around at the suddenly silent kids in the room with me. I made eye contact with one or two, and as I did, they each turned away, except for Yolanda who smiled at me, and Lupe who shook her head knowingly, as if she had been waiting for this moment all along. "I think so," I said. "We all were. I wasn't the only one."

"Of course you all were," she said. "But I wonder if it hasn't occurred to you that some of us here might expect you to be happy Texas won the war?"

No," I said, missing her point. "I don't think so. Not Texas, anyway." I had never been to Texas and could not imagine going. My family had never forgiven the state for John F. Kennedy's death.

"Really," she said, smiling as if "No" had been the perfect thing to say. "And why is that?"

"My family and I aren't fans of Texas," I answered. Someone behind me snickered into their hand. "And we never will be."

"Really?" she said. "Is that so?"

"I've never even been there," I said, wanting her to know I was sincere. "My mother doesn't believe in going there. So I've really only been to New Mexico and Michigan."

"See," Lupe whispered to Luz Viera. "It's always Michigan this and Michigan that."

"Lupe," said Mrs. Perez, "Hush your mouth. No one is interested in your comments right now." She focused her attention back on me. "Well," she said, "Whether or not you've been to Texas is not the point. What is, however, is that after

years of fighting for what he believed in and after years of sacrificing, our general had to give up the land of his fathers to Americans like you. But instead of applauding and holding your head up high, for your victory, you boo and hiss along with the rest of us. Why is that?"

I didn't know how to respond. I still did not understand what she was driving at, or why she was so focused on me. I had been caught up in the moment like everyone else in the class, and I still thought she was talking about making noise. "We were just having fun," I said, hoping that would end it. But it didn't.

"Fun?" she said. "How nice. But many of us here in Las Cruces are truly sad that Santa Anna lost his battle. Are you?"

"I guess," I said.

"But why?"

I didn't know and was about to say so, when Lupe butted in. "She isn't. She isn't sad, Mrs. Perez," she said. "She's happy." She looked at me. "You're happy that Santa Ana surrendered. I heard you talking about it at recess. Tell the truth."

"No I'm not," I said.

"Lupe," said Mrs. Perez. "One more word from you and you're on your way to the office." Lupe slumped in her seat and stuck out her tongue at me. "Now, Miss Clare, tell me this," Mrs. Perez said. "Are you happy in my class?"

"Yes, Mrs. Perez," I answered.

"Are you happy living here in Las Cruces, where so many of us are legitimately proud of our Mexican heritage?"

"Yes," I said, uncertain as to why she asking me that question.

“And you’re happy to be a citizen of the United States?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Then tell me,” she said, walking over to my desk, her blue dress twisting around her calves and knees like the flag of an aggressive country that thinks only of the victory. “Why aren’t you cheering for the United States, instead of crying for Santa Ana? When the truth is that if Santa Ana had won, we would all be part of Mexico, and we would be speaking Spanish in this class, and flying the Mexican flag in the school courtyard.” Pride was shining in her eyes, as she spoke, if she had somehow proven something worth working especially hard for.

I looked down at my shoes. Nike Athena’s, the Greek Goddess of Wisdom.

“But at least he wouldn’t have moved a river,” I said to quietly to them.

“What?” asked Mrs. Perez.

“Sorry, Mrs. Perez,” I said. “Nothing.”

That night I told my mother what had happened at school. “I don’t understand,” I told her. “Mrs. Perez was so mean.”

“Las Cruceans take their past very seriously,” she said. “And Santa Ana’s surrender to the Texans, still hurts.”

“Oh,” I said. “I thought it was something else.”

“What?” she asked.

“I thought it was that Mrs. Perez doesn’t like white people.”

“Miya Clare,” said my mother, “I never want to hear you talking like that again.”

It was afternoon, a sunny day in October. Yollie and I were chain smoking on the roof of her garage, lying on our backs, watching the sun descend through the late fall sky. Perhaps it was the effect of all the nicotine, or maybe it was something else that made me think about things in such a weird way, but as I lay on my back, looking at the endless blue dome above me, I started to think about how, when I was a young child, I had sometimes fantasized about my dying. It is something I think all young children do, I believe, because the young are closer to death. At three or four, or seven years old, with so few years in the world of the living, their awareness of a time when they were not alive is still near by. When you are that young, that new, you can feel the sense of not being, you can feel its presence in the morning when you rise from sleep, or at night when you close our eyes and hear the rhythm of your heart echo in your pillow. When you are a child, you are a creature on the border. Your body is firmly rooted in the land of the real. But your dreams and your senses are still attuned to the world from which you came, the world where you are not—and yet. So there is little difficulty for children in imagining themselves dead, which I did often. There were other things too, when I was young, to remind me of not living--jumping into the water from the high dive at the deep end of the pool and plunging down, down, down into the cold, with my eyes open, so I could watch the world retreat above me, or spinning myself around in circles until the earth lost its balance beneath my feet and my legs wobbled in three dimensions and folded themselves under me like falling dominoes, or holding my breath and counting, counting and counting, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, until the spent fuel of respiration burst from me and I gulped air the way the thirsty swallow water. I did these things the way all children do, to

feel the strangeness and the power of pushing my body into a place where my mind could so easily go, the place where I was not—again.

When I used to imagine my demise, I would always begin the same way, with an image of myself floating skyward, but not too high, if I was inside the house, for instance, I floated only to ceiling height. From there, below me, I would see my little dead body, dressed in a favorite dress, lying on its back on my white bed spread with the embroidered purple flowers, my hair neat and blond against the white pillow, my face in repose, almost but not really smiling. On either side of me stood my father and mother, wracked with guilt, crying, pulling at their hair, pleading to God to reverse the disaster of my loss, speaking their bitter regret and sorrow for every way they had ever wronged me. The Christmas toys I coveted but was never given. The second bowl of wonton soup I wanted at Young's Chinese restaurant on El Paseo Drive. The spotted pony I wished for but never received. The TV show (Superman) I was not allowed to watch, although all my friends could. The toy gun they refused to give me for my birthday. The way they never believed that I loved my sisters enough. Their disappointment in me that I was just a regular child--a prodigy at nothing. All of these, both the small, that in my childish egoism I held against them, and the larger injuries that tore at the fabric of love and that I could never name, all of these hurts, I made them suffer, until in my dream of death I grew sad for their grief, even though their grief was the reason I was dying. Moments later, I would simply float away, into another day dream, or sit up and go out to play. Sitting on the roof of Yolanda's garage on that late fall day, smoking cigarettes in the late October

afternoon air, made me feel the same way, both present and not. Inside the world and outside of it.

We were smoking, she and I, against our better judgment but we were smoking none the same-- because we were tired of being good girls, because we wanted to be sexy (we felt sexy) and because we were enamored with the artists, poets and intellectuals who drank thick dark coffee and smoked cigarettes in French cafés, inhaling deeply, holding the nicotine and carbon dioxide low in their chests until they tilted their chins up towards the sky and blew thick, sultry, slow moving smoke rings towards the sun. But our concerns weren't the same as the French artists. They were far more banal. "Did you get your grades back for Anglo Purity trigonometry?" Yolanda asked me, casting for my consciousness and reeling it back into the present like a fly fisherman reels in a trout from a stream. I started to answer, but I inhaled clumsily and had a coughing fit instead. We were smoking. We just couldn't do it as well as the artists did.

"It's not Anglo Purity," I said, when I could finally speak. "It's Advanced Placement."

"Anglo Purity. Advance Placement," Yolanda said. "What's the difference? Who cares?" She blew a lopsided smoke ring my way.

I tried to make one of my own, to intersect with hers, but I couldn't get the rhythm right. "I do." I said. There were twenty of us in the Advanced Placement program, or what Yolanda called "Anglo Purity," at Las Cruces High School and we traveled together, not very coherently, through English, science, history and math. Eighteen of us were white. Yolanda and Jaimie Escalante were the only Mexicans,

and that particular racial equation recently had started to drive Yolanda crazy. In defense of how it made her feel, she gave our classes a nickname, and referred to them that way, whenever she wanted to feel powerful, as in, “Did you finish the essay on comparing and contrasting the concept of the hero in Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn for Anglo Purity English?” Or, “Did you study for the Anglo Purity math test?” or “Did you memorize the periodic table of elements for Anglo Purity chemistry?” At first I thought it was funny. There was a certain cynical rightness to the name, and to the purpose behind creating a separate program for the (mostly white) high achievers. But lately I had grown tired of it. “I wish you would stop talking that way,” I said, inhaling, this time smoothly. “It’s boring.”

“What?” she said. “Are you kidding me? Who is talking here? Not, I think, my freedom-fighting friend.”

“Racism is old news,” I said. “Get over it.”

“You better stop smoking so many cigarettes,” she said. “It’s messing with your head.”

“Oh, right,” I said. “And so tell me, how has being a Mexican hurt you?”

“What would you know about it?” she said. “You’re white.”

“And that makes me a minority here in Southern New Mexico,” I said. “So I know plenty. I get discriminated against all the time. Remember at the Mesilla Festival when you finally had to buy my funnel cake for me, because since I wasn’t Mexican, the guy wouldn’t serve me? ‘Get over it.’ Isn’t that what you said that day? When I complained about it?”

“It’s not the same,” she said. “And you wouldn’t talk about it like it was, if you had any idea how it feels.”

“But I know how it feels,” I said. “That’s what I’m saying.”

“No,” she said, blowing a cloud of smoke right in my face. “You don’t. And why is it that lately no one can say anything to you without you making it all about you? ‘Stop it, it’s boring.’ ‘Stop it, I don’t like it,’” she said, mimicking me. I brushed the cloud of smoke away with my hand. “Because it’s not about you,” she said, before I could respond.. “Right now, I’m talking about me, and how I feel. Right now it’s about things like the teachers who say ‘Oh my, my, look at that,’” she said in an exaggerated voice, “when they see me for the first time. ‘What do you know? I have a little Mexican girl in my class. Ain’t that special.’”

“Nobody says that,” I said.

“Like you would even know,” she said. “And if they don’t say it, they think it.”

“That’s bullshit,” I said. “You can’t believe that.”

“I do.”

“Some of our teachers are Mexican Americans,” I said.

“Name one,” she said, and before I could answer, she added, “who we have this year.” I thought about the teachers we had for the semester and could think of no one who was not as white as me. I looked out on the horizon as if the answer would be written there in the sky. The mountains seemed to waver a bit in the distance, but they offered me no help. “See,” she said. “You don’t even bother to notice things like that. But I do.” She lay down on her back, not looking at me. “Do you have any

idea how it feels Miya Clare? To get dirty looks and shitty comments from people you've known all of your life?"

"Yes," I said. "I get it all the time."

"I'm not just talking about kids you go to school or church with," she said. "I mean from your cousins, or your uncle's God-daughter, or even from your own grand-mother, because you're doing good in school?"

"Your grandmother?" I said. "But she's so kind-hearted."

"That's why she says it. She thinks if I get too smart, no one will want to marry me."

"That's cold," I said.

"But she's just crazy," Yollie said. "And I know that. But it's not like she's the only one. And what I hate, is the others. The ones who think I'm taking something away from them. And you know why they think that?" I shook my head. "I'll tell you," she said. "When you grow up in Southern New Mexico, you learn that there's not enough to go around. The pie is only so big." She raised up her hands into the air, four inches apart, and held them in front of my face, so I could see, clearly, how small the pie really was. "If I get a slice," she said, "then there's less for everyone else."

I shook her off. "I don't believe that," I said. "That's not true. The pie is infinite. It's big enough for everybody."

"We're not talking about what you believe, Miya," she said, sitting up. "How often do I have to remind you?"

"Sorry."

“Maybe where you came from, in Michigan, there really was enough to go around. I don’t know. But I can tell you that here there isn’t. Not enough to eat. Not enough land to farm. Not enough jobs. Not enough money. Never enough water. You live with that for ten generations and I promise you, you’ll start to believe there’s not enough pie for everyone and there never will be.” She stood up and walked over to the edge of the roof.

“Don’t jump,” I said.

“Oh please,” she said, glaring at me. She took the last cigarette out of the pack. “See,” she said, crushing the empty package in her fist. “Not enough.”

“We can buy more,” I said.

“But that’s in the future,” she said, lighting up. “What’s important is that for you and I, today, there’s no more. For us, in this moment where we exist with our needs, and wants and desires, there’s one for me, none for you.” She threw the crushed and empty pack over the edge of the garage and it fell to the ground. “It’s that simple,” she said. “The laws of thermodynamics applied to the real world. So if I’m in Anglo Purity, I mean AP classes and Jaimie and I are the only Mexicans, which means there’s only room for two Mexicans. Not three or four, just two, and here I am, taking some other poor *cholo*’s place. It’s a simple math equation, and the poor and down-trodden are very good at that kind of math.”

“No one thinks that way about AP classes,” I said. “Actually, they think we’re idiots for working so hard.”

“Oh yeah ‘Ms. I know everything?’” she said. “Tell you what. Go ask my Aunt Alma why my cousin Maria didn’t get into concert choir when we did.”

“I don’t have to ask,” I said. “I know.” Yolanda raised her eyebrows at me. “She can’t sing,” I said. “I mean have you heard her?” I pointed my finger at my mouth in the universal sign for ‘gag me.’ “That’s why she didn’t get in.”

“I don’t think so,” said Yolanda.

“Then why?”

“Because there’s only enough room for one Vasquez in concert choir and that Vasquez is me.”

“And your Aunt told you that?” I said, cynically. “Or maybe you were just thinking she would.”

“Oh no,” said Yolanda. “She told me, right to my face. We were over at her house last week. She said, ‘You know if it wasn’t for you, there would have been a place in choir for Maria.’ Then she told me she would forgive me for it, even though Maria desperately wanted to be in choir, because she knew although I took Maria’s place it wasn’t really my fault.”

“That’s harsh,” I said.

“That’s the way people are here,” she answered. “I just can’t believe you don’t know it already.”

She sat down with her cigarette, after that, and the both of us lay there, looking up at the blue sky and the froth clouds high over the mountains, breathing in the air and the nicotine.

“Look around at the twenty of you,” Miss Buehler said, from where she sat, perched on her stool. “Eighteen of you will go to college, but ten will go to New

Mexico State and never have your horizons broadened.” Miss Buehler, our junior year Anglo Purity English teacher was from “back East,” which was pretty much all people in Las Cruces had to say about the state of North Carolina. “Four of you will go up to Albuquerque, to the University of New Mexico,” she continued, “and you’ll think you’re really special to be going to the top school in the state. But once you get there you’ll discover that all of your professors received their degrees from UNM, or the University of Texas at El Paso, or the University of Wyoming, in Cheyenne, and they’ll be just like you, provincial, with no real knowledge of the world.” Tall, and slim, with very white skin and frosted blond hair, Miss Buehler carried herself like a cursed princess who once upon a time, a long time ago, had dreamed of a future in the theatre, but instead found herself consigned to a back-water castle for some offense--perhaps a failure of talent--she was certain she did not commit, and so she took out her vengeance on us, her second-class students, New Mexico’s finest. “Your professors will never have seen mannerist architecture in Venice, or Michelangelo’s beautiful work on the Sistine Chapel in Rome,” she said. “They will never have looked upon the original manuscripts of John Keats, or the tapestries hanging on the walls of Versailles, seen the Rosetta stone or marveled at Goya’s paintings in the Prado. That’s in Spain you know, where so many of your ancestors started out.”

She stopped speaking and looked around and if there had been a globe to spin theatrically—at that moment—she surely would have spun it. “Have any of you ever been to Europe?” she asked. She was answered with silence. “I thought so. How about New York? Boston?” No one raised their hand. “The nation’s capital, Washington D.C.? Anyone?” Still no response. “So where have you been?” she

asked, sliding off her stool. “Hoover Damn?” A few hands went up. “Lake Havasu?” A few more. “How about Las Vegas,” she said, smiling and looking absolutely feral. Everyone but Yolanda and I raised our hands.

At first, I had appreciated Miss Buehler’s fierceness. It seemed to me a commitment, a sign of how far she was willing to go to lift us up. I imagined that like a modern day, feminine Orpheus, she had come into our little city near the Mexican border to lead us out of the dark forest of small-town poverty and ignorance into the golden fields of light. But I soon realized that the only connection Miss Buehler had to Greek myths was the fact that she had read them, and if there was any mythic figure in her genealogy it was most surely Narcissus rather than Orpheus, and we, her long-suffering students, were the modern-day equivalent of her reflective pond.

One day in class, shortly after Thanksgiving, when the leaves had fallen from the trees and the landscape of the valley was gray and lifeless, and we were feeling fat and slobby—Thanksgiving in New Mexico consisting of ham and turkey, potatoes and stuffing, and tamales, chili rellenos, rice and beans—we were discussing the Golden Age of Thebes. “Why must Theban society kill its king?” Miss Buehler asked. “Why is regicide such a necessity?”

“The Thebans have to kill the king to start the world again,” someone had answered. “They spill his blood on the ground to renew the harvest.”

“Yes,” she said. “But why? What is it about a king’s blood that gives his death much power?”

“It’s holy,” I said.

“It’s symbolic,” said someone else. “It’s the symbolic body of the people.”

“The King’s blood rejuvenates the community,” another student added

"Does the king die forever?" Miss Buehler asked.

"No," said Yollie. "He comes back in the spring, reborn."

"That's right," said Miss Buehler. "And what other stories do we know where an innocent, a paschal lamb, so to speak, must be violently killed in order for a new society to rise from the old? What other stories do we know about the killing and resurrection of the king?"

"Osiris in Egypt," I said.

"Dionysus in Greece," said Yolanda.

"Yes, and who else?" she pressed. We clearly weren't offering the answer she expected. But what did she want? I couldn't figure it out. "Who else in death takes on the sins of their civilization?" she asked. "Who else dies and is reborn in the spring?"

No one answered. Although by then I imagine a few in the class who knew more of the New Testament than I did, might have had an idea about what she was driving at, but I was not one of them. I thought about Joan of Arc, Abraham Lincoln, both Kennedys, Martin Luther King, the Challenger Astronauts who had died the year before. I could have made an argument for any of them dying for their countries, their societies, or the greater good, but unfortunately—for the argument, anyway--none of them had been resurrected. Miss Buehler threw up her arms in exasperation. "I know there has to be at least one knowledgeable Catholic in this classroom," she said. "At least some of you should be making the connection by now. Where's

Margaret?" She noticed the empty desk. "Absent. Of course." She surveyed the room again. "Pam?" she said, a question in her voice.

Pam shook her head, "Not Catholic," she said.

Miss Buehler looked at Jane Rosenthal, our class' only Jew. "Well you should know," Miss Buehler said to her, "but you probably don't." Jane was very smart. She probably did, but she kept silent. She didn't need the trouble.

Miss Buehler's eyes settled on Jaime Escalante. "Jaime," she said.

"Yes ma'am," he answered, always polite to a fault.

"You're planning to go into the priesthood, aren't you?"

"Yes ma'am."

"And doesn't the story of death and resurrection of the King of Thebes remind you of a story you already know?"

"I don't think so, ma'am."

"Well," she said, crossing the room to stand in front of him. "Let me see if I can approach this from a different direction. What was the name of the king of the Greek gods? Do you remember?"

"Zeus," he said.

"Right. Zeus. Now in English we say Jesus, but in Spanish, how would you pronounce that?" Jaime did not answer. "Will anyone help Jaime out here?" Miss Buehler said. "Relieve him of his suffering?" No one raised their hands. "Yolanda?" She chose my friend arbitrarily. "You know, don't you?" Yolanda looked down at her desk. She didn't want any of this. "Why don't you tell us, then?" Miss Buehler said, not relenting. "Please."

"Jesus," Yolanda answered, almost whispering the Spanish pronunciation *Hey-Zeus*.

"Isn't that something?" said Mrs. Buehler. " In English we have Jesus. In Spanish we have *Hey-Zeus* and in the world of the ancient Greeks we have Zeus himself, king of the gods. So Jaime, does that help? Now, any thoughts on what tragic figure in Greek mythology shows up in our modern world in the story of the ritual death and resurrection of the king?" With that Jaime turned white, crossed himself, loaded up his books into his back-pack and dashed out of the room. "Now what was that all about?" asked Miss Buehler, sliding back onto her stool and crossing her legs for the last time. "You'd think he wasn't interested in thinking out of the box."

The next day Miss Buehler did not return to class. Nor did she come back the next day, or the day after that. Soon it became clear to us that she would not be coming back at all, and when we returned to school after Christmas break, the assistant principal was there in our classroom, in the company of a priest dressed in black with the traditional white collar. "What happened to Miss Buehler?" Jaimie asked, and I couldn't tell if his voice was shaking with fear or with happiness.

"Miss Buehler and the school decided to go their separate ways," said Mrs. Battencort. "This is a traditional community with Christian values." We all immediately looked over at Jane Rosenthal to see her reaction. Smart girl that she was, she didn't have any. "This is Father Guzman from the order of St. Francis," Mrs. Battencort continued. "He's agreed to help us through the end of the semester."

“What’s he going to teach?” someone called out. AP students could be bold.
“The Bible?”

A few of us chuckled, but that stopped when Mrs. Battencort flashed us a frown. “Yes,” said Father Guzman. “As a matter of fact, I am. But as literature. The Bible as literature. Not as a religious treatise, but as a great treasure of literary themes and images.”

I looked over at Jaimie Escalante and could only guess what he was thinking. The Bible was the word of God and someone was talking about reading it as literature, in this community that was so Catholic that banks and the post office closed on Good Friday. Yet the someone in question, the person talking about the Bible in such blasphemous terms, was a priest. And children in Southern New Mexico were taught to love and worship their priests. I glanced at Yollie. She was staring at me with her eyes open so wide a cat could have crawled through them. “Do-you-believe-this?” she mouthed at me.

I shook my head “No.”

“Who knows what the devil looks like?” Father Guzman asked. “Who can tell me something about Hell?” No one answered. “Come on,” he said. “Surely you have some idea.” He looked down at the seating chart. Called out a name arbitrarily. “John Williams,” he said. “What do you think?”

John shrugged. He wasn’t going to be the first to talk.

“Come on,” said Father Guzman. “I won’t bite. But tell me about Hell. What does it look like? Is it hot? Cold?” The chuckling started again with that question

and grew stronger when he asked his next. “Is it full of green fields? Mountains? Are there lakes to swim in? Mr. Williams, what do you say?”

“It’s hot,” John said. “Like the inside of a volcano, with fire and brimstone. There’s no sky, no trees, no grass, no water. It’s just terrible.”

“And how do you know that?” the Father asked.

John shrugged. “Church, I guess. It’s in the Bible.”

“But it’s not,” said Father Guzman, as if he had been waiting for that moment. “That description of Hell comes from Milton. *Paradise Lost*. Milton used the power of the Biblical story of evil and of the Devil to create a visual metaphor of Hell. The Bible becomes a literary source, the river that releases the floodgates of his creativity. In turn, his story of the descent into Hell attached itself to the Bible and Milton’s interpretation has become part of the canon from which our understanding of the biblical tradition grows. Does anyone here know why the words literature and liturgy are so entwined arm in arm?” He looked around the classroom at our stricken faces. I am sure mine was as panicked as the rest.

“Okay,” he said. “I think we have some work to do here.”

Orin's Testimony

It was in the early evening. I had lit a fire and we were having dinner when the phone rang with the news about Miya.

Peggy had been telling me a story about a tourist, a woman who came into the shop to buy jewelry, and who asked if she could bite down on the turquoise stone in a ring she liked, to make sure it was real and not plastic. It was a funny story and we were both laughing because the woman was so sure of herself. But you can't tell anything by biting down on the stone. It's an old wives' tale.

I had just poured us both a second glass of wine. Our evenings had become almost romantic with all our children grown, Miya in Oneg Kempo, Leslie in Austin at college. Angela was still living with us, but she was almost never home. Things were finally going well at the store. I was even thinking of opening another one. Life was bountiful.

So we were home by ourselves that night. Peggy had made fresh pasta. I remember that so clearly because she was serving it in this lovely Italian bowl that Miya gave us for an anniversary a few years before. It was from Italy, white, with hand-painted tomatoes, eggplants and grapes, all bright and vivid, and large, large enough that you could have filled it with enough food for five or ten, but that night there was just enough for two. When the phone rang, I didn't feel like getting up from the table to answer. I thought about just leaving it go, letting the machine take

it. Whoever was calling could wait. But it's hard to ignore the phone when you've been a businessman and a parent as long as I have. Even if you don't want the information that's being delivered. I picked it up. "Hello," I said.

It was a friend of the family who knew someone in the governor's office. He was calling to tell us that he had heard that something terrible had happened to Miya, but he did not know what. He thought she was in the hospital in Oneg Kempo, but that she was probably all right. He told us to stay by the phone. Someone, he was sure, would be calling us soon. We waited for the second call, consuming anxiety and fear instead of dinner, dread taking up residence in our hearts the way a ghost in a horror story takes possession of the living. We did not want it, the news. It came anyway. The second call. An hour later.

I got on the phone in the kitchen and Peggy picked up the cordless from the study, so she could listen too. It was a woman from the state department. "Mr. and Mrs. Clare, we are so sorry." Peggy had come back to the kitchen by then, the phone in her hand, and as the woman talked, I watched her shrinking into her body like a balloon that had been pierced, falling more and more into herself with every word the woman said. Our daughter had been killed, she told us. She wasn't sure of the details. I remember screaming into the phone. I called the woman a criminal and a liar, and then I couldn't talk anymore. I felt my own body lose strength, my face crumple and go slack, and I thought for a minute that I was having a stroke, and that Peggy would have two deaths to deal with on a single night. I reached my hand over to the chair behind me, and lowered myself down, cursing my body for failing me, and then, I don't know, after ten minutes, an hour, whatever it was, I realized there

was nothing wrong with me, except the worst possible thing. My daughter was dead. And she died in another country, far from home, and there was nothing I could do about it.

I should never have let her go.

I should never have let her go. But how can you stop someone from living their life, making their choices? She was an adult. Twenty-four years old. A college graduate. A grown woman. She didn't ask me for advice. I gave it to her anyway. "Don't go," I said. "It's crazy there. Let them figure it out first. Go later, once things have settled down." You want to protect them. It's a father's job. To protect his child, no matter how old she is. But after a certain point even a father can't tell his children what to do.

I know you brought my wife and I here thinking it might help us if we went through some kind of healing process with you, if we witnessed this course of truth and reconciliation, shared it with you, as your country takes responsibility for its past and for building a new future, and that's truly a laudable goal. I wish you luck with it. I really do. I'm sure if Miya were here, she'd be pleased to see how far you've come, and she'd tell her mother and me that we should be happy for all the good that has happened here, and that we should forgive that man for what he did, and forgive all of you too for not protecting her. But my daughter was a better person than I will ever be. If it were up to me, this man and anyone else involved would never go free. But it is not. I have no power here. So from where I stand, whatever you decide, in a sense, it doesn't matter.

If he stays in prison.

If you grant him amnesty.

If you let him go free.

What does it mean to me if it doesn't bring my daughter back?

So I want no part of it. All I want, the only reason I am here, is like you said, to find out how and why my daughter died here. That's what I care about. It's the only truth and reconciliation I am interested in. I can't have justice. I'm not interested in punishment. All I can have now is the truth. I know you are trying to understand why she came here, as if that matters. She came. What I want to know is why she died here.

And I will tell you this. My family has been waiting for two years to find out what happened and we are out of patience.

My wife and I, we have asked and asked and asked and asked. And no one can tell us anything. "We are not sure," they say. "We just don't know." "There are so many stories." "It was a bad time." "We are trying to get to the bottom of it." "Mr. Clare, Mrs. Clare, that's why we're here."

Now you say this man is ready to tell the truth? And if he tells us the truth he can earn his freedom?

Well, you've asked me, so I will tell you. Freedom for truth? For me that is a very hard bargain.

The Slow Steady Crawl of Small Changes

Yollie never liked Father Guzman as much as I did. But then, she went to church every Sunday, plus baptisms and weddings and first communions, and her mother invited priests over to dinner every month and fussed all over them, from the moment they walked in the door, through the salad, main course, and dessert, and until she said good-bye, after the late-night glass of wine. With all that, an intellectually-challenging Catholic priest might have just been a little bit more than Yollie wanted in her life. But I thought Father Guzman was great. So when he offered me the opportunity to join the Human Relations Club I said yes, without bothering to ask what it was, exactly, that the Human Relations Club did. Once I found out that instead of going to meetings and talking about feelings, the students in the Human Relations Club worked at the food kitchen and collected clothing for the homeless, I was even happier I had agreed to join. And when I learned that their next meeting--the first I would attend--was actually an overnight field trip to Santa Fe for Las Cruces Day at the legislature, I was ecstatic. Although I had lived in Las Cruces for six years, I still had never been to Santa Fe.

By the time my mother dropped me off Thursday night, after she closed the store at nine, most of the other students going on the trip were already on the bus. I climbed up into the darkened coach, waving goodbye to her as I went, and then stood at the top of the bus' stairs blinking, waiting for my eyes to adjust to the lack of light.

As soon as they did, and I could see, I realized my late arrival had a singular consequence. All of the double bench seats had at least one person in them, and most had two. I could make out the faces of three people I knew, Jane Rosenthal, Luz Garcia, and Yollie's cousin Maria, but they were already sitting with someone else. What to do? I started to walk toward the back of the bus, trying to come to grips with the fact that I would have to sit next to a stranger for the ride up to the state capitol, and that it would probably be someone who fell asleep with their head on my shoulder and drool on me, when I heard someone call my name. "Hey, Miya," the voice said. "Hey, there's a seat over here by me." I looked around, but couldn't tell where the voice had come from. It was a boy's voice, someone I almost thought I recognized, but I was skeptical. I wasn't ready to believe that a real boy was calling out to me, unless somebody had put him up to it--someone who was determined to tease me, the AP nerd--by luring me over to the seat where the fat kid lay in wait, or the kid with the permanently boogery nose. "Over here," said the boy, standing up. "You can have the window if you want." And then I saw that the boy who had raised himself up from his seat to speak to me was Lupe's cousin, Tomas. The same Tomas whom had told me I was pretty the day Lupe tried to cut my hair, and who I had seen from time-to-time, at school, surrounded by friends, and who, I was sure had never, in a million years, noticed me. What was he doing on this bus? And why was he offering to sit next to me on the nine-hour ride from Las Cruces to Santa Fe? He was the last person I would ever expect to make an offer like that. It didn't make any sense. Lupe's cousin? One of the most popular senior boys in the school? I started retreating, retracing my steps and going backwards the way I had come, like a polite

Japanese leaving the room. In response Tomas started walking towards me, his hands open and spread as if to show he had no weapons. His voice was soft and slightly silly, the way trainers speak to shy and tender puppies. “No really,” he said. “It’s okay. That’s what we do. That’s what we’re here for.” I stopped walking backwards. “It’s part of our job on the Human Relations club,” he said. “To reach out to people, to make strangers feel like friends.” He held out his hand to me in the aisle of the bus. “I’m Tomas Macias, president of the Human Relations Club. I think you are our new member?” Slowly, as if I were underwater, I reached my own hand toward his. We shook and he motioned to me to follow. A few steps later, he pointed to his seat. “There. Take the window. You’ll be more comfortable.”

By then it was easier to nod and accept his hospitality than to bow out gracefully, and, I was not sure, despite my feelings of being Japanese, that I could have bowed at that point, even if I wanted to. I shoved my back-pack full of books under the seat in front of me and sat down. Tomas slipped into the seat beside me and smiled. I didn’t know what to say. I don’t think he knew either, so neither of us said anything. Over the next few minutes, two more kids who I didn’t know arrived and then Father Guzman came on board, followed by some parent chaperones, and coach Jabo. Five minutes later, the driver pulled the handle on the accordion doors and I heard that familiar coosh-coosh bus sound as the air brakes released. We pulled slowly out of the school parking lot. I glanced at my watch. 10:05 p.m., the school board in its wisdom having decided years earlier that if Las Cruces High scheduled their students to travel at night and arrive in Santa Fe in the morning, they would only miss one day of school and only have one day at the hotel before returning Saturday

night. On paper it was a great plan. We could sleep on the bus and arrive at the state capital for breakfast Friday morning, ready to go. But in reality of course it meant that we would stay awake all night and arrive in Santa Fe feeling the way high school kids do after being awake and active for twenty-five to thirty hours straight. It would also mean that when we finally arrived at our hotel for a night's rest, the last time we would have put our heads down on pillows to go to sleep would have been Wednesday evening, and that by the time we did fall into bed, after the dinner following the legislative session, we would be zombies.

I only point this out as a way of explaining something that is probably not explainable, and something that would probably not have happened if Tomas and I had been firmly integrated into our real lives, and if we had been doing what we would normally do on a Thursday night, instead of sitting next to each other on a yellow school bus as it traveled through the dark of a New Mexico night. Tired and getting more tired, we were unable to sleep. Embarrassed. Wound up. Uncertain. Too aware of each other. Elbow on the seat rest, shoulder next to shoulder, breath, smell, sounds. Of course what happened between us then didn't happen quickly, unless you call twenty-four hours quickly. It happened gradually and it happened, I imagine, because it was easier to decide we liked each other than to figure out how to deal with the fact that we were going to have to sit next to each other all the way to Santa Fe.

For about the first twenty minutes on the bus we sat quietly, each pretending to pretend that the other wasn't there. I looked out the window, trying to see the mountains and the stars between the metal window frame and the multiple reflections

in the glass--my face, Tomas' dark curly hair, his well-formed cheek bones and patrician nose in profile, the people in the rows of seats across the aisles, the windows behind them. And then, through my window, I saw the illuminated Hatch Chili billboard that had welcomed us to Las Cruces six years ago, just at the moment when Father Guzman walked up and said hello to me and put his hand on Tomas' shoulder. "How are you doing, son?" he asked.

"Fine."

"Are you excited?"

"Of course," Tomas answered.

"You should be," Father Guzman said. "It's not every boy who gets to meet the governor. I'm very proud of you. Did you know that, Miya?" he asked me. "Did you know that young Tomas has been asked to represent our students at a special meeting the governor is having with our community leaders?"

"No," I answered. "I didn't."

"Well you do now," Father Guzman said. "And be sure. He will represent us well." He patted Tomas on the shoulder again. "Get some sleep. Tomorrow's going to be a long day."

He walked away, heading up the aisle to chat with other students and Tomas leaned over to me and whispered in my ear. "Why do they always say that?"

"Say what?" I whispered back.

"Get some sleep," he answered.

"I didn't know they did," I said.

"Whenever we go on a trip."

“Maybe they don’t know what else to say,” I said. “Or maybe they’re praying that we go to sleep, so they can.”

“Oh,” said Tomas. “I hadn’t thought of that.”

He settled back down in his seat, and I returned to my window, gazing outside with even less luck than before. I started thinking about the first time I saw Tomas and whether or not he remembered me from that day when I was at his Cousin Lupe’s house and she tried to cut my hair. I decided he didn’t remember because if he had he would never have invited me to sit with him. But I wanted to find out. I desired to know. I almost opened my mouth to ask him, but I willed myself not to. I said to myself, “Don’t do it. Don’t even bring it up.” I wanted to though, badly. I could feel the question pressing up inside me, filling me up the way you fill up a balloon when you blow it full of air, the pressure pushing every other thought away. I was going to ask him. I wouldn’t be able to help it. If I didn’t do something, my lips were going to move on their own. The words flooding out into the air despite my desire to stop them. They were going to bypass my intelligence. They were going to explode my caution and I would just blurt. I needed a plan to save myself. Something to do. Something to distract my brain from the object of its attention. Books. Reading. I would bury my emotion in someone else’s story. I started to reach down toward my backpack, but realized right away that with Tomas next to me, and both of us in our seats, there wasn’t enough room for me to bend over far enough to reach under the seat where my back-pack lay. I thought about asking Tomas for help, but that would require making him pay attention to me and the prospect of that was horrifying. I was already so nervous and uncomfortable sitting next to him I could barely live in my

skin. At that moment I deeply wished he had let me find someone I didn't know to sit next to. Someone who would have handed me my back-pack without causing me doubt or uncertainty, even if it meant dodging rolls of fat or watching him wipe his sleeve across his boogery nose.

“Here, let me get it for you,” Tomas said, seeing my dilemma.

“No that's all right,” I said, bending down to try once more. I didn't notice that at the same time he was bending down too. “I'm sure I can get it. It's just a matter of reaching over.” I twisted my head to try to get my shoulder into the space and extend my reach, assuming that my saying “No” was all that Tomas needed to stop trying to help me. But I was wrong. He hadn't stopped. He was bending down too. Exactly then, the bus hit a bump on the pavement, or there was a gust of wind, or the driver twisted the steering wheel for some reason I will never know and I lost my balance, or Tomas lost his and our heads banged together like bumper cars on steroids.

“Oh shit,” said Tomas, sitting up straight and rubbing his forehead. “What was that? That hurt.”

“Oh my God,” I said, falling back into my seat. I was blinking like crazy--the pain was so bad--trying to keep from crying. “Ow.” I closed my eyes. “Oh.” I reached up to my forehead and touched the center of agony. There was going to be a goose egg there like nobody's business.

For a good thirty seconds we both sat there in our private distress and finally Tomas asked, “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, sure,” I answered, holding my hand to my head.

“Really?” he said.

“Yeah,” I said, lying, because I wasn’t sure. The whack was too hard, the question too soon. “What about you?”

“Doesn’t hurt at all,” he said.

“Really?”

“No,” he said. “To tell you the truth, it hurts like hell. You got a hard head or something?” He leaned toward me, showing me his forehead. “You see anything? I have a bump up there?”

I looked. The skin was smooth and vaguely burnished, the color of golden olive oil. No bruises or blemishes anywhere. “No. I don’t see any bumps.”

“Sure feels it.” He rubbed the spot where we hit. “Look again.”

I leaned over close. “No bumps.”

“Okay.” He sat back in his seat. I sat back in mine. “Hey,” he said. “You want me to look and see if you’ve got one?”

“I know I’ve got one,” I said. “I can already feel it.”

“Let me see.”

“No, that’s all right.”

“Come on. Let me take a look,” he said.

“No,” I said.

“Oh, now that’s not fair,” he said. “I let you look at mine.”

“Okay,” I shrugged. “Go ahead.”

“You got to bend down some,” he said. “So I can see it better.” I tilted my head down and to the left. “Nope,” he said. “You’re good. Nothing there.”

“Yes there is,” I said. “It’s right here.” I carefully touched the bump with my fingers. “I can feel it. See?”

“Not yet,” he said. He reached over and put two of his fingers lightly on top of mine. “Let me,” he said. I moved my hand away and he touched my forehead. His fingers felt cool and soft. “Oh, I got it. Now I do. Right there.” I nodded. “But it’s small,” he said. “Nothing to it. I think you’ll live.”

“Well that’s good to know,” I said, not sure if I should feel offended, or grateful, or if I should laugh. I turned back to my window. I would pretend none of this had ever happened, ignore Tomas and his “You’ll live,” for the rest of the bus ride, but he denied me that opportunity.

“How about if I get you your back-pack now?” he asked. “But you have to promise not to move,” he said, before I could answer. “Okay?” I nodded. “Good. Just stay there for one minute and everything will be fine.” He reached down and lifted my blue canvas bag out from under the seat and put it on my lap. “I’ll put it back for you too,” he said. “When you’re ready. Just let me know.”

“Fine,” I said, unable to maintain any kind of distance or sophistication in the face of his earnest desire to help. I rummaged through and found my copy of Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Bean Trees*, zipped the back-pack up and handed to him.

“That it?” he asked. “Everything you need?”

“That’s it.”

“It’s your last chance,” he said. “If I put it back now, you won’t be able to get it by yourself again.” He must have seen something in my face. “Unless I help you, I

mean. But I will. Don't worry." He slipped the back-pack back under my seat. "You used to be Lupe's friend, didn't you?" he said, as he straightened up.

"No," I answered quickly. I couldn't believe it. After all we'd just been through, he was remembering me from Lupe's. Where did that come from? "Not really," I said, not wanting to go there.

"But I saw you at her house," he said. "I'm sure of it."

"I don't know," I said. "Maybe. When I first moved here. I went to lots of people's houses."

"She wanted to cut your hair," he said. "Didn't she?" I nodded. "But you didn't let her?"

"No," I said. "I didn't."

"That was good," he said. "I'm glad."

"Really?" I was surprised to hear him taking my side against his cousin.

"Yes, really. Definitely really. She was just doing it to be mean. That's the way she is. My cousin's trouble."

"She's okay," I said. I had learned years ago not to criticize someone's family. Even when they did. "We just, you know, had different interests."

"Too bad she didn't bring you over more often." I wasn't sure how to interpret that comment, and I was even more confused by his next. "I've seen you in choir," he said. "You sing soprano."

"You've seen me in choir?" I said, and then thought, "Oh that's good."

Repeating his sentences back to him. Like a talking parrot. That's going to make a good impression. I'm an idiot.

“Sure,” he said. You’re in the second row.”

“But how do you know?” The full choir never met at the same time except during rehearsals and that was only a few times a year.

“There’s not too many girls with blond hair in the second row of concert choir. Let me see.” He started counting on his fingers, and then stopped. “Oh I know,” he said. There’s one. You. And then there’s the fact that you look like an angel.”

“No I don’t,” I said, happy though that he thought I did. But timing being everything, that was the moment when Tomas’ friend Roberto Montoya chose to lean over from his seat in front of us, waving a comic book in his hand.

“Tomas man,” he said. “Look at this. The new *Fantastic Four*. Check it out.”

“What you got?” Tomas said, turning to look, and as he did I realized with relief that I was glad to not be the focus of his attention for a moment. I needed some time to breathe and to pull myself together. Nothing that had happened in the last few minutes made any sense. Tomas remembered me from four years ago, when I had come over to Lupe’s house? He noticed me in choir? He knew what row I was in and what part I sang? He thought I looked like an angel? There was no way to coordinate the information I was receiving with my picture of myself and the world Tomas and I lived in. In that world, I perceived myself to be invisible, and when I wasn’t invisible I wasn’t particularly welcomed. In that world, though, Tomas was everything I was not. He was popular, one of those rare people who wasn’t stuck in one group, but belonged to every group, and who everyone seemed to truly like. He

was in the choir, and on the football and basketball team. He was in the Human Relations Club, and was a crack auto mechanic, his uncle raced each weekend during the summer at the racetrack over by the airport and Tomas was on the pit crew. Discovering that Tomas was aware of me and had been aware of me for some time was like learning that my mother was really the Queen of England, that I had been spirited away as a child and raised by peasants, and that all this time my mother's loyal soldiers had been searching for me, the girl with the strawberry birthmark on her right shoulder.

I opened my book and tried to read. It wasn't fair. I had remembered Tomas from Lupe's house, I had even day-dreamed about him once or twice, but when Lupe decided to despise me I had put him out of my mind like my other old crushes, each transforming from a feeling of something at least akin to passion, into simple, wistful wishes from afar. There was Kevin O'Connell from Grand Rapids who gave me my first kiss, Peter Williams who, before he left Las Cruces, told me he had planned on marrying me so we could be together forever. There was Terry Calderon who worked at Scoopy's Ice Cream Shop and who I was sure gave me a larger scoop than he was supposed to. And of course, there were the adults. I kind of thought Coach Jabo was cute and I could see the stately appeal of Father Guzman even though he was a priest and far too old for me. But all of these crushes were really silly little things, business to talk about to Yollie when she slept over, and we could go on for hours whispering about how to get Terry to notice me at the school dance; or, if Yollie went to the bowling alley where Nestor Garcia worked, was it better for her to act helpless and ask him how to show her how to "make the ball hit each and every

pin,” or if it was better to roll strikes so that he could see how talented she was, or, if we were really feeling daring, to speculate on why Father Guzman joined the priesthood. Was it because of a broken heart? Did the lady in question hurt him so badly that he turned to celibacy? Did she jilt him for another man? Did she die tragically?

But now, driving through the night on a bus to Santa Fe, the object of so many day dreams was sitting next to me and had touched my forehead with his fingertips, admittedly after he had banged into it, and he had told me I looked like an angel. As a result, in the time it took to travel from Las Cruces to Truth or Consequences my wistful crush-like awareness blossomed into an ache I knew, as surely as I knew my name, I would never get rid of. I read from page thirty of my book, “Ivy and her mother-in-law were not speaking, on account of one thing or another.” “Lou Ann could never keep track,” I was hooked like a fish, risking all for the beautiful lure that had appeared before me, but knowing that, no, I did not want to go there. So I tried again to read, but like Lou Ann, I could not keep myself on track either.

“This comic stinks, Roberto,” I heard Tomas say. “It’s boring. I like the X-men better. They have more existential depth. Wolverine and Storm have to deal constantly with the moral ambiguities of science and technology, and the fact that no action or choice they can make is clearly good or clearly evil. The Fantastic Four, they’re just *cholos*. Everything is ‘flame on,’ or ‘flame off,’ ‘Here comes a hurting one,’ or ‘I’ll get you Doctor Hazard.’ There’s no subtlety.”

“Man, you sound like some high school English teacher,” said Roberto.

“Well, good,” said Tomas. “Then maybe I’ll get an A on the paper I turned into to La Holguin, cause that’s what I said.” He leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes. “End of discussion,” he said dramatically, quoting a movie I was sure I had seen but couldn’t remember.

“You wrote a school paper about a comic book?” I asked.

“Si,” he said. “*Como no?*”

“They let you do that?”

“Why? Don’t they let you in the classes you’re taking?”

“No. We get to study the Bible.”

“Like church?”

“No. Like literature. Father, I mean, Professor Guzman is our teacher.”

“Oh. You’re in that class. He was telling me about that class, breaking my...” he stopped himself. “Well just giving me, some you-know-what because I didn’t get myself into those special classes. Says I have the brains for them, but I’m just too lazy. What do you think? Is he right?”

“He’s right,” Roberto answered from the seat in front of us.

“Shutup, fool,” said Tomas. “No one was talking to you.”

“I don’t think you’re lazy,” I said.

“Yeah,” he said. “But what about the brains? That’s what I want to know.”

I considered my answer. If I said I he had brains, he’d know I liked him. If I said he didn’t have brains, he’d probably think I liked him anyway, but I would have said something mean and hurt his feelings. What? Was I an idiot? “You seem pretty

smart to me,” I said, hoping that the truth would work in this context. “You know a lot of things.”

“Yeah, well, so do lots of people,” he said. “That doesn’t make you smart.”

“But you can do things too,” I said. “Like fix cars.”

“Anyone can do that,” he said.

“No, they can’t,” I said. “I can’t.”

“Exactly,” said Roberto.

“Shut up,” Tomas said to him.

“You sing almost all the solos in choir,” I said.

“Yeah, maybe,” he said. “But you don’t have to have brains to sing.”

“Father Guzman thinks you’re smart,” I said, enjoying my power. “You just said he did. Didn’t you?”

“Yeah,” Tomas answered, embarrassed. I could see him blushing.

“He would know,” I said.

“Yeah, maybe,” said Tomas. “But Father Guzman likes everybody. He thinks we’re all God’s children.”

“And like the woman said,” Roberto chimed in from the seat in front, “he would know.”

“Dude,” Tomas said. “Who invited you into this conversation?”

“Dude,” Roberto answered. “It’s a free country, and I didn’t know I needed one.”

“Well you do,” said Tomas, shaking his head. “Go back in your cave.” He shook his head. “Roberto’s very immature,” he said to me. “Sometimes it’s better

not to humor him.” He reached up to the spotlight over his seat. “You mind if I turn this off?”

“Go ahead,” I said.

“That way, maybe he’ll get the message.” He turned off his light, leaned his head back against the seat and closed his eyes. My light was still on and I tried to read. “Ivy and her mother-in-law were not speaking, on account of one thing or another.” It was the same line I had tried to read before. But it was no use. I couldn’t concentrate. Giving up, I flicked off my light as well. A few minutes later I felt Tomas’ head on my shoulder. I opened my eyes to look at him, expecting to see him asleep, with his head tilt just an accident, but his eyes were open. “Is it okay?” he whispered.

“I think so,” I whispered back.

“Good,” he said.

I fell asleep myself shortly after that, although given how excited I was, I hadn’t expected to, and in what seemed like no time, the sun was up and the mileage sign on the shoulder of the highway read “Santa Fe fifteen miles.” Father Guzman came down the aisle passing out sticks of cinnamon gum, saying “Morning breath” in the same intonation I could imagine him saying “Body of Christ.” Half an hour later we unloaded in front of the state capitol. All thirty four of us climbed off the bus and shuffled, tired and cold, into one of the ante chambers where there was a breakfast laid out on a bank of white cloth-covered tables. Croissants and muffins; blueberry, bran, lemon-poppy seed, bagels of every persuasion. Trays piled high with slices of cantaloupe and honey dew melon, wedges of pineapple and a sprinkling of

blueberries, raspberries, and grapes. In the center of each table--there were three-- was a grouping of elegant silver coffee pots that looked like Russian samovars.

“Who’s this for?” Tomas leaned over to ask me.

“I think it's for us,” I said.

“No way,” he said. “We must be in the wrong room.”

“They said they were going to serve us breakfast.”

“But this?” Tomas was not alone in his doubt. No one from the bus had taken even the smallest step closer to the richly laden tables. We were all still huddled in the corner by the door. White linen? Silver coffee service? This was the food of the gods, or at least Santa Fe’s politicians. Despite the obvious—we had been led into the room by a legislative page—we did not believe. Even after coach Jabo said, “Come on kids. What are you waiting for? Eat up.” Even after he filled up a plate for himself, piling it high with fruit and muffins and pouring himself a cup of steaming, fragrant coffee, even after John Gonzales, the senior class president, tentatively picked up a piece of cantaloupe with the nearby tongs and even after Mrs. Amador, the volunteer chaperon from Memorial Medical Center, picked up one of the small white breakfast plates from the stack where it waited and placed upon it a bagel and a square of foil wrapped cream cheese, still we hung back.

“I think it’s okay,” I said to Tomas. “I mean to have some. At least let’s look.” I walked over to the table and waved at Tomas to join me. “Try something.”

“Na, I’m not that hungry.”

“Come on.”

“Na, nothing looks good.”

“Not even the muffins?”

“Nope. There’s no tortillas, no *frijoles*. Too fancy for me. But you go ahead. If you want.”

“That’s all right,” I said, “I’m not that hungry either.” I joined him back at the door and together we walked over to some chairs that had been taken from their stacks against the wall. We sat down on the blue upholstered seats to wait until they called us to the legislative session. At the time I didn’t really understand why Tomas and the other Las Cruces kids didn’t want to eat any of the food. I hadn’t joined in Tomas’ boycott out of any sense of political or even emotional solidarity. I just wanted him to like me. If he wasn’t going to eat, then I wasn’t going to eat. If he had helped himself I would have too. It was just that simple. I wanted to connect with him, to show him that we were alike. But years later I saw something that made me think of that uneaten breakfast in Santa Fe and to understand it in a different way.

I was on an airplane, one of those heavily booked flights where they don’t assign seats and everyone comes in wheeling black overnight cases that take up an entire overhead bin. We’d been loading steadily for half an hour and every aisle and window seat and every bin in the front of the plane was taken. Seconds before the flight crew closed the doors, a black man walked into the airplane. He was wearing a raincoat over his business suit and he had a wool hat on his head. As he walked down the aisle, the few people in rows with middle seats open turned away. It wasn’t personal (their body language seemed to suggest). Rather, they simply didn’t want anyone sitting next to them. They wanted the room. When the man had made his

way about halfway down the length of the plane, he chose the a middle seat between a large woman at the window and a large man in the aisle seat who appeared to be related. He sloughed off the raincoat, folded it, put it down on the seat and then started opening the overhead bins, looking for a place to put his hat. One after another he opened the bins. Three, four, five. Each was fuller than the one before. Nobody from the staff came to assist him and in a few moments the murmuring of some of the passengers around me indicated that the man's failure to find a bin for his belongings had earned their attention. But that attention did not become cause for humiliation until the man opened his seventh or eighth bin; this one much smaller than the rest, with a red latch instead of the standard aluminum one. With the door of the bin fully raised I could see that the storage area held a fire extinguisher and a bottle of oxygen, and that there was only the smallest amount of room where someone might squeeze something in, if they had searched and failed to find another solution.

The man lifted his hat off his head. Behind me, someone chuckled, the sound far more like a "guwalf" than a laugh. Its nature far more like a "laughing at you," than a "laughing with you." It was a nice hat. Gray checked wool. Fedora style. The man squeezed the hat slightly so that he could work it into the space between the fire extinguisher and the oxygen canister. He slipped the hat in, but before he could close the door the hat popped back out and fell onto the floor. This was too much for the fellow in the seat behind me and he laughed out loud. The guy sitting next to him must have joined in too, because although I did not turn to see, I clearly heard two people. The black man retrieved his hat from where it had fallen on the floor and

tried to reposition it inside the compartment. Again it popped out, but this time he was wiser and he caught the hat as it fell, but not before four or five people in the airplane joined in the laughter at his lack of success, as if he had been put there for their amusement, a man in black face, unlearned about flying and so deserving of their amused contempt instead of their help.

The man turned toward the laughter and smiled. It was an embarrassed smile. A “Yes, this feels pretty stupid to me too” smile. A “But what am I supposed to do? I need someplace to put my hat” smile. An “I’m dying inside” smile. He tried a third time to put his hat inside the bin, and finally was able to snap the door shut before it jumped back out at him. At last he sat down, removing himself as the other from the stage.

I didn't know that morning in Santa Fe that it was the same kind of humiliation Tomas was avoiding (or that he even knew to avoid it) by refusing the banquet laden with foods his mother never served and his family could not afford. The croissants and bagels and fancy baked muffins, the melon and pineapple that never graced any table he had ever seen before, and cost as much per pound as steak, the coffee from an elegant service that would have looked more at home on a southern plantation, the overabundance and the certainty of waste. The breakfast spoke too loudly of our otherness and Tomas understood that, even though I didn't.

For the rest of the Santa Fe trip Tomas and I stuck together. I waited for him in the restaurant of the Hotel La Fonda while he and Missy Johnson, another girl from our school, met with the governor along with a bunch of VIP's and legislators in for

Las Cruces Day. I walked with him into the big Catholic church on the square, stood next to him while he bowed his head and bent his knees before the crucifix at the altar, lit the match for him after he bought a votive candle for his grandmother (his hands were shaking too much for him to do it himself,) helped him pick out a bolero for his father and a bird fetish for his mother, suggested a havelena fetish for Lupe and told him I was sure she'd love the turtle pendant he finally chose for her. At the curios store I lost track of him in the room that housed Navajo rugs. One minute he was standing by me, the next he was gone. I started scouring the store looking for him. It was a warren with room after room, each devoted to some aspect of Mexican or Southwestern crafts. In the *Dia de Muerto* room I caught up with him. Or rather, he caught up with me, barging out of a rack of clothes with a black cape over his shoulders and a skeleton mask over his head. I screamed. My heart felt like it really did stop. He pulled the mask off his face and started laughing. "You're white as a sheet," he said, full of glee. "I can't believe I scared you."

"I have to sit down," I said. There was a chair in the corner. "Why did you do that?"

"It's funny," he said. "Come on. Lighten up. Don't be so serious." He handed me the mask. "Here. Try it on. You can scare me."

"Okay," I said. I put the mask over my head. "Boo."

"Oh help, help."

I took the mask off. "It doesn't work without the element of surprise," I said.

"I know," he said. "But you'll think of something."

After that it crossed my mind that Tomas and I weren't really on the same wave length after all. We were having fun. But it was more like buddy fun and even though I wasn't thinking of him in any way as a brother it occurred to me that he might easily be thinking of me like a sister, which definitely meant he was not thinking of me as a girlfriend and that when we got back to Las Cruces, everything would return to the way it had been and we would be strangers again, our thirty-six hours together nothing but a dream. He would pass me in the halls without saying hello, ignore me in the cafeteria, choose a Mexican girl to take to the next school dance, and I head-over-heels for him, forever, would be the one stuck with remembering what he said, how he looked, who he was, destined to spend the rest of my life miserable. But he surprised me.

That night after dinner, we walked down the hallway of the hotel together to our rooms, he to the one he was sharing with Roberto, and I to the one I was sharing with Missy Johnson, who I was sure would keep me up all night describing in great detail everything the governor of the State of New Mexico had to say. She loved the governor. She thought he should be president, swearing that he'd be better than Roosevelt, or Kennedy or Nixon or Bush or any of them before or since. Personally, I thought he was a bum, but that was just New Mexico politics.

Tomas' room was closer to the elevator than mine, so we passed his first. I stuck out my hand. "Good night then," I said. "Sleep well."

"Good night?" he said, a question in his voice. "I thought you might come in."

"To your room?"

“I wanted to take another look at the presents. Do you want to see them?”

“I was there when you bought them.” He couldn’t really be inviting me to come into his room at night. Could he?

“I know. But...come in anyway. We can look at them again.”

When he opened the door the room was dark. Roberto hadn’t come back from dinner or more likely from the arcade room, where he was probably wasting quarters on games he could never win. Tomas turned on the light and sat down on the double bed closest to the window. The room was warm, almost hot, and for the first time I realized how cold I’d been all day. We’d left Las Cruces in a nighttime weather of sixty degrees, fifteen degrees cooler than the daytime high. In Santa Fe it was thirty and that morning snow flurries had danced around my nose.

“Feels good in here,” I said.

“I came up before dinner and turned on the heat,” he said. “I can’t stand the cold weather. It thins my blood.” He patted a spot next to him on the bed. “Come and sit. I’ll show you my riches.”

“I’ve already seen them.”

“Not everything.”

“Really?”

“Yes really, Miss Miya Clare. You may, like your name says, be clear about many things, but not everything.”

“Oh,” I said. “I know. You bought something else when you were playing with the skeletons?”

“Maybe yes. Maybe no.”

“Let me see,” I said, all bravado. “Show me.” But I felt nervous. What if he had bought me a present? He was acting like he had, but if it was true, what would I do? How would I react? Would I keep it together? Or would I go into my blathering idiot imitation like I had done on the bus? And then suddenly I was disgusted with myself for even thinking that way. Boys like Tomas didn’t get girls they just met presents. That only happened in Hollywood movies. In romance novels. In Disney cartoons and in the childish stories I used to fantasize about when I was playing horses with Yolanda, and in that case, who was I fooling except myself?

“Come and sit,” he said, patting the bed beside him. I sat down next to him and he handed me a small turquoise-colored box. “Here,” he said. “I bet you haven’t seen this one.”

“What is it?” I asked.

“Open it,” he said.

“You open it,” I said, stalling.

“I’m not going to open it,” he said. “It’s for you.”

But I was afraid. What if it was something wonderful? What if it was something I hated? Like an enamel-painted pin with the New Mexico Zia on it, or a plastic key chain with something like the “Fifty Seventh Annual Las Cruces Day” written inside? “It’s okay,” he said. “I promise. If you open it, it won’t bite you.”

I opened it. Inside, lying in a bed of cotton was a silver bracelet. A simple round bar, plain and unornamented, three quarters of an ellipse. Thick as a pencil. I lifted the bracelet out of the box. Tomas took it from my hand and put it around my wrist. He had to do it carefully, twisting one end up and the other down over the

narrow bone. He leaned over, once he was done, pushing the hair away from my neck with his face. “Do you like it?” he whispered.

“Yes,” I said, barely audible, afraid to speak too loud, that if I did I’d wake up and be eleven years old again, playing horses with Yolanda .

“Let me see,” he said, taking my hand. “It looks good on you.” I could feel his breath on my skin, warm and humid. I could hear him inhale, and I felt my own chest rise along with his as he drew breath in. “I wanted you to like it,” he said, reaching over. One of his hands found my shoulder, he pulled me close and kissed me, slipping his tongue into my mouth. It tasted like oranges. I had never been kissed that way and I hadn’t known tongues had a taste. Actually, since I had never had a boyfriend, I had never been kissed in any way, by any boy at all. For a moment that startled me, as I stopped to consider my options, and then suddenly I stopped considering anything and my tongue was touching his and I kissed him back. I reached my arms around him and I could smell cinnamon. The white fragrance of laundry soap. The scent of pine trees that covered the mountains outside the window. I started feeling lightheaded and aware of the heat building up in my face, hot and flush, the way it did when I had to run a mile in eight minutes or less in order to pass the test in health class.

“You are so beautiful,” Tomas said. “Do you know that? Do you know that you are so, so beautiful?” He pressed his body against me and I could feel each of his ribs, the soft space of his stomach against mine, then something surprisingly hard against my leg. At first I didn’t know what it was. I thought that he must have had his keys in his pocket and they were pressing uncomfortably against me. I almost

said something, like “Can you move your keys,” before I realized exactly what it was that I was feeling. And then embarrassed for him and for myself, I shifted slightly so I wouldn’t have to ask him to move. As I did, he sat up and started unbuttoning my blouse, kissing my lips with each button he loosened. “Is this all right?” he asked.

I nodded, afraid to speak, afraid that my voice would be the frog-croak that would break the spell. “May I take off my shirt?” he asked. Yes, I nodded again. He pulled his shirt over his head. His chest and shoulders and stomach were beautiful. Light brown, the color of pecans. I could see the press of each of the muscles in his stomach, like an upside-down ridge working its way up from belly to chest. “Hang on,” he said, and he went over to the door and hooked the chain lock. He came back over to the bed and reached down for the button of my jeans and that is when I stopped him, putting my hand over his and then lifting both our hands away from my pants and up to my stomach.

“What?” he said, reaching down for my button again.

“I can’t.”

“Just a touch,” he said. “I won’t do anything but touch.”

“No,” I said, pushing his hand away. “I can’t.”

“Why not?” he said. “Don’t you know how I feel?” He reached down again.

“How hot I am for you?”

“I guess,” I said, lifting his hand away for the second time and shifting my body so that I was not in such easy reach. But of course I didn’t know how he was feeling. Not really. Except in theory. Maybe.

“Okay,” he said, sitting up. “If that’s what you want.” I sat up too, and feeling suddenly naked with my blouse unbuttoned all the way down. I pulled one of the pillows out from under the bed spread and held it up to my chest.

“I thought you wanted to,” said Tomas.

“I wanted to do what we were doing,” I said.

“That’s what we were doing. I was touching you and you were touching me.”

“We were kissing, and then you started touching. You’re the one who wanted that.”

“Of course. I would touch you everywhere. With every part of me. With my eyes. With my hands. With everything.”

“I want to go slow,” I said.

“I thought you liked me,” he said

“I do like you,” I said.

“But then why? Why won’t you let me touch you there?”

I shook my head.

“Are you afraid?” he asked. “Afraid I would hurt you? Because that’s crazy. I would never hurt you.”

“But you will,” I wanted to say. If we went further, or if we didn’t. One way or another. And you already have. By the tone of your voice. By the closed-up quality of your face. By the anger and injury that so quickly replaced the thick soft warmth of only minutes ago. And that fast, I knew he and I were over. I had said “No,” and with a single word, my first relationship with my first boyfriend was over in less than a day, finished before it even started. At that moment I hated being me

and I hated the idea that Tomas would step out of my life as powerfully and quickly as he had come in. “You would hurt me,” I said.

“No,” he said. “I won’t. I’m not like that.”

“You will,” I said. “You can’t help it.”

“God bless it,” he said, and stood up. “This is such bull-shit. You think just you let me be with you, I don’t respect you?” He stopped. “Oh, never mind,” he said, and reached for his shirt and pulled it over his head.

“See,” I said. “I was right. It didn’t even take a minute. You said you weren’t going to hurt me, than why are you now?”

“I’m not hurting you,” he said, pushing his arms through the sleeves. “How am I hurting you? I’m doing what you asked.”

“You’re making me miserable,” I said. “Putting on your shirt. Walking away because I said wait.” The tears rushed up so quickly then, that they took me as much by surprise as they took him. “One minute we’re kissing,” I said, “and you’re making me feel better than I’ve ever felt in my whole life, like I was in heaven, like I had the body of an angel, like I was being loved by an angel, and the next minute you’re saying ‘I don’t understand you,’ just because I wouldn’t let you put your hand down my pants.” I was in full born crying fit by now. “You’re hurting me so much, I just want to crawl up and die.”

“Stop,” he said. Don’t cry.” He sat down next to me and put his arms around me pulling me to his chest. My tears fell onto the clean white cotton of his t-shirt.

“Miya, please.” He kissed my cheek just below my right eye. “I’m sorry,” he said.

“I’m sorry. I promise. You are right. You don’t deserve this. And I can do better.”

He pulled me toward him as he lay down with his back against the pillows. “Come here,” he said, reaching me closer. I lay my head down on his chest. “Forgive me all right? Okay?”

“Okay,” I said. I closed my eyes. We must have both fallen asleep like that, because Roberto woke us up when he let himself in the room later that night.

Tomas and I dated all through high school, and then during his first year as a student at the University of New Mexico, in Albuquerque, while I finished my senior year. We stuck it out as a couple, through weekend visits and long drives home on Sunday night, through holiday vacations, Thanksgiving, Christmas and spring break, through the anger and criticism of his family for dating a *vuela*, a light-skinned girl, through Sunday afternoon dinners in which his mother would express her part in that anger by slipping *habanero* peppers into my chili Colorado, and his brothers would express theirs by laughing at me when I turned red, mouth open and teary-eyed, unable to do anything to cut the heat. “Oh, too hot for you?” his mother would say. “Well here, drink some water, chew on some bread. It will put out the fire. Better learn to like hot food though, if you want to get along in this family. No mild peppers for us. We crave the heat.” At first I didn’t know why I was the only one having problems. I believed it was my tongue, not her food. But after the third time it happened Tomas leaned over and speared a piece of meat from my plate with his fork. He bit into it, and quickly spit out the half-chewed bit into his napkin as his face turned bright red like mine. “*Jesu Christi*, that’s hot,” he said. “What did you do to it?”

“Don’t talk to your mother that way,” his father said. “And don’t swear at this table.”

“With all due respect,” Tomas said, “you should taste her food.” He stood up, wrapped his hand around my arm, and pulled me to my feet to. “We’re out of here.” As we left the house I heard his father yelling.

“*Por qué usted hizo eso?*” he said. “Why did you do that?”

“*Deseé hacerla fuerte,*” she answered as Tomas and I closed the door behind us. “It’s not my fault that it’s strong.”

We stayed together, Tomas and I, through Yollie’s speeches to me that I was “colonizing him,” treating him the way white slave owners and imperialists have always treated people of color, and through her lectures to him, that he told me about later, in which she accused him of being a traitor to his race. “You think white is the most attractive,” she said to him once. “You fall for a white woman because you believe that only white is beautiful and the more white the better. That’s why you’ve picked a blond.”

“How can you talk that way about your best friend?” Tomas had asked her.

“I’m not involved with her sexually,” Yollie answered. “And that makes all the difference. I’m not saying that you can’t be friends with a white person,” she added. “I’m just asking you why, of all the beautiful brown women around here, a blue-eyed blond is the one you fall in love with?”

We stayed together despite Lupe's determination to fix Tomas up with girls she knew: Ascension Lara, Maria Elena Espinosa, Martina Flores, cheerleaders like Irma Montes and even tough street chicks like Silvia Navarette. She would invite them to a sleep over on Friday night and then call Tomas on Saturday morning, and ask him to deliver a plate of his mother's tamales for breakfast. "You're totally transparent, Lupe," he would tell her. "I know what you're trying to do."

"Then why do you come?" Lupe asked. "No one is forcing you."

I had the same question.

"She's my cousin," he said. "My mother would not be happy if I said no."

We stayed together through the ribbing of his friends who would say provocative things in Spanish, "*Ella no es bastante buena para usted, hombre,*" despite knowing I could usually understand most of what they said. And we stayed together through Father Guzman's attempt to convert me to Catholicism. "Tomas is part of a long chain that can trace its Catholic roots through Spain and Rome to the first days of Christ," he explained to me over a late Sunday-after-church-breakfast of eggs and *chicarones*, that he and Tomas and I were enjoying at *La Ristra Restaurante*. "His family is counting on him as their only college-bound son to be a spiritual leader as well as a role model to the rest."

"I can be a role model and a leader," Tomas answered him, "with Miya at my side."

“Only if she’s willing to join us in Holy Communion,” Father Guzman answered.

“I’ll have to think about it,” I said.

My parents, when I told them, were not excited. “We’re Episcopalian, Miya,” my mother said. “And I hope that’s all that needs to be said.”

In fact, it wasn’t the outside pressures of the world that ended our relationship. And it wasn’t Tomas, who despite my early prediction, stayed true to his promise not to hurt me. What broke us apart was me, and not because I stopped loving Tomas, although I guess I didn’t love him enough because I didn’t want to stay in New Mexico or go to UNM. I wanted to go to UM, the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, back to the state where I was born. I was looking for something even then, something in myself that I wanted to recover, and that I believed I would never find if I stayed. “But you don’t need to go to Michigan,” said Tomas when I told him what I was thinking. “There’s nothing there for you there that you can’t find here.”

“Yes there is, and yes I do,” I said.

“I’m telling you, Miya,” he said. “That’s crazy. Listen to me. I know what I’m saying. They don’t have anything there in Michigan that you need that you won’t find here, if you just give it a chance. I promise you,” he said. “I’ve been to school. I know. You haven’t. You don’t.”

“The University of Michigan has the best professors in the world. Leaders in their field.”

“They have professors like that in Albuquerque,” he said. “Lots of them.”

“Name me one,” I said. He couldn’t. There were none to name.

“What if I just asked you not to go?” he asked, after I told him I’d been accepted.

“Don’t,” I said.

“If you go it will change everything,” he said. “Between us. It will.”

“It doesn’t have to,” I said, refusing to recognize the obvious. “I don’t see why. It’s not like we aren’t already living in two different places.”

“Excuse me,” he said. “But Albuquerque is 240 miles from Las Cruces. That’s four hours away from here. How far is Ann Arbor?”

“I don’t know.”

“Then maybe you better find out?” he said. “Because it’s a lot further than that. And then once you do, come back and tell me what you really want to do and if you decide you’re going there then fine. Go. We can just say good-bye. Since that’s what you want.”

“Don’t be that way,” I said.

“What way?” he asked.

“Don’t cut me off.”

“You’re the one cutting me off,” he said. “You’re the one who is leaving.”

“Why are you making this so hard? Why are you acting like there’s something wrong with me?” I said. “Like this is all my fault? You always knew I wanted to go away to college. So why are you fighting me?”

“If you didn’t want to break up, you wouldn’t go,” he said.

“I’m going,” I said, “but I’m not leaving.”

“What’s the difference?”

“Well, I’m not leaving you.”

“Then what do you call it?”

I had no answer for him then. Nor did I have an answer later.

Makeba's Testimony

I could see her in the customs line, all rumpled and sleepy, looking just like someone who had traveled for twenty-six hours, which of course she had. I waved at her and when she saw me, she smiled and waved back. When she was through, I came over to her and gave her a warm hug. Although I had never seen her before, she was somehow exactly as I had imagined she would be. "I am so pleased to see you," I told her. "We are all so happy that you have come." I saw then that she had the letter in her hand, that I had sent her asking her to come and join us in our efforts, and help create a new democracy.

"I read it on the plane," she said, when she saw me looking. "To remind me of why I was coming here."

I have heard some say that Miya was foolish to come to Oneg Kempo, that she was naïve about the ways of the world. But if they are correct, then I am naïve and foolish too. For I believe as she did. But doesn't it seem now like we were right, Miya and I? How else do you explain our coming together today, in front of this commission? That would never have come about in Oneg Kempo before. How else do you explain why we can finally talk about what happened here? Our history? Our past? Tell the truth to each other? Try, together, to find reconciliation? Miya came to our country to help bring freedom to our people—to all of us, white and black—

and we have made great strides. That is no small thing, although that is probably a discussion for another time.

So, I met Miya at the airport. We collected all of her belongings and climbed into the clinic's little green Opal and drove out of the airport toward the city. As I drove, we made conversation, the way people do when they don't know each other well, but find themselves brought together in close circumstances. I described our work at the clinic to her, and told her how, by providing health care we were able to gain the people's trust. I talked about the elections, how, as we were getting close, the climate of change was bringing out the best in people, and the worst. I asked about the health and well being of our mutual acquaintance, Dr. Peter Baylor, whom she and I both knew from the University of Michigan. Dr. Baylor, of course, is the colleague who put Miya in touch with me. I had sent him correspondence about our need for volunteers and he had suggested Miya and helped with the arrangements to bring her here. He is a true supporter of our efforts.

About five miles from the airport, on Chamber's Highway, I saw that the National Police had set up a roadblock. That was quite a surprise to me, because it had not been there on my drive in to pick Miya up, and nor, judging by the small number of cars in line, it had not been there for long. You can't help but get a sense of these things after being involved in political struggle for some time, and this roadblock felt strange to me, as if its purpose there was suspect. It crossed my mind at the time, and I still believe it to be true, that its only purpose was to intimidate. What other means would it serve? Now for someone like me, who has put up with far more, such a show of power is wasted. But for a young woman from America, like

Miya Clare, whose only knowledge of real world struggle might be limited to what she learned from books or studied in class, or read in the newspapers and magazines, a roadblock such as the one we came across could be very frightening. Perhaps the thinking might have gone that it would even cause her to question her choices, to ask herself why she really came to Oneg Kempo, and if the risk was worth it. It might make her want to say, “Makeba, I am sorry. I think I had better change my mind about being here. I do not need that kind of trouble in my life.” And if she had said that, I would not have thought badly of her. In fact, I might even expect it in a person of her youth. Still, if someone had asked me, I would have told them not to bother with such a roadblock if that was their goal. But then perhaps the purpose was not to scare her off, but to merely to let her know who it was who was really in charge, and to create an opportunity for them to ask their bold question. “Who did she think she was, coming to Oneg Kempo, and to tell anyone what to do?” That sort of business. And if that was the case, then I had to be careful. We both did, because there was no way to tell how far they would go. So I cautioned her.

“It’s probably nothing, this barricade,” I said, as I slowed down. “The National Police are putting them up all the time now, for no good reason except harassment. They say they are doing it in order to keep the troublemakers out of the election process. But I think it is simply to intimidate. With all that, though,” I told her, “it is probably best not to mention that you are here to help with the elections, unless they bring it up first and specifically ask you. Better just to tell them that you have come to work with my organization at the clinic, which is where you will be headquartered after all.”

“But don’t they already know why I’m here?” she asked me. “It’s right on my visa application.”

“Yes, they do know,” I said. “At least officially. Which may be why they have placed this roadblock here, if they even did it on our behalf. But because life has become quite complicated in Oneg Kempo everything is a strategy, and since I cannot be sure of theirs, I have found that the simpler our response, the better. Saying you are working at the clinic is something the officer who stops us to look at our papers will easily understand. He will be less likely then to feel the need to keep us here while he checks with his superiors.” What I did not mention at the time, but what had also crossed my mind was that if they decided to hold us, they could keep us in detention for a week before the law required our release. And that would have been very unfortunate. I took her hand. “Don’t worry,” I said. “I’m probably being over cautious. But in Oneg Kempo caution is never a bad choice.”

The car in front of us passed through and then it was our turn. A guard tapped on the window for our papers. Miya handed him her passport and I gave him my resident documents, which he handed back immediately. Perhaps he did not recognize my name. Or perhaps he had been told to purposely ignore me. I will never know. But he opened Miya’s passport and examined each page carefully as if it might contain some hidden secret that only he could discern. Of course there was nothing there to find. No one from the United States travels to Oneg Kempo if seventeen different agencies on both sides of the border don’t give their approval, and we had cleared Miya’s arrival through every one. It was a game that he was playing. A last gasp of the powerful, a last chance to say “We, we are still in charge.” This I

knew, and this Miya knew and this was known too, by whoever ordered the roadblock as well. And yet in Oneg Kempo, at the time, every move and every action was calculated. This one? Perhaps it was simply to cause my blood pressure to go up and to compromise my health, which it did, despite my best effort and my doctor's warning to keep it under control, although I do not think that even the most cunning in Gloucher's cabinet would have thought of that. But that was not my worry. No, it was the guard himself that I was worried about, because who knows what a country boy in a uniform, with a gun over his shoulder, might decide he doesn't like? Who knows what he might do at a makeshift barricade, far away from headquarters, when faced with a car in which sit a black woman who is a well-known political organizer, and a young volunteer from the United States? I held my breath until he finally spoke, but then had to bite my tongue not to answer his bile. "Never been here before, Miss Clare?" he asked. "Never been to the dark continent?" And other than mine, those were the first words Miya heard in Oneg Kempo.

"No," she answered, totally aware I am sure, of how hateful his remark sounded, and how hateful it was guaranteed to make both of us feel. "This is the first time."

He closed the passport and lowered his head into the window. "So what brings you here then?" he asked, purposely knocking his knuckles against the Red Cross decal on the window as if it were a target instead of a symbol of neutrality and life. "You a health care worker? Or are you here with other purposes?"

"What other purposes might that be?" I said to him, since I already had my papers back.

“Are you here to make trouble?” he said, speaking to Miya. “Stir up the blacks? Get out the vote? Make poor little Oneg Kempo over in your spitting image? You Americans. The whole lot of you. Most arrogant people the world has ever known.” He held her passport up, waving it back and forth in front of his face, as if he was going to hand it to her but had changed his mind. And if it hadn’t been so terribly ugly and awful, I might have started to laugh. A government soldier sounding like a Maoist revolutionary, giving a critique of American hegemony. What is that strange TV program the Americans love so? Black and white. Ah, I have it. *The Twilight Zone*. That’s what it was. I wasn’t sitting in a car in Oneg Kempo. I was in the Twilight Zone. “Well?” the guard said, when Miya still hadn’t answered.

She spoke up then, like the strong young woman she was, telling him that she would be volunteering at the clinic and studying our system of public health, as we agreed, and assuring him that she was not here to make trouble, and that seemed to satisfy him. He gave her back her passport. “Okay then,” he said. “You go ahead and look at our health system, little girl. Best in the world. Doctors take care of everybody here, you know. Not like in your country, where you just let the darker races die.” He backed away from the car, Miya rolled up the window, and I put my foot slowly but firmly on the gas.

Neither of us talked for a minute, letting the red cones and guards disappear in the rear view mirror. When we were far enough away that it felt safe to speak, Miya said “Oh God, That was awful.”

“Yes it was,” I said. “But you handled yourself properly.”

“It’s one thing to read about it or hear people talk about it,” she said. “But experiencing it for yourself. I couldn’t have even imagined.”

“I know,” I said, and I squeezed her hand, wishing that hadn’t been her official welcome to Oneg Kempo. “It is always a revelation when you see oppression like that for yourself.”

We did not say much after that. I think neither of us was in the mood for conversation, and I drove into the city, to the house of one of my nurses, Betty Niketia, where Miya was to stay. I had thought at one time about having Miya live at the university, in one of the guest cottages they have for students, or at the youth hostel near-by, but I had decided against either, thinking she would be safer and perhaps more comfortable if she stayed with a local family, and Betty had volunteered. She was waiting on the porch with her two sisters when we arrived, and after helping Miya get settled I said goodbye and left her in Betty’s capable hands with a promise that I would see her the next day. But, as I mentioned, it was a busy time.

While I had planned to be available to be Miya’s mentor, by then everything was moving too quickly. The elections that had once seemed impossible were suddenly just months away and there was much to prepare. More and more each day. Policy to review, orders to respond to, election documents to print, the slate of candidates to settle on, the party platform to write. And still, we needed to run the clinic, carry on our outreach, register voters. And if that were not enough, our coalition had begun to come apart. Always tenuous to begin with, suddenly it seemed that we were at each other’s throats. ASOKY, PNC, AZN, my National Woman’s

Movement, all juggling for position and power. One day I would learn that a member of my organization had been beaten while trying to mobilize support for our candidates, and the next day I would hear that a colleague who had been with me for months or even years, had worn our badge in the morning and then left us to join the PNC in the afternoon. Almost daily it seemed that supporters were being arrested, or their papers were declared invalid. It seemed that we went from a stable and healthy to a body under duress. And I was at the center, desperate to hold it all together. And then, as if that was not enough, I began to hear rumors of my name being on a death list, as well as there being a movement among some in the government to arrest me and put me on trial. I did not believe any of it. “Too blatant,” I said. “It will attract too much attention.” Still, I was fearful. It would have been so easy to detain me for a few days or a few weeks, until it was too late.

For this reason as well as others, I was not able to spend the time I had planned to with Miya. I barely had an opportunity to introduce her to the other international volunteers, like Olga and Michael. But still, I considered Miya’s presence a blessing. Although she brought no cameras or reporters with her, I believed the fact that an American woman was involved in our organization would bring us credibility and neutralize some of the danger. If anything were to happen to her, I believed, the whole world would turn their eyes on us, and so with her here we all felt safer. Also, how wonderful to have someone with us who had lived under democracy, imperfect as it might be. A living, breathing representative of the country that founded democratic rule, in our midst? So Miya coming to be with us, was a true gift.

And then, you should have seen her at work. She was a true marvel. Brave and kind. And I loved her for it. We all did. Every morning, for the two weeks she was here, she came to the clinic, riding the bus with Betty, and she set up her table in the hallway, and made herself available to the women who came to the clinic for medical care. If they didn't know they were allowed to vote, she explained to them that they were. If they didn't know how to read a ballot, she read it to them. If they said they were not sure if their single vote would make a difference, she convinced them that it would. It was quite something to watch what went on between the women who came to the clinic and Miya. It could do nothing but touch your heart. From time to time someone would get up, perhaps because she was bored, or she needed to move her legs, or she was simply curious about the American woman in the hallway. She would walk over to Miya's table and talk with her for a moment or two, filling out the paperwork that Miya had, asking questions, reading pamphlets, or having Miya read them to her. After some time had passed the woman would go back to the waiting room and sit down. Soon I would see that woman talking to the one sitting next to her, and then the second woman would get up too, and walk over to Miya's table and talk to her. After that she too would come back with a receipt and talk to the next woman, and after that another, and another until almost everyone who had come to the clinic that day had a registration slip in her hand, and many had smiles on their faces, talking up this and that, about how they would have their part in changing the world. At the time, it made me smile. Today, it makes me want to weep.

So. What else?

You have heard. And the rest you know. She came to be with us and she became one of us, one of our own. And then we lost her.

Yes. It is true.

We did.

But she will always be a part of our history. Her blood was spilled in the founding of this nation. We will not forget.

Would we be here without her? Could we have done it? If she had not joined us? If she had stayed home? Safe? In the country of her birth?

You already know the answer to that. We would have done it no matter what. It was the future we required. So yes. Of course. There is no question. We are, all of us, dispensable.

Did we need her? Yes of course. Every voice, every passion, ever dream and every person willing to give life to the dream is needed, needed always.

Was her sacrifice in vain? Do you ask me that?

Then hear my answer.

Only for those with no heart. Only for those with no memory.

The Gradual Shifting of Tectonic Plates

My mother stayed in Las Cruces, watching over Leslie and Angela and the store, while my father drove me to Ann Arbor in the first brand-new car my family had ever owned, a bright new silver Cherokee he bought at Sisbarro Jeep Eagle. We drove north on Highway 25, and then east, over US 80, retracing the path we had taken eight years before, spending most of the seemingly endless hours on the road talking about my life, my sisters, whether Tomas and I would continue to see each other, about my father's hopes of buying a second store in the new Hilton hotel they were building out at the Northwest edge of the city, his memories of college, how he and my mother met when they were both working at the bookstore at Michigan State, why I was going to a rival college instead of his alma mater and how proud of me he was for growing up and being such a good kid.

We stayed at a Motel 6 in Lincoln, Nebraska and a Holiday Inn in Gary, Indiana. We ate at Denny's and Stucky's and as we traveled east I felt like I was returning to America from a long visit in another country. My father had made a joke when we left Colorado. "Let's put a tortilla on our windshield," he said, "And then keep driving until someone asks us what it is. Once that happens we'll know we're in the Midwest." I laughed along with him although I wasn't so sure it was funny, and of course we did not put any Mexican food on our window. It would have just made a mess before being blown off by the wind.

We arrived in Ann Arbor after three days on the road, in the afternoon, pulling up to the brick-and-ivy covered Sylvia Burke Davis Women's Dormitory as the sun cast long stippled shadows through the trees, and sunlight reflected off the stained-glass windows on the first floor, spreading prisms of color, red, green and yellow, on the sidewalks in front of the building. My room was on the third floor of the dorm, where the windows were still leaded, but made of transparent glass. It was a large room, larger than my bedroom at home, with high ceilings and wood floors, finished with deeply varnished molding and window casements. There were two plain single beds, two desks and two dressers made of real wood, birch I thought. Or oak. A steam radiator—the kind that I hadn't seen since I left Michigan—sat imposing and unused along one of the walls. I walked over to it, reaching out to touch its painted iron coils. I had not seen a radiator like that since I was a child, and was amazed to realize that I had completely forgotten such an object had even existed. “Do you remember these?” I asked my father.

“Of course I do,” he said. “They're in every house in Michigan. Including the one you grew up in.”

“I know,” I said. “But I haven't seen one, or actually even thought about one of these, in forever. Seeing it today, it makes me feel like I'm falling through time.”

“I know what you mean,” he said, and he walked over and put his arm around my shoulders. “Odd, isn't it, the way the things you forget have so much power over you once you remember them?”

Later, after we pushed my mostly still-packed suitcases into the closet to get them out of the way and after he helped me make my bed, pulling the sheets tight and

covering them with my mother's favorite Hudson blanket--blond with three stripes of bold color at the foot--my father and I took a short driving tour of Ann Arbor. The college town that I had never seen before reminded me of Grand Rapids. Once again I felt like I was falling backwards, with that same weird sense of displacement in time and history I had felt earlier in the day. Everything reminded me of the life I had left so long ago, the street lawns separating the flint sidewalks from the road, the grand and stately trees still mostly green with barely a hint of yellow and orange in their deep internal leaves, the houses of brick or wood, narrow and tall, the front porches with their white or gray fences, the red fire hydrants, the parks every few blocks with steel swing sets reaching toward the sky and old fashioned slides stretching back towards the ground, the storefronts on State Street with their tall glass fronts and brick facades. At the corner of Main and First where we were stopped for a red light, I opened the window to let the cool air rush inside. Goose bumps rose up on my skin. "I feel cold," I said, happy for the sensation. "I feel winter."

"Winter?" said my father. "What are you talking about, winter? This is nothing. Miya, do you remember what winter's really like Michigan? Snow? Below zero? Wind chill?"

I didn't remember, but I had the sensation of looking both back and forward to something, as if the cold he promised would wake me like some fairytale princess, from an eight year sleep. "I don't know," I said, closing the window, too taken by the private and personal sweetness I was feeling to really want to share it with him but not wanting to leave him out either. "That much cold," I said, "is kind of abstract to

me. But I'm looking forward to it." Although was I? Really? Tomorrow my father would leave me, and for the first time in my life I would be on my own. "I think?"

"Oh come on now," said my father, sensing my mood. He turned on the heat, filling the air with new car smell. "Don't go weak-kneed on me. You'll be fine. But you should get yourself a down jacket. Or maybe your mom and I will get you one for Christmas." He looked over at me and I gave him a weak smile. Leaving home. Returning home. This was all so much harder than I had thought. "You're my girl," he said. "You know that? Right?" I nodded and he smiled back. "You'll always be my girl."

That night, after dinner at a restaurant whose walls were decorated with hundreds of U of M football photos and lots of related paraphernalia, I went back to my dorm, and my father spent the night at Weber's Inn, a hotel that he chose because that was where he and his friends stayed when they came to town for the University of Michigan, Michigan State football game. "It's different," he told me, when we met for breakfast in the morning. "I used to think it was fancy. But really, it's kind of a dump."

"Maybe it's just gotten old," I said.

"No," he said. "I mean, it has gotten frayed around the edges, but that's not it. I'm the one who's gotten old. I just don't see things the same way anymore. When I was your age, in college, the whole world shined. Shabby or brand new, it made no difference. Everything looked lit up. Everything looked full of chance and opportunity. I didn't weigh things so much. I didn't sit down on the bed and test it to see if the mattress was hard or soft. I didn't read food labels or drink low cal beer.

That's what so great about being your age, about being at a University." My father took a sip of his coffee. I ate a bite of my pancake and a piece of bacon, enjoying the crunch and the salt and the rush of grease. "It's all still an adventure when you're young," he said, "not a cost benefit analysis. I tell you what. I'd trade places with you in a hot second if I could."

"No thank you," I said, thinking not very highly of the deal that he was offering, even if it had been possible. I craved the adventure and the world my father had just promised.

"You sure?" he asked. "Because I'd love to be in college again. With the exception of marrying your mother and when you and your sisters were born, the day grandma and grandpa dropped me off at State was the best day of my life."

"I never knew that," I said.

"Oh yeah. The absolute best day." He looked at me, suddenly embarrassed, as if he had given away a secret. "One of the best I mean." He picked up his napkin and dabbed at his mouth, even though there was nothing there.

"Daddy," I reached over the table for his hand. "I understand." And if he felt on that day, the way I felt on this, then I totally did. I was here, me, Miya Clare, twenty-five hundred miles away from home, sitting with my father in a restaurant, eating pancakes, about to say good-bye to my dad, and on the very verge of something new. I was stepping out of one world and into another, just as the five of us had done as a family when we moved to New Mexico. But this time, it was by my choice. I was in Ann Arbor as a function of my will, my desire. That's what had dawned on my father and made him wistful and slightly jealous of me. He wanted

that power for himself too, although unlike me he could no longer have it. But I could. Today, for the first time, I was the instrument of my own actions rather than an innocent corollary of the will and desire attached to someone else. This time, instead of feeling as if I had been taken, or rather, actually having been taken, carried, and deposited somewhere I hadn't necessarily wanted to go—this time the choice was mine. And this time, instead of feeling lost and lonely and adrift in a town where I knew nobody, in this town where I needed a map to find my way, in the state where I was born, I finally felt safe.

“I wish your mother could have come with us,” my father said when he dropped me back at the dorm after breakfast.

“Me too,” I said.

“She really did have to stay and take care of the shop and the girls,” he said. “Otherwise she'd be here too. She wanted to, you know.”

“I know,” I said, letting him off the hook, although I didn't quite believe him. She could have come if she wanted to. I wasn't sure why she didn't. Maybe it was too sad for her, or maybe she didn't want to be bothered, or maybe she just didn't want to say goodbye. I didn't know, but whatever it was, I decided to forgive her, and not let it worry me. I was too happy, too excited about stepping into my new life for regrets. But a few minutes later, when it was time for my father to drive away, nothing seemed quite as easy as it had moments before. I didn't want to let go and I didn't want him to leave. I hugged him and I held his hand, wrapping each one of my fingers around each of his so tightly that he had to unwind them one-by-one in order to pull free. And I let go only reluctantly, wanting to hold on to him, even to stop

time, the way I sometimes stopped reading a book that was giving me sorrow and joy, refusing to turn the last few pages, as if by leaving them unread I could hold the characters in place, keep them from committing their sins, or losing their passions, as if I could stave off the final danger or the ending, at least. But I have never been able to resist the call of the page. I have turned it always, and so, I let my father go, releasing his hand from mine and when it was loose he reached over and pulled me close. "I love you," he said. "I'm so proud of my girl. You'll do great. I promise. You will."

He got in the car and closed the door. The slam was as final a sound as I had ever heard. He waved at me and said something behind the glass as he started the engine and inched the car out into the nearly empty street. He drove forward a few feet, stopped and waved again and then pulled out into traffic and drove away. I watched and waved, standing in front of my dormitory until he turned onto Geddes Road and I could not see him any more. The wind came up, or perhaps that was when I only first noticed a wind that had been there all along, and with it the fragrance of grass and loam, brown leaves and tree bark, apple must and dirt, and the cold tin of the great Michigan lake. I breathed in deeply. It was a fragrance so recognizable, so close and full of longing, so personal and well known that even after eight years of being away I breathed in the smell of home.

My freshman Spanish teacher that first semester, Luis Aguirre, was from Guatemala, and so I elevated him in status over every other Spanish speaker I knew in New Mexico, all of whom spoke Spanish as a second or alternative language. Even

more compelling than his linguistic purity, however, was the fact that Luis was a very handsome man with dark curly hair, a high forehead, almond-shaped brown eyes fringed by long deep-black eye lashes, a wide flat Olmec nose, a well-shaped mouth, and perfectly aligned white teeth. He had wide shoulders, a barrel chest and trim waist, and he was light on his feet, with almost a dancer's step. He was slightly short, but all his parts seemed to work together perfectly and he had a voice that was the aural equivalent of velvet, which must have been part of the reason I developed a crush on him. Also, he was nothing like the language teachers I'd had in high school with their endless drills from the textbook every day. No, Luis was an advocate of new pedagogy.

"I don't teach language the usual way," he told us on the first day of class. "Rather," he said, "I teach language as a social construct. It is the concrete representation of power and control." Some of the students in the class started to fidget, looking down at the floor, or at their hands, or up at the ceiling. I couldn't tell if it was because they didn't know what Luis was talking about, or if they did, and it scared them.

"You have been taught all your lives that language is neutral and objective," he continued, raising an ironic eyebrow, "but in my class you will learn how language is a way of organizing thought and communicating ideas imposed from above." One woman, with long dark hair woven in a French braid that hung down her back, crossed her arms over her chest and held herself tightly. "It is a tool of power used by people who want you to think what they want you to think, and to do what they want you to do," Luis went on. A man in jeans and a denim shirt slid down into his chair

and stretched his legs out long and wide, in an apparent attempt to take back some of the intellectual space that Luis was claiming. But I found myself leaning forward at attention, my eyes wide. What he was saying thrilled me.

In my life I had seen over and over the way language had been used to isolate and separate, define and impose borders and boundaries, steal or grant power. Lupe's "Don't be a chicken," Mrs. Perez' "Don't you think, Miya Clare," Mrs. Buehler's "Only eighteen of you," even Yollie's "Anglo Purity," yet I had never heard someone in a position of power, like a teacher, admit it. Nor had I ever heard any Spanish speaker own up to such a thing.

"Think about this," Luis said. "Even though I am a native speaker and Spanish is the official language of the country I come from, and the land where I was born, it is not the native language of my family or my community. It is a tongue imposed on us by the Spanish colonizers. How then do I say it is mine?" He stopped himself. Perhaps remembering that we were freshman or sophomores, eighteen or nineteen years old, that all but a few of us in the room had grown up in Michigan and most had seen very little of the world. "Well, never mind," he said. "But after today, we will never talk English in this class again."

Within weeks Luis had us reading out loud from Lorca's play *House of Bernarda Alba*. I had the part of Prudencia. After that we read poems by Octavio Paz, and essays and ficciones from Jorge Luis Borges. We read Father Antonio Vieira's original writings on liberation theology. We watched *La Ley del deseo* and *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* without subtitles. We conversed with each other in baby Spanish at first, and then gradually with growing authority. It was a

thrilling adventure and I found myself as excited about the process as I was about the man who was leading us through it. One afternoon, about three weeks into the semester, I caught up with Luis after class. I wanted to ask him about a video of a Mexican novella he had shown us that day, and I wanted to tell him how interested I was and how much I enjoyed being his student. While we were talking, I mentioned that some of my friends from home, in New Mexico, used to watch the novella on TV everyday.

“If you’re from New Mexico,” he said, changing the subject, “why aren’t you fluent? You should be. You should speak Spanish like it’s a natural second language. Why don’t you?”

I was completely taken aback by his response. I didn’t know Luis very well yet, and was unaware of his habit of saying whatever was on his mind—as long as he thought it was true. “You’d have to know Las Cruces,” I tried to explain. “It’s not like Santa Fe which is what everyone thinks of when I tell them where I’m from. It’s really different there.” We had stopped at a cross walk to wait for the light to change and although I gave him ample opportunity, he did not press me for more. When the light turned green he waved good bye and went in another direction. I was disappointed that our conversation had gone no further, but consoled myself with the fact that I saw Luis four days a week, Monday through Thursday, and reminded myself that unlike my other crush, the over-heated one on my anthropology teacher Rich Grazia, who I only saw twice a week, and which seemed far more like a matter of life and death, my crush on Luis was somewhat benign, so I could stay calm.

In October, Luis invited the students from his intensive Spanish to a Halloween Party at his apartment. "I don't usually do this," he said to the class the Thursday before. "Mix my personal life with school. But you are all smart and motivated students and my party will be like taking a little visit to Buenos Aires, or Bogotá. You can put what you've learned here in the classroom to work."

I went to the party with Jane Levine, another girl from the class. We showed up at Luis' apartment at about ten; we hadn't wanted to be too early. When we arrived his apartment was full of brown-skinned, black-haired, jewelry-clad, dressed-to-kill people dancing and shimmying to Euro-tech. It was hard to get in the door and once inside it was hard to move around the room, the crowd was so thick with writhing bodies. "I can't believe all these people," Jane whispered to me after we'd been at the party ten minutes and had only managed to work our way two feet closer to the kitchen where we were hoping to find some beer. "There's so many."

"I think it's cool," I said.

"I know, but where did they all come from?"

I glanced around. "Detroit?" I said. "Venezuela? Maybe they jetted in?" But I understood Jane's point. There weren't that many Latin American students at U of M. If there were, we'd have seen some of them, in the quad, or in the dormitories, or at the library or at Dominic's Restaurant. But here in Luis's apartment it was as if we had stumbled on a complete and separate world--Monte Carlo, or a James Bond movie--full of interesting and handsome men and gorgeous women. It was the women I noticed more, all tall and lean with fashion model figures that made them look outstanding in their fabulously expensive clothes. Luis had never spoken about

his background and it had never occurred to me to wonder about it, although upon reflection, someone who grew up in Guatemala and then came to the University of Michigan for graduate school had to come from status or money. Still, given all the things we'd read and talked about, Vieira and Fuentes, the music we'd listened to--Sunni Paz and Los Olvidas--I'd assumed he was from a working-class family, or at least the under-paid intelligentsia. After seeing the people at the party I wondered if I needed to think again.

The tempo of the music on the stereo slowed and the dancers came together into close couples creating some space here and there, and the opportunity to move through the crowd, past the furniture that had been pushed to the side. I grabbed Jane's hand. "Come on," I said, giving her a pull. "Now's our chance. The beer is waiting."

In the kitchen a tall woman with dark hair that danced around her shoulders, a glitter-white halter top, lime green leather jeans and spiky black sandals on her feet had draped herself over Luis, her head on his chest and her bosom pushed into his side. She was speaking Spanish to him. "*Podríamos ir para un paseo,*" she said. "*Tengo mi derecha del Jaguar afuera.*"

Luis looked up when Jane and I walk into the kitchen. He stepped away from the woman and unlooped her hands from his neck. She straightened up and gave him an evil look. "My students are here," he said, as if in explanation.

"*Pozo no era mi idea invitarlos,*" she answered.

"*Tenga cuidado,*" he answered back. "*Mis estudiantes entienden español.*"

"What do I care what they think?" she said to him in English.

"*¿Y por qué debe usted?*" I asked her back in Spanish. "Except that Luis has asked you to be polite."

"Miya," Luis said. I could tell by his voice he was not happy that I stuck my nose in his business.

"*Ella no respeta sus huéspedes,*" I said.

"*Eso no es verdad. Ella apenas no tiene gusto de compritir.*"

"She doesn't want to share?" I asked, only half believing him. "But this is a party."

He gave me a dirty look and switched to English. "Veronique, these are two of my students. Miya Clare from Las Cruces, New Mexico, and Jane Levine from New Jersey."

"Pleased to meet you," I said, holding out my hand. Veronique seemed to debate a minute and then she finally held out hers too. We shook. I gave her a strong American grip. She returned something weak and vaguely European in its ability to communicate disdain through the most subtle of body language. "What brings you to Ann Arbor?" I asked.

"I live here," she said. "With Luis."

"Here in this apartment?" asked Jane. Never one for subtle, she had a crush on Luis too.

"No. But I live here in the city of Ann Arbor until he comes to his senses and returns to Guatemala to marry me." She lifted her chin high, kissed air at Luis and walked out of the kitchen.

"I should know better than to invite my students to a party," said Luis. "It always ends badly."

"Sorry," I said. "But why was she such a --" Jane elbowed me in the ribs before I could complete my sentence. "I mean," I said, "why is she so haughty?"

"She's part of the aristocracy," Luis answered. "In her world, she doesn't have to be nice to peasants."

"That's so rude," I said.

"Yes, Veronique is rude," he said.

"And we're not peasants," I said. "We're intellectuals. Aren't we?"

"So?" Luis answered.

"But she's nice to you," said Jane said. Now it was my turn to elbow her in her ribs. She hadn't caught on yet. "He's not a peasant," I whispered to her. Veronique was, as far as I could tell, not the type for slumming.

Jane and I went back into the living room to join the party. I danced with some of the men, none of whom I knew, shaking my hips in the fast dances and showing off what I learned at all the *quinceneras* I'd attended in Las Cruces during the slow, but I felt that the whole time we were dancing, the men were seeing me as some kind of stand-in, a mannequin for someone else more important or more beautiful, who had already left, or who was yet to come. They wouldn't look me in the eye, glancing past me at the horizon of Luis' apartment wall. The way they held the dancer's pose, their left hand barely present in mine, their right hand noncommittal on my shoulder, and the looks I got from the women at the party made me decide I never wanted to go to Monte Carlo or Rio, or Cannes. In Las Cruces

there were rich families. I had gone to school with their children. They shopped at my parents' store for gifts. They even came to fund-raisers for the high school choir. But they had earned their money from oil fields, or from distributing propane or harvesting pecans or cotton, and they took pride in the fact that they were rough and crude and not in the least bit cultured. I had never been around the kind of super-rich, international-jet-set-rich that I saw at Luis' party. Even if they were second tier, after all this was U of M, not Yale or Harvard, and even if they were the rich, shoe-horned in to a Ph.D. student's apartment in Ann Arbor, Michigan, rather than spreading themselves thin at Saratoga, or gathering in Century City, or enjoying the nightlife in Manhattan or Paris, or partying on a yacht in the Mediterranean or luxuriating in their wealth on a sugar plantation in Columbia, or a coffee plantation in Venezuela, it was obvious to me that they could not see—literally could not see anybody but themselves. Me, my friend Jane, people like us, we were background noise to them, not even worth worrying about insulting. We were the little people, the ones of whom Leona Helmsley famously said “paid their taxes.”

But at least for that night I was at Luis's party and there was plenty of beer. There was also dancing, and I considered myself a great dancer. Plus I harbored a secret hope that if Luis saw me dancing he might realize that girls like Veronique offered him nothing other than their daddy's millions, while a girl like me, who had natural soul, was more than worth getting to know. I nurtured this hope that night despite the fact that I knew from my own experience that giving up the world you belonged to for the sake of love was impossible. Still, I thought maybe Luis would do it, if he could only see me, and if he could see me, then maybe he would fall in

love with me and we could move to Guatemala together and build a revolution based on liberation theology or the writings of Vieira or anything else that he loved. I looked for Luis while I was dancing, eager to see if he might have noticed me moving to the music, seen how light on my feet I was, how in tune with the music's rhythm, but I never saw him the whole time I was dancing with the boys in his living room. Finally I stopped worrying about it. I would see him in class. I wandered back to the kitchen to get another beer and Luis was there, standing in the same place by the sink where Jane and I had left him an hour before. "I didn't know you were here," I said. "I was looking for you on the dance floor."

"I don't dance," he said.

"Then why do you have a party?" I asked.

"My friends dance. Véronique dances."

"Did she leave?"

"I think so. She doesn't like too many people."

"She certainly didn't like me."

"She doesn't have to. You're my student. She doesn't have to like my students."

"But you like me?" I said, smiling coyly, not seriously flirtatious, only slightly.

way you want."

"Not in the

"What do you mean?" I said. His answer took me off guard and sent a little shiver of shame running through my bones. I was confused by it. Surprised. I was sure I hadn't been that obvious. Besides I wasn't even sure how I wanted him. And

if I wasn't sure, than how could he be? Yes I had a crush, but I didn't have the slightest clue as to what I'd do if I found out he had a crush on me back. Be happy? Take him up on it? Run? "I'm sorry," I said. covering, and trying to buy myself some time. "But I'm puzzled. How is it that you think I want you to like me?"

"Don't be silly," he said. "You want me to like you the way a man likes a woman."

His words hit me like a stone. It wasn't that I was surprised that he knew I thought he was attractive. I hadn't tried to hide it. But he had gone too far. Much further than I, and far more sure about my feelings towards him, it seemed, than I was. And even though I wasn't totally sure he was right, I felt caught. As if my inner self had been stripped of its natural armor and put on a stage. Of course I liked Luis, but I had not been ready to so blatantly admit it. Now I had to take a stand. Agree or deny. Admit my crush and expose myself as a young and naïve fool or disavow everything and let Luis think I was a liar. Either way, whatever I said, I was going to have to die of embarrassment. It was so trite for a freshman to have crush on her teacher. I felt totally busted, caught like I was in the middle of one of those dreams I used to have when I was in middle school, where I'd find myself in the hallway between classes with no shirt on. How could I have gone to school without realizing I was only half-dressed?

"What's the matter with you?" Luis asked. "You look like you've seen a ghost." Then he shook his head and laughed. "Don't worry about it so much," he said. "I understand. Totally. It's no big deal. All the American girls who take my

class get a crush on me. Unless they're black. It comes with the territory. Didn't you know that?"

"No, I didn't," I answered, although I immediately started thinking about my friend Jane and another girl I knew from Spanish, Lynn Ellis, who had a crush on Luis as well. Was he right? Could that be true?

"It's because I'm from South America and that makes me exotic," Luis explained. "It's the other side of colonialism. The one that's secret. You know what I'm talking about. The powerful attraction to the dark other. Here in your own country, the Southern man was afraid of the black man, not because the black man coveted his women, but because the women coveted the black man. Not strange fruit, but forbidden candy. They couldn't hang their own women. So they hung their slaves."

"That's sick," I said.

"But true," he answered.

"I mean about the hanging," I said.

"And I mean about the hanging," he said. "And about the women and the men, too. It's all part of the same bloody circus."

"It's not that way for me," I said.

"What isn't?"

"I grew up with Hispanic men, and I don't idealize them."

"Who said anything about idealize? I'm talking about attraction." He grinned at me, raised an eyebrow and pulled a bottle of beer from its bed of ice in the sink.

“White girls just find Latino men hot,” he said, twisting off the cap and handing me a bottle. “But don’t worry about it. We don’t hold it against you. Have a beer.”

I took the beer from his hand, mostly to have something to do with mine. It had never really crossed my mind that I might have been attracted to Luis because of his ethnicity or his race. I thought I was attracted to him because he was articulate and worldly, sophisticated and smart. He knew things that I didn’t know, read things that I had not read, experienced a world far beyond my experience. He knew about painting and movies and literature, he knew about politics and philosophy, and it seemed to me at the time and still does now, that his knowledge informed his life in a very deep and powerful way. He was intellectual and masculine and very much himself, and I interpreted the combination of all of those things as very sexy. Did his being Hispanic heighten that? I didn’t know. Possibly, after all my first and only boyfriend at that point in my life was Hispanic, and wasn’t that two-for-two? But as I told Luis, I had grown up with Latino men. In Las Cruces, a girl pretty much couldn’t date if she didn’t date a Mexican. So I thought about what he said, and thought that he might be right about white girls, but that didn’t make him right about me. Still, I decided to change the subject.

"Are your friends really as rich as they look?"

"Yes," Luis said. "They are very rich. Their fathers own all the wealth in their countries."

“So their fathers are the land owners?”

“Yes.”

“And the military leaders?”

“Yes.”

“And the people who oppress the peasants and steal their land?”

“What do you think? Of course. That is the way it is down there.”

“Doesn't it bother you? Having friends like that?”

"No. Not at all. Because you must remember, they are also their countries' intellectuals."

"But they're part of the ruling class. You just said so yourself."

"In Latin America the ruling class is the one that will set the people free. There is no other way."

"You can't be serious," I said.

"You Americans. Everything to you is so black and white and of course all of you think you know what is best for the weaker country. Even though you know nothing about life there. Even though you've never lived there or even visited. Yet you all feel so confident about the path we should take to freedom. Such arrogance. When you know nothing about the contradictions in the third world."

"But what about Father Vieira? What about Liberation Theology? Is that all just talk? Are you having us read that in class to tease us? When you don't even believe it yourself?"

"It is an ideal," said Luis. "A vision to aspire to. But Latin America will never be free if we depend on the *campesino*. It is the rich who study in America. Who learn about the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Who experience the freedom of capitalism. They're the ones who will bring democracy to the third world, they will bring it with them, because they are the only ones who get to taste it."

Two of Luis's friends stumbled into the kitchen then. An incredibly handsome man with black hair and blue eyes wearing a white golf shirt that pulled tight over his chest, and a woman in a halter dress splashed with the bright colors of the tropics, fuchsias and hot orange, lime green and white. "Luis," said the woman. "Come out and dance."

"Yes," the man said. "Come out and dance. We will play a song just for you."

The woman grabbed Luis' hand and pulled him toward the doorway. "You have a good mind, Miya," Luis said as the woman pulled him into the living room. "And you're not too much of a fool. I hope you are enjoying my class."

As I have said, Luis was not my only crush and in fact, he was not the worst. That designation belonged to Rick Grazia, my anthropology professor. The first thing I noticed about Rick, on the first day of my first class with him, when he walked in the door and time stopped for a brief minute, was the way he moved. Like a cat. Light and lithe, padding on his feet as if his body, and the earth, and gravity had all made an agreement to partially suspend their rules so that he would appear to float, but only barely. Although the day had been warm, Rick wore a long-sleeved sweater woven out of cotton the color of huckleberry, its weave unraveling in the middle, right above his wishbone. He had dark hair that settled in wide and floppy curls around his ears and forehead and his eyes were the same color as the eyes of honeybees after they have been sucking on sweet fruit all day. His cheekbones were high as if made for the old black-and-white Hollywood camera. His lips were thin

and aggressive but his mouth was wide with teeth that pushed out slightly, adorning his face with a rakish imperfection. His hands were large, with long and beautiful fingers that shaped the air when he talked, making circles and spheres and cradles to hold the ideas that he wove into the air when he spoke. But his physical beauty wasn't the half of it for me. He was (and is, I think) the smartest man I had ever met.

You could say that I loved him. But love is a complex thing. At first in his class, I felt like a stupid, clumsy groupie, the kind that hang around rock and roll bands, hungry and eager and out of their league. I wonder some times what Rick saw in those first classes when he looked up from the lectern, out at the students sitting at their desks, to determine how closely we were following his thoughts--the ones that would travel at the speed of their own intellectual string theory. When his gaze would light on mine, how did I appear? As a sheep? A little child? An adolescent girl, awestruck in a full on state of admiration?

"I don't understand," I said to him after his lecture the fourth week of class. "I don't understand some (actually any) of the words you are using." I thought perhaps he would see in my admission an eagerness to learn, a willingness to work harder, and the kind of humility required from an apprentice who wants to gain knowledge from a master. He did not see any of those things, or if he did, he did not care. He shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't see why not," he said. "They're perfectly good words."

"But I haven't really heard them before," I said. "At least not in this kind of context." I was referring to words like fragmentation and contradiction, discourse and construct, commodity fetishism, alienation, imaginary and symbolic.

"Really?" he said, cold. "I find that rather shocking."

"I grew up in New Mexico?" I said, making my statement a question. "I guess you've never been there? My education was not exactly high concept?" But even as I was speaking I saw a glimmer in his eye, a wink of interest that had not been there even moments before. Since most of the students at UM were from Michigan, perhaps the fact that I was from New Mexico made me interesting to him. Maybe he would discover that I was something more than a simple blue-eyed Michigan blond he had originally credited me for.

"Santa Fe?" he said, making the usual mistake.

"No. Las Cruces," I said, giving my usual truthful answer. But why did I always have to correct people? What difference did it make if they assumed Santa Fe and I let them? I watched his face grow uninterested again, and if I could have taken back my words I would have.

"Las Cruces?" he said, proving I was right and should have kept quiet after all. "Never heard of it."

"It means the crosses," I said.

"I speak Spanish," he said. "I know what it means."

"Oh?" I said. "Sorry."

He leaned over to the table, to pick up his lecture notes and a stack of books.

"Well then." He smiled, the kind of smile someone uses to say good bye, nice knowing you, *hasta la vista. Au revoir. Auf wieder sehen.*

"It's down South," I said, trying once again to get his attention. "It's near El Paso." I saw nothing new in his face. Desperate, I said, "Forty-three miles from the Mexican border. On the Rio Grande, just north of Juarez."

"Juarez?" He put his books and papers back down on the desk. "Tell me what you think about Juarez."

"It's a big city. Very poor. There's a small community of wealthy and then miles and miles of shanty-towns filled with people who've come up from the country with their families, hoping for work. But they don't find any."

"Sounds like Sao Paulo," he said.

"Brazil?"

"Where I did my field work. What I was talking about in the lecture today. What happens to a primitive or agrarian world view when people get caught in the net of capital. You've read Marx."

"No."

"Lacan? Freud? Gold? Bakhtin?"

"Some Freud. I've read some Freud."

"Okay, good. I have a study group at my house Thursday night, mostly graduate students, but we don't have anyone from New Mexico, forty miles north of Juarez. You'll bring a good perspective. And you'll catch on. In the meantime, don't worry. My lectures are like this." He made a big spiral in the air, with his long-fingered hands. "I start at the top and I work my way down to the bottom, looking at the same things many times from a different angle, until at some point we can start to understand the story that they tell us. How are you with cosmology?"

"Black holes, big bang, I studied physics."

"No, more like God the father, God the spirit and God the Holy ghost. Mary, the angels, the seraphim and cherubim. The way the Hindus think the world rides on the back of a big turtle, or the Romans think it's carried by Atlas. You know, the stories we tell each other about how the world works and who we are inside it."

"I guess I'm okay with cosmology," I said.

"Good. I'll get you directions for Thursday group then."

Would I have felt more passion or less passion for Rick Grazia if I had not also been a bit in love with Luis Aguirre? Equally, would I have been so overwhelmed with feeling for him if I had not also felt an attraction to Luis? I don't think so. Sexual energy is a funny thing. It is like ghost energy. It exists and it grows and it has a life, an illusion and a presence all of its own, a potential flood, right outside your body, one more second and you will burst, or fall, or shatter into a feeling that unravels the boundaries of self, physical and not. It erases your intelligence, obliterates time and hurls you into eternity. You can feel it, whispering just outside hearing distance, building the way the thunder clouds build and thicken and swirl and collapse into themselves, gathering energy, pulling tighter and tighter like some brown dwarf star on its way to becoming a singularity. That is how I felt when I walked across the campus of the University of Michigan. That is how I felt when my skin would not settle quietly against my sheets at night and I could feel every single fiber of cotton scraping across my body, as if each thread had become a tiny pricking pin. That is how I felt when I sat in my Modern English class, or ate

lunch in the commons or studied in my dorm room or at the library. That is how I felt when I went to the movies at the film society, or socials scheduled by the floor residents in the dorm.

How can I tell you how fragmented I was, how over-stimulated by the pull of desire? To walk into the second floor of Angell hall and sit in the high-ceiling lecture room with the ten-foot-high windows open at the bottom and to see, through their divided light, the grandfather oaks on State Street still holding their leaves, and the cloudless blue Michigan sky, to smell the sweat dusty smell of the fields outside the city, newly laced with fertilizer, to hear the hint of music that lilted in and to see the faces of the students, white and black--to use the short cut description--instead of brown. It was a world of my imagination, the land of my childhood transformed. I felt like Rip Van Winkle who woke up twenty years later. Here were the children I went to school with, grown up. Here was the school building of brick and mortar, wood and plaster, instead of adobe and cement. I walked from dorm to class, from class to library, from library to dorm on sidewalks that were clearly marked, signified for direction, and yet I felt removed from myself, and recreated, like a fairy-tale creature, transported to the land of my innocence, as if I had never left and time, instead of a collector of dues was, really, a friend and a caretaker. I had been freed—given the chance to become the person I could be, and so I ached, not so much (as it might appear) for the lover's hand as for the story-teller's voice.

And so, having left my childhood behind, I reeled myself in to Rick's world, like a big fat salmon on a string. I'd walk across town every Thursday night, at 5:30

exactly, to the stately tree-lined street of single family houses not far from the University where he lived. There, I'd find a place on the floor at the back of Rick's living room behind the long haired female graduate students and the curly haired men, all dressed the same in blue jeans and t-shirts in the early fall, and then in blue jeans and sweaters in winter. There, I'd sit and sip cups of strong brewed tea as Rick would go on about the internalization of the meanest values of the post-modern world into the world view of the Indians and subsistence farmers of Brazil. I remember being mesmerized, not so much by what he said, as by the way the whole room became mesmerized as he talked. I remember watching the women, how they'd lean in to Rick when they spoke, or when he did. How their chins reached forward, how their mouths were slightly open, revealing a hillock of lip, a small rail of teeth, how their faces tilted slightly to the right or the left, cocked like a puppy's, eyes open wide listening almost in a trance. Or the way, when they had something to say, they leaned their torsos over their folded legs, lifting from the hips and pressing their chests forward, shoulders back and necks held long. "I was thinking, Rick," one would say, her comments followed by a head tilt, or the brush of their chin on invisible air, "I was thinking that by attributing the holiest symbols of Catholicism to the paramilitary death squads, well wouldn't that inflame the people instead of pacify them?" The woman who had spoken leaned even further forward and turned her head to look first at the group and then back at Rick. As she did her long, honey-brown hair brushed across her chest. Why don't you just come out and say it, I thought to myself. Instead of pretending? Why don't you just say it out loud, "If it was you,

Rick, who was brushing your hand across my breasts, rather than my own hair, that would so totally inflame my passion?"

"Why don't you just say it," the words tumbled from my lips, quietly but they were out in the air. The graduate student resting his head on his elbow on the carpet next to me, turned and frowned in my direction, but not even that was enough to stop me, although I immediately regretted what I whispered next. "Why don't you tell the truth, instead of spewing all of this priceless bull-shit?" because it suddenly occurred to me that Rick might hear what I was saying too. But he was too busy.

"I think you're right, Adele," Rick answered the woman who had spoken, appearing to ignore the significance of the hair brush across the breasts, and thankfully, my words as well. "The use of Catholic symbols is inflammatory, but they also create the willingness to surrender. Think about the way Jesus is written about as a shepherd and the way the people are described as his sheep. And then take it further. Think about how Jesus himself was his father's lamb, stretched on the cross in sacrificial surrender." He made the shape of a circle with his hands, and then opened them into a blossom in the air. "Lamb and shepherd and then finally God and son of man," he said, "ascending to heaven. By using the language and symbols of the church, but internalizing them into the symbols of its own cosmology, the state establishes the desired outcome."

I recognized his response as the amazing love dance that it was, sexually charged and yet completely disguised. "You are right Adele," I translated his answer to her, in my mind. "I am inflamed by your willingness to surrender to me. Shall we go further? Sheep and sheperd, lamb and son of man, ascending together, in desire."

All Rick needed to clinch the deal was a time and a place. What's more, it wasn't just the women who were hot for him. The men, straight as well as gay, were all over Rick too. Dressing like him, in tattered sweaters and old button-down shirts that hung un-ironed and starchless from their (and his) frame. The way they let their hair grow long and shaggy around their ears. How they borrowed Rick's two-and three-day pattern of going about with his face unshaved, and mimicked his hand motions, making spirals and circles in the air, shaping their ideas with their fingers, which as a rule weren't as long as Rick's, so had nothing of his elegance. They started walking like him, the juniors and seniors and graduate students, chest out and forward, taking small steps instead of long American strides. At the Thursday gatherings, if Rick's son Nikko happened to run into the room, it was the men who would reach out to bounce him on their knee, as if to show Rick that they were so completely bowing to the power of his charisma that they would take on the role of women in order to stay close by.

I know these comments sound judgmental on my part, as if I'm reporting on these events and people with disdain. But I'm not. I was totally taken up, too. And if there is a bitterness in my voice it's there because I was jealous of Adele--of all the Adeles, and there were so many--each one of them my sexual competitor, because every next day during my first year at the University of Michigan I was more in love with Rick than I had been the day before. I was jealous of the boys who spent time together with Rick as if they were his cousins or his brothers, hanging out with him at his house, long after we girls went home, building his deck for him, reframing windows, installing his sprinkler system, painting his house. Those boys, who

painted Rick's house, had the satisfaction of being with him every day for weeks, scraping the old paint off, sanding, repairing boards that had been eaten through with dry rot, and then finally finishing only days before November's first real snow.

I was jealous too of Rick's wife Lea, the woman he had chosen well before I or Adele or any of the current crop of graduate students and hand-picked undergrads had shown up. It was tempting to despise Lea. Not that there was anything despicable about her, other than the fact that she had something we couldn't have. More, she was nice. Always. The day I left Ann Arbor on my way home to Las Cruces and then on ultimately to Oneg Kempo, when, despite the odds, we had actually become true friends, she gave me two gifts. One was a small piece of fabric woven by a shaman's wife. The other was a tiny clay sculpture of a fish. "I think it's about 600 years old," she told me, handing it to me through the window of my car. "You can always sell it if you need the money."

"I'll never sell it," I said and I squeezed her hand. "Thank you." But that was much later, after many things had happened and after I realized that she, not Rick, was the one who deserved my love and friendship. But in the beginning, Lea did not seem interesting the way Rick was interesting, or even the way the female graduate students were interesting. She never talked about the unstable nature of signification, or the mirror stage, or subject position. She never even mentioned any of the fascinating things that Rick discussed in his lectures and in the study group. As far as I could tell, she gave them no credit at all. Rather, Lea talked about lasagna and Nikko's bed time, and when Rick might be able to carve a moment in his busy

schedule to replace the screens on the sliding glass window, because the mosquitoes were coming in and biting them all to shreds every night.

"You're not such a baby that you can't handle a few mosquitoes?" I heard Rick say to her, when she asked him.

"No," she answered, with a smile balanced carefully between forgiveness and resignation. "But Nikko is covered with them. And your sister is coming to visit and maybe you'd like her to be able to sleep here in comfort."

"Fine," Rick said, "I'll get one of the kids to do it." He was referring to the graduate students..

"Not Scott then, all right?" Lea said. "Last time you had him here he put in the window backwards. They've not opened right since."

"I'll get Pete. He's going to be my teaching assistant for introduction to cultural anthropology next year, so I'm sure he'll be delighted."

"Fine."

The only reason I even heard that conversation about the screens was that I had stuck around to help clean up after one of the Thursday night groups that turned into a Thursday-night dinner, after someone ordered pizza, and someone ran out for beer, and Rick grabbed a cardboard container of olives and a jar of pickles from the refrigerator to go along.

"You don't have to do that," Lea said to me as I washed the dishes and stuck them in the rack to dry.

"It's no big deal," I said.

"Are you one of Rick's TA's?"

"No, she's not," Rick called out from the study where he was searching for an article that would deal "perfectly" with one of the questions that Adele or Cindy or Kathy or Kerry or Delia had asked a few hours before. "She's a freshman. From New Mexico."

"Taos?" asked Lea.

"Not too far from there," I said, finally having learned to stop correcting people's assumptions about exactly where in New Mexico I came from. "But in the desert."

"Well then," she said, either cynical or warming to me, I could not tell which. "I guess they teach manners in the desert."

"I don't know," I said. "But it didn't seem right just to leave it all..." I didn't finish the sentence, "for you," although we both knew that was where the thought led. What I'm less sure about, and hope she forgives me for, is whether it was obvious to Lea that I was not helping with the cleaning in order to be polite, or to help her, but rather because it let me be in Rick's light a little bit longer. There was also the chance – at least that's how my thinking went at the time – that my staying to help would make him more aware of me, and would perhaps elevate my status. If no one but me stayed to clean up, and no one did, then I would (theoretically at least) become more important to Rick than the rest.

That was the key.

Olga's Testimony

So, you ask me, how did it start?

Lebanon. Somalia? Mogadishu? I've been in all three places, and I can tell you it always starts the same way.

With a rumor. A shout. A scream. A yell. With heartbreak. With a good and innocent woman trying find the man she loves, and hoping to keep him out of danger. With a friend trying to protect someone they think of as a brother or a sister. With a parent trying to protect their child. It's an old wound, isn't it? An old story. They all are, I suppose. But I can see by your faces that you do not care to discuss these things today, do you? It is in your eyes, plain as day. You are looking for the facts. "Tell us what happened, Miss Morrissey, spare us the local color, if you don't mind." So I will tell you, it started the way most things do, with too much going on. We were, all of us busy at the clinic, taking care of the women and their children, trying to make sure they had enough to eat, that they were breastfeeding their little ones, or if they were using formula, they weren't extending it with water because they did not have enough money to buy a full supply. Miya was away. She and Michael had gone out to the Shosanguve to talk to one of Makeba's former comrades, an old nationalist who found God and become a priest, about coming back into the organization. So neither of them were there to witness any of this.

It started as you know with the big march. As the speaker said in the beginning, there is no argument about the basic facts. That was the first day. The streets were filled with teachers and students, as well as the young men involved in all the trouble. Thousands came from the townships, to protest the law forbidding teachers to use English in schools. They were tired of the joke the government was playing on them, building schools, paying teachers salaries and then seeing to it that none of the graduates of the program would ever be able to go to university, not even the teachers college, or read a national newspaper, or apply for citizenship, or vote, or report their taxes, anything like that, because they couldn't read English, you see. So they came to march. They came on foot, on bikes, in bakkies, and flat trucks. They carried banners and signs showing their affiliations, ASOKU, OKSC, AZN, maybe others. We could see them from the second floor windows of the clinic, and we could hear them. We didn't march though. Makeba was worried there would be violence. "Things are too volatile just now," she had said. "It is better if we stay off the streets." She feared that the young people had gotten stirred up and frustrated, that they were tired of the slow pace of change that was coming through the political process. She feared that they would take out their frustration on innocents, since those who were guilty were too far away to touch. She told us to keep our distance, and we would have, but Sello, the boyfriend of Betty Niketia, one of the nurses at our clinic, did not listen.

Betty had begged him not to march, begged him to be patient, to wait until after the election when there would be no need. But Sello felt he had to march, and who could blame him? He was a teacher himself. He felt it was his moral duty. Of

course, that is how he got injured the first time. Leading a march of children. There was a picture in the papers of it, when it happened. The girls in their skirts and high socks. The boys in their bush shorts. The police fired upon him and his students. But Sello was lucky. They only shot him in the leg. They killed three others, though. Do you remember? A girl of thirteen, a boy of eleven and one of the other teachers at the high school. So many innocents. When you have been through what I have been through, you pay attention to the death's of innocents. You have no choice. They don't let you forget them.

The march started in the morning. We could hear bits and pieces of the sound of it, the toy-toying and the chanting and yelling in the distance. Around noon a man came to the clinic yelling for Betty, literally screaming out her name and saying he had something to tell her about her fiancé, Sello. The man had been obviously beaten. He had bruises around his face and head. There were bloody slashes on his chest and face, abrasions on his arms and hands. I took him into an exam room, calmed him down and then went to find Betty. I thought she might recognize him, but she didn't. In fact, she did not know him from Adam, and it upset both of us that a stranger would know her name and where to find her at work. When that happens it's usually the case of a police informer. So we did not trust him. "What do you mean, coming in here?" Betty asked. "What do you mean barging in like this? Acting like you know me? This is a woman's clinic. Who are you to behave in such a way?"

"He is not from the school," she said to me. "He is not from Sello's township. I don't know what he is doing here. He should go."

But the man didn't want to go. "I know this is a woman's clinic," he said, staying put on the exam table. "I am not a fool. But I came here because I have something to tell you."

"Then say it," said Betty. "Say it and go."

"It's about your man."

"What about him?" I said. I did not trust him, as I said, from the beginning, and I was trusting him even less. "Why do you play games? If you have something to say then speak. Tell her. Otherwise go."

"Is that how you talk to someone who is trying to help you?" he asked, like he had no care in the world.

"How do I know you're trying to help us?" I said.

He just shrugged his shoulders and asked for some water, and Betty, as tired of his game as I was, tore open an injury kit and started swabbing one of the wounds on his shoulder. He flinched of course. Beta-dine does the job, but it stings. "Tell us then," she said. "While I clean your wound."

"You're hurting me," said the man.

"Yes," said Betty, swabbing again. "Sometimes that's what it takes to prevent infection."

"It is a good thing you are a nurse," he said then. "Your skills will serve you well, because your man has been shot."

"No," Betty said. "That cannot be true."

"How do you know?" I said. "Who told you?"

"I saw it myself," he said. "With my own eyes."

“You are a liar,” I said. “You saw nothing.”

“My back was turned. But I heard the shots. I heard the running. I heard a man fall.”

“And you turned around to look?” I said. “Instead of running? I don’t believe you.”

“I turned around because he grabbed me as I tried to run,” the man said. “His hands were like a claw around my leg and he held me in a grip like a lion. He would not release me until I promised to come here and tell his woman.”

“Is it true?” Betty asked, him. “Are you talking about my Sello or are you lying?” and she turned to me. “I must go to him.”

“Wait,” I said to her. “We need to be sure.” I addressed the man again. “You saw them put him in an ambulance?” I said. “You saw them take him to hospital and then you came here to find Betty?”

And he said, “They did not take him to hospital.”

“What?” I asked him. “Then where?”

“To the prison,” he answered.

“Liar,” said Betty.

“I am telling you the truth,” he said. “Why would I make something up?”

And so he told us the rest. They were all marching, he said. He and his boys from Notenyo, marching because there was no work and they wanted jobs. They did not care about school any more, school was behind them. So they thought it funny that Sello was marching nearby with some other teachers and students. The whole group, all dressed up in their uniforms, neat and clean and shiny as pins. The man

told us that he and his boys had laughed at Sello and his students, and had asked them if they thought they were going to church or Sunday school, instead of a political march in the city? He told us that they pushed the school boys, slapping them on the back, and digging their palms into their shoulders. They had teased the girls, all innocent in their school uniforms and heavy tie-shoes, whistling at them and asking them for dates. Sello, high and mighty, told them to show respect and watch their manners. They thought about tripping him or pushing them down, but he walked with a limp and they decided it would be bad luck to hurt a cripple. They slapped him on his back and called him “Sir” and marched right next to him. A little while later they were hungry and thirsty, but they were poor men and they did not have any food or water. Sello opened up his pack to them and shared his lunch and his snacks and so he became their boy too. Soon they were having a good time. Their bellies were full and their thirst was slacked and the pretty girls from the school were walking next to them showing their legs when everyone stopped. Then, like the sudden rising of a storm everything changed. There was noise. People were running. Then there were screams and bullets and blood. He started to run too. His boys were already moving when he felt something holding him down to the earth. He looked and there was Sello, on the ground, blood dripping down his leg and chest. He had tried to pull free, but Sello was too strong and he would not let go until the man promised to go to Betty at the women’s clinic and tell her to find him at hospital. He promised and only then would Sello let go but, already the police had come and he could not flee. He hid inside a building and watched. A policeman reached into Sello’s pocket and pulled his papers. Once he read them, he called up on his radio

and soon a van came and two policemen picked Sello up and put him inside. They didn't even use a gurney, they just tossed him in.

When he was done with his story, Betty said, "I am going to find him."

"You can't," I told her. "It's not safe."

"It's not safe for him if I don't," she said. "I must."

"Stay here," I told the man, and I walked with Betty to the employee lockers.

"You can't go looking for him," I said, as she put on her jacket and put her purse over her shoulder. "It's getting dark."

"I'll come back as soon as I know something," she said. She leaned over and kissed me on the cheek. "I'll be fine."

Then Makeba walked in. She had heard there was some commotion. I quickly told her what was about and she agreed with me. "You can't go, Betty," she said. "It is too dangerous. The man is not trustworthy. I believe he is lying."

But Betty just shook her head. "Sorry, sorry," she said, and she ran out the door. Makeba and I went back to the examination room, but the man was gone. Just gone.

A few hours later, Michael and Miya came back to the clinic, and we told them what happened. They wanted to go and look for Betty, but Makeba convinced them to stay at the clinic for the night and then try to find her in the morning. We all spent the night there sleeping in the hospital beds, and the next morning Miya and Michael went out to look for Betty and Sello.

That was the last time I saw Miya alive.

The Gathering of Forces Under the Surface

So much of what I did that year in Ann Arbor was motivated by my wish to draw Luis' attention and Rick's attention, to have them recognize me, see me, and to make myself more interesting and valuable in their eyes. That was the key. With Luis though, the key turned one way--after all, he wasn't married. With Rick, it turned another. Even as I stood next to his wife, washing dishes in her house, her four-year-old son tugging first at her pants leg and then at mine, I wanted to steal Rick away. Take him into my arms. Kiss his face, plant my lips on his, wrap my fingers around his bony ribs, pull him close and never let go. But even at the height of that insane lust, even when I had downgraded all of the symbols of marriage in my mind, even totally inflamed with the idea of being shepherd to his lamb, there was a little voice in my head, a little compass, a little silver bell that rang (and rang, and rang, and rang) to tell me that I was not like that. I was not the kind of person to fool around with a married man. And thus the contradiction. And thus the pain. I was not like that. Not like the girl I wished I could be when he looked up at me in the Thursday-night group, or in class, and asked me my opinion, or when he pinched my arm, or gave me a confusing squeeze, or told me how much I was needed, in his classes, in his study group, how even how much he and Lea trusted and liked me. And yet, I could not give him up. I was his puppet. Every word he said, a gift to my

ears. When he called me by my name, or touched me - my hand, my shoulder, my arm - I felt as if I had been touched by Zeus, or by Orpheus.

And yet, where was I going to go with all of that passion?

Nowhere.

So I lived for it, for him, despite knowing that there would be no future.

Foolish me. I thought all of us were like that. That we were all prisoners of our morals more than our passions. No one advised me to the contrary. So I did not know that the Adeles and the Cindys and the Kathys and the Delias and perhaps even the Scotts and the Petes were all, or could happily be, his lovers. No one bothered to tell me that Rick slept with a student or two, or three every year, and that having sex with him was what made them special in his eyes until they graduated, or became too demanding, or he told them either that he was not going to leave his wife, or that his dalliance in bed was completely for the experience and nothing more, or he grew tired of them or more interested in someone else. I believe now that they thought they were doing me a favor by not telling me. I think because I was so much younger, only eighteen, that they were trying to protect me. It may also have been because they saw that I was friends with Lea, I hope it was that, and that they recognized as she did, that I would never sleep with her husband. Or perhaps they looked at me as competition and everyone knows you don't tell your competition anything.

No matter. I was on a mission. I couldn't make myself prettier. I couldn't make myself richer, or more sophisticated, or more powerful, or more glamorous or any of the other ineffable qualities that Rick (and Luis) seemed to be attracted to in each of their own radical postmodernist ways. There was only one thing I could do to

raise myself in their esteem and that was to become smarter. And so I did. I read everything I could find: Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, Hegel, Wittgenstein, Eric Wolf, all of Rick's publications, Gold, Bakhtin, Baudelaire. If either of them referred to an article, I'd go to the library and find the journal that same night. If Rick mentioned an author, I'd comb the shelves for every book or monograph or article the author had written. The library staff got so familiar with me that they assigned me my own carrel despite my freshman status. Some nights I'd put the books I was reading on the floor and climb up on the Formica counter top that functioned as the carrel's desk and I'd go to sleep, dreaming about hunters and gatherers, liminal periods, Hegelian contradictions, life under erasure, the carnivalesque. I'd leave the library at one o'clock in the morning to cross the quad in the quiet darkness of the Michigan night, listening to skish-pop of downed helicopter-seed pods as they broke and crumbled under my feet.

One early afternoon in November, as the last of the elm and oak leaves hung onto the near barren branches of the trees, and the wind blew around my ankles and my face with an astringent Northern air, I caught up with Luis as he walked back across campus after Spanish class. "Luis? Wait a sec," I said, hurrying. He was walking quickly.

"Yes?" He kept moving.

"Remember that night of your party when you told me it was the intellectuals and the artists who would set your country free?"

He slowed down, glanced my way for a second and then picked up his speed again. Like me, he wore a heavy jacket, a sign in the forty degree fall weather--still mild by Michigan standards--of someone who had grown up where there was no winter. "For this question you wish to stop me in the cold?"

"I want to know if you really believe what you said," I told him. "About intellectuals? And freedom?"

"Do you?" he asked, stopping to face me.

"I don't know," I answered.

"Than what are you doing here at the University?"

"That's just it," I said. "I don't know. I mean, of course I'm here for my education. I never had any doubts about college. And I always knew I wouldn't stay in New Mexico. But now that I'm here, it's different. Things are changing for me. I'm changing. The world isn't like what I thought it was."

"No," he said, with a laugh, and started walking again. "It's probably not."

I followed him. "I was hoping I could talk to you about it. Get your advice."

Luis stopped again, lifted up his arm, and pushed back the sleeve of his jacket so that he could see the watch on his wrist. "Ah. Two-oh-five," he said, smiling.

"How do you like that? Class is over for the day."

"Well maybe another time then?" I said. "I thought maybe you could help me. You know, figure it out. As a teacher," I added, just in case he thought I was coming onto him, and after the party it occurred to me that he might.

He shook his head, "Nope. Sorry. Can't." He started walking again. I let him get a few steps ahead of me and then trotted to catch up. I reached out and

tugged at his arm to stop him. My hand sunk through two inches of soft goose down before I felt meat and bone. "Why not?"

We went for coffee.

"I don't know why I am bothering to talk to you," he said after the waitress delivered our cups. "None of you Americans have any clue. You think that other countries are just like here, only they're more quaint, with different street names and smiling, happy people speaking languages you can't understand. Look around you. You see it everywhere. Even here."

The walls of the coffee house were decorated with photographs of Peruvian Indians in traditional clothes, the young girls in embroidered tops of many colors, the older women in bowler hats. A white card underneath the photos said they were for sale, and that they were the work of a graduate student photographer at U of M. "The rest of the world is like a movie to you," Luis said. "And you have no idea what it means--a different culture, a different history, government, land. For you, it's just, somehow," he searched for the word, and then came up with it, "fiction. It's a story you tell yourself of faraway places, no more real than fairyland or the kingdom of elves. And despite all the ruckus around you, you never wake up. What would it take to wake you up? But in my country you don't get to dream, or if you do..." He stopped and then started again. "In my country ten families control everything. All the farm land, the banks, the military." He lifted up his cappuccino with one hand and pointed at it with the other. "The people live and die like slaves in the coffee plantations and the mines and over here you grin about Juan Valdez and his mule.

For you Americans everything is simple, with no complexity. You like everything sweetened with sugar and milk.”

"I don't believe that," I said. "I mean look at the history of this country. Thomas Jefferson, William Payne. This country was founded by revolutionaries. They had an idea of democracy that was unprecedented.”

"And they wrote slavery right into the constitution."

"But then they fought a civil war to get rid of it."

"Oh please," Luis said, standing up. I had crossed a line with him, given him the textbook version of history, and he didn't like it. "That war wasn't to get rid of slavery. It was to create an industrial revolution in the South. And it offends me that you are so ideologically naive that you don't even know it, or that you think otherwise." He reached into his wallet and put two dollars down on the table. "But if that's what this is about, you asking for my time and attention so that you can give me the correct interpretation of American history, I have other things to do." He put his wallet in his pocket and started to turn away. "See you in class.”

"Luis, wait. Please." He stopped. "I'm sorry," I said. "You are right. I shouldn't have said that. I don't know what I'm talking about. I really don't. In fact that's why I wanted your help." He stayed where he was, standing a foot away from the table, giving me a minute, not sitting back down, but not walking away either. "I don't want to debate or argue," I said. "That's the last thing I want. I'm just trying to understand something here.”

"What, Miya?" he said, slightly impatient "What are you trying to understand? You're confusing me. Try to be clear.”

“I’m trying to understand what I, as an American, am supposed to do?”

“As an American?” he said.

“Yes.”

“What you are supposed to do?”

“Yes.”

"Get a passing grade in my class," he said. "Get your degree. Get married. Move into a three bedroom house. Raise your family and then go back to sleep."

“No,” I said. “I can’t. I just can’t.” And then at an attempt of humor. “I guess I’ve had the political equivalent of way too much coffee, and it’s keeping me awake.” I looked up at him standing there, hoping for a smile. He relented and gave me one. “But really,” I said. “What if I don’t want to go back to sleep? Even if I could, which I can’t. What if I want to wake up?”

"But why would you want to do that?" he said. "When you have all of the benefits of an American life? *La Vida es Sueno*. The American dream?"

"Because I feel more alive now than I ever have. Because I’m seeing things, and I’m learning. Since I started taking your class and Rick’s..."

“Oh him,” said Luis, interrupting me and waving his hand in front of his face like he was brushing away a bothersome fly.

“Oh him, what?” I said

“He’s a bag of hot air, full of distraction.”

“So you don’t like him?” I asked.

“What’s not to like? He paints pretty pictures with his thoughts and words. So what if he gives theory a bad name?”

“I don’t know about that,” I said. “I thought he was well respected.”

Luis raised his eyebrows. “Whatever,” he said.

“Okay,” I said but still. Between you and him, you’ve painted me a picture that’s different than the one I used to see. That’s what I wanted to talk to you about. You’re an intellectual and I’m not. You’re from the third world. You see things more clearly. You’re not as blind as I am, as people from America are, and I thought that you could help me figure out what to do with all that, how to put things into practice, now that I’m seeing more clearly than I ever have before.”

“Oh Miya, Miya, Miya,” he said, shaking his head in what looked like pity.

“That’s what white people always want from people of color. It’s my favorite contradiction. You’re the oppressor, but you want your subjects to set you free.”

“I’m not the oppressor,” I said. “How could you say that? That’s not fair.”

“Of course you are. Why else would you want me to rescue you?”

“I don’t,” I said.

“Oh, right,” rolling his eyes, and looking off at the portraits of the Peruvian woman who lined the walls, as if they could help.

“Luis,” I said. “I don’t want your pity, and I don’t want you to rescue me. I want your guidance.”

“No,” he said. “Forgive me. But you want me to help lead you out of Egypt. You want me to help you find your way to the promised land. That ring a bell?”

For a minute I couldn’t say anything. Of course it rung a bell. But was that what I was asking him? Maybe it was. “Okay,” I said. “Then tell me. Rescue me from what? Lead me out from what?”

"From being blind," he answered. "From the land of the blind. From being stuck. From being unable to act. Isn't that what you just said you wanted from me?"

"No," I said.

"Sure it is," he said, finally sitting back down. "That's exactly what you are saying. You want me to rescue you from the prison of ideology, your own ideology that you control. Only you don't call it rescue, because that's too close to the truth. You call it 'tell you what to do,' because then it leaves you an out. You can decide if you like it or you don't, and you can take it or leave it, just like any other K-Mart shopper. It is a power game Miya. Don't you see it?"

I sat there across from him doing the frog thing. My mouth open. My eyes blinking in slow motion. Was it true? Was that what I was asking him for? From my position of power? What position of power? It was so confusing. True I was white and he was brown. I was American and he was foreign. I was a native speaker and he spoke Spanish. Surely by all those markers I was more powerful than he. But did that make him right? By asking him what to do, was I putting the onus on him to rescue me from my world of contradictions? But that wasn't the only way to look at it. He was a man, in the end, which gave him more power than I had. He was a teacher. More power there too. Then there was the fact that he was an adult and I still felt like a child. Why shouldn't I ask him for leadership and guidance? He had all the leadership roles. I was all turned around. "Okay then," I said. "So what if you are right? What if I am asking you to rescue me? What's so bad about that?"

After all, I'd do it for him if he asked me.

"Well I can't," he said, and before I could ask why not, he continued. "It's the subject, object contradiction. Right now, I'm the object for you, but the subject for myself. If you become my object, then I'm no better than what I despise. Like your friend Rick, the hero of the intellectual left. You want me to tell you how to step out of the natural order of things. But you can't step out, you're as trapped as a princess in any enchanted castle. And the minute I come to free you, I become part of your story, which I refuse to do. You'll have to find your own way out. If you can. But between you and me—I don't think there is an exit."

"But what if you've already become part of what you despise?" I asked. "What if you're already in the story too? If we're in it together? I mean, you're a student at the University. So am I. But maybe it's even worse for you. You're a graduate teaching assistant. You have students of your own, whom you get to control. You're actually being paid by the state. I bet it says so right on your paycheck. I bet it's even signed by the governor."

"It's signed by a machine," he said.

"Yes, but still."

"There you are," he said. "You've got it. Clear as a bell. I don't think you need my help."

"But I do," I said.

"No, you don't," he said. "You understand it perfectly already."

"How can you say that?" I said. "I don't understand anything."

"Miya," he said, "Why do you think I'm here at the University?"

"Because you are an intellectual."

"In a sense, yes. But take it further. What are the choices for an intellectual?"

"That's what I'm asking you," I said.

"But what's your answer?" he said. "Not mine. Yours." I started to shake my head. I could not see where he was going. "The answers are the ones you already know," he said. "The ones you are afraid of because they seem so dull. Tell me."

"Fine," I said. "Go to a University. Teach. Write."

"There you go," he said. "That's exactly right. Or in my country, in Guatemala, you can also put on a uniform and fight in the army, or you can leave."

"You could open up a newspaper," I said.

"And get shot," said Luis. "Or campaign for new housing for the poor and get shot, or write poems or novels and get shot. So I come here and I don't get shot."

"I want to change things," I said.

"You can't."

"I don't believe that."

"Well try then. And watch what happens. You'll become jaded or corrupted or twisted up, just like everyone else. Or you'll go to graduate school and study Althusser and study the French school or the Russian formalists. You'll grow your hair long and wear it in a ponytail hanging down your back, and it will be blond on the bottom and gray on the top. You'll idolize Cuba, and sniff around for the revolution that will happen one day, just around the corner, until you sound like an old anarchist making speeches into the wind."

"I didn't think you were so bitter," I said.

"I'm just realistic. But you said you wanted my help, so now I'm giving it."

"That's not much help," I said. "And you make it sound like it's my fault that I'm an American."

"Not an American. I'm an American. You're a U.S. citizen." He stood up. "Come on," he said, leaving the two dollars he put on the table earlier for the bill. "Let's walk." Outside the sun had dipped down below the houses, turning the sky dark grey, and the air quite chill. I wrapped my arms around my chest seeking to hold in the warmth. "Why did you say you want to change things?" he asked.

"Because it's not real. It's not right, what I see," I added, "Now that I see."

"You're just romanticizing."

"No, I'm committing to a better world," I said. "A different natural order."

"But why?" Luis laughed. "What is so wrong with the world you have? You have plenty to eat. You have a warm bed to sleep in at night. You can stand on the street corner and condemn the government. You can read any book you like. You can live any place you'd like to live. What do you have to worry about?"

"I told you. It's not the truth. There's too much poverty. Too much oppression. Not enough freedom."

"And you came to this only recently? Now that you are a student at a University?"

"How else was I going to come to it?" I said. "I had to learn. I had to wake up." We stopped at the street corner and waited for the light to change. A car with a group of fraternity brothers turned in front of us. A blond haired boy stuck his head out the window. "Ashley's, tonight," he said. "Ten straight. Be there. Part-ay." He pulled his head back in as the car drove away.

Luis shook his head. "As I was saying, that just makes it all the more romantic. To be on the side of the ones who suffer, rather than on the side of the ones who win. But you are what you are. You can't change that."

"I don't see it that way."

"What if you have no choice?" he asked.

"I'll make the best choice I can," I said.

"And if there is no choice?"

"Then what are you supposed to do?" I asked him. "Give up?"

"No," he answered. "You act as if there is a choice to be made, even if there is not, or even if it's not a good one, and you do what you can. Intellectuals have always led revolutions."

"Are you a revolutionary?"

"I am a member of an oppressed minority. That makes me a revolutionary by birth. You are a member of the ruling class. You can only be a revolutionary by choice."

"I don't believe in violence."

"You need to visit my city Miya. Or perhaps Argentina, or Chile. It does no good not to believe in violence when the people around you are violent. My country is not safe for me. That's why I'm here, a graduate student, or as you say, a teaching assistant. If I go home they will kill me."

"Because of your politics?"

"Because I'm an Indian and a member of the intelligentsia, and I left. That's the first part of your education. In the United States if they are scared of you they

ignore you, or they send you to a place like this, where you can sit in classrooms or in the houses of your professors and talk about politics as if politics is simply a struggle between the world of ideas. Only in universities in the United States and in Europe is there any concept of a difference between theory and practice. Did you know that?"

"No."

"Well, think about that then, because it is time for me to go."

A week later I found a note pinned to the door of my room at the dormitory.

"Bertolucci's *The Conformist* is at Sproul Hall tonight. Go." I recognized Luis' handwriting.

I asked him about it after class. "Surely you know the film," he said. "It's about how a man, a weak man became a fascist in Mussolini's Italy."

"No. Mussolini was not a hot topic at Las Cruces High."

"Ah, the lament of the culturally deprived. Go. Learn something."

One Thursday night I was the first one to show up for Rick's study group. I knocked and the door was answered by Rick's son, Nikko, who was totally naked and covered with bubble-bath-bubbles from head to toe. "Rick's upstairs with the flood," he said in his five year old voice. Then he lowered his voice to a whisper. "He said never to use the dishwashing soap to make bubbles again. But I'm going to because the bubbles are really good." He let out a belly laugh, darted inside and started climbing up stairs. "Daddy," he said, "it's the girl you like with the yellow hair."

"Miya, is that you?" Rick called down from the second floor. The girl he liked, I thought to myself. What did Nikko mean by that?

"Yes it is," I said. "Hi."

"Come on in," he called down. "And could you be a love and put on the pot for tea? Lea's not home and I've got a mess up here. There's some kind of bread from Tivoli's in the fridge as well, if you wanted to put it on a plate and slice it. I'll be down as soon as I can."

I walked into the kitchen, filled the tea pot and turned the gas burner on under it, went to the cupboard and found a box of loose Lipton tea and poured a handful of leaves into a ceramic teapot sitting next to the tea box. I pulled a sea green plate down from the cupboard, found a loaf of dark-fruity looking bread in the fridge, unwrapped it from its plastic casing, placed it on the plate and started slicing.

This was the first time I had been in Rick and Lea's kitchen by myself. Actually, it was the first time I had been anywhere in their house by myself and it felt eerie, like I had wandered into a museum of sorts, and the furniture, and the use-objects, and the books, and art work, and magazines were all symbols, put where they were to signify a person, a family, a lifestyle, a place in time. And like a visitor to a museum, I wanted to observe and gather, touch, feel the texture of Rick's life with my hands, examine the shards of his life, represented by the things that surrounded me. The faucet handle in the kitchen sink that grinded and sputtered when I first pushed it to open, before finally releasing the water in a smooth flow. The gas burner that seemed to search for the pilot three times, before connecting with the small blue flame that ignited its fire, the fridge--I went back to it once I had cut the bread, to look again at the bottles of marmalade and the jars of peanut butter, the rice and grains and dried fruits, apricots and raisins, in their plastic bags with their prices and

quantities written by hand on their food co-op labels. The bottles of Moosehead ale, cups of yogurt with fruit on the bottom, the bag of whole roasted coffee beans, a slab of emanthaler cheese, a round of gouda, and nothing more.

I walked into the living room that had been remodeled to twice its size by the removal of a wall between two smaller rooms in the house. I could see the shadow of its past in what was now an unadorned center archway, the size of the missing wall. There was an abstract wooden sculpture in the corner under the window, the size of a small dog. I walked over and bent down to look more closely, ran my hand over its surface, feeling the smooth warmth of the wood under my palm. It felt like skin. I stood up, and looked out the window. A small space of lawn separated Rick's and Lea's house from their neighbors who I did not know, and who revealed nothing to me from behind their closed and shaded windows.

From the kitchen I could hear the tea pot work through the octaves of its whistle, starting with the low rub of air and then rising in tone and volume to the aggressive pitch of a whistling pot at the boil, but I did not want to leave my tour of the house to attend to it. I walked over to the fire place and stood on tip-toe to look at the objects on the mantel. They were fetishes, like the ones my father sold at his store, carved of turquoise, or onyx, or marble, in the shape of animals, their stone eyes looking out into the world in peace, or defiance, or wonder, their power objects strapped to their backs like burdens or children. I picked one up, closed my fingers around it, and lifted it to my mouth. I opened my hand slightly, just enough to reveal the stone surface without letting go and breathed out a slow breath, moist and heavy like a kiss, before putting it back. I turned to the books on the book shelves, I wanted

to run my hand along their spines, open them up and inhale the smell of their pages, but the tea pot was relentless, aggressive and insistent, calling me back to turn it off and return the house to quiet and peace. I was pouring the hot water from the pot into the leaves when Rick walked into the kitchen. He was in jeans and a white Hanes T-shirt, bare-footed and wet headed, like a boy fresh from a dip in a river on a sunny day. "I heard the kettle," he said. "And when you didn't turn it off, I thought I better come down."

"I was outside," I lied, pointing to the sliding glass door at the other end of the breakfast nook. "I guess I didn't hear."

"Well then," he said. "So you're alright?" He reached out, put his arm around my shoulders and gave me a little squeeze. He smelled of soap and shampoo and fresh water. "Appreciate the help, you know. Don't know what I would do without you."

I hadn't known I was going to lie. But then it hadn't occurred to me that Rick might hear the tea kettle all the way upstairs, that he might wonder why I hadn't turned it off, that he might come down to investigate and that finding me safe and sound he might ask me why I let it whistle for so long. I suppose I could have told him the truth, but then I would have been so full of shame that I would have had to walk out of his house and never return. I would have had to drop out of his class, and then find a way to totally avoid him. I was not, at that time of my life, someone who could do something I felt guilty about, like taking too close a look at my professor and his family's things, and then simply continue the relationship with the people I felt that I had harmed as if nothing had happened. And so there was no way I was

going to let him know I had been snooping around his home where he lived with his wife and son. In what world would I tell my adored professor that I had been searching through his kitchen and living room like an archaeologist, looking for clues to his life that would gain me an intimacy that was not naturally mine? And yet, here he was standing close to me in his house, oblivious as to what I had done, fresh out of the shower, with his arm around me perhaps a bit too long for a plain show of affection. It was I who broke the moment, shrugging to signal it was time for him to remove his arm from around my shoulders. He gave the top of my arm a small squeeze and let go. "What time is it then? Do you know?"

I looked over at the clock on the stove. "Ten of."

"Christ. That late? Be a love, would you, and bring Nikko down. I can't believe Lea's not here yet."

"Sure." As I walked by him, Rick reached out to stop me, grabbing my arm, at the soft fleshy part that most women hate but that I think men love because it reminds them of our breasts. I hesitated, turned, saw him looking at me with concentration bordering, I thought, on intention. I looked back at him the same way. I think my heart tripled its beating. I know my breathing grew shallow and quick, as if I was gulping for air instead of sucking it in, although I tried not to show it. I am sure I wanted to stay right there, in the hallway of his house, frozen like that in time, with Rick's hand on my arm, the electric current between us buzzing, our bodies in a perfect agreement of desire, known, but still unacknowledged. But that is not the nature of history. Contradictions do not go unresolved. There is no equilibrium in a world bound to time. Perhaps that is why Rick may have leaned in closer or only

seemed to have leaned in closer, as if he was going to kiss me. Or, why I might have only thought I felt him tighten his grasp on my arm as if to bring me closer to him. But I can not say what happened next, because I do not know what happened inside of him. All I do know are the actions, which though indisputable, tell almost nothing. He let go of my arm. I started up the stairs after his son.

A few minutes later, the door bell rang and the first of the graduate students showed up for the study group, Lea came home, collected Nikko and they went across the street to the neighbors, Stanley showed up with a large bottle of inexpensive wine and we talked together about Jameson as we drank Stanley's wine in the mugs I had set out and the tea grew cold in its ceramic tea pot.

Betty Niketia's Testimony

When Makeba asked if an American girl, coming over to help with our elections could stay with me, in my family's house, it was unexpected. If Sello and I had been married, it would have been better. She could have stayed with us, in our home, where we could have made her comfortable. But we were only engaged. So I lived with my parents and my sisters in a house that was far away from the clinic, in the Luhesha township. It was small, and very full, with a kitchen and then my father and mother in one room, my two sisters and I in another. I did not understand why Makeba was asking such a thing of me. I asked her, would it not be better for the American girl to stay in the city in an apartment of her own, or with people who could offer her nicer accommodations? And she told me it was important for people from the West who wanted to help, to really know and understand Oneg Kempo, and the best way to do it was to stay with a family like mine and so, with my father's permission, I told Makeba yes.

The day Miya Clare arrived we were very excited. We moved my sisters' bed into the kitchen where there was enough room at one end. My mother made a big *potjie* and my father borrowed an extra chair from the neighbors. It was night time and we were waiting by the window. When Makeba drove the clinic's Opal car drove up the street with Miya inside, my sisters and I ran out to great her. The sisters took her suitcases from her and I gave her a hug. "I'm so glad you're finally here," I said.

“We are all so happy to see you.” Then I said good-bye to Makeba, and invited Miya inside our house. I introduced her to my father and mother, Allou and Dolly, and showed her the room she and I would be sharing. When she understood that my sisters had moved their beds to make a place for her, I could see she felt badly, but instead of saying, “Oh no, you shouldn’t do that,” which would have only embarrassed my family, she said “Thank you. I believe I will be comfortable here.” That is the moment I knew that she was a good woman, Miya Clare. She had sensitivity and respect for the feelings of others.

After she rested and unpacked we went outside to sit on the porch and eat the food my mother had prepared for us and we began to get to know each other. I told her about my sisters and how they bothered me to distraction. “They cannot leave me alone,” I said. “It’s always, ‘Betty, Betty can you do this? Can you do that? How do I look? Can I borrow your dress?’” She told me she had sisters too, one in Texas at University, and one still in New Mexico with her parents, and she told me how they almost never saw each other anymore.

“Isn’t that lonely for you?” I asked her. “To be so far from your family?”

“Not lonely,” she said. “Maybe sad some times. But I am used to it. In the U.S. we move around a lot. For jobs, or school, or because there’s someplace else we’d rather live.”

“We are not like that in Oneg Kempo,” I said, remembering Makeba’s advice to help Miya to get to know our people better. “Here we try to stay where we are, with our families close by.”

We talked about our fathers. I told her that mine still saw me as a little child which was very hard on me. “At the clinic,” I said, “I am considered a grown-up. A professional woman. I have my own desk. I have a locker with a key where I keep my things and no one can open it up but me. There are doctors there who respect me. The patients call me ‘Miss Betty’ when I tell them how to care for their wounds once they leave hospital, or how to make sure their children are eating well. I give shots, vaccinations. I write instructions. I take blood. At work people listen to me and they treat my words with respect. But then I come home. Here my father tells me what to do, my mother tells me what to do. They forget that I am as old now as they were when I was a baby. I do not know how they can forget, but they do. They know that they have grown older, but to them I am still a little girl.”

Miya told me it was the same for her, and that was not what I expected. “But you have done so much,” I said. “You went away to school. You have traveled. You have lived on your own. How can that be?”

“Because fathers are the same everywhere?” she said, offering what I thought she believed was a fact, but making it sound like a question. “Especially when it comes to their daughters.”

It was during our talking that Sello came, although I did not know right away because he is a cautious man, and since he did not know who Miya was, at first he hid in the bushes where he could watch and listen without being seen. But he was not there very long. He was noisy and I heard him. I stood up from my chair. “Who is there?” I shouted out, thinking the noise in the bushes was my sisters spying on me. “Come out and show yourself.” But when the girls did not start to giggle and come

out of the bushes with silly grins on their faces, I grew nervous. “Who is there?” I said. Still no one. “Who is there?” I said one last time. “If you are there you better say something. Because you are scaring me.” Then from the bushes Sello stood up, brushing the dirt and the insects from his shirt and pants. I could not believe what I was seeing. “Sello,” I said. “Is that you? What are you doing here?”

He apologized for hiding and explained that he had decided to come to visit because he had not spoken to me in a long time, and since there was no evening bus service from Notenyo during the week he had come on foot and walked all of that way. But when he arrived and saw Miya, he had become concerned because he did not know who she was and that she was staying with us. He said he had considered walking right up to the porch and saying hello, or else turning around and going home, but he had already walked twelve miles one way, and he did not want to return without seeing me. So he decided to hide and to listen first and then make his choice about what to do. He quickly knew everything was fine, but then he had a problem. How do you politely announce yourself, once you have been listening in on someone in secret? Do you just stand up from your hiding place and say “hello?” Do you try to sneak away without being noticed, and then casually walk up to the front door, as if you had not been there listening in for the past ten minutes, hearing everything? That was his problem which was solved for him when I heard him. I shook my head. “Sello,” I said, “I am happy to see you. And I forgive you for scaring me, but what kind of crazy man are you to walk all that way tonight?”

“It’s not that far,” he said.

“And with your leg,” I said.

He told me then that I worried too much, but he sat down, pulled his bad leg close and started rubbing the calf. That's when I told Miya how he almost lost his leg when he was shot that year, and then sent to jail. For two weeks, I told her, I went to the jail to clean his wound and bandage his leg. What would he have done if I was not a nurse? I also brought him food every day, even though my Papa forbade it. "Your school teacher is a trouble maker," he said to me. "Let him go hungry, he won't starve, and maybe he'll learn not to fight the law."

But Mama wouldn't hear of it. She made a plate for him every night, and every night I rode the bus to the prison, to take the food to him. And while I was on the bus I used to imagine fighting with Papa in my head. "This is my food Papa," I would say to him in my mind. "Every bite comes from money that I earn at the clinic." Brave words, I told Miya, and Sello who was there, and so, listening. But you should have seen the way my hands would shake when I would sneak in and out of the house, so afraid that I would make a noise and that my father would catch me, that I could barely move. Later I found out that it was my Papa who had told my mother to give me food for the "teacher, with the heart of a lion inside a mouse's body." My Papa who said, "If we did not feed him, his heart would eat the mouse and he would starve." When I learned the truth, I did not know, at first, why she kept my father's secret. But later I understood. If I had known I had my father's blessing, I would have walked into the prison with my head held high. And Sello would have suffered for it. Better to walk in with my head hanging down, like a criminal. That is the way it is here in Oneg Kempo. That is what saved Sello from me the first time, but it could not save him again. Because the second time I knew. I knew that my father

and mother would stand by me. And Makeba, and everyone from the clinic. Olga, Michael, even Miya Clare, who would bring the eye of America on all of us.

So after the man came to clinic, the one that Olga told you about, I was willful. I walked out onto the street as a fearless woman. A woman full of pride. I did not even think about the safety of others. I did not think about Makeba or Olga and how they would worry about me. I did not think about Miya and Michael, that they would come to look for me, and that they would be in danger because I walked into the prison to look for Sello with my head held high, like a woman who does not remember that she is black and they are white, and that her fiancé, Sello, was considered a criminal. But I forgot all of that, or I did not want to pay attention. My heart was on fire with fear and anger. So I walked out of the clinic and into the streets, where the men were fighting, raising their sticks, and rocks and pieces of wood against the tear gas, and the batons, and the rifles with rubber bullets and real. But of course they did not raise their weapons against me. Why should they? I was one of them. I did not care that the power was not righteously mine, or that it would turn to dust in my hand, because the power of anger only lasts while the blood is white hot and once it cools you are left with nothing.

I walked out into the streets, and to the hospital first. “I am a nurse,” I said, when the woman at the hospital told me it was closed to visitors and I should come back tomorrow. “Can you not see by my uniform I am a health care worker like you?” I said to her. “Would you turn me down because of some government rule when you owe me solidarity?” I was harsh with her. I used the loyalty of our

profession to force her answer. “You must tell me what you know. You must look at your lists and see if my Sello’s name is on it.”

And so she looked at the list. “The name is not there,” she said. “You should look somewhere else.”

“Where?” I asked her. “Where should I look?” But I knew.

I went back into the streets. It was nearly dark by then and there were not so many people out. The ones who were, though, were drunken and angry. They called things to me. “Peach” and “Darling.” I picked up a piece of wood of my own that I found lying in the gutter. I held it in front of me like a torch and no one came near. I was not afraid. My father had given me food for Sello, had called him a lion. I was a nurse at the clinic. I had my own desk. My own locker. The doctors who respected me. The patients who I taught to care for themselves. I gave shots. Stitched wounds. Wrote down instructions. I was not afraid. “Sello,” I called in the dark as I went. “Sello.” I did not think about Miya and Michael, and how they would come looking for me. I did not think about Makeba and Olga, or the doctors at the clinic, or my family, and how they would be frightened and worried.

I walked for a hours, stopping people, asking them if they knew Sello, or if they had seen him. I did not find anyone from Sello’s school, or from the village. No one I spoke to could tell me anymore than I already knew. And then I went to the prison but they would not tell me if they were holding him there, if he were at the prison or at the hospital, although I knew then, by the way they whispered back and forth to each other, that he was there. But they said I had no right to know, that I had no right to even ask. They said that if I was not careful they would arrest me too.

“Who do you think you are?” they asked me. “Coming here like this? Telling us what we must do?” Who did I think I was, “to inquire about such a man? To demand to see him?” I was nobody, they told me. Just a foolish woman with her head held high, when I should have held it lowered. A woman fierce and full of dignity, when I should have been timid and scared. So they told me, “Go home. Go home,” they said. “This is not for you. Your man is nowhere. Your man is nobody. Go home.” And not even then did I hang my head. In my pride, I stood up even taller. “I will find him,” I said. “I will find him, you will not stop me.” I had forgotten I held a stick in my hand and when I raised my arm above my head, I raised the stick as well.

I tell you this now, because this is why Miya Clare died. This is why, because Sello came here to march. The police beat him and they took him away. He did not throw rocks. He did not beat at cars with a piece of wood or a stick. He did not break glass windows. He was a peaceful man. He was a school teacher. A man who saw all of it came to tell me, as you have heard. He came to the clinic to tell me that they took Sello away, and that he needed me. I put on my coat, and I went out to find him. Olga and Makeba told me to wait. They said it was not safe. But I could not wait. I was too scared for him. I went to the hospital. I went to the prison. I yelled and I screamed, and I raised my stick into the air, high above my head, so the police put their eye on me. They locked me up. They put me in a cell. I am still in prison. That is why I wear this suit of Orange, and why I lie on a cot each night, staring with sleepless eyes at the ceiling. My father and mother and sisters far away. My Sello dead. Miya dead. The guards at the prison where I went to look for Sello would not let me make a phone call after they locked me up. No Makeba. No Olga. No one at

the clinic to know where I was or what happened. That is the reason they came to look for me. Michael and Miya Clare, the next day. They came to look for me just the same way I went to look for Sello. And that is why they were out there. In the danger. She came with Michael to look for me, out on the streets where they thought I must be.

It is my fault that she is dead. I held my head up.

Later When the Mountains Come

At the Christmas holidays I left Ann Arbor for the first time in four months and went home to Las Cruces with tales of a library so full of books that it rose nine stories into the sky and had four sub basements. I showed Yolanda pictures of brick buildings covered with ivy, and of marble buildings fronted by columns and porticos with grand entrances and wide steps rubbed to a smooth sheen by hundreds of feet over ten generations. "It's beautiful," I told Yolanda. "The buildings are a hundred years old, the campus looks like Greece or Rome." We were sitting at the levee, on a picnic table near the sign put up by the Army Corps of Engineers that identified the spot as the former location of the Rio Grande. Since the day when my mother and sister and I had gotten caught in the rain storm seven years before, the city public works department had poured a concrete pad and chained a picnic bench to a metal ring sunk deep into the concrete foundation. "I'm learning so much," I said. "About how things really are, the underlying super-structure, about the contradictions in our political economy and how they set the stage for revolution. We're going to have a revolution here in the United States, you know. It's just inevitable."

"A revolution?" said Yolanda, looking at me like I was speaking Chinese or was wearing a glass eye. "Here in this country? That's what they're teaching you up in Michigan? They must be crazy. You must be crazy. There's never going to be revolution here in the United States. Why would there be?"

Overhead, two doves flew by and landed in one of the trees that lined the ditch. "Because it's inherent in the system," I said. "There's a fatal flaw. No matter how hard you try to prevent it, sooner or later it's going to break and things will change." Just then one of the birds started to call, its "caw, caw" sounding to my ears like a chant; "I'm a bird, I'm a bird, I'm only a bird."

"So fine," said Yolanda. "What's our fatal flaw, here in the United States?"

"Poverty is part of it," I said. "Racism."

Yolanda half-laughed, half snorted. "In that case we should have had your revolution by now."

"I know," I said, reading her disbelief too earnestly. "We almost did, in the thirties. If FDR hadn't come up with the new deal we would probably be a socialist country now. And then in the 60's. Did you know that in 1968 the French students almost overthrew the government?"

"I don't think so," she said.

"They did," I said. "They had barricades in the street. What do you think would have happened if they had won? With the student movement here in the U.S. and Abby Hoffman, and the Weathermen, the French philosophers and everything else? You know, we're not so far away."

"From France?" she asked.

"From revolution," I answered.

"Oh right. Of course," Yolanda said. "Revolution. How could I be so slow?"

I knew she was being facetious but I couldn't really imagine Yollie not seeing things the way I did. Besides, I was pretty jazzed up, wanting to talk and talk and talk

about what I had learned. "It's because ideology disguises the truth and the contradictions inherent in the social structure," I said, turning my conversation into a speech. "We've internalized power relations inside the family, the schools, the church, all of our social systems. But systems are always in flux by their nature. Power relations change and inevitably there must be a disruption of the dominant discourses as people create new truth relations." I took a breath. "So we're close, but we're just not there."

"Miya Clare," Yollie said, looking at me like I had grown a third arm, or turned green, "You are so loco. I have no idea what you are talking about. I could not understand a word you said. It's a good thing you've come back home to be with normal people. Up there in Michigan they are teaching you fairy tales."

"No, they're not," I said, wondering what they were teaching her at the University of New Mexico, and trying to sound more patient than I felt. "They're teaching me what's real. And it's incredible, Yolanda," I said, getting jazzed again. "I wish you could be there with me. And see it and hear it for yourself. I'm learning from some of the smartest people in the world. I'm reading books by recognized geniuses." I stopped, not seeing the sympathy of recognition in her face. "How can you call what I'm saying fairy tales?"

"Because you talk like you think a revolution is a good thing."

"It is," I said.

"Well, if that's what you think," she said, standing up, "then you don't know shit. You and the big talkers up in Michigan. Tell them to come down here and talk about revolution with some people who really fought one. Tell them to go look at

what happens when the people rise up to take power. You don't need to go to France. You can look right here in New Mexico. You can talk to my *abuelita*. Her father's brother fought in a revolution. A real one. Do you even know what happens in a real revolution?"

"Of course I do. I don't take it lightly."

"People fight and they get killed--for nothing. It doesn't matter about the ideas or what your geniuses say. All that matters is who has the power and who has the biggest guns."

"So then what do we do about injustice?" I asked. "Turn our backs?"

"I don't care about injustice," she said. "It's just a word."

"So you don't care if people suffer?" I asked, surprised at Yolanda's answer and feeling myself superior, since after all, I did.

"Of course I care," she said. "But I don't think the answer to suffering is more suffering. I don't think the answer is dying for a cause. My uncle Paolo's death didn't make for any less suffering. It made for more. He picked up his machete and his rifle for a cause. He died for a cause and what was the result? His children were never born. A whole line, my grandmother's nephews and nieces, my cousins, never born. That is the result of a revolution. A whole future wiped away."

It was warm by the old river bed, now turned irrigation ditch, and I could feel the sun heating my skin through the fabric of my shirt. I missed this. This heat and the smell of pine needles. In Michigan there was already snow on the ground, and I was always cold. It was harder to think about revolution here by the river, easier to

feel that the smart thing to do was leave well enough alone, to let someone else worry and sacrifice. "At least your uncle fought for something he believed in," I said.

"He didn't have any beliefs," said Yolanda. "He fought because it was Santa Ana. He fought because he was macho." She stood up and walked over to the edge of the ditch. "He died with his machete in his hand and there is no less suffering in the world." Yolanda looked back at me. "His death changed nothing."

I walked over to where she was standing by the water. "Then what do you do, Yolanda? Tell me. Do just accept things as they are? Do you wash your hands of it? Turn your back?"

"No."

"Then what?"

"Are you asking me?" she said. "Or are you just trying to make your point?"

"I'm asking you," I said.

"Okay," she said, looking up at me. "Go to medical school. Become a doctor."

"I don't want to be a doctor."

"Then become an engineer. Go out to the colonias and build sewage treatment plants, or electrical power stations."

"Yolanda, individuals can't do anything by themselves."

"Is that what your books say?"

"Yes."

"Well then they are wrong. An individual won the war against polio. An individual found the vaccine for small pox. An individual fired the shot that started

World War I." She looked at me. "Maybe you shouldn't be so quick to dismiss what one individual can do." She turned and started back to the car. "I'm ready to go."

I followed her down the levee and we got in her car. She lit a cigarette. "I thought you quit," I said.

"I did. But right now I need a smoke."

That night I found out what Yolanda meant about the power of an individual, at least as it had influence on my life. Tomas and I were in my bedroom, sitting on my bed as we had so many times in the past. "Aren't you going to kiss me," I asked.

"Sure." He moved closer, gave me a light peck on the lips, and then quickly drew away.

"What was that?"

"You said you wanted a kiss," he said.

"Yeah," I said. "But that's the kind of kiss you give your Aunt Juanita. And she has bad breath and warts on her face."

He shrugged. "Sorry."

"I mean come on," I said. "I know we're not officially going together, but that doesn't mean we can't enjoy each other's company." I prodded him with my finger between his ribs. "Don't you miss me?"

"Sure I miss you," he said.

"Well then why are you so hesitant? It's not like I'm going to bite you."

"But like you said," he interrupted me. "We're not together any more."

"Oh," I said, the light going on in my head. "Oh now I get it. You're not available. You're seeing someone."

He nodded.

"Then why didn't you just tell me?" I said, speaking first without giving my feelings time to catch up with my heart.

"Timing, I guess," he said.

"So are you going to tell me now?" I asked.

"Give me a minute, okay," he said. "I just got here."

"What's the big deal?" I asked. "Is it someone I know? Is that why you're being so shy? Come on." I still wasn't ready to take his admission completely seriously. He couldn't have switched alliances so soon. Could he? I got up on my knees and dug my finger under one of his ribs, in a spot where I knew he was ticklish. He squirmed away. "Tell me," I said, poking him again. "Tell me." I squeezed the ticklish spot above his knee, and then reached under his arm to tickle him there. "You better tell me or I'm going to tickle you really bad."

"Miya, stop it," he said, standing up and surprising me with his unwillingness to play. "Just stop it, okay. Maybe it's not so easy to talk about. I mean you barely called me all year, you know. You only wrote me two letters and now you come to visit, and you're going to go away again in two weeks and you expect us just to pick up where we left off?"

"No, I don't," I said. "I don't expect that at all. I just wanted to get together for a little while. I miss you. I wanted to see you." I leaned back, so I could get a good look at him. "Why are you acting so strange?" I asked. "I thought we still liked

each other and I don't know what's wrong with two people who like each other having some fun. I don't know why you have to go and get all weird on me. If I didn't know better I'd think you were dating Leslie, or even Angela." I watched as his face turned white, and then mine did too. "Oh my God," I said. "Are you dating one of my sisters?"

"No. Jesus Christ, Miya. How could you even think that?" he said.

"Then what is it?" I asked, and then somehow I knew. "You're seeing Yolanda," I said. "Aren't you?" I stood up. "That's what you're trying to hide from me. You're going out with my best friend and neither of you has the guts to tell me."

"We wanted to tell you."

"When? After you let me make a complete fool out of myself? I mean you're with me, here in my bedroom, on my bed and now you tell me this? Don't you think one of you could have had the common courtesy to let me know that you were dating? I was with Yolanda the whole afternoon. Other than my family, the two of you and Father Guzman are the only people I even came back to see. Jesus. You'd think one of you would have said something."

I sat back down on the bed my heart squeezing inside me. I was upset and mad and feeling the fool. But at the same time, I didn't really know how I felt. It wasn't clear to me. It wasn't that I was still in love with Tomas, or that he was in love with me, or that his being involved with someone else was a problem. After all, we had had fallen in love with each other the way babies do, all cuddles and giggles and attachments, and then I went away. And from the minute I left, just like that, I knew I was never coming back to live in Las Cruces. I also knew Tomas would never

leave. He was too connected, too rooted, too close. We had no future together. But somehow I had always thought that we would be there for each other, and that as we grew older we would become friends, almost like brother and sister. I realized even as I was reflecting on all of that, how goofy it sounded. Far more likely and truthful to the way I was, and Tomas too, was that we would drift apart and have nothing to do with each other, until maybe we met each other anew at our high school reunion twenty years later, where we would look at each other with some kind of affection, embarrassment and curiosity, and wonder to ourselves how in our youth the two of us had been inseparable. But that had been my fantasy, I realized. Not his. Now my boyfriend and my best friend were lovers, and if there were two people in the world that I did not want to share, it was them. Tomas and Yolanda belonged to me.

"How long?" I asked. Tomas put his hands in his pocket and looked down at his feet. "How long, Tomas? Did it start before I left?"

"You know it didn't," he answered.

"Then when?" I said.

"I don't know," he said. "At first it was just that she missed you," he said.

"And so did I. We both missed you. So much. And we were both lonely. You'd have known that if you'd even called."

"I did call," I said.

"Or really paid attention," he answered.

"That's not fair," I said.

Tomas shrugged. "So Yolanda was living up in Albuquerque on campus, and I had an apartment. Sometimes she'd take a bus into the city and come see me, or I'd

pick her up at the dorm and we'd have lunch or go somewhere. It was hard for her at school. She's never been anywhere but Las Cruces."

"So you decided to play big brother."

"No, I decided to be nice to your friend, because ..."

"Because why?" I asked. I could feel tears coming up into my eyes even though I didn't want them to. I knew what he was going to say, and when he did I couldn't keep them from coming.

"Because it was like being close to you. That's all we talked about at first. You. Or at least that's all Yolanda talked about anyway, and it made me miss you so much I couldn't stand it. And then it made me miss you less."

"Are you sleeping with her?" I could feel the tears start down my face. Whether they were tears of loss or tears of anger, I didn't know.

"Miya." He sat down on the bed next to me, pulled his shirt tail from out of his pants and used it to wipe the tears off my face. "Don't be sad."

"I'm not sad. I'm hurt."

"I'm sorry," he said. "We didn't mean for it to happen. It just did. I gave Yollie a ride home for Thanksgiving and then I couldn't find anyone to do something with on that Friday, so I called her up to see if she wanted to go to the movie. We decided to walk, and on the way there I felt one way, and on the way back I felt another. I can't even say why. I just felt different about her. I don't know. Like some kind of switch had been thrown, or all of the wiring in my body had been suddenly changed. I felt as if I had been woken up from a spell or maybe I had fallen into a new spell. We couldn't help it, Miya."

"You should have told me."

"I know. We talked about it. How to do it. So you wouldn't be hurt. Or be mad."

"What about just telling me?" I asked. I was feeling angry now, righteous that they had kept their secret from me. "How about Yollie calling me up on the telephone and saying, 'Miya, my best friend in the world, I just want you to know I'm going out with your old boyfriend.' Or how about you calling me up and saying, 'There's something I need you to know.' What about that?" I asked. "Nice and simple? Did that even occur to you?"

"We wanted to wait. So we could tell you in person."

"Then why didn't Yollie just tell me this afternoon."

"She tried."

"No, she didn't."

"She called me after she dropped you home. She said she wanted to tell you, but she couldn't find the way to do it. She said you were so excited about politics and revolution that she never found the way to work it in."

"She's a chicken," I said. "In fact, you're both chicken." I stood up. "I think you better go home."

"Miya."

"I'm serious," I said, anger rising. "Go home."

"I'll come by with Yolanda tomorrow. Maybe we can talk."

When Tomas called the next day, I told my mother to take a message. Yolanda called a few minutes later. "Tell her I'll have to get back to her," I yelled from my room.

A few minutes my mother came to see me. "What's going on?" she said.

"Nothing."

"Miya," she said. "Don't lie to me. It's not nice and it won't work. I'm your mother. What's going on with you and Tomas and Yolanda? Why won't you talk to them?"

"I already talked to them," I said. "They're seeing each other."

"Oh," she said, and she sat down next to me on my bed. "Serious?"

"I think."

"Honey, I'm sorry," she said, putting her arms around me. "Losing your first love, that's always hard. It's a real stinker when it's to your best friend."

"No, it isn't," I said, pulling away from her and rolling over to face the wall. "It's no big deal."

"Is that why you aren't taking their calls?" she said. "Because it's no big deal? Come on, Miya," she said when I didn't answer. "I wasn't born yesterday." She reached out and started rubbing my back. "I know it hurts. How could it not?"

"Because I'm the one who left," I said. "I made my choice."

"You all left," said my mother. "You went to Michigan, and Tomas and Yolanda went to Albuquerque. Nobody stayed here. So why are you to blame?"

"I'm not," I answered. "That's the point. That's why it makes me so mad. They act like I forced them to be together. Like I forced them into it and they had no control at all."

"You and Yolanda need to talk," my mother said. "She's your best friend."

"I know who she is," I said. "She's a traitor."

"Honey, he doesn't belong to you," she said.

"He doesn't belong to her."

"Apparently he does now."

The door bell rang. "If that's for me," I called out, "I'm not available."

Then I heard Angela's voice. "Miya. Miya," she sang in her child's cadence. "It's for you."

"I'll take care of it," my mother said, standing up.

"What are you going to say?"

"You have heart burn?" she said.

"How about a stomach ache?" I said.

"What if I say, 'You are two of the most important people in my daughter's life and she's having trouble coming to terms with the fact that she may not be the center of your universe.'"

"Great," I said. "My own mother thinks that the problem is that I'm a narcissist, not that my best friend and my boyfriend have abandoned me for each other."

“Things change, Miya,” she said. “Today Tomas and Yolanda are more important to each other than you are. I know that hurts. But you’ll get over it. We all do. It happened to me.”

“No, it didn’t,” I said.

“Yes, it did.”

“When?” I said, growing curious.

“With you. And your sisters. You all found people to replace me in your hearts. As soon as you started to grow up. It’s just the way it goes.”

After my mother left I walked into my closet, which was almost the size of one of the carrels at the library, closed the door, turned off the light and curled up on the floor, feeling how it felt to be unloved and recognizing it.

The first week of my last year in high school, when Tomas and I were still new, and everything good had still seemed possible, a neighborhood boy who lived a few blocks away, only five minutes if you cut through the long backyards behind the houses and climbed over the stone fences between them was killed by a sword. He was in middle school, and in the vague way that people who live in the same place get to know of each other after a while, I knew who he was, or at least I had met his older sisters and brothers when they had come around selling Girl Scout cookies in the spring or *luminarias* at Christmas. The boy, Buddy Perkins, who was fourteen years old, had been playing in his bedroom with two of his nieces, age nine and six, and his nephew age seven. They were visiting with their family from Silver City. The four children--Buddy was still a child, although he would have hated to be described that

way--were bouncing a rubber ball--the kind you buy at supermarket in the summer, plucking one out of a large wire cage, and then dribbling it along the linoleum corridor of the store until the manager stopped you and asked, “Are you going to buy that or not?”

The youngest was bouncing the ball up and down, and up and down on the floor, each time bouncing it higher and higher until the last time it bounced higher than Buddy’s head. The ball in its trajectory caught the decorative but sharp-edged sword that was hanging on the wall in the bare space between Buddy’s bed and his desk in just such a way that it slipped from its hook and slid downward toward the earth, blade lowered and under the influence of gravity, only to be slowed and finally stopped by the skin and bone and muscle of Buddy’s neck. The nieces and nephews were screaming, the parents rushed in, the father trying to hold the lips of the newly created mouth closed against the blood, the mother calling for 911, the aunt, her sister, herding the young ones out of the room. The paramedics came and one, losing his sense of professional distance fell, overwhelmed, to his knees on the floor. The other pushed past him, tearing open the sterile bandages and trying, trying, trying to stem the flow of blood. They got Buddy into the ambulance and over to the hospital but the trauma nurses and ER doctors could not keep him alive.

The *Las Cruces Beacon* published the bones of the story the next day; the details we learned more slowly, from a cashier at Jewel Osco, who was the sister of the paramedic who did not faint, from the husband of the trauma nurse who was a teacher at our school, from the police lieutenant called on scene who stopped at my father’s store the next week to pick up a bracelet for his wife to celebrate their eighth

anniversary and who said, “What were they thinking, those parents? A sword on the wall. A sword, for God’s sakes.” And soon we all knew the story of Buddy Perkins and we all considered it in our own way; what it meant, why it happened, if it were fate, or luck, or an evil joke. And I remember feeling that although it was terribly sad that this young boy’s life had ended, and although his parents must be filled to breaking with grief, the worse tragedy was that Buddy (unlike me – I imagined in my adolescent certitude) had died without ever having been kissed, or cuddled, or tickled by someone whom he had chosen and who had chosen him, without ever lying down next to someone he was in love with, and smelling the fresh clover of her skin, or the soapy cleanness of her hair, without ever taking her to a dance, or driving out into the country with her to watch the stars fill the black sky of the New Mexican desert. I felt sorry for Buddy, in my superior way, sorry that he would never know what I had known, would die without the benefit of romance or sex, a boy, a child forever.

How foolish I was. How trite to consider myself so much better, so much luckier than him, because I had a puppy-love romance. To think, and feel, to even say--I’m sure--because lying in my closet in the dark, disassociated from my self, I could hear my voice through history, saying to Tomas, “I feel so sorry for Buddy. He died without ever being having someone love him, other than his father and his mother. How awful is that? To have died without knowing what you and I know, what it is like to have love?” With the story of Buddy’s death in my mind, I sealed myself against a broken heart.

I did not see Yolanda or Tomas again during the winter break. I didn't want to. It was too hard, too confusing, and I felt too mean and unforgiving. But I was lonely. In defense against that emotion, I went to visit Father Guzman at his church.

"Here," he said, handing me a box of decorations. "Help me with the trees. If you're going to spend the holidays being a martyr, at least you'll have something you can feel good about, when you reflect back upon this moment later."

I opened the box and unwrapped the first of many ornaments I would hang during our conversation. It was an angel made of smoked glass, with wings as wide as it was long.

"That comes from Spain," said Father Guzman. "It's four hundred years old."

I tried to give it back to him. "Here," I said. "Take it. I can't handle the responsibility."

"Of course you can," he said. "Do you think I would let you anywhere near her if you weren't equipped to take care of her and keep her safe?"

"Yes," I said. "You would."

He stopped and smiled at me for a second. "Well," he said, "you're probably right. But only a little bit right. Now that you know who she is, you won't let anything happen to her. She's for that tree." He pointed to one of three Christmas trees in the lobby in front of the sacristy. "Put her up high, on a strong branch that can hold her weight."

I carried the angel with me and climbed up on a step stool in front of the tree. Near the top I found the perfect branch. It was thick as my thumb and strong, with healthy clumps of needles pointing in all directions. I threaded the angel onto the

branch, working her deep into its strong center. When I let go the branch sagged and dropped, pulled down by the weight of the glass. For a second I thought the branch would break or that the angel would slip off, but as I watched the branch and the ornament found equilibrium. The angel settled, resting lightly on a puff of pine needles growing from the branch below.

I climbed down from the step stool and went to the box to unwrap another ornament. This one was made of baker's clay and was clearly carved by hand. It was a miniature of the church that we were in. "That was made by one of my parishioners," said Father Guzman. "The first year I was here, I think. It almost looks like something that was modeled by a child. It's the simplicity that fools you. But if you look closely, you'll see the adult presence in the detail. A child wouldn't necessarily care about the number of windows and bells in the tower. But if you count them, they are exactly right. The same number there as in real life. It makes you wonder, doesn't it? What the man who made this had in mind. Was he just going for authenticity or did he think that it was God's hand that made the tower and the bells? And of course if that's what he thought, he would have to ask himself, 'Who am I to challenge God?' But both of those questions have answers that we'll never know."

"You can't ask him?" I said.

"Oh no," he answered. "I cannot. The man who made this, Emanuel Losoya, has been gone a long time. His last rites, I think I gave them," he stopped for a minute to think, and then went on, "maybe the second year I was here. Maybe the third."

"Does his family come to see your tree?" I asked. "With the ornament hanging on it?"

"No," said Father Guzman. "They don't. His wife passed away a few years ago. He had a son and a daughter. The daughter is in El Paso, I lost touch with her. And the son? He was in the military. One of the ones from Las Cruces who was killed on duty. His name is on the memorial at City Hall. So I hang the ornament for me, not for the family. I know that is a weakness in a priest to do something just for his own pleasure, but somehow I think God doesn't mind."

After that we were quiet for a long time, both of us unwrapping and hanging ornaments and then adding tinsel and lights. After a few hours all three trees looked wonderful, thick with decorations each full of history and stories worth listening to, if Father Guzman decided to tell them.

"You should make an ornament, Miya. I'd like to have something of yours to hang on one of my Christmas trees."

"I don't know what I'd make."

"Well, it could be anything."

"Except a Spanish angel or a baker's clay model of your church," I said.

"Oh I don't know about that," he answered. "If you made an ornament it would not be the same as what I already have. But you might be right. Because it would be better to make something that represents your future rather than your past."

"I don't believe in the past," I said.

"Really?"

"No. I thought I did. But the past has a way of changing on you," I said.

"Only when you look at it through brand-new eyes," he said.

"I know," I said.

"Then what exactly is it that you believe in? I know you're not Catholic, but I hope you don't mind me asking, because you are someone who is important to me."

"I don't know anymore," I answered.

"No?" he said.

"Not really. I thought I did, but..." I bent down and started looking through the box, to see if there were any other ornaments or decorations left between the pieces of tissue paper. "Let's just say I'm confused," talking into the box because I didn't want to look at his face, at the compassion I knew would be there. "I used to think that I understood things," I said. "That I could look around and see the world with clarity, know what's real, what's right or wrong. But now." I turned and looked at him. "It's like waking up one morning and discovering I'm blind. And not just that I'm blind now, but that I've always been blind. All along. From the very start. I just didn't know it."

"And now you are uncertain?" he said. I nodded. "But of course, uncertainty is not a sin," he said. "Especially when it is accompanied by humility. Perhaps it's not such a bad thing for you, right now, not to be so sure. To allow yourself the opportunity to feel like a blind man, or woman, finding her way. When I was your age, that's what leaving home for the first time and going away to college," he cleared his throat, "or in my case the seminary, was about."

"But if you can't trust what you see," I said, "and you don't know what you believe in, how do you know who you are? That's what's scaring me."

"Miya," he said, "I think the answer is that maybe you don't know. At least not until you figure it out for yourself. And maybe even then it's not a hundred percent. That's why we need God isn't it? Life is a mystery to us. All of us. Perhaps that's because we are meant to be uncertain."

"It's not so much that I'm uncertain," I said standing up, empty-handed. My search of the box finished and yielding nothing else but loose paper and bits of tinsel. "Or at least I'm certain about one thing. And that's that I'm angry. I'm just not certain I have the right to be."

"Of course you are angry," he said. "That's natural."

"But why?"

"Are you asking why is it natural for you to be angry? Or why Tomas and Yolanda have fallen in love?"

"Both," I said.

He plugged the lights into the wall, but they did not go on. "*Merde*," he said, shaking the strand in his hand. "These lights. It happens every year. No matter how careful I am and how gently I put them away, one bulb always goes bad, and now I will have to find it."

"I'll look," I said.

"How will you know it when you see it?" he asked.

"It will be the one with the loose filament," I said.

"Ah, then on some things you still do see with some acuity. Good." He handed me the green string of lights. "Here you are."

I started searching for the bad one of the bunch.

"You don't think it's wrong for me be angry?" I asked, running the green cable through my hands and carefully looking at each of the bulbs one at a time.

"Is that wrong with a capital 'W'?" he asked. "Or just a little one?"

"Capital," I said.

"Then I can't say," he said. "Because you're asking me to judge what's in your heart and your heart just beats. It doesn't beat right or wrong."

"And if it's a small 'W'?"

"Then I think it's good to celebrate happiness."

"Theirs or mine?" I asked. Father Guzman didn't answer. He just waited for me to speak again. "What if it's not about being happy?" I said. "What if it's just about getting back at me?" I asked.

"Getting back at you?" he said, picking up another strand of Christmas lights. "For what?"

"For abandoning them," I said. "Leaving them behind."

"Then you probably don't have anything to worry about. They won't last. But, Miya," he asked, "what if it is love?"

"Yolanda and Tomas?"

"That's who we're talking about," he said.

"What if it is love?" I asked.

"Then I would suggest that what you are feeling is jealousy."

"I'm not jealous," I said.

"Are you sure?"

I thought about it for a minute. Even though I wasn't Catholic, I always felt like it would be wrong to lie to Father Guzman, a sin in my own universe where I chose who I wanted to confide in and who I didn't. "No," I answered, honestly. "I'm not sure."

"Good." Father Guzman opened a box and pulled out a big square of green felt. "Uncertainty leads to humility," he handed the felt to me. "And as I said, that's probably a good place for you to be right now." He nodded to the felt. "Put that under the base of the tree."

"I thought you were supposed to put white felt at the bottom," I said. "With glitter?"

"Is that what they do in Michigan?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Well that's because it snows there," he said. "Here it stays green all year long."

I put the felt around the base of one of the trees. "Do you have any more?"

"In the box. So what are you jealous of?"

"Maybe I'm jealous of the fact that they have each other, and they don't need me anymore."

"You have become superfluous?" he said.

"I think so," I said.

"And that makes you jealous?"

"That's what you told me," I said.

"That's true," he said. "I did." He stepped away from the tree he had been decorating. "Would you like a cup of coffee?" he asked. I nodded yes. "I think there's some in the kitchen." I followed him across the court yard of the abbey. It was cool and pretty, the sun spreading through the leaves of the oaks, cypress, and pines that dotted the courtyard between the buildings. In the kitchen we sat at a rough wooden table and drank rich black coffee out of thick mugs. "It's difficult when you find out that people don't need you in order to become whole," he said.

"That's true," I said, reminding myself about humility. But I couldn't quite stay there, even though he was right. "That's not the only thing that's bothering me," I said.

"What else?"

"They lied to me."

"Really. How did they do that?"

"They didn't tell me."

"Then how did you find out?"

There was only one answer, despite what I'd said. "Tomas told me," I answered.

"So then they did tell you," said Father Guzman. "There was no lie."

"They didn't tell me right away," I said.

"But they did at the first opportune time?" he said.

"The second."

"Ah," said Father Guzman leaning back, and crossing his hands over his belly.

"Then you certainly do have something to complain about." He laughed.

"You're teasing me," I said.

"You're teasing yourself."

"They were my friends."

"And they betrayed you?" he said.

"I feel betrayed."

"Because they were not supposed to love each other?" he said. "They were only supposed to love you?"

"That's right," I said.

"But not very realistic."

"No," I answered, "not very realistic."

"So what will you do?"

"Leave them alone."

"And your friendships?"

"I don't know. I'm not sure I still want to be friends."

"Friends are a blessing in life," said Father Guzman.

"This may be more of a blessing than I want," I answered.

"Do you think maybe their loving each other is another way of loving you?"

he asked.

"If that's the case," I said, "who needs it?"

"I don't know," Father Guzman answered.

"I do not either," I said.

"Hum," he said. "No wonder you didn't find that broken light."

He took a last sip of coffee and stood up. "I have some stencils and a can of spray-on snow," he said. "Would you like to help me frost the classroom windows?"

Jarmula's Testimony

I am Jarmula. I am a priest in the Anglican church. I am a good friend of Makeba and her movement. She and I worked side-by-side for many years in the struggle to bring freedom to the people of Oneg Kempo. We are still working side by side, although Makeba doesn't necessarily agree with my methods, mostly prayer and raising chickens. But that is not why I am here now. I am here today because when I read that there would be an amnesty hearing, and I learned that Miya Clare's parents would attend, I asked to speak, for I wish to share a story with them. I did not know Miya Clare well, but I was with her the day before she died, when she and Michael came up to Shosanguve, to the diocese where I am the priest. Miya and I spent some hours together that day, talking inside our Lord's temple, and during that conversation she made a strong impression on me. A few days later I received the terrible news of her death. Since then I have prayed for her and for her family, as has my whole congregation, and I have also prayed that there might be more that I could do, to bring solace and respite from grief, to those who mourn her, and to call out a healing spirit and holy guidance for those who face the difficult task of determining amnesty for Dumisani Mphebe.

That is why I am here. For Miya and Mphebe, both.

As I said, Miya came to visit me at the church compound. She came because my dear friend Miriam Makeba was concerned for my safety. It is true that in my

younger days I had been a person of some authority in the movement, and you can not help but make a certain number of enemies, and perhaps even comrades who do not forgive you for understanding one fine day that change is God's to make, not man's. Makeba was worried that in the passion of the times, one of them, my former comrades, or enemies or even someone in Gloucher's government might try to use me as a pawn in their power game. Either that or make me a target or a martyr. She felt that if I made a statement in public, if I announced an alliance with her organization, then the people who might act against me would know that I was under her protection, and so I would be safe. This was not a new idea for Makeba. She had made this argument to me many times since I left the movement and each time I turned her away. But she could not help but try again. She is not a woman who easily takes no for an answer and so she told me she was sending Michael who had already visited with me before to try to convince me of the righteousness of her argument, and that she was also sending a young American woman who she thought I might actually listen to. Makeba has great faith in the power of the feminine. Confident that I would enjoy their company at the very least, because Makeba is a great judge of character, I told her that her friends would be welcome in my house and the Lord's house, any time.

It was afternoon when they arrived, their presence announced by the chickens running and squawking all in a fluster outside the building, angry because someone had come to disturb their afternoon without bringing them anything special to eat. I have always found hens to be better than watch dogs because they are totally without self consciousness. They are never embarrassed or in doubt about their behavior later

like a dog would be. But hearing the chickens, I did not come out to greet Michael and Miya as I would usually do, not because I preferred to be rude, but rather because I was in the small room behind the chapel, and there was something in the room I wished to show them, and I wanted to let it reveal itself to them as it would. I heard Michael call. "Jarmula," he said, "we're here." And I thought to myself how good a son of man he was. How hard he worked for the cause of freedom in so many countries before coming to Oneg Kempo. This, I knew, was why he was so worried about me. He had seen for himself what men are capable of when they take it upon themselves to be God's hammer and to do his work, or so they say.

"In here," I said. "Follow my voice." I did not turn to look at them when they entered the room. Instead I continued to look at the painting I had been staring at, one that had been given to our diocese recently and was a work of special beauty. The painting, of the Virgin Mary, was unusually large, luminous and full of mystery. "So what do you think of her," I said, still without turning to look at them. I did not want them to pay attention to me. "What is the first thing that jumps right at your mind? Is it the color? The size. The smile on her face?" In the painting the Blessed Mother was dressed in a blue dress and veil, a golden halo over her head. As I said, it was a work of large proportion. At least four-feet tall and three-feet wide. It was carved as well as colored, so each of the Virgin's features was in relief. Her head was tilted to the right, her dark blue shawl was draped around her head. Her blue eyes were downcast as if she was looking at the ground.

It was Miya who answered my questions, I am sure at Michael's prodding. He has answered such things from me far too many times before to have felt any need

to do so again that day. “She is looking down,” Miya said. “It’s her gaze. She’s looking at the Earth instead of heaven.” She walked closer to me and closer to the painting. “I’ve never seen that before,” she said. “I didn’t think it was allowed.”

“Allowed?” I said. “Who would allow such a thing? Or not?”

“I’m not sure,” she answered me. “But I’ve never seen the Virgin Mary in such a pose. I’m not very religious and I’m certainly no expert, so I hope you’ll forgive me, but I grew up in a very traditional Catholic community and I always thought Mary had to look up at God in devotion, or if not at God, then at the baby Jesus.”

“Yes, you are correct,” I said. “What you say is generally true and that is what makes this painting so special. It is rare to see Mary with downcast eyes, though the Sainted Virgin may look anywhere. It is her prerogative. But still, a very insightful, and a good question.” I reached out my hand to her. She was clearly a young lady of deep spiritual knowledge, aware of the pull of faith and the power of art. I was attracted to her goodness immediately. “I am Jarmula,” I said.

“Miya Clare,” she said, accepting the hand I offered.

Until that moment I had not known her name. “Miya,” I said. “Miya Clare. Miya for me?” I asked. “Or is it for I? And then there is Clare. Clare for Clarity? To be clear? To be able to say ‘I am clear,’ or better, ‘I see clearly?’ Is that your Christian name?” I asked her. “Or is it a shorter version of something longer?”

She said it was her given name, passed down from her great grandmother, and I told her it suited her well, for she seemed like a woman of vision. Then I could not help but slap Michael on the back and shake my head at Makeba’s mischief, sending

Miya Clare to impress me, to bring clarity to my imperfect way of seeing, and perhaps even to help me to see things her way. Very smart. Very clever. I almost had to surrender. “Miya,” I asked. “Are you like Michael and Makeba? Do you never take no for an answer?”

“She’s an American,” Michael answered. “Like me. So what do you think?”

“Then let me tell you both now, especially you, Miya, since you are the Angel of Clarity, and I do not want to spend the rest of our visit arguing instead of talking about things that matter. Because I know why you are here, and I know why Makeba sent you and why Michael brought you, and clever as their plan is, I am not changing my mind. But if it would comfort you, I will tell you why. All right? Are my terms accepted?”

They both agreed and so I told them about the painting which is why I believe the Lord brought them to me that day. “Take a look at it again,” I said. “Look at it carefully. Can you believe that the man who made this painting of the blessed Virgin is blind? When you look at it, when you observe the details, the colors, the love in the Virgin mother’s eyes, would you know, unless I told you, that the man who painted her could not see?”

No they could not. How could it be possible? How could a man pick up a brush and design a face, choose colors and create the look of flesh, or fabric? How could he paint eyes, hands, the sky behind if he could not see? And so I told them. “The artist who made this painting of the Virgin Mary was able to do so because he was totally infused with the spirit of God, even though he has been blind since he was a little boy. He sees nothing. The story is that he was bitten by a hundred year

spider. A killer that comes out only once every hundred years to remind the sinners of the day the whites brought the Gospels to Africa.”

“So the painter was a sinner?” Miya asked me.

“No, my dear,” I answered her. “He was a child. A little boy who was transformed while laying in his mother and father’s bed. Sweating out the poison of a bite that took one type of vision and traded it for another. And now he is a blind man who paints and carves on this wood without the benefit of sight. Do you doubt me?” I asked her then. “Do you say to yourself, if not out loud, ‘How did he paint this?’ That is the question, isn’t it? You would think it impossible, yes?”

They agreed, of course. But I told them it was not impossible. “How can it be impossible?” I asked. “The painting is here, right here in my little holy chapel in my tiny community of brothers and sisters far away from the comings and goings and the business of being a country. Far away from soldiers and thugs, governments and elections, speeches and speech makers. And you know why? You know why this painting is there?” I asked. “Do you know why it exists at all, in the midst of such a world where so little that we love is holy?”

They did not know.

“It is here because the man who painted it does not think he is better than God. He does not think he knows more than God. He does not demand from God that the Lord do what he, a blind man, wants him to do. The painter of this painting does not busy himself cataloguing all that is rotten in the world or all that is holy. He does not tell God what to do, how to be, how to vote, or organize. He does not preach words that send men out on the streets to demonstrate and fight. No. What he does is

permit himself to be an open vessel, and allow God's will to express itself through him. He feels the beauty of God and he is released. He emancipates his mind. He relinquishes his will and he is free to use himself as God's brush. God's tools."

"But Jarmula," Michael said. "No wonder she's looking down. She has no hope. And if you don't take action to make life better, when you can, then there's no reason to look up." Poor Michael. He was not so much like Miya. He could not accept the miraculous truth of the story. And I think he had not given up his hope of convincing me to put myself under Makeba's protection. "Jarmula," he said. "You know what I am talking about. You were in the movement. You know that there are times when you must take action, in this world, not the next."

"I was in the movement," I said. "And when I was engaged in the world of politics and organizations, in the struggle of brother against brother for power, I saw what I believed and I believed what I was seeing--because I was blind. But now when I see, I see truly, although I look blind to you. Like our artist. Like the Madonna in the painting. She is full of hope because in the artist's true feelings the Blessed Virgin Mary's eyes look down at us, instead of heaven. The artist is blind, but only physically blind and for the blind heaven is not up, or down, or left or right, or even forwards or back like your political philosophers. The blind don't look up to heaven. They have no need and they can not. Such is the wisdom of this poor man's story. He judges us with his Mary. 'If you can not look in God's eye,' he asks, 'can you still rise to join him?'"

You might argue now that none can look at the face of God, none can know God. Or what he thinks. That his plan for us is a mystery. But that is not fully so.

His plan is a mystery, because we only see incompletely. But everyone can look at the face of God. That is what the blind man tells us. With his Mary. She looks where she wants and everywhere she looks she sees the Lord. That, and that only. The secret of transcendence. Not a man's vote. Not the political rallies. Not our new nation state, and not death, mine which Miya and Michael came to prevent, and Miya's, the friend and neighbor who came to my home, to offer me rescue, only to become a victim herself, Miya whose death we all so deeply mourn and regret.

I have moved the painting into the main chapel near the entrance where I and the congregants may see her when we enter the church before prayers and when we leave. I believe the artist would forgive me if he came to know that in my head at least, I have given his painting a name. I call her Holy Virgin Mother, Our Lady of Clarity.

We Stand at Their Peaks to See the Longest View

I went back to Ann Arbor early, five days before I originally planned, and arrived in time to join a few friends from one of the co-op houses in their celebration of the New Year. We drank cheap champagne and danced around the living room to Cheryl Crow, Madonna and Janet Jackson, wearing cone-shaped paper party hats and blowing blowers. As my New Year's present, the president of the co-op let me crank the heat up to seventy-six degrees and for the first and only time in an Ann Arbor winter, I was warm. Two weeks later, just after the semester started, the graduate students went on strike, announcing their decision to close the school down on the coldest day of year. The digital thermometer near the State Street entrance to the quad read negative seventeen degrees. On a hunch, I hiked across campus to Spanish class, slipping on icy sidewalks lined with two-feet high banks of snow, a scarf wrapped around my nose and mouth, my feet buried in heavy rubber boots lined with a dense pad of felt. My back-pack rested on the thick back and shoulders of my green down parka. I kept my hands, mummied-up in fat ski mittens, deep in my pockets. As I expected, Luis was there, sitting like a prince holding court, in front of the few students who had braved the weather and the politics to be there, and as I expected, he did not have his books open to our lesson. Instead, he was wearing his winter jacket and still had his hat upon his head as if he was moments away from facing the cold

again. "So is class cancelled?" I asked him, unwinding my scarf from around my face so I could talk.

"What do you think?" he answered.

"Yes," I said.

"*Bueno*," he said. "And I am going to join my comrades in solidarity."

"Is that just for today?" I asked.

"Until it's over," he said. "There is no other choice that I can make."

"But what about our credits?" asked Jane Levine, who like me had shown up in the hope of normalcy. "I need this class to graduate."

"Then help," said Luis. "Go out and demonstrate. The faster the administration gives in to the demands, the sooner we can start teaching again."

"What if they don't?" she asked.

"Then we'll keep striking," Luis said. "We've all agreed. No scabs."

"And what are we supposed to do while you're striking?" asked Lisa. "I'm paying for this education."

"Yeah," said a student named Bill. "That's right."

"The whining of the privileged class," said Luis. "Do you know what they pay us? Do you know what our lives are like? I teach three classes, I get six thousand dollars a year and out of that I have to pay not just room and board, but tuition."

"You knew what the deal was when you came here," said Bill. "No one held a gun to your head."

"You don't know that," I said, as Luis shot him a terrible look. "You don't know whether someone held a gun to his head."

Bill looked at me like I had just picked my nose in public. "What are you talking about?" he said.

"You heard me," I said, trying to return the look of disdain. "You don't know what he had to leave behind to come here. You don't know what his life was like. And you totally don't know if someone held a gun to his head or not."

"Oh, come on Miya," said Lisa. "Don't be so dramatic."

"I'm not being dramatic," I said. "I mean, have you ever asked him?"

"Let's forget about it," said Luis.

"No," I said. "I'm serious. Do you know what he came from?" I asked Bill. "Do you know what his life was like there? How do you know what he's gone through? Do you ever read anything about what's going on in South America?"

"No more, Miya," said Luis. "You are crossing the line."

"Were you really in danger?" Lisa asked. "Is that true?"

"He was," said Jane, jumping in to help me out. "We met some people from his country at a party. He had to leave."

"He was in danger," I said. "It wasn't safe for him. And now he's here and all he wants is to make enough money to live on. I think that's fair."

"Yeah, well I still don't think they should shut down the school," said Bill.

"My other professors are going to keep teaching and I'm going to stick with going to class."

Luis shrugged. "Do what you want. But since this class is taught by a graduate student, we will not meet again until the end of the strike."

The next Thursday the study group at Rick's house quickly evolved into strike central, the graduate students spending the entire evening planning their activities to politicize the strike, visions of Paris in 1968 dancing in their heads. "What's going on here is more than just economics," said Rick. "This is an opportunity to shine the light of analysis on ideology and illuminate the truth game with such a powerful vision that people will have to see clearly and to respond." I leaned over to my friend Stanley, one of Rick's graduate students whose comments I could usually understand. "What did he just say?" I whispered.

"Words," he silently mouthed back to me.

"That's true, Rick," said the president of the Graduate Student Organization, who Rick had invited to meet with us. "And while we understand that your vision of this action is highly political," she said, speaking I hoped, on behalf of her organization rather than with the unfortunate use of the royal "We." I could not tell for sure. "For the moment we want to stay focused on the issues on the negotiating table. We don't want things to get out of hand."

"Too late," said Stanley. "They're already out of hand. Have you thought of that? I mean you said you said publicly that you wanted to shut the school down. That's a pretty incendiary opening gambit if you ask me."

"It's a strike, Stanley," said one of the other students. "What do you think they're going to say?"

"I don't know," he answered. "How about one-two-three-four we don't want your fucking war?"

"Don't be so cynical, Stanley," Rick said.

"I'm not being cynical," he said. "I'm being honest. A bunch of white graduate students on the hunt for a better pay check just isn't something we should be getting all excited about."

"It isn't, if it's considered entirely by itself, Stanley," a woman named Eleanor said. "But this gives us an opportunity to go further. Like Rick said, it's a teaching moment. We can bring out the politics of the thing because we're outside the usual structure now. We can use the strike to educate people."

"We're really hoping all of you will lobby your faculty to cancel class," said the GSO president. "We want you to up the pressure on the administration."

"Has anyone contacted BAM?" someone asked. "We could plan a joint rally."

"Right," said Stanley. "Great idea, the black students will just be so excited to throw their weight behind the GSO. Because after all, how many officers of the GSO are black?"

The president of the Graduate Students Organization shrugged, and didn't answer.

"Okay," said Stanley. "Forget about officers. How many of the people in GSO are black?"

"You're not being fair," the woman said. "Our membership is a function of who is admitted to the University. You know that."

“Great excuse,” Stanley said, looking over at Rick. “These people are lumpen,” he said to him. “Petty bourgeoisie. Why do you even want to get involved with them?”

“It’s a strike Stanley,” Rick answered. “It’s a chance to get people's attention. In that way Eleanor is right.”

“It’s nothing but a pure economic play,” Stanley answered. “There’s no deeper politics. This is Michigan for Christ sakes. We’re twenty miles outside of Detroit. In ten years, your striking graduate students will realize they can't get any real money out of academia and they'll be lining up to be middle management at GM and Ford.” He stood up. “They’re playing at politics. Like children with a miniature tea set. Everything is perfect, but it’s all pretend.

“Sit down, Stanley,” said Rick. “And relax. You're too damn serious. You need to look at this as a chance to have some fun.”

That night about three a.m., Rick called me at the dorm, waking me from a dream about taking horseback-riding lessons. The phone rang just as I was finally learning to manage my horse with calm hands during a canter. “We're all meeting at my house in an hour,” Rick whispered through the wires. “GSO and BAM are going over to occupy the Admin building in the morning. The BAM people have asked me and a few others to come along. They don't trust GSO to represent people of color. I've already asked Stanley and some others. I want you to come too.”

“Me?” I said, from my dream. “What?”

"This is very important, Miya. I want you there. We need you. Get over here to the house as soon as you can. You'll want to bring a few days worth of food, toothbrush, change of clothes. You know. Prepare to stay a while."

"Bring food?" I said, still sleepy and unsettled. "What're you talking about?"

"We'll discuss it when you get here," he said. "Hurry up. Talk to you soon. I have some other calls to make." He hung up the phone and I climbed out of my covers to get dressed, putting on thermal long underwear under my sweater and jeans. The lobby of the dorm was dark and quiet when I came down stairs, lit softly by the streetlights filtering in through the stained glass windows in a wash of red and blue and gold. I could hear the hum of the heater and the sound of the forced air through pipes. I was excited. I didn't want to be. Rick's late night call seemed overly dramatic, like someone playing at important things, but I couldn't resist the pleasure in it. I was hooked, game or not.

I showed up at Rick's house half an hour later, after crossing campus in the cold and the dark. There were others there already, although not Stanley, but I wasn't surprised. He had already said he had no sympathy or interest in the graduate student's strike. But the rest of us did, and together we walked over to the administration building, me, Jean Simon, an African American woman Rick knew from BAM, two men I recognized from the Thursday night study group and a man I hadn't met before who Rick said worked for the Michigan Daily, the university newspaper. "Meet Alex Stoll," Rick said. "He's our mole. Our man on the inside." It was about seven o'clock in the morning and the orange edge of the sun was barely illuminating the horizon when we arrived at the plaza in front of the administration

building. Fifty or sixty people were already there. A few I thought I recognized from pictures published in Alex's newspaper over the caption "student leaders." Most I had never seen before. We waited, stamping our feet to keep the circulation in our toes and blowing humid plumes of condensed air into the cold and then just as the sun truly rose into cloudless sky an African American man climbed up the steps of the plaza, carrying a hand-held megaphone. He lifted it to his mouth. "People," he said. "People, we are going inside."

I leaned over to Jean. "Who is that?" I asked.

"Edward Binns," she answered. "From BAM."

Edward Binns was continuing. "We are about to become an army of occupation. We will be a peaceful army. We will be a moral army. We will be a civil army but will not be moved. Once inside you may not get a chance to come back out, so search your hearts now and decide if you want to go through these doors behind me, or you want to walk away."

I turned and looked at Rick. "Are you sure we want to do this?" I whispered to him. Somehow, I did not see myself as an occupier, and for a brief moment a picture of Yollie's Great Uncle Paolo, beheaded by a machete, took temporary residence in my brain. I made him disappear. This is America, I said to myself by way of a talisman. Not Mexico.

"Of course we do, Miya," Rick said, breaking into my hallucinatory reverie. "It's part of your political education. Plus you're needed here. You can help."

"I want to help," I said. "But that man just said once we go in, we might not be able to come out. I don't know." And then, understating my anxiety by several

orders of magnitude, I added, "Not being free to come and go makes me a little bit nervous."

"Don't worry about that," said Alex Stoll. "I'll give you one of my press credentials. I have extra. They're not going to keep the press inside. They can't."

With Alex's offer of a guaranteed escape route my anxiety about being trapped, or being in trouble, I wasn't sure which, gave way to a sense of adventure, the thrill of being part of something important that was enhanced all the more because Rick had specifically asked me, to accompany him, to be part of his group, when there were so many others he could have called. I had been waiting, at least since the day of Niko's bubble bath and that brief moment in the kitchen when I had felt that electrical charge of passion pass between us, for something to happen to let me know if it had been real. Something that would tell me that I was important to Rick, special among others, and now here it was. Here was proof. Other than Jean, I was the only woman in the group, and I knew why Rick had called Jean. She was one of the leaders of BAM, the Black American Movement, and Rick believed that African Americans had revolutionary potential. Months before he had lectured about that, "Far more than workers, who have been totally co-opted by American wealth," he had told us. "Blacks are the key to social change in this country. Blacks have been the true victims in this country. Blacks therefore are the most politicized people. And while it's true that that tendency has not been fully realized in their consciousness yet, their suffering has earned them the right to be our moral leaders." And now, his words, like a prediction, were coming true. Now, here, in front of sixty or seventy of us, or more, a black man was leading us into the administration building

to occupy it in support of the GSO strike. It was as if Rick's words had come alive in my life, from theory to practice to praxis. How could I do anything but go along?

We walked inside the building, slowly and solemnly, the people from BAM first, then the president of the GSO accompanied by other people I didn't recognize and then my little group. I was wedged in between Jean and Alex Stoll. We moved slowly over the stair well and then started climbing the eight stories up, the hallway filling with the ring of our footsteps on the metal steps and the sounds of our voices echoing back to us from the near-by walls. I leaned over to Alex. "I can't believe I'm doing this," I said. "It's so exciting."

"Political action," he answered me. "It's like electricity in your veins." We exited the stairwell and filed into the lobby in front of the president's office. The receptionist, her face white, pressed the intercom button on the telephone. "They're here," she said into the microphone. The man who earlier had spoken through the megaphone walked up to her and held out his hand. "I'm Edward Binns," he said. "President of BAM." The receptionist did not reach her hand back.

"You have no right to be here," she said. "I've called security."

"Thank you," said Edward Binns. He turned to us. "Ladies and gentlemen, sit down please, I've been told security has been notified and I'm sure they're on their way." We all dropped to the floor, one after another. We crossed our legs, helped each other remove backpacks and made ourselves as comfortable on the floor as we could. A few minutes later the elevator opened and Dr. Michelson, the University President, flanked by two security guards, walked out its doors and into the lobby.

The receptionist who had called him got up from her desk, entered the elevator and disappeared as the silver doors closed behind her.

"You are on University property," Michelson said, "and you are here illegally. I have the authority to remove you by force and I will use that authority if necessary."

"We have a right to be here," someone yelled out. "We pay our tuition and we pay taxes. The University belongs to the people."

The president continued. "I am going to go into my office now. I will leave the security guards here. Anyone who chooses to leave may do so within the next thirty minutes with total freedom and no consequence. Neither I nor the guards will ask for ID or try to identify you in any way. You may go completely unencumbered. When I come back out of my office in thirty minutes, if you are still here, we will take your names, we will begin proceedings against you and we will press charges. The course of action you take is entirely yours. It is up to you. I leave you with your decisions, and I hope you each make them based on your individual conscience, rather than the tyranny of the group." He picked his way past all of us sitting on the floor and entered the two wide doors that separated his personal office from the lobby. The guards stopped at the door and did not follow him in. They turned to face us once he was inside. I could see that they had guns and billy clubs, and cans of mace attached to their utility belts. Around me, I could hear people in the room settling or fidgeting. The guards did not say a word to us, and none of us tried to follow the president into his private office. Alex Stoll opened up his spiral notebook. "I like it as a strategy," he said to me, writing down what Michelson had said.

“Giving the enemy thirty minutes to turn tail and bolt. It ups the ante tremendously in my estimation and it will make one hell of a quote.”

“I don’t see anyone leaving,” I said.

“Give it some time,” said Alex. “Let’s see what happens when we get closer to minute thirty.”

But it wasn’t five minutes later that Rick leaned over to talk to us as a group.

“Well children,” he said, “I think this is my cue to say good-bye.”

Children? I thought.

"What?" asked Jean. "Are you leaving?"

"I must," Rick said. "I have to."

“Bull shit,” she said. “Nobody has to.”

“Oh now, that’s not your call then, is it?” he said.

“But you brought us here,” she said.

“Yes, I did,” he said. “And to your benefit. But come on Jean. You know the rules. You students are all safe here. What can Michelson do to you? Nothing. But me. I’m not safe at all. Not a bit. If I’m here when he locks the building down, and the cops start taking names, I could lose my job. The disciplinary committee will have a field day. They’re trying to get rid of me anyway. This would be all they need.”

"But this was your idea," I said. "To come here. You called us up. That’s why we joined you. You can't just leave us."

"Don't worry Miya, he said, putting his hand on my shoulder and giving it a squeeze. “You don’t need me. You’re smart, and strong. You’ll do fine. And Alex

here will take care of you,” he said, releasing my shoulder. “Won’t you, Alex?” he asked. “Won’t you look after our little Miya?”

“Of course I will,” Alex said. “You can count on me.”

“And Miya,” said Rick. “You also have Jean right by your side. Nothing bad will happen. I promise.” He reached over and gave me a hug, which even while I felt angry at him for abandoning me made my breath catch in my throat.

“But Rick,” I said.

“No, no, no,” he said. “Don’t worry.” Then he leaned over and whispered in my ear. “I’m very proud of you. So stay the course.” He stood up and walked over to the stairwell. At that moment I realized he had never planned to stay for the sit-in. He wasn’t wearing a back pack. He didn’t have the food and the toothbrush and change of clothing he had suggested that I, and I assumed the others, bring. I realized something else then, too. Rick Grazia had fooled us. He had used his charisma and his leadership to reel us in, and then once we were hooked he had turned his back on us to walk away, ready to leave us to the wolves, however benign those wolves might actually turn out to be--which there was no way to know--while he retreated to safety. It was as if a mask dropped from his face, revealing the true plains of his self, or perhaps blinders dropped from my eyes. It occurred to me that Luis had been right after all. All Rick was about was pretty words and complex meanings. There was no depth of being to his purpose. He was not willing to risk his own well being or sacrifice anything for his cause. But he clearly wanted others to. “He is not a good person,” I said to myself. “He is a scoundrel, a dishonest man. He uses people and takes advantage of their innocence and loyalty.” In that moment I sealed my heart up

against him, although I was not yet fully cognizant of that change in status, and being Rick, he didn't notice at all. "I'll see you on the ramparts," he said, opening the doors to the stairs. A man and a woman I did not know joined him.

"What's with you, Grazia?" a woman's voice called out from the crowd. But I could not see who the voice came from. "Are you turning coat?" the voice went on. "Are you running away?"

"No, dear child, I'm not," he answered with a swagger. "I'm going outside to take the cause to the street. I'll be in the quad organizing the support rally we have planned for noon." He stepped out the door to the stairway and it closed behind him.

"What do we do now?" I asked Alex and Jean after he was gone.

"We wait," Jean said. "And see what happens."

Twenty minutes later, and true to his word Dr. Michelson walked out of his office. He was accompanied by five additional security guards who must have been there in his office before we arrived. The guards started fanning through the crowd, demanding ID's and taking names. The guard who approached me was small, maybe five foot five. My height. He was stocky with brown hair and a military bearing, but he smiled at me and he bent down to talk with me, instead of bearing down at me from above, and he spoke with a quiet respectful voice. The normalcy of his behavior confused me. I didn't know how to respond. Should I be respectful? Cold? Friendly? Cocky? That was the attitude that seemed to have the most currency with people around me, but I wasn't sure. "Okay," he said, after I gave him my name, "Would you mind giving me your student number." I rattled it off. "Alright then, I

need your address, your phone number.” I thought he would stop, but he kept going.

“Tell me your parents’ names and addresses.”

“Why do you need that?” I asked.

“Are you under twenty-one?” he asked me.

“Yes,” I said.

“Then there you are,” he said. “You’re still a minor.”

“I thought that was eighteen,” I said.

“Not on university property,” he answered. “Parents’ name?”

“Orin and Peggy Clare,” I said.

“Address?” he continued. “Phone number? “School?” “Major? “Graduate or Undergraduate?” “Year?” “Michigan resident?” “How long have you been in the state?” By the time he was done with me I felt completely intimidated and I could not even rise to neutral as an attitude, let alone challenging or cocky. I was beside myself. My stomach was clenching, my hands were shaking. I knew he couldn’t really do anything to me, or at least I thought he couldn’t. I didn’t think they’d arrest all of us. And even if they did, what would it be for? Trespassing? Could that really be that bad of a crime? I didn’t think so, and yet I had grown anxious. Luis’s fear of his native land, Yollie’s Grand Uncle, the security guard’s questions, they all seemed of a course to me, although one far more severe than the other. This man, this guard who was not much bigger than me could ask me anything, any question at all, and I would have to answer him. I had no choice. He knew who I was. He knew all about me. He was going to put my name in the system. I would be on some list somewhere of students who had broken the law, who had made bad choices--who were politically

active--who were Post-Marxist or Feminist or revolutionary, or who had some record of behavior, or some quality that the school or law enforcement wanted to identify and remember. The whole thought of that, even as crazy and over-wrought as I knew it to be (somewhere in my psyche anyway) made me feel like I wanted to vomit. It was terrifying and I was terrified. Even as I kept trying to tell myself that this was America, this was a college campus, even as I was making the case in my mind that all of this was theatre of sorts, the university with its security force making a show of power with the purpose of intimidating us, but with no real fire-power behind them, and we, the students, calling the bluff. But try as I did to convince myself of the validity of that argument I didn't believe it. I didn't feel that the guns and the billy-clubs, the uniforms and the questionnaires, the walky-talkies that connected the guards questioning us to more guards outside were just for dramatic effect. They were very much for real. I felt their power and sensed how unprotected I was. How vulnerable. Without volition or agency of my own. That knowledge, as well as the situation, terrified me. I started to wish I had never answered the phone when Rick called, wished I had not agreed to meet him at his house, wished I had not come to this sit-in, or wished I had followed him down the steps when he left, well before anyone came to ask him his name or put him on any black list.

"What are they going to do with our names?" I asked Jean after the guards were done.

"Put them in some computer," she said. "Keep them in our files. Flag us as trouble makers. You know." She must have seen the look on my face. "Don't worry about it," she said. "They're not going to arrest you."

"How do you know?"

"It'll make them look bad. University administrators are not supposed to be hauling off their students to jail. Mommy and Daddy, who are paying tuition, don't like it."

"I guess not," I said. But her words did not make me feel any better. I didn't like being in the lobby outside the president's office, sitting around waiting, wondering what I was really there for. It made me anxious. I wanted to go home.

At noon we could hear the sounds of the rally Rick said he helped to organize outside in the quad in front of the admin building. There was chanting, and then a speech by a woman who sounded like she might have been from Africa. I could not make out the words. And then the voice of a man, booming through the quad, his electronically enhanced voice, much louder than the woman's natural one, creating a vibration in the windows of the lobby where we sat, eight stories up, and causing them to buzz. "Until there's a fair wage, for fair work," the voice said, "until the administration recognizes the graduate student union, until they recognize graduate student's rights to organize, until they end racism, until," the voice went on, "until the University agrees to hire more African Americans..." When it was all over, it would occur to me that there was no natural connection between ending racism and giving graduate students more money, but still the voice went on, "until the University agrees to hire more women, more people of color, until it agrees to open admissions, until it reduces tuition, we will not be moved." Later that afternoon someone used the receptionist's phone to call out from the sit-in to order pizza and Domino's actually delivered. Since the elevators were shut down the poor pizza guy

climbed all eight flights of stairs with seventeen boxes of pizzas in his hands. That night I slept curled up, leaning against the wall, and in the morning I woke up stiff and sweaty, my mouth sticky and dry. I prodded Alex Stoll awake. "I want to get out of here," I said.

"But the fun's just about to start," he said.

"I don't care," I said. "Give me one of those press passes. I want to leave." With a shrug, he pulled the pass out of his back-pack, but then held it in his hand instead of giving it over to me. I tilted my head so that I could read what it said. 'Press. Michigan Daily.' "May I have it?"

"I don't know what's gotten into you," he said. "But if I give this to you, and you use it to leave, you won't be able to come back."

"I don't want to come back," I said.

"I don't get it," he said. "Rick said you were political. That you had a commitment. How can just be willing to pick up and go?"

I wanted to answer that I could taste the green stomach bile in my mouth and if didn't get up and out, and into the air, I would puke. I wanted to say that I felt like the skin on my arms had become a web of nerve endings that could feel every brush of fabric, every shift of air in the room. I wanted to tell him that sound was pressure to me, the coughs, the movement of winter clothing against the carpeted floor, the murmurs of conversation, all seemed amplified as if my ears had become hyper-sensitive. I wanted to ask him if he could not see how the muscles of my neck had tightened around my throat. If he did not know that I could not breathe? But I said none of these things. Instead I said, "I don't know. Maybe I am political and maybe

I'm not. Maybe Stanley was right and occupying the Administration building for an increase in graduate student wages is stupid. Maybe I just don't like this. It feels crazy. It scares me. I need some time to think."

"Political struggle is scary," Alex said. "Resistance is scary. "You don't always have time to think. But if people, including people like you, give into their fear, nothing's ever going to change."

There it was. If people gave into their fear, life would never change. The world would never get better or more fair. Poverty would never end. Torture of innocents would never stop. Rape and brutality, murder, destruction, the compression of people's spirits and hearts all would continue unless people like me were willing to stand up and if not fight, at least resist. But I couldn't. At least not then. Not there. And not for that cause, because besides being so young, and when I thought about it, actually being a member of the community I was protesting against, I realized I wasn't convinced. Sitting in at the University of Michigan administration building felt somehow more like theatre than struggle. More like pretense than real. And I felt stuck, more like a child being punished, than an activist or a liberator, sitting inside that locked-down lobby outside the president/principal's office, there to be disciplined for some offense against manners and good breeding rather than as part of a political action against the state. Despite my intense anxiety, which was real, I also had a sense that what we were doing was acting out, which would help explain where at least some of my anxiety was coming from. And I decided at that exact moment that if I were ever going to put myself at risk, feel this way again, it would be for something I believed in deeply, something that really would have at least the tiniest

chance of changing the world. "Alex, I've really got to go," I said. "Give me the pass."

"All right. All right," he said, and he handed it to me. "Show it to the guard at the door," he said. "Tell him you're on deadline. That you're here as a member of the press. He'll let you out."

"You're sure?" I asked him.

"I'm sure," he answered.

It happened as Alex said it would. I walked to the stairway where a security guard was blocking the door. I showed him the press pass. "That's yours?" he said.

"Yes."

"Then you can go." He opened the door for me and I walked down the stairs, all eight flights, lonely, and despite my certainty of a few minutes before, full of shame that I had not been strong enough to stay with the others. I had walked into the building a soldier and felt like I was leaving as a traitor. Why else would I be slinking down the back stairs, alone, in my back-back and heavy winter jacket? Certainly not from the strength of my convictions. Where was my pride? With each step down, I could hear the growing voice of self-doubt at my weakness in the echo of my foot on the stair. What if Alex was right? What if I really was only a fair-weather friend to political change and revolution? I didn't know what to think, about Rick, about the sit-in, about me. Finally, I arrived at the bottom and I let myself out onto the first floor and into the atrium and the air and the light. I walked across the lobby and out the door into the sunshine. As soon as I stepped outside I felt like I could breathe again, as if the air had become newly oxygenated and my lungs,

starving just moments before, expanded in the joy of freedom. I felt saved at that moment, truly saved, standing out there in the sunlight with the blue Michigan sky over my head, the clouds high and white, the trees, leafless in their winter dormancy stretching out their branches tall and robust as if to reach each of their living arms into the heavens. The glint of the sun on the windows and steel frame of the administration building, the warm glow of the red bricks, the shiny paint on the cars parked along the sidewalks. All of these things, all of these things took on some kind of holy power for me in that moment. I had crossed the great Rio. Yes it was a river of my own anxiety, but no less real for that.

Later I understood that I had been in no danger in the administration building. The students sat in for three days and then the administration agreed to meet with them to discuss their demands and they all went home. No one was disciplined. No one was arrested. No one was shot. But when I was up there in that small area, closed in by the walls, pressed against the people around me when I woke up hot and sticky the first morning, with the smell of people I didn't know in my nose, and a taste of dust and stone in my mouth, when I could hear people outside coming and going as they wanted and knowing that I couldn't, when I could hear their laughter and their shouts, I felt what it was like to not be free. And the feeling of that, the knowledge of that changed me. And I prayed I would never have that feeling of imprisonment again.

Except that I did. The day before Rick had his famous car accident in which two University of Michigan students, Jean and Alex, were involved, Rick asked me to come with them to Detroit. By that time, I was skeptical not just of Rick's motives,

but of Jean's and Alex's as well, and I had also promised myself that I would not forget my revelation in the administration building, that Rick did not mean me or anyone else particularly well. But I was susceptible still. It was only a guardian angel I think or some strength of spirit that I did not know I had until then, and do not even fully recognize now, that kept me out of that car that day.

It started with another telephone call to my dorm room. Rick on the other line. "Some of us driving down to Detroit," he said. "The UAW is holding a rally in support of what's happening here, at University. I want you to come. I'll pick you up at noon."

"I don't think I can," I answered, hating him still for abandoning me, hating him more for reaching out again, and then hating my hate for him. Melting, but not wanting to melt. Swearing I wouldn't trust him, but listening to him anyway.

"Don't be silly, Miya," he said. "What else have you got to do? The University is on strike. You aren't going to classes."

"I'm trying to keep up with my reading," I said.

"We'll be there at noon," he said. "I have Alex and Jean coming. Do you have anything to eat?"

"What kind of things to eat?" I asked. Why were we talking about food? Again?

"To bring to the rally," he said. "We're all over here working on the strategy and there's no time to eat. So bring something. I think the UAW will make a proclamation today when we're down there, assuming the TV news trucks come. That will be the key. And if they do, we want to have our position statement ready.

Here,” he said and through the phone I heard the sound of some papers shuffling in the background. “Let me read this to you.” He started. “For the last twenty years,” he read, “since the end of the Vietnam War, and the advent of the cultural revolution, there has been a rift between the working class of America and its youth. The benefits of privilege and education, built on the backs of the working woman and working man and blacks have disguised the natural solidarity between the factory worker and the student, the black man and woman and the intellectual.” He stopped. “What do you think so far?”

“It sounds good,” I said wondering why he asked me.

“Alex and Jean wrote it,” he said. “It’s a bit 101 but I think it will do the trick.”

“I’m sure it will.”

“You know you have to get back on the horse, Miya. If you fall, or if you’re thrown. You have to get back on. And the sooner the better.” For a minute I didn’t understand what he was driving at. I was taking him too literally, asking myself why he was talking about horses, and if somehow, in addition to getting under my skin, he had gotten into my dreams until I realized what he was talking about at the same exact moment he chose to make it more clear to me himself. “Alex told me that you left the political action,” he said. “He mentioned that you went home.”

“I did leave,” I said.

“I was surprised,” said Rick.

“I didn’t feel safe,” I said.

“Political action is not always safe,” he said. “There are risks involved.”

I wanted to say, “Well you left.” I wanted to say, “I would have probably stayed if you’d been there.” But I wasn’t strong enough. I couldn’t stand up to him. Not even over the phone.

“Well,” he said, “the good news is that now you have another chance,” and then, as if reading my mind, “And this time, we’ll all be there together. Solidarity, you know. Ciao.” He hung up.

I walked over to the Kroger. It was cloudy when I left and by the time I returned with a grocery bag full of some salami and sliced turkey, a head of lettuce, a loaf of French bread, a bottle of mayonnaise and a yellow, barrel-shaped squeeze bottle of mustard, a bag of Oreo cookies, half a dozen mackintosh apples--my favorites, and some plastic wrap, it had begun to rain. Since my roommate, Elaine, was at her boyfriend’s, I used her desk as a staging area to make eight sandwiches, two for each of us. I cut the bread, smeared each side, layered it with meat and lettuce, and then wrapped the sandwiches in plastic and stuffed them in my backpack along with the cookies and the fruit. By the time I was done, it was almost noon. I tried to read a little bit, someone’s dissertation on the meaning of carnival in political economy but I could not concentrate. In a few minutes Rick and Dave and Jean would be coming by to pick me up and we would drive to Detroit together.

Detroit was a ruined city, or so I had heard, stripped of life by the rules of poverty, money and race, the way a tornado strips a tender tree of limb and leaves, or so I had read, because even though I had grown up in Grand Rapids, I had never been. But Detroit was also the home of the union movement, the energetic core of worker power that, if the philosophers were right, at least according to both Rick and Luis--

and it was rare that they agreed--would, along with the blacks, ultimately set the country free. So going to Detroit would be an adventure and part, I assured myself, of my necessary political education. More, I was going to a rally organized by the powerful auto workers union. Maybe they would rejuvenate the strike with meaning for me. Certainly that was worth building a few sandwiches.

But as I pressed turkey into mayonnaise covered bread and layered lettuce and tomato on top, I could not shake the feeling that there was something about this trip to Detroit that did not have the ring of truth. I reminded myself how what had sounded so acceptable from the podium and so natural in the Thursday night study group had turned into dust and sand in the living of it. Graduate students on strike? How did that make any sense when the whole purpose of being a graduate student at the University of Michigan was to prepare yourself to take your place in the corridors of the elite? Solidarity between the state of Michigan's most privileged--the students at U of M--and the African American community that grew up around the outskirts first and then the inner city of Detroit? What could possibly be natural about that? For that matter, what did we students have in common with a man or a woman who worked on the line in auto factory all their lives? Who was being fooled here? And who was trying? In a few minutes Rick would pick me up with Jean and Alex in the car and we would drive over to meet with auto worker union leaders. It did not make sense. We did not belong together. I couldn't speak with any certainty for anyone else, but given the choice between being a black man or woman in the United States at the end of the twentieth century, or being an auto worker in Detroit or being a graduate student at University of Michigan, I would take graduate student any day

(and I thought all my comrades in arms would too, to be honest.) In fact I totally wanted to be a graduate student. I couldn't wait. How much more wonderful could it be than to get paid for going to school, and being asked to teach classes? And then to know that once you had performed the work required, that you could become a university professor yourself? I knew all this. I heard the voice of logic hammering away at my brain, saying "wake-up, wake-up, wake-up," and I tried to wake up, but I kept making sandwiches instead.

I was involved, bread/turkey, in something larger than myself, lettuce/tomato. This was real, bread/plastic wrap. This was what I had been waiting for, looking for. I was caught up in the excitement, infected by the desire to be part of something historic. And maybe, just as important, was the realization that I felt spoiled somehow, tainted by the fact that I'd walked away from the sit-in in fear, left my friends there to face the consequences--and then--as if by some cosmic joke, there were no consequences. I had been frightened by my imagination and my own distrust of the world. But despite my worry, the only fall-out from the sit-in was the respect that came from being one of the students who was there. After realizing that, and because there was no way to go back and do it again, the only chance I had to feel good and proud, the only chance I had of replacing the feeling of sheepish embarrassment that I had inherited by stealing away down the stairs with Alex Stoll's press pass in my hand, was to stand up for myself at the very next chance I had. So I made the sandwiches and I kept a watch outside my rain-splattered window for Rick's car. When he finally pulled up in front of the dorm I took the stairs--the elevator was too slow--ran outside and opened the door, the handle wet in my hand.

“Hello Miya,” Rick said from the driver’s seat. “Climb in.” He patted the empty space next to him. Alex and Jean were in the back. I threw my back pack with the sandwiches inside beside him.

“Good morning Miya,” said Alex, sounding oddly formal. “I hope you are ready for some action. This time.”

“Action?” I said. “You mean the rally?”

“We have a new plan,” said Alex.

“What kind of plan?” I asked, hesitating at the curb. A drop of rain splattered on my hand and then another on my face. I wiped it away.

“Leave her alone, Alex,” said Rick. “Stop being such a shit. She’s a kid. Think of what you were like when you were nineteen or twenty.”

He looked over at me. “She’s a puppy. Aren’t you, Miya? So get in. Don’t pay any attention to him,” he said. “Alex’s just being dramatic. He’s a journalist. A writer. You know how they are. Jean just knows some people from the Jose Marti Organization,” he added. “And we’re going to meet them. That’s all. That’s all he’s talking about. Don’t worry.”

“My brother-in-law,” said Jean. “We’re going to meet them downtown, and then head over to the rally together.”

“Who are they?” I asked, from the sidewalk, noticing that the rain was coming down more quickly. In a few minutes I would be soaked.

“They’re like Shein Fein,” said Alex. “They’re into armed struggle.”

“Stop it, Alex,” said Rick.

“No they’re not,” said Jean, hitting him in the arm. “They’ve done a lot of good work in Detroit. Detroit Summer. Take Back Our Schools. They don’t believe in violence.”

“Anymore,” Alex said.

“Children,” said Rick. “Stop your squabbling.”

“Armed struggle?” I asked.

“Don’t let Alex scare you,” Rick said. “Come on. Get in. You’re one of us and we need you.”

“Jean,” he said, when I didn’t move. “Talk some sense into her, would you?”

“Maybe you better go without me,” I said.

The rain started coming down harder and Rick turned on the windshield wipers. “Just ignore Alex,” he said. “He had a few pulls from the bottle this morning and now he can’t keep his mouth shut.”

He turned around to look at him. “You’re such an ass,” he said.

Then he turned back to me. “He’s an ass, Miya,” he said. “That’s all. He’s a drama queen. Don’t listen to him. He doesn’t know what he’s talking about.”

“Oh bullshit,” said Alex. “It’s right there in their manifesto. Clear as day.”

“Get in the car, Miya,” said Rick. “You’re getting all wet.”

“Only when there’s just cause.” said Jean.

“Don’t be so naive,” said Alex. “You know that anything can be just cause.”

“I don’t think I believe in armed struggle,” I said.

“Now Miya,” Rick said, all professorial, “our Alex is just feeling his testosterone and his whiskey. And so he’s trying to scare you. I don’t know why.

I'll have to ask him about it when he's sober." He shot him a look. "We're just going to Detroit to talk to some people. That's all."

But I didn't believe him. Not after he had walked out on me. And more, I couldn't understand why it mattered to him if I came or not. What did I mean to him? Why did he care if I showed up? Every alarm bell inside me was going off. I didn't believe anything he was telling me. I believed Alex.

"Never mind," I said, taking a step backward, and suddenly I was thinking about the last time I'd been standing outside of a car in the rain, trying to guide my mother away from an irrigation ditch filling up with flood water.

"Oh come on, Miya," said Jean. "What's the problem?"

"She's wimping out again," said Alex. "Like she did at the administration building."

"Is that right, Miya?" Rick asked. "Are you scared? What of?"

"Sure she's scared," said Alex. "Look at her. She's white as a sheet." And then he said, "She should be scared. We all should be scared. This is revolution." But that's not what I was scared of. I was scared of them.

"Oh shut up," said Jean. "You're drunk."

"Alex, you're such a moron," Rick said. He looked at me and smiled. "Miya, don't worry so much. This is just a meeting. And Alex's just being a shit. So come on, get in. We're running late." He reached out his hand to me.

For a minute I felt myself acquiesce. Rick was reaching out his hand to me. All I had to do was take it. He had saved the seat beside him. He wanted me to come with him. He wanted me to. I had escaped New Mexico, my childhood, the pull of

my past. They had no claim on me. And that's why I almost gave in. I almost gave in to the part of me that wanted to have nothing to do with the little girl that I had been, and everything to do with the force of Rick's will and his desire. It wouldn't be so hard. To slide in the car. To settle in the passenger seat next to him. To ride close by, all the way to Detroit. To let him introduce me as someone important to him. But then I remembered that I did not trust him. "I better pass," I said. "Maybe another time."

"Miya," said Rick. "Don't be silly."

"Oh let her go," said Alex. "She'll probably start to cry once we get there." I felt like crying already.

"Are you sure, Miya?" asked Jean. "We really wanted you to come with us."

"Keep the sandwiches," I said. "Just bring me my backpack when you're done."

"I don't understand," said Rick. "You should come. We need you."

"I guess I'm just not political," I said, closing the car door. "I thought I was," I said as I heard the lock click. "But I'm not."

I stood there outside my dorm, watching the car drive out of sight, wondering why I hadn't gotten in, why despite all I had said, I wasn't sure I was right, wasn't sure I should have gone, wasn't sure I didn't want to run after them and call them back, climb in the car and say, "I changed my mind." The next day I heard about the accident. It happened as they were driving back to Ann Arbor from Detroit. Rick lost control going seventy, and his car went over the side of the highway and into a ditch. Jean wasn't wearing a seatbelt. She was thrown from the car and broke her

neck. She died in the hospital. Alex broke his legs and a number of ribs. He had to leave school and go home to his family in Bloomfield Hills to recover. Rick, a lucky bastard I guess, left the scene unscathed and by the time the University decided to launch an investigation he was in the jungle of Brazil doing field work and I had switched to African studies.

Michael's Testimony

Miya and I didn't find out that there was trouble at the clinic, that Sello was hurt, and that Betty had gone out to look for him, until we got back. But we knew something was wrong almost as soon as we left the Shosanguve. From the road you could see billows of black smoke coming from the city, and from the hills to the east. We weren't in the car more than ten minutes when the police vans started coming from both directions, sirens blaring. I had to pull over to the side of the road to let them pass. "Maybe we should go back," I said. "Spend the night at the church, and try again in the morning." Miya agreed, and I started to try to turn around, but then I changed my mind. It was what I saw when I looked back the way we came. It was even worse than what was there ahead of us. People were just flooding into the road, some families, most of them walking, especially the older ones, and women with their kids. But there was just an unbelievable number of men out there too, and some of them were carrying clubs and pieces of lumber, metal, and in the distance, further away, I could hear their chanting, "One settler one bullet." It was the very beginning of the riot although we didn't know it yet. The early warning before the storm.

It took us hours to get back. I kept having to slow down the car as crowds of people filled the road. A green convoy truck drove by with National Police troops lined up on a bench in the back, and after that, even though the windows were closed I could smell the odor of burning rubber and then something God-forsaken I had

smelled before. “This is going to get bad,” I said and I punched the recycle button on the car’s air conditioner.

“What is it?” she asked me. But I didn’t have to answer. She figured it out. You don’t read about it much anymore. But that year was the one that we referred to as the year of the rubber necklaces. Strange, isn’t it, how the tortured take their cues from the torturers? How quickly the National Police’s favorite atrocity was adopted by the oppressed to terrorize their political rivals? Anyway. She knew. Someone had been burned to death on that hill, or they were dying. She took my hand. And we just sat there in the car waiting for a while. The night growing darker. The smoke growing thicker. Then we started moving again.

The thing about Miya is that she was a really cool person. I liked her. A lot. I hadn’t expected to. When I first heard she was coming to Oneg Kempo, I thought she would be a typical do-gooder with a missionary complex. You know, one of those milk-fed, white bread girls with good bones and all the benefits of modern American dentistry who can’t wait to save the rest of the world by making them more like us. A lot of Americans are like that, and they give aid workers like me a bad name. They come to places like Oneg Kempo to spread the gospel of McMocracy and they end up just making people hate us more. Or else they come for the thrill, or because they get some kind of romantic charge out of being with people of color or from third world countries. I’ve seen a lot of women like that everywhere I’ve been. Sudan. Sarajevo. I don’t know if it’s some kind of Florence Nightengale thing, or some kind of attraction to the exotic, but I had no reason to expect that Miya was any different. To me, on paper, she fit the profile. So I avoided meeting her, coming up

with ways to be out of the clinic when she was there, keeping to myself as much as I could. Then finally, Makeba roped me into going out to see Jarmula one more time, and told me to take Miya with me. “I’d rather not,” I said. But there’s no arguing with Makeba once she’s got her mind made up. She’s a rock. So I had to go find Miya and introduce myself. I wasn’t real happy about it, so I suppose I wasn’t very nice. I’m not in my best mood when I feel like someone’s making me do something I don’t believe in.

The clinic had closed early for the day and I found Miya in the hallway, putting her stuff away. When I walked up to her, she was holding a handful of pencils with a thick rubber-band around them, and she started playing with it as we talked, plucking at it and then letting it go like a little guitar string. I thought that was really funny. That’s why I remember. Anyway, I’m sure I didn’t properly introduce myself. I just got straight to the point. “Makeba wants me to take you up country,” I said. “But I told her I didn’t want to. I’m not a big fan of Americans.”

Miya just shrugged and said, “Okay.” I thought that was really funny too. “You think it’s okay that I don’t like Americans?” I asked her. “Even though I am one. And you are too?”

“I’m from New Mexico,” she said, “a state that really puts the whole meaning of America into contention. When people tell me they don’t like America or Americans, I try to think about which America they mean. And it occurs to me that they’re not talking about a country, but a state of mind. And who am I to argue with that?”

How could you not like someone with a comeback like that. I know I couldn't. So I explained to her that what I didn't respect was people from America and Europe coming to Oneg Kempo looking for adventure, or so they could have something on their resume when they ran for public office, or went after that high paying government job. She told me if she had wanted a high paying job she would have gone to business school, and that she left her bungee cord at home. So it was obvious that she had a good sense of humor too. What could I do but let her come in the car with me? We drove out to see Jarmula. And you know what happened there because he told you. The three of us debated about free will, and being true to your own vision, and Jarmula basically said he was going to stay where he was and that fate would have its way. So we left him there, and headed back.

By the time we got to the clinic it must have been one, two in the morning, and we were freaked because all the lights were on. Makeba and Olga were there and they told us about Betty. That she was out on the streets looking for Sello. They were waiting there for her, Makeba told us, and hoping she would come back. If she didn't, then we'd need to go out and look for her in the morning. There was nothing to do but for me and Miya to stay there too. We probably couldn't have made it home by that point, even if we wanted to. It was too crazy out on the streets. And we were exhausted. I went into one of the exam rooms and crawled up on the table and fell asleep. I think Miya might have crashed on a couch in the waiting room. She was as tired as I was, but I'm sure Makeba and Olga stayed awake all night.

In the morning when Betty hadn't shown, Miya and I decided to go look for her although Makeba wasn't sure it was a good idea. We knew there was going to be

a second march and that it could easily turn violent again. We debated for a bit, whether it was safe for us or whether we should just wait until things calmed down. But we were worried about Betty, and our need to do something to try find her won out against any natural sense of caution we had. So we ate some cold cereal that they keep at the clinic for the kids, Familia or something--neither Miya or I had eaten anything since lunch the day before--and then got in the car. The streets were pretty empty that early in the morning. We tried the hospitals first, starting with General, but they didn't have anyone named Sello in their books, and they weren't showing anyone who'd been admitted because they'd been hurt in the riot the day before. After that we went to over to Mercy, even though they don't admit blacks. We thought maybe they might have made an exception because of the trouble. But that's when the admitting nurse took it on herself to reminded us that despite its name, Mercy isn't for everybody, something she suggested we would know if we'd actually grown up in Oneg Kempo, rather than come in from the outside to make trouble.

Some country isn't it?

People dying in the streets and being burned to death in the hills with smoking rubber tires around their necks and a hospital that won't treat people of color and is proud enough of the fact to remind you?

Yes I know.

It's changed now.

But does that make it any better for the people who paid the price in the past?

As far as I'm concerned, no.

Anyway, since we didn't find anything at the hospitals, we went to the prison to see if Sello had ended up there, or if Betty had shown up to look for him. At first I thought the guard was going to help us. He said he thought he was familiar with the woman we were talking about and that he had seen her. "Oh I know who you mean," he said. "A very nice looking black woman. Well kept. In a nurse's uniform. Yeah, she was definitely here last night."

"What time?" I asked. "Did you help her? What did you tell her? Where did she go?"

He shrugged. "Couldn't say for sure," he said. "There was quite a few women here last night. All of 'em asking about their boyfriends or their husbands. The thing about the one your talking about though, is that I remember her from before. She had a fellow inside. She'd bring him food. Bout every night. A school teacher I think he was. Right?"

"Yeah," I said. Hoping he was going somewhere with his talk. But he wasn't. He was just talking.

"Nice enough fellow, her man," he said. "But not too smart, was he? Didn't know enough to leave well enough alone. That's the way most of them are. You know? It's one of those things I can't figure out. They're never happy with what they got. It's not enough that we build a school and give 'em a classroom with books and maps and pictures on the wall, uniforms for every student, free lunches. Nothing we do is good enough. And why? Because they didn't want to teach them blacks in their own language. They want to teach them in ours."

I didn't interrupt him because I was hoping he might actually say something that would help. I could see that Miya was biting her tongue too, but I could tell he was making her sick. It was just such a disgusting display. Finally he told us that they still had a large number of men in the prison holding area and that they had not processed any of them, so he didn't know if Sello was there or not. Once they were booked, he said, they would publish their names in the newspaper and we could come to find them then. He said that he told the same thing to all of the women the night before, including Betty, and he said that he explained to them that it didn't matter how much they wailed or pulled their hair or banged their chests there was nothing else to be done.

So Miya asked him, "What if the man was injured? What happens if he's hurt?"

And the guard said, "They got doctors inside, for that. Fix him up if he needs it. No worries there."

"But the doctors would know then, wouldn't they?" she said. "If the man was injured? Wouldn't they know who he was, by name? And wouldn't they have it in their records." The guy shrugged.

"Could you at least check?" I said.

No he couldn't, he told us. "No names." And then he said, "Since the two of you are so concerned, I'll tell you this. So far none of them coloreds or blacks has been taken out in a body-bag, so for all you and I know, if the fellow you're looking for is inside he's still alive." He was smiling when he said that but as soon as he stopped talking he stopped smiling too, and his face just turned evil. "That's all then,

is it?" he said. "And there's the door. Good bye and good luck. Don't call us. We'll call you."

"Don't worry," I told Miya when we got back to the car. "People like him are a dime a dozen in Oneg Kempo, but they're on their way out." I told her that I was sure that Betty and Sello were fine, and that they might even be at the clinic themselves by now, and that by the afternoon it all would be over, and everyone would be safe and sound. Betty, Sello, Miya, Jarmula, me. And in another couple of weeks, after the elections, we'd be working together, building a new country. That it would all be all right. What did I know? I should have turned around and driven right back to the clinic. Right then.

We had checked the hospital.

We had checked the prison.

What else did I think we could really do? Drive up and down the streets looking for them? I can't believe I was so stupid.

What was I thinking?

I don't know.

That we could find them? That if I didn't look, something bad would happen? I guess that's it. I guess I thought that if Miya and I were out looking for them, then they would be all right. And I never thought for a minute that anything bad would happen to us. Why would it? We were the good guys. Besides, I didn't think we'd be out that long. I figured we'd find them and get back to the clinic fairly quickly. I had a pretty good idea about where the marchers must have been when the police attacked, and I thought maybe Betty would figure that out and go there too. By then

it was mid-morning and the streets that had been pretty empty when we started out were filling up with people. It was getting hard to get anywhere. The police weren't helping. They were just making it worse. Blocking roads, redirecting traffic, using barriers and temporary fences to force everyone toward the center of town, the way you lead cattle to the slaughter house. We turned down the street near Morganveld Station and the east side of the street was barricaded. The sidewalks were closed off too, and everyone was being routed into a narrow area of the street. Pedestrians and cars pressed into each other's right-of-way. But it wasn't like we could stop moving, or turn down a street and go somewhere else where we wouldn't be in the same traffic flow as the people on foot. The police and the guards weren't giving us that option. They were herding us forward and closing off any escape routes, the way they do when they've decided a protest is going to get out of hand, or when they want it to, so they increase the pressure. They drive the crowd into one narrow street after another, and then they drive their trucks up behind them, forcing them forward and once they're in far enough, they block off the exit behind them. They just keep the pushing and pushing and pushing, with trucks, motorcycles, the big, heavy-hoofed horses they ride, dogs, barricades. Miya and I saw it all as we inched along, trying to work our way over to Eona Center where I thought we might find someone who would tell us if they'd seen Betty.

As we got closer to Eona Center there were more and more men on the street and it was harder and harder to keep the car moving forward. I was pressing on the brakes almost every second. It was getting really hot, and the air-conditioner in the Opal wasn't working well. It doesn't in stop-and-go traffic. I started to use the horn

a little bit. Nothing harsh. Just a little bit of warning to let people know we were there and try to get them to move out of the way. At one point I even thought about trying to pull over, thinking maybe that Miya and I could get out of the car and walk to where we were going. By then we were just a few blocks from where I thought it was that Sello had gotten hurt, and the crowd was almost at a standstill. I could barely put my foot on the gas without worrying that I would hit somebody. I was sweating like a pig, but it wasn't only the heat. I was growing anxious about the feel of the crowd. An edginess was picking up. No was singing. No one was dancing. No one was holding hands. I didn't put my finger on it at first, but then I did. There weren't any children out. There weren't any women, or if there were there were very few. It was almost all young men, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, twenty, maybe a few in their early thirties, but I doubt even that old. And I'll tell you, they didn't look like marchers or protesters. They looked like men who had come in from the townships the day before and who had slept in doorways or on the sidewalk all night, and who were hungry and pissed off and spoiling for a fight. A lot of them had some kind of weapon in their hands. Rocks. Bricks. A few crowbars or baseball bats, but mostly just pieces of wood, from boards that had been split, or fence posts that had been wrenched out of the ground, or branches broken off from trees. I barely saw anyone who was empty-handed. "Lock your doors Miya," I said. "And check the windows. Make sure they're closed all the way. Okay?" She said "Okay," and I said "Good." And then I said, "I don't think we're going to have any problem. But whatever you do, stay calm and don't get out of the car." Those were my words to her. "Don't get out of the car." I still thought we'd be safe. We were in the clinic vehicle. Half the

people in the community knew the green Opal by sight. And there were red cross stickers on all the windows. I believed that would give us some immunity, if things got out of hand, but even then, I wasn't going to guarantee it.

That morning we were the only white people out on the street. Usually that wouldn't bother me. But as I said before, the crowd didn't feel right to me. Not with what they started chanting. The same thing we'd heard the night before. "One settler, one bullet. One settler, one bullet." Not with the fact that it was almost all young men. The chanting was coming from far away at first, not from the people around us, and it started out kind of scattered. But it quickly got louder and stronger, and soon it was picked up by everyone around us. They were all repeating it, stamping their feet, marching past us, and around us, the way water flows around a rock in a river, because by then we had completely stopped moving and there was nothing I could do. I couldn't back up. I couldn't drive forward. I couldn't turn around. I just had to hope that people would let us alone. But they didn't. As you know.

I didn't see who hit us first. Or what they hit us with. I saw some of the men waving their fists and their clubs in the air. I heard people screaming at us. And then I heard the bang. It was on Miya's side. But in the rear. I must have taken my foot off the brake, a totally instinctual reaction, because the car rolled forward, and somehow that became the signal to storm us. After that I heard more than I saw. There were so many people pressing around us, all I could see was a fog of bodies; shirts, skin, hair. Legs, arms. They were banging on the fenders of the car and then they started on the roof. "Boom." "Boom." By then there was no mistaking the

forces of the crowd, and I did not think we had any chance of escaping. We could hear their anger, everything was out of control, and I knew what that meant, the crowd growing louder, the tension building, like water behind a damn, and then releasing in a flood of emotion, wave after wave of feeling. And it didn't matter that Miya and I weren't even really part of it, that we were there by accident. That we weren't their oppressors, that we held them no malice, that we had no desire to control them, that we were even there to help. None of that mattered. Because they couldn't stand it any more. Not for another day, or another minute, so they were lashing out, pushing against the walls, breaking free. "Stop it. Stop it," Miya was screaming. I can't even begin to tell you what it was like. How terrifying it was.

"Calm down," I said. "Stay calm." But we were caught up in it, that flood of anger rising up around us. The fury. We could taste it. For the men chanting and raining down blows upon the car it made no difference who we were, or what our motives or natures were. We were just something in the way, something to overwhelm on their path to freedom. So again and again, the blows showered down. Bricks, clubs, bats. Bats, bricks, fists. People were hitting us with what ever they could. "One settler, one bullet," they were shouting at us now. "One settler. One bullet." And it didn't let up. It just got stronger and stronger, pouring down on us. With more and more people beating on the car, raining blows on the fenders and hood. Smashing the lights. Trying to shatter the windows. A storm of blows. Thundering against the metal roof.

I tried to shift into reverse, and turned my head to look behind me to see if I could back out, but I couldn't see anything. People were sitting on the car, or

jumping on it, reaching under the chassis and trying to turn us over. I turned the wheel to the right, and to the left, but I couldn't get any traction. The force of the crowd was too strong. I heard the rear window break. "Get down. Get down, Miya," I said. But she didn't get down.

"I've got to get out of the car," she said.

"No. Don't," I told her. By then they were hammering us. Just hammering us. They shattered the windshield, and I couldn't see anything. But we were still inside. And the doors were locked. We weren't safe, but we had some protection and I could hear the police sirens moving closer. Once they were there, maybe the crowds would disperse and we'd be okay. She started to reach toward the door.

"Sit down, Miya," I said. "Stop moving."

"I know where we are," she said. "I can go get some help."

"No. Don't," I said. "I'm the driver here, and you've got to trust me. I need you to stay in the car. The police are coming," I added. "I can hear their sirens. And as soon as they get here, I can steer us out of away and find someplace safe. But right now, you have to stay in the car. Okay?" She didn't answer. "Okay?" I said.

She collapsed back into her seat. "I guess," she said, not moving.

"All right then," I said. But my victory was short lived. Because the whole time, the crowd was hammering away at us. Smashing at us with their bats and their bricks. All the windows were broken. They were screaming for blood. And then suddenly Miya reaches for the door handle again. She unlocks the door. And I'm pleading with her. "Please Miya. Don't. Don't. I'm asking you. Begging you. Don't get out of the car." I reach over to try to pull her back toward me but she

pushes my hand away, and in response I must have pressed my foot on the gas without even realizing it, because the car jerks forward, the tires whining against the pavement. The crowd surges around us, the car swaying and rocking as people press and push against it. They are yelling and screaming, rat-a-tat, rat-a-tat, like a hail. Like thunder. I press down on the horn and that's when she opens the door. She opens the door and climbs out, and closes the door behind her. In seconds, I can't see her anymore. She's been pulled into the crowd. There are no choices left then. I have to get out too, and to try to find her. I climbed out of the car calling "Miya, Miya." I run over to the passenger side, calling her name, trying to find her, to see where she's gone, and for a few seconds no one tries to stop me. And then in an instant I see her, just as some boy takes a brick and brings it down on her head, right down on her skull. Right in the soft spot. Right behind her ear.

I don't know if the man who hit her is the same one who is in this room, asking for amnesty. I really don't. Everything was so confusing, it was all happening so fast, and I couldn't really see any particular individual, it was as if it was just one huge mass of people. And as I watched she fell, and then I was running over to her side, but I feel like I'm having one of those nightmares, when you are running and running and you're not getting anywhere. Your feet are stuck to the ground, your legs are churning, you're straining with all your might, but you can't move. I hear her scream, I'm sure it was her, and that I hear the sound of her screams inside the sound of all of the other screaming. I call out. "Miya," and then I feel this terrible pain, someone has come at me, and hit me, right across the ribs, so hard that they crack, which means that I can't breath, my ribs are pushing into my lungs, but I am

trying to move forward, trying to run, pushing my way through the crowd, but someone hits me again, and again, and again after that, and I go down. I could smell the dirt and the oil on the street, I could hear the sound of people screaming and running and the wail of sirens as they came closer and closer before I passed out.

When I came out of it the next day, in the hospital I didn't know anything. I just knew I was in pain. I had a punctured lung, broken ribs, broken clavicle, surgery for a ruptured spleen. I was hooked up to a morphine drip. In and out of consciousness for a week. I didn't learn about Miya. They let me get a little better first, before they told me. And then they asked me what I saw. I told them what I told you.

I did not see who did it.

I do not know exactly what happened.

I can not tell you which blow was the one that killed her.

I don't know who it was that caused her death.

I am not a very good witness.

But it is Not the Mountains That are the Story

The strike was over. We picked up all the pieces, Jean's memorial service, Alex's move, loading his stereo and furniture into a UHAUL, driving across Interstate 42 to his parent's house in Bloomfield Hills and unloading everything into their garage. Returning to Ann Arbor, finishing up research reports and finals, drinking tequila with sugar and lime together the night before Rick, Niko and Lea boarded the plane to Brazil. Lea gave me two gifts. A small sculpture of a fish and a tapestry. "Just in case we don't see each other again," she said. "So you'll always have something to remember me." Luis left too, not much after that, moving to Miami, which was, he said, "the most Latin of cities in America." I stayed in Ann Arbor ticking away at my required classes, English, math, history, science, and there, against the verdant backdrop of my beloved University, its splendid campus, its buildings of ivy-covered brick, hand-cut flagstone, polished granite, the genial homes on Michigan and Madison, State and Central, wood framed two stories, brick English Tudors, Craftsman-style bungalows, Cape Cod A frames, the streets planted with both front yards and tree lawns, shaded in the summer by ancient oaks and rare elms strong enough to have resisted the ravages of disease and framed starkly in the winter by the branches, naked and heavy with snow, I became at least something of an adult. In that well nurtured college town, in the easy way the natural rhythms of the place reasserted themselves, the graduate students returning to their studies, the professors

to their research, their lectures, their assignments, their books, new students arriving every fall, and others leaving with their degrees at the beginning of the summer, all of us doing what we had always done, I also came to realize I was at a loss to know where I stood. The true north that I had stumbled upon in my first introduction to the struggle of ideas and politics seemed somehow jury-rigged when I looked back, as if the compass I held in my hand (and in my heart) had not been the real thing, but rather some token won in a five cent game of chance that once removed from its cheap plastic bubble revealed itself to have been manufactured specifically to fall apart. It seemed to me that I had been right when I concluded that we had all been play acting in a fantasy, and it was one that was no more grown-up or realistic than the stories Yollie and I told ourselves in our slow and faraway childhood afternoons in Las Cruces, playing horses and dreaming of Arabian princes to spirit us away from the world that we lived in, and into one that we could love so much better. It was not that I had changed my mind about justice in the world, or that I had become a supporter of the status quo. I had no patience for the people I knew on the left who woke up one day, only to become Republicans, claiming that there was nothing to be done to make the world anew, so they'd best look out for themselves.

No. That was not it at all. Rather I had come to believe that it was not the University, its students or professors who could lead the world to freedom, if in fact there was something quite so static as freedom, or if freedom could be defined in any kind of concrete way, and was something to which people could be led, like the Israelites of biblical times. And I was not sure that in the modern world that it was. I also came to believe that as pleasurable as all of the thinking and talking, and the

reading and writing and debating and marching was, as exciting and liberating to those of us who were engaged in it as it might be, it liberated no one else. And then, like Stanley who turned his attention from Latin America to Alaska, and Luis who turned from Guatemala to Miami, I turned away from South America and anthropology. I altered my focus from that which I had known, to that which was new, and I changed my alliance to the African Studies Department. That is how I came to be a student of Dr. Peter Baylor, who was head of the department, and why, during the spring of my senior year, just as the crocuses came up in the flower beds outside Angell Hall, he called me into his office to tell me about a job with the African National Women's organization in Oneg Kempo. A friend of his, he said, a former fellow student, Mariam Makeba was looking for someone from America to help her mobilize women there in preparation for her country's first free elections. Initially, I told him no. I didn't think I was the right person. I didn't speak any native languages. I had only taken a few courses. I suggested someone else from the department would be better. But he held firm.

"I'm suggesting you, Miya," he said, "because I think you, specifically, will do well. There is something you have, an empathy for the other that is the most important quality right now. Everything else you can learn." He told me about Makeba. How they met when they were both in graduate school at Columbia, two Africans in a sea of whites who were drawn to each other and became fast friends. He told me that she herself was an alumna at the University of Michigan, as I soon would be myself, and how she was one of the most intelligent and dynamic people he knew. "She is a natural leader," he said. "Just like you. And she is engaged in the

politics of the real. She has done so much to bring Oneg Kempo to the brink of democracy, and I believe she is one of the few who can bring all of the factions together into a new government, without them killing each other first. But she needs help. I thought of you right away.”

“I’m flattered, Dr. Baylor,” I said. “But I’m not really political.”

“But I thought you were,” he said. “I thought you were involved in the GSO strike, if I remember correctly. Were you not?”

“I was,” I said, thinking about Rick’s car accident and how everything that had once seemed so fresh and new had faded like a late cut flower in my hand. “But that feels like it was a long time ago.”

“Oh,” he said. “I had thought that maybe you might have even met Makeba then. Or heard her speech. She was here you know. On the day of the sit in. Talking to students in the quad.”

“No,” I said, remembering how I had thought I heard an African woman’s voice, but also how impossible it had been to hear anything from inside the President’s office. If I had been out in the quad with Rick I would have heard her. “I didn’t.”

“That’s a shame,” he said. “If you had heard her that day, I do not believe you would hesitate now.”

We talked again later that month, a few days before graduation, and he handed me a letter that Makeba had written me, and sent in his care. “Dear Miya,” the letter said. “There are so many powerful events happening here in Oneg Kempo, now that we are on the way to building democracy. With the help of many organizations in the

U.S. and Europe we are mere months away from ending years of pain and tribulation. We would not be able to provide you much in the form of financial gain, only your air fare, room and board and spending money. But our needs are great and your help is desired and will certainly be appreciated. Please let me know, as soon as you can, if you have any interest in helping us. Dr. Baylor says you are his finest student and the one we need. I hope you look inside your heart and decide to come.”

“You see,” he said when I put the letter down. “She is very persuasive.”

“Yes she is,” I said. “But I don’t know if it’s what I want to do. I have no sense of clarity. I’m just not certain.” There was a radiator in Dr. Baylor’s office, just like the one in my dorm. It stood cold and silent, its paint chipped and slightly dusty, attesting to its years of work and fortitude, its efforts unneeded in the warmth of the late spring. How strange, I thought, that now it was not only my childhood that the iron radiator reminded me of, but also how it recalled for me the conversation with my father, when he drove me from Las Cruces to school. And I wondered, what would happen the next time I noticed one. Which conversation would it remind me of then?

“None of us ever really have clarity, Miya,” Dr. Baylor said. “Not really. We say we do. We act like we do, But that’s because you can’t hesitate if you want to move forward in life. So we act, even though certainty escapes us.” He shrugged. “And while it is true that life does not always turn out as you wish it too, if you hold back every time the door opens for you, where will you be in ten years? Or twenty? You’ve already turned down my offer to stay on at the University as a graduate student, although I have made it clear there is a place for you in the department.

You've turned down offers from other graduate schools as well. Yale. Cornell. Now it seems you want to say no to this offer too?"

"I know," I started to say, but he held out his hand to interrupt me.

"I've seen this before. It happens to many of our most promising students," he said. "You work so hard, and you learn so much here, some of the lessons are easy, some of them are hard, but either way you are tired of working, tired of learning, tired of how difficult it is to change from being a child to being an adult. So, like you, they finish here and they decide that they have had enough. They don't want to spend one more minute in school and they walk away. Some return. Some do not, and of those who do not, some, many I think, look back with a great bit of anguish, from their job selling insurance policies or working for Ford Motor Company, on this moment of important choice, That's not what I want for you."

"And I don't think that's what's going to happen."

"Probably not," he said. "But if you go to Africa you can be certain it won't. And at least you will still be learning. Then when the elections are past, you can come back here and get your doctorate with us. We'll have scholarship money for you then, I am sure. And if not," he shrugged. "You can still decide what your next steps are. And maybe at that point you will be more clear, or at least more certain. Don't you think?"

A week later, I wrote Makeba a letter, telling her I would come and then I went back to Las Cruces to say good-bye. My father argued with me. "Don't go," he said. "It's not safe there. The government's completely fallen apart. It's full of corruption."

“It’s not safe anywhere,” I said, foreclosing the argument. And then before he could say anything else, added, “That’s a lesson I already learned.”

His face fell when I said that, and my heart broke a little. He would have protected me—from any pain if he could, and I think that perhaps up until that moment, he thought he had. After all, that’s what fathers are for. I put my arms around him. “I know you love me,” I said. “And you want to take care of me. But you can’t. You have to let me go. And I’m ready for this. I’m all grown up.”

He nodded and hugged me back. “I know. And really, I guess I have to admit it, you’re an adult now, and was some time ago when I said good-bye to my little girl.”

“When you dropped me off at college,” I said.

“I remember that,” he said.

“I cried as you drove away.”

“I did too. But I knew you were safe. I knew you were coming back.”

“I’ll be safe, Dad,” I said. “I won’t let you down.”

“I know,” he said, giving me a hug. “of course you will. But I’d be happier if you changed your mind.”

“I know,” I said. “But I can’t.”

The day before I was to leave, my mother and I went shopping in El Paso. I didn’t find any clothes that I liked, but she bought me enough bras and cotton panties to last me ten years in Oneg Kempo’s underwearless wilderness. On the drive back,

just as we came up on to the loneliest section of highway 10, where there is nothing to see for miles but the asphalt highway and the creosote dotted land of the high desert, the high-altitude dome of the sky and the hollowed out cones of ancient volcanoes my mother asked, “What are you running away from, Miya? What are you trying to escape?”

To the west, thick black thunder clouds had begun to roll heavily up on the edge of the valley, and already, over the slope of the Organs, I could see the stabs of lightning sparking out of the clouds and reaching for the ground below. It was summer. Monsoon season. If we were still on the road a half an hour from now, we would meet the storms.

“I’m not running away from anything,” I said. “Why do you say that? What do I have to run away from?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “It just seems like you’ve been leaving us for years.”

The clouds grew darker, more solid at the edge of the horizon where the valley and the mountains and the sky and the curve of the earth meet to disappear. I could hear the sound of the rubber tires spending themselves on the road. “You were not the easiest child,” my mother said after a moment. “Not one of those sunny, happy-go lucky types who scooted through the world without worry or care. You always fretted too much. About wounded birds and butterflies who had the powder brushed off their wings. Even when you were a little girl you wanted to save the world.”

“That’s what all children want.”

“No,” she said, “I don’t think so. Your father and I used to talk about your philosophical streak. You were always thinking.”

“Yeah,” I said. “I always was.”

“I don’t think you ever forgave us for moving you down here. After we left Michigan you just got so serious.”

“No, I didn’t.”

“But you did. I know you did. I saw it for myself. You missed your friends. Your school. It was hard for you. There were so many times when I thought we should have moved back.”

“Then why didn’t you?” I asked.

“See what I mean?” she said. “You never have forgiven me.”

Was that true? Had I never forgiven her? Had there been anything to forgive? Maybe. Certainly there had been many times when I was growing up in Las Cruces that I imagined myself in a different life, one where my family had stayed in Grand Rapids. A life where I had grown up in the same neighborhood, had the same friends, gone to the same schools with them from elementary to high school, where that first kiss with Kevin O’Connell had turned into a first boy friend. Where I had never had the pain of moving, never had to deal with Lupe or Mrs. Perez, never learned what it felt like to be made into an object because of your culture or the color of your skin, never had my heart broken by Yolanda and Tomas. But then of course there would have been other heartbreaks, other teachers who were bitter, other girlfriends who were mean. Life didn’t spare you the normal pains of the human conditions, no matter where you grew up. Still, what would my life have been like if

we had never moved to New Mexico? Who would I have been? A doctor? An actress? A religious leader? A politician? How could I even speculate? Those were questions with no answers. In some way, every choice we make is a momentous action. Take one path and not another and all the alternative possibilities disappear at the very instant you take your first step. The three-dimensional bubble of potential collapses in upon itself, each surface flattening, one upon the other, like the folding plains of a deflating origami balloon. There is no turning back. The person you could have been; the one who gets married to her high school boyfriend and who raises two children, or who goes to med school, or becomes a lawyer, writes a great novel, who runs for congress, starts her own business, becomes a teacher, or an actor, or an architect, or grandmother, the woman who becomes a lobbyist at fifty, or the one who buries her husband after his ten year fight with cancer are gone. Long gone. Gone for good. Gone in the way only those who have never been could ever be gone, or gone in the way of those who are no more.

The storm clouds grew thicker over the hills, now forming not just to the east of us, but also at the edge of the *Pacaho* foothills to the west. I could hear the murmur of thunder in the distance, and smell the scent of the desert soil wetted by the rain from miles away. “What do you mean, I never forgave you?” I asked, looking to make peace, with her, with myself. “There was nothing to forgive.”

“Maybe,” she said. “Maybe not. We all do what we have to do, Miya, and your father and I felt we really had to get away from Grand Rapids and we believed we would do well here. And I think for the most part we were right. I don’t believe we could have stayed in Michigan and been happy.”

“I understand, Mom,” I said.

But she wasn't finished. “Just so you know,” she said, “don't think we didn't question ourselves about whether we'd done the right thing a hundred times. Because we did. So many nights, after you girls went to bed, we'd sit there talking about it. ‘Do you think we did the right thing?’ we'd say. ‘Do you think Miya's going to be able to make the adjustment? Would she have been happier if we'd stayed in Grand Rapids? Do you think she would have fit in better?’ I can't tell you how many times we had that conversation. How many times one of us said, ‘Why don't we just go back,’ and then realized that we couldn't, even if we had wanted to—even if we had made a mistake to come here. Maybe we shouldn't have. We knew you weren't happy in Las Cruces, Miya. We always did. But we tried our best we could to make it alright for you.”

There was a flash of lighting and a crack of thunder right on its heels. I could see the dark curtains of rain in the distance, reaching down across the horizon like fingers.

“Mom, I know,” I said. “Don't worry about it.” But she still had more to say.

“It was harder for you than for your sisters. Once they got here they adapted just fine. I think it was because they were younger than you. But you know, you always seemed to have a foot in both worlds.” As she spoke she turned to look at me, turning the steering wheel as well. The car veered to the right.

“Mom,” I said, loudly. “The road.”

“Sorry,” she said, straightening the wheel of the mini van. “I just think that everything considered, you might have been happier if we had never come here. That’s all I mean.”

The rain came just as we approached the first of the Las Cruces exits. She turned the wipers to high and they pushed the water off the windshield in sheets. Still, as hard as they worked, the rain was coming down so intensely it was almost impossible to see. “You remember when we first moved here?” my mother said. “And we all got caught in the rain? You and me and your sisters?”

“Of course,” I said. “How could I forget?”

“It was raining like that then,” she said.

“I think so,” I said. “Yes. I think it was.”

“And now you’re leaving.”

“I am.”

“I wish you weren’t. It’s not the same as when you left for school,” she said, to the rhythm of the wipers and the staccato of the rain, and the throaty voice of the thunder surrounding us on all sides.

“I feel like you’re leaving us for good.”

“I’m not,” I said, reaching over and putting my hand on her shoulder. “I’ll come back. It will be fine.”

Dumisani Mphebe's Testimony

You asked me my name. My name is Dumisani Mphebe. You asked me to answer you in my own words. Whose words could I use, if not my own? The words of the policemen who have jailed me? The words of the men who knocked on our doors and asked us to join their political parties? The words of the prosecutor, the one you have heard tell you he is such a simple man? The words of my buddies who grew up with me? There are so many words to choose from, I do not blame you for demanding that I speak in my own words. But why wouldn't I? Why would I want to use someone else's words now? Now that you will hear my story?

As I said, my name is Dumisani Mphebe. I was born in the township of Notenyo, to Mabel and Ernest Mphebe, twenty-two years ago. I am one of three male children, but the only son who lived past the age of five. I have two sisters, Lena who is sixteen and Osan who is eleven. I attended elementary school in Notenyo and finished the eighth grade, but I did not pass into high school, because I was not a good student. They would not let us learn in English and I was not satisfied with the situation, so I did not do well. For this reason, at fourteen, I moved to the city to live with my mother's brother. There I was able to work at his side, on a city crew for a fair wage. But four years ago, my uncle sickened and both of us were let go--he because he could not work and I because there were many other healthy men on the

crew with nephews and cousins of their own. I tried to find another job in the city, but after many months of failure I returned to Notenyo to stay at my parent's house.

This is what you want to hear? Is that correct? How I went into the world as a young boy and had some luck—some--but not enough? How I started out with more than many boys have? That I was able to take my first steps as a man with a job and an uncle to protect me? Do you tell yourself now that this boy, this Dumisani Mphebe does not deserve your pity? Do you think to yourself, there is no one to blame but fate? Do you pull away from me, from my story and ask yourself in disgust and disbelief, "Are we all to be considered guilty now, because his uncle sickened, because there was no other family to help him, because he was unable to find another sponsor? Are we expected to believe what happened to Mphebe is our fault? That we are responsible for everything? For every tragedy that befalls the poor or the blacks?" You see, now I am doing the very thing you told me not to do. I am talking in your voice, despite your warning to speak only in my own words. I apologize.

So. In Notenyo I had some buddies from school. Like me, they had no work. Like me they were staying with their mothers or their grand-mothers, who were glad to have them, because their husbands were away, in the mines up north or Spain, or anywhere where they could try to make a living. Some afternoons my buddies and I would get together for a cigarette or a game of soccer, or to play Paper, Scissors, Rock. Sometimes we would arm wrestle or tell stories about the women we had spent the night with. Sometimes we would measure who had the largest package in his pants or who could send his water the greatest distance. On Saturday mornings, we

stood together in the doorway and bet whose mother would come around the corner next, balancing a basket of rice and melon on her head. Then, if there was beer in the house because a father or grandfather was home for a birthday or a Baptism, we would drink it. It was not a bad life. I can not complain.

Maybe twice a month someone from the ASOLU or the Oneg Kempo Student's Congress would ask us to join up or go out into the streets to get people to sign a petition. We always said no, unless they offered to feed us, or had some money at the end for a beer and a bakkie ride home. That is how I learned that we were prisoners and slaves in our own country, from the words of the speakers as they talked about grandparents who had died in the mines, children who had died in the wars, mothers and sisters and daughters ravaged by the National Police, sons and brothers and fathers kidnapped from their homes at night and found by their families days later, a ring of burning rubber tires around their necks, and about the men killed by the police at night, their corpses dumped in front of their houses at dawn. That is also how I learned about the school children who were killed as they marched down the street in their stocking feet. Someone showed us pictures from the newspaper. The children's bodies looked like people I knew. Like my sisters, like my buddies.

And so one day some men from ASOKU called a meeting at my old school, and three or four hundred of us came. The meeting started at one o'clock and went for on for three hours, and during that time I listened to speeches from many men and women. They called for us to raise our voices, and at the end of the meeting I stood at the front of the room, with all of the other speakers, and I raised my fist in the air and said, along with the others, "One settler, one bullet, one settler, one bullet." And

I was voted in as president of my group. After that I became eager to do everything I could to help the organization and my country and so I went to political classes to learn more and I saw that our land had been stolen from us and that our grandparents, and great-grandparents, and ancestors even before them, had been killed and made into slaves. And so we knew it was time, we learned, to take power back and return our land and our freedom to our people. Men from ASOKU would come and meet with us. "It is time to bring the rule of minority whites to an end," they would say. And we would repeat the lesson.

"It is time to force a change," they would tell us.

"We must bring the government to its knees."

"Refuse to pay your school fees."

"Stop them on the streets."

"Throw stones at their cars if you must. Break their windows."

These were our political leaders telling us this. Telling us to take such actions to free our country. Our spirits were inflamed. Our emotions were high. We were overcome with passion for freedom.

But you are not interested in that. You only want to know what happened the day the white girl died. I can see it in your faces, behind the mask of patience you show in this room where it is best to appear polite--where politeness comes costumed as fair, and fairness is unchained from luck and fate, education...sickness. You practice fair in its most pure form. You are fair for history, fair for the electronic cameras and the images they beam across the world. Fair for the record, fair for the documents tomorrow's judge will review, fair for the transcripts the university

students will examine with a fine comb, fair for the policy statement from the U.N. You are fair for the world, not for me. But perhaps I will still benefit.

My buddies came for me early in the morning the day of the march and we waited at the square. Soon we were marching toward the main bus line. There were many of us in the march, some from my town, some from the city, some from other townships, many, many faces. As we walked we threw stones at some of the cars we saw, and we chased them away. It was like a holiday march, only with a purpose, and soon we were singing and toy-toying and chanting our political slogans. There was a truck stopped on Sixteen Drive and we tried to light it on fire and burn it down, but the police came and we ran away, many of us going in separate directions. After a while, some of us came back and threw stones at the police vans, breaking their window and their lights. But what are stones against bullets? Still, we felt like we could have the upper hand that day. Our emotions were high. Our spirits were full of passion.

Someone in our group said that there was a gun that had been stolen from a policeman, so we decided to split up and travel separately to the center of the city. My buddies and I got on the train and took it to the Morganveld station. When we got off, we started toward the city center where everyone was marching. On the way we passed by the Apostolic church, and I saw a girlfriend there. I stopped, and she asked me what was happening. I told her that we were looking for targets, meaning trucks and cars owned by the government or companies and even the police. While I was talking to my girl friend, I saw that some of my buddies were throwing stones at a government truck and I went to join them. At our meetings we had been told to

destroy government property, and so that is what we were doing. We were all in high spirits but it is true that we were nervous. We felt in control, but we were not. Every time we walked down a street or turned a corner, there were barricades on either side of us. We had no choice of which way to go. The police had blocked off the side streets, and we could only move in one direction. Our passage was slow. It felt very close and crowded. We were stepping on each other, almost like animals in a pen.

It was not much later when the white man and the white girl drove up in the car. It has been said that the car was a clinic car, and that we would have recognized it. But that is not true. I did not recognize it. I had not seen that car before. And nobody around me recognized it either. All we saw was that there was someone driving their car into a crowd, and that the person driving the car was white, and so therefore our oppressor. He drove the car right into the street where we were marching, and we had to move out of the way or he would have hit us. The girl who died, Miya Clare, was in the car with him. When we saw them, it made us angry. What were they doing in our city? In our country? What were they doing driving the car into the street? Where we were already so crowded? When we were trying to march?

We did not know why they were there. We did not know that they were looking for the woman, the nurse's man. We did not know they were part of a democratic organization. All we knew is that they were trying to go where we were going, and to move us out of the way so that they could steer their car up the street already too crowded with people. And we saw that they were white people who

thought nothing of pressing on the horn and telling us to get out of the way, as if they were the strong ones and we were the weak.

We yelled at them.

We shook our fists.

"What are you doing here?" we shouted. "Go away. Get out. Leave us alone."

Someone--not me--threw a rock. It banged against the car and bounced.

Another man threw a rock and another was thrown after that. It has been said that we banged on the car with wooden clubs but I do not remember that. I only remember the rocks and the bricks. Many of us were throwing them and one hit a window of the car and made it break. There was some cheering then and someone said "Now you know where to aim." That is when the girl, the one who died, started to climb out of the car. The man tried to pull her back. He tried to stop her. From where I was standing I could see it all. But she pushed him away. Foolish girl. She should have known better.

I don't know who she thought she was, why she thought that she could just get out of the car and tell us what to do. But she got out and then people were throwing rocks at her too. She started running in my direction, toward the petrol station, and that is when a rock flew past my ear, so close I could hear its wings. It hit her on her shoulder. "Stop," she yelled. "Stop. I'm on your side. Don't throw rocks at me." That is when I picked up my rock. Only a girl who thinks she is still the ruler of the world, only a girl that thinks she can boss people with words like "Do this," or "Don't do that," would say that. If she had not spoken those words, if she had not tried to tell

us what to do, I would not have thrown the rock at her. As it was, my rock hit her in the forehead. I can still see how her skin split, the way the red blood that came to the surface, how she looked right at me. That is why I picked up the second rock. Who is she to look at me? I threw again and hit her in the arm.

In that moment the white man got out of the car too, from the other side and came around. I picked up another rock and threw it at him. He was running towards me, yelling at me to leave the girl alone. And then someone else, a fellow who I did not know, hit the white man in the body with a piece of fence post, swinging it hard and fast. When the fellow hit him, the white man made a sound like a dog who had been hit and he fell to his knees. The fellow raised up his wooden stick to hit him again. I think he hit him at least three times. But then the white girl came over, she was still bleeding, and tried to grab the club. He pushed her out of the way and hit the white man again. He tried to get up, saying “Stop, stop,” all bent over and clutching his hands around his middle. The girl is screaming too, and calling out, “Help us, help us.” And there were many of us who could have helped her, but there were none of us who wanted to. Because they were white. And because it was too late. And because we thought, what if the man has a gun in his car, and he goes and gets it and then shoots us with it? Because white men always have guns in their cars. That is something we all know. Someone yelled out, “Hit him again, hit him again.” Someone else called out “Kill them.” And I felt scared, because I was afraid that if we let them get up, the white girl or the man, things would get worse. I don’t know why I thought that. It is not as clear to me now, as it was then. But we were in high spirits. We had been chanting. “One settler, one bullet. One settler, one bullet.” Our

political leadership had told us to bring our oppressors down, to their knees, and so, when I saw those people, from the car, on their knees, I could tell myself that it was right, that we were right to do what we were doing.

But now I think that my notion of who I was, as a man, as a good man, had fled, washed away in the flood of people and activity, and instead of seeing what was really happening, all I saw was the way that fellow was bringing his stick down on the white man again and again, until he stopped trying to get up, which was all that we wanted. If the girl had stopped too, maybe it would have been different. I do not know. Then I found myself moving closer to the man and the girl, and to the fellow who had hit them. I wanted to see up close if the man was still alive and how badly the girl was wounded. After all, it had been my first throw that had cut her skin open, and so already her blood was on my hands. I think the girl must have picked up a rock and hit the fellow with it, and hurt him, because he dropped his stick, and brought his hand up to his ear. When he took it down it was covered with blood. By then I was very close, I picked up his stick, and I was going to throw it away, or hand it to him, I had not decided which, when the girl started scratching and slapping at me, and trying to knock it out of my hand. I pushed her away, and she fell down. When she tried to get up the other fellow kicked her. She was on the ground, on her hands and knees. "You better hit her," he said to me. "The police are coming. You better hit her and run." But seeing her all covered with blood like that, it made me feel ill. I did not want to hit her any more.

Suddenly I could hear the police siren, and my first thought was why had I not heard it before? Then, like everyone else, I wanted to escape. I looked for a way out.

But we were locked into the street. There was no where to go, no way to get out easily. I was still holding the stick. But I do not know why I did not try to run. I thought about dropping it. I did not want to be standing there, holding it when the police arrived, but then someone grabbed it from me. He raised it high in the air and then smashed it down on the girl's neck and shoulders. She fell onto her knees. Then he hit her again. I think he killed her with that one blow, but after that he kept hitting her again and again and again. Someone grabbed my arm. "Run," he said. "Run away." I let him pull me along, my feet moving as if I were wearing shoes of cement. But every way I tried to go was blocked, and the police had seen me, with the stick in my hand, seen me near the white man and the girl. They rushed at me, knocking me to the ground, beating at me with their clubs, putting handcuffs around my wrists. I could hear them doing the same with some others.

Later they told me that the man was in the hospital and that the girl was dead. They told me that she was a democratic girl from America who had come to help with the elections, and to try to make life better for people like me and for Oneg Kempo. They told me I would spend the rest of my life in prison for killing such a good and beautiful girl, who only came to our country out of compassion. I folded my arms and closed my ears. Why do they hold me responsible? It was not my fault that she died. What was she doing on the street that day, when she should not have been there? And how was I supposed to know she was a democratic girl? That she was on our side? That she was someone special? To me she was a white. One of the people who made slaves of my people. That is how I saw her that day. That is why I had no leniency. And so, what if she was here to help us, I thought to myself, I did not

invite her here. I did not ask for her help. What, gave her the right to come here and try to tell us what to do? But isn't that always what white people do? Don't they always try to save the black man from himself? Civilize us? Enforce what they say is the proper way to be? It does not matter that it is the correct way to cook the white family's dinner, rather than cook dinner, or to clean the white family's house, rather than any house, or to grow the white family's crop, instead of growing food that we want to eat, or create a black-skinned government that the white man believes in. It is what the whites decide. And if the black man obeys, if he behaves the way the white man wants, then the black man will be allowed to live under the white man's thumb, with almost nothing in his hand. But if he disobeys, he will lose even that. That is how I saw her, and that is why, for so long, I had no mercy in my heart. But that is no longer how I feel. I have had a long time to think, and I do not wish to have blood on my hands.

I have listened to the people talk, and I see that I did not know Miya Clare, but I have come to be deeply regretful for her killing and I would only ask that her parents and friends in this room today and in other places that they might be, to forgive me for what I have done.

If I had the chance to do it over again, if I was in that time and place again, I would not make the same choice. I am no longer that man. But I can not change the past. I cannot rewrite history. Only in children's games, do we get to start over, to do it again. Every choice we make as an adult has a consequence. And mine is that I helped to kill an innocent girl.

You said you wanted my own words, and these are my own words too. But I have sat here in this room and I have listened to all that has been said. And this is a commission of truth and reconciliation. And my truth is that I took a life I should not have taken. And my reconciliation is to all of you who loved her and to almighty God I ask forgiveness. I should never have committed such a terrible act.

What I seek is forgiveness and amnesty.

That is why I say this.

For all who loved Miya I ask forgiveness. I am sorry.

Rather it is the Movement That Made Them So

So.

We have come this far

And

Now I can see them

I can see them for myself

Now that time has collapsed into story and I am here.

We are.

They are.

Here in the midst of it.

All of us.

Overtaken by power, by persuasion. The boys. They are. We are. There.

On the street in this moment, still, collapsed as we all are together in time, me hooked

like a hungry fish by the telling. They, the marchers, hooked too. Intoxicated by the

sheer joy of

opening their mouths at last,

by the way their voices grow in stature giving their pain consequence.

If you watch them, or listen you can hear their laments explode out of their

bodies.

They are thrilled by their power.

They are fueled by their rage

By the force of combustion as their call pours out of their throats and lungs, their hands and feet and eyes and ears. “One settler, one bullet.” They rush out onto the street.

They gather and march. March and gather.

They spill onto each other, growing as they travel. One becomes ten. Ten becomes many. They grab hands, form chains, five, six, ten people strong. They spread out through the street, through every street. They sing without melody. They chant with only rhythm. They call to each other, the boys.

They yell to their mothers to stay inside.

They brag to the women that they will salvage freedom.

Their speech spills out from their every cell. The boundaries of their bodies disintegrate before the force of their anger just as Einstein said all boundaries would. No corporeality only process. They are like ghosts

The boys, the angry boys, the boys with the rocks, and the clubs and the sticks. The boys with the screaming words, the boys with the wood pulled from the bones of their houses now weapons in their hands. In this, this still-hooked-moment, they are almost, entirely, energy but no part spirit. They can not become ghosts. Their bodies will pull them back. Their bellies will churn and give in to hunger. Their bladders will call for release. Their teeth will want to chew. Their tongues will want for water. They will grow cold and tired in the darkness.

And then

When the fuel of their violent ecstasy has spent itself into memory, they will lower their fists from over their heads, cease their chanting, stop clapping to the cadence of their feet. They will feel suddenly lonely and strange, each wondering who that man is standing next to him and if he can be trusted. They will slow the pace of their walk, hang back and look more carefully at their neighbors' eyes

The way this man holds his mouth; the curve of that man's chin. They will decide, for the moment that the men standing next to them are all right after all--but still--their doubts will linger. They will bury them, slapping hands and slipping away into the next alleyway or footpath or darkened door.

And what of me? The teller of this story. The one that has led you through. Do you not wonder who it is, whose voice you hear? The one whose voice speaks to you, has spoken to you through all this. Do you not wonder about me?

I who am I am energy and spirit, but no body.

I who am without touch. Who can listen but can not taste or smell and who, without these most fundamental human senses am cut loose from will, cut loose from desire. And what would I will for, what would I desire for anyway?

Retribution?

No.

Not really.

The future will unfold as the future wants.

I can be patient, in this world where, my body has no more dominion.

But I will tell you now, this is the one truth I know. We insert ourselves into different stories. Such is the human condition. To choose for ourselves, or not. That

is why who I was then was a twenty-four year old American girl, and why who I am now is a ghost.

I chose my stories. From the very beginning. Willingly and without concern. Yet when the time came to save myself, I could not. And now I am gone. Gone in the way that only those who have never been could ever be. Or gone in the way of those who are no more. I always thought death was death and living was living. But I can promise you this. Nothing that happened has changed me except that I have become a ghost. And for ghosts – I have already gathered - time is not solid. It has no limits.

The story of my death, of any death, add it to the other stories of deaths before mine and deaths still to come. It is, as Olga said, an old wound. An echo, I think, of other old wounds on the souls of so many people as they recall generations of death, and pain and tribulation. Not just in Oneg Kempo but across the world.

Old wounds.

We all have them. I know this too. Easy enough to say it's the wounds that drive us, that make us run away.

But I did not go to Oneg Kempo looking for such wounds. I did not court death I am not like that.

I'm more like you.

I would rather hide from death than seek it. And if death keeps me in its eye, then let it chase me until I have exhausted my energy for life, and all of the gifts that life brings. I did not welcome death. I wanted death to be the one to surrender. And why not? I was young. I was in love with my living. My eyes are open like a

child's. Or at least they were. And a child still, in my house death has never been welcome.

So.

I have come to you with this story, as traveler might wander in a dream. If I were a dog, perhaps you would see my legs move now. Back and forth and back and forth in a symbolic representation of running, as I lay here on my side with my eyes closed and my body bound to the earth as none other than the dead can be bound, into the earth and finally of it.

But I am not a dog. I have no furry body, no legs that can move, no muscles to move them, no nerves to signal the muscles, no brain to signal the nerves, no scent of summer fields to make me dream of running, no rabbit in the bush, or duck in the river or young boy riding by on a bicycle to make me wish to chase. I have no body to make wishes or dreams. I have no time. Wishes and dreams are artifacts of the future. All I have is will. Will and desire. In tandem and in contradiction.

I am that I am. Spirit with voice. Perhaps what the God-fearing would call a soul rather than a ghost and yet I am not sure. I am not prepared yet to believe that a soul is fated to be only a harbinger of the past, as if the past was all that was unknowable. I have always thought of a soul as all wise, able to tell stories yet to be written, whereas I can only tell you the story of what has already become. Yet this I am sure of. All ghosts have a story to tell. We are the voices of the past. That is the voice I have to share with you.

There and then gone. Amnesty and forgiveness.

I learn. I am learning.