

# **LISEY AND THE MADMAN**

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For Nan Graham

I

THE SPOUSES OF WELL-KNOWN WRITERS are almost invisible; no one knows better than Lisey Landon, who has given only one actual interview in her life. This was for the well-known women's magazine that publishes the column "Yes, I'm Married to Him!" She spent roughly half of its five-hundred-word length explaining that her name (actually short for Lisa) rhymes with "CeeCee." Most of the other half had to do with her recipe for slow-cooked roast beef. Her sister Amanda, who can be mean, said that the accompanying photograph made Lisey look fat.

There was another photograph, one that first appeared in the Nashville American and then in newspapers around the world, mostly under the headline HEROIC GRADUATE STUDENT SAVES FAMOUS WRITER, or variations thereof. This one shows a man in his early twenties holding the handle of a shovel that looks almost small enough to be a toy. The young fellow is peering at it, and by his fozzled expression the viewer might infer he has no idea at all of what he's looking at. It could be an artillery shell, a bonsai tree, a radiation detector, or a china pig with a slot in its back for nickel. It could be a whang-dang-doodle, a cloche hat made out of coyote fur, or a phylactery testifying to the pompatus of love. A man ill what looks like a faux highway patrolman's uniform (no gun, but you got your Sam Browne belt running across the chest and I good-sized badge, as well) is shaking the dazed young man's free hand. The cop-he has to be a cop of some kind, gun or not-has a huge oh-thank-God grin on his kisser, the kind that says, Son, you will never have to buy yourself another drink-in a bar where I am, as long as we both shall lire, so help me God, amen. In the background, mostly out of focus, are staring people with dismayed what-the-hell-just-happened expressions on their faces.

And although thousands, perhaps even millions, of people have seen this photo, which has over the years become almost as famous as the one of the mortally wounded Lee Harvey Oswald clutching his belly, no one has ever noticed that the writer's wife is also in it. Yes. Indeed she is. A part of her, anyway.

On the far right-hand side. Not quite halfway up.

If you look closely (a magnifying glass helps in this regard) you'll see half a shoe. Half a brown loafer. Half a cordovan loafer, 11 to be exact, with a quarter-heel. Eighteen years later Lisey Landon can still remember how comfortable those shoes were, and how fast she moved in them that day. Faster than the award-winning photographer, certainly, and she'd not seen the dazed campus cop or the dazed young man-Tony, his name had been-at all. Not then, she hadn't. But she had earlier, and certainly later, in this picture, she knew how it had made her laugh. How it makes her laugh still. Because the spouses of well-known writers are almost always invisible.

But I got a shoe in there, she sometimes thinks. I poked in a loafer. I did that much. Didn't I, Scott?

Her position was always behind him at those ceremonial things, behind him and slightly to the right, with her hands demurely clasped before her. She remembers that very well.

She remembers it all very well, probably better than the rest of them. Probably better than any of them.

## II

Lisey stands behind and slightly to Scott's right with her hands clasped demurely before her, watching her husband balance on one foot, the other on the silly little shovel which is half-buried in loose dirt that has clearly been brought in for the occasion. The day is hot, maddeningly humid, almost sickeningly muggy, and the considerable crowd that has gathered only makes matters worse. Unlike the dignitaries in attendance for the groundbreaking, the lookieloo-come-'n'-see folk are not dressed in anything approaching their best, and while their jeans and shorts and pedal pushers may not exactly make them comfortable in the wet-blanket air, Lisey envies them just the same as she stands here at the crowd's forefront in the suck-oven heat of the Tennessee afternoon. Just standing pat, dolled up in her hot-weather best, is stressful: worrying that she'll soon be sweating big dark circles in the light-brown linen top she's wearing over the blue rayon shell blouse. She's got on a great bra for hot weather and still it's biting into the undersides of her boobs. Happy days, babyluv.

Scott, meanwhile, continues balancing on one foot while his hair, too long in back-he needs it cut badly, she knows that he looks in the mirror and sees a rock star but she looks at him and sees a dolled-up hobo out of a Woody Guthrie song-blows in the occasional hot puff of breeze. He's being a good sport while the photographer circles. Damn good sport. He's flanked on the left by a fellow named Tony Eddington, who is going to write up all this happy crappy for the something-or-other (campus newspaper? surely the campus newspaper goes on hiatus at least during the month of August, if not for the entire summer?), and on the right by their standin host, an English department stalwart named

Roger Dashmiel, one of those men who seem older than they are not only because they have lost so much hair and gained so much belly so soon but because they insist upon drawing an almost stifling

gravitas around themselves. Even their witticisms felt like oral readings of insurance policy clauses to Lisey.

Making matters worse in this case is the fact that Roger Dashmiel does not like her husband. Lisey has sensed this at once (it's easy, because most men do like him), and it's given her something upon which to focus her unease. For she is uneasy-profoundly so. She has tried to tell herself that it is no more than the humidity and the gathering clouds in the west presaging strong afternoon thunderstorms or maybe even tornadoes: a low-barometer thing, only that and nothing more. But the barometer wasn't low in Maine when she got out of bed this morning at quarter to seven; it had been a beautiful summer morning already, with the newly risen sun sparkling on a trillion points of dew in the field between the house and the barn which housed Scott's study. What her father, old Dandy Debusher, would have called "a real ham 'n' egger of a day." Yet the instant her feet touched the oak on her side of the bed and her thoughts turned to the trip to Nashville-leave for the Portland jetport at eight, fly out on Delta at nine thirty-her heart dipped with dread and her morning-empty stomach, usually sweet, foamed with unmotivated fear. She'd greeted these sensations with surprised dismay, because she ordinarily liked to travel, especially with Scott: the two of them sitting companionably side by side, he with his book open, she with hers. Sometimes he'd read her a bit of his and sometimes she'd vice him a little versa. Sometimes she'd feel him and look up and find his eyes-his solemn regard. As though she were a mystery to him still. Yes, and sometimes there would be turbulence, and she liked that, too. It was like the rides at the Topsham Fair when she and her sisters had been young. Scott never minded the turbulence, either. She remembered one particularly crazy approach into Denver-strong winds, thunderheads, little prop-job commuter-plane all over the sky and how she'd looked over to see him actually pogo-ing up and down in his seat like a little kid who needs to go to the bathroom, with this crazy grin on his face. No, the rides that scared Scott were the smooth downbound ones he took in the middle of his wakeful nights. Sometimes he talked (lucidly-smiling, even) about things you could see only if you looked through

the fingerprints on a water glass. It scared her to hear him talk like that. Because it was crazy, and because she sort of knew what he meant and didn't want to.

So it wasn't low barometer that had been bothering her-not then-and it certainly hadn't been the prospect of getting on one more airplane or eating one more airline snack (these days she brought their own, anyway, usually homemade trail mix). And then, in the bathroom, reaching for the light over the sink-something she had done without incident or accident day in and out for the entire eight years they'd lived here, which came to approximately three thousand days, less time spent on the road-she smacked the toothglass with the back of her hand and sent it tumbling to the floor, where it shattered into approximately one million stupid pieces.

"Shitfire, save your smuckin' matches!" she cried, lips drawn back from her teeth, frightened and irritated to find herself so: for she did not believe in omens, not she, not Lisey Landon the writer's wife; not little Lisey Debusher, either. Omens were for the shanty Irish. Scott, who had just come back into the bedroom with two cups of coffee and a plate of buttered toast on a tray, stopped dead. "Whadja break, babyluv?"

"Nothing that came out of the dog's ass," Lisey said savagely, and was then sort of astounded with herself. That was one of Granny Debusher's sayings, and Granny D certainly had believed in omens, but that old Irish highpockets had gone on the cooling board when Lisey was only four. Was it even possible Lisey could remember her? It seemed so, for as she stood there, looking down at the stupid shards of toothglass, the actual articulation of the omen came to her, came in Granny D's tobacco-strapped voice ... and comes back now, as she stands watching her husband be a good sport in his lightest-weight summer sport coat (which he will soon be sweating through under the arms nevertheless): Broken glass in the morning, broken hearts at night. That was Granny D's scripture, a11 right, handed down and remembered by at least one little girl before

Granny D pitched down dead in the chicken yard with an apronful of feed and a sack of Bull Durham tied up inside her sleeve.

It isn't the heat, it isn't the trip, and it isn't Dashmiel, who ended up doing the meet'n'greet job only because the head of the English department, with whom Scott had corresponded, is in the hospital following an emergency gall-bladder removal the day before. It is a broken ... smucking ... toothglass at ten minutes to seven in the morning combined with the saying of a long-dead Irish granny. And the joke of it is, Scott will later point out, it's just enough to put her on edge, just enough to get her either strapped or at least semistrapped.

Sometimes, he will tell her not long hence, speaking from a hospital bed (ah, but he could so easily have been on the cooling board himself, all his wakeful, too-thoughtful nights over) in his new high whistling and effortful voice, sometimes just enough is just enough. As the saying is.

And she knew exactly what he meant.



### III

Roger Dashmiel has his share of headaches today, Lisey knows that. It doesn't make her like him any better, but sure, she knows. If there was ever an actual script for the ceremony, Professor Hegstrom (he of the emergency gall-bladder attack) has been too muddled to tell Dashmiel what or where it is. Dashmiel has consequently been left with little more than a time of day and a cast of characters featuring a writer to whom he has taken an instant dislike. When the little party of dignitaries left Inman Hall, temporary home of the library sciences staff, for the short but exceedingly warm walk to the site of the forthcoming Shipman Library, Dashmiel told Scott they'd have to more or less play it by ear. Scott shrugged goodnaturedly and nodded. He was absolutely comfortable with that. For Scott Landon, ear was a way of life.

"Ah'll introduce you," Dashmiel said as they walked toward the baked and shimmering plot of land where the new library would stand. The photographer in charge of immortalizing all of this danced restlessly back and forth, hither and yon, snapping and snapping, busy as a gnat. Lisey could see a rectangle of fresh brown earth not far ahead, about nine feet by five, she judged, and pickup-trucked in that morning by the just-starting-to-fade look of it. No one had thought to put up an awning, and already the surface of the fresh dirt had acquired a grayish glaze.

"Somebody better do it," Scott said.

Dashmiel had frowned as if wounded by some undeserved canard. Then, with a sigh, he pressed on. "Applause follows introduction-"

"As day follows night," Scott murmured.

"-and then yew'll say a woid or tew," Dashmiel finished. Beyond the baked tract of land awaiting the library, a freshly paved parking lot shimmered in the sunlight, all smooth tar and staring yellow lines. Lisey saw fantastic ripples of nonexistent water on its far side.

“My pleasure,” Scott said.

The unvarying good nature of his responses seemed to worry Dashmiel rather than reassure him. “Ah hope yew won’t want to say tew much at the groundbreakin’,” he told Scott rather severely as they approached the roped-off area. This had been kept clear, but there was a crowd big enough to stretch almost to the parking lot waiting beyond it. An even larger one had trailed Dashmiel and the Landons from Inman Hall. Soon the two would merge, and Lisey—who ordinarily did not mind crowds any more than she minded turbulence at twenty thousand feet—didn’t like this, either. It occurred to her that so many people on a day this hot might suck all the air out of the air. Totally dopey idea, but—

“It’s mahty hot, even for Naishveel in August, wouldn’t you say so, Toneh?”

Tony Eddington—who would be rahtin’ all this up for something called the U-Tenn Review—nodded obligingly but said nothing. His only comment so far had been to identify the tirelessly dancing photographer as Stefan Queensland, U-Tenn Nashville, class of ‘83, currently of the Nashville American. “Hope y’all will h’ep him out if y’can,” Tony Eddington had said softly to Scott as they began their walk over here. Eddington was carrying a little wire notebook in which he had so far written absolutely nothing, so far as Lisey could see.

“Yew’ll finish yoah remarks,” Dashmiel said, “and there’ll be anotheuh round of applause. Then, Mistuh Landon—”

“Scott.”

Dashmiel had flashed a rictus grin, there for just a moment, then gone. “Then, Scott, yew’ll go on and toin that all-impawtant foist shovelful of oith.” Toin? Foist? Oith? Lisey mused, and then it came to her that Dashmiel was saying turn that all-important first shovelful of earth in his only semibelievable Louisiana drawl. “Followin’ that,

we'll proceed on across yonduh parkin' lot to Nelson Hall-which is mercifully air-conditioned, Ah might add."

"All sounds fine to me," Scott replied, and that was all he had time for, because they had arrived.

## IV

Perhaps it's a holdover from the broken toothglass-that omenish feeling-but the plot of trucked-in dirt looks like a grave to Lisey: XL size, as if for a giant. The two crowds collapse in around it in a circle, becoming one and creating that breathless suck-over feel at the center. A campus security guard now stands at each corner of the ornamental velvet-rope barrier, beneath which Dashmiel, Scott, and "Toneh" Eddington have ducked. Queensland, the photographer, dances relentlessly, his old-fashioned Speed Graphic held up in front of his face. There are big patches of darkness under his arms and a sweat-tree growing up the back of his shirt. Paging Weegee, Lisey thinks, and realizes she envies him. He is so free, flitting gnatlike in the heat; he is twenty-five and all his shit still works. Dashmiel, however, is looking at him with growing impatience which Stefan Queensland affects not to see until he has exactly the shot he wants. Lisey has an idea it's one of Scott alone, his foot on the silly silver spade, his hair blowing back in the breeze. In any case, Weegee junior at last lowers his big old box of a camera and steps back to the edge of the crowd's far curve. And here, following him with her somewhat wistful regard, Lisey first sees the madman, a graduate student with long blond hair named Gerd Allen Cole. He has the look, one local reporter will later write, "of John Lennon recovering from his romance with heroin-hollow eyes at odd and disquieting contrast to his puffy child's cheeks."

At that moment, beyond noting all that tumbled blond hair, Lisey thinks nothing of Gerd Allen Cole, omens or no omens. She just wants this to be over so she can find a bathroom stall in the bowels of the English department across the way and pull her rebellious underwear out of the crack of her ass. She has to make water, too, but right now that's pretty much secondary.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" Dashmiel says in the carrying but somehow artificial voice of a carnival barker. "It is mah distinct pleasure to introduce Mr. Scott Landon, authuh of the Pulitzuh prize winnin'

Relic, and the National Book Awardwinnin' The Coaster's Daughter. He's come all the way from Maine with his loveleh wife to inauguarate construction-yes, at long last-on our vereh own Shipman Lah-brey! Scott Landon, folks! Let's hear it!"

The crowd applauds at once, and enthusiastically. The loveleh wife joins in, patting her palms together automatically, looking at Dashmiel and thinking, He won the NBA for The Coaster's Daughter. That's Coaster, not Coster. And I sort of think you knew it. Why don't you like him, you petty man?

Then she happens to glance beyond him and this time she really does notice Gerd Allen Cole. He is just standing there with Al-that fabulous blond hair tumbled down to his eyebrows and the sleeves of a white shirt hr too big for him-he's all but floating in it-rolled up to his biceps. The tails of this shirt are out and dangling almost to the whitened knees of the old jeans he wears. Instead of applauding Blondie has got his hands clasped rather prissily together in front of him and there's a spooky-sweet smile on his face and his lips are moving, as if he's saying a prayer ... but he's looking straight at Scott. As the wife of a public man (some of the time, at least), Lisey at once pegs Blondie as a potential problem. She thinks of guys like this as "deep-space fans," although she'd never say so out loud and has never even told Scott this. Deep-space fans always have a lot to say. They want to grab Scott by the arm and tell him that that they understand the secret messages in his books; deep-space fans know the books are really secret guides to God, Satan, or possibly the Coptic Gospels. They might be on about Scientology or numerology. Sometimes they want to talk about other worlds-secret worlds. Two years ago a deep-space fan hitchhiked all the way from Texas to Maine to talk to Scott about Bigfoot. That guy made Lisey a little nervous-there was a certain walleyed look of absence about him, and a knife (sheathed, thank Christ) in one of the loops of his backpack-but Scott talked to him a little, gave him a beer, took a couple of his pamphlets, signed the kid a paperback copy of Instructions to Be Left in Earth, clapped him on the back, and sent

him on his way, happy. Sometimes-when he's got it strapped on nice and tight-Scott is amazing. No other word will do.

The thought of actual violence does not now occur to Lisey certainly not the idea that Blondie means to pull a Mark David Chapman on her husband. My mind just doesn't run that way, she might have said.

Scott acknowledges the applause-and a few raucous rebel yells-with the Scott Landon grin which has been caricatured in the Wall Street Journal (it will later appear on any number of Barnes & Noble shopping bags), all the time continuing to balance on one foot while the other holds its place on the shoulder of the silly shovel.

He lets the applause run for ten or fifteen seconds, whatever his intuition tells him is right (and his intuition is rarely wrong), then raises one hand, waving it off. And it goes. When he speaks, his voice seems nowhere near as loud as Dashmiel's, but Lisey knows that even with no mike or battery-powered bullhorn-and the lack of either here this afternoon is probably someone's oversight-it will carry to the very back rows of the crowd. And the crowd helps out. It's gone absolutely silent, straining to hear him: every golden word. A Famous Man has come among them. A Thinker and a Writer. He will now scatter pearls of wisdom before them.

Pearls before swine, Lisey thinks. Sweaty swine, at that. But didn't her father once tell her that pigs don't sweat? She can't exactly remember, and it's sort of an odd train of thought anyway, isn't it?

Across from her, Blondie carefully pushes his tumbled hair back from a fine white brow with his left hand. Then he clasps the left with his right again. His hands are as white as his brow and Lisey thinks: There's one piggy who stays inside a lot. A stay-at-home swine, and why not? He looks like he's got all sorts of strange deep-space ideas to catch up on.

She shifts from one foot to the other, and the silk of her underwear all but squeaks in the crack of her ass. Oh, maddening! She forgets

Blondie again in trying to calculate if she might not ... while Scott's making his remarks ...very surreptitiously, mind you ...

Her dead mother speaks up. Dour. Three words. Brooking no argument. No. Lisey. Wait.

"Ain't gonna sermonize, me," Scott says, and she recognizes the patois of Gully Foyle, the main character in his all-time favorite novel, Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination*. "Too hot for sermons."

"Beam us up, Scotty!" someone in the fifth or sixth row on the parking-lot side of the crowd yells exuberantly. The crowd laughs and cheers.

"Can't do it, brother," Scott says, "transporters are broken and we're all out of lithium crystals."

The crowd, being new to the riposte as well as the sally (Lisey has heard both at least fifty times; maybe as many as a hundred), roars its approval and applauds. Across the way, Blondie smiles thinly, sweatlessly, and continues to grip his left hand with his right. And now Scott does take his foot off the spade, not as if he's grown impatient with it but as if he has, for the moment, found another use for the tool. She watches, not without fascination, for this is Scott at his best, not reading scripture but strutting showtime.

"It's nineteen-eighty-six and the world has grown dark," he says. He slips the three feet or so of the little spade's wooden handle easily through his cupped hand, so that his fingers rest near the thing's business end. The scoop winks sun in Lisey's eyes once, and then it is mostly hidden by the sleeve of Scott's lightweight jacket. With the scoop and the blade hidden, he uses the slim wooden handle as a pointer, ticking off trouble and tragedy in the air in front of him.

"In January, the Challenger shuttle explodes, killing all seven on board. Bad call on a cold morning, folks. They never should have tried to launch.

“In February, at least thirty die on Election Day in the Philippines. Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos, meanwhile, responsible for the deaths of a hundred times that number-maybe four hundred times that number-leave for Guam and, eventually, Hawaii. No one knows how many pairs of shoes babyluv takes with her.” There’s a ripple of laughter from the crowd. Not much. Tony Eddington is finally taking notes. Roger Dashmiel looks hot and put out with this unexpected current-events lesson.

“The nuclear reactor accident at Chernobyl kills thousands, sickens tens of thousands.

“The AIDS epidemic kills thousands, sickens tens of thousands. “The world grows dark. Discordia rises. Mr. Yeats’s blood-tide is still undimmed.”

He looks down, looks fixedly at nil but graying earth, and Lisey is suddenly terrified that he is seeing it, his private monster. the thing with the endless patchy piebald side, that he is going to go off, perhaps even come to the break she knows he is afraid of (in truth she is as afraid of it as he is) in front of all these people. Then, before her heart can do more than begin to speed up, he raises his head, grins like a boy at the county fair, and shoots the handle of the spade through his fist to the halfway point. It’s a showy move, a pool shark’s move, and the folks at the front of the crowd go oooh. But Scott’s not done. Holding the spade out before him, he rotates the handle nimbly in his fingers, accelerating it into an unlikely spin. It’s a baton twirler’s move, as dazzling-because of the silver scoop swinging in the sun, mostly-as it is unexpected. She’s been married to him since ‘77-almost nine years now-and had no idea he had such a sublimely cool move in his repertoire. (How many years does it take, she’ll wonder later, lying in bed alone in her substandard motel room and listening to dogs bark beneath a hot orange Nashville moon, before the simple stupid weight of time finally sucks all the wow out of a marriage?) The silver bowl of the rapidly swinging spade sends a Wake up! Wake up! sunflash running across the heat-dazed, sweat-sticky surface of the crowd. Lisey’s husband is



suddenly Scott the Pitchman, grinning, and she has never been so relieved to see that totally untrustworthy honey, l'rrr hip huckster's grin on her husband's face. lie has bummed them out; now he will sell them the doubtful good cheer with which he hopes to send them home. And she thinks they will buy, hot August afternoon or not. When he's like this, Scott could sell Frigidaires to Inuits, as the saying is ... and God bless the language pool where we all go first to drink our fill and then to strap on our business.

“But if every book is a little light in that darkness-and so I believe, so I believe, so I must believe, for I write the goddamn things, don't I?- then every library is a grand bonfire around which ten thousand people come to stand and warm themselves each cold day and night. We celebrate the laying of such a fire this afternoon, and I'm honored to be a part of it. Here is where we spit in the eye of chaos and kick murder right in his wrinkled old cojones. Hey, photographer!”

Stefan Queensland snaps to, but smiling.

Scott, also smiling, says: “Now-get one of this. The powers that be may not want to use it, but you'll like it in your portfolio, I'll bet.”

Scott holds the ornamental tool out as if he intends to twirl it again, and the crowd gives a little hopeful gasp, but he's only teasing them. He slides his left hand back down to the spade's collar, his right to a position on the handle about a foot from the top. Then he bends, digs in, and drives the spade-blade deep, dousing its hot glitter in earth. He brings it up, tosses its dark load aside, and cries: “I declare the Shipman Library Construction site open!”

The applause that greets this makes the previous rounds sound like the sort of polite patter you might hear at a prep-school tennis match. Lisey doesn't know if young Mr. Queensland caught the ceremonial first scoop, not for sure (she wasn't looking), but when Scott pumps the silly little silver spade at the sky like an Olympic hero, Queensland catches that one for sure, laughing as he snaps it. Scott holds the pose for a moment (Lisey happens to glance at Dashmiel

and catches that gentleman in the act of rolling his eyes at Mr. Eddington-Toneh). Then he lowers the spade to port arms and holds it that way, grinning. Sweat has popped on his cheeks and brow in fine beads. The applause begins to taper off. The crowd thinks he's done. Lisey, who can read him like a book (as the saying is), knows better.

When they can hear him again, Scott bends down for an encore scoop. "This one's for Yeats!" he calls. Another scoop. "This one's for Poe!" Yet another scoop. "This one's for Alfred Bester, and if you haven't read him, you ought to be ashamed!" He's starting to sound out of breath, and Lisey, although mostly still amused, is starting to feel a bit alarmed, as well. It's so hot. She's trying to remember what he ate for lunch-was it heavy or light?

"And this one ..." He dives the spade into what is now a fairly respectable little divot (Queensland documenting each fresh foray) one last time and holds up the final dip of earth. The front of his shirt has darkened with sweat. "Well, why don't you think of whoever wrote your favorite book? The one that, in a perfect world, you'd check out first when the Shipman Library finally opens its doors to you? Got it? Okay-this one's for him, or her, or them." He tosses the dirt aside, gives the spade a final valedictory shake, then turns to Dashmiel ... who should be pleased with Scott's showmanship, Lisey thinks-asked to play by ear, Scott has played brilliantly and who instead only looks hot and pissed off. "I think we're done here," he says, and makes as if to hand Dashmiel the spade.

"No, that's yoahs," Dashmiel says. "As a keepsake, and a token of ouah thanks. Along with yoah check, of co'se." His smile-the rictus, not the real one-comes and goes in a fitful cramp. "Shall we go and grab ow'sefs a little air-conditionin'?"

"By all means," Scott says, looking bemused, and then hands the spade to Lisey-as he has handed her so many other mostly unwanted mementos over the past twelve years of his celebrity: everything from ceremonial oars and Boston Red Sox hats encased in Lucite cubes to the masks of comedy and tragedy ... but mainly

pen-and-pencil sets. So many pen-and-pencil sets. Waterman, Scripto, Schaeffer, Montblanc, you name it. She looks at the spade's glittering silver scoop, as bemused as her beloved (he is still her beloved, and she's come to believe he always will be). Every last speck of dirt has slid off, it seems; even the Made is clean. There are a few flecks in the incised letters reading COMMENCEMENT, SHIPMAN LIBRARY, and Lisey blows them Off. Then she looks at this unlikely prize again. Where will such an artifact end up? She'd say Scott's study over the barn, but in this summer of 1986 the study is still under construction and probably won't be ready for occupancy until October ... although the address works and he has already begun to store stuff in the musty stalls of the barn below. Across many of the cardboard boxes he had scrawled SCOTT! THE EARLY YEARS! Most likely the silver spade will wind up with this stuff, wasting its gleams in the gloom. The one depressing surety is that it'll wind up in a place where one of them will stumble across it twenty years from now and try to remember just what in the blue smuck-Meanwhile, Dashmiel is on the move. Without another word as if he's disgusted with this whole business and determined to pm it behind him as soon as possible-he starts across the rectangle of fresh earth, detouring around the divot which Scott's last big shovelful of earth has almost succeeded in promoting to a hole. The heels of Dashmiel's shiny black I'm-an-assistant-professor-on-myway-up-and-you're-not shoes sink deep into the earth with every step. Dashmiel has to fight for balance, and Lisey guesses this does nothing to improve his mood. Tony Jddington falls in beside him. Scott pauses a moment, as if not quite sure what's going on, and then also starts to move, slipping himself in between Dashmiel and Eddington. He delighted her into forgetting her omenish feeling

(broken glass in the morning)

for a little while, but now it's back

(broken hearts at night)

and with a vengeance. She thinks it must be why all these details look so big to her. She is sure the world will come back into more

normal focus once she has, in Dashmiel's words, grabbed herself a little air-conditioning. And once she's gotten that pesty swatch of cloth out of her butt.

This really is almost over, she reminds herself, and-how funny life can be-it is at this precise moment that the day begins to derail. A campus security cop who is older than the others on this detail (she will later identify him from Stefan Queensland's news photo as Captain S. Heffernan) holds up the rope barrier on the far side of the ceremonial rectangle of earth. All she notices about him is that he's wearing what her husband might have called a puffickly huh-yooge batch of orifice on his khaki shirt. Her husband and his two flanking escorts-Dashmiel on Scott's left, C. Anthony Eddington on Scott's right-duck beneath the rope in a move so synchronized it almost could have been choreographed.

The crowd is moving toward the parking lot with the principals ... with one exception. Blondie is not heading toward the parking lot. Blondie is still standing on the parking-lot side of the commencement patch. A few people bump him, and he's forced a few steps backward after all, onto the baked dead earth where the Shipman Library will stand come 1989 (if the chief contractor's promises can be believed, that is). Then he's actually stepping forward against the tide, his hands coming unclasped so he can push first a girl out of his way to his left and then a guy out of his way on his right. His mouth is moving. At first Lisey again thinks he's mouthing a silent prayer, and then she hears the broken gibberishlike something a bad James Joyce imitator might write-and for the first time she becomes actively alarmed. Blondie's somehow weird blue eyes are fixed on her husband, but Lisey understands that he does not want to discuss Bigfoot or the hidden religious subtexts of Scott's novels. This is no mere deep-space boy.

"The church bells came down Angel Street thick as falling oak trees," says Blondie-says Gerd Allen Cole-who, it will turn out, spent most of his seventeenth year in an expensive Virginia mental institution and was released as cured and good to go, thanks very much, and these

words Lisey gets in the clear. They cut through the rising chatter of the crowd, that hum of conversation, like a knife through some light, sweet cake. “That rungut sound, ar! Like rain on a tin roof! Dirty flowers! Ya, dirty and sweet! This is how the church bells sound in the basement!”

A right hand that seems made entirely of long pale fingers goes to the tails of the white shirt, and Lisey suddenly understands

(George Wallace oh Christ - Wallaceand Bremmer)

exactly what’s going on here, although it comes to her in a series of shorthand TV images from her childhood. She looks at Scott and sees Scott is speaking to Dashmiel. Dashmiel is looking at Stefan Queensland, the irritated frown on Dashmiel’s face saying he’s had Quite! Enough! Photographs! For one day! Thank! You! Queensland himself is looking down at his camera, making some adjustment, and C. Anthony “Toneh” Eddington is making a note on his pad.

She even spies the older campus security cop, he of the khaki uniform and the puffickly huh-yooge batch of orifice; this worthy is looking at the crowd, but it is the wrong part of the crowd. It’s impossible that she can see all these folks and Blondie too, but she can, she does; she can even see Scott’s lips forming the words think, that went pretty well, which is a testing comment he often makes after events like this ... and oh Jesus Mary and JoJo the Carpenter, she tries to scream out Scott’s name and warn him but her throat locks up, dry and spitless, she can’t say anything, and Blondie’s got the tails of that lolloping big white shirt all the way up, and underneath are empty belt loops and a flat hairless belly and lying against his white skin is the butt of a gun which he now lays hold of and she hears him say, closing in on Scott a little from the right, “If it closes the lips of the bells, it will have done the job. I’m sorry, Papa.”

I’m sorry, Papa.

She's running forward, or trying to, but oh God she's got such a puffickly huh-yooge case of gluefoot and someone shoulders in front of her, a coed with her hair tied up in a wide white silk ribbon with NASHVILLE printed on it in blue (see how she sees everything?), and Lisey pushes her with one hand, the hand not holding the silver spade, and the coed caws "Hey!" except it sounds slower and draggier than that, like the word hey recorded at 45 RPM and then played back at 33.3 or maybe even 16 RPM. The whole world has gone to hot tar and for an eternity Scott and Dashmiel are blocked from her view; she can see only Tony Eddington, making more of his idiotic notes-a slow starter, but once he gets going ... whooo! Boy takes notes like a house afire! Then the coed with the NASHVILLE ribbon stumbles clear of Lisey's field of vision -finally!-and as Dashmiel and her husband come into view again, Lisey sees Dashmiel's body language go from a drone to a startled cry of fear. It happens in the space of an instant.

Lisey sees what Dashmiel sees. She sees Blondie now with the gun (it will prove to be a Ladysmith .22, made in Korea and bought at a pawn-and-loan in South Nashville for thirty-seven dollars) pointed at her husband, who has at last seen his danger and stopped. In Lisey-time, all of this happens very, very slowly. She doesn't actually see the bullet fly out of the .22's muzzle-not quite-but she hears Scott say, very mildly, seeming to drawl the words over the course of ten or even fifteen seconds: "Let's talk about it, son, right?" And then she sees fire bloom from the gun's nickel-plated muzzle in a yellow-white corsage. She hears a pop-stupid, insignificant: the sound of someone breaking a paper lunch sack with the palm of his hand. She sees Dashmiel, that chickenshit southern-fried asshole, turn and plunge away to his immediate left. She sees Scott buck backward on his heels. At the same time his chin thrusts forward. The combination is weirdly graceful, like a dance-floor move. A black hole opens in the right side of his summer sport coat. "Son, you honest-to-God don't want to do that," he says, and even in Lisey-time she hears the way his voice thins a little more on every word until he sounds like a test pilot in a high-altitude chamber. Yet Lisey is almost positive he doesn't know he has been shot. His sport coat swings open as he

puts his hand out in a commanding stop-this-shit gesture, and she realizes two things simultaneously: that she can see gouts of blood soaking into the front of his shirt and that she has at last-oh thank God for small favors-broken into some semblance of a run.

“I got to end all this ding-dong for the freesias,” says Gerd Allen Cole with perfect fretful clarity, and Lisey is suddenly sure that once Scott is dead, once the damage is done, Blondie will either kill himself or pretend to try. For the time being, however, he has this first business to finish. The business of the author. Blondie turns his wrist slightly so that the smoking and somehow cuntish muzzle of the Ladysmith .22 points at the left side of Scott’s chest; in Lisey-time the move is smooth and slow. Blondie lies done the lung; his second bullet will be a heart shot, she chinks, and knows she can’t allow that to happen. If her husband is to have any chance at all, this loony tune must not be allowed to put any more lead into him.

As if hearing her, repudiating her, Gerd Allen Cole says, “It never ends until you are. You’re responsible for all these repetitions, old boy. You are hell, and you are a monkey, and now you are my monkey!”

This speech is the closest he comes to making sense, and making it gives Lisey just enough time to first wind up with the silver spade-her hands, somehow knowing their business in their own way, have already found their position near the top of the thing’s forty-inch handle-and then swing it. Still, it’s close. If it had been a horse race, the tote board would undoubtedly have flashed the HOLD TICKETS WAIT FOR PHOTO message. But when the race is between a man with a gun and a woman with a shovel, you don’t need a photo. And in slowed-down Lisey-time there’s no chance of a missed perception, anyway. She sees it all. She sees the spade’s silver scoop strike the gua, driving it upward, just as that corsage blooms again (she can see only part of the flame and none of the muzzle; the muzzle is hidden by the blade of the spade). She sees the spade carry on forward and upward as the second shot goes harmlessly into the hot August sky. She sees the gun fly loose, and there is time to think,

Holy smuck! I really put a charge into this one! before the commemorative spade connects with the blond fruitcake's face. His hand is still in there (three of those slim long fingers will be broken and Lisey could give Shit One about Monsieur Deep-Space Fruitcake Cole's fingers), but all the hand ends up protecting is his forehead. The spade's silver bowl connects solidly with the lower part of the wouldbe assassin's face, breaking his nose, shattering his right cheekbone and the bony orbit around his staring right eye, mashing his lips back against his teeth (and pretty well exploding the upper lip), breaking nine teeth, as well-the four in front will prove to be shattered right down to the gum line. All in all, it's quite a job. A Mafia goon with a set of brass knucks couldn't have done better.

Now-still slow, still in Lisey-time-the elements of Stefan Queensland's awardwinning photograph are assembling themselves.

Captain S. Heffernan has seen what's happening only a second or two after Lisey, but he has also had to deal with the bystander problem, in his case a fat bepimpled fella wearing baggy Bermuda shorts and a T-shirt with Scott Landon's smiling face on the front. Captain Heffernan first grapples with this young fe11a and then shunts him aside with one muscular shoulder. The young fella goes flying with a dismayed what-the-fuck:) expression on the speckled moon face beneath his crew cut.

By then Lisey has administered the silver spade to the wouldbe assassin. Gerd Allen Cole, aka Blondie, is sinking to the ground (and out of the photo's field) with a dazed expression in one eye and blood pouring from the other one. Blood is also gushing from the hole that was his mouth. Heffernan completely misses the actual hit. Roger Dashmiel, suddenly remembering that he is supposed to be the master of ceremonies and not a jackrabbit, turns back toward Eddington, his protege, and Landon, his troublesome guest of honor, just in time to take his place as a staring, slightly blurred face in the photo's background.

Scott Landon, meanwhile, shock-walks right out of the awardwinning photo. He walks as though unmindful of the heat, striding toward the



parking lot and Nelson Hall beyond, Nelson Hall which is home of the English department, and air-conditioned. He walks with surprising briskness, at least to begin with, and a goodly part of the crowd moves with him. The crowd seems for the most part unaware that anything has happened. Lisey is both infuriated and unsurprised. After all, how many of them actually saw Blondie with that cuntish little pistol in his hand? How many of them recognized the burst-paper-bag sounds as gunshots? The hole in Scott's coat could be a smudge of dirt from his shoveling chore, and the blood which has soaked his shirt is as yet invisible to the outside world. He's now making a strange and horrible whistling noise each time he inhales, but how many of them hear that? No, it's her they're looking at-some of them, anyway-the daffy dame who has just inexplicably hauled off and smacked some guy in the face with the ceremonial silver spade. A lot of them are grinning about it, actually grinning, as if they believe it's all part of a show being put on for their benefit; the Scott Landon Road Show. Probably they believe exactly that. Well, fuck them, and fuck Dashmiel, and fuck the day-late-and-dollar-short campus cop with his Sam Browne belt and oversize badge. All she cares about now is Scott. She thrusts the shovel out not quite blindly to her right and Eddington, their Boswell-for-a-day, takes it. It's either that or get smacked in the nose with it. Then, still in that dreadful slowtime, Lisey runs after her husband, whose briskness evaporates as soon as he reaches the suck-oven heat of the parking lot. He begins to stagger and weave; his upper body begins to curl into a shrimp shape. She sees this and tries to run faster and still it feels like she's running in glue. Behind her, Tony Eddington is peering at the silver spade like a man who has no idea what he's gotten hold of; it might be an artillery shell, a radiation detector, or the Great Lost Whang-Dang-Doodle of the Egyptian pharaohs. To him comes Captain S. Heffernan, and although Captain Heffernan will later in his secret heart doubt that it was really Eddington who laid the gun-toting nutjob low, the captain is not (even at one in the morning, even to himself, over bourbon and branch water), able to swear it was not Eddington but the wife who stopped the nutjob's clock before said nutjob could fire a second shot-the kill shot, most likely-into the writer. The mind is a monkey; the mind is a monster. The mind is sort

of a madman, actually. Captain S. Heffernan knows these things, knows it's why so-called "eyeball witnesses" are never to be trusted, and that includes so-called professionals like himself. Besides, he tells himself, that fat kid with the zits and the crew art was in my way.

In any case, the nutjob is down, the nutjob is puling through the hole that used to be his mouth, the nutjob is toast, and Stan Heffernan seizes the Eddington kid's free left hand and pumps it, feeling a large relieved grin spread across his face as he realizes he may just get out of this mess with his skin on and his job intact.

Lisey runs toward her husband, who has just gone down on his hands and knees in the parking hot. And Queensland snaps his picture as she goes, catching just half of one shoe on the far right-hand side of the frame ... something not even he will realize, then or ever.

## V

He goes down, the Pulitzer prize winner goes down., Scott Landon goes down, and Lisey makes the supreme effort to break out of that slow and terrible Lisey-time. She must succeed because she has heard the cry of alarm from the part of the crowd that's been moving with Scott and now she hears-in the maddening slow-speak of Lisey-time-someone saying Heeeeeee's hurrrrt! She must break free because if she doesn't get to him before the crowd surrounds him and shuts her out, they will very likely kill him with their concern. With smotherlove.

She screams at herself in her own head

(strap it on RIGHT NOW!)

and that does it. Suddenly she is knifing forward; all the world is noise and heat and sweat, but she blesses the speedy reality of it even as she uses her left hand to grab the left cheek of her ass and pull, raking the goddamn underwear out of the crack of her ass, there, at least one thing about this wrong and broken day is now mended.

A coed in a shell top, the kind of top where the straps tie on rite shoulders in big floppy bows, threatens to block her narrowing path to Scott, but Lisey ducks beneath her and hits the hot-top. She will not be aware of her scraped and blistered knees until much later-until the hospital, in fact, where a kindly paramedic will notice and put lotion on them, something so cool and soothing, it will make her cry with relief. But that is for later. Now it might well be just her and Scott alone here on the edge of this hot parking lot, this terrible black-and-yellow ballroom floor which must It was a hundred and thirty degtees at least, maybe a hundred and fifty. Maybe more. Her mind tries to present her with the image of an egg frying sunny-side up in her Ma's old black iron spider and she thrusts it away. Scott looks up at her and now his face is waxy pale except for the black

triangles forming beneath his eyes and the blood which has begun running from the right side of his mouth and down his chin in a scarlet stream.

“Lisey!” His voice is thin, whooping. “Did he ... shoot me?” “Don’t try to talk,” she tells him, and puts a hand on his chest. His shirt, oh dear God, it is not wet with blood but soaked with blood, and beneath it she can feel his heart running along so fast and light; it is not the heartbeat of a human being, she thinks, but that of a bird. Pigeon-ssrrlse, she thinks, and that is when the girl with the floppy bows tied on her shoulders falls on top of her. She would land on Scott but Lisey instinctively shields him, taking the brunt of the girl’s weight (“Hey, shit! FUCK!” the startled girl cries out) with her back ... it is there for a moment and then gone. Lisey sees the girl shoot her hands out to break her fall-oh, the divine reflexes of the young, she thinks-and the girl is successful ... but then she is crying, “Ow! Ow!OW!” This makes Lisey look at her own hands. They aren’t blistered, not yet, but they have gone the deep red of a perfectly cooked Maine lobster.

“Lisey,” Scott whispers, and oh Christ how his breath screams when he pulls it in.

“Who pushed me?” the girl with the bows on her shoulders is demanding. She is a-hunker, hair from a busted ponytail in her eyes, crying with surprise, pain, and embarrassment.

Lisey leans close to Scott. The heat of him terrifies her and fills her with pity deeper than any she has ever felt, deeper than she thought it was possible to feel. He is actually shivering with the heat. Awkwardly, using only one arm, she strips off her jacket. “Scott, don’t try to talk. You’re right, you’ve been sh-”

“I’m so hot,” he says, and begins to shiver harder. What comes next-convulsions? His hazel eyes stare up into her blue ones. Blood runs from the corner of his mouth. She can smell it. It stinks. Now the collar of his shirt is filling in red. “I’m so hot, please give me ice.”

“I will,” she says, and puts her jacket under his head and neck.

“I will, Scott.” Thank God for his sport coat, she thinks, not quite incoherent, and then has an idea. She grabs the hunkering, crying girl by the arm. “What’s your name?”

The girl stares at her as if she were mad, but answers the question. “Lisa Lemke.”

Same as mine, small world, Lisey thinks, but does not say. What she says is, “My husband has been shot, Lisa. Can you go over there to”-she cannot remember the name of the building, only its function-“to the English department and call an ambulance? Dial 911-”

“Ma’am? Mrs. Landon, is it?” This is the campus security cop, making his way through the crowd with a lot of help from his meaty elbows. He squats beside her and his knees pop loudly. His knees are louder than Blondies pistol. Lisey marvels. He’s holding his walkietalkie, which was previously clipped to his Sam Browne belt in the place where a regular cop would wear his gun. When he speaks, he does so slowly and carefully, as though to a distressed child. “Mrs. Landon, I have called the campus infirmary. They are rolling their ambulance, which will take your husband to Nashville Memorial. Nashville ... Memorial ... Hospital. Do you understand me?”

She does, and her gratitude to this man is almost as deep as the pity she feels for her husband, lying on the simmering pavement and bleeding from his chest and mouth, shuddering in the heat like a distempered dog. She nods, weeping the first of what will be many tears before she gets Scott back to Maine-not on a Delta flight but on a private jet, and with a private nurse, and with another ambulance and another private nurse to meet them at the Portland .Jetport’s Civil Air Terminal. And all that is later. Now she turns back to the Lemke girl and says, “Lisey, he’s burning up-is there ice, honey? Can you think of anywhere there might be ice?”

She says this without much hope, and is therefore amazed when Lisa Lemke nods at once. "There's a soda machine and two snack machines over there." She points in the direction of Nelson Hall, which Lisey can't see. All she can see is a crowding forest of bare legs, some hairy, some smooth, some tanned, some sunburned. She realizes they are completely hemmed in, that she's tending her fallen husband in a slot the shape of a large vitamin pill or cold capsule, and feels a touch of crowd-panic. Is the word for that agoraphobia? Scott would know.

"If you can get him some ice, please do," Lisey says. "And hurry." She looks at the campus security cop, who has gone to oncknee on Scott's other side and appears to be taking his pulse—a completely useless activity, in Lisey's opinion. "Can't you make them move back?" she almost pleads. "It's so hot—"

He doesn't give her time to finish, but is up like Jack from his box, yelling, "Move it back! Let this girl through! Move it back! Let this girl through! Let him breathe, folks, let him breathe, all right, what do you say?"

The crowd shuffles back ... very reluctantly, Lisey thinks. They want to see all the blood, it seems to her.

The heat bakes relentlessly up from the pavement. She has half expected to get used to it, the way you get used to a hot shower, but that isn't happening. She listens for the approaching howl of the promised ambulance and hears nothing. Then she hears Scott, croaking her name. At the same time he twitches weakly at the side of the sweat-soaked shell top she's wearing (her bra now stands out against the silk as stark as a swollen tattoo). She looks down at him and sees something she does not like: Scott is smiling. The blood has coated his lips a rich candy red, top to bottom, side to side, and consequently the smile looks like the grin of a clown. No one lover a clown at rrtidrtight, she thinks, and wonders where that came from. It will only be much later that night—that long and mostly sleepless night, listening to the August dogs howl at the hot moon—that she'll realize it was Lon Chaney. She knows because the line was the

epigram of Scott's third novel, the only one she has hated, Empty Devils. The one that's sort of a riff on Romero's Living Dead movies.

"Lisey."

"Scott, don't try to talk-

But he is relentless, twitching at her blue silk top, his eyes dear God, they are so deep in their sockets now, but still so brilliant and fevery. He has something to say. And as always when he has something to say, he will find an audience if he can. This time he has her.

Reluctantly, she leans down.

For a moment he says nothing, but she can hear him getting ready to. He pulls air in a little at a time, in half gasps. The smell of blood is even stronger up close. A mineral smell. Or maybe it's detergent. Or

It's death, Lisey, that's all. Just the smell of death.

As if he needs to ratify this, Scott says: "It's very close, honey. I can't see it, but I ..." Another long, screaming intake of breath. "I hear it taking its meal. And grunting." Smiling as he says it. "Scott, I don't know what you're tal-

The hand which has been tugging at her top now pinches her side, and cruelly-when she takes the top off much later, in the motel room, she'll see the bruise: a true lover's knot.

"You ..." Screamy breath. "Know ..." Screamy breath, deeper. And still grinning, as if they share some horrible secret. Do they? "So ... don't ... insult my ... intelligence. Or ... your own."

Yes. She knows. It. The long boy, he calls it. Or just the thing. Or sometimes the thing with the endless piebald side. Once she meant to look up piebald in the dictionary-she is not bright about words, not like Scott is-she really did, but then she got sidetracked. And actually, it's more than just a few times he's spoken of that thing.

Especially just lately. He says you can see it if you look through dirty water glasses. If you look through them just the right way, and in the hours after midnight.

He lets go of her, or maybe just loses the strength to hold on. Lisey pulls back a little-not far. His eyes regard her from their deep and blackened sockets. They are as brilliant as ever-as aware, as full of pain-but she sees they are also full of terror and (this is what frightens her the most) some wretched amusement. As if what's happened to him is in some way funny.

Still speaking low-perhaps so only she can hear, maybe because it's the best he can manage, probably both-Scott says, "Listen. Listen, Lisey. I'll make how it sounds when it looks around."

"Scott, no-you have to stop."

He pays no attention. He draws in another of those screaming lung-shot breaths, then purses his wet red lips in a tight O, as if to whistle. Instead of whistling he makes a low, indescribably nasty chuffing noise that drives a spray of blood up his clenched throat, through his lips, and into the sweltering air. A girl sees this gusher of fine ruby droplets and cries out in revulsion. This time the crowd doesn't need the voice of authority to tell them to move back; they do so on their own, leaving the three of them-Lisey, Scott, and the cop-a perimeter of at least four feet all the way around.

The sound-dear God, it is a kind of grunting-is mercifully short. Scott coughs, his chest heaving, the wound spilling more blood in rhythmic pulses, then beckons her back down with one finger. She comes, leaning on her burning hands. His socketed eyes compel her; his mortal grin compels her.

He turns his head to the side, spits a wad of blood onto the hot tar. Then he turns back to her. "I ... could ... call it that way," he whispers. "It would come. You'd ... be ... rid of me. My everlasting ... quack."



She understands he means it, and for a moment (surely it is the power of his eyes) she believes it's true. He will make the sound again, only a little louder this time, and somewhere the long boy-that lord of sleepless nights-will turn its unspeakable hungry head. A moment later, in this world, Scott Landon will simply shiver on the pavement and die. The death certificate will say something sane, but she will know. His dark thing finally saw him and came for him and ate him alive.

So now come the things they will never speak of later, not to others nor between themselves. Too awful. Each long marriage has two hearts, one light and one dark. This is the dark heart of theirs, the one mad true secret. She will ponder it that night in the terri

ble moonlight while the dogs bark. Now she leans close to him on the baking pavement, sure he is dying, nonetheless determined to hold on to him if she can. If it means fighting the long boy for him-with nothing but her fingernails, come it to that-she will. "Well ... Lisey? What ... do ... you ... say?"

Leaning even closer. Leaning into the shivering heat of him, the sweat-and blood-stink of him. Leaning in until she can smell the last palest ghost of the Foamy he shaved with that morning and the Prell he shampooed with. Leaning in until her lips touch his ear. She whispers: "Be quiet, Scott. Just be quiet." She pauses, then adds, louder-loud enough to make him jerk his head on the pavement: "Leave that fucking thing alone and it will go away."

When she looks at him again, his eyes are different-saner, somehow, but also weaker. "Have ... you seen...? Do ... You know ...?"

"I know you," she says. "Don't you ever make that noise again." He licks at his lips. She sees the blood on his tongue and it turns her stomach, but she doesn't pull away from him.

"I'm so hot," he says. "If only I had a piece of ice to suck ..." "Soon," Lisey says, not knowing if she's promising rashly and not caring. "I'm getting it for you." At last she can hear the ambulance howling its

way toward them. That's something. Yet she is still in her heart convinced it will be too late. That sound he made, that chuffing sound, has almost shot her nerve.

And then, a kind of miracle. The girl with the bows on her shoulders and the new scrapes on her palms fights her way through to the front of the crowd. She is gasping like someone who has just run a race and sweat coats her cheeks and neck ... but she's holding two big waxed paper cups in her hands. "I spilled half the shitting Cokes getting back here," she says, throwing a brief, baleful backward glance at the crowd, "but I got the ice okay. Ice is ni—" Then her eyes roll up almost to the whites and she reels backward, all loosey-goosey in her sneakers. The campus cop-bless him, oh bless him with many blessings, huh-yooge batch of orifice and all-grabs her, steadies her, and takes one of the cups. He hands it down to Lisey, then urges the other Lisa, coed Lisa, to drink from the remaining cup. Lisey Landon pays no attention. Later, replaying all this, she'll be a little in awe of her own single-mindedness. Now she only thinks, Jurt keep her from falling on top of me again if she faints, and turns back to Scott.

He's shivering worse than ever, and his eyes are dulling out. And still he tries. "Lisey ... so hot ... ice ..."

"I have it, Scott. Now will you for once just shut your everlasting mouth?"

And for a wonder, he does. A Scott Landon first. Maybe, she thinks, he's just out of wind.

Lisey drives her hand deep into the cup, sending Coke all the way to the top and splooshing over the edge. The cold is shocking and utterly wonderful. She clutches a good handful of ice chips, thinking how ironic this is: whenever she and Scott stop at a turnpike rest area and she uses a machine that dispenses cups of soda instead of cans or bottles, she always hammers on the NO ICE button, feeling righteous-others may allow the evil soft-drink companies to shortchange them by dispensing half a cup of ice and half a cup of

soda, but not Lisa Landon! What was Good Ma Debusher's saying? I didn't fall off a hay truck yesterday.'

His eyes are half-closed now, but he opens his mouth and when she first rubs his lips with her handful of ice and then pops one of the melting shards onto his bloody tongue, his shivering suddenly stops. God, it's magic. Emboldened, she rubs her freezing, leaking hand along his right cheek, his left cheek, and then across his forehead, where drops of Coke-colored water drip into his eyebrows.

"Oh, Lisey, that's heaven," he says, and although still screamly, his voice sounds more rational to her ... more with-it, more there. The ambulance has pulled up on the left side of the crowd and she can hear an impatient male voice shouting, "Paramedics! Let us through! Paramedics! C'mon, people, let us through!"

"Lisey," he whispers.

"Scott, you need to be quiet."

But he means to have his say; as always, and until death closes his mouth sixteen years later, Scott Landon will have his say. "Take ... a motel room ... close to ... hospital."

"You don't need to tell me th-"

He gives her hand an impatient squeeze, stopping her. "It may ... have heard you ... seen you."

"Scott, I don't know what you're-"

The paramedics come shouldering through the crowd. She and Scott are down to only seconds now, and Scott knows it. He looks at her urgently.

"First thing ... You do ... water glasses ..." He can say no more. Luckily, he doesn't need to.

## VI

After checking in at the Greenview Motel and before walking to the hospital half a mile away to visit her husband, Lisey Landon goes into the bathroom. There are two glasses on the shelf over the sink, and they are the real kind, not plastic. She puts both of them in her purse, careful not to look at either one as she does so. On her walk to the hospital she takes them out one at a time, still not looking at them, and throws them into the gutter. The sound of them breaking comforts her even more than the sound of the little shovel's scoop, connecting first with the pistol and then with Blondie's face.

(scanned from McSweeney's Enchanted Chamber of Astonishing Stories)