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SEABROOKE, DEBORAH. *Gaining Ground*. (1975) Directed by:
Fred Chappell. Pp. 50.

In these three stories, the major characters become aware that they can change their lives. The final outcome such a change might bring is never known, and sometimes never considered by the main character.

Through the use of an omniscient narrator, the reader has an easy vantage point from which to see the characters and judge their actions. However, by using the main character's point of view, we are permitted to know his thoughts and feelings. We see a large part of the story unfold within this inner life.

In the first story, Marcy loves a familiar surrounding. He treats his sister's probing questions as a threat to his happiness. He fights to preserve his own isolation.

"Gaining Ground," the title story, is different. The isolation imposed upon Francis and Suzanne is from the outside. Leaving home can only mean a change for the better. Unlike Marcy, the unknown thrills Francis.

The last story has its main character, Angela, standing on strange and precarious ground all the way through. She is an American transferred to a new life in Greece. Like Francis in "Gaining Ground," Angela wants to be an individual, but she feels an emptiness inside. Her change comes in the company of two strangers.

GAINING GROUND

by

Deborah Seabrooke

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
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Approved by

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NOTE

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IN THE FAMILY HOUSE

From the doorway Marcy saw his sister kneeling on the kitchen floor. Her fingers curled around the boar bristle brush turning her knuckles white. Dipping the brush into a pail of soapy water, she rested back on her flattened legs.

"Grace, can you spare a minute? I've got something to show you."

"I can't come now," she said looking up at her older brother. They had lived on in the family house after their father's death. "The floor is half done and my skirt is wet around the hem. I can't just drop everything for you."

Although she wasn't past forty Marcy had noticed lately a certain sponginess to her features. And there were lines, thin pencil marks, drawn like a little fence above her upper lip. A wet piece of hair pasted itself to her cheek but she didn't brush it away. In fact, he thought, she probably kept it there to irritate herself, making her work all the more thankless.

The morning was still cool. The oaks that lined Prime Avenue seemed to heave huge breaths as the wind passed by. The breeze blew on them through the screen door. Marcy put his hands calmly in his pockets. "O.K. Grace, I don't care if you don't want to see it."

He sat on a couch in his room. His stocking feet rested on a green leather hassock in front of him. The room was large with a wood floor and dark wood walls. A bookcase was built into one wall. Books that couldn't be fit in were stacked on the floor. Next to the couch was a large gong. Grace thought it was a horrid thing, but Marcy loved it. The big brass dish was suspended from the tips of two elephant tusks which curved down and were embedded in a marble block serving as the stand. Hanging down in front of the dish was a polished wooden stick with a ball of lamb's wool at one end which was used to beat the gong. But he only did that on the Fourth of July.

Across the room was a bar with a great yellowed and chipped mirror behind it. A brass rail ran around its base for a footrest. Above the bar a lamp hung from the ceiling, its red glass giving a glow to the room when it was on.

Marcy turned the pages of Supreme magazine. Grace had ordered it from England last year for his birthday. He mostly liked to look at the advertisements and auction news, dreaming of a house he would one day like to own where even the wallpaper would be famous. Perhaps, after he was gone, the state might open it up for visitors.

He stopped at a page which read: "W. Harris and Sons cordially invite you to visit our English and Continental works of art." There was a picture of a chandelier. Under it were the words: "eighteen lights, fitted for electricity."

The artist had drawn starlike rays coming from the facets of the cut crystal beads. He turned the page. Another ad, a watercolor picture, showed three people on a cruise. A man with a beach robe sashed at the waist sat on a canvas deck chair smoking a cigarette. Next to him was a woman in a squarish one-piece bathing suit reading a book. A young girl stood at the railing with her page-boy ruffled by the breeze. "At Home or Overseas, State Express, the Best Cigarettes in the World."

Marcy's radio sat on an endtable next to the couch. Stations faded in and out as his fingers adjusted the tuning. Finally, he settled back to his old station which played songs from famous musicals in the early afternoon. This was always a bad time to fiddle with the knob; he couldn't get another station until night.

As he looked at the magazine, his hand felt over some nuts in a dish. No little round ones left. What, no filberts? Marcy looked into the dish. He shook it a little hoping to uncover one. Just peanuts. He swore now that the saleslady in Woolworth's put more peanuts in each time. "You might as well throw out the bag for all the filberts in it," he said aloud.

Grace appeared at his door. She wore a pressed dress and had put her long bangs back in a barrette. "What are you mumbling about, Marcy?"

"Oh Grace, no more mixed nuts. They may be a bargain, but the lady cheats us. She charges us for mixed nuts and

gives us peanuts!" He spit out the word "peanuts" with such violence that Grace ventured no further into the room.

"Why are you standing in the doorway? If you don't believe me, see for yourself."

She turned over the nuts with her finger. "But Marcy, you must have eaten them all without knowing it. We've been going to that lady for years."

"Grace, I know what I ate." He closed the magazine on his lap.

"I'm not going to listen if you yell."

"Oh dear Lord, can't I even express my opinions to you? I'm sorry, I didn't mean it was your fault. I only meant..."

"I know. All right, I'll ask only for filberts next time. Turn off that awful music! I guess I'll get bread at the store. We don't need much really." This way of running all her thoughts together irritated Marcy because sometimes she was impossible to understand.

"I can't follow you, Grace. Oh, wait a minute, this is my favorite part- 'They've gone about as far as they can go!'" Marcy sang out with the radio. "It's Oklahoma. Rodgers and Hammerstein."

"Trivial things," she told him. "Marcy, I'm going to the cleaners. Need anything done?"

"Oh yes, wait a minute." He got up and opened a door to a large closet across the room. Several shirts hung on wire hangers. He took two off. "Here. Worn once, but on those hot days last week."

"All right. Please don't walk on the kitchen floor. I've just waxed it."

She was gone. He could hear her upstairs in her bedroom opening and closing her closets. Then she went down the stairs and left through the back door. The car started in the driveway at the side of the house. He pushed up his window and watched Grace back out.

"A little to the right!"

She then cut the wheels which corrected the path of the Buick and backed out successfully the rest of the way. Only one bush, the one in the middle of the row, showed any damage: a broken branch. Marcy stood up from the window and decided to leave it open to let the breeze come in.

Turning the pages of the magazine, he found the ad with the watercolor picture: "The Best Cigarettes in the World." He put himself in the place of that man, fortyish, hair not yet gray, firm chest and stomach sashed in at the waist. It was a good ad and smoking was an excellent occupation. It gave rhythm to the day. Good tobacco was for quiet men like himself, men who sat back and could tell you the champion of the next race.

Marcy leaned his head against the cushion and looked at his bar. Every piece that made it up was carefully chosen. When he thought he'd found the right addition, he'd wait a bit, possibly discarding it later for something that fit much better. He knew the things that belonged together.

This always struck him, though. He could never remember the men who sold him the items in his collection. They were faceless after an hour.

"Marcy, what was it that you wanted me to see in your room this morning?" They were having dinner. Grace passed a bowl of peas to him. He took it and put a spoonful on his plate.

"I wanted you to see something? Oh. It was an ad in the paper this morning."

"An ad?"

"For a job."

"A job! Marcy, I never thought you'd do it. You've heard me say Dad's money was getting low. Not that we're going to starve, but we just don't have as much as we used to. It cost a pretty penny when he was in the nursing home."

"I know. You've always been good with the bookkeeping. But the job was nothing. I decided to forget it."

"Well, what was it?" Grace cut into her pot roast.

"It was an ad for a teller in the bank. But I thought about it this afternoon, and it didn't seem very promising. Not the sort of thing I like."

"No? No, I guess not. Sounds pretty boring."

"Please pass the butter."

"Marcy?" Grace looked across the table at him.

"Grace, please pass the butter."

"All right. Will you keep looking, though?"

"Yes, of course. Will you pass the butter?"

The next day she was sitting at the table in the kitchen with the morning paper. She had it open to the classified section and saw the job for the bank teller, and there was something else in the second column; a job in a book bindery outside of town. It looked good, she thought, he liked books.

Marcy came in and started his four minute egg. Grace got up and put a slice of bread in the toaster.

"There's a good job in the paper today. A job at a book company."

"Have you been looking at jobs for me?"

"Oh, just glancing down the page."

"Well, you said there was no problem with the money. We have enough."

"Yes, that's true. Maybe we'll have to cut down on sending things out to be cleaned, though. I can get mother's old machine working again."

"Grace, you're talking nonsense. As it is, I bet you could hire a woman to do these floors."

"But I don't like to trust this house with a stranger. I can do a better job myself." She took his toast out and buttered it at the table. "The job sounded really very interesting."

"Let me see." He walked to the table with his egg cup. "Grace, that's work for a re-tard."

"Oh Marcy, don't say that."

"Any Joe can run a machine."

"But I thought it had to do with reading the manuscripts, perhaps selecting tasteful covers for them."

"That's not done in a bindery."

"Oh well, eat your egg."

"Why do you want me to get a job?"

"Marcy, you sit in the house all day. In your room. When was the last time you saw any of your old friends? Mine have forgotten to ask about you any more."

"Don't worry about it. I'm very happy. You know that. I read and listen to the radio."

"But that's all."

"No, I think a lot. You wear yourself out cleaning, shopping and visiting people, and at the end of the day all you can do is fall in bed."

"Marcy, I know I could hire people to do these things. I could spend more time improving myself, but I'd get bored, frankly. And I'd miss my friends."

"Well, let's forget it. We're happy aren't we? We've got our house." He looked across the table at his sister and his smile faded. Her eyes were going down the classified columns. "Grace, stop it. You have no right to force your small views of things on me. You don't know what kind of job I'd like. No book binderies, no banks, no nothing. Give me that paper."

"No, I'm not finished with it."

"Then turn to another page!"

Grace glared at her brother, her lips pulled together as if they were on a drawstring. "That bar of yours, why did you build it? You never use it. It's a museum piece. Just something for you to spend Father's money on. You bring that trash home and stare at it all day!"

"I don't stare at it!"

"Well, what do you do, then? I guess you have imaginary conversations on the barstools with all your friends. Or maybe you think you're Teddy Roosevelt resting up for your next safari."

Marcy tore the paper out of her hands and threw it on the floor. "Leave me alone. My life is none of your business."

"But I live with you. I'm your sister. Remember? I'm all you've got."

"Not so at all, Grace." He got up from the table taking his dishes to the sink. Then he left her in the kitchen as she bent down and gathered up the morning paper.

The next few days were blistering-- Dog Days, Marcy called them. The end of August. Like the houses of the older people in the neighborhood, theirs was not air-conditioned.

Marcy sat in his room with all the windows open to let in any breeze that stirred outside. Their neighbor,

Mrs. Olay, also had her windows open. She seemed to turn her television louder in the heat, as if that helped her forget about it. Grace told him at dinner that she had visited Mrs. Olay. She had sat rubbing ice cubes on her wrists to cool off. Grace said it was like a television commercial with Mrs. Olay claiming that the ice cubes really worked. For Marcy, she was nothing but a noise coming in his windows of announcers, organ music, shrill voices, and sounds that comprised an anonymous racket.

He sat reading a National Geographic, glancing at an article about an excavation in Greece but lingering over the advertisements for expensive cameras and Scotch. He thought about starting an antique bottle collection to put on a shelf in front of the big mirror.

One morning after his argument with Grace, he found a page from the classified section under his door with more jobs circled. Again, the bank teller's job, the job at the bindery, but then she'd circled an ad for an auto mechanic's job, a manager's opening at the supermarket, and even an offer for a waitress's position at the diner on the corner. Marcy threw it down and locked Grace out for the day. She wasn't funny. She didn't take him seriously. When the time came, he'd help out with the finances, but he wasn't going to march the streets and stand on lines for no reason.

The afternoon was the time Marcy liked best to sit at his bar and have a cold drink. He kept ice in a small

refrigerator, a jar of orange juice, and vodka on a shelf under the big mirror. On these hot days he allowed himself two drinks.

The sunlight at four o'clock spread across the big wood floor and turned the walls a golden color. The radio by the couch played opera in the late afternoon. Every fifteen minutes, the program gave a quiz: who sang this part in 1924? Marcy usually never guessed the answers correctly, and he admired the people who called in. They would win some sort of prize; a free record or just the chance to speak to the celebrity guest on the phone.

He clinked the ice in his glass. Grace had not bothered to come in his room any more, even to dust or straighten the books on his shelves. If she had gone to the cleaners, she hadn't told him. The clock in the hallway outside his door ticked loudly even above the noise of the radio. Marcy sat listening to it for several minutes before he stirred himself out of his trance.

He took a cigar from the humidor in the corner of the bar. The lid clapped shut. Marcy ran it under his nose smelling the tobacco. Then he lit it from a silver lighter he kept in his pocket. He sucked on it until billows of smoke puffed out of his mouth. There was a knock.

"Marcy, may I come in?"

He got down from the barstool and opened the door a crack. Only his nose, the cigar, and the length of his tie could be seen.

"What do you want, Grace? I thought we came to an understanding."

"I'm not going to talk about getting a job. I came to see if you had any clothes to give me to be cleaned." She pushed slightly on the door and it opened. Marcy went to his closet and picked up his laundry from the floor. He held his head far back to keep the cigar away from the clothes. She held out her arms to receive them.

"Dear Grace, you should get a woman to help you," he said sucking on the cigar and letting out two bursts of smoke.

"Nonsense. I can do a better job myself. When will it ever cool off? This is the third day of this heat. I don't see how a cigar can give you any comfort. Extinguish that terrible thing. You're liable to burn the house down."

A sock fell to the floor. Marcy picked it up and put it on top of the pile.

"It helps me concentrate. I don't hear Mrs. Olay's television so much when I'm smoking."

"That's ridiculous. Well, I'm not going to stand here forever." She went out. "I've got to collect my clothes now."

A small stream of perspiration slid through the hair at the back of his neck and met his collar. He went to the window. It was quiet. Mrs. Olay must have gone to take a nap. The air waved in swirls above the pavement.

He saw Grace walk out to the car with a basket of laundry. She put it on the back seat. Then, coming slowly down the driveway she looked up at his window for advice. He had none to give; she was going perfectly.

GAINING GROUND

There is perspiration on her nose and upper lip. Somehow Francis has fit into these pants. She stares at herself in the mirror. That ripping sound was nothing to worry about, even with the salesgirl standing right outside the curtain. Turned out to be just a tiny split in the rear seam. Not enough to make her buy.

But they aren't bad. She has settled for other clothes when she couldn't even raise the zipper all the way. She sucks in her stomach uncovering a rhinestone button atop the fly. In the dressing room is a padded stool and Francis wants to sit down but she doesn't dare. Instead, she lifts one leg out in front of her and puts the foot down carefully, toe-first, like a model.

"Fran! Where did you find them?"

Her friend Suzanne has slipped past the salesgirl and parted the curtain. Down here in "Big Girls" things are so different. Most of the customers are stout matrons who manhandle the clothes, pull and yank the material, stretching it over their bra and girdle armor. Suzanne marvels at the strength of the fabric which holds Francis in. But she does not come any closer as if nervous about standing too near an over-pumped balloon.

"I think I'm going to get these," Francis tells her smoothing her hands down her thighs. "You find anything upstairs?"

"No luck. Everything's so overdone." Suzanne looks at the huge cuffs on the velveteen pants.

"What do you mean? You can't go around in matching sweater sets forever. Wait for me outside and we'll find you something that'll be perfect."

Alone, Francis undoes the zipper and breathes again. She eases the material inch by inch down her rump. Her underpants go with it.

Up the escalator they ride, watching the busy shoppers on the first floor. At the top, Suzanne leads the way to the teen department. The air smells like perfume.

Suzanne stands back and lets Francis pick through a rack of dresses. The clothes are tiny as handkerchiefs. Francis loves the feel of the different materials, fuzzy knits and slick shiny nylon. She selects a black dress with a big white collar. There is a sequined animal in the center of the chest.

"This is it, Sue. Like it?"

Her friend nods weakly. "Maybe you ought to pick out a few others in case this one doesn't fit."

She returns to the rack of clothes, putting the black dress at the beginning so she can keep an eye on it. This dark green one with the little yellow collar might please

her, Francis thinks, and it was short enough to be in fashion. The salesgirl was coming toward them. Better make the final selections before she asks if we need help.

In the dressing room, which is smaller and without a stool, Francis watches Suzanne undress and notices a black and blue mark above her elbow. She has skin that bruises with the slightest bump and refuses to go on the trampoline in gym. Suzanne puts her head inside the black dress. Her little buttocks wiggle inside baggy cotton panties.

"There. You look good in that." The black dress fits snugly around her body. Francis fixes the belt for her.

"Well, I'm sure you're right. But...the material's itchy. Let's just see that green one."

Suzanne speaks in whispers, as if the distant giggling behind the other curtains makes her nervous. Francis fights an urge to be mad at her. Such a little dishrag. Can't make up her mind about anything. She's got the money for three dresses sitting right there in her purse.

Francis volunteers to go out and look over the rack once more. Better be careful, she thinks, shoving the hangers. You know what happened yesterday. Almost lost a friend, you did. Your only friend. A dress falls off the hanger and she looks over her shoulder to see if the salesgirl noticed. Suzanne didn't realize how lucky she was fitting into a size seven. I don't hope for that any more, thinks Francis. She had become expert at tuning out comments about her weight.

So much so, that she often disavowed her own conscience telling herself "no more chocolate." It wasn't baby fat as her mother said. Francis knew if she ate carrots for the rest of her life, she'd never get below a size eighteen. So far, Suzanne was the only person who seemed to agree with her. They ignored the problem of her weight because it couldn't be changed. And it was understood that a certain other fact, about Suzanne, would be passed by.

But she slipped up yesterday. She is already into size 11's and picks her way back down the rack. She could kick herself now that she thinks about it. Saliva burns in her mouth like acid.

Yesterday, Wednesday, Trudy Stetson came late into the eleventh grade study hall. She wore a decal on her cheek. A butterfly that made every head turn. Talk had it that the drugstore sold them five in a bunch.

"Lend me the money for a package," Francis told Suzanne. They were out in the hall after the bell rang. Students wove around them on the way to classes.

"But I don't like tattoos. They give me the creeps."

"They aren't tattoos." That was what made her angry. Calling something by the wrong name just to win an argument. Plus, Suzanne was openly quarreling with her in front of all these people.

"I'm not spending my money for something I don't want."

"You can have your choice. You can pick the prettiest ones for yourself."

"No one's stopping you from getting your own package."

"Cheap Jew," Francis said evenly. Suzanne's milky skin went whiter. Francis watched her hurry away past a row of lockers, knee socks wilting down her legs.

She grabs one more dress off the rack, hoping Suzanne will like it, and notices she is wet under the arms. She feels sick when she considers apologizing. I'd rather forget that it happened, she thinks. Suzanne is behind the third curtain, waiting for me to make things right again.

Her friend receives the dresses from her, and steps into a yellow voile. As she zips her up, Francis lifts the big rope of a braid that hangs down Suzanne's back. If only she could grab it and lead them out of here, past Belk's window and down the road to a different town. They might be able to start over again, shed their faults like water.

Upstairs in her bedroom, she paints her eyes with mascara and a green cream that she rubs on with her pinky. She and Suzanne split the cost of cosmetics. Right now, Francis wishes she had it all here in front of her. Especially the pancake make-up that Suzanne uses to cover her freckles. Sometimes they make an exchange at school: a bottle of Heaven Sent for an Avon cream sachet. It is the one thing they can share.

As usual, on Friday night they would leave the school

dance ten minutes after their parents dropped them off. They had been to other dances before and sat at the wall watching couples hug each other in the darkened cafeteria. A few weeks ago, they discovered that a bus stopped at a nearby corner and went downtown. The velveteen pants will be warm enough. The last time she and Suzanne went out, the air was slick and whipped up under her skirt. They had to keep ducking in doorways to get away from the wind. Finally, the movie theater came in sight and they bought tickets and saw "The Group." It was worth two-fifty and more. Francis thought she would like to be a member of a band of girls. Oh, the way they all took care of each other! Suzanne had noticed that, too. "But I'd change my name to Berns instead of Bernbaum," she had said when they stopped on a corner for the Don't Walk sign. Francis hadn't carried the conversation any further. Suzanne's comment made her nervous, as if any moment her own dam might burst and she would start complaining about her weight, resolving to begin a new reducing plan. Ayds candies, cottage cheese, Exer-cycles, Metracal, a whole succession of remedies paraded before her eyes. Results that would not last. The light changed and they walked across the street.

Some people were born in this town and died here. Francis had seen a photograph of herself as a roly-poly child playing in the yard of the same house she lived in now. Born fat and would die fat, nothing could change the way things were.

Suzanne had travelled here from Philadelphia three years ago, coming down on the train after her parents bought a house. Her little brother Henry was with her, and Nana who ordered chopped chicken livers in the dining car. Shortly after her arrival at school, she found her way to the same lunch table where Francis ate along with Mitchell Tate, the math whiz, and Lorna Rufus who had a scalp disease. Suzanne unwrapped neat, white packages of bagels and lox, and kishka that her mother ordered every month shipped in dry ice from Gluckstern's. Then she usually had a sandwich that she gave to Francis, thick with cold cuts from the expensive deli department in the supermarket.

Suzanne had told her that there were real flowers in the dining car, that the porter came to your seat with the softest light green pillows. But what interested Francis the most was hearing about another city. Philadelphia. Flowers in Rittenhouse Square, the rainbow painted road in front of the art museum. And once, Suzanne had told her, the Queen of England stayed in the hotel up the street from her family's apartment.

"Except for meeting you, Francis," she confided one day, "I wish I never came here."

Francis had to agree. Though this town was the right place for plenty of other people, she and Suzanne needed something better.

When she calls the ticket office at the train station,

she has to let it ring fifteen times before a man finally answers. Her conversation with him is brief. Alone again, she stands for a minute and taps her thigh with her fingers. She breathes deeply several times so her voice will be level and then quickly dials Suzanne.

"Listen, I've got a great idea for tomorrow night." She pauses for effect. "You know how you've always said you wanted to go down and see the train come in? Well, we won't just see it, we'll take a ride."

"What do you mean?"

"Instead of going to the dance, we'll take the bus downtown as usual. But at nine-thirty-one guess where we'll be?"

"Where?"

"On the train to New Orleans."

There is silence on the other end of the line. But finally Suzanne asks, "Are you joking?"

"No, I checked the schedule. I thought you'd be excited. Don't you think it would be fun? This could really change things for us."

"Change things? I don't understand." She sounds more incredulous every minute.

"No more sitting with Lorna Rufus at lunch. Travel, it broadens the mind. That's what you said when your family took that trip to Rome last summer."

"Mother's coming. Talk to you later. Francis, you've got to give me time to think." She hangs up.

It took Suzanne forever to make up her mind. She needed someone to step in and arrange things for her. Someday she would thank Francis for changing her life.

Francis straightens the phone on the little table in the hall. Then, in her bedroom, she leans close to the mirror and feels the blood thrill against her cheeks. She can imagine the sound of Suzanne's patent leather shoes stepping lightly, walking next to her down an exotic street in New Orleans.

A car bumper scrapes in the driveway. Downstairs her mother's high heels hammer across the tiled foyer to the front door. The toy poodle Sammy barks and crashes at the screen.

"Daddy's home!" her mother says.

Now she is called for supper. Her father's voice comes up the stairs. "Francis, FR-AN!" Would he be mad if he knew she was best friends with a Jew? She rises from her dressing table and the queerest feeling comes over her as if the room has moved and jostled her for an instant. She and the mirror stand still as the walls spin around.

"Got up too fast." She holds her head. Mascara makes a smudge in her palm. Wash your face before you go downstairs. Your mother doesn't like you to wear make-up. It'll ruin your skin, Francis.

The dizziness stops as suddenly as it came on. She feels disappointed and sits on the bed. In Science, the teacher said the world rotates at 1,036 miles per hour. She is

moving with the earth, speeding, a bright blur in the empty sweep of space.

"Francis, will you come down here?"

A train sliding effortlessly on silver threads into the night.

Friday night, they walk to the corner to wait for the bus. The air is cool and a little misty.

"There's nothing to lose," Francis says. The words come out as from a barker at a carnival. The din from the band in the cafeteria adds to her performance.

"You don't think we're going tonight, do you? We haven't packed. And Francis, what would our parents say?"

"Don't worry about that. It'll take time for them to figure things out-- that we left together and where we went. Maybe next week the man at the ticket window will recognize our pictures in the paper, but the police still won't know where we got off the train."

"My parents don't know yours. What'll they say when they meet each other?"

"Think of it, Suzanne...New Orleans, the Mardi Gras, the Gulf of Mexico."

"This whole plan of yours sounds like something I saw on T.V. Two teenage girls stowed away on a plane to California. They almost suffocated in the baggage compartment. And when they got to Los Angeles, their parents were waiting for them. The police work fast, Fran."

"It'll take them a while to find us." She looks at her watch.

The city bus roars toward them. The driver puts on his blinker and pulls over. The light is harsh inside the bus and the floors are dirty. They sit near the front. The driver keeps looking in his mirror at two Negro boys who are fighting over a pack of cigarettes in the back seat.

"Besides, I don't want to go farther south," says Suzanne.

"Don't worry." Francis pats her leg. Guilt about Wednesday's fight washes over her. "No one will know anything about you. We might be able to stay a long time in New Orleans and get jobs." She had always wanted to be a salesgirl in Montaldo's.

The velveteen pants aren't worth fifteen dollars, she thinks. They sucked up the remainder of last month's allowance. Had I known I was going to need the money I could have put up with my old plaid ones. When she had called the ticket office again and the man told her it would cost forty-eight dollars and thirty-one cents, she was frantic. But she found a twenty dollar bill in her mother's jewelry box, almost two dollars in change on the floor of the car, five more in her diary, six quarters in church collection envelopes in an old Sunday pocketbook, and luckily, she hadn't touched her allowance for this month. Yet Francis now realizes that, like an

idiot, she has forgotten about Suzanne's fare.

"How much money do you have?" she asks, nudging her friend's arm.

"Not enough, I'm sure."

"Well, don't just sit there, check." Francis takes a deep breath and looks at an advertisement in the bus:

F U CN RD THS, U CN ERN BG MNY AS A SPD-WRTR
Someone has written underneath, LK SHT U CN.

She hears her friend digging in her purse.

"I can't find my wallet."

Her heart drops. "Here, let me look." The purse is choked with Kleenex, pens, a notebook, mittens, a mirror, a bar of halvah, but at last she feels the hard security of Suzanne's wallet. She pulls it out triumphantly as if she has a fish on the line.

The wallet is fat with money. Where does she get it all? For a minute, every thought leaves Francis but the one which centers on the Bernbaum fortune. She had never been to Suzanne's house, but knew she lived in Wildwood, the flat land on the outskirts of town where a few rich Jews had built their houses. Wildwood had its own lake and country club, its own mountain piled fifty feet high on which was built an ultra-modern synagogue. Francis imagines that Suzanne's father rewards her with ten dollars every time she brushes her teeth.

"Seventy-five, seventy-six dollars," her friend whispers looking behind herself at the two Negro boys.

"I brought along some extra tonight because I thought we might go to a movie or stop somewhere to eat."

Francis is laughing. The more she thinks about the money, the more she laughs. Her fat quakes under her chin. Her seams split a little wider. "No, I'm not...I'm not laughing at you," she tries to say. Finally, at their stop, she goes limp and Suzanne has to pull her out of the seat.

Downtown all the lights are going. Though the movie is nothing they want to see, a war picture, they stand under the marquee and watch the yellow light bulbs flashing. Francis makes her eyes focus differently and the yellow lights appear to flow in a waterfall. Going past dark store windows, she watches Suzanne who tonight walks tilted slightly backwards. She crooks an elbow and lets her hand dangle, yes, the way Trudy Stetson does!

They stop in the Kandy Kitchen for doughnuts and Coke. It is still an hour and a half before the train comes. Suzanne had not said definitely she would go, but then she hadn't said "no" either. Perhaps, Francis thinks, I ought to let things ride for a while.

Suzanne puts her purse on the counter and says she will pay. "I borrowed this pin from my mother. Like it?" she asks. A purple stone in a gold setting sits above the place where she is still waiting for a breast to come in. "I wish you said something in the store if you didn't like this dress, Francis."

"But I do. I said it had elegance. You look good

in simple lines. They accentuate the slender figure."

"You read that in Mademoiselle. They always say stuff about simple lines." For the first time tonight Suzanne looks clumsy. Part of the doughnut falls in half before she gets it to her mouth, and the powdered sugar sprays her dress.

At a quarter to nine, they go to an intermission at the concert hall. The program says the orchestra plays Beethoven and Schumann, a composer Francis has never heard of. There is a huge chandelier in the glassed-in lobby. Suzanne does not seem to enjoy herself very much. She stands by the door with her arms folded and watches Francis buy an orange drink.

"Want some?"

"You didn't get a straw."

"I forgot. But you can drink it this way. Try it, come on. You've had this stuff before. I bet people in the north go to concerts all the time."

"I've been to a few."

A handsome gentleman in a dark suit asks them with widened eyes and a smile to move away from the door. They watch him go out and cross the street. A woman with a cigarette holder backs into them. She recognizes Suzanne.

"Why hello! Is your mother nearby? I have to talk to her."

"She and my father stayed in their seats."

"What row?"

"Seventy-six," blurts Suzanne.

"No honey, the rows go by letters, A,B,C,..."

Suzanne pulls Francis across the lobby away from the lady. "Let's get out of here."

They are running down the street. Francis can't go very fast. The velveteen pants make her feel as if she's bound in ropes.

"We had to leave, anyway," she is saying between breaths, "in order to make the train." They stop at the next corner. Under the street light, Suzanne looks pale as if she were going to get sick.

"I feel terrible lying and that was only Mrs. Epstein. Francis, I don't think I can possibly..."

"Look Suzanne, you're my best friend."

"It's not right. My mother will have a nervous breakdown if I run away."

Francis imagines Mrs. Bernbaum sobbing into a silk hankie, her gold bracelets clinking on her arms. "If we're caught, you can blame it all on me. You do hate this town, don't you?"

Suzanne shifts from foot to foot. "Well, I'm not sure."

"You can decide when we get to the station." Francis knows it is on the south side of town. If they keep on Oak Street, they'll eventually find it. She remembers a picture of the station in the paper. The historical society wanted to preserve it because of the huge Corinthian columns.

Negro men, dark as shadows, come onto the sidewalk in front of them. One man gets very close and mumbles at them before walking on. Francis wishes for a city bus. The two friends huddle close together, Suzanne breathes very loudly.

As she feels them getting nearer the station, Francis grows anxious for the trip. They will stay up all night watching lights going by of towns all down the line. Now the sidewalk has become cracked and chipped. Most of the buildings have broken glass shattered in front. She sees a cigarette still burning on the pavement and kicks it against the wooden shingles of a seafood store, hoping it will catch the city on fire.

The train station sits like an aging queen in front of them. One cabby waits with his radio on. Francis's heart rises when she sees the beautiful brass revolving door. She takes Suzanne's hand and puts her in one quarter of the circle. She presses herself into the next section. Inside the building, three huge globes light the ceiling but down on the floor benches and telephone booths swim in thick, gray air.

"No ma'am. No animals allowed in the passenger cars..." The man at the ticket window talks on the phone. They see his silhouette through the fogged glass. Francis taps on the window.

"Can I help you girls?"

"Two tickets to New Orleans," she says trying to

hide her face in the collar of her ski jacket.

"One way?"

"That's right."

"What are you gonna do in New Orleans?"

Francis looks around to Suzanne for help. Her friend is biting her lip, looking as if any minute she were about to cry. "Visit relatives. We're sisters going to see a sick uncle."

"Oh," the man says. He is writing something and with a swift chop of his hand he makes a machine punch two holes in the tickets. "That'll be ninety-six, sixty-two."

"Sister?" Francis waits a minute to see if Suzanne is going to make up her mind. Slowly her friend lifts her purse toward the man at the ticket window. Francis takes it and gives him five ten dollar bills from Suzanne's wallet, and forty-six of her own money. She finds three quarters in her jacket pocket. It seems they wait forever for the man to make change.

The shoe shine man sleeps in his throne set up outside the men's room. He grunts as if he is waking up, but settles again into a rhythmic snore. Their footsteps echo in the building as if no one has walked here in a hundred years. Francis stops before a map painted above them on the wall. It shows train tracks snaking all the way to California. That state is tan like all the others. A map for explorers who have yet to discover the new world. Suzanne tugs at the whistling fabric of her ski jacket. "I can't go. I just can't," she says.

"What are you afraid of?"

"That they'll never find us."

"The police?"

"My parents deserve better than this," she continues.

For the first time, Francis thinks of the people she is leaving behind. Her mother, heavy woman in a dark, waistless dress. Her father falling asleep in front of the T.V. set. Somewhere in the back of his mind he knows the dance will be over soon. He will have to drive a cold car all the way up to the high school to pick up his daughter.

By the clock above the ticket window it is only five minutes before the train arrives. "How many exciting things have you done in your life?" she asks Suzanne.

No answer.

"Just once wouldn't you like to try something different? This is your chance. All that stuff you're worrying about won't even matter in another year. And when you're eighty, you can tell your grandchildren about your trip to New Orleans."

This makes no impression on Suzanne. Finally, Francis leaves her and runs up the ramp. She aches to split open these pants with scissors so she can move. In the distance the train rumbles on the tracks. She looks at her watch. It is on time. Bells are dinging at the crossings.

The train comes into the station with its breaks screaming. As it stops, the cars bang against each other. Francis runs to the edge of the platform and is so near,

she can almost touch the steel panels under the windows.

"Wait up!" Suzanne calls. She is running toward her, the long braid swatting her back like a whip. Francis jumps onto the first step of the car. She grabs the skinny steel railing and swings her weight in a semi-circle. The train jerks once.

"Francis, get off!"

At the door of the car, the conductor fingers his chrome ticket puncher. The train jerks again so violently that Francis almost falls off the step.

Men out on the platform wave lanterns. The conductor is telling them to hurry. Then, almost imperceptibly, the train begins to move.

"Don't!" Suzanne cries, tears beginning to run into her mouth. "You're my best friend."

The train goes a little faster. Suzanne, running alongside, at last lifts up her arm. Francis grabs her coat sleeve and they are safely onboard.

SEASIDE ROOMS TO RENT

Resting the baby on her hip, Angela reached down to pick up the empty laundry basket. With a quick jerk she settled the baby higher on her side and walked across the beach back to the hotel with her burdens, trying to step lightly over the gravel. Her feet were still too soft not to feel the gravel bite.

Angela had come to Corfu four months ago with her husband, Nicholas. Before this they lived in Astoria, Queens for five years. Nicholas had been with the Greek Navy in Boston harbor. He jumped ship late one night and walked along the streets past barred shop windows. In the morning he bought a pair of dungarees and a shirt and wore them out of the shop. He put his uniform through the slot of a mailbox on the street.

Two days later, a New York City bus stopped in front of Macy's and Nicholas got off. He had heard that this was the world's largest store. As he entered he caught his reflection in the glass doors.

He spent most of the day watching a wall that held over fifty televisions. He had seen television once in Athens but it was dull. It showed only adaptations from melodramatic novels with people that could not act. Now

he watched American serial comedies. Fluffy-headed Lucille Ball seemed to Nicholas the finest actress alive.

Toward five o'clock he went to the basement of the store to the Horn and Hardart automat. There he met Angela. She was sitting alone at a table, dark haired and pretty. He smiled at her and pulled out the empty lining of his pockets in a clownish pantomime. She was forced to give him a dime.

Angela watched him flip the lever for the coffee as he had seen the person before him do. He seemed fascinated with the big stainless steel machine. A few minutes later he was telling her about himself, drawing pictures on a napkin. She drew him one picture--a stick figure of a girl working behind a counter of gloves.

Born on Corfu, Nicholas had never left the island except to go fishing with his father. In his broken English he told her how it was now being developed for the tourists. One day he'd go back there and run his family's new hotel. Angela imagined blue, clean water where she could swim. At night they might walk through the old town and dance to music in the open air. Corfu. She told him she could smell oranges and lemons when she said that word.

She kept working at the glove counter in Macy's. Through her, Nicholas got a job as a stock boy. Later, after they were married, he drove a United Parcel truck in the suburbs. Though lines of resignation crossed their foreheads, Angela's parents wished them happiness.

It was early September now. The hotel had been

empty all week except for two women. She guessed they were about sixty years old. Sitting on the coarse sand in the hotel's aluminum beach chairs, they each had a novel to read or a magazine they had bought in the town. They were very red and complained of their sunburns, yet they never sat under the thatch umbrellas that the hotel also provided. Once in a while, the larger one would put on a green rubber scuba mask that covered most of her face but made the skin outside it bulge and pressed her mouth into a peculiar fishlike smile. She then walked down to the water hunching her shoulders at every step and whimpering as the gravel scraped her feet. Bending over knee deep in the water, she rested the mask gently on the surface and peered in. She never moved from the spot she chose but occasionally stood upright to stretch her back. Then she bent over again always waiting for something mysterious to swim past her legs.

When Angela came to the back door of the hotel she dropped the basket, put the baby in it, and sat on the cement step that was always shaded in the early afternoon. The baby cried out but she ignored him for a minute. She stared out at the sea and then her eyes scanned the beach. Each hotel along the street provided beach chairs and thatch umbrellas. Down the road, one place had put in a swimming pool before the summer started. But the rates were expensive there. Their own building wasn't really even a hotel. The sign read SEASIDE ROOMS TO RENT. That summer they watched

other hotels steal away some of their customers who tired of the hot rocky mixture at their feet and went in search of the fine sand that had been trucked into other beaches from the south side of the island. Angela saw them checking out in the morning, explaining in an off-hand way that their vacation had been cut short. Later, they would appear coming out of a store in town, hiding from her under their big brimmed hats.

Angela took the baby out of the laundry basket and put him on her lap. Hearing something, she looked up and saw her mother-in-law rounding the corner of the hotel. Her face was like the bark of a tree although she wasn't past fifty. A faded pink dress hung down to her ankles with the hem half torn out. She was no taller than Angela's shoulder and her bare feet traveled painlessly across the rocky ground. Grinning widely when she saw the baby, the mother-in-law picked him up. "Yassou! Yassou!" she said as she raised the child over her head. The baby laughed and was carried down the beach by his grandmother, the old feet running noiselessly toward the wash that boiled in a tub over a fire.

The two women boarders walked down the back stairs to the doorway where Angela sat. They waited for the girl to move out of the way and then stepped into the sun. Turning to her, they said hello and pleasantly requested fresh towels. Might they stay another week if it was all right? It was such a convenience to be able to speak

English with someone at the hotel, they said. Angela wanted to say something interesting to start a conversation. She also wanted to talk with someone in English. Nicholas had gone back to speaking Greek. He had been eager for her to learn the language but quickly became disappointed when she had so much difficulty with it. She hadn't even learned the alphabet yet. She wanted to talk to these women, but like a person with a stone tied to her waist, she felt herself sinking. Instead, she replied that she'd put fresh towels in their room right away and was pleased that they liked the hotel. The women smiled emptily at her and walked over to the beach chairs in bright plastic sandals. Angela heard them as they discussed whether they should sit facing the hotel so they might tan their backs, or facing the sea which was a nicer view. They sat facing the sea.

Angela's feet and legs reddened as the sun began to cover the step where she sat. She pulled her skirt down to wrap up her legs and put her feet in the shade of the laundry basket. How many times had she thought of Astoria, Queens this week? Alone, with nothing familiar around her, she worried more. Nicholas was the only person she was close to. Her main fear was that something might detain him at his job, an accident, perhaps. When the tourist season fell off more money was needed and he had gotten work at a fruit-packing plant in the main city across the island. Sometimes at night, after she had waited for him, he

went down the street to Spiro's restaurant without her, just to talk with the other men, to have his fill of retsina, and to dance. Once he came home and she was already in bed. He was wet with perspiration and dropped his shirt on the floor. Walking out to the back of the hotel where they had an outside shower, he looked back toward Spiro's. It was still possible to see the lights down the beach.

Nicholas came back into their room. He walked over to the baby's bed in the corner and rubbed its cheek. The child's hand rose to its face and then he rolled over. Angela waited to talk to him. She wanted to tell him how lonely she was. Couldn't he spend his nights with her? The language was impossible to learn. Swimming by herself in the afternoon was beginning to bore her. The day was too long.

She turned in bed and looked at him. His dark hair was cut short and his brown eyes were now hidden in a shadow. He kissed her unsmiling face and then looked at her as if to ask "What's wrong?" Leaning over, he spoke in her ear: "Angela, you must now learn to live in my country. The rules are different from those in America."

She turned back to the wall, her body heaving in silent little convulsions. Nicholas got into bed and moved away from her so he could sleep.

On the step where she sat, the sun had pushed the shadow of the building away. As if she were being chased, she grabbed the laundry basket and took shelter inside in

their basement room. She sat down in a chair and reached forward to open the cabinet where she kept her bathing suit. Her bathing cap with the yellow rubber flowers was in the top drawer. She pressed it down on her head and pushed her hair up into it. Then she took off her dress and put her feet into the bathing suit. Pulling it up, she noticed that it was beginning to feel tight. She smoothed her hands over her hips to try and measure how much weight she had gained.

Walking out into the hottest hour of the day, Angela unpinned a towel from the clothesline. A few yards away sat the two women boarders. They'd brought their chairs down close to the water. Angela put the towel around her shoulders and walked down to the water. She could easily hear their conversation.

"She's cute," said the smaller woman to her friend.

"She could only be about twenty-five. But that suit is a little dumpy for her at her age, don't you think?" the larger one said. She pulled at the bones of her bathing suit to stop them from digging into her breasts. Seeing a magazine that the other had under her chair, she thought, the rascal must have bought it this morning before I got up. Then she said plainly to her friend: "Do you mind if I just step over there and look at the magazine under your chair? I've read the one I bought yesterday. It wasn't much good; no articles about anyone I like. Just the Kennedys. You can't get away from them. Who cares about her anyway?"

"No dear, go right ahead. I wouldn't mind all the articles about the Kennedys, if only they wouldn't keep showing them as the most admired people on earth. It's so false. God knows what sorrows Jackie really bears inside herself. No dear, go right ahead and see if it's any good. I haven't looked at it yet, so don't read anything out loud to me. I'd like to read it myself."

The heavy woman rocked herself up out of the flimsy little chair. The plastic mesh stuck for a second to her back. When she walked over to the magazine and bent down, you could see the red woven design on the backs of her thighs that the chair had left.

"Oh God," she said in a hoarse voice.

"What dear?"

"Liz Taylor."

Floating on her back with only the sky to see above her, Angela dreamed she wasn't on Corfu. As a little girl she used to jump up in the air and sometimes got the feeling that she was unattached in that instant, floating above the world. Maybe Nicholas would come home early and see her and swim out to her.

The loudspeakers that usually blared Greek music down the beach were silent. Spiro's restaurant was empty. She laughed, thinking of the crazy sign for tourists that was put out in front of it, by the road. Like something that would be written in 1950 on the side of a race car, it said, SPIRO, BOSS IN HIS SPECIAL. With most of the tourists gone

they did a slow business. A week ago Nicholas and she walked down late at night for a drink. The restaurant had a television and the whole town, it seemed, was packed in to watch it. Angela felt uncomfortable and recoiled from the unminded children that ran dizzily between the chairs. When they knocked themselves down and cried, the adults gave them sips from their drinks.

She drifted closer to shore and suddenly bumped into something in the water. Quickly getting a foothold and turning around, she stared into a face bobbing on the surface. It was one of the women boarders. She still wore her straw hat and sunglasses.

"I'm sorry dear. I hope I didn't scare you. I didn't see you until it was too late. I never look where I'm going."

"Oh, that's all right. I was just daydreaming."

"Daydreaming? My, I shouldn't think you'd have any need to daydream when you live all year round on an island like this."

"No, I suppose you're right," said Angela.

"Is that your husband who comes here around six? He looks awfully nice. He's a real Greek, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Well, my friend and I would like to invite you two up to our little balcony some night for a drink. We wonder what it must be like to really live here. Do you find the language a problem? Lou and I- Lou was my husband-

used to come here years and years ago and we just couldn't get the hang of it. We learned the words for please and thank you, though. The Greeks seem thrilled if you can say just a little something."

"Well, thank you for the invitation. Maybe we'll come up sometime."

The older woman smiled and began her short journey back to shore, taking little jumps off the bottom to propel herself, while on the surface her arms stroked with delicate ease.

On a rock covered with seaweed, Angela watched her swim away. Then she turned on her back and fanned her body in the direction she came, laughing to herself as she put on the woman's self-assured smile.

Clean boiled sheets hung on the line. She went up the beach and knelt by her child in the sand. The grandmother had left him there with the wash pail to play with. He was filling it with rocks and sand in busy handfuls. The wind came up and something flew into his eye. Angela picked the baby up and brought him back to the hotel, talking to him to stop his crying.

A little before six, she went up to the room where the two women boarders stayed. She could hear them talking to each other.

"I think we should face the building tomorrow," one said.

"Yes, I guess you're right, but what a bore. I'll have to get up early and buy lots to read. I hope they still

sell those masks, too."

"But you've already got one."

"If you had been swimming with me today when we went in, you'd have known that the rubber strap broke."

Angela had waited for Nicholas tonight, but got impatient. Now she knocked on their door.

"Oh my, who's that?"

"Well, if you had been swimming with me today, you would have known that I had a nice conversation with that girl and invited her to our balcony for a drink." Then she called out, "Just a minute, dear."

"I hope you invited her husband, too."

"I did. I did."

In a minute the door opened and Angela saw the smaller woman stand before her in a pink dress with an enormous ruffle around the neck. She wore a rhinestone clip in her hair. Her mouth was drawn much bigger than it was in pink lipstick.

"Please excuse us. We didn't know you were coming tonight," The woman looked around Angela and out into the hall.

"My husband won't be home until later. I hope you don't think it awful of me to come alone."

"Why, what on earth for? Come in. Marsha will be out in a second and then we'll have some drinks. What do you like? Gin and tonic? Whiskey sour?"

"I'd like a gin and tonic."

Marsha stepped out of the bathroom. Her hair was

short and curly. Angela had not noticed this before, because they both wore hats on the beach. Her dress was navy blue with a low cut V-neck which showed the white top of her slip.

"How do you do," she said and gave Angela her hand. She smelled of Noxzema.

"I hope you don't mind me barging in up here," said Angela. Her hands were cold. She didn't know these women dressed up so much. She smoothed her hair down with her hand.

"You haven't barged in at all, dear," the other woman said. "I invited you. Marsha, she said she'd like a gin and tonic. Let's make us all some drinks. You know what I always have."

Marsha walked to a bed and bent over an open suitcase. Underwear, a package of bobby pins, and a pair of white gloves were visible in a whirlpool of clothes. Digging her hand into the suitcase, Marsha felt the bottles and pulled them out. Then, neatly tucked in a side pocket, she found the drink mixes. Gathering all this into her arms she swayed to the bathroom. Her friend skittered over, and before Marsha could put the bottles and mixes down on the lid of the toilet, she had spread a hankie over it.

"I hope you don't mind our bathroom bar. When you travel, you have to make do." Emerging from the door, she looked at Angela. "By the way, I'm Ruth. How silly of me not to have introduced myself."

Angela smiled and told Ruth her name.

"Angela. That's nice. I have a cousin with that name."

She saw the girl fidget with her ring. "Come on. We'll go outside and sit and Marsha can bring the drinks out."

Marsha was already coming out of the bathroom.

There were three aluminum folding chairs. Angela sat down and Marsha came over to her with the drinks on a small silver tray which she had not seen her take from the suitcase.

"The one on the left is the gin and tonic," Marsha said smiling.

Angela took her drink. It was in a plastic glass on which the words Olympia Airlines were printed. Then Marsha handed a drink to Ruth, pink with a cherry in it, and sat down next to her putting the silver tray down by her chair. Ruth proposed a toast to the wonderful weather. She had read in the international edition of the Herald Tribune that it was raining in New York for the third straight day.

"I'll probably find that my car has floated away. I left it parked on the street by my apartment building. My neighbor is supposed to move it for me so that I don't get a ticket. Those silly parking regulations usually get the better of me. I've gotten so many tickets for parking on the wrong side of the street."

"I know what you mean. We used to live in Queens..."

"Did you really? How dreadful," Marsha said.

"Yes, well, I was always getting confused. I think that on the odd days of the month you had to park on the left side of the street, and the even ones, on the right."

"Whereabouts in Queens, dear?" asked Ruth.

"On Eighty-first Street. Quite near to the airport."

"Was your husband in New York at the time? Is that how you met him?"

"Yes. He was in the Greek Navy. We met in Macy's."

"Isn't that delightful? Like something you'd read in a storybook."

Angela wanted to laugh. She thought of herself and Nicholas dressed in silks whirling around a ballroom floor. Her mother-in-law, a magic wand in her hand, talked with the coachman.

The drink was not settling well with her. Sitting in the twilight with two strange old ladies made her feel far away from home. Suddenly she asked: "When are you going back to New York?"

"In another week. If it's all right with your hotel. I understand many of them close down in September."

"We hate to leave," Marsha said. "We've stayed longer than expected. We wanted to see another island, but we're getting such a wonderful tan here and it's such a bother to pack up and move."

"Remind me to wire my nephew to tell him when to pick us up at the airport," said Ruth to Marsha. The rhinestone hairclip had slipped to the side of her thin hair.

"Well, I guess I better be going. My husband will be home and the baby should be put to bed." Angela stood up and stepped backward to regain her balance. She walked

over to Marsha and put her glass down on the silver tray. The two women got up and lightly shook her hand.

"That grandma must be a lot of help to you with the little one," Ruth said.

The girl walked back through the room to the door. "Thanks so much for the gin and tonic. I'm not used to the retsina yet. It still tastes like Mr. Clean to me."

Ruth and Marsha laughed from the balcony. They waved goodbye as she went out the door.

Nicholas had come in while she was upstairs. She found him down in their basement room lying on the bed and smoking a cigarette. He had a good shirt on and the pants to his one blue suit. The suit was a garish iridescent color that he bought in Athens when they first arrived. Angela never hated it more than now.

"Where were you?" he asked her.

"I was upstairs. One of the women boarders asked me up to have a drink. I thought you were going to be late."

"It is not right for you to wander around in the rooms upstairs at night. Your place is down here."

"Thank you for telling me." And then Angela's look softened. "I mean to do the right thing, but I have a hard time understanding my duty in this house."

Nicholas seemed uneasy on the bed. He sat up on the edge of it and put his cigarette out in a bowl on the floor.

"I'm going to Spiro's tonight. It's his father's birthday. A small party with the men. Tomorrow I don't

have to work. I sleep late."

Angela had once walked down to the restaurant late at night to bring Nicholas home. She was furious at being left alone. Standing in the doorway at Spiro's, she saw him fastening a button on a sleeve of one of the dancers.

The mother-in-law sat in a corner of their room and bounced the baby on her lap, talking nonsense to it. The child drooled and the grandmother drew him close and hugged him.

The next week came and Marsha and Ruth looked redder.

Angela took a black cocktail dress which had been creased and flattened out of the family's closet. Going into the basement room she opened a drawer in the cabinet and found a small candy box. It contained lipstick and a bottle of perfume. Angela unscrewed the cap and dabbed some perfume on her neck. Her hands then felt inside the drawer for an envelope. Two hundred dollars which she had saved from America were safe inside. A week earlier, while putting some of Nicholas's shirts in his drawer she found a jar where he had been keeping most of his earnings from the fruit-packing plant. The feel of the money created an exhilarating flutter in her chest.

Angela went upstairs to the women's room again. Fixing her a gin and tonic, they went to the balcony.

"Well, well, we're so glad to see you. You look quite marvelous. New dress? The last few days have been

unutterably hot, haven't they?" Ruth asked. "Why look, my arms are damp even as the sun sets." She gave a quick look to Angela and lifted up her glass to drink.

The girl held her glass tightly in her lap. The drink seemed repulsive to her and now she knew why. It was warm.

Marsha turned to her. "Read any good books lately? I was reading Sex and the College Girl back in New York before we left." She tittered with Ruth. "I'm sorry I left it at home."

"Actually, I haven't read much at all lately."

"Of course," Ruth said, "you're involved here with the hotel and that young child. I imagine you're concentrating on the new language, too. It is difficult. Marsha, where do you think we should eat tonight?"

"Shall we catch a bus to that town on the other side of the island? They have those mammoth fish steaks."

"Sounds all right with me."

The air became still. A pair of hands fought away a fly.

Twice Angela rose to put her glass on the little silver tray and leave. She sat back on her chair each time. Suddenly she told them that her mother was very ill and wanted her home right away to take care of her. The two women boarders raised their eyebrows and nodded their heads.

"These things happen so fast," Ruth had said.

Within the darkness of the basement, Angela smiled.

Sometimes, if Ruth and Marsha weren't on the beach, she'd go to their room. From the closed door she listened, thinking they might have left without letting her know. But she heard the shower going. She heard them talking.

At the end of the week, when Nicholas's mother was out by the fire on the beach, Angela held her baby outside the door of the hotel. A canvas bag rested by her feet. It held another dress, a coat, and diapers. The two hundred dollars she'd saved and most of Nicholas's money were folded in her pocketbook. The two women came down the stairs with their suitcases, panting in the heat. They left in a gray taxi.

Nicholas had overslept that morning and was late for work. She had nervously helped him find his clothes and fixed coffee. Sweat wet the back of her dress. The windows were rolled up in the car. The baby fussed on her lap and pulled her hair.

Angela untwisted the ring on her finger and put it into the ashtray on the door of the taxi. The road was dusty and people ran to the sides as they drove along. Thinking someone had looked in and recognized her, she dropped her face down. Ruth and Marsha were trying to remember if they left anything back in their room. The suitcases bumped in the trunk.