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### **2009 Drue Heinz Literature Prize awarded to California native**

PITTSBURGH—Anne Sanow has been named the 2009 winner of the Drue Heinz Literature Prize, one of the nation's most prestigious awards for a book of short stories. Sanow's manuscript, tentatively titled *Triple Time*, was selected by best-selling author Ann Patchett from a field of nearly 300 entries. The collection will be published by the University of Pittsburgh Press this fall.

Patchett stated, "This is the kind of manuscript that reminds me why people want to become editors and agents, and why writers are willing to judge contests: you hope that among the bad manuscripts and the good ones and the very good ones there will be one that is great. This book is great."

The 42-year-old Sanow, who resides in Provincetown, Massachusetts, explained she is deeply inspired by place and landscape, and how the sweep of history in a particular place is experienced on a personal level by those who live there. The stories in *Triple Time* are set in Saudi Arabia and linked by various characters over a 50-year span, from the end of World War II to the mid-1990s.

"My characters are native Saudis and expatriates going about their lives and loves and losses and discovering who they are and where they belong," Sanow said. "My interest as a writer is to try to avoid easy exoticism by working from the inside out, character by character and place by place, so that somehow, the epic and minute become enmeshed."

Recalling her reaction to winning the Drue Heinz prize, Sanow said, "It was a surprise both humbling and exhilarating—I'm thrilled to become part of a tradition that truly believes in and supports the art of the short story."

Born and raised in California, Sanow moved to Saudi Arabia for two years following high school graduation. She has a BA in English from George Mason University and an MFA from Washington University in St. Louis. Her fiction has been published in *The Kenyon Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Other Voices*, *New Orleans Review* and *Web Conjunctions*, among others. She has received four Pushcart Prize nominations. Twice a fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Sanow has received fellowships and residencies from the MacDowell Colony, the Edward F. Albee Foundation, the Jentel Artist Residency Program, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, among others. She currently lives on Cape Cod, where she is an editor and writing instructor.

The image shows a vast, arid desert landscape under a hazy, orange-tinted sky. In the foreground, a large, rusted metal barrel lies on its side, partially buried in the sand. The sand is marked with intricate, wavy patterns, likely from wind erosion. In the background, rolling sand dunes stretch towards the horizon. The overall color palette is dominated by warm, earthy tones of gold, tan, and brown.

# TRIPLE TIME

ANNE SANOW

WINNER OF THE DRUE HEINZ LITERATURE PRIZE



Anne Sanow

## THE DATE FARM

Jill stands a few yards in front of the pickup truck, letting the sand blow around her ankles. All the way out to the desert they'd been racing toward the sunset, and now, at the top of the escarpment, it is about to bleed into the horizon. The sky wipes into navy, a big piece of dark coming down, flecked with stars.

"Oh," she says softly, out over the edge.

Sean calls to her, "Hey, darlin'. You want to do me a favor and come back from the edge a little, okay?" His voice is odd to her yet; he is English, but his accent mingles with twangy inflections he has picked up from the many Americans in Riyadh, people from Texas or the deep South. She cannot make out some of their phrasings herself. She is jarred by them, feeling displaced at parties or in the markets, where a *y'all* will ping above the guttural Arabic like a honeyed alarm. They are far from the city now, however. She makes a vague reply to assure Sean that she is not so stupid as to fall down the cliff face. She wonders if she would hurt herself falling down; should she miss the cragged rocks, the sand below looks pillowy and soft, almost welcoming.

Sean says something else but the words slip in and out of Jill's earshot with each pulse of wind. She does not bother to turn around. She squats down on her haunches the way the rug sellers do when drinking tea in the souks. Her small frame is lost in the white thobe, which billows out from where it has caught behind her knees, and she has wound a red-checked ghotra tight on her head to cover her hair. That afternoon Sean had told her that no way was he taking her anywhere all got up in that genderfuck outfit. It was the first time she'd heard the word *genderfuck* and she laughed. For the rest of the party she'd sashayed about, her bikini visible through the cloth in flashes of turquoise, and when Sean was the only one still sober enough to drive she figured that he'd take her rather than let her charm one of the other guys into it.

"You're how old again?" he'd asked as they climbed into the truck. It was crusted in hues of umber, splatted designs of mud and sand, as if from a high-pressure paint gun. A weekly hose wash by the houseboy did little to improve it.

"Eighteen," she replied, used to the question.

"Christ. Keep covered up." Before going he insisted that she at least don jeans and a shirt underneath her costume.

"Oh, you knew that," Jill said.

"Well, the last thing I need is to get stopped with some underage chippie playing dress-up in men's clothing. So I'm driving you, but you do what I say out on the road."

"Fine." She pulled the ghotra in around her face, letting the folds shadow the angles of her features. A small flap flickered in time with the breaths from her nose. Although she did not have the traditional black cord to hold the cloth on her head, she looked like a prepubescent boy, maybe the son of a Saudi business owner, being driven by a Western employee.

Sean opened up speed once they were past Intercontinental Road. He gunned it and went straight for the horizon; they passed only a few Mercedes water trucks for nearly an hour. When he pulled off the highway into the dunes (there was a particular point at

which to make the turn, past the roadside boulder hugged by the carcass of a long-forgotten crashed limousine), the escarpments rose in front of them. He knew where you could drive right up one of the ridges that was wide and hard enough to hold the truck, and this is where he took her.

Jill can feel him now hesitating, staring at her back, or perhaps into the sky. At this moment she wishes that she could be alone. The very idea of taking herself somewhere without a companion, without parents or a driver or a potential lover—supervisors, all of them: she should be at a point in her life where she is truly learning how to negotiate, how to move, but in this country she does not have the luxury.

“Did you see?” She motions back to Sean, feeling guilty about trying to erase his presence.

“What’s that,” he says, coming over and squatting next to her.

“Camels—there.” Two big dark ones are standing in a sand bowl, and a third trudges its way up one of the dunes.

She doesn’t say anything more, just watching them, and he doesn’t ruin it for her.

“We camp out here sometimes,” he says a minute or two later. “Take bikes up and down, dune buggies.”

“Yeah?”

“And there’s a shitload of flies.”

“I know how to camp,” she says. She wants to sound ready to go, in possession of some authority.

Sean grins; he seems amused by this giveaway tone in her voice. “We’ll get you out next time then.”

“Good.” Jill watches all the shapes around her blur into a moonscape; it is a terrain that seems to belong not on this earth or in this time. It has become eerie, starkly comforting. They are marooned. “Thanks for taking me out,” she says to Sean. They both squat like that, finding their balance, and let the night wind cool them.

—

Her days are about length. It is now early October, and Jill has been in Saudi Arabia for just over two months. In this time she has shifted and slid, the move halfway around the world upending her whole being. Her former self of school and suburban ease has been reduced to a microscopic thorn, a negligible pain that migrates and twitches sporadically. Back home the class of 1982 has moved on as well. When she was leaving, one of her friends, a girl nearly the valedictorian, confessed to Jill that she really wished not to go straight on to university, that she would rather do nothing at all for a while—for once. This friend is now attending Stanford. Jill is the one who has time, all the time she could have imagined was ever in the world, and nowhere to hang her new self at the end of a day.

Eight miles from the city center and in limbo. Daily exile in a cheaply built prefab housing compound with undesirable companions. One year, she'd promised her father, and during this exchange they'd both pretended to overlook the fact that he didn't have her college tuition. Oh, she thinks, it is special here.

She telephones the administration building for the Army Corps of Engineers, where her father works. "What are the jobs this week," she asks the receptionist, who by now takes her calls in a sympathetic tone, giving out what information she can, which is unfortunately not enough to effect a change in the rhythm of Jill's days.

"Nothing really," she says now. "Unless you've passed the typing test."

"No," Jill says. Her attempt at the typing test was a disaster, a new record of subpar, based on total improvisation of the mechanics. "How about at one of the rec centers?"

"Sorry, dear," the woman says. "Try back next week."

Jill hangs up. It is nine in the morning, and she has now completed the only task that can be deemed an attempt at forward momentum in this life. By half-past seven each workday the compound is empty of men, except for the Yemeni houseboys and the Egyptian racquetball coach. There are so few jobs for women, and those that exist are occupied mainly by the wives. Her mother has one, arranged in advance by her father.

She does not want to be a secretary. She does not wish to serve snacks at a recreation center on one of the U.S. government compounds or tend the game room. For any hope of escape, though, any release from the blankness of her time, this is what she must try for.

Bearing the heat, she dons her Walkman and treks the inside perimeter path of the compound, a half-mile in its entirety. The only creatures are a few wives by the pool, tanning themselves to leather; Jill is from California, but she is still startled by the deep, metallic skin tones these women have achieved. They resemble candied oranges. Later their children will return from the international school to join them or play pinball in the game room. Although Jill has been asked to babysit these children some evenings she is indifferent to them, and feels lobotomized whenever she attempts conversation with the few teenagers her age who exist like lizards, sitting in the sun smoking, or watching videotapes of MTV and *Heavy Metal* recorded by their friends in the States.

She stops at the front gate with its guard post and traffic bar. "Salaam alaykum," she says to the guard, a young Saudi from the National Guard with a machine gun, probably her age. He checks the identity of each returning car in the evening, phones in before allowing guests to proceed. Jill has been told that she may not walk through the gates alone, down the road to the little village, or into the escarpments that jut out above in bleached ochre. What would he do, Jill wonders: shoot her? And who, she thinks, would wish to trespass *in*?

"Alaykum salaam," he replies. This one is cordial; his piety must be compromised, Jill thinks, because of his post here. She, at least, represents a possible compromise, in her shorts and T-shirt, sweaty ponytail swinging; how funny, she thinks, to be a forbidden thing when it has become difficult to sense her own weight or shape.

"And how is your day today?" she asks.

He shrugs, or begins to; it softens into a quiver as he checks himself. "Same-same." The universal reply. At some crossing point between her old world and the Red Sea she'd internalized it, un-

derstood it as a stand-in for anything, an opinion or a greeting, unrooted, nearly meaningless.

"It's hot, though," she says.

"All my days the same, miss," he answers, and then shifts his eyes back to the road.

—

In her first weeks she had become friendly with Rowena, a young woman working with a Lebanese architect who did not mind employing her illegally. Jill and Rowena both swam regular laps in the pool—something that, oddly enough, few people seemed to galvanize themselves into doing—and this common ground led to Rowena's including Jill in small evening gatherings at her house. The friendship had been brief; Rowena returned to the States a month later. The coveted job evaporated into the wispy network of favors and connections Jill had not yet penetrated, but Rowena did leave her with a libidinous Arabian housecat as well as a slim entree to her friends Georgia and Caroline. They were sisters, a few years older than Jill. Both had jobs and American boyfriends in their late twenties who were contractors with Saudi firms. Some evenings they invited her along to parties away from the compound and she had met Sean this way, by a pool in a courtyard, one of those nights.

Sean is twenty-four and divorced. This has the tinge of a blunder, to Jill; something embarrassing, on a rung surely lower than the one aimed for.

"When?" she asks him. They are in the souks, looking for a new music store Caroline has told them about that is supposed to be next to an establishment called Perfume Super Europe. The colorful welter of shops and merchandise has so far proved diversionary and misleading. It is evening prayer call, and they are hunched down in a back corridor, eating schwarmas, out of sight of the red-bearded muttawein.

"Put your veil back on," Sean says, picking up the end that is trailing from her shoulder. He can be relaxed and accepting, yet often shifts to unease in public. Earlier he had refused to follow Jill

into a lingerie store more splendidly tacky than Frederick's of Hollywood. The scent of sandalwood bloomed from the doorway to reveal a combat zone of black-clad women and one hapless Pakistani clerk. The women were ruthless, ordering him up ladders and into bins, yanking lace garter belts and bustiers from packages and flinging those deemed unsatisfactory to the floor. The prices, Jill noticed, were exorbitant.

The market where Jill and Sean are crouching is both indoors and out; they are lost in a maze of gleaming white-tiled walkways and offshoots. Shop walls and display windows are crammed every which way with goods, and improvised flats of tin or light plank boards act as ceilings. The cover is intermittent; in places the sky is visible and in others, dead-end corridors hold stacks of unused construction material.

"Sweetheart. Veil."

Jill says to him, "I'm trying to eat."

"I don't bloody care. Put it on. It's too close to Ramadan."

"Okay" She complies, first shoveling the rest of the pita in her mouth and wiping the oily sauce from her fingers. The black silk goes back over her hair. "So when?" She looks at him.

He sighs. "Ginger went back to London in March." The look in his eyes is more practical than sad.

"I bet you don't want to talk about this," Jill says. She looks out into the main hallway from her perch on a step. It is mostly quiet, the men having retreated to the interiors, prostrate in worship. The women stand or sit in clusters, waiting. These are the middle-class women, or their maids; the wives of wealthier men sit in the back seats of cars parked in lots or next to the curbs.

"Too right. It's done, and that's all."

"Did she have a job?"

Sean shakes his head, mouth full of food.

"I can understand that, then," she says. "I'm going crazy without anything to do all day." They hear the thin whine of a radio, and the store grate next to them rattles up. The scrape echoes repeatedly as the other shops reopen. Voices start up again, and people pour into the hall.

"You want to go?" Sean asks. "We'll have a drink back at my place." Jill agrees; she can think of nothing that she wants here, not any object that will divert her enough. They will find their way out now to thrumming Baatha Street, past the store fronts with brightly colored fabric hanging from the ceiling, past the glimmering breast-plates and ropes of gold in 18 or 21 karats, the perfume bottles and the lingerie, the rugs woven in reddish patterns, the coppery pots that throw off the light in luminous glares, out of this cacophonous warren and back into the open sterility of the city where a watchfulness will hover alongside them, until they are home.

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A month passes, and then Sean gives Jill something quite valuable. They are not in love, Jill thinks; at least she is not, and does not feel such a sentiment from him either. They have fallen into a habit of a kind, easy and unquestioned, and enjoy themselves at the parties where it is better to have the cocoon of partnership to retreat to when the expat bullshit factor becomes tedious. If she could define it Jill might say that it is a companionable feeling. Little is expected of her other than sex and the ability to laugh, both of which feel easy to offer up, are in fact a relief. One month is an admirable enough stretch of time, in expatriate Riyadh, for a relationship. What Sean gives to her is like a present, maybe a celebration: his houseboy now has a driver's license, and Jill is allowed to call on him for rides.

Sean's house reminds Jill of something in Los Angeles. Low and angled, with large windows and sliding glass doors, hallways and walk-in storage areas to use up space and make the whole appear larger than necessary. A terraced passage, wound over by dried bougainvillea vines and strewn with crunchy petals, stretches from the garage to the front door. There is no grass (the only lawn in Riyadh is a startling expanse in front of the King Faisal Hospital), but instead a patio that wraps around; it holds a blocky swimming pool. Everything is covered in a fine layer of sand, and the leaves of the palm trees droop listlessly over the eight-foot walls surrounding the place.

Sean does not lock the front gate. Jill comes over when she can reach Hassan, the houseboy (“*Allo!*” he barks into the telephone, sounding of pillaged French). This journey from her compound to his house becomes an ordeal of sorts—the telephone lines into the city may be jammed, or Hassan may decline to answer if he is busy or playing backgammon with a neighboring house servant. It is an activity that can command a block of her day and divert her energies. When she is there she does much as she would at home: she swims, she listens to music, and she reads. She has developed an appetite for Robert Ludlum paperbacks, Cold War operative stories stark and mechanical. She pads around the house in a souk dress. She does not bother to mind her wet and sandy footprints when she comes in from the pool; Hassan will sweep up, several times a day.

She is almost like a wife. There most of the day, there when he gets home. She’s learned how to mix a tequila sunrise cocktail and vodka martinis by the pitcher. She knows that she is not content, she is in a holding pattern, and she has no idea what to ask for in this place.

Jill makes it a rule that she not help herself to liquor while she is alone; she is not yet that desperate. In any case there is usually company in the evenings. Sean does not distill his own sidiqui grain alcohol but he keeps a good supply, and he has black market connections for supplements of the real stuff. His friends, other men from work, like to avail themselves of his bar. Jill is not much impressed with these friends. They relay tales of their encounters with the ragheads (as they call them), business trivialities stretched to epic proportions with themselves the benevolent victors. Or they speak of other drunken nights, which are in fact most nights. “That Aramco shindig,” Michael says. “Yeah, all three girls were ugly,” Gregor replies. These two fancy themselves adventuring rogues; Gregor has brought hashish into the country in his boot heel.

“I’m like their fucking babysitter,” Sean has told her. “They’re attached to me and my bar, like bloody useless limpets.” But his choices in this way, like Jill’s, are limited.

One of these languid nights, rolled out before them like dough, the talk turns to capital punishment. "You've got to see a beheading," Gregor says to Jill. "Seriously, it's a real rite of passage, your first one."

"There's nothing like that," Michael agrees.

"Well, what is it like?" Jill asks idly. She doesn't believe either of them.

"Oh, come on now," Sean says. He frowns and gets up from the table, shaking the dregs of melted ice and sidiqui in his glass. "Who's for more?"

"I think you should tell her, Sean," Gregor says, tilting back in his chair. When Jill turns to Sean, to hold out her glass, she misunderstands the tightness of his expression. "I'm *fine* to have more," she says, and he takes the glass automatically. Michael and Gregor are both looking straight at him now.

"You cunts," Sean says, just loudly enough. This makes them laugh.

"What—?" Jill turns to them; her face is flushed and she's smiling, looking for the joke. "Right, right," Michael is laughing, and he slaps hands with Gregor.

Sean leans on the bar.

"Come on," Jill says. "Tell me a story! I'm bored."

"Fine," Sean says. "I will tell you."

—They're always on Friday mornings," he starts. He looks straight at Gregor. "Early. People start to gather right after sunrise prayer is over. It's actually almost silent the way they come into the clock tower square—they just stream in, sticking together in these little groups, all talking softly. They have the guardsmen out with trucks and guns. You wouldn't believe it," he says. Gregor exchanges a glance with Michael, but both are silent now.

"The men go to one side, the women to the other," Sean says.

"I didn't think the women would be allowed to go," Jill says. She folds her arms over the back of the chair.

"Oh yes," Sean says. He takes a slug of his drink, hands Jill her fresh one. "The women go. This is all part of how it works:

everyone is meant to watch and witness punishment.—Of course, they don't stand together. These things don't start on time, either; the people press in close together, more and more, leaving a space around the chop block and a path to the prison. Finally they bring the prisoner out and walk him up."

"Don't they fight it?" Jill asks. "I just can't imagine that they wouldn't try."

"Well, they're usually drugged. They're bloody well out of it by the time they get up there."

"Really," she says.

"Wouldn't feel much," Michael puts in.

Jill looks at him, scornful. "Well, we don't really *know* that," she says. "That's just one of those things people always say, but we don't really have any idea."

"O.K.—" He tries to wave off her mean mouth.

"They don't seem to really know what's coming," Sean says. "And when it happens at least they have the grace to make it fast. It looks choreographed—like ballet. The executioner swings the sword up high and around. Like taking a golf swing. Then down: one slice. Done."

"*Khalas!*" Michael says, making a cutting motion across his throat, but they ignore him.

"Jesus," Jill says. Then: "Is there a lot of blood?"

Sean nods. "The body sort of jerks back, a reflex. A few big spurts come out of the neck and shoot forward. Once that force is out, then it slumps over. Depending on where the executioner is standing and the force of the blow, he sometimes gets covered in it."

Gregor whistles. "No fuckin' idea, eh Mike," he says.

Jill says to him, "Definitely no fucking idea. Either of you."

"Jilly." Sean is teasing her now. "Come on."

The alcohol hazes through her; she is aware of having something withheld from her, or something twisted. She is not steady. She wants to link her faith somewhere but is suspicious. "You're not lying to me, are you?"

He waits a beat. "No," he replies.

"Then take me," she says. "I want to see it."

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Jill. I’m not taking you to bloody Chop-Chop Square, okay?”

Gregor and Michael get up to leave; Jill can tell that they wish no further part of this quarrel in which they have been complicit. After they pass through the living room Sean returns and sits at the table across from her, but he does not meet her gaze.

“Well fuck you too,” she says.

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Late on Thursday afternoon he drives out to the compound. Jill has a washtub of liquor bottles soaking in the back yard, a couple months’ worth of empty “tea ration” stock that her father is allowed from the U.S. government. She wears long rubber gloves to scrub the labels from the bottles, working until they dissolve into petaled curls of undecipherable paper, and then she puts the bottles, a few at a time, into a doubled layer of heavy trash bags and smashes them with a hammer. Sean sits in a deck chair, watches her as she keeps methodically at it.

“It’s not a bad exchange, I guess,” is his offer at conversation. She hauls up a bag, shards poking through in places. The mess goes into a blue trash bin to be wheeled over to the recreation center, where it will join hundreds of other scrubbed and smashed bottles that are disposed of at the dump out near the airport, nicknamed Expat Hill for the swelling, glittering mound of residue that carries the aroma of gin and soap.

“I suppose not,” she says after a minute. “My dad gives me the booze, I do the dirty work.” Her distracted parents have become liberal in this way, and she squirrels away evidence of her excesses. They must allow her something, here.

“I came to see if you want to drive out to Al-Kharj,” he says.

She is still sore at him. This is an offering, however, and she’ll take it; she does not know when her next moment will be.

It is clear-skied and around ninety, and the wadi smells fresh as they drive out to the dam. The road narrows as it snakes around and they get farther from the highway. Jill’s moodiness lifts as she

sees more that is new to her. Stunted mud-walled farm houses are wedged into the spaces between sections of the escarpments, seeming to be extensions of the rocks themselves; palms and scrubby desert bushes are jammed into any available crevice, shading over yards. *Allahu, al' akbar* wavers out from a village mosque, and as they pass by the gates are being closed to the road. Goats wander out, unattended, and chew into the boxes and cans that are stacked ready for disposal.

The dam rises sharply in front of them after they take a long S-curve. The wadi pinches close here, and the thick dam wall spans only a few hundred feet across. Sean pulls off the road. He parks in a small empty lot where a lone Toyota truck sits next to a shed.

"The caretaker's probably praying or sleeping," he observes as he gets out.

Jill is disappointed; this does not seem like very much, this stagnant place. It is still and soundless. The truck's motor, turned off, expels a retch into the air.

Sean is pocketing his keys, walking to the stairs that rise steep to the top of the dam. "Up and over," he says, pointing.

Jill is dubious, but she gathers up her dress, abayah over it, and follows.

The climb is arduous. Somehow, this is funny; Sean has a gain on Jill, and keeps looking back down at her, pretending that he isn't tired. The air has begun to revive her, and the wind blows in her face. They are ascending, she does not know to where, and this act of scaling something is unalloyed. Near the top Sean hops up the steps on his right foot, one at a time, clearly with some effort. When he is on the lip of the wall he looks back and he is red-faced, and his shirt has become damp from sweat. He waves at her.

"All *right*," she calls up to him, laughing. He looks good to her there, out of breath from hopping up like that, grinning like a boy. She takes air into her lungs and stamps up each step to the top, making her calves ache.

He is already going down the other side. "We're here," she hears him say. The little farm is spread out below them, the tilled rows like

a flocked cloth. Palms sprout at intervals around the pools of water collected from the irrigation ditch that runs from the dike wall.

"It's lovely!" she says, and her words are tossed back to her from the wadi. She picks her way down the steps and at the bottom the earth smells watered, clumps from residual dampness when she turns her toes into it. A sweetish tang wafts up to her, along with smoke from a smoldering compost heap next to a farmhouse across the field. Squat houses cluster beyond the farm and down a single dirt path where there are no people that Jill can see.

Sean has reached the house and motions for her to stop at the edge of the field. A man comes toward him, followed by two others nearly identical in their white thobes and ghotras. Behind them at the door is a figure garbed in black. Jill can see her face, and realizes that she is young. The girl withdraws and Jill instinctively puts her own veil back over her hair.

"It's fine," Sean says, walking back to where she waits. "He doesn't mind if we sit out under the palms."

The field is small, and Jill cannot tell what might grow here in the sandy dirt. The water comes from an underground river and gurgles up where the palms clump at a corner of the field. The leaves offer a canopy for them, and they sit underneath. Jill chooses a date from a little cloth bundle that the farmer has given to Sean. It is sticky, and juices like a wizened plum.

"It's so peaceful out here," Sean says after a while.

"It is. I love it."

He looks at her, and she cannot decipher it exactly. "What?" she says. He shakes his head then. "Never mind," is his reply. The breeze lightly whistles around them, and the palms sigh in the air.

"So you'll go back, right?" he says abruptly.

"Back?"

"Home. To college."

"Well, yes," she says. "Sure." She feels her impatience flick into a frown, smoothes it. She realizes that she has disengaged from what comes next. Why he would put it to her like this, she does not know; that she would be expected to elucidate is a mystery. She has

alighted here, and she will go again. She has not been asked anything, not explicitly, but she feels put upon, and unfairly so.

She decides to exhibit a pique, one that she will play out as humorously petulant. “Oh, you,” she says, getting up to stretch. She goes to the palm tree, lightly like a dancer. With her arm outstretched she steadies herself with her fingertips, lifts up in a mock arabesque, imagines him looking, behind her. Her long dress has become transparent in the light and the shape of her raised leg is visible. She puts her other hand on her head and wriggles goofily. About to turn back to him, she is arrested by a glimpse of the girl in black, who has come out of the rear door of the farmhouse and is watching Jill.

“Hey,” Jill says. A field separates them, they are not close enough for the girl to hear her, but Jill smiles, hoping that the girl will be able to see that. She evidently does; ducking her head, curiosity gets the better of her and she looks up again. A pigeon scuttles in front of her and the girl, holding Jill’s gaze, kicks at it. Now Jill laughs.

“What,” Sean says, but Jill shushes him.

The girl’s veil has slipped from her head now. Jill can see her eyes lighting out from her dark face. Waving at her, she does a little dance step. The girl has her hands on her veil, about to return it to her head, but first she laughs, wide and open, and Jill is restored, thinking it a lovely moment. Later, she thinks that she must have closed her eyes, causing her to miss the rush of movement before the sound. She hears a sharp bleat, nearly like a goat. The girl is struck in the head, she cowers under a barrage of slaps and chops from one of the men, and then she is shoved and pushed, through the door and back inside, swallowed up.

“No!” Jill yells out, and her cry is loud. “My god!”

“Shhh, Jill, hey now,” Sean says. She turns to find him standing behind her; he has seen it all. This churns her helplessness into fury. “How could you—”

“What,” he says.

“How could you not do anything!”

"It's horrible, I know," he says to her. "I wish I could do something."

Jill feels his hands on her shoulders, and knows that his tone is meant to soothe, although it does not. "It's my fault," she says then. "I shouldn't have looked at her."

"No," Sean says, "it's just the way it is."

She wishes that she could blame him. What she hears in his voice, the flatness and a kind of resignation, or acceptance, is the element that seems to dilute everything, and this she cannot parry.

They walk back to the truck in silence. Sean goes briskly, as if with purpose. Jill climbs the stairs in a slow rhythm. At the top she pauses at a haunting sound in the air that is like a whippoorwill, only there are not whippoorwills anywhere here, where she is so far from anything. The wind has come up and it plays symphonic tricks.

Sean is waiting in the truck; Jill steps in and clicks her door shut. She will take something up tomorrow. If it is time she has been given then there must be something that she can get out of it. Put it on her side, if not defined. She can set herself a schedule.

"There'll be a few people round tonight," Sean says, while Jill is arranging her abayah in her lap. She sees time there in his face. A small piece of it has transpired, accreting with the others that have passed over him.

"I'll go home, I think."

He starts the engine. "Have it your way," he says. They pull onto the road. She hears from him neutrality—not anger, or impatience, nor surprise. It is as if everything will roll out again the next day, she will ask him another question and he will fashion an answer as best he can, as well as he will, and it is her choice to accept it or to decline.

Jill has the feeling of slipping over a ledge, and what falls blossoms into a new, sharp sorrow. It is exhilarating. As they drive down the road the sun is setting beautifully again, tingeing the village and pouring over the walls and roofs and covering anything they have just seen.

She cranks the window down and leans on the ledge, letting the wind slam her and leaving her arm carelessly bare. She waits for Sean to yell at her but he does not. Intuiting then that she should offer him no comfort, she hums to herself as they approach the highway. His presence is now a kind of burden to her, and as long as she is with him she will hold his fears secret and they will be heavier than her own. Already she is restless. She watches him as he drives steadily, in control of the truck. He is staring at the road ahead and taking nothing in; a distant speck becomes another vehicle, and he fixes on it as it approaches in case it is something, anything, interesting.