

ARTHUR, ARTHUR

by edward I. williams, III

Part I

She turned her face from the strands of sunlight that filtered through the window and fell upon the bed. Her hair lay across the pillow like an open fan, and the curtain beside her was swaying in air of the vent. The frost against the window was slowly receding, inching its way back to the perimeters of the glass. She remembered sliding back herself, slipping away from and out of the circumstances of that summer of '68.

She had pointed her life in certain directions, had gone so far as to give it boundaries, had planned and schemed, all with the sole intention of attaining happiness. But the truths she had made for herself fell apart that summer. The boundaries broke, and the security she had planned so absolutely dissolved before her eyes. But that had been nearly two years ago, and though she had not forgotten, she had certainly tried. The efforts had led each, one by one, almost inevitably to this hour. Now she lay beneath the weight of blankets, trembling like a child that has just come in from the rain. It seemed irrelevant, somewhat ridiculous in an odd way, but she wondered what they had done with the note, she wondered what their reaction had been, and she wondered why she had failed.

She thought of Arthur as she always did and of James whom she seldom remembered. They had both played important roles in the debacle of that haunting summer; Arthur through the telegram that told of his suicide; and James through the chaos that ended in divorce.

She remembered locking herself in the room and refusing to see anyone after she had been told of Arthur's death. She remembered it distinctly, as if it had happened only yesterday. She remembered weeping the night away and refusing to see anyone, even Mother. She remembered especially the vague sense of comfort she had felt in hearing the older lady's pleas and the fists against the door. She remembered finding, somewhere in the solitude of that night, a secret satisfaction. She had locked the door. She had denied herself to others. She had reached deep within herself and struck back. She had felt the pain, had become imbued in it, almost to the point that it resembled joy. There were occasions, many times afterward, when the two feelings became inseparable. They had merged into one

somewhere in the night. They had merged the morning after. They were one when she stalked down from the room and entered the kitchen, asking matter-of-factly, in a distant, stoical voice:

"Do you want breakfast?"

Part 2

She had married James in '66 and taken a job as clerk in a small office. Between the times of their marriage and the divorce, their relationship, for the most part, seemed either strained or distant. Still, the marriage might have continued indefinitely had Arthur not shot himself in the spring of '68, because neither of them had the strength or the will to terminate it. They had grown used to one another in a rather somnolent way. It was just that somnolence, that gradual hypnotism brought about by the pages of his books and the hours of her job, that bridged the gap between their differences and held them together. It served as a sort of go-between.

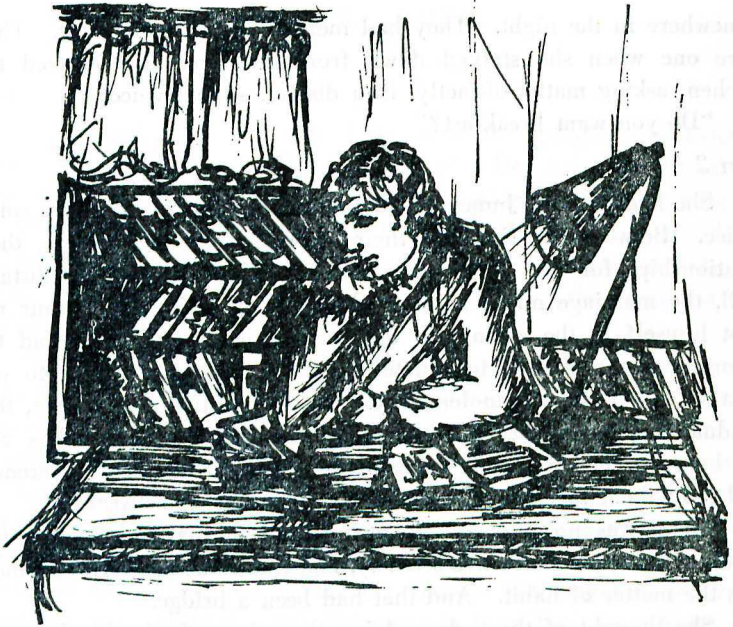
There was no intensity of feeling and no particular happiness between them, but there was security, and there was comfort, and there was the matter of habit. And that had been a bridge.

She thought of those days, lying there beneath the blankets and watching the frost on the windows. She remembered sitting across the room knitting or reading novels while he studied. She saw the desk littered with papers and books and pamphlets. She saw James sprawled across it, tinted by the light of the lamp. She saw the cloud of cigarette smoke hanging in the sallowness of light; and he seemed older, mellowed, more paternal than he really was while sitting there. The fluid haze of smoke and light blurred his features and lightened his hair. It gave her the impression of a dream, it seemed so soft. Before her eyes closed, she longed to go to the image and make it real. She wanted desperately to give it essence, to have it there before her, tangible. But it was the kind of longing that is filled with despair. And the desire roared inside her with the despair until she felt it was unbearable.

He sat at the desk in sweater and slacks, and she sat in the rocker, wearing a robe loosely. The desk was littered as it always was, books and papers and medical reports stacked one above the other; and she was thinking to herself almost in a whisper:

"It must have happened like this. It must have been like this."

He happened to pause and noticed that her eyes were watching



him. His mouth broke into a smile, and his voice was comfortable and soft when he spoke:

“What are you thinking?”

He had started a fire earlier in the evening, and the flames were casting shadows across the room. She enjoyed the warmth, felt secretly drawn to it in a strange way. She felt herself burning with them, felt the passion rising inside her and burning to touch. Her wide eyes started from the hearth, and inside she was saying, “That it must have happened in this manner.” But when she answered her husband, she said:

“What are *you* thinking?”

“I asked you first.”

“Well then, answer me first. What were you thinking?”

“Something to the effect that I could use a break.”

“Oh, that serious! Do you want some coffee?”

“No.” And again his voice reached out and soothed her, stretched across the room and touched her, settled on her lips.

“Tea?”

“No.”

"Then, how about a drink?"

"No. Not while I'm studying."

"Well I can't think of anything else to offer," she shrugged.

"Then you're not thinking very hard."

She knew that he could tell what effect his voice was having on her. She knew that he could see the flushed, excited look her eyes betrayed, and her blood pulsed in time to the rhythm of the fire.

"I suppose I'm not."

"Come here, then."

Her eyes froze, her hands clutched at the yarn and the needle. She didn't want this.

"Who?" coy and sarcastic in a fabricated, womanly way.

"Stop your stalling, Janis, and come here."

"Why?" her voice sounding distant, cracking with the fire, aching in the flames.

"And stop being so naive."

"It must have been like that!"

"Now come here so I can see what's . . ." and his voice broke into pantomime, the flames and the shadows washing away the words. The yarn rolled from her hands like a ball a child would roll across the floor. She smiled weakly, afraid that his eyes would read the fear in her face, trembled, and rose from the chair feeling trapped.

Part 3

She didn't know how long she had slept or what time it was when she woke. The frost had disappeared, and the room was bright with rays of sunlight falling across the furniture, so she guessed it must be afternoon. There were voices issuing from somewhere in the room, but she was too weak to make them out distinctly. Gradually they came alive, and she managed to discern the ending of the conversation before the closing of the door shut them out again.

". . . that she'll be fine now, at least physically. God only knows what's on her mind, and I can't be of much help there. As far as I know, Dr. Gilbert is as good a—, well, a—, I'd suggest him over anyone else I know. But there's no need for me unless something drastic happens, which I doubt will. If she asks for anything else, try to pacify her. There'll be scars of course, we can't help that, but . . ." which must be the doctor, she thought.

". . . never get used to it, though. It just seems one thing after

another. Sometimes I wish I'd never met him," which must be mother, and the reference was obviously to Arthur.

". . . certainly can't blame yourself for anything. Not this either. I've known you a long time, Ann; and I can't say that I've ever met a finer woman."

"Oh, I don't blame myself. But, still, I feel responsible in an odd way. She's so much like her father. She was distant, she was difficult to raise. She loved him very much."

"I'm sure that she did. It's been hard on you."

"That night that Arthur died, she locked herself up and wouldn't see anyone. And when morning came, I don't know—it was—like, like nothing had happened. She never mentioned him, never went to the grave. Then James. I—I just don't know anymore."

"Well, you get in touch with Dr. Gilbert, and if you need me for anything else . . ."

Then the door snapped very softly, and she drifted to sleep again.

Part 4

The next few days passed without incident. Janis, who felt terribly weak at first and lapsed into involuntary periods of sleep, stupor, and consciousness, gradually improved and became coherent. The nurse was dismissed so that Janis and her mother were alone in the expansive house, and things more or less became settled, more or less.

Behind the surface normality, there remained the unanswered questions, the unresolved problem of her attempt on her life. The crisis had passed, the physical balance of life or death, but the enigma that had led up to it remained; and neither the mother nor the daughter mentioned it. They seemed resigned to let it pass. They seemed willing to let it die like some still-born secret and slip unnoticed into the past.

It happens that in a course of a person's lifetime, an incident often occurs that threatens his security. A phantom rises before him and looms there insolent and insurmountable. Rather than face it, a person will often turn and run or ignore it or rationalize it away. Anything to escape the insane glare of the sheer nothingness that confronts him. If the phantom is larger than he, he has any number of ways to reduce its enormity and flee from it. So it happens that terribly significant things, or things that should have been terribly significant, are reduced to memories or ironies or theories: nothing.

Always though, there comes a time when the facade crumbles, and

he remembers, if only for a second, and if only vaguely. But the second is long enough, the vagueness sharp enough to cut deep inside. The remembrance gnaws at his insides, still unresolved, still unforgotten, and still insolent. In the end, what has been reduced is the person himself, and the realization of that fact is what it is that starts to eat away inside. The stoics and the masochists and the martyrs carry the wound to the grave and somewhat enjoy doing it. A lesser person hates every second of it and is tormented almost beyond endurance.

The wound is hidden; the phantom is eluded; and something that should have been terribly important becomes only a mask, and not even tragedy.

It seemed as if the mother and the daughter had resolved themselves to exactly this course of action, because neither mentioned the near fatality.

They talked of trivia and only in broken, unconnected dialogue. Then a tension developed and began to burgeon. The old lady ignored it, had refused to acknowledge it, and went about her work as she was accustomed. She brought the tea in the afternoon, the firewood in the evening, and breakfast in the morning. They hardly spoke at all, but when they did, it was the lady complaining of the cold and the daughter agreeing despondently. There were times though, late in the evening beside the fire, when even the mother felt the tension. The eyes of the daughter burned, the hands trembled, the face went pale and haggard.

Not an hour expired without Janis turning the phantom over and over in her mind. She felt it odd that nothing had been said, and the wound began to bleed. It ached beneath her ribs, ached like an empty, hollow feeling. And where was she to go? What was she to do? She had tripped in her attempts to flee, and something inside her seemed to cry out. She thought of Arthur without respite. And a week passed without incident. But always, at every moment, there was the woman, seen from across the room or beside the fire, and always the need, the futile effort to go to her and explain, the phantom still insolent.

She caught herself at the window thinking, nearing the moment, reaching for the key, restless.

Part 5

She had stood at the window for quite some time without speaking. A vacant, distant expression had settled in her deep, wide eyes, and

her lips were screwed up in a nervous, rigid manner. Beyond her silhouette, the crest of trees stood black and erect against a colorless sky. There was a strange, almost nebulous beauty about her that betrayed the frailty, the haggardness, and the thinness of her face. The robe she was wearing fit carelessly around her shoulders, and her hair was disheveled and unattractive, but her eyes were tormented and restless and beautiful. Inside, she was struggling with herself, trying to bring herself to speak, but failing miserably.

Her mother, who was dusting behind her, was bent over like a crab. She looked shrewish and tragically old to Janis.

"And everything will be fine, you'll see," in a motherly, reassuring tone. "We'll move the piano upstairs where it used to be when you were a little girl, and I'll have the room redecorated."

It irritated Janis to talk of the room and plans Mother had made because what she was thinking was so antithetical.

"Mother."

"We'll go through the attic . . ."

"Mother," her eyes pleading and hopeless.

"Oh, you'll get used to me. But there'll be rules, you understand."

"Please don't, Mother."

The older lady paused and looked at her daughter in confusion.

"Don't talk about it anymore." Janis' eyes, full of sorrow, apologetically met the older, harder eyes that seemed full only of age.

"But, Janis," she replied, "You always wanted . . ."

"I'm not staying, Mother. I'm leaving tomorrow." And the old feeling of pain and joy washed over her like a wave. "I'm leaving tomorrow. I'm sorry, but I have to go."

"Why, of course you don't. You haven't anyplace to go. Don't start this, Janis. I'm too old for this."

"I'm sorry, Mother, but I can't stay. You have to understand that. It's not your fault or anything. But I just don't want to. I can't."

"Of course you can. That's absurd. Why couldn't you?"

"I don't know. I just can't. I couldn't ever. I just couldn't."

"But Janis, I'm your mother: your mother. I haven't got anyone but you."

"Oh, I know you don't. I know you don't, but I can't help it. I don't have anyone either."

"Then stay. You'll feel better tomorrow. You'll see. You have

to stay.”

“But you don’t understand. I don’t have any choice. I have to leave.”

“No you don’t. You stay here and we’ll be comfortable. We’ll get along.”

Janis turned to the window and looked out in desperation, her eyes soft with sorrow, a cloud of despair hanging over them. “You know we’d never be comfortable. We never have.”

“But we could start.”

“Oh, how could we? Mother, we’ve never been close.” Then her face turned to the old lady, and her eyes were affirmative. “You know we’ve never been close. We don’t even know each other.”

The older eyes contracted and looked away. “We didn’t, that’s true enough. But that was back when you were a child. That’s all changed.”

“No, it’s not.” Then she paused, and a frail hand ran across her mouth. “I’ve thought about this for the last few days. I do have something I have to say. Maybe then you’d understand or maybe you wouldn’t, after all. I don’t know.”

“You don’t have to explain anything. If it’s about last week—”

“It’s more than that. It’s a lot more than that.”

“Oh I don’t see why you can’t let things be and stay.”

Janis’ eyes filled with despair, tormented in the stare the older lady gave, and hardened with confusion.

“There’s lots of reasons, maybe.”

“Oh, Janis, listen for once. You never listened. Even when you were young and I wanted you to listen, you’d go to—,” stopping herself before the word escaped.

“I always went to Arthur, I know. That’s—I don’t know how I’m going to say this. I don’t know where to start.”

“You don’t have to explain anything, Janis. I understand.”

“I don’t see how you can, Mother, because I don’t even understand it myself.”

“Understand what?”

“Many things—Daddy. How you felt about him and me.”

“He was sick. I felt sorry for him, but I couldn’t help . . .”

“Oh, I’m not condemning you. I’m not implying anything. I know how sick,” and her hand swept through her hair. “You know

that I loved him.”

“I know. You always went to him. But Dr. Gilbert said you shouldn’t talk about . . .”

“I don’t care what Dr. Gilbert said.”

“It’ll just upset you.”

“No it won’t. For God’s sake, Mother, I tried to kill myself! How will this upset me?”

“See. You’re getting upset already.”

“I’m not. I’m not, though. Not like that.” Then with heavy eyes, she added, “That’s over now. I couldn’t go back to that.”

“Janis, why don’t you pray? Why don’t you even try. God would listen. He could help.”

“I can’t do that. You know I can’t. That’s not any better than the razor blades.”

“Janis!”

“It’s not. It’s not any better.”

“You don’t know what you’re saying. That’s, why Janis, that’s blasphemy.”

“But I don’t believe in god at all! I don’t feel drawn to him. I don’t feel repelled, or influenced in any way. I never have. Never.”

“Oh, stop talking like that! This has gone too far. You’re not well yet.”

“I am though. And I have to leave, and I have to tell you something first. I can’t stop now, Mother. Once you go to a certain point, you’re more or less committed. I can’t turn back now because I really believe in certain things.”

“You don’t even believe in God. How can you believe in anything if you don’t even believe in Him?”

“That’s just it. Believing in him wouldn’t be anything. If I could, if I honestly could, that would be easier for me. It’s like everything I don’t understand, I could, well, I could label that god. But I can’t anymore. I can’t just turn to him, or make him, because of fear or confusion or doubt.”

“It’s more than that, Janis. You have to have faith. You can’t expect an explanation for all things.”

“I don’t think I need an explanation anymore. Not really. Oh, Mother, I didn’t want to end up talking about god. You’ll just be angry. I don’t want that.”

"Then let's drop it. Let's stop talking so much. It's so depressing. I know! I've got an idea! You help me go through the attic."

"No."

"Janis, *try*. Try for once."

Her face was urgent, and her eyes were strained; she felt helpless before the old lady. "I am trying."

"No you're not."

"But I am! I am. I'm going to see Arthur tomorrow."

"You're what?"

"I'm going to visit the grave."

Something strangely fearful settled in the lady's face, something desperate and wild. "I don't think you should, Janis. It would be too much after last week," the words sounding distant and almost hollow.

"I've already decided, though. I want to. I have to, now. I don't expect you to understand, Mother. I never understood myself.

"I felt all along that I was different. I didn't try to be. I didn't her again, as if in a dream, began to pulse involuntarily: the pain and the joy, the love and the hatred, the fear and the desire. Her wide eyes looked at the floor and came back up to the emptiness that Mother had reserved for her.

"I felt all along that I was different. I didn't try to be. I didn't intend it to be that way. I even fought against it at first. I've thought about Arthur, about Daddy, quite a bit lately because I refused to before. After that night last week, I had to because there was nowhere else to go—I couldn't turn to—."

"You don't have to talk about this. I don't think it's wise."

"Why don't you understand what I'm trying to say?"

"Because it's unimportant, Janis. It's over. It's past."

"But it's not! Well, in a way it is; but nothing really ends. Not even when it dies. It just gives way to something else, effects something in a special way, almost becomes a part of something, even though it's dead."

"You're talking nonsense."

"I suppose I am. But didn't you ever wonder, even when I was small, why we never talked? Didn't it ever bother you?"

"You always liked Arthur better. That's all. I knew it. I knew it all along, and it used to hurt to see you go to him. But I couldn't

very well tell you not to. That wouldn't have helped, would it?"

"No," with a sad smile. "I did love him."

"I know you did."

Inside, the confusion began to swell, and it rose until she felt helpless again. She knew she should say it, she wanted to terribly. "But what I felt for Daddy—you can't imagine really how attracted I was—it didn't make any sense at all."

"Janis, this is all unnecessary."

"How did you feel? How did you feel about him?"

"Your father wasn't a well man."

"I know that. But that's not what I asked. I want to know how you felt about him."

"Dr. Gilbert said it was nothing on my part. He said Arthur was that way long before . . ."

"I don't care what Dr. Gilbert said, or anybody else. I just want to know how you felt."

"I don't think it's any of your business how I felt towards him."

"I don't suppose it is."

"It's not. It's not at all, how we felt about each other."

"But I often wondered anyway."

"Then, you're finished now?"

"Finished with what? Wondering?"

"Yes."

"No. But I've more or less accepted the fact. So in that respect I guess you could say I am finished."

"And you're going to see the grave, still?"

"Yes. I must. I owe it to him."

"And you insist on leaving?"

"Tomorrow."

"I don't see any sense in it. I think it's unfair for me."

"I know you do. But you don't understand about Arthur and me."

"I understand that he's dead. He's dead, isn't he?"

"Yes. He's dead, now. But what I feel isn't."

"That's natural enough. Any daughter would say that. That still doesn't explain why you have to leave. Do you resent me that much?"

It was like an arrow piercing her breast, it was so direct and unexpected. The hard, almost marble eyes of the old lady narrowed and fixed on her daughter.

"Think it over is all I'm asking, Janis."

"But I have already; for a week that's all I did. Don't you see? Mother, I loved him."

"I know, Darling. I know you did."

"No you don't. How could you? I loved him like he was a—," and the words caught in her throat, wedged themselves somewhere inside her mouth and refused to be uttered. But it was unnecessary. The lady's face blanched with sadness and read the message: like he was a lover.

"I still do," Janis whispered, somewhat surprised that she wasn't crying. "That's why, when I married James, that I couldn't love him. Because of what had happened with Daddy. I never knew James. I never gave him a chance. It was just Daddy."

"You don't have to say anymore. You don't know what you're saying. You can't. I don't want to listen anymore."

"I only want you to accept it is all. Just accept it. That's all I ever wanted. That's all that ever mattered." And she felt her eyes begin to fill.

"I think you should forget that you said any of this."

"I can't. I'm going to the grave, and you don't have to go with me; I want to be alone. Then I'll try and find James, but I wish you would smile or cry or something. Don't just sit there. Don't just sit there!"

But the lady sat immobile and unmoved, unthinking. Her voice was coarse when her lips parted: "Why? Do you feel ashamed?"

"I did at first, but not any more. No, I don't. I know you won't understand this—but I'm not guilty anymore because I feel that in a way, in a sense, what we did was right. You don't believe that, or understand that, I know."

"I don't believe you. I don't want you to talk anymore. I never did. You never let me close to you, and I never wanted to be there anyway."

"I felt it. Maybe that's why I loved Arthur so. I felt it."

"You don't feel. You don't feel anything that you can't touch. You don't even believe in God." She was grim; firm; her cheeks still ruddy and her eyes hard. "You've got a lot to answer for, Janis."

"I don't know if I have or not, Mother. When I was young, I felt that I did. I always—I always said to myself that I was too young

to stop it, and that I didn't know really what was happening because I thought I had a lot to answer for. I still don't know if I knew exactly what was happening, and I don't think he did either. But it happened. And, well, in a way, I did know because I felt it and I didn't want to feel it, but I didn't want to stop it either. Because sometimes I just had to touch him. It was strong to just reach out and . . ."

"And you feel better, now that you've told me. You're not sorry. You think that you've hurt me."

"I don't know. I feel a little better for myself. I don't know how you feel."

"I feel like I've mothered a bitch, is all. That's how I feel."

Janis' eyes flinched and her face stiffened with anger. She looked away, hurt and angry, and walked briskly past the lady.

"I'm sorry you feel that way."

"It doesn't matter. You run along."

Janis wanted to say something, but when she turned to face her mother the words were not there. The old lady's face broke into a wry, endlessly sneering smile, and her eyes burned intensely. Her face broke into a screen of wild patterns, and her teeth pushed back the thin purple lips and framed her mouth into a wild, happy smile.

The transformation shocked Janis. And it dawned on her like a clap of thunder. The lady was deliriously happy.

"You knew all along, didn't you? You knew all the time! You drove him to it!"

But her words failed to move the elder lady, did not in any way shake the smile from the ancient face or avert the burning eyes that froze in their sockets.

"You knew all those years!"

The pallid face lacerated with creases merely smiled, hideously alien from all that was around it.

Part 6

It was early November, and a stiff wind raked across the cemetery. It was overcast and cold, and dead leaves rushed between the bare columns of trees and the blunt edges of marble. Save for the deep green of grass and the sallow tint of dying leaves, the day was colorless. The trees, the brush, and the tablets of marble blended as in a faded photograph into a oneness that was dismal and dreary. Clouds hung in the sky like metal-grey weights, and rain was threatening.

A monotony had set in, a vague sameness about every object, so that when the car crept along the winding lane and pulled to a stop, it seemed out of place. The bright red of enamel set against the pallor of the day obtrusively and almost in defiance. When Janis first stepped from the car, and the gust of wind scraped across her face, she shuddered and managed to say as the door closed behind her:

"I won't be long."

She had made it a point to bring flowers, had carefully chosen the yellow rue, and then gone to ask directions. His grave should be a few yards before her. She was somewhat afraid as she neared it, fearful of seeing finally the carved letters in the firm stone, but she felt at the same time a sense of joy.

Beyond her and to her left, she noticed a small pond that had filled with leaves. A child, dressed in a blue coat and wearing yellow knee socks, had wandered off alone and come upon the ducks. They sat motionless on the water, among the dead of fallen leaves, and looked at him without interest.

He was a young child, not more than two or three, and his laughter startled her at first. There was something about it, something about the cadence of that young laughter that seemed incongruous with the marble, the sky, and the leaves.

It wasn't the child so much as the voice of the child that startled her. There was something elusively familiar about it, something melodious and free. Here was this deep laughter, this impish, almost demonic laughter that seemed so full of life; and all around it, nothing but inertia and silence. Had not the wind been blowing, had not the eerie, lifeless sounds the winds make been cooing so forlornly, she might have overlooked the laughter. But the wind had sharpened her senses. It was brisk and stiff and biting. And amid it all, there in the whirl of the chilling wind, this deep, throaty laughter! It was almost as if she remembered it. Something irresistably natural about it attracted her to it, something haughty and lustful. It called out like a memory and left her startled.

Then there before her eyes she saw the marble tablet and she froze.

She was taken aback. She was disarmed. She felt empty and aching. Her knees trembled, her eyes filled, but she struggled to control herself. Beyond her, the laughter continued, natural and throaty. She heard it like a faint whisper calling from somewhere afar. Her

cheeks were scarlet, but the wind had taken the color from her face, and she looked like a ghost. She had pulled her hair behind her head and placed it in a braid so that she not only felt much older than she really was, but she looked it too. She felt weary but with a certain tranquility born of endurance.

Arthur's name was caught in the marble and cast before her like a monument. With her fingers, she traced the indentations that spelled out the letters and she felt the cold against her skin.

She remembered walking into his room as a little girl and seeing it strangely barren, not understanding when Mother explained that he had left. She remembered again, the telegram that came many years later when he killed himself. She remembered James and the hard eyes of Mother, the endless nights spent running from herself and others, always, it seemed, back to Arthur.

So it was different for her to see the name spelled out in letters that were hard and firm. It was cold, and the winds were bitter. The rustle of leaves and the laughter of the child melted into one and touched her. She felt the arms embrace her, felt the breath against her lips and the deep kisses, the wind against her face. She felt the darkness fall upon her and heard the sounds within her throat. She saw that the flowers would be blown away, so she unfastened the braid in her hair and used it to clip them down. Her hair caught in the wind and flew across her face and billowed behind her, the laughter of the child still singing in the background.

Walking back to the cab, she felt weak, but she knew that her trip had given her strength and that someday the strength would solidify into something else and become happiness. But for now, she felt sad, with only a hint of joy to pacify her; no longer guilty; no longer resentful.

As the cab pulled away, she glanced back to the spot where she had stooped and placed the flowers. The braid had failed utterly; the rue were blowing in the wind; and the child, the elfish child, was laughing wildly and chasing after them. She watched his hands clasp at the yellow flowers and heard his voice through the window. Her face broke into a smile, a tentative, weary smile. The yellow legs carried him after the rue, and his blue coat flapped behind him. When the cab passed the exit, she wondered what she would say to James. She had no idea how he would react to seeing her. But she felt she

no longer needed God nor death nor Arthur's illusion to get her by. She thought of the child again, and her eyes were tragically happy.

November was beginning, the pond was covered with leaves, the marble was cold and firm, and the child was laughing wildly. She loved Arthur without guilt, deeply, and without regrets. She was no longer sorry for what she had done, and she felt on the threshold of something new, November closing out a world she had known.

It began to rain very slowly at first, but by the time the cab reached James' apartment, it was pouring. She felt somehow that she belonged to the rain, had always belonged to it.

THE END

For Steven

Antonio Criscimagna

The evening paper reports
the death of a young man
whose life now gone distorts
not the evening's rum and coke.

A woman reads
aloud, over the sound
of crushed ice, the deeds
of someone whose record
is now in order.

As he was buried
without ceremony, they wonder
what insurance he carried,

for a God-fearing man
would a proper burial demand.