they were so cold and remote, she thought. It was like disobeying gods.

As she rounded the corner of the square building she looked up at the willow tree and thought she saw her window. At least she had two windows, she thought. That was an omen. Then she remembered the fly on the glass. And her hands were dirty for supper.

Tangled Patterns

JANET JARRETT

The woman pressed her body against the wall and leaned her forehead against its hardness. She tightened her body against the wall and beat upon it with her fists. The dull thud came through to her with an insistent beat, and the urgency she felt lost itself in the pounding of her own fists. She leaned against the wall and let herself become the pounding and nothing more. She wished the pounding could be inside the minds of all the people she knew in the next room. She wanted to beat against their heads until there was nothing left for them either but the thudding sound.

When the pounding finally stopped, she walked to the window. The cold glass was good to feel against her cheek, and she pressed her wrists against it too and cooled them until the little pulse that was there beat slower. The pointed lights in the street below had a hypnotic quietness. If she opened the window there would be the river smell; but she would not open the window, it might bring back the pounding, and the lights below would become too hypnotic to resist.

She thought she would have to be back soon to the people she knew in the other room. She remembered how it had been when she left. The heaviness had beat upon her mind and body until the room had flattened out into a cardboard bedlam. The noise made by the man at the piano had poured through the room and stopped at the other end where it rebounded endlessly between the floor and the ceiling.

The room was filled with the people she knew and she hated to go back. She knew them all too well. They had all at one time or another brought the twisted patterns of their lives to her. She knew more about them than they knew, and being with them only snarled the tangles of her own mind. She wanted to scream at them to make them listen to her. She had learned to be alone and to straighten out her own pattern of existence for herself. Why couldn't they?

Because her mind was losing itself in the lights below, she let it remember the day she had left the man she loved.

Ann stood at the door of the cottage and looked out at the lake that lay quiet in the pink of the early morning sun. Allen had already gone out someplace, he always liked to get up when the morning was still gray. He said that morning was like a woman. You couldn't know her properly until you had seen her without paint.

She felt the wood of the door beneath
her hand and it was rough and wooden and full of splinters. She rubbed her finger against it and a tiny piece of wood caught in her skin. She pulled it out and squeezed until there was a tiny round red drop of blood. She felt an unreasoning anger at the sight of the blood. How much longer would they have to stay in this place?

She turned to look at the room. The floor was rough and wooden too and through the door she could see the big black stove in the kitchen. They were staying in this place while Allen finished his picture. He had nearly finished it now, he could do the rest in New York.

She went into the next room to look at the picture. She remembered the day she had asked Allen what it was. He laughed and said, “Why, darling, it’s us. Don’t you see that?”

She had looked at it again. There was a starkness of broken white monuments against deep blue shadows and pale yellow sand and there was a fuzzy green moon that was only half a moon and not well formed. It was unreal and impressionistic and she didn’t understand.

He was speaking, “Ann, sometimes I’m almost frightened at your mind. It’s so hard and cold. You can’t see anything beyond the surface rules of life. You’re those rocks, white and absolute. You forget that most people are fuzzy moons that don’t know the rules very well.”

She had let him think that. Let him think that she didn’t see the meaning of the two circles of water that spiralled out to meet each other and pass and then meet again on the other side when he tossed a stone into the lake water a little farther than the one she had thrown. Let him think that she wanted to go back to New York because it was an obligation instead of a pattern to be finished.

It had always been like that, if she had only known it. He had always wanted to stay in a place beyond the time that was alloted to that place. They always stayed too long with groups of people. Whenever they stayed too long the purpose of their coming had diminished in proportion to the time and when they finally left there was no reality or pattern to their having gone.

It was that way with themselves. He had never known when to leave her. Because a thing was good for a length of time, he believed that it was good for more than that time. And it was never so.

She didn’t mean to do anything about it this particular time. She never had because she had always hoped that he would see the relations of things. Perhaps he would this time.

Breakfast was nearly ready when he came in. She forgot her irritation when she saw him. She could almost believe he stayed too long because that was his pattern and perhaps his pattern was as good as hers.

They didn’t say much at breakfast because they never did say much to each other. She knew his thoughts as well as he did and their conversation was always about his thoughts, so there was no need to talk. Over their coffee he leaned back in his chair and said, “Do you know what I’m thinking?” She looked at him and she knew, but because she hoped she was wrong she said she didn’t know.

“I don’t want to go back to New York. The picture’s almost done, but there’s no reason for going back except to do those damned murals. You know I hate to do them; so I think I’ll write and tell them I’m sick or something, then
we can stay here the rest of the summer and through fall. I'm tired of doing things I'm supposed to do."

Yes, he had always been tired of doing things he was supposed to do. Her anger came back coldly and with a reason, but she spoke slowly and carefully, "But Allen, you promised to do the murals, they are waiting for you. You can't forget your obligations like that. We wouldn't enjoy staying here on stolen time. If you go back now you can have them finished by next spring and then we can plan a vacation, if you like."

She had chosen her words carefully, but she might as well have spoken without thought. The effect on him couldn't have been worse.

"Of course you'd want to go back. Can't you ever forget the rules. It's part of your well-ordered existence that we should go back. How you even forgot yourself long enough to marry me is more than I can see. Come to think of it you probably planned it anyway. Well, I for one, am sick of planning. I'm staying here and to hell with New York and murals and plans. You go back if it's so important. Maybe I'll see you around sometime."

Even as she packed to go back she didn't mean to. Maybe she was wrong after all, maybe patterns didn't get you anywhere. She started to go in where he was painting to tell him that. But when she saw what he had done to the picture, she only said, "I'm leaving now," and walked out of the room. In one corner of the picture against the pale yellow sand he had painted the blackness of a high fence.

Ever since, when people had spoken of her patterned life she had let them talk, let them believe that the world was really black and white for her. It was easier that way, her pride could never be hurt. Sometimes she almost believed in the pattern herself. It was when she faced the hopeless tangle of her own thoughts that she hated the people she knew. She had learned to pretend that her life was patterned. Why couldn't they?

As she leaned against the window, the lights in the street below drew her to them until they almost were at her fingertips. She decided to open the window and let the lights and the smell of the river do their work, but the door of her room was opened quietly, and one of the people she knew came in.

"I'm so glad you're alone, Ann. There's something I want to talk to you about."