A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES

by

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INTRODUCTION

Let us say an image occurs to me: a little girl in a red sweater jumping rope and singing an old nursery rhyme; or another little girl being pushed by her father in a swing; or perhaps it is just a sound -- the banging of a screen door, a clap of thunder, someone playing "Chopsticks" on a piano at night, or even the silence itself. The image reverberates in my mind; it returns again and again to haunt me with its potential meanings. At last I must try to put it on paper. The image expands, becoming a series of images, the very flux of experience, and in this flux I search for form. This form, or shape, is the meaning. Through form I try to catch the image that originally haunted me with all its allusions, its tonalities, and its cadences.

I write, then, about life, the experience of living, the meaning of people's lives. I write of the flux, the passage of time, change, impermanence, the ephemeral quality of life. But more than this, I write of people. I write of hidden fears, anxieties, neuroses, private agonies; I write of internal pain, stifled emotion, buried hurt: even more, of loneliness, isolation and solitude. In all their relationships -- mother and daughter, teacher and student, father and child, friends, strangers -- there exists
an inability to communicate. Each is caught inside his own head and his own body, behind his eyes and his skin, in a tangled mass of nerve fibers. His only means of communication -- through words or gestures -- are at best pathetic and ineffectual. His encounters, whether with reality or other people, lead to disappointment, disillusionment, misunderstanding, and occasionally, fear.

Each encounter is an epiphany: the meaning of the experience is made concrete through an image: thus, Mrs. Theodore Sutten stares at a frozen lake. With the clarity and succinctness of a poem the emotion is revealed, still intangible, elusive, and but half-glimpsed. Caught each inside his own head, these characters can only express themselves through dialogue and action. Emotion and thought must be interpreted from external movements, from that which can be seen or heard or touched. That is reality: we can never really go into another person's head.

The writer, however, is not so limited as this might suggest, for although an image appears to be external, the complexity of its structure provides subtle revelations not present in other styles of writing. Rather than cataloguing the particular nuances and ramifications of an experience, the image embodies the abstract, making of itself a paradox containing at once the tangible and intangible qualities of the experience.
In the same manner the story as a whole tries to embody the experience of being alive. Analysis, in contrast, would leave the event tedious, dissected, bloodless, and thus, lifeless. Evaluation is further complicated by the nature of today's social structure: we cannot assume what values are held in common. The writer becomes an artist who must express himself through his selection of subject matter and detail. Like those whom he writes about, he too has a need to communicate. His search for meaningfulness is a search for organic form within the flux of experience.
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A Day in the Park
Corrine was walking on the narrow sidewalk beside the wrought-iron fence surrounding the city park when she passed a little girl in a red sweater who was jumping rope. She could hear the words of the jump-rope song very clearly when she went around the little girl. It was one of those old chants repeated in a high child's voice, such as she herself had sung as a child.

"In came the doctor. In came the nurse. In came the lady with the alligator purse."

Corrine stopped at the corner and waited for the light to change. She looked back curiously at the little girl, who seemed intent on her song and the jump rope, but unaware
of the traffic in the street or the dark quiet of the park. Then Corrine found herself looking beyond the fence to where a man stood almost hidden in the shadow of a tree. He stood motionless, barely lifting a cigarette to his lips and lowering it again, his eyes fixed on the little girl.

A car honked loudly, breaking the silence of her thoughts. Looking up, Corrine saw the green light and hurried across the street, hugging her coat closer, her heels clicking loudly on the pavement. She went through the swinging glass doors of the dime store and headed down the aisle that she always took to the toy department. It was a familiar route, one that she often took to forget her problems. She could enter again into a child's world of make-believe; she could again be innocent and pure.

So Corrine walked slowly past stuffed animals, pink giraffes, collie dogs, pandas, button-eyed teddy bears, a rocking horse with dappled spots, red balloons, blue balloons, and live parakeets in a gilded cage. She watched a wooden monkey bobbing down a pole, clickety-clickety, all the way down.

She stood and watched the electric train clattering through metal tunnels and over bridges. Then she passed a rack of shiny bicycles and a little boy kneeling, fingering the spokes. There were shelves with boxes of games and puzzles and nurses kits with stethoscopes. Sets of dishes with painted flowers
and lacy edges and matching cups. A doll's house with a tin roof and tiny chairs and tables and beds. A music box with a little queen that danced to the tune of London Bridge. Is falling down, is falling down. Then she pulled the cord in the back of a talking doll with yellow hair and blue glass eyes.

The doll said: "I'm Chatty Cathy. Who are you?"
She pulled the cord again.
The doll said: "Let's pretend." The cord stuck and she went on saying, "Let's pretend. Let's pretend."

Corrine put the doll back on the shelf and hurried away.
She was ashamed, but now the shame yielded to urgency.
Retracing her steps to the front of the store, she went outside again where she stood for a moment, uncertain, blinking at the glare of the evening sun. People pushed and jostled and elbowed their way past her, but she scarcely noticed. The street was crowded with rush-hour traffic, the air loud with their impatient horns.

Across the street Corrine saw the little girl in the red sweater, the jump rope dangling in one hand. She was backed against the fence, looking up half-trustful, half-frightened at the man leaning over her. He was touching her hair, his hand barely moving, brushing her shoulder. She seemed unable to move, caught up in his eyes, as immobile as he.
The light was red. Corrine could only watch. She saw the little girl getting in his car. She tried to shout, to stop it, to keep it from happening, but by the time she got to the other side of the street they were gone.
Who's Afraid of the dark?

Deanna Kay Crabbs

It was eleven-thirty and the traffic moving past the drugstore on Main Street had thinned to a few cars. The drugstore was dark except for a light in the back room where a young girl stood untying her apron. She turned when the owner's wife entered the room.

"I know it's late," the woman said. "Does your mother mind?"

Rachel shook her head. "I don't think so. She hasn't said anything yet and this is the third time this week. Of course, she's got the baby on her mind and all."

The owner's wife leaned forward. "How is the baby?"

Rachel hesitated. "She doesn't seem any worse."
The woman sighed and looked at the account books in her hand. Rachel folded her apron and laid it on the counter. Then she put on her jacket and moved to the door. She was careful not to let the screen door slam when she left.

outside the wind was cool. The red flasher at the train-crossing down the street was blinking in the dark. Rachel walked past the traffic light at the intersection and down Ninth Street. She passed under the fluorescent lights of the filling stations and the neons of an all-night diner. Then she walked past houses with yellow porch lights and curtains at the windows and white picket fences and tall hedges. She walked faster in the shadows to the next corner and the next street light.

A car drove past when she was standing under the third light. It was a red car and that was all she noticed the first time. She was almost to the next corner when it approached her again. She saw the yellow headlights spreading across the blacktop as the car pulled to the curb beside her and stopped. A man with a jockey cap on his head looked at her from behind the steering wheel.

"Want a ride?" he said.

Rachel shook her head. She walked on, but the red car pulled forward and the dark face of the man grinned at her.

"What's your name?" he said.

she was standing in the shadow of an elm tree. "Why
do you want to know?" she asked.

His gleaming little eyes watched her. She shifted her weight from her right foot to her left. Somewhere a dog barked. Piano notes moved up and down the scale as someone practiced in a house with the lights dimmed and the curtains drawn.

"I have to go," she said. "I'm late already. My mother will worry." She was biting her lip.

"Wait," he said. "Stay and talk to me." He pushed the door open. His face was dark and unshaven beneath the jockey cap.

She shook her head.

"I want to take you for a ride," he said.

Rachel turned and ran. She did not look back. The streetlights were far apart. The shadows were moving on the sidewalk. The low-hanging branches slapped her face. She was breathing hard.

Then she saw her own house and ran across the wet lawn. She jerked at the doorknob. Her hand was shaking. She closed the door behind her and leaned against it.

The room was almost dark. The only light was the black and white glare of the television screen in the corner of the room. A woman was sitting on the divan. She held a baby in her arms.

"Mama?"
"Is that you, Rachel?"

"Yes, Mama. It's me."

She walked over to the divan and sat down beside the woman. The movie on the television showed a young man kissing a beautiful girl. Rachel saw that her mother wasn't watching. In her arms the baby was moving. Her tiny fists clenched and her body in the nightgown jerked. Her eyes were tightly closed. She was crying in her sleep, her head moving from side to side and her body heaving with sobs.

"Mama?"

The woman didn't answer. She rocked the baby in her arms and crooned softly an old love song as the tears ran down her face.

Rachel got up and left the room very quietly. She turned on the overhead light in her bedroom and got undressed and put on her cotton pajamas and sat cross-legged in the middle of the bed. She was going to pray, but there was nothing to pray for except streetlights and doorlights and neons and flashers.
Midge was careful not to slam the car door when she got out. She stood for a minute with the sheet music tucked under her right arm. The wind was blowing her hair. Somewhere a dog barked. She turned and walked to the back of the house and entered. She latched the screen-door behind her and stood with her face pressed against the screen. A light came on in the kitchen behind her. She did not turn around.

"Midge, is that you?"

"Yes, Mother."

"Do you know what time it is?"

"No."
"It's nearly two-thirty."
Midge closed her eyes and said nothing.
"Did you hear me? I said it's nearly two-thirty."
"I heard you."
Her mother moved farther into the room. Her houseslippers brushed across the tile floor. She stopped several feet away.
"Where have you been?"
Midge walked away from the door. "I just felt like driving." She went past her mother and into the kitchen.
"Midge, this can't go on. What will people think?"
"I don't care what people think." She laid the sheet music on the table and sat down in front of it.
"Would you like a glass of milk?" her mother asked.
"I'm not thirsty."
"It would make you feel better."
"I said I'm not thirsty."
Her mother poured the glass anyway. She set it on the table in front of Midge.
"Try to drink it. You'll feel better."
Midge was staring at the wall opposite. She paid no attention to the glass of milk.
"Has it started to rain?"
Midge shook her head; the wind was louder now.
"I'm glad you broke up with that drummer," her mother said.
"If you please, would you like me to do it?" the girl offered.

Miss Buelher looked at her tall, slim figure, draped in white, and her serene blue eyes. Nodding, she let the girl take the cup from her and pour the steaming coffee, smoothly, efficiently.

"Is anything the matter?" Sybil ventured to ask.

Miss Buelher started. "Of course not. Why should you think such a thing?" She fastened a hard look on the girl,

"I don't want to talk about it," said Midge. "I mean, what did we know about him?"

"Mother, please."

"You couldn't have loved him. Not a boy like that."

"Mother, for God's sake, shut up!"

She heard thunder moving closer like the distant roll of drums.

"It's going to storm," her mother said.

Midge did not answer.

"He wasn't worth it." Her mother paused in the doorway. "You're too good for him, Midge. You know that, don't you?"

Midge did not look up.

Her mother stood waiting a long minute. Then she turned off the light and left the room.

Midge sat hunched over the glass of milk in the dark with the sheet music spread out on the table before her.
A Private Kind of War

Deanna Kay Crabbs

Through the beaded curtain she could see students sitting at the tables in the red candlelight. On the platform before them sat the long-haired bard with his head bowed over a notebook lying open across his knees. He spoke softly, ignoring them, reading almost to himself:

"A fire leaping brightly, a flame burning, rising, an ash-white world lying naked under a mushroom cloud. . . . They will become we and he will become I and stumbling we shall drown in a can of booze . . . . I am waiting for insanity to release me to a world of grey cigarette smoke. . . . When the day comes you will be bombed out of your mind and then we will stand together on the beach and sip cyanide."
He saw her standing in the doorway and stopped. Janey could not see his eyes behind the dark glasses. She parted the beaded curtain. Peter's friend was sitting alone at a table near the platform. He was lighting a cigarette from the candle on the table. She crossed the room and sat down facing him.

"Hello, Edward," she said.
Edward nodded and dragged off his cigarette.

Peter stepped off the platform and joined them. He closed his notebook and laid it on the table in front of him.

"They didn't clap," said Janey.
"They never clap," said Peter.

She saw him put his hand under the table. She glanced at Edward, but he went on smoking and said nothing.

"I heard you read tonight," said Janey.
"Not really," Peter said. "You didn't really hear me."
"Yes, I did. I was standing in the doorway and I heard you read."

"You don't understand," Peter said.
"It was about a war," said Janey.
"No."
"But I'm sure that it was."
"You're wrong. Let's talk about something else. Would you like a coke?"
"No," said Janey.
"Then a cigarette?"
"No."
He lit one for himself and blew the smoke across the table. Janey was staring into the candle flame.

"Why did you come tonight?" said Peter.
"I came to see you."
"Did you hear that, Edward? She came to see me."
Edward nodded.
"You came to hear me read," Peter said.
"Yes," said Janey.
"But you can't hear me read," said Peter. "Isn't that right, Edward?"
"Will you stop it," said Janey. "Will you please stop it!"
"It wasn't a war," said Peter. "Edward, tell her. Tell her that it wasn't a war."
"No, it wasn't a war," said Edward.
"I don't care," said Janey. "I don't care what it was."
"You ought to care," said Peter. He grabbed her hand and held it tight over the candle flame.
"Peter, let go. You're hurting me."
"I tell you that it wasn't a war. Can't you see? Can't you see that it wasn't a war?"
"Yes, Peter. Yes. Now let go of my hand."
"You can't see," said Peter. "Why can't you see?"
He shoved her hand into the flame. She screamed and jerked away from him.
"Why did you do that?" she said.
Peter didn't answer. He was staring at the wick of the candle and would not look at her. She turned to Edward. In answer Edward let his cigarette butt drop in a cup of coffee. The ash sizzled and went out; the cigarette turned dark as the water saturated it. Janey pushed her chair back and stood up. Her hand was hurting.

"Anyway it's your war," she said. Then she turned and left the room without looking back.
The Spinster

Deanna Kay Crabbs

Miss Bueiher had gone outside without her coat and now stood shivering in front of the school building with her arms clutched across her chest. Her bare arms were covered with goose flesh and the cold wind penetrated her thin dress. She heard two voices in the dark, their laughter quite distinct in the clear night air, and squinted through her glasses trying to locate their origin. Then the couple came into sight under the arc of a streetlight opposite her. They had their arms about each other's waist, walking slowly, their voices low and muffled. While she watched, the boy broke away, stooped in one quick movement, and scooping up a handful of snow, plunged it
under the girl's coat-collar. The girl screamed and ran off laughing and squealing in a shrill voice as she frantically tried to pluck the snow from under her blouse.

It's already melting against the heat of her body, thought Miss Buelher, and shivered. The boy and girl had already turned the corner and disappeared into the dark with only their voices carried back, that same deep bass laughter and the shrill protesting, then silence again.

Miss Buelher scurried back into the brightly-lit corridor of the school with its gleaming tile floor and scrubbed concrete walls. She paused at the cafeteria door to peek in at the banquet. Her eyes had to readjust to the dark candle-light before she could discern her Latin students, who lay sprawled about the low tables eating with their fingers and sipping grape-juice while they talked. They were wrapped in sheets which were pinned at the shoulder and more or less hampered their steps when they tried to move about. They were laughing and calling out to each other with a great show of hilarity.

Miss Buelher retreated to the Home Ec. kitchen to see if her coffee was done percolating. It was, but her hand shook as she took a cup and saucer from the cupboard and tried to pour it. Hearing a movement behind her, she turned and saw that Sybil Benedict, one of her students, had followed her into the room.
"To think about, well, things." Sibyl faltered, her fingers plucking nervously at the sheet.

"You shouldn't go out at night alone. It's dangerous for a young girl. Any number of things could happen to you. Surely your mother doesn't approve of your roaming about like that."

"Oh, she doesn't know---" Sibyl hastened to correct herself. "I mean, she has never told me that I can't go for a walk."

"It's dangerous," said Miss Buelher with careful finality.

Sibyl refrained from answering.

"And how do you find the banquet?" Miss Buelher said, changing the subject quite abruptly.

"Oh, it's very Roman."

"Roman?"

"I mean, well, you know. With the candles it seems like we're in a different world. The candles were a very nice idea, don't you think."

"No, I firmly disagree. I didn't want candles, but I let them talk me into it and now I'm sorry. It's entirely too dark. And the chaperones didn't show up. I'm very upset about that."

"But you're here."

For Sibyl that seemed to solve everything, but Miss Buelher was visibly flustered. She tried to drink her
coffee, but knowing that Sibyl's eyes were fastened on her trembling hands was too much for the elderly woman's presence of mind.

"I must go see how the banquet is going," she said, drawing herself up with as much dignity as she could muster. She nodded coolly to Sybil, who lowered her eyes with humility. Then she left the room, wondering at her own behavior, for Sibyl was one of her best students and they usually got along quite splendidly. Sibyl was ordinarily a very well-mannered girl, with her lesson always prepared, and sitting in the front row with her eyes never straying, ready to raise her hand to recite. She never passed notes or whispered. At most, she day-dreamed on occasion. She was the ideal pupil. Miss Buelher had trained her for the state Latin Contest, and, although she hadn't placed, she had received honorable mention, which quite satisfied Miss Buelher. It was all the more puzzling then why the girl should disturb her now.

Looking into the dark room of the banquet, Miss Buelher felt a premonition of fear. Fear? How absurd! And yet... what was it? They seemed innocent enough. Their boisterous laughing and talking. Their sprawled figures wrapped in white sheets. If only they had listened to her. Candle-light was quite unnecessary. She peered about the room, but her vision was restricted by the dim light. If only she could see! too dark! too dark! What is it that they
whisper in the shadows? What forbidden words and secrets are exchanged in those dark corners? What stealthy touches? What furtive kisses? Oh!

She fled back to the kitchen, pausing at the door for breath, desperately trying to regain her composure before facing those eyes of Sybil Benedict's. As she stood there, half leaning against the doorway for support, and one hand clutched to her chest, she overheard a conversation in low voices.

"She has been absent all week." That was Sibyl's voice, those clear bell-like tones.

"Do you know what they say?"

"They say that she is pregnant."

"Yes. I talked to her sister. It happened on a back road. In his car. She won't tell her parents."

"What will she do?"

"She hasn't decided. Her sister says that she lays on her bed and cries. She's not eating. He wants her to have an abortion. She keeps saying, 'But a live baby, just think!' And her sister says that she must have awful nightmares because she wakes up screaming in the night. But she won't tell; she won't!"

"Oh!" From the tone of Sibyl's voice, Miss Buelher realized that the girl had seen her shadow. She heard them rise hastily from the chairs and come toward her,
their sheets rustling about their legs. They passed her with their faces blank and their eyes cast down.

Miss Buelher watched them glide toward the dark doorway of the cafeteria. The other girl leaned toward Sibyl and whispered, "Do you think she heard?"

"Sshh!" They disappeared into the room.

Miss Buelher tried to sort her thoughts. Was this what they talked of? So young -- to know such things! She shivered. That look on Sibyl's face. What was it? She must talk to the girl. Sibyl was only fifteen or sixteen. Evidently she could not talk to her mother.

Miss Buelher made her way slowly to the doorway, her movements sluggish, as though she were moving through water. She felt drawn to the door and at last reached it. She entered the room, bewildered by its darkness and tried to discern Sibyl's face among the others in the candlelight. Someone bumped against her, and murmured, "Excuse me." With a shock of recognition she saw that it was Sibyl and that her blue eyes were wide and glistening with fear. No, not fear, terror. And longing. Those luminous eyes in the candlelight. That pale face and quivering lips. Clutching her white sheet about her.

"Sibyl!" The commanding tone of the elderly woman's voice arrested the girl.

"Yes?"

"I heard."
The appeal in Sibyl's eyes was like a scream and made Miss Buelher tremble. She continued in a firm voice, "I must ask you to tell the principal tomorrow what you know of this matter."

She saw the mask pass across the girl's face, the eyes become opaque, the stare vacant, and only her lips continued to quiver slightly. She barely nodded and passed on, out through the door, leaving Miss Buelher to stand awkwardly in the dark room, clutching her elbows, her arms covered with goose-flesh, as she peered into the dark corners of the room and wondered why she had let them talk her into allowing candle-light instead of the bright over-head electric lights that would have been so much more appropriate.
"Notice the stroboscopic effect of this painting," said Miss Wetzel. "In an attempt to render motion the artist has fractured the image of a nude woman into overlapping geometrical planes. Notice the oblique angles and the jagged lines, the contortion of the facial features, the dismembered body, and the shattered limbs. Observe the counterpoints and the crossing diagonals which splinter the image. The leaden forms erupting from the dark background are arranged in such a manner as to produce a sensation of movement, not an illusion of fluid life-like movement, of course, but an effect geared for the mind and so constructed as to counteract the external reality of the painting, or in other words, its inherent immobility. Are there any questions?"
She paused for a fraction of a second, then continued, "The figure itself, you will notice, is a complex pattern of intersecting lines and planes systematically arranged in relation to the total configuration. No doubt Mrs. Sutten was under the influence of the Cubists when she executed this painting."

The students stirred restlessly. Miss Wetzel counted them rapidly, fifteen, no one missing. She seemed relieved, then glanced at her watch. They were even on schedule.

"Now if you will follow me to the next room we will look at Mrs. Sutten's plastic sculptures, also a product of her sojourn in Mexico. Please keep together. I don't want you wandering about the hotel bothering the guests. Remember that we are very privileged to have this opportunity of viewing the latest work of the distinguished Mrs. Sutten."

When the group had left the room, one girl remained idling before the painting of the nude. She studied the robot-like precision of the lines several minutes, then, losing interest, she turned to the bay windows that looked across the lake. The lake was frozen over and the ice was covered with drifts of snow like great white dunes.

"Did you like the painting?" A woman's voice had interrupted her thoughts.

"What?"

"The naked lady."
"Oh. Yes. That is, I guess so."

"If you don't like it, just say so. A person should always speak out. Say what you feel."

"Yes, of course. But I'm not sure what I feel."

"Nonsense." The woman emerged from the shadows carrying a glass of sherry in one hand and a cigarette in a gold filigree holder in the other. "You are an art student?"

The girl nodded. "Yes, I am."

"Then you must have opinions. To be an artist you must feel things. You must see things too. If you don't see them you will be a bad artist."

"You must be Mrs. Theodore Sutten," the girl said.

The woman laughed. Her laughter was gay, but shrill. "Theresa, dear. Theresa. Call me by my first name. The other sounds so stuffy." She sipped from the sherry, winking at the girl. "You are noticing my costume, aren't you? You are wondering why I am dressed the way I am." She was wearing a red silk jacket, burgundy pants that flared like a pasha's, green eye shadow, and a sultan's turban. "I will tell you," she said. "I am celebrating. I'm throwing a party for myself. To welcome me home. Oh, didn't you know? I've just returned from Mexico."

She finished her sherry and set the empty glass on the window sill. Her eyes were bright as she stared at the glazed surface of the lake stretching away cold, blue, and impersonal to a dim horizon.
"Have you ever been to Mexico?" she asked.

The girl shook her head.

"There is no place like it. You must go there some day. Really you must. It is like no other place in the world."

Her earrings shivered. "It's a splendid place. The sun is so bright there. You can see the heat in crinkled waves in the air. The people lay in the sun on the beaches until they are so dark that you only notice their teeth when they laugh. You catch a love for it like a fever. It is all part of the sweltering heat, the torrid nights, the passion and the squalor and the beautiful black-eyed children. Los niños. They run half-naked through the streets. The little beggars! I gave them candy and money. 'For favor,' they said. 'Señora.' They followed me everywhere. They followed me home through the streets like a cortege. Oh, I felt like a queen, yes, a queen, the way they followed me. Los niños."

"Did you paint them?" asked the girl.

"The children? No. Never the children. They were too beautiful to paint."

She tilted her head to one side, watching the frozen landscape back away. Her lips pouted in silence. The girl was standing near enough to smell the expensive perfume and now she could discern the tiny wrinkles beneath Mrs. Sutten's make-up. She was not a tall woman, but she seemed tall with the turban held so proudly on her head.

"Did you paint much while you were there?" asked the young girl.
"Yes. Of course," the woman laughed. "They are all around you. I painted under the famous young artist, Juan Juarez. Have you heard of him? No? He was my instructor. Surely you've heard of him, although he is very young."

The girl shook her head. "I don't think so."

"I wanted to pose for him," said Mrs. Sutton. "I wanted him to paint me in the nude. I used to beg him to do it. But there was no persuading him. He preferred the young Mexican girls whose bodies were still ripe and firm. He said it was obscene for an old woman to insist on posing."

Her lips trembled. She lit another cigarette.

"Oh, he was a hard man. Yes, so cruel. He would shout at me. He would call me an imbecile and say that I had no talent. Often he left me in tears, dishonored, disgraced, ridiculed. And yet I wouldn't leave him. He mocked me, reviled me; it made no difference. I would endure any amount of abuse just to be near him. You have no idea." Her eyes were very bright now. "He had such passion in those dark angry eyes. Oh, yes, he could curse my painting, insult me, drive me to no end of despair. But he was such a man."

The girl felt uncomfortable in the stillness. She felt that Mrs. Sutton had forgotten her presence. "Why?" she said, breaking the silence. "Why did you let him treat you so badly?"

The woman looked at her. "I loved him," she said simply. "Does that shock you? No? How could you know what it's like? You're so young. Only a child. Seventeen, eighteen?"
The girl crossed the room slowly, toward the door which led to the display of plastic sculpture, but before leaving the room she stopped again to look at the painting of the nude. The lines were calculated, mechanical, precise. Somehow the girl could not help thinking it unoriginal. The she noticed for the first time that it was dated prior to the spree in Mexico. Mrs. Theodore Sutten was still standing at the window when she finally left the room. The aging woman stood quite motionless, the gaudy silks clinging to her body, her head held high under the turban, her dark form silhouetted against the glare of the ice, silently staring across the vast white planes of the frozen lake.
A Day in the Park
Deanna Crabbs

Jim Henderson paused a minute at the outskirts of the park to kneel with his camera in hand, rapidly adjusting the focus as he watched his daughter Terry through the lens-finder. She was scampering up an embankment, catching at the grass with her hands because of its steepness, and calling back "Hurry up, Daddy!" She paused at the top, rocking back and forth in her short yellow dress, with a smudge on her forehead and her tangled blonde hair falling in her eyes. He snapped the picture, then let the camera fall back against his chest, where it bumped lightly, suspended by a leather
cord from his neck, as he hurried to catch up with her.

She was running again, her legs flying outward and the yellow skirt flapping about her pants. Jim followed more slowly, watching her head for the swingset to pick out the highest swing. She hoisted herself into it, squirming about until she was settled. Her legs dangled in mid-air, her feet were at least six inches above the ground.

"Come swing me, Daddy," she said. "You're so slow."

He adjusted the camera once more, tried to catch that look of exasperation and impatience, then circled the swingset and began to push her seat from behind. She squealed and clutched the chains tighter and demanded to go higher. Jim watched her swing out, away, then back, her yellow skirt flaring.

"Higher!" she begged. "Higher!" And he watched her fly away from him, swing back, then fly away again, her blonde hair blowing. He tried to take another picture of her, like that, slanted, at a dizzy angle.

"I want to stop," said Terry. "I'm tired of swinging."

"Already?"

She nodded vigorously, and Jim let the swing slow by itself. He reached out a hand to touch her shoulder as she came to a stop. She looked up at him, craning her neck about, and wrinkling up her nose. He smiled.
"whose girl are you?"

"Yours."

"And who else's?"

"Mommy's."

He nodded, watching some children at a distance who were playing on the monkey bars. There was another swingset and other children swinging on it, a couple of teeter-totters, a merry-go-round, and a game of blind-man's bluff. One of the park benches was occupied by an old man with a newspaper spread across his lap. He looked up from time to time, blinking, as if suddenly noticing the children. Jim heard their voices, shrill, laughing, whining. Terry squirmed restlessly under his hand and he knelt down beside her, squatting in the dust, steadying her swing.

"I want to ask you something very important," he said. "I want you to try to understand." He pushed a stray wisp of hair out of her eyes.

"I want to swing some more," she said. "Will you swing me, Daddy?"

"In a minute."

He looked at the dusty ground below the swing where the grass was worn away by so many feet pushing and dragging to a halt. He frowned, lost in his thoughts, until Terry began twisting about once more.

"I want down," she said.
"In the meantime I want you to be good for Mommy. Will you promise me that? Will you be a good girl?"

She nodded, wiggling about until Jim helped her slide to the ground.

"I like picnics," she said.

Jim laid his hand on her hair.

"Daddy?" He had stood up, watching the farther side of the park, and didn't seem to notice her tugging at his hand.

"Daddy, let's have a picnic."

"Not now, Terry."

"Why not?"

"We didn't bring a lunch. It wouldn't be a picnic without sandwiches."

"Then next time."

He was quiet, his eyes focused in the distance.

"We'll have a picnic," she said again. "All of us and the baby too. Let's do it next week."

He didn't answer. Terry threw a small pebble as far as it would go, still he paid no attention. So she hurried away, running toward the teeter-totter, and Jim, still standing by the swing, lifted his camera, focused on her yellow dress and flying legs, then let it drop again without having taken that last picture.
"Eighteen."

"Eighteen." The woman smiled. "Only a child. What could you know of it? What could you know of the passion that drives a woman to forsake all pride, all self-respect? To let herself be laughed at and called a silly old woman. To know that everyone talks about it. About the money she spends on a man young enough to be her son. Yes. That Juan Juarez. Oh yes. He had a way with women."

"Then why did you leave?" the girl asked timidly.

"I had to come back," the woman said. "I had no choice." She shrugged and lit yet another cigarette. "He left me. He found another foolish middle-aged American woman, also without talent, but with even more money."

Mrs. Sutten surveyed the room with narrowed eyes. The walls were hung with her work, the disjointed counterparts of people who had posed for her, now confined on rectangular canvases and framed in wood. Her glance lurched drunkenly from painting to painting, while her face registered wonder, then amusement. "My husband arranges these exhibitions to keep me happy, he says."

She looked back at the girl, who dropped her eyes. Mrs. Sutten broke into loud laughter. "You know what you've forgotten?"

"What?"

"You've forgotten my paintings. That's quite unforgivable. I'm an old woman and I need to be humored. Now go look at my paintings. I've talked too much as it is."