

At seventeen Shelly Thorpe had borne a son. The baby was taken for adoption; she had ceased to think about it almost at once. She went on to university, enjoying the atmosphere of college life. She had even contemplated post-graduate study, but her parents at length lost patience with her, and the necessity of earning her own way forced her into a business career. Seven years, three affairs later, she decided to enter another profession. She seldom regretted the decision.

She lay with one arm across her abdomen and like a ballet dancer, stretched her leg. Her head turned on the pillow toward the boy at her side. He showed not the least uneasiness at her admiration, and found it easy to return her gaze. She smiled, and said, softly, "How old are you?"

"Nineteen".

"Nineteen," she sighed.

"Anything the matter with that?" he said. "Or maybe you're worried about corrupting the morals of our youth?" This she found really funny and she laughed with him. He reached over and tugged at a strand of her hair. She slapped at his hand and he gave up, still laughing.

"No. It's just . . ." Her hesitation hung in the air like smoke. Then, "I had a child once. He'd be your age now."

The statement didn't startle him. He was vaguely flattered that she was confiding in him. This, he realized, was not something she told everyone. At the same time, it came to him as a surprise that he had estimated her age so well. He found it impossible to think of her as having been a mother. He felt that he should say something.

"You're wondering what happened to him. He was put out for adoption. I hope to hell they found him a good place. I guess he deserves something". She lay silent awhile, staring at the ceiling, "What time is it?"

"Four thirty . . . ah . . . five . . . six . . . Four thirty-eight."

"Pretty near time for you to toddle off, little man."

"Uh." He lay back whining like a child, "But mommy, I don't wanna."

"She laughed. "Well, want to or not, you're going." She moved beside him and got up.

"Whither away, blithe spirit?"

Over her shoulder she threw back at him, "To the can, little man." He was about to say something, in reply but checked himself.

When she came back, she was wearing a robe, hidden in the whipped-cream folds. Her soft smile pleased him.

"Could I have your phone number?" His politeness was genuine. She recognized this and felt grateful. She took a slip of paper from the table and wrote it down for him.

"Now back to your studies, little man."

"Mind if I eat first?"

"Not at all. Glad to see you're not trying to live on love alone." They both laughed. As he turned to leave, she reached out for his arm, "Tell me your name again."

He was caught off guard. "Timothy Adam Harding, esquire. For God's sake, call me Tim."

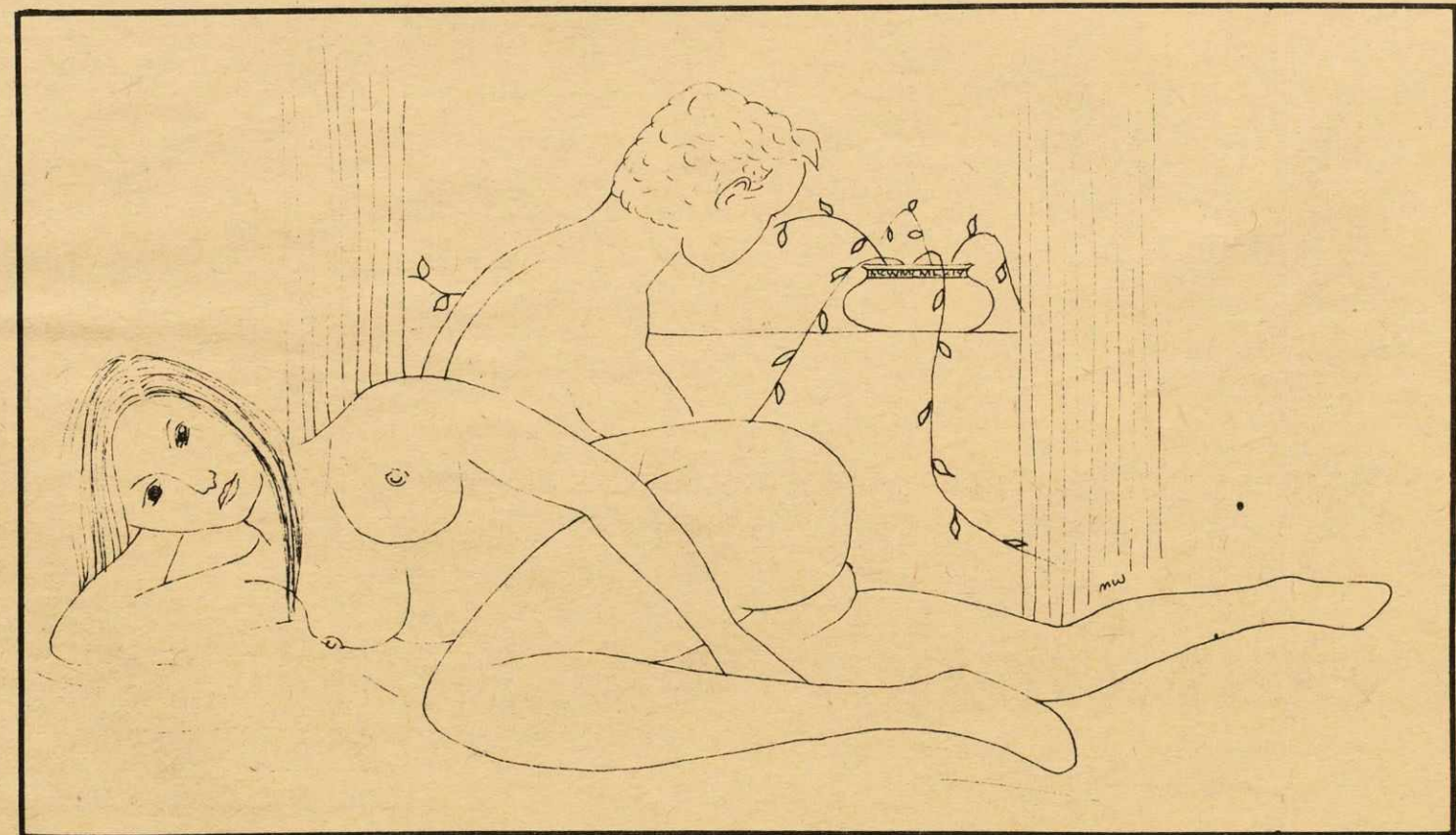
"Is your father the lawyer?"

"Yes, but he's not my real father. I was adopted, too."

For a moment her face clouded. "Why didn't you say so before?" she asked.

"Didn't think it was important. Besides, I had other things on my mind." He smiled at her and she felt warm. "Well, I'm off." He waved to her from the door and was gone.

In the weeks that followed they met occasionally. She grew to like him as a person; was interested by what he told her of



his life in college. She thought again of her own college days, and he soon learned that she had been to university. This he found more surprising than the fact that she had a baby. She saw his

the water's iciness on his hand. She sat up when he returned, looking almost child-like, smiling at him. "Thanks."

He sat down beside her as he drank. "Where did you have the

him from the window go splashing off into the night. He swam

out of her sight before she realized that the room was growing cold.

She heard nothing from him for weeks. In April, the weather suddenly turned warm; she felt cheered by the youth of the world. It was in April that he came to her.

He was drunk. The ringing at

her door signalled it, and she was prepared when she opened to admit him. He stared at her dully as he brushed past into the room. He sank onto the couch and without waiting for her to follow him began to mumble, "Got to know, I have got to know," lengthening the words out in a slur.

She stood over him, neutral. Slowly, as though it required the maximum of concentration, he spoke. "I have to know," he repeated, "the day. You must . . . must remember the day." His voice trailed off.

"Would you mind telling me first what it is you're talking about?" Her tone was firm, commanding.

He laughed foolishly. Then "You know what I'm talking about. You know." He nodded

solemnly. "Baby. Got to know about the baby." He paused as if trying to remember something.

Suddenly it struck her. She found the idea so enormously ridiculous, so astoundingly absurd that she could not feel shocked by it. The magnitude of the boy's guilt resembled in her mind the burden carried by an ant, its significance as great. It was so outrageously funny that she could not even laugh. Slowly she realized the torment he must be in. Oh, little man; poor, poor little man.

She began to stroke his hair gently, softly; but when he became aware of what she was doing, he thrust her hand away and rose savagely to face her. But before he could say anything he retched.

Afterward, she would have helped him to his feet, but he pushed her away. He said nothing, not a word, and staggered out. She cleaned as best she could the carpet and the davenport, not repelled by the task, simply neutral. She went to the window to feel the touch of spring. Oh Shelley, Shelley, she thought, all things are possible, but nothing is probable for very long.

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puzzled look and asked him what was so funny; lots of girls go to university and some learn even more than what's in the books, little man. He laughed then at her seriousness.

He was in her apartment on a March Saturday. Rain fell, pounding the city. He went to the window. Mood and the weather matched tones for them both.

"Ah, spring, spring. Where have the days of spring fled? Aye, where are they?" He spoke softly in the dim room. The rush of rain against the windows drowned the sound of his voice. She stirred on the bed.

"Get me a glass of water?" she murmured. For a moment she couldn't understand why he laughed. He went into the kitchen and got it for her, aware of

baby? The quiet question hung suspended for an instant. She was not expecting it and did not know how to reply.

"What do you mean?" she said to fill the pause.

"Here? In this city?"

"No, Montreal. Why?"

"When?"

"What do you mean, when?" She was becoming angry. "What right have you to ask all these damn questions?"

"When?" His voice bore the edge of insistence.

She put the glass down and flung her arms wide in exasperation. "Oh, for the love of . . . in May, May something or other. Why don't you get the hell out of here and come back some time when it's not raining?"

He got up, "Yeah. Sure". He