

"Spenser is an overmuscled troglodyte! I'd rather...."

"I read mysteries too," said Elaine in a small voice. Gregory and Adelle looked at her. "You do?" said Gregory, puzzled.

"What sort of mysteries do you like, Elaine?" said Adelle, smiling innocently at her. Elaine shifted gaze about the table.

"Oh, all sorts really. I like Simenon, and,....uh, Agatha Christie. I've never really cared for Spenser's or Marlow's books."

"Philip Marlow's books?" Adelle asked the question in a soft, leading tone of voice. Gregory seemed embarrassed but Elaine didn't even look at him; she was beginning to feel pleased with herself.

"Yes, I think Marlow's quite over rated as a writer."

"Oh really," said Adelle, with a dangerous feline smile on her lips. Gregory was silently concentrating on his plate. Silence settled in deeply. Adelle took a long drink of wine and then reclined in her chair. Her glass was held high beside her cheek. She examined the glass in a distracted fashion and softly said, "Elaine, Gregory's told me that we have a mutual friend, Alan Reynolds." Elaine looked up from her plate and shook her bangs into her eyes.

"Yeah, I know Alan, He's a great guy." Adelle nodded her agreement and replied, "You must have been around last spring before he left on his trip to Spain." Elaine sat up in her chair and answered loud and fast.

"Yes, he talked on and on about that trip. I got a post card from Madrid last week. He's been to the bull-fights, just like Hemingway."

"How nice," said Adelle. Gregory squirmed in his chair. Adelle gave me a look that said, "See that?" She knew, as did Gregory and I, that Alan had been away for nearly a year and he'd gone to Italy, not Spain. In silence I cleared the table and took the dishes to the kitchen.

*Adelle (speaking of Elaine):
Oh, a marvelous girl, as long as you keep a sharp eye on the silverware. A totally unreliable woman leaning on a totally reliable man. Somehow one can always trust Gregory to find a rock upon which to smash his heart.*

*Gregory:
It came to me slowly how chaotic and untrustworthy she was. All her tragic tales, that I believed in so readily, I learned to be fabrications. She is a liar. Yet I know her well enough now to see how pathetic a girl hides behind those lies. She lies because she thinks that is how she'll keep my love and she drags me to bed because that is how she wants to ensure my lust....She frightens me.*

I stood on that autumn morning on Jarvis Avenue, breathing the sweet, crisp air and admiring the gracefully falling leaves. A squirrel rustled through the hedge beside me and bounded past to the sanctuary of a curbside tree. Up the trunk he scurried till he was perched on a branch high over my head. We regarded each other for a time in the quiet. Then up the street a door banged and I saw Gregory walking down the sidewalk to his house. He saw me and waved. I waited by the tree.

He was a small lean young man possessed of a nervous energy and piercing gaze. He wore an old school jacket that bagged at the shoulders and that had sleeves that hung nearer his knuckles than his wrists. On his head he had a wooly toque and on his hands gloves, though it was not so cold out. I could almost imagine a mother bundling him up before letting him out the door.

"Hello Ian," he said. "Hi Greg." We shook hands. Gregory always offered his hand when he met people.

"You wanted to talk to me?" "Yes I did....Shall we walk?" He stood back with his arm outstretched along the sidewalk.

"Sounds fine to me." We began walking. "Beautiful day," I said.

"Certainly is." He bounded ahead suddenly and snatched a fluttering leaf from the air. "I love autumn," he said, "You know it's probably all the years one spends in school that does it, but for me autumn is the season of new beginnings. I always have hope at this time of the year." He contemplated the leaf in his fingers.

"You have something important to tell me Greg?" He looked up, distracted, with a faint smile on his lips.

"Yes I suppose I do." He tossed the leaf away and began to blush. "I'm in love with an extraordinary young lady named Elaine Pierce." He then laughed happily and wrapped his arms about himself.

Adelle's first response to the news was a long whistle, descending in pitch. She was sprawled across the sofa, a bag of cookies at her elbow and a tattered copy of 'The Big

woman her chance. But you know how Gregory can be."

"He did manage to get this one into bed." "Oh really? So now his problems really

She lies because she thinks that is how she will ensure my love and she drags me to bed because she wants to ensure my lust... she frightens me.

Sleep' in her hand. When she wasn't in classes Adelle could normally be found in such a position. She said she found it good rest and relaxation after a hard day grappling with Melville, the great white whale, and the rest of the 'superhuman crew'. I've been living with her for two years now and love her despite the crumbs she leaves on the sofa cushions.

Her whistling concerto of amazement finished, she sat up.

"Well I'll be damned, Gregory got himself a floosie. How about that."

"My dear, we don't have any idea what sort of girl she is. Besides, what sort of word is 'floosie'? You've got to stop reading that hard-boiled trash." I sat beside her and took a cookie from the bag.

"Floosie's a perfectly good colloquialism. But I suppose you're right. We should give this

start. I wonder how he did it anyways. Probably sang her a sonnet or two and got horribly intense." She sighed heavily. "I wish he wouldn't try so hard. He worries me so. He's like a kid who insists on climbing trees even though his hands can scarcely reach the boughs." She tossed the Chandler aside and lay with her head on my lap, her eyes closed. I gently rubbed her forehead.

"He's an old friend, isn't he?" she said. "Gregory?....Yes, I've known him since high school."

"I hope this works out well for him." "So do I. Anyways we'll get a look at Elaine next Saturday. I've invited them over for dinner." Adelle took my hand and held it at her side.

"That will be nice. I'll give her the third degree while you're playing in the kitchen."



"Come on. Let's be kindly in our thoughts. She's probably a wonderful girl." "Oh, you're always so god-damned fair, no fun at all."

*Adelle (to me):
You've been brooding over Gregory and his femme fatale as if he were you're only heir. Either adopt the hapless boy, Ian, or let him get on with his life. He's not your responsibility.*

*Gregory:
Her moods grew more and more violent and I found myself constantly frustrated as I tried to solve the mystery of what she wanted. As the mock-life of lies she had given me fell away in tatters we found baser and baser ground to hold common between us. Ours became a bond of lust, because she would not let me love her. Our bed stank of self-deception.*

And then one night I came home to a silent house. I found her in the bathroom, laying in bath splattered with gore, the crimson razor still in her fingers. Her eyes were open but dull.

I have to leave her. I'm empty and I can give nothing more. I have to say good-bye.

Gregory lay on my couch sleeping as Adelle and I watched over him. She turned to me.

"You can't do this forever, Ian." She was sitting taller and more resolute, her hands making emphatic gestures in the air. "Granted, Gregory needed support and rest tonight but if you let him he'll lean on you forever. We have...."

"No, I think you're wrong about that." I interrupted. She began to argue but then shut her mouth and sat quietly, waiting for me to elaborate.

"He's not so simple Adelle. He keeps a lot inside, out of sight. That's something I can sense in him. You wait and see. One night's sleep and he'll begin to pull himself together again. Whether I, or we, help doesn't really make a difference. He'd do it anyway, he doesn't quit. What was really devastating for him about Elaine was that he had to give up on her. He doesn't give up on people easily." I said this and wondered why it had taken me so long to realize these things. Somehow spoken aloud they seemed so self-evident. Adelle sat beside me and quietly pondered. I stroked her neck gently and after some time she looked up at me.

"Maybe I've underestimated the both of you," she said.

I shrugged and smiled, "It was a god-damned mess."

"And now it's over?" she asked.

"I think it is."

"Poor Elaine."

"Yes....poor Elaine."

The room was quiet for a time. Then we went to bed. In the morning we found Gregory gone, his blankets neatly folded on the chesterfield, and a note thanking us very sincerely for all we had done.

