Charles Lamar Phillips

Prairie Symposium

"Harvey Friedman wants to know who you are," Mary Guthrie said.

Harvey Friedman was the Dean of Liberal Arts. He was well-off, well-spoken, well-dressed. Some said dashing. Some said he had a real eye for beauty (or at least for good-looking coeds). Mary had been having an affair with him since she moved to Iowa City in the fall of 1976 to take a degree in art history and became his teaching assistant. Not quite two years later, she was still trying to break it off, with only sporadic success. Both she and Bobby Duncan hoped she had managed finally to do it, if maybe for different reasons.

"How interesting," Bobby said.

Mary frowned. She swore she had not slept with Friedman since she started sleeping with Bobby, but he took it for granted she was lying. We all have our little fictions, he believed, and the story she tried to peddle was that Friedman had been after her to tell him what was wrong. He even promised again to leave his entrenched trophy wife, Mary claimed. But the money belonged to Mrs. Friedman, and when Mary laughed out loud at him, the dean demanded to know the name of the other guy.

Bobby told her to tell him. He told her that to reach the end of an affair, you had to create the sense of an ending. He didn't really know what the hell he was talking about, but it sounded good (he had once used the line in a paper he'd written about Graham Greene). In the past, whenever Bobby (who had recently separated from his wife) wanted to finish off one of his little flings, he simply stopped talking altogether to the lover in question and walked away. Clean, done, and out—brutal maybe, but *over*. Mary didn't know about that, though, and she listened to him, and she told Harvey Friedman his name. So now the good dean was attempting to pry information out of her about Bobby. He wanted to make sure Bobby was not simply using her, she said he said. He wanted to make sure Bobby was worthy of her.

"Right," said Bobby Duncan.

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"He sounds like your father," Bobby said. "He's old enough to be."

She rolled away from him under baby blue sheets. Bobby clicked on the lamp by the bed and looked at her.

"Part of it, he wants to see how you measure up," she said. "He wants to know if there's a chance you're like the others."

"Oh," Bobby said blankly. "The others . . ."

She looked at him, mugged disgust, and went on to make her point.

"But I think it's more than that, Bobby. He's not a bad man. Sometimes he *is* fatherly. He wants me to be okay. To do well."

"Oh, you do fine," Bobby said.

She moved over to Bobby's side of the bed and peeled the sheets back clear off their bodies. She let her hand glide by its nails across his belly to the inside of his thigh, while she softly kissed his neck and the lobe of his ear. She placed an arm out on either side of him and lifted herself up over his chest, turning down her head and allowing her long auburn hair to brush the length of his belly. She slipped her pale, full lips over the tip of his erection, and rolled her head round, playing with her kiss along the ridge, and when she tilted her face, she looked at him with her nearly colorless green eyes, eyes that held the hint of her slightly crooked smile.

They had begun to know each other's bodies, timing the sex better these days. As she lay at an angle from him, her breasts sloping back against her frame, one knee placed against his side and one of her long legs stretched out away from them, Bobby touched her and made her lift her body in waves, and she grew damp, waiting for him. She swung around on top and took her time, moving slowly at first while he worked his fingers, then faster, till she let go and leaned backward, supporting herself with an outstretched arm on the bed behind her, working only the lower half of her body like a belly dancer.

There had been times he couldn't manage to hold off, and she would have to give up her orgasm at the worst possible moment in answer to a helpless, whimpering twist or two from Bobby. And there had been times he just managed to make her come, pounding upward harder and harder as she rolled in light abandonment, before he himself lost it. And there had been times like this one, the best times for Bobby, when he would hold out, and she would gasp, collapsing forward onto his chest, and hang there, limp, relaxed, trying to bury herself in him, while now Bobby finished leisurely, moving rhythmically and steadily and lifting her slightly off the bed.

They weren't at the stage yet where they talked freely about fucking, telling each other how good they were and what they enjoyed best and what they wanted to try next, but they were getting there. For now, they lay scrunched up together after sex, she in the curve of his arm, her leg resting over his stomach, as Bobby smoked a cigarette and Mary lit a joint and they talked about the day, and themselves, and what they might do come late spring, when the academic year was over.

As she handed him the spliff, she said, "Bobby, why didn't you actually talk to Jenny when you were down in Davenport? Why did you back off? You could have gotten some of the deadwood cleared away, you know . . . Wasn't that why you went down there?"

"Mary, it's over. Finished. I'm not the one who walked out, who trashed the apartment, who ripped up *her* things. I went down there, and I parked outside her parents' place, and then I realized I had nothing to say to her."

"But it's not finished. It's obvious what she wants you to do—make some effort."

"I made an effort."

"Not much of one."

"It was an effort. Why are we talking about this? Why are you taking up for her all of a sudden?"

"I'm not. I'm taking up for me. You were the one talking about the sense of an ending. This trip to Davenport—it was no ending. You're more, I don't know, *hers* right now than you ever were when you two were together and we were doing afternoon quickies and fooling around a few odd nights."

"What do I say to her? *Hi, Jen. Just thought I'd ask you why you ripped everything up and took off. Just sort of curious.* Besides, I know the answer already, don't you?"

"I guess," she said. "But it's not over till you lose your pride about being left."

"You'd know all about that."

"Lord. *Yes.* I know all about it," she said. "Good night."

She slept, and he smoked. If the point was that they both had other . . . entanglements, *hey okay*, he decided. That was a fair point. No one ever came to these things without some history. Bobby tried not to think about it too much, though, so he, too, could sleep; but he couldn't. Finally, he left her there, naked, her face down on the pillow, her hair spread out across her shoulders, her perfect body with its perfect ass as motionless as a still life on a painted canvas.

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Things had not been easy for the two of them in the last couple of weeks. You'd have thought they would be, with Jenny gone, but no. For one thing, Bobby could leave nothing alone. When Mary was off at class or the library and he was still trying to salvage his dissertation—taking days off from *New Midlands* (literary Iowa's little magazine), working at Mary's the way he used to work at his and Jenny's place—he found much to distract him from his writing. He moved around, poked into things, gathered information about Mary from the apartment, picked up the small details of her life he half consciously hoped he could use to construct the real Mary Guthrie, the actual woman he knew was there somewhere behind her physical glow. He told himself it was a habit he'd developed in graduate school, looking for the verifiable particulars that give you the full picture, but he knew he was lying to himself. Normal people called what he was up to snooping.

Bobby found her diary the first day. It was more a combined "events" list and a "readings" notebook than a diary. Otherwise, he would never, ever have read the whole thing, each entry, start to finish. She listed under the date what book she was reading, the page she was on, and a line or two of her impressions. She was a pretty impressive reader. Nabokov. Pynchon. Some poetry. Wallace Stevens. Sylvia Plath (*Oh, well*, he thought). Then came Fred Exley and William Styron and John Cheever and Donald Justice and Larry Levis and Louise Glück and Tess Gallagher and—no surprise—his pal Carter Cooper, all of them connected to the Writers' Workshop, all

of them having read from their works on various evenings at various venues around town in the last few years.

Lately, there was a lot of Baudelaire.

After the book titles, Mary listed occasional plays—the ones that came to Iowa City—and movies. Then there were the names of people she met or the places she had gone on a particular day. Sometimes a man's name would have a lightly written plus mark beside it. Sometimes a minus sign. When Bobby found his name listed on the day he first met her without any mark, and then a few days later, on the night they first screwed, with a plus sign beside it, he knew. That's when he found out, too, who the others were, the previous attempts she had made to break free of Friedman. Always, the "-" would appear for the last time by a name two or three days after Dean Friedman had reappeared with a "+." She had tried as recently as last fall to leave him for some guy she labeled "Logan +."

Now Bobby made himself a drink, lit another cigarette, and sat out in her deliberately decorated living room, waiting for something to happen, for events or fatigue to catch up with him so he could go to bed and join Mary, but he knew he was in for another long span of uneasiness.

Anywhere, he thought, puffing on his cigarette, holding it the way he imagined a French flâneur might when he took his turtle out for a walk, *Heaven or Hell. Anyplace, just out of this world.*

Mary was too private, Bobby decided. That was the problem. Two years of fucking a prominent man had gotten her used to secrecy, to keeping her own counsel, to going her own way, to reading her nights away in her hermetically sealed aesthetic world, to sitting in the back at poetry readings and local plays and concerts and films and leaving abruptly when the lights came up. Her mother's set had probably called such behavior *tact.* Mary was not in the habit of revealing herself or her life to her pals or her classmates. She opened up to no one, not even the few pluses and minuses in her calendar, not even this last plus—Bobby—the important one. And Bobby told her everything. Everything. Whether she listened or not, it seemed, these days he couldn't keep his mouth shut.

The imbalance made Bobby feel exposed. He was really out there in the cold, and what was worse, he had nothing on her, no way of protecting himself, except what little he could garner from this diary business and, good God, he couldn't use that, she would know he was a sneak. He took a drag and smiled without pleasure as he realized he would have welcomed her reticence in most of the women he slept with. So why not in her? Why did he want the details? Man, he thought, could it be that he really cared for her? Was that it? Was that why he felt so out of control? Was he worried that without Jenny around as an excuse and a barrier, something far too serious was developing, something he just couldn't handle? Nothing had ever developed with any of the women he had fucked casually around town and at MLA meetings and during the conventions he attended for *New Midlands.* Because he always had Jenny, and no matter how bad the marriage, she was the real woman, not these . . . *others.*

The other women meant something to someone, Bobby knew that, just not to him, because he would not let anything come of being in bed with them but a couple

of wasted hours and a few wet spots on the sheets. As if he had to prove to himself that the various bodies, the utter unavoidable specificity of sex that makes it different from anything else, were nothing to him—nothing but the occasional clack of bones *together, covered with the lie of time, yielding flesh, and the corruption of an easy* intimacy—that *they* were nothing to him but momentary escapes of a night, and that Jenny, his wife, was real. But thinking like this made one harder than one should be, he decided, and led to blindness, not insight. Was he really as indifferent as all that?

Mary was different. She was simply too stunning even for Bobby to sleep with and walk away from. Maybe the truth was that only the coast-hugging rich (some of whom, like Dean Friedman, sometimes sojourned in Iowa), with their arrogance and their sense of entitlement, felt comfortable possessing real beauty. The rest of us midland bums, we in between and below, Bobby thought, just suffer the longing it creates. For having a thing, owning it, drains the owner, sucks him into the being of the thing possessed, and beauty sucks hardest, faster than any other possession, till you're depleted beyond replenishment, lost beyond rescue. In truth, Bobby was worried by his need for Mary. He was worried by the way he found himself on these sleepless nights sitting in her perfectly decorated apartment, each room done tastefully, lying in his bathrobe amid the ferns and the fruit bowls on her bright green-and-white sofa, languidly thinking about her through the time-haze of Scotch and nicotine.

She had told him, in answer to a carefully put question, that part of her reason for taking up with Friedman was that she had fallen in love with Thomas Hart Benton and John Steuart Curry and Grant Wood, and Friedman's last book was the bible on those who painted under the Midwestern sun just the way his first book had been the bible on the native abstractionists. Bobby had looked at the huge painting of three monks from a monastery in Dubuque that took up Mary's living room wall. Even with its almost Van Gogh-ish thick paint and bold brush strokes, the utterly horrifying bland realism of the three sinister figures in their ancient hooded habits could not have been painted anywhere other than Iowa. It was the prairie light. So even. So steady. So flat. Like the vast landscape behind the Capuchins.

"It's called *Pratum spirituale*," Mary had told him. "It means spiritual meadow."

"Soul of the prairie," Bobby Duncan had replied.

A few days before, the first time he saw the artist's name, Randy Bass, in her diary with its plus-and-minus marks, Bobby had said to her, "They look like they're yearning to break you on the rack, then burn you alive." He paused, then added: "Because of your easy living."

She caught his tone and looked at him oddly, but she just laughed. "I can take them down if they bother you."

"No," he replied. "I like them. They keep reminding me we're *all* sinners."

Bobby hated to admit it, but he worried about her easy living, about that out-of-frame phantom, Friedman. He feared that the dean was real to Mary the way Jenny had been to him, and so nothing could ever come of this, of the two of them together. But it was more than Friedman. She spoke the flawless English of a finishing school. Like Daisy Buchanan (or was it actually Jordan Baker?), Mary had a laugh that sounded like money and a lilt in her voice like a clarion of good breeding. She never argued;

she joked. She smiled her disapproval. But he did not have to *hear* her to recognize how much bigger her family's bank account was than his. He could just look at her. She was simply out of his league—he knew it in his bones. Yet he still could not watch her walk into a room without feeling good about her, and feeling good about her, feeling trapped.

God, he thought. *I'm in love. Me. A late postmodern master deconstructor, student of Spivak, disciple of De Man, devotee of Derrida. In fucking love, for Christ's sake, and short of cash.* There was no time for this. Not now. No time among the events of his life. *Especially when my glass is empty of Scotch*, he thought, trying to irony himself back down, *and I have to get up, go back into the kitchen, and find a refill.* When he returned, he resisted the green-flower couch and plopped down on the wicker lounge, testing another perspective on Mary's living room, which he now dubbed *The Tropics of Iowa*. He may have had his drink, but he had lost his compass, and with the slow, sinking fear of a defenseless navigator at sea in foggy weather, it occurred to him he would certainly fail to reach landfall. He was lost and there was all this mess with his dissertation and his estrangement from his wife.

Then came the flash in the dark and the sudden pitch of the stormy ocean and he realized what he really wanted, right now, this minute, Jesus Christ, was for Mary to say she loved him. She had never said it. But if she ever said it, he could say it, too, without shame or loss of face. And he was just on the verge of believing that professing his love, that the expression alone, would give him his bearings. Then he could stop sitting up here all night, drinking and smoking and worrying his way through all the trouble he was having—with his dissertation committee, his uneasiness about Jenny, his fear of Friedman, his growing vulnerability. If Mary would say it, he could say it, and, saying it, banish the general sense that something was hopelessly wrong. But how could she? All they ever did was trade remarks and screw. She never got the chance.

Jenny would hate her. She would hate her easy sensuality. These last few years, he and Jenny had had to work at it, work at it too hard. The freshness of their early days in Iowa and Chicago had vanished. It wasn't that his wife wasn't sexy. She was. Sculpted breasts and well-shaped legs and, once upon a time, a very darkly passionate manner. But the second year they were married, she had gotten pregnant and there had been some trouble—some pain or other—and a miscarriage. Then she—she had gone through something close to frigidity; not repulsion, exactly, but a kind of dispirited anxiety. They had waited it out, discovering after a while that they did okay when Jenny could concentrate completely on the sex itself and on nothing else. Bobby could not breathe heavily, nor sigh in pleasure; he could only move, slowly, quietly, smoothly; otherwise the fucking became dry and painful. They tried, halfheartedly, to laugh it off. They called Bobby the "silent lover." But after a time, the struggle grew disquieting, almost spiteful, and they fought. Oddly, when they fought, fucking got easier, and the last few months had been better sexually, more passionate, than at any time since Chicago. Still, Bobby was sometimes surprised when Mary would whisper to him while he was inside her, and he felt awkward talking back to her, as if that were somehow even more a betrayal of Jenny.

Mary . . . she seemed to slip so easily out of her clothes. It was exciting and

unnerving, like everything about her. Once or twice a week she would come home in the afternoons during lunch, and they would fuck on the living room couch, or on this lounge, with a pure licentiousness. They spent long weekend mornings in bed, and then all evening, too, breaking up the conversation in between with dinner out, dope and brandy in. They would fuck and take a long, slow bath and fuck again. Food got better and so did conversation about nothing. It worried him but he knew they, too, would lose all that one day.

Some of the burn, in fact, cooled when Bobby had started going into the *New Midlands* office more regularly, but enough remained still that nights, like tonight, Bobby would sit there and fantasize about her body. It was crazy, crazy. He would start with his worries and woes, and he would wind up once again with the flush on her pale cheeks as she pulled her dress back on over her smooth, just-damp skin; or the two sharp bones jutting from either side of her abdomen far enough, almost, to grab hold; or the long, even curve from her rump to her thigh he could not help but trace with his open palm, or the triangle of pubic hair hiding the wet crease between her legs. And hers was not just an everyday body, with its parts and places; it was not like the others. There was nothing frail, nothing tentative, nothing defeated about her body—she was in all of it. It was animated with her simmering and her sensuousness. Lying pressed naked against her at night, Bobby felt not only the pleasure of stolen time, of smooth, warm flesh, but the ecstasy of knowledge, of intimate truth.

There is no time for this, Bobby thought, drinking his drink. *No time now for this.*

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The time was 2 A.M., and Bobby knew just how far gone he was because he was remarking that even Mary's messiness was better than the messiness of other people; it was the temporary and casual mess of a busy woman who offhandedly dropped her days onto the solid world she had carefully established—a messiness not like his messiness, which was simply the abandonment of all order. Just after 2 A.M. Mary came into The Tropics from the bedroom. She screwed up her cosmetic-free face against the brightness of the living room, and she stood there openly disrobed, desirable, unselfconscious, lush.

"What's wrong?" she asked. She stopped blinking, located Bobby at the center of a cloud of exhaled smoke, smiled, and said, "I miss you now when I wake up nights and you're not there."

"Hi," Bobby said. "Welcome to Professor Duncan's all-night symposium. I've been thinking."

"About me, I hope."

"About you."

She walked over to the wicker lounge in that flat-footed plop sleepy women use, took Bobby by his hands, and dragged him over to the sofa. She pushed him down till he lay lengthwise, his feet suspended over the far arm rest, opened his bathrobe, climbed down and squeezed herself beside him with her back to his chest, wrapping the robe around them both.

"I'm cold," she said.

"*Cold?* It must be 80 degrees in here. This is The Tropics of Iowa, woman."

"The Tropics? . . . Oh. Right . . . Ha. Ha. Ha. I'm cold," she said.

Bobby let her put his arms around her. She was comfortable to hold. Relaxed, she perched on the edge of sleep, wanting only to be hugged.

"I've been thinking," Bobby said. "Times change."

"I know," she yawned. "You keep saying that." She squirmed back and forth, lightly, against his chest, preparing for another plunge into sleep.

"Up. Up," Bobby said. "Time for more booze."

"No," she protested, only half awake. "No. It's so warm."

Bobby rolled her off the couch and got up. In the kitchen making his drink, he watched her through the open door climb back onto the sofa and try to curl into a corner. He was wondering if they were going to fuck again. "Mary?" he asked. "Just how serious is this—us—and this business with Friedman?"

"Oh, he wants to meet you. That's it. That's all. To hell with him. Hurry up, please. Get back in here with your nice warm body."

"No, I meant *us*. I mean, was that guy, that Logan-plus-sign you slept with in September, was that like us?"

"What?" Mary sat up straight on the couch. She looked at Bobby. He was standing in the doorway of the kitchen. They stared. She crossed her legs as if she were fully dressed and sat, demure, poised, awake, naked. Then she started to laugh as Bobby walked over to sit next to her. She threw her head back and bounced her body against the sofa laughing, lifting up her knees, wrapping her arms around them.

"Oh, no," she laughed. "You *didn't*. No. No. Oh, my Lord, you did! I mean—really—Bobby. I know you're supposed to be some kind of researcher and that you like to dig into musty old trunks and file cabinets, but my notebook? And you figured out my secret code, you clever devil. Lord."

"I don't think it's so funny."

She laughed again.

"You should see your face. You look so serious. Tousled hair, thin little nose. You'd think you had just accused me of murder. I confess, Bobby—okay, you've got the goods on me, Duncan."

"Was Logan-plus-sign married, too?"

She laughed. "Yes. God, yes. He was married, too."

"You like us married, don't you?"

"Well, now, you're outraged," she replied. "You really are outraged! Old love 'em and leave 'em Duncan! Listen, honey," she tried to control herself. "Listen, now. You know you had no right to do that—oh Lord, I think I've been *deconstructed*!" She started laughing again.

"When does my minus get added to my name?"

Suddenly she was serious. Bobby could sense the anger under her laughter, and that made him feel better.

"Maybe we should put it in right now. No, better yet, next time you open my diary just stick in the minus yourself and close the door behind you on your way out. Or

next time you steam the flap to open my mail, or listen in on one of my phone calls. I really ought to throw you out. You know that, don't you?"

They stared at each other over Bobby's half glass of Scotch.

"Oh, go to hell," she said and suddenly smiled again. "I don't care. Give me your bathrobe. I'm freezing. Hand it over and we'll call it even."

It took Bobby a second to get her point.

"Oh—you mean now we'll both be exposed."

Mary's smile grew wider. Bobby gave her the robe, then went back to the bedroom for a pair of pants. He felt mean, small, rat-like.

"You're so blasé," Bobby said, coming back into the living room.

"Yes, Bobby. Only most people call me 'even tempered.' And some of the nastier ones say 'smug.' Make me a bourbon, will you, now that you're up. This really is unfair, you know. I can count the number of men I've slept with on one hand. Just open up my diary, count the number of pluses, and you've got it. Go ahead, count them."

"No," Bobby said. "I won't."

Then he started to laugh, too.

"I already have," he said.

"Mathematics," she said. "Bet you can't do that with the women you've slept with in the past month. Besides, you're the only one who counts."

"Me and Friedman," Bobby said.

"Okay," Mary replied. "Have it your way. You and Friedman."

"I'm sorry about the date book, Mary. I shouldn't have read it."

"No, you shouldn't have. But I want you to understand this. I'm not ashamed of myself. And no matter what you do, I won't be. I'm not ashamed of anything I've done. Not of Harvey. Not of the others. Not you. I didn't end it with Harvey because I was ashamed or felt he had done me wrong or anything like that."

"Why did you end it? It was never over before."

"Oh," she said, watching the ceiling. "Circumstances. I finally realized the circumstances made it pretty unhealthy. And I had found you."

"But—I'm just another affair. Not now, I mean—back then. I was married, too. It seems you were just repeating the same circumstances, the sickness."

"No," she said. "I was immunized against them, it, whatever. I'm losing the thread of the metaphor here."

"Marriage as disease," Bobby mused. "Makes Jenny a germ, so you're the wonder drug."

"I had a feeling you were curable."

Bobby looked back to the couch and saw her smile.

"You knew that? How could you? I didn't even know."

"From Harvey. I could see the difference. He always talked about his wife, about leaving her, and never intended to. You never said a word about Jenny, till it was over. One person, one disease, prepares you for the next."

"Mary," Bobby said. "I think I feel ashamed about Jenny, about my failure."

"I know."

Bobby turned around to face her on the couch. She had pulled the bathrobe over

herself like a blanket, and its dark blue contrasted harshly with the bright tropical motif of the room.

"The reason I read your notes," he said, "is that I need to know something true about you. I need you to tell me things."

"But I've told you what's important. I—"

"No, I mean all of it. The why, too. Why Friedman, not just the fact that it is Friedman."

"Was Friedman."

"Was, is, what's the difference?"

"I've told you things. I told you about Mother, about Daddy."

"Oh, yes. Mary Guthrie has a past, just like me, like the rest of us. Yes, you've told me. You were born in North Carolina. Daddy was in Big Tobacco. He sent you to school in Europe to get rid of your accent. You went to Sweetbriar, took a course in art, met Friedman at a show, admired him but didn't sleep with him. You liked his writing, though, and were flattered to take the T.A. job he offered. And when he more or less forced himself on you one night, you let it be."

"Enough, Bobby."

"Daddy paid for analysis. Your analyst, of course, was neutral about the affair with Friedman, and you kept it up. His wife walked up to you at a cocktail party after a year and said she had always wanted to meet the woman who was out to wreck her marriage. So you stopped going out. You read a lot. You—"

"You make it sound like a story."

She reached over and took what was left of her drink off the wicker coffee table and sipped it.

"*You* make it sound that way," Bobby said. "When you tell it. Like a job resume."

"It's the analysis," she said.

"I'm not interested in psychoanalyzing you," Bobby said. "I just want to know who you are, what you really think and feel."

"About what?"

"Your father, for instance. Don't tell me that you're secretly in love with him and that Friedman is a father substitute—none of that bullshit. Just tell me what he's like, the things you did growing up. That would be enough. I can draw my own conclusions."

"He owns things."

"*Mary.*"

"I don't know how to do what you want, how to tell you what you want to hear. I'm not a writer; I don't have the words."

"I give up," he said. "Maybe I should talk to Friedman; he's got seniority. I'd probably learn more about you from him."

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False dawn insinuated itself into the bedroom as they slipped back under the sheets. They moved together instinctively against the chill. Bobby looked at the stuffed toy animals, lumps in the dark against the far wall. He had banished them from her bed

when he moved in. She had said that they, the toys, were good lovers because they were warm and they did not insist on talking about themselves. That was all Bobby did, he realized, talk about himself. The worst thing about screwing up his degree was that it made him even more self-conscious, so now he was even feeling guilty about feeling guilty.

Pressed up against him, she was still awake, still thinking, too. She buried her face in Bobby's shoulder. She appeared to be sobbing. She did not speak, and neither did he. They lay there together, without talk; there was only time between them. After a while, the real dawn appeared and let itself into the room, surrounding the stuffed animals and the two lovers. The gray light only half revealed them, their spent bodies, twisted round each other, caught up in circumstances and cleaved by force of will, on a cold morning in the middle of a bed in the middle of the country.