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Chappell. pp. 62

Sound of Rain is a creative thesis concerning the relationship of a young man, Jake Wood, and a young woman, Pat Reding. It has been written from the partial omniscient point of view, centering on Jake Wood. The major theme of the story could be said to be the failure of the two central characters to understand each other or themselves well enough to allow them to become intimate with each other.

SOUND OF RAIN

by

Robert Hill

A Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro  
May, 1969

Approved by

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## APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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April 30, 1969

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## SOUND OF RAIN

### I

What started them talking is of no importance, and what they said was forgotten very soon after they had separated. It was before they met, before having spoken to one another, that they had in a sense, said to each other all that was possible. It took place while she was pacing back and forth across the sand at the edge of the lake, occasionally putting a whistle which she carried around her neck by a rawhide string to her mouth, without ever carrying out her threat, to stop some bit of water play that was becoming dangerous. Once when a young woman, who acted more like a child than the children she was playing with, a boy and a girl, both not more than six years old, started pushing water into the little boy's face and laughing when he screamed "Mommie quit, Mommie quit," she motioned toward the woman and sternly told her not to play so rough. Jake Wood was sitting part of this time on the grass, behind and somewhat to the side of her and the rest of the time he was swimming out toward the center of the lake. The strange thing, which at first he took not as strange but as natural, was that he felt a strong attraction toward her and he was sure that she felt the same attraction toward him. Always he was conscious of her movements, and she of his, except that she would not acknowledge her interest in him. As he watched her, several times he started to get up from his towel and walk to the edge of the sand and begin a conversation, perhaps even ask her out for that night, but each time he stopped himself, partly waiting for some sign from her, and, more importantly, it seemed to him that he could

not just begin talking to her in that way without losing something, which was now vague. While he watched her he began to think of her as if she were familiar to him, not so much as if he knew her, but that there was something about her behavior, her movements and curiously in her physical appearance that he knew well, and yet he was sure he had never seen her, or at least never noticed her before, and when he tried to connect her to someone else, there was no one she reminded him of, except vaguely the girl he was engaged to a year before, and this was normal since every girl that attracted him somehow he connected to her. And he knew, without even the usual doubt, that she was attracted to him in the same way, and he took a great deal of pleasure from the knowledge which he later explained to himself as a fantasy, and this was no doubt part of the reason he delayed trying to speak to her. By this time he was watching her, without trying to avoid the admission of his interest. He wanted her to know and acknowledge that she knew he was watching, but she refused. He was becoming more and more involved with this girl and still he could not bring himself to speak to her. He finally got to the point that he was actually angry with her for being so stubbornly aloof from his interest, and he wanted only to leave, but not without making her conscious that he was leaving without speaking to her, without making her acquaintance, which he could do if he wished. He got up from the grass and walked, clumsily it seemed, to the pier and dove into the cool greenish water and swam easily but with a little too much effort toward the middle of the lake. When he stopped swimming he was looking toward the opposite bank, across the floating rope which separated the swimming part of the lake from the part reserved for canoeing. He was

looking in the direction of a man on the opposite bank, who sat at the edge of the water fishing, and he was even more conscious than he had been when sitting on the grass behind her that she was aware of him, but he did not want to look toward her so he swam to the floating pier in the center of the lake. He sat for a while on the pier just to the side of the diving board. The board was at the level of his eyes and blocked his view of her where she stood on the beach. He was looking into the water shaded by the pier. A few small fish would occasionally swim close to the surface or release bubbles of air that drifted to the surface beneath his feet. It seemed he had only sat for a short time, almost losing her image in the water, when she blew the whistle which was signal at the end of the day for all swimmers to come ashore. When he stood and looked toward her she motioned for him to come in and something in the way she did it again made him angry at her, as if she were usurping some right from him. He dove into the water, staying under as long as possible, swimming through cool then cold spots as he went deeper into the lake before coming to the surface again. When he came up and cleared his eyes of water he was beyond the rope out into the other part of the lake. He heard her whistle and without looking toward where he knew she stood, he began swimming to the pier on shore. He did not have to change strokes; he swam without changing his pace straight to the ladder and climbed out of the water.

Simultaneous with his climbing up the ladder he promised himself not to speak to her, but he ultimately did make some small remark as they passed when walking up the grass covered bank to the parking lot. She answered and smiled, but without giving up her position which he

had decided was, for the moment, superior to his, if one could believe the relationship which existed between them. He wanted more than ever to break the indifferent surface which stopped him from saying what had already been expressed, as far as he was concerned, but again sheerly by the feeling which passed between them as they walked up the bank, he knew if he tried to break through at this point, she would have won some kind of victory, which, in itself would have been fine, except that he also knew such a victory for her would end whatever was between them, and for the moment he did not want to give up so easily the strange sense of being chosen, not just by her, which he connected to what had happened between them.

He waited for some sign from her on Friday and again on Sunday afternoon. Each time when he had left the lake, his actions seemed ridiculous and he decided she simply did not care to know him, but he could not forget the pleasure he had taken from his fantasy and also the anger he felt toward her. He thought she was acting like a child; if she knew of his feelings as he knew of hers, why did she not just relax and then the tension which held him away from her would dissipate. But there was a further confusion; he did not want to destroy that tension, rather he wished to get inside it; he wanted it to act in his favor instead of against him. The circumstances had to be just right if this was to happen, and the chances for everything to be right were so slim that he had all but given up.

A few days later after he had finished his swim and was taking a walk around the lake, getting as far away from the actual reality of her as possible while still maintaining what he knew must be only a

fantasy about her, he noticed for the first time that she seemed to be watching him openly. She was sitting on the far side of the lake with a friend, speaking very freely since no one was swimming, but constantly looking in his direction, and it seemed, directly into his eyes across the water. The fantasy seemed again more real than ever. The girl to whom she was talking had brought a small collie with her to the lake which she had tied to a tree at the edge of the grass and which had been barking and pulling at his rope ever since. For a time they seemed to be talking about the collie since they frequently turned to where he was tied, when she decided to walk the dog around the lake. During this time Jake had stayed at a far corner, sitting on the bank. He watched her and the dog coming down the side of the lake; once the dog slipped into the water in spite of her efforts to prevent it, and as she approached where Jake was sitting he felt the tension, which he knew must be more than his imagination, increase as she came closer until she and the dog were behind him, at which point, he stood and looked directly at her, expecting to meet her eyes. Instead she was struggling with the collie to keep it from again pulling her toward the water. The dog which was already wet brushed against Jake's legs, pulling itself and her toward Jake. She smiled, holding the rope wrapped around her hand.

"Sorry," she said.

"It's all right," he said and knelt to try and get the dog to keep still. He held the dog with one hand on its chest and pushed it into a sitting position.

"He's a miniature collie, isn't he?" he asked.

"Yes."

"They're usually pretty excitable."

"He's about to pull my arm loose."

"Let him go, or would your friend object?"

"No, it's not that," she said. "He belongs to me, it's just that if he gets any wetter I'll have to keep him in the trunk when I go back."

The dog was sitting still, breathing heavily through his mouth.

"You seem to have calmed him. Here, you take the rope."

Her gesture surprised Jake for a moment and he found himself looking directly into her eyes before he recovered, quickly enough he thought, and took the rope from her hand.

They stayed for a time on the far side, letting the dog investigate the undergrowth to the side of the grass. They were silent, and again Jake could feel that he was involved in some sort of contest, that so far he had not lost, but also that she was in a superior position. Her silence, strange he thought of her silent and not himself being the silent one as he ordinarily did, seemed proof of her position and now he realized she was continuing their relationship on the same level as before, if more openly. She was still far from dropping the shield of indifference which so much irritated him. And he was finding it tremendously difficult to plan any kind of strategy while he was so close to her. What preoccupied him was the same feeling of familiarity he had felt so strongly the first time he saw her. He almost had to hold himself back to keep from expressing his feeling, not so much by telling her of it, but by a relaxation of his actions. He wanted her physically more than he had any girl except perhaps the girl he had known the year

before. It was a strange mixture of emotions she caused him. Remembering the girl he had been in love with, not in a sense remembering her, but rather connecting this girl to her, he felt for a moment, while they were silent, tenderness toward this girl, but then looking at her more directly he saw her apparent indifference and he felt himself get angry again. He tried to stop these feelings short by making the statement, to himself, "This is ridiculous, the whole thing is," but unsuccessfully. The closest thing to a mature reaction he could manage which was a compromise, was to feel sorry for her since she was apparently not capable of returning his feelings or rather expressing such emotions, since, he reasoned, she could not first admit them to herself, as he was doing.

She was a few feet away, kneeling to break off some blue wild flowers along the border of the undergrowth.

"Are you a student?" she asked, kneeling again, not looking at him.

The dog had buried himself in the vines, pulling the rope which Jake was holding.

"Graduate student," he said.

"I've noticed you coming here a lot recently," she said.

"Oh, did you mean am I a student this summer?"

She looked at him.

"No, I'm working for the University this summer," he said.

He pulled the dog back toward the grass and they started walking along the side of the lake, she beside him. She had thrown the flowers into the water.

"Are you in school at the University?" he asked.

"I'll finish this summer, I'm writing my thesis now."

"And working here?"

"This is time off," she said, smiling at him then running ahead to the pier used for launching the canoes.

I was close, he thought, she must feel awkward smiling like that, and yet it seems natural enough for her. She's acting like a kid again.

He led the dog onto the pier after her. She had sat down with her feet dangling in the water.

"Why don't we take a canoe out?" he asked.

"Sorry," she smiled. "Can't with the dog here, and I'm still on duty."

He was standing to her left with the dog looking back toward the woods. He felt as if he should do something besides standing above her like that, and he couldn't very well leave, it would seem stupid, and sitting beside her seemed to be giving in. This is really funny, he kept saying to himself, keeping his pride.

"What are you writing your thesis on?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing important," she said. "The effect of a certain kind of exercise on controlling weight."

She was looking down at her feet, pushing back and forth, making low splashing sounds under the pier. Then as if she had just remembered, she turned.

"I'm sorry, you want me to take the dog?"

She was looking at Jake. The feeling of familiarity came again. I'm getting closer, Jake was thinking.

"No. He's fine." The dog had lain down, breathing now with his

mouth closed. The shade from the trees far to their right, where Jake had been sitting was reaching out to almost cover the lake. The air was cool and it smelled like the water. Jake sat down beside her, crossing his legs under him rather than putting them in the water like her. She had stopped splashing water. A group of people were coming down the bank on the other side, where she had been. They did not have bathing suits, and two middle aged women were carrying baskets. There was a wooden picnic table where they started spreading cloths and food. Then she started moving her feet again. The silence was easier now. Jake had almost relaxed and he was watching the people moving around the table across the lake. His arms were resting on his knees, but his hands felt awkward, as if they were hanging in the air. He placed them flat on the wooden boards of the pier. The boards were warm from the sun. The shade from the trees was coming lengthwise across the water toward them, the sun getting brighter as it moved closer to its setting. Jake was watching her, keeping his hands flat against the pier.

"I don't know your name," he said suddenly.

"It's Pat," she said, splashing water again. "Pat Reding." She looked at him, then back toward the people across from them.

He started to tell her his name, then stopped himself. He felt that he was winning the contest, and by some sort of intuition he was beginning to know the right things to do, or not to do. Refusing to offer his name was a minor victory, that is if she really wanted to know, and he felt sure she did.

A woman, young and dressed in shorts and a blouse was coming down the bank toward the beach. Pat saw her and waved. She motioned toward

Pat then went to the bench where the girl who had brought Pat's dog was sitting.

"Now I can go home," Pat said, getting up, standing for a moment above him, her feet turning the wood dark brown as the water soaked into the planks.

"I'll stay here for a while," he said, handing her the rope as he got to his feet. The dog jumped up with her and started pulling toward the shore.

"Good-bye," she said, walking to the end of the pier. She looked back and Jake smiled and waved. He had decided to stay for the same reason he had not offered his name, and now he could not stop feeling that he was losing again, but he was sure he would have given her more by leaving, which would have seemed as if he were following her. What a stupid game, he thought, and almost started after her as she walked around the near side of the lake; no girl is worth playing this kind of nonsense for, but instead he walked in the opposite direction, moving slowly, not looking again toward Pat.

Two days later, on Sunday afternoon, when he returned, she was not on duty. He swam for a while and tried to convince himself that he had not just come to see Pat. The water was warm and after a short time he climbed onto the floating dock in the center of the lake. The diving board was being used by two boys about the age of ten who were running and jumping off. Jake sat on the opposite side, looking toward where they had walked two days before. More people were present today than usual, but most of them, families with young children, were staying in the shallow water close to the beach. He was watching several canoes

with kids being paddled around by their fathers and finally when he could find no pleasure from watching the canoes being pushed through the water or even from the warm wetness of the lake, which today felt more like tepid bath water, he admitted that the only reason he was here was to see Pat. He had been looking forward to it and he even admitted that if Pat had been present, which he would have preferred, she would have been indifferent to him. He was becoming less defensive in his thinking, but in another way, since Pat was not here, he felt much more at ease. It was as if her absence was a constant which he could depend upon, as if the lake itself represented her sufficiently, while her presence would have interfered with his reasoning.

Before, when Pat was there, he found himself so taken with immediate events that he was left hardly any time to think in an objective way, and when he was away from the lake and Pat he could not consider their relationship to be more than a curiosity. Today he began to form a kind of fantasy about her. It had its origin with the attraction which he had felt between them since the first day, but it became much more complex now since he had decided to consider her seriously. He thought of her as another form of himself. As he was sitting on the floating dock it seemed that he was the only person at the lake who was alone, but he didn't mind that he wasn't noticed by anyone around him. Pat had held herself at a distance from this same mass of people, not in the way of being snobbish, but rather because she did not identify with any of them and they did not seem to know her. On the first day Jake had come to the lake he had been attracted to her because there was something about her which seemed familiar. It had seemed as if they

were being pulled toward each other. But there was something about her, or about himself, which kept them from actually coming together, kept them from admitting what had passed between them. And curiously it was this unknown part of their relationship which fascinated him most. He knew that if they were to get from each other what both had known since the first day, then he would have to overcome what was now at best vague. In any case, there was something he would learn from her about himself.

They had, in a sense, said all of this to each other at the beginning and on every meeting since and now Jake felt relieved to have reasoned it out. He had a definite basis for action, instead of the intuition which had served him before. He was glad Pat was not at the lake. All this time he had been watching the canoes moving around each other on the lake. There were four of them trying to find space enough to turn and pass one another, with two boys in one having a fine time confusing everyone else. The sun was hot as it came off the surface of the water and it was getting rougher as more people were swimming. For the first time since he had been coming, the place was crowded. There was all the noise and chaos of a Sunday afternoon on any public beach. He was glad Pat was not there. When he decided to return to shore, he dove from the side of the pier since several kids were trying to touch bottom under the board. Jake moved slowly through the warmth of the water, once dodging a man swimming on his back, a few times going down to the cooler layer of the lake. When he reached shore he sat for a while on his towel spread on the grass. The sun would dry him and probably even his bathing suit in a short time. People were everywhere on towels and

blankets. Behind him two couples were listening to a transistor radio. The two girls were rather oddly shaped, one with large hips and small legs and the other with a tiny body. When Jake was almost dry, his bathing suit feeling warm and wet, he threw his towel over his shoulder and started up the incline to the parking lot. He was pleased with his conclusions about Pat and now when leaving, Jake enjoyed his solitude. After today he was much surer of his position with Pat. It seemed that he held the superior place, for the time being anyway. She was attracted to him as much as he was to her, and if he waited a bit longer then the affinity they shared would overcome the nebulous sort of conflict which separated them. When he thought of seeing Pat again, it was as if they had already become intimate with each other, but now seeing her would mean staying at the same distance from her as before.

## II

He did not come again until Wednesday afternoon, ready to begin his role as the impassive observer. As he walked down the slope, stopping to drop his towel and leave his tennis shoes on the grass, he could not see Pat anywhere. He walked to the edge of the water and he was beginning to think that again today she was not there. No one was on duty, that is unless either the young guy sitting on the bench or the girl with him were life guards. Only one other person, a man fishing on the far side was visible. Jake was even to the point of wondering if Pat had left for good when he noticed that the girl was the friend who had brought Pat's dog to the lake and he recognized the young guy as a student from the university. He decided to ask the girl about Pat before leaving.

The water was much cooler since there had been rain one afternoon early during the week. As he was swimming toward the floating dock, Jake could see someone lying on the far side, but he had given up finding Pat, so he did not think it was she. Instead, he decided to meet this new girl and perhaps take her out and in that way avoid being disappointed if Pat did not appear again. He swam to the pier without really looking again at the girl and climbed out of the water, being almost pleased with what he was about to do, and stepped right into the company of Pat who turned her head as he came onto the dock, apparently just opening her eyes. Jake did not say anything at first.

"Hello," she said, and looked away.

"You surprised me. I thought that.....I didn't see you."

She turned her head again, smiling as she had when she ran ahead to the pier. Jake for the moment forgot everything he had discovered on Sunday, as if yesterday they had walked together.

"I thought at first you had finished your thesis and left," he said, leaning with his hands behind him against the diving board. The air was cool and it was as if the heat of the sun off the lake caused chills. Pat looked warm and comfortable. She didn't answer immediately, but somehow Jake didn't mind; he did not feel angry.

"I guess I'll be here a few more weeks," she said finally, without effort. And then she was silent for a long while, as Jake stood looking directly over her toward the woods beyond the lake. The sun was getting warmer as he dried. What had happened Sunday came back to him, and he realized that she was winning her game again, that she had all but won completely. He wanted to make as little of his leaving the dock as

possible, as if her being there had not upset him. He pushed away from the diving board and walked to the edge where he let himself fall forward. The water was cool then warmer as he moved along the floating rope away from Pat. He stopped where it made a right angle leading back to shore, keeping himself barely afloat, being now at a safe distance from her. She had trapped him into playing their game again and he was angry not only at her but at himself because he had fallen into a situation where he had to play. For a long while he stayed in one place, letting himself relax so his mistake would not compound itself. She pushed herself into a sitting position, without looking toward him, instead, watching the man on the far side who was casting his line out into the lake. On shore Pat's friend and her friend, a stocky guy with a muscular build which made him look even shorter than he was, were kicking a plastic ball, bright blue, back and forth over the spot where Jake had left his towel. He swam on his back toward shore, moving slowly and looking at the dock where Pat was lying down again. He knew that he would have to avoid her the rest of the day, to protect himself from giving her any more knowledge concerning his feelings, to remain as mysterious as she was being. He felt as if he were fighting some force which seemed to be working of its own will against him and cunningly in league with her, for the time being, but if she only knew, against them.

Considering his alternatives for action, he could not approach her any more today, that was definite, and he ought not to walk around the lake, since it would seem an invitation to her and thus only going another way to approach her, and he could not just sit in the background because it would seem stupid. He decided to leave as soon as possible,

giving enough time so he would not appear to be going because of her. He sat on his towel, feeling a slight chill as the leaves were turning their dull green bottoms into the wind. The plastic ball bounced awkwardly behind and over him. He lay down at first, then sat up again. Pat had not moved, then she suddenly stood up and walked to the edge of the dock and pushed off into the water. He had not seen her swim before now. She moved gracefully, her arms breaking through the water slowly and precisely as she made a straight line toward the beach. Jake thought it odd that she should come ashore by the beach rather than the pier, and it somehow made the lake seem more under her authority, as if she had a special knowledge of it. She walked out of the water and crossed the sand to where her towel lay on the bench facing away from Jake. She dried herself, appearing not to look particularly at anything except not in his direction, then sat down to brush her hair. It was a dark brownish red color and it was held by a metal band at the back. The ball bounced clumsily off the bench.

"Watch where you kick that thing, Greg," she said, still drying her hair.

Greg caught the ball as it rolled toward the sand and heaved it high into the air over her head. It hit on the other side of her and fell into the lake. Greg was wearing cut-off dungerees and a pull-over shirt. When the ball hit the water he pulled the shirt off and started after it.

"Wait a minute, Greg," Pat said. She waded in after the ball. The water came to her waist. She threw it at Greg then stepped out again and dried herself.

As on Sunday Jake thought of himself as the one apart, but this time he did not enjoy the distinction. He was being consciously ignored by a girl he was attracted to, in favor of Creg and his friend. Jake saw himself and Pat as being involved in a similar nonsensical game as Creg and the girl with their plastic ball. As he picked up the towel and tennis shoes, Creg was racing to the ball which rolled slowly down the beach. Pat was sitting with her back to Jake and he could hear the wind turning the leaves as he walked to his car.

When he arrived on Friday afternoon, it was late and as he came across the grass the place appeared deserted. The water had taken on a deep green solitude, unbroken even by the shifting of the wind across its surface. It was too late to swim, but still he went to the edge of the water and stood watching, expecting some movement, but the stillness did not change. He sat on the bench and waited. From the other side a girl came out of the woods. She too was wearing a bathing suit. It was Pat. He waved and he could see her smile and wave back. She came toward him around the lake, where already the trees were outlined on the soft texture of the water. He started to meet her. She was barefoot and he still had his tennis shoes on. Just before they met, she headed toward a path leading into the woods.

"I can't find my dog," she said. "He must have wandered into the woods."

"How long since you saw him?"

Jake followed her into the shade of the large trees. He was conscious as they entered the woods of the stillness of the water. It seemed that he could hear the sounds of their voices and their footsteps

more clearly than usual. They seemed completely alone.

"I guess it's been almost an hour," she said softly.

He was following a few feet behind her across small patterns of light. It came at a low angle from their right, breaking through the trees suddenly, causing Jake to glance directly into the face of the sun and making him step carefully for a moment to avoid touching her with his hand.

"I've never been along here before," he said.

They crossed a small ravine and started up a hill. The light was brighter at the top. There was a large clearing ahead of them. He was just to the side of her. As they reached the open ground they could see six one room buildings in two groups of three facing each other with patches of grass in the clearing around them.

"What are these?" he asked her.

He moved ahead to the window of the first building.

"Camping huts," she said. "A group from the university spends two weeks here every October."

He looked inside the hut. All of the windows had shades pulled half way down. Inside there were two sets of bunk beds and two dressers. The grass was warm from the sun and the long shadows of the houses reached out to the woods. Inside the buildings the light was dim.

"No heat, no running water, and bathrooms only at the lake," she said. "Nice place to spend two weeks."

She was standing behind him. He turned and smiled at her and they walked between the houses into the woods again. He glanced in the window of the last hut as they passed.

"What's his name?" he asked.

She looked at him.

"Your dog, what's his name?"

"Bartleby," she said, smiling.

"Bartleby," he laughed. "Why?"

"Because I like it. I call him Bart."

"Will he come if you call him?"

"Sometimes, but usually not. He's just six months old."

They were walking through the woods almost beside each other.

There was no path and the leaves from a year before were scattered over the ground. The trees were still.

"I'll try calling," she said.

She called once and waited, then again.

"He may be at the lake by now," Jake said.

"Yes, he probably is."

They started circling back toward the lake. The leaves were brittle and she had to step carefully. She led him down a hill and across what appeared to be a dry stream bed. She crossed first and he followed. They walked now on a smooth path along the other side of the stream bed.

"What happened to the water?" he asked her.

There was only the sound of his voice to break through the stillness.

"A housing development just beyond the woods, they didn't want it running through their yards."

They came suddenly upon a small road. The stream bed continued across the road and into the woods, but now the road's smoothness was

not interrupted by the stream.

"I'm completely lost," he said. "You know where we are?"

"Yes," she said and smiled.

The road seemed to be curving back toward the lake. It was getting late and the shade covering the road was solid. Coming around the curve before them, a man was walking toward them. He stopped and waited when he saw them.

"You know who he is?" Jake asked.

"No, I've never seen him."

He was wearing worn blue overalls. He stood in the middle of the road watching as they approached.

"You the girl who owns a dog?" the man asked.

"Yes."

"There's a dog just been run over out on the highway. They told me it might be yours."

Pat was looking directly at him.

"Where?"

"Down at the store, bout a mile from here, toward town."

Jake was silent. She did not turn away from the man.

"How bad is he hurt?"

"It's dead," the man said. "I pulled it off the road. It's laying alongside the road now."

"Thank you for coming," she said.

"Glad to do it." He turned and walked along the road away from them.

Pat watched as he left.

"I better go see," she said softly.

"I'll go with you."

She followed where the man had gone. Jake walked beside her.

"It may not be your dog. It seems like a long way for him to have wandered off."

"It does seem a long way," she said, moving quickly back toward the lake.

The road came out of the woods into the parking lot.

"Want to take my car?" Jake asked.

"No."

He got into her car and she went around to the driver's side. She opened the door and took the keys from under the mat and then closed the door and started the car. They did not see the man again. Pat drove out of the parking lot and along the dirt road toward the highway. She stopped before entering the highway, then turned back toward town.

"He said about a mile, didn't he?" she asked.

"Yes, in front of a store."

He was watching her, trying not to be too concerned or too indifferent. They reached the top of a hill and at the bottom on the other side of the road they saw a small store with gas pumps in front. The traffic was heavy on the highway and the sun was setting, dark red, and the light was getting dimmer. When they were almost to the store she saw a small dog in the dusty grass on her side.

"It's Bart," she said.

Jake hadn't seen the dog. He turned to look back as she pulled off the road. A truck went by them from the other direction. The wind from

its passing was warm. Jake got out of the car and started back to where the dog lay beside the road. She had to wait for a break in the traffic to open her door. Jake stood over the dog and watched her coming toward him. They were still wearing their bathing suits and the noise from the traffic sounded loud and threatening. She stood beside Jake facing the oncoming cars, looking at the small collie lying in the grass at their feet. The wind was blowing her hair. She knelt beside the dog without touching it. There were no marks except for its head; its smooth brown coat lifted slightly with the wind from the passing cars. A small pool of blood had dried under its mouth.

"We can bury him at the lake," Jake said.

"Yes."

"We'll have to put him in the trunk. Do you have any newspaper?"

He had to speak over the sound of the cars passing.

"Yes." She stood up and walked back to the car.

She got the keys from the front and opened the trunk. She came back carrying several folded newspapers. He took them from her and she stood above him as he wrapped the head of the dog in newspaper. The side of his head that had been lying on the ground was covered with blood that was sticky like saliva and with dirt from the grass. He stood over the limp body of the dog and took its front legs in one hand and back legs in the other. He didn't want to tell her but she would have to carry its head. When he picked it up the head fell limply toward the ground as if it were separated from the body. The newspaper slipped off. He set the dog down again, still holding to its legs.

"Here, I'll take the head," she said, and held the dog's head,

loosely wrapped in newspaper.

They carried the dog's body toward the car where the trunk stood open. Each was holding the body stiffly away from him. Jake's arms were soon tired because of the awkward way he held it. He moved slowly so Pat would not get blood on her. When they got to the car Jake waited for a moment, breathing deeply.

"Ready," he said and they lifted it into the trunk.

The head of the dog lay uncovered over the newspaper, the mouth open. Jake closed the trunk and they got back into the car. She crossed the highway, turning around in front of the store where a green and red neon sign had been turned on.

She drove carefully with both hands on the steering wheel. Jake noticed that she was crying. She saw that he was looking at her.

"I know it's stupid," she said, watching the road, then turning toward him.

"No, it isn't stupid."

The road to the lake was just ahead.

"How long have you had him?"

She turned in the dirt road. The lights of the car were just visibly reflected off the undergrowth as she turned.

"I guess about three months. I got him in May."

"Not very long then."

The only sound was the bumping of the tires over the road. The air was thick with dust.

"No, not long. I guess it really shouldn't matter this much. It's been such a short time."

"That's got nothing to do with it."

She turned the curve in front of the lake and drove into the parking lot. It was almost dark now.

"There's some tools in the shed at the bath house," she said.

"I'll get them."

She had stopped crying. Jake took the keys from the car and unlocked the trunk. The darkness made it hard for him to see the body of the dog. He returned the keys and moved the car so that it was pointing into the woods. He turned the motor off and got out of the car. The headlights were shining through the trees ahead of him. He waited for Pat. There were no sounds in the darkness and then he heard Pat walking toward him.

"I found an old shovel and a pick," she said and he could see her coming across the parking lot carrying the tools in front of her with both hands.

"That'll be good enough," Jake said. "We'll have to take the dog first and come back for the pick and shovel."

She set them against the car and they went to the back to get the body of the dog.

"Here, get hold of his head like this," Jake said and he wrapped it in the newspaper and held it for her. As she reached forward she moved against him. He waited a moment before moving to take the legs.

"Okay?" he asked, and they lifted the dog's body out of the trunk and started into the woods ahead of the car. They stopped once to rest. It was quiet around them. They followed the lights until they were as far away from the parking lot as possible. When they stopped Jake was

breathing deeply.

"Good grief," he said. "I didn't realize he was so heavy."

"I guess you are tired. I'll get the shovel and pick, and wait," she stopped. "I think I've got a flashlight."

She went back to the car.

"It's hot," he said to himself.

She walked carefully over the rough ground. He could only see the silhouette of her body moving away toward the headlights, sometimes blocking out one of the lights. He began brushing the leaves aside to clear a place for the grave. There was no wind and the still air around him was warm. His legs were itching and he could just see the ground as he brushed the brittle debris to one side. She came back carrying the tools and a small flashlight, shining it on the ground in front of her.

"Maybe it would be better to wait until tomorrow," she said as she approached him.

"No, it's all right. I can do it now."

He was sweating profusely, but he did not want to lose what was between them by leaving too soon, not that he had reasoned this. It was the same intuition which had served him on the first day. He decided not to try and think, but to relax and give in to it completely.

"I found the flashlight," she said. "But it's so small."

She held the light on the body of the dog, passing over the head, partly covered by newspaper, and then its feet which were crossed as Jake had been carrying them. He slid the dog to one side and then took the shovel and tried to break the ground with its blunt edge. It was not hard but there were many roots just under the surface. Pat was trying

to cover the area where he was digging with the small ray of light.

"I'd better use this first," he said and took the pick from her. "Stand back a little more."

He swung heavily into the ground with the sharp end of the pick, then pulled upward breaking through the wirelike roots. As he was digging he thought that maybe he should wait until morning. He felt ridiculous swinging the heavy pick in the dim light from the car and Pat holding the flashlight, but now it was too late to stop, so he slowly dug the grave, breaking through the green roots with the pick and then the shovel.

"You want me to dig awhile?" she asked him.

"No, it won't be much longer." He was breathing deeply.

"Do you think anything will bother him here?"

"No. I'll cover the place so nothing can find it."

It was much easier after the first few inches. The earth was soft and dark and as he pushed the shovel easily through it a light breeze was beginning to cool them. The sky lit up for a moment, silently, to the west beyond the lake and then they could hear the low sound of thunder.

"A storm coming," she said, looking back toward the darkened sky.

The wind was moving the leaves around them. He finished digging and took the flashlight from her. After looking more closely at the grave he set the flashlight on the ground pointing toward the body, lying in the darkness to the side of them.

"This should be good enough," he said and started to lift the dog, waiting for her to lift the head again. She moved to help him.

"No, it's all right. Hold the light, I can do it, I think."

When he lifted the dog toward the hole the newspaper stuck to its head. Jake set the body into the hole. It was almost too small. He took the newspaper and covered the head again, folding the body into the fetal position so that it would fit into the grave. She was holding the light on the head of the dog which was covered.

"I think that should be good enough," Jake said. "Do you think it's okay?"

"Yes."

The sky had continued to brighten periodically behind them and the thunder sounded closer. He covered the dog with loose dirt and leaves, then packed it down with the shovel. She helped him spread leaves which they carried from the darkness around them. Sometimes the sky would lighten enough for them to see. And then they were finished.

"I guess that's it," he said.

He stood close to her over the grave. He was holding the shovel and pick. She had turned the flashlight off and the ground was dark.

"Yes, thank you." She looked at him and they started back toward where the headlights were waiting for them. The coolness of the wind was drying the sweat from Jake's body. He was tired and it seemed late. She took the tools back to the shed at the bath house and he waited at her car. When she returned, he opened the door.

"I'm glad you were here." She stood for a moment then got in.

"I am too," he said.

She closed the door. The window was down.

"Maybe I can do something to help you," she said.

He had started toward his car in the direction of the lake.

"Maybe I could take you out," he said.

"That would be good."

She backed the car away from the woods then started slowly out of the parking lot. She waved as he was getting into his car. Just before she pulled into the highway he was behind her. The wind was much stronger and he could smell the rain in the air. She pulled away from him without looking back, even through the mirror.

"She must be a virgin," he said aloud to himself.

And it was more a feeling that he had than anything he had reasoned, something which had been building within him possibly since the first day and it had not been until now more than a vague and undefined suspicion, but after being almost intimately involved with her, the feeling had become clear as the distance between them had diminished. It seemed to come to the surface by its own force, and all this time it had been part of the tension between them. For the time being he was satisfied to leave the reasoning until later and get from the clarity of the feeling a kind of relief, a break in the tension which separated them. He felt that she could be reached.

As he drove into town, following at a distance the two red lights which he knew belonged to her car, the rain began to fall, at first in big single drops, then spreading rapidly to cover the windshield.

It was raining the next morning, Saturday, and as he lay in bed Jake thought of what had happened. He had decided to call her, but he would wait for a while and give himself time for the last night to assume a reality which it now did not have. He remembered the feeling

he had about Pat before losing sight of her car in the rain. If she were a virgin then she could be another of the type who save themselves for marriage, or to put it a little more honestly, who use what they have cautiously, to assure marriage. But this contradicted his identification with her and so there had to be a better reason. Perhaps she was innocent and she was honest enough not to have made love because she had not found anyone she respected enough. But this was too ideal. Again he was connecting Pat to the girl a year before. Karen had been a virgin and at the time he had considered her innocence to be this same ideal kind, but that had not been the case at all. Karen was a virgin because sex had not existed before he awakened it for her, and when she lost her ignorance, she lost her innocence and ultimately could never make love without feeling guilty. Pat was more a sophisticated case than Karen though; she obviously was very conscious of her physical desires. Yet still, Jake could not believe his ideal reasoning to be possible. It was certainly true that she kept herself apart from most people and even those whom she associated with she maintained a kind of superiority over, but was this superiority, this indifference altogether honest? Perhaps it was a protection against something. In any case, Jake felt he had penetrated if by an accident, her indifference, but to what extent he could not tell. He wanted her, that he was sure of, and now he felt that he could safely move closer.

When he called her in the afternoon it was still raining. He could hear the wind blowing the rain against the windows as he talked to Pat on the phone. He was alone in the large house he shared with two other students and his being alone made him acutely aware of the wetness and

greyneſs outside. While he was talking to Pat, he wanted to continue with her the intimacy of laſt night, not ſo much by what they ſaid, which was unimportant, but by the way it was ſaid. He was diſappointed again. Pat was friendly enough, but ſhe ſeemed to be unwilling to remember or to acknowledge what had happened. She kept between them the tenſion which Jake now thought to be a protection againſt ſomething he had not yet diſcovered. He tried to make his voice ſound like hers, and forget, for the time being, the night before.

The reſt of the afternoon he could not avoid the feeling of dread which he had about ſeeing Pat that evening. He had ſucceeded in bringing them together on a baſis which admitted, if diffidently, his deſire for her and her deſire for him, and he could not underſtand this feeling of dread, which was not the nervous anticipation he would have felt to be natural. It had to do with croſſing the ſpace between their relationship before tonight, which had never really manifeſted itſelf further than the moment his body touched hers when they were carrying the body of the dog, and the relationship which would emerge after tonight. At one point he felt as if he had defined the feeling. It ſeemed ſimilar to the feeling he had known as a boy when caught in a lie and there was nothing to do but to face the truth and accept its conſequences. But he could not give himſelf any reaſon for the feeling.

When finally it was time for Jake to go, he felt ſomewhat better, not ſo much becauſe the dread had extinguished itſelf, but rather becauſe the waiting was over and he could find the cauſe of his apprehenſion. It was not fully dark as he drove to Pat's apartment and for the moment the rain had ſtopped. He parked his car on the road adjacent to

the group of brick complexes where she lived. There was a luminescence to the atmosphere which was grey and moist. The sky seemed to have a dull yellow glow. He crossed the yard, walking through patches of wet grass. She lived in the first group of apartments. He found the right door. It was a downstairs apartment. After he had knocked and waited for a few seconds, Creg opened the door.

"Come on in," he said. "They're almost ready. Pat said to get you a beer."

"Thanks," Jake said and sat down on the couch facing the kitchen area and beyond that was the hallway where the bedrooms were.

"I didn't know Pat had a roommate," Jake said. "I saw you and the other girl out at the lake, but I didn't think she lived with Pat."

Creg brought the beer from the kitchen. He set it on a coaster on the cluttered table in front of Jake.

"You want a glass?"

"No thanks."

"They've been living together since June. Pat use to live by herself before then."

Pat's roommate came from the hallway into the living room.

"Hi. Pat'll be here in a minute," she said.

She sat on the couch with Creg.

"My name's Susan Palmer. And did you know that Pat don't even know your name."

"It's Jake Wood. And yours is Creg. I don't know your last name."

"I guess it really doesn't make any difference. It's Phillips."

"Pat says you're a graduate student," Susan said. "What in?"

Pat was coming toward them. Jake had heard the door to her bedroom close. As she came into the living room he felt the dread again, just as before. She had long dark red hair and this was the first time he had seen her when she had not been wearing a bathing suit. As she crossed the room and sat beside him, he kept his hands still, resting on his knees. She sat down before speaking to him. As he watched her he felt an intense desire for her which he controlled by focusing hard on the space she had crossed when coming in.

"Sorry I'm late," she said.

He looked at her and tried to relax. She was wearing a deep blue dress and she sat close to him but without touching him.

"It doesn't matter," he said.

He sat leaning forward. There were some papers scattered over the table in front of them.

"What did you want to do tonight?" Creg asked.

"Nothing in particular," he said.

"We thought maybe the movie at the Parkway might be good," Susan said.

"What is it?" he asked Pat.

She sat up on the couch.

"What's the name of it? It stars James Garner."

"Grand Prix," Creg said. "There was a story about it in Life magazine. It cost something like three million to make."

"Is this your thesis?" Jake asked Pat. He picked up a sheet of paper from the table. He held it just out of her view in front of him.

"That's just something I was working on this afternoon."

She reached across Jake's arm to get the sheet of typing paper. He let her take it from his hands. The sheet had a graph plotted in red and black ink.

"We'd better go if we're going," Susan said. "It starts in ten minutes. But it doesn't matter to me." She looked at Greg.

"I don't care. You still want to go?" He looked at Pat.

"I guess so." Pat stood up. "You want to finish your beer?"

"No," Jake said, standing and moving away from the couch. "You better take an umbrella."

Light brown draperies covered the sliding glass doors leading outside, but he could hear the sound of the rain on the concrete terrace, just outside the doors. No one had noticed that it was raining again except Jake.

Pat couldn't find her umbrella.

"You had it this morning," she said to Susan.

"Yeah, when I went to the store. Did you see what I did with it?" she asked Greg.

"I don't think you brought it in. Look outside under the stairs. Sometimes I've seen you put it there."

"It must be," she said and opened the door.

"Here it is," she yelled from outside.

She brought it in, a small red umbrella. Pat went back to the bedroom and returned wearing a blue raincoat. She stopped beside Jake.

They followed Greg and Susan. Jake was the last one out. The door locked when he shut it.

"We can take my car," he said to Greg. "It's parked on the street."

They walked across the wet grass. Pat held the umbrella, but it was so small, Jake did not try to get under it with her. When they got into the car, Creg and Susan getting into the back seat, Jake wiped the water from his face with his hand.

"You should have walked under the umbrella," Pat said.

"Then we both could have gotten wet," he said, smiling.

He started the car and tried to see behind him. There was a sudden downpour of rain.

"This is just great," Susan said. "If we sit here much longer we may as well go back in too."

Creg had laid his umbrella across the floor of the car.

"It's not so bad," he said. "Come on out Jake. I can't see anything coming."

Jake pulled out into the street and started slowly toward the intersection ahead.

"Your car's just like Pat's," Susan said.

"No it's not," Creg said.

Pat had turned so that she could talk to Creg and Susan in the back seat.

"The engine's bigger and it has a four-speed transmission," she said to Susan.

"But it's the same color and everything as yours."

When they got to the theater there was a long line just beginning to move inside. The rain fell steadily and most of the couples in the line stood under black umbrellas like Creg's. They waited in the car until the line was almost gone, then Jake and Creg went to get the tickets.

When they were inside they had to sit close to the front because so many people were there.

After the movie they went back to the apartment. Pat went into the kitchen to get everyone a beer. Jake sat on the couch again and Greg followed Pat. Susan put several records on the portable stereo which sat on the table to Jake's left, just in front of the sliding doors. Jake watched everyone moving around and he felt out of place.

Pat brought him a beer and then went back to get herself one and a glass. Greg came out of the kitchen after her. Susan had turned the overhead light off, which left the lamp beside the couch where Jake and Pat were sitting. He sat back and tried to relax, as if he had been here many times before. Pat was sitting sideways with her feet drawn up under her. She was facing him.

"How much more time do you have to finish your thesis?" he asked her.

She leaned over to set the glass on the table but couldn't reach it without changing her position. She handed it to Jake.

"And would you hand me one of those cigarettes?"

He took one from the pack on the table and handed it to her with some matches.

"Thank you." She lit it and inhaled. "My advisor will be leaving town in two weeks, so I have to finish before then."

"That's not long."

"No." She held the cigarette so that the ash would not fall on the couch. "But I'm almost finished with the first draft. I just have to write a conclusion."

She slid her feet from under her, holding the cigarette carefully until she could reach the ashtray on the table. Susan and Greg started wrestling on the couch across from them. Susan was beating Greg on the back and he was laughing and holding his hands behind his head to protect himself.

"You can't hurt him like that," Pat said. "Hit him lower."

She put the cigarette out in the ashtray as she got up and started toward the hallway. Jake was leaning back with his feet propped on the scattered papers. He sat and watched Susan and Greg. They rolled off the couch onto the floor and Susan climbed on his back. Both were laughing so much their movements were weak and ineffectual.

"He's just like a big monkey," Susan said, laughing and trying to catch her breath.

After a few minutes Pat came back wearing a shirt and trousers. As she came by Greg reached for her feet and she stumbled away from him.

"You asked for it," she said, moving toward him.

Greg caught her at the knees and tripped her. When she fell he was careful with his hands to catch her by the arms and hold her down. Susan tried to break his hold by hitting his forearms with her small fist.

"You big ape," Pat yelled and she struggled to get her knees against his chest to pry away from him. Greg was laughing and finally he let Pat go. She swung with her fist to hit him in the side. He doubled up laughing and pushed Susan away from him toward the door. She hit the door and sat for a moment rubbing her head and pulling her dress down.

"You hurt me," she said looking at Greg who was sitting on the

floor trying to catch his breath. Pat got up and sat on the couch beside Jake again.

"Why didn't you do something?" she said.

"What did you want me to do?"

"Help us."

"Why?"

Creg lifted Susan up and then went into the kitchen.

"Anyone else want another?" he asked from the kitchen. "Jake?"

"No thanks."

"You don't drink much," Pat said, sitting with her feet under her as she had before.

"I don't like beer."

"It's good when it's real cold, then you can't taste the bitter. I'll get one from the freezer and you can have some."

She jumped up and went into the kitchen.

"I guess you think we're crazy," Susan said.

"No, just normal I guess."

Pat said something to Creg as she came back into the living room. She poured part of the beer into a glass and handed it to Jake. He drank a few swallows and handed it back. They sat for a while listening to the stereo. No one said anything and Pat leaned back, resting her head on Jake's shoulder. Susan and Creg were quiet and Susan seemed to be asleep after a few minutes. When the last record had finished playing, Pat moved to put more records on the stereo. Jake put his arm around her waist.

"Don't play anything else," he said.

She leaned back without saying anything. He pulled her closer, letting her head rest across his chest. Her hair was touching his face and when he breathed, the air was warm. She held herself still against him. Jake was breathing slowly, steadily so she wouldn't move away again. He moved his hands around her waist and after a few moments upward until they were touching her breasts. He felt the warmth under his hands increase slowly until it was almost hot, then he let his hands fall downward again. Her breathing had become quick and when he touched her again she shifted her body, it seemed involuntarily, so that for a second his hand was covering her breast. Then she sat up, reaching to the table for a cigarette. He let her move away and watched as she lit the cigarette. She sat on the edge of the couch.

"You don't smoke, do you?" she said.

"No."

She finished the cigarette and sat back again careful not to touch his body with hers. Susan and Creg were asleep on the couch across from them.

"Are you free next weekend?"

"What?"

"Next weekend, do you have to work at the lake?"

"I don't know yet. Why?"

"Would you like to go water skiing with me?"

"Where?"

"At a place close to my home."

"It depends on my thesis, if I get enough done," she said.

She got up from the couch and walked over to where the draperies

were covering the glass-pannelled doors. She pulled them aside and opened the doors enough to go out. The sound of the rain came through into the room. It had been raining ever since they had returned. Jake went across the room to where the doors were separated. He stood looking at Pat who had gone out into the rain. She stood barefoot on the wet concrete. The sky was not black but grey and still it had a faint luminescence to it.

"You like the rain that much," he said, smiling at her.

She was facing away from him, then she turned and came back inside.

"Sometimes," she said going by him into the kitchen. The carpet was wet where she had walked. She came back drying her hair with a towel.

"I guess I'd better go. It's late."

Creg and Susan shifted on the couch without opening their eyes.

"Do you want to use my umbrella?"

"No," he said, smiling at her. "It wouldn't help that much."

She came closer and stopped drying her hair. He could smell the dampness if it.

"I'll call you later about next weekend."

He was very close to her, but he did not try to put his hands on her again.

"It's okay to go out through here?"

They were beside the glass doors.

"Yes, unless it's too muddy."

"Goodnight," he said and went through the opening into the rain.

She watched him cross the yard and get into his car which was parked on

the street. The sound of the car door shutting was muffled by the rain on the terrace.

As Jake was driving back to his place he felt very relaxed. The emptiness of the car and the streets was a relief. He opened the window part way and pushed out the side glass. The rain bounced off the glass into his face.

### III

On Sunday the weather changed. A warm breeze began clearing the sky and drying the ground. Jake walked for a while during the morning through a park near where he lived. The park wasn't much, just a little patch of grass and some trees with a stream running through it. He was thinking about two days before when he had buried Pat's dog and how it seemed much longer than two days since then. He knew that the most important element in their relationship at this point was time, not in the sense of there being two weeks and only a weekend left, but rather that if their relationship was to go any further, there had to be an illusion of time which would give them a kind of past and an illusion of permanence either behind them or to come.

That afternoon he decided to stop by Pat's apartment. Susan and Greg were there and all three seemed to have expected that he would come. They spent the afternoon watching television, with Pat half heartedly working on her thesis. She invited him to stay for dinner and for an hour or so when the TV was off, they were almost at ease with each other. After dinner Jake and Pat went out onto the terrace. The clouds that had been breaking and reforming all day moved slowly through the sky, occasionally blocking the sun.

"Do you suppose you'll be working at the lake this week?"

"If the weather's good." She sat down on a reclining deck chair.

"I may be out Monday afternoon, if it's clear. I don't have to work." He sat on the foot of the chair. She moved her legs against his side.

"Come over and help me if it's raining. You can proofread my thesis."

Inside they could hear the TV again. Greg was watching a soccer game. They sat for a while longer without saying anything. The sun was hot. Then Pat got up and started back inside. She stopped at the opening in the doors as Jake was standing up.

"Look, I hope you don't mind, but I'd better do some work. You can stay and watch TV, but I've just got to get something done. I've been messing around all day."

"It's okay. I'll see you later." Jake started across the yard to his car.

"Maybe I'll see you tomorrow," she said.

On Monday afternoon Jake went to the lake around three. For the first few minutes they were awkward with each other, much more so than the first time they had talked with each other. It seemed to Jake as if Pat were acting shy. She was no longer the authoritative force she had been before when he had come to the lake. Except for two guys who came just after Jake and stayed only a short time because the water was muddy, they had the lake to themselves. And after the two guys had left, Pat began to relax. Jake told her about the graduate work he had been doing in chemistry. She seemed to be interested in what he told her. At

first he told her about himself to make her feel at ease, but then he found himself getting enthusiastic. The time passed quickly and it seemed only a short while and Pat was off duty. They decided to take a walk through the woods.

"What are you going to do after you finish at the university?" she asked him as they started along the path.

"I don't know. I've thought about applying to medical school or else just go into some field of chemical research. I don't really want to work for an industrial lab. At least not from the experience last summer I had with Fiber. I guess I really want to go to med school, if only it didn't mean so much more time in school."

"I don't see how you could consider going to school any longer."

He laughed.

"That's true all right."

They were close to the dirt road above the lake. They crossed the dry stream bed and started up the road to the parking lot.

"Why don't we walk over to where Bartleby is buried."

"Okay."

"Do you suppose anything has bothered him?"

"No," he said and smiled. "After all this rain, the grave should be pretty well hidden."

They walked slowly through the parking lot since Pat was barefoot.

"Look, why don't you let me carry you if the gravel hurts your feet so much," Jake said. "I promise not to touch you any more than I have to."

Pat smiled. She knew that he was referring to Saturday night.

"I think I'll do okay without your help," she said.

After they had gotten through the gravel, the ground was still rough since there was no path. The leaves covered the ground so that it was hard for them to tell exactly where the grave was. Jake found the general area and waited for Pat.

"It's here somewhere." He pointed toward the area in front of him.

"Well, if you can't find it I guess that means it's all right." She stopped beside Jake. They stayed for a few minutes, then started back to where their cars were.

"Have you decided about going with me this weekend?" he asked.

"I'd better not go," she said, watching where she stepped. "I guess I'd better work on my thesis."

When they got to the parking lot, Pat went to her car. Jake threw his towel through the open window of his car and opened the door.

"Why don't you come over later for a beer?"

He had gotten into his car and started the engine without saying anything.

"I don't think so," he said. "Maybe I'll see you later."

He drove out of the lot ahead of her and before getting onto the main highway he could not see her car behind him.

The next day was grey and overcast. Late in the evening the rain started again. He thought about calling Pat, but he felt that he just didn't want to see her again. She was still very attractive to him, but he was tired of playing games with her. Besides, if he stayed away for a day or so, maybe she would change her mind.

When on Wednesday the rain stopped him from seeing her at the lake,

Jake was disturbed by the closeness of her leaving. He wanted to see Pat that night, but the thought of Susan and Greg or having to sit and watch TV while she wrote her inane thesis was impossible to him. Finally he decided to ask her to go out for a drink with some of his friends and later he would have her to himself.

When he called, she wanted to wait until nine-thirty before going out so she would not feel guilty for leaving her work. When Jake got to her apartment, instead of going around the building, he tapped on the glass doors at the side of the living room. She was a little surprised to see him on the terrace when she came from the hallway. The living room was dark and as she walked across the carpet toward him, he could only see her silhouetted figure and the loose movement of her dress. The dress didn't have a belt and it fell straight from her shoulders so that it emphasized the contours of her body as she moved. She turned on the lamp after she had opened the door.

"Sorry, but I'm not quite ready again," she said.

She went back past the kitchen and through the hallway to her bedroom. Jake stood in the middle of the room and waited. It was dark outside and the air was damp coming through the glass doors. He felt rather awkward standing in the room alone. It reminded him, in a milder sense, of the feeling which had bothered him the first time he had taken Pat out. She came from the bedroom, turning the light off as she came through the door. He watched the movements of her body under the dress. It was made of a silk-like material.

"Ready?"

"Should I take an umbrella?"

"No, it isn't raining."

They went out by the terrace. As they were going through the doors, Jake put his hand at her waist. The doors locked when she shut them.

"I like your dress."

They were walking across patches of wet grass and the only light came from the street.

"I don't think I can keep my hands off tonight."

"Maybe that's why I wore it," she said as if she were joking.

He took her to a small tavern where they were to meet Jake's two roommates. As they were driving over, Pat seemed shy again. She was less sure of herself than at any time before. Jake began to feel protective toward her. When they got to the tavern and started through the tables to the booth where his friends were, he was increasingly aware that Pat felt as out of place here as he had with Creg and Susan on Saturday night, except that it was in a different way. It was as if, in a mild sense, she were feeling threatened.

He introduced Pat to his friends. There were six people at the booth and only one girl besides Pat. Jake sat across from her on the outside because of lack of space. He was having a hard time talking to her. One of his roommates was sitting beside her and for a while tried to make conversation. Jake ordered them two beers. He was talking part of the time with the girl sitting beside him, enough not to be impolite, but he really wanted to talk to Pat. He kept watching her across the table. Finally when Jake's roommate finished his drink, he had to go to the bar for another. Jake sat down in his place. Pat stood up to let him in, so she would be on the outside. They had to sit very close be-

cause of the small amount of space. She was warm against his side and he was beginning to feel relaxed inside. He had been unconsciously drinking his beer. It had given him something to do with his hands. Pat noticed that he had almost finished.

"I thought you didn't like beer," she said to him, and at first he couldn't hear because of the noise at the bar. He turned so that he was almost touching her hair with his face.

"What did you say?"

"Your beer, you finished it," she said and smiled.

"I guess I wasn't thinking about it."

They were speaking directly to each other, but she couldn't help but look away as the people moved past their booth.

"You can have mine too," she said.

"No thanks, might get me drunk."

"That's all right."

"Well, it won't take much more. Believe it or not, I feel high on just this one."

When she turned toward someone moving past or someone making a sudden outburst at the bar, her hair brushed across Jake's shoulder.

"It's really crowded tonight," he said.

He started to drink some of her beer.

"Would you rather have something else?"

"Why don't we go back to my place?"

"That would be good. Ready to go now?"

He felt her move away from him as she got up from the booth. They said goodby to Jake's friends and started out past the tables and the bar.

He put his hand across her shoulder as they went through the door.

As he was driving back to her apartment, he thought about what he was trying to do and it scared him. He stopped himself from thinking about it.

"Did you get much done today?" he asked her.

"Not really, I rewrote the conclusion about six times. It just doesn't sound right to me yet."

"Maybe I could help."

She was silent, but this time he did not know why. He concentrated on driving. When they arrived at her place and started across the yard in back, a misty rain was blowing into their faces, but it wasn't cold and it was almost pleasant. Pat gave him the keys and he opened the doors and let her go in before him. She switched on the lamp and then went into the kitchen. It was quiet as it had been before except that he could hear Pat in the kitchen. She came back carrying two glasses. Jake was standing at the doors looking toward the lights of the apartments across the yard.

"Now. I want to see you get drunk," she said, sitting the glasses on two paper napkins on the table. She went into the kitchen again and returned with two beers. The glasses had been chilled as well as the beer. He sat down beside her. He drank from the glass, watching himself drinking and then putting the glass again on the table. His movements were slow and it was as if he were working himself from some point inside and it was funny to move the glass from the table to his mouth and then back again.

"I'm almost there now," he said, leaning back on the couch. He

put his hand on her shoulder and she moved back against him. She pushed her shoes off and lay across the couch with her head resting on Jake's chest and shoulder. He put his arms against her and his hands at her waist. Her dress was smooth and soft and she was very warm. He was breathing slowly, deeply with his face touching her. After a few minutes the sensation of numbness began to spread upward from his hand. It began as a tingling in his hand. He moved his other arm free and shifted his weight. She moved away.

"I'm sorry, you should've said something."

"It's okay. It just feels a little funny."

He opened and closed his hand several times. She lit a cigarette and sat up. Jake changed his position and then put his hand across her back just below the nape of her neck. The feeling had returned. He stretched lengthwise on the couch behind her and moved his hand downward to her waist and the dress was warm and soft. She finished the cigarette and he moved to let her lean back. She turned facing him and as he came close to her face he could smell the cigarette and he kissed her at first softly then covering her mouth completely and he could feel his body coming to life as if he had been asleep. He moved away from her mouth and she shifted on the couch so that her body and his were touching more as she moved. With his hand he touched her, first with the finger tips moving downward and her body responded until he felt the warmth of her skin under the dress and his face was just above hers with her eyes closed he could feel her breath coming quickly as he moved his hand slowly, through the folds of her dress until his fingers softly covered her and her breath caught and again and she was moving under him and he push-

ed his hand upward until it was covering her breast and he kissed her again and pressed his body to hers and he moved his hand down again until her breath caught sharply and caused her to pull away as if he had burned her and then he moved away and kissed her again softly with his hand touching her hair.

"Why don't we go into your room?" His face was close above hers.

"We can't now." He let her move away from him and he lay his head on the side of the couch and waited. She was sitting up and she lit another cigarette.

"Why not?"

"Susan will be coming back."

"So?"

"I couldn't with her here."

"Then come over to my place."

She blew the smoke out, breathing deeply.

"Your roommates are there."

He didn't say anything. She finished the cigarette and turned to him again. She rested her head across his chest and he touched her hair with his hand.

"I want to, believe me I do," she said and he couldn't see her face. She was quiet and he was conscious of the stillness of the room. Her head was heavy against his chest as he breathed.

"Why don't we go somewhere this weekend?" he said.

"Where?"

"We could go to the beach."

"Okay," she said but he didn't hear.

"What did you say?" He lifted upward slightly.

"We can go to the beach."

"Then we'll leave Friday or Saturday." He moved backward on his arm again.

"Saturday. I'll have to work Friday."

They did not say anything for a while. She was almost asleep, breathing quietly. He kept himself still so he would not wake her. Then she moved and sat up.

"What time is it?"

"I'm not sure."

The glasses were sitting on the table, not quite empty.

"Susan'll be coming."

Jake stood up and stretched his arms above him.

"Okay." He sat down again and put his shoes on. He sat for a moment, then stood and walked over toward the glass doors. It was almost dark in the room. She followed him. She was still barefoot and she seemed shorter when he pulled her toward him.

"You want me to come over tomorrow?" She was against him and again he felt as if coming out of sleep and the sensations of his body were being awakened.

"I'd better work on my thesis tomorrow and Friday. I have to get it done."

"Maybe I could help."

"No, I'll just have to do it myself."

He felt himself relax again as they were talking. He kissed her and started to leave.

"Call me before Saturday," she said.

He walked across the dark ground and his feet and legs were numb and unresponsive. He was very tired and he didn't think of Pat again until the next day when it all seemed unreal.

He called Pat Friday evening and he knew that not seeing her had been a mistake. He would have to accomplish in one day what had before taken him all week, and if he could not, then he would be taking a strange girl with him to the beach.

#### IV

The sound of the tires on the wet pavement separated Jake from the girl beside him. Pat was asleep, her head resting on the seat so that she was facing Jake, her legs drawn up under her. He was tired, but relaxed. They had left at ten that morning; now it was a quarter after four. They were starting to cross the sound. This was Pat's first trip to the coast, so he decided to wake her.

"Pat, almost there." He let his hand remain for a moment on her knee. She smiled and stretched. He could see that she had not been asleep.

"How much longer?"

"Half an hour, over this sound and then one more."

The rain was getting heavier. Midway, the bridge made an arch for the shipping channel. They could see the rain out over the sound separate into patches. The wind was blowing in gusts.

"It looks like it might rain all weekend," he said.

He watched the rain being blown across the water. It changed colors from light grey to deep brown and the rain seemed to separate from one

area of the sound to another. The bridge was just over eight feet high except at the shipping channel. He wondered about the bridge being flooded.

"What made you change your mind?" he asked.

"What?"

"About coming with me this weekend, what made you decide to come?"

Several places along the water were covered by layers of fog. It rose upward and surrounded them for an instance in a white mist. She had been watching through the side window.

"I thought we were going skiing."

"We were."

She didn't say anything.

"Was it because you didn't want to stay at a place close to where I live?"

"Yes."

"You're really that afraid of someone knowing?"

"Yes."

They would be there in another twenty minutes. Jake began to think about the motel and what name he could sign.

"Besides, we couldn't have gone skiing with it like this," she said.

"I guess not."

She lit a cigarette. The sound of the wet pavement increased when she opened the side window. Jake was trying to concentrate on driving and he wanted to forget about Pat for the time being. In the back of his mind he could see the room he wanted, something modern. He thought of walking across the soft carpet and her watching from in bed. It had been

like that once with Karen, but then the place had never been a problem. With Karen he could always forget everything, but now he could not overcome the sense of dread he had felt before, but never so strongly. There was something about Pat, about himself, he could not bring himself to admit, that he did not know yet, that he had to free himself from. But it wasn't Pat; all along he had thought the dread was because of her. But it wasn't; it was something he had connected to her, which was part of himself.

They had passed through a small town and were surrounded on both sides by marsh land and in the distance the sound.

"Reminds me of the bayous at home, except I miss the cypress."

"Your Dad's place in bayou country?"

"There's one almost in our back yard."

"I guess you're a swamp girl then, what is it, a cracker?"

She smiled, then crossed her legs and looked toward the swamp. The swamp was covered in part by a grey mist. The wind coming through the window was cool. She finished her cigarette, leaning toward Jake to put it out on the edge of the ashtray. Part of it failed to go out. She pushed the ashtray back into the dash.

"What if I change my mind?" she asked.

"Change your mind, why?"

"No reason."

She was attempting to be casual. He laughed.

"You won't."

"You're pretty confident, aren't you? Are you that great a lover?"

"That's got nothing to do with it."

"Then how do you know I won't?"

"Ask me again tomorrow and I'll tell you."

"Why not now?"

She closed the window. He looked at her and she was smiling.

"No."

She didn't say anything more. They were crossing the second bridge. It rose at an incline until it reached the shipping channel which was closer to the inland side. The rain had almost stopped. The water was still rough and the wind kept the waves in chaotic movement across the sound. Jake listened to the tires hitting the expansion joints of the bridge and he held the car at a constant speed so that the bumping of the tires took on a smooth rhymical pattern.

Immediately after coming off the bridge they were surrounded by motels. Jake drove for a few miles and stopped at one on the beach front. The price was too high. He tried two others on the front, still too high, so he decided to try across the road. Pat waited in the car. After a few minutes he brought the key and started to drive to their room.

"What name did you give?"

"I gave my name."

She was silent for a moment.

"Jake.....when we get back....." She paused.

"You want me to say we stayed in different rooms."

He stopped the car in front of their room.

"I'll say we did if that's what you want."

## V

He had lain with his arms crossed under his head for some time. They were growing numb.

Must get control of it. Try. Erect yourself. Army of arms dying behind me.

He smiled to himself. The figure beside him moved closer. Her back touched his side. She curled herself up like a child.

Warm. Wait, my arms. Shivering warmth and a flood of semen. It's coming, rushing downward through the fingers. Flex them. She's so warm and it's coming back. Against her like a child. Once upon a time.

He was facing her with his body adjusted to the curve of her back and his knees bending to fit the angle of her legs. He put his hand gently between her breasts.

The fingers feel the fullness spreading. Stayed on the beach too long. i'm tired. Sun came out finally. Beach of broken shells and warm sand. It was cold. Feel the freckles. And white sand dunes, wet grey sand.

His hand stopped moving. She pushed closer.

Feels good against her, its moving. The tide was rising. White crests breaking. Warm waves. Cold then warm underneath.

The humming of the air conditioner filled the room. Jake had wanted to stay on the beach because he liked the sound of the surf.

Like an idiot running down the beach standing on my hands. Never seen her act like that. She wanted to race me. And i felt foolish and then she started splashing and running through the waves cold and i carried her. She held on soft against me breathing and i was running

through the surf stumbling and had to stop. It was like she remembered and i had to be careful again. She liked it when i carried her but couldn't let me for long. Had to laugh said 'I can walk too.' Try and get her like that. Relax. Move slow palm then fingers so smooth, around there, sensitive, relax, make her relax. Not too fast.

He stopped with the palm below her waist, still without pressure, with his forearm resting on her thigh.

Can't let it stop now. Wonder what she's thinking? It's now, twenty-three years and it's now why him. Why did she choose me i wonder. She moved. Around first, then slowly. So soft there it's moving against her. Her legs careful, around, closer, away. Just touched her there. Afraid of someone knowing...afraid of me knowing... getting involved with.....depending on me. She didn't want to go to my place because she feels safer here.

He could not see anything in the room clearly, the shape of the lamp beside them, just barely the other bed, and strangely like a protecting angel, the TV resting on a platform below the bed.

Let her watch the movie. There was no hurry. Should have. Daddy can't I stay up tonight. Saturday night movie. Paladin, Have Gun Will Travel. She kept wanting something to drink "gotta have something to drink at the beach." Finally got her some beer. i don't like beer. Damn you almost stopped it again. Gotta stop thinking.

His hand moved to her breasts, remained for a moment, then downward again, always gently, carefully reacting to her movements, moving softly over her with his fingers.

With Karen. It took me two months to get from here to here. Two

nights this time. Wait...too fast. Like burning her on the couch.  
Wait then start again.

The difference between that virgin and this virgin. Virgin. She moved, it feels so good against her. I love you. i like her i still love Karen yes you can watch the movie. Touched her....again..damp so soft and lovely....

He slipped from her for a moment, his hand lightly touching her thigh. She turned, his hand letting her move under it without breaking away. Cool air was blowing from behind him, their bodies were not touching. He waited for a moment. It was as though a narrow line curving the length of her body separated them, an intense heat travelling from her body to his through the touch of his hand. The air was thick with warmth. He waited until he could not wait any longer.

Closer, close like sealing my body to hers legs first slowly up and there i can now where it's coming from the warmth flowing inside but wait in the drawer we should but i don't care not now have to start again i can stop in time and shivering warmth from inside her feel my way with my hand on my elbow no i can't again and again and there i am inside almost she moved and again be gentle and slowly my arm is getting numb it's there so small it will hurt if i'm gently but it will but it must why me why did she choose me and i can't break through and i have to hurry i have to break the pain she moaned and i can't be gentle i must and again and again so small i can't have to stop hurting her have to stop i can't anymore.

For a while he could only hear the air conditioner, then he could hear the watch on his arm. He concentrated on the smallness of its

sound.

"I'm sorry." A long pause. "Did I hurt you?"

"Yes, a little."

"Do you want to talk?"

"Yes."

Can't i can't anymore now.

"Thank you for being so gentle with me."

"I couldn't help it."

She's bound to know. i think she knows.

"I should have told you before," she said.

"I knew. But why did you choose me?"

Maybe she doesn't know yet, blames it on herself.

"Is it so easy to tell?"

"No."

i knew somehow, after her dog...

"I've always had trouble showing affection to anyone."

Yes, i know. Damn, she must think it was her fault.

"Why did you stop?"

"I had to..."

i couldn't keep....i lost control over.

"I was hurting you. The next time will be easier, you're so small."

Relax now the next time easier she couldn't know why i stopped.

She sat up to get a cigarette, holding the sheet with her arm. He watched as she lit the cigarette and inhaled.

Almost masculine the way her movements never too fast and her face perfect, not beautiful, not the kind girls want, beautiful when it shows

pain, like when she smiled....when making love.

"Why do you smoke?"

Get her to talk. Karen liked to talk, couldn't stop herself sometimes. Make her relax again.

"Habit. It's too hard not to." She tried to laugh.

Say we stayed in different rooms. Afraid of someone knowing, anyone.

"Why?"

She waited for him to go on. He was silent. She inhaled a long breath, slowly, exhaling as she spoke.

"Why I started?"

She changing again, have to stop.

"I guess it was an excuse.....whenever things get too close....it slows them down..." She stopped.

The light in the room had changed. He could see clearly now through the greyness of the morning. He could see her face.

Maybe later, plenty of time later. i can't again now.

She moved to put out the cigarette as she spoke.

"I was afraid of this."

"What?"

She knows i guess i just lost control that's all nothing to think can't now anyway. Change the mood, get away from her.

"You'll be all right." He paused for a moment. "You want the shower first, I don't feel like moving yet."

She sat on the bed for a few minutes before getting up. The room was cool. He watched her cross the room then reached behind him to cut

off the air conditioner.

He slipped back into the warmth of the bed. The greyness of the morning made it seem colder than it was. He covered himself completely with the sheet. The dark warmth was pleasant. He could hear the wet sound of the shower.

Have to do something have to get control of it again 'Why did you stop?' had to watch the movie goddamn the movie. Relax. It'll be okay next time. Listen to the shower warm shower sound. Soapy skin, freckles, soft there smothered in milkwhite suds.

He was in a car, lying with his head in someone's lap, Karen. He was in a very deep sleep. The car was parked in the far corner of a large parking lot. The surface of the parking lot was black asphalt. A building, not very tall with many windows was just visible. It was the new high school.

She was standing in the doorway, the lavatory sink behind her, the metal shower was behind the door, as it had been at the first place.

You can't have her yet it said.

He could almost reach with his hand it was a circle he was reaching for and she was willing to let him but he could not get past. He touched it that's all he ever could it stopped him.

He was in a large parking lot. She was caressing him his head was in her lap. The black surface glistened from the light. The pavement was wet.

And he was in bed with her and it had to be now he could feel it enter and try to enter and he pushed and pushed it in and she was willing to let him she didn't move away and he was feeling the dark warmth

of her and he didn't have to move even. He heard something he stopped himself. He had to get away from her, out of her and he knew they were at that first place again where he remembered first he lived and the heater was there warm and it glowed in the darkness beside his bed where he remembered it making the low fire noise. It was almost all he could stand to pull out again to hold it back.

When, he asked. He didn't make her have a face but he was sure who she was and he knew what he was afraid of who he was too and he wanted it to go on but he didn't even let him have a body he was only a fear. He couldn't stop it next time he wouldn't. He imagined it and found himself inside her again and he knew it was close if he could just stay a little longer it would happen.

They were in the car pressing to her the seat he was almost. Outside the black pavement glistened. It was wet. The rain fell at a slow steady rate. It sounded as though it fell at a great distance. He was very comfortable. She was caressing him while he slept. She was smiling. And then he heard...the rain had stopped.

He awoke sitting up in bed with the sheet held tightly in his fists. The shower had stopped. He lay back in bed, stretching his body full length, and tried to relax. She would be back soon.

Will be good this time. Never any trouble with Karen. There'll be no trouble this time just relax that's all stop thinking so much. Take a shower her waiting in bed.

He could hear her moving things in the bathroom and as she came from the bathroom into the greyness of the bedroom, he could see that she was dressed. She smiled and started to straighten up the room.

"Your turn," she said and Jake knew that he had failed.