

children gather their books held together with leather straps, Helga hands them little lunch pails (an anachronism here, Mulgrave wonders), kisses them one by one, they leave, walking carefully, single file, across the parking lot, against the arrows to the left of the aisle, as instructed exiting at the walkway on Heath Street, then five minutes later Henry Kisses Helga and leaves, carrying his briefcase, exiting at the walkway on Yonge Street, where, in the notebook, he takes a street car south to Wellington Street and walks over to Bay Street to his office, where he has a position writing geological reports for a company promoting stocks in a gold mine. (Henry came up with this idea for a scenario when the farm is lost during the Depression but the father, they discussed, could always find work because of his fine appearance and superior intelligence).

Helga can be seen clearing the dishes, washing them in a dishpan in the sink, after which she emerges from the front door, an apron over her housedress, in cold weather and on the farm she will wear a heavy cardigan, and in full view she proceeds to sweep the front steps and shake the mat, indifferent to the cars that pass on all sides as she wields the broom and when she is finished she stands for a moment and looks into the distance, making Mulgrave reach for his notebook and rapidly write gazing out at the fields yielding their growth to the morning sun, Mulgrave has no problems with chronology, after all, memory operates outside time, he has several hard covered note-

books, one of which will be for the farm at Elora before the Depression drove the family to the City, in the meantime Helga has reentered the house.

The kitchen curtains closed.

He went on making notes, snippets really, his mother coming down the stairs, from one year to the next, she comes down the stairs, and when she gives him a hug and a kiss, her skin is slightly moist, but no more than a flower in bloom is moist: you cannot put down in words such desires for all the world to read, and her skin has a fragrance of its own, he can feel and smell her skin, his pen stays in mid-air, but he cannot see her features, and trying to put a face on the body was like being under an anaesthetic counting backwards from ten, he halts at number seven, he has a vision, a woman weeping, don't stop now, the doctor urges, go on, six, five, four...

As if he sought oblivion.

For one thing, the dark blinds at the bedroom windows hung slightly away from the glass, bits of light from the parking lot floodlight penetrated the room, Henry in bed beside Helga in the semi-darkness knows she is awake, wants to comfort her, tells her, we can love each other anywhere, we've slept together in stranger places, remember the time you were locked out and we slept in the shoe store where I worked? so that Helga drew a little closer, she, I can't even read in bed with that silly little lamp, and Henry,

that's the way it used to be, saving on electricity, I suppose, it's an authentic lamp of the period, Henry wanting to hold her, nothing has changed between us, then after a while he asked what's the matter and Helga said I just can't relax, I keep hearing motors and car doors slamming, we're supposed to be living in a farm house 'way out in the county, in peace and silence, he, we could get ear plugs, and she, then we might as well stay in separate rooms if I can't hear you sleep, he, you mean I snore? she, no, no, you make sounds I'm used to, I can tell by your breathing if you're having a good dream or a bad one, or how your writing's going, your breathing keeps changing and I want to hear it, even in my sleep, and he, drawing away, says, it's just for a year.

It was after months of monotony, moving the kitchen curtains back and forth for the binoculars, that Helga decided to leave the curtains permanently parted; if she was going to be stuck in the house the rest of the year, she too would use binoculars, there is that grey Oldsmobile again, she thought he was an elderly man with his daughter, but just now he leaned over and gave the girl a non-paternal lingering kiss full on the mouth before opening the doors; in her sights now is a couple in a white Audi 5000, she crying, he staring straight ahead through the windshield; perhaps Helga will also write a book, *Life on the Parking Lot* or something like that.

Dark of the Moon

A Story by Sharon Butala

Janet and her friend, Livie, and Livie's boyfriend, Nathan, get out of Nathan's car and then stand uncertainly listening to the faint laughter and occasional muted shriek coming from the darkness on the far side of the parking lot, across the space that must be grass, between them and the tall black pines whose uppermost silhouette they can see hard against the starry, luminous sky.

"No moon tonight," Livie says.

"The dark of the moon," Janet says

softly, and shivers. The summer night is cool at this altitude, out here on the edge of the forest.

"Can't see a goddamn thing," Nathan says. "Well, let's strike out. They aren't going to come for us." Crickets, or is it frogs, are singing loudly and steadily with an immediacy that the human voices don't have. The three of them stumble across the gravelled parking lot behind the row of parked cars, trying to find their way in the dark. When they reach the

slowly rising sweep of grass — they hear it against their sandals and feel it on their bare ankles — they suddenly see firelight not so far ahead, just inside the forest's edge. It flickers and glows between the straight black trunks of the lodgepole pines. There must be a clearing ahead. It's been so dry up here that open fires are forbidden except where the park attendants have dug pits and circled them with rocks.

"Those stars are incredible," Janet says.

The others don't answer her, which doesn't surprise her, she's used to that, and Nathan walks straight into a metal barbecue stand that the park people have fixed in cement in the grass.

"Uh!" he says. "Damn!" The bottles in the case of beer he is carrying rattle alarmingly. He backs up and feels his way around the stand.

"Oh, look," Livie says, excited now. "There's Brian and Annie."

"Did you think we had the wrong party?" Nathan asks her, amused, but they are all walking faster now toward the bonfire which has grown larger as they near it, and the people standing or sitting around it with bottles in their hands, their faces rosy with firelight.

"In this blackness we could still have the wrong party," Janet says, "and none of us would ever know." Her voice rises lightly at the end, but neither Livie nor Nathan pay any attention to her.

"Hey, somebody's coming," a voice ahead of them says, and a few people turn to peer into the darkness through which Janet, Livie, and Nathan are walking. Then they are in the circle of dancing light, saying hi, exchanging the case of beer for three opened bottles.

"How come you're so late?" Brian asks, one hand thrust into his trouser's pocket, the other holding a beer bottle that is wet from the tub of melting ice that must be sitting somewhere nearby.

"I had to work till eleven," Livie says.

"Where's the food?" Nathan asks. "I skipped dinner. I'm starving." Brian points behind them, deeper into the woods, past a cluster of pines.

"Back there."

There is an awkward moment for Janet and Livie when Brian turns back to the people he'd been talking to and Nathan leaves them to circle the fire and squat, talking, beside somebody he knows. They are still looking around, trying to adjust to the scene, but everywhere people seem to be locked into conversations. The couple on their right who have been talking quietly, their faces close together, begin to kiss, and laughter breaks out among some others they can't see, who are standing far back in the forest.

"Come on, Janet," Livie says. "Let's go over to where they're cooking."

They circle the fire in the path between its radiance and heat and the cool darkness of the night, behind the backs of the people who stand or sit facing the fire. Janet doesn't know anybody here. They walk a few feet through absolute black toward the metal barbecue stands on the other side of a ring of huge pines and find

another group of people, all men this time, standing together talking, occasionally reaching out with their long-handled forks to turn pieces of meat which are cooking on the barbecues in front of them.

"Hey, Livie," a man says, sounding pleased to see her. She moves around the barbecue to hug him and he bends to brush her cheek with his lips. "Glad you could make it," he says, holding his fork lightly in both hands, balancing it.

"I had to work late," she says. "It smells terrific."

"I figured that," he says. "Won't be much longer till we can eat." He turns his head to look questioningly at Janet who still stands on the other side of the barbecue.

"Oh," Livie says. "I'm sorry. This is my friend, Janet. I talked her into coming with us tonight. Janet, this is..." But a conversation next to them which suddenly grows louder, drowns out her voice so that Janet hears only his last name, which is Baker.

"Hi, Baker," she says, and when he grins at her, interested because she has unexpectedly called him by only his last name, she sees how the glow from the charcoal fire in front of him — even through the smoke that drifts upward from the cooking meat — makes his eyes glint. She moves around the barbecue toward him.

A woman is calling Livie, at first she doesn't appear to hear, then, without speaking again, Livie turns and goes through the night toward the voice.

"Look at the stars," Janet says to Baker. "Just look." He lifts his head and looks. They stand together staring up, while the meat beside them drips juices which hit the hot charcoal and sizzle. High up, above the pines which are unexpectedly, gently swaying at their black, mysterious tops sixty or so feet above them, in the vast distance beyond that, there are the stars, shining with a pure, brilliant light, a hard brilliance that takes Janet's breath away. She almost falls, and puts her hand out on Baker's arm, apparently to steady herself, but really because she is afraid.

She feels the wrinkled softness of his shirt and his hard, warm forearm under that, and amazingly, he sets the fork down, draws her to him, and holds her against him with both his arms around her, his head still raised to the stars.

Janet is on top of Baker, leaning over him so that her long, dark hair sweeps along his chest. She's laughing. Tonight there is some moonlight which the curtains can't fully shut out and she can see how his eyes and teeth gleam as he looks

up at her, smiling. She lets herself fall gently toward him till their chests meet. She puts her arms under his neck and her mouth next to his ear.

"For some reason I keep thinking of this movie I saw. 'Heartbreaker?' Did you ever see it?"

"I don't think so," Baker says. His hands are on her waist, resting there gently. He slides them down over the curve of her hips and then up to hold her rib cage tenderly between his palms.

"Peter Coyote and Nick Mancuso, or something. They're these best friends in New York. Peter Coyote is an artist and he has this model." Baker begins to turn his hips slowly to the right. She realizes he wants her to turn so they can lie on their sides facing each other. She knows he isn't really listening, but this doesn't silence her. Even as she turns with him, sliding her leg down by his longer one, she is thinking of how to tell him the next part in an interesting way.

"And his model is really a nice girl, but she's a call girl, too. And she loves him, the artist. But he doesn't love her." She pauses a moment. Baker has found her mouth and is kissing her so that she can't speak. It's almost as if he is trying to stop her from talking. "So one night the two friends and the model wind up in bed together. You know how things like that can... happen..." She pauses, knowing that for a second, at least he is listening.

"Yeah," he says, his husky voice rising attentively. Encouraged, Janet goes on.

"And then, later, she sees all these artists and people around him and she's really sad, and she says, 'I know I'm not interesting or smart. The only interesting thing about me is my chest.' She has these big breasts, you see."

"Are you just about finished this story?" Baker interrupts to ask, but he's laughing and he takes a handful of her long hair and gives it a teasing tug. Janet kisses his mouth, then whispers, "And then she says, 'The other night?'" She kisses his forehead. "You loved being inside me..." She kisses his chin, and she knows by how still he is that he's listening again. She remembers how the actress spoke, her intonation, the pain-filled way she turned her head away from the artist to deliver her next line. "You're a heartbreaker," she says.

Janet waits. Baker says nothing. "I don't know why I keep thinking of that." Or maybe he hasn't been listening. "It was a good movie," she says.

He rolls over so that he is on top of her, spreading her legs with his, and puts his mouth, hard, over hers.

"Who was that?" Janet asks. She never, not in a million years, meant to ask him that question, but the look on his face as he returns from the living room where he has been talking on the phone so takes her by surprise that the question is out before she quite realizes she has spoken.

"My wife," he says. Janet stops chopping the celery, the quick, hard crack against the chopping board ceasing abruptly, then beginning again. "My ex-wife," he amends, opening the cupboard where he keeps his pots and pans.

"I didn't know you'd been married," Janet says.

"Yeah, two kids." He sets a glass casserole on the stove beside him.

"Does she live here? In the city?" She tries to sound casual, and, in fact, succeeds.

"No," he says, "in Vancouver. She married again. She phones sometimes about the kids."

"Should I chop the almonds?" Janet asks. Sometimes, when they are together in his apartment the phone will ring and he will talk a little longer than is polite. Somehow she always knows when the caller is a woman. Is it his manner then?

"I bought slivered almonds," he says. "Bad form, I know." They smile at each other in a playful way, suddenly intimate again, and a little shiver runs down Janet's back.

"I've never been married," she says, leaning on the cupboard still holding the knife, watching him as he works. "I wish I had been."

"Hah!" he says. "Don't wish that."

"Why not?" she asks, teasing, setting down her knife. He is working with the chicken now, stripping the skin off the pieces and setting it in a pile to one side.

"Because," he says slowly. "Because it's... pretty hard, to be married."

Janet reflects on this, on the way he has spoken so carefully without looking at her, keeping his voice light, stripped of emotion, which reveals to her all too clearly, how deeply he feels, although about precisely what, she doesn't know. He glances at her then, and smiles again. "Time to put it all together," he says, stretching out his hands to take the celery, and now he speaks in an entirely different voice, the one she is used to hearing.

"So," Livie says. "You've been getting it on with my friend Baker." Her voice borders on unfriendliness, so that Janet looks up from her salad and studies Livie cautiously, who doesn't look up from hers. Janet can't think what to say to Livie in response. Yes?

"I like him a lot," she says, finally. "I think he's a nice man." She eats a little salad. "How are things with you and Nathan?" This seems like a strange thing for her to say, and she can't think why she did, except because of that funny tone in Livie's voice.

"Yeah, he's a nice man," Livie says. "Nathan and I'll probably get married one of these days." When Janet looks up, surprised, smiling at her, Livie adds hastily, "Well, it's no big deal. We've been living together for almost a year. You know that. And we've both been married before, so it isn't exactly first love."

"I suppose," Janet agrees after a minute. For some reason she finds herself feeling like crying. Livie suddenly relents, or else the emotion that Janet has sensed her to be full of today, ever since they sat down to eat, can't be contained any longer.

"I... we'll get along fine. We really care for each other," Livie says, "and I... he... he's a nice man." The two women smile tentatively at each other, although Janet is thinking that Livie had meant to say something else.

"A nice man," Janet says, and laughs. "Well, he is," she says.

"Nathan or Baker?" Livie asks in a careful tone. She is looking at her salad again, and Janet can't figure out what's the matter with her.

"Both of them," she says, shrugging, not smiling now.

"Nathan for sure," Livie says. "Baker, not so sure." But she refuses to explain or elaborate when Janet questions her.

"I think you must have had an affair with Livie," Janet says to Baker. They are driving somewhere in Baker's old car through the late fall evening, and Janet thinks that now and then she can smell the old dead leaves, like smoke drifting through the silent air.

"Didn't you know that?" Baker says, surprised.

"No," Janet says.

"I took it for granted she would have told you. Don't women always tell each other things like that."

"Yes," Janet says, and sighs. She cannot imagine why it is whenever she gets news she'd rather not hear that her whole insides go dead. Her bowels feel as if they have turned to cement, her stomach loses all hope of sensation, and she feels as if she will be forever unable to rise from wherever she is sitting. "But she didn't tell me. I... just... figured it out."

"Clever," Baker says. His voice has changed again. That lightness she has heard every once in a while is back, his

unconscious way of hiding what he is really thinking, which, of course, reveals to her that he is upset. Angry? Sad over the loss of Livie? Or is it something else? What else could it be?

"Are you angry with me for mentioning it?" she asks him, finally.

"No," he says. "You have a right to ask."

"I don't think I asked you," she says.

"It felt like a question to me," he says. Janet watches the steady place ahead of them where the road meets the night sky. Now her hands, resting palms up on her lap, feel dead, too. She forces herself to turn her hands over so that her palms are touching the warm wool of her skirt and don't feel so unprotected, bruised even, by the air in the car.

They arrive at the house they have been travelling toward. The hostess, opening the door, glances swiftly at Janet, whom she has never seen before, then her eyes move to Baker, she breaks into a smile and reaches up to receive his hug. Janet is reminded of the way he hugged Livie in the park months before.

Oh, well, she thinks ruefully, what can you expect from a man you meet in the forest in the middle of the night. This thought delights her so much that she smiles with what appears to be an eagerness and warmth at the roomful of strangers.

Baker is sitting on the side of the bed holding a cigarette in one hand and an ashtray in the palm of the other. The smoke drifts past his bare arm to curl across Janet's naked hip where she lies with the lower half of her body curled around him. It is cold in the room, but neither of them seem to feel it. She lifts herself and puts her arm across his thigh, her palm on his knee and then runs her hand down the back of his calf following the contours of the muscle.

"I like your leg," she says. Her hand reaches his ankle and she pushed it on to feel his long instep and even his toes. "I like your feet, too," she says. He flicks the ashes from his cigarette into the ashtray which he moves away from her head. "I love men," she says. "Despite my mother teaching me that I should hate them." Baker laughs briefly, but doesn't speak.

Janet sighs and lies back again, straightening her legs and not touching him. He glances at her, then goes back to staring at the wall across from him. She looks up at the ceiling.

"Did you ever see the movie, 'Heartbreakers'?" she asks. Her voice is dreamy, far away, as though she has for-

gotten who it is she is talking to.

"No," he says, still staring at the wall.

"It's about these two men, good friends, and one of them's a painter. Peter Coyote and Nick Mancuso, I think." She pauses, takes a long strand of her dark hair, pulls it around in front of her eyes, then lets it go. "Peter Coyote plays a painter, I think, and he has this model. She's a call girl..."

"I have to go right away," he says.

"Just let me tell you this," she answers. Her voice has returned to its normal tone and quickness. The air in the room, she notices, suddenly feels colder and more taut somehow. She thinks how if there were a fire here, it would pop and crackle

now.

"All right."

"One night the two friends go to her apartment for dinner, and something happens, you know how things happen..." She waits. He nods. "And they all go to bed together." She lies back again, thinking about the blinking red light on his answering machine in the other room. "The call girl, his model, is in love with him, but he doesn't love her. And she says to him... something, um..." She looks at Baker's smooth back curving up and away from the concave line of her abdomen and touches him with her fingertips, on his shoulder, then drops her hand. "She

says, 'You loved being inside me. You were so... hard.'" Baker turns his head to look down at her, his eyelids flicker, then he looks away again. "Then she says, 'You're a heartbreaker.'"

She touches him again. Her voice has trailed away and in the silence the furnace begins to hum down in the basement. She wonders what time it is — three, four o'clock? And when he leaves, she has to go, too, because it's his place they're making love in. He sets his ashtray down on the floor.

"Is that what you think I am?" he asks. "A heartbreaker?" But she doesn't reply. Only looks at him.

Kat

A Story by Joyce Marshall

"Rona?" She'd always known it would happen and there was even a brief pause to alert her before Kat looked up from typing and, in a voice that wobbled in its effort to seem casual, the question came: "What was my dad like?" Rona waited, pretending to study one of the sheets Kat had completed, made a pencil mark. "You've been around, haven't you," the girl went on, "since before I was born? The family friend."

"Since about a year after you were born." The family friend. Yes, willing or not, and at first she'd been both unwilling and uneasy (though pleased that Sam should want to show her his life), that's what she'd been. "But you remember him surely."

Kat fiddled with the keys. Behind her the denim curtains hung lifeless. The room was stifling. "After the divorce doesn't count, the way he got fat and seemed trying to be something with us that he'd forgotten how to be. I don't think the boys minded. I minded. And before — I was only seven when he left. When I try to look for him in those first years I can't see anything much, it's gone cloudy."

"You don't remember the day he decided you should be Kat rather than Kathleen and re-christened you in the birdbath in the back yard?" Kat shook her head. "You still use the name." No response for a moment, then a small, rather puzzled nod. "He had a very special quality," Rona said, "if I could just make it clear to

you..." and to myself... "He was lighthearted." Moroseness was the other side of that lightheartedness. (Don't tell her that). "He had a gift for putting an edge on things. You felt that he met each day fresh and new." Am I telling her he wasn't fully grown up? He wasn't. At forty his face had a blurred boy look. His smile came all at once, one of the few smiles she's seen that literally sparkled. (With malice sometimes. Don't tell her that). Kat didn't resemble him. For years Rona had looked for something — hint of that smile perhaps? — on this very different face: blunt nose, long, rather trembly upper lip. She no longer looked. Kat was simply Kat, big and rather clumsy (the typing Rona had set her to when she turned up at the door three hours ago would have to be done over), with her mother's wide shoulders and hips but not fiery and dramatic like Sally, just open and too young for her age — twenty-five — and, so often, troubled. And still not safe, as Rona had hoped she would be, from her mother's griefs and demands.

"What was *she* like?" Kat was staring at her hands, as if the wedding ring with its tiny row of diamonds still surprised her. "The woman who broke them up."

"I know very little about her," Rona said. "She was young, I gather, and lived in Yorkville, which was sort of hippy haven in those days. Though she wasn't a real hippy, just sort of slumming. I mean she had well-off parents who sent her

money."

It had seemed such an ordinary occasion. "Come for supper in the garden," Sally had said. "The kids are at Sam's folks." Sally had drunk too much (but then she often did) and as the light thinned around them and they sat over cooling coffee, she'd burst out suddenly, "Who's this bitch you're seeing, Sam? A woman knows these things." Sam had given Rona a wild single look (and never another till the last). "I've been trying to tell you," he'd said (was that for me too? did I warrant even that much?), then on and on about this being the sort of thing men dreamed of but that he'd never dared hope would come for him. (Sam, always so quick and light, mumbling such banalities). He couldn't ask her to lead a hole-and-corner life (with me it was that he hated to ask me). She wasn't the sort to wilfully break a marriage. He'd have to deal with this part of it alone and go to her clean. Rona had stayed longer than she knew she should, heard things she realized she decently shouldn't hear, wanting to strike and scream but just becoming smaller, till Sally began to keen and rock and Sam, muttering "Look after her, Rona," fled from the house and the garden, leaving the women alone.

"What was so special about her?" Kat's eyes were a very pale blue. They were fixed on Rona.

"Need there have been? I think it was mostly your father, Kat. He'd seized on