

## Gadzooks

Chrystal Anderson, the art model, had written a religious poem about Jesus and made him say, "I am the Cussword."

"What . . . ?" I said. I was slowly reading her poem out loud as best I could with her tight, tiny handwriting that I wasn't used to.

"What?" she exclaimed. "No! 'I am the *Resurrection!*'" She took the sheet of drawing paper out of my hands, pinching it at the very edges of the left and right sides so she wouldn't smear her sketch of Jesus, all saggy on the cross with his knees given out. She stared at the "Resurrection" word a long time, making sure, I guessed, that she was right. She was moon-eyed to begin with, and me misreading her poem in that insulting and mistaken manner put a heartstricken look on her face.

It was just before class in the third-floor studio of the Art Building, and all around us students were drinking Cokes and Diet Cokes and smoking and waving away smoke. Women wearing jeans or bell-bottom pants. Men the same way. That was in October of 1973, and though I never knew any of them very well, I remembered them all, and I could draw them all today from memory, if I felt like it. Everybody's hair was long and straight and pushed behind their ears, or in a shag like Chrystal's. Only I wore mine in a pixie. I said to Chrystal, "Are you Christian?"

"Yes," she answered and looked from her poem to me, nervously.

"I'm thinking of becoming Christian," I told her. Actually I already was and was only speaking from anxiety.

ety, trying to make friends with her and take her mind off the "Cussword" confusion. But I must admit I was attracted to the religion of Epicurus, who in my history book said exactly this, "Beauty and virtue and the like are to be honored, if they give pleasure, but if they do not give pleasure, we must bid them farewell."

Beauty was giving me enough pleasure but virtue wasn't, and I was ready to tell it so long. In spite of being a Baptist, I was not, back then, religious. And if I did like Epicurus said, I was supposed to die a happy person and not have trouble sleeping.

That would be a real good deal. I'd been very wakeful and restless ever since Earnest had left me the year before, and lots of times near dawn I'd lie listening to the morning bird sounds. A treeful of birds chittering and talking right outside the window of my bedroom, me practically right among them because I lived in a garage apartment. Once I'd loved all that bird noise, but lately I would become petrified. I'd start believing that I was fixing to get carried off, one sharp beakful at a time. At that hour of the day I could believe anything, before I got hold of some coffee. And watching Chrystal check her poem, I realized that I'd spent a whole year trying to follow Epicurus's advice about virtue before I even heard of him. But it was too hard. I couldn't do it by myself.

Right off the bat that afternoon Dr. Joel said, "A literal drawing where each feature receives the same emphasis is brutal to the eyes. There's too much force." He was flipping through our pile of homework assignments, and my picture of Earnest from an old photo was the only one to slow him down long enough to start lecturing. This frequently happened. "It's like a caricature in reverse," said Dr. Joel next. What of it? I wanted to ask, though I liked Dr. Joel amazingly well, him and Chrystal out of the entire class. He was small, but manly, with cat-muscles and hair that was longer

than any other man's in the studio, curly as could be and very black. You could make out every bone in his head, he was that *cut*.

The reason I didn't come right out and say I preferred caricatures in reverse for Earnest, completely apart from the fact that I hadn't been blamed by name, was that I was in mourning for him, or so they all believed. Not a one of them knew, and as far as I could tell nobody that I couldn't avoid there in Weatherford had figured out that Earnest had jilted me. That was a secret I'd have burned in hell before I shared. I'd told Earnest's boss in a split-second speech over the phone that Earnest wouldn't be roughnecking for him any more, and I told everybody else, the ladies whose houses I cleaned and the students and everyone, that Earnest had died.

From a buck running an antler right through the middle of him one fatal weekend when he'd driven back to our hometown in southeast Oklahoma for a hunting trip. "A wild animal, when it goes into rut . . ." I'd say to people and never finish my sentence, while whoever I was talking to would nearly break down with disgust and compassion, more for me, I always hoped, than for Earnest. Poor me, brutally widowed. Barely nineteen. And really it would have been every bit as incorrect to tell people I'd been divorced. I never got any legal papers.

Dr. Joel said, "A pencil drawing without shade values and line variation is too monotonous." But I just kept peeling the paper away from the point ends of my crayons, getting them ready to sharpen. Chrystal lay on a blanket on the floor in her beige brassiere and panties that hit her around the waist, briefs I mean, sweating.

It got so hot in that studio, even in the fall. We usually couldn't open the windows because the wind from outside would send everybody's paper flying around like trash. We had a big round fan on tall legs that made a noise like a rainstorm, but it hardly budged

the air. Mostly it only caused big globs of heat along the walls to sort of roll over, like fat old dogs. Chrystal out there in the middle of the studio always surprised me by not smothering, and she'd complained to me after I'd finished her poem that she'd come up with a serious case of heat rash on her behind, which she blamed equally on the temperature and on the polyester blanket she had to lie on.

While Dr. Joel went on about literal drawings, she kept wiggling around, trying to find a pose she could tolerate. I got to thinking about her poem. Some lines in it went, "From this one egg hatch chicks, rabbits, and reptiles. Hopping bounding slithering crawling. Shedding feathers, fur, and skin. Cheeping thumping hissing 'Amen.'" There was a lot more, and the poem along with the Jesus illustration was an assignment she had in another of Dr. Joel's classes, where she was a student and not the model.

"Miss Anderson wrote a good poem," I said. "About Easter-time." I set my three red-shaded crayons on a table behind me, next to my four violet-shaded ones, matching saturations. Nobody took up the conversation. I turned back around and said to Chrystal, "I can't remember if you gave it a name."

She looked at me slowly, then looked slowly away, a habit of hers until she got startled by something. A frank glance. She wasn't good at hiding things, just lousy. She was bonkers over Dr. Joel, but he never used it against her. She said, "I'm thinking about calling it 'Gadzooks,' but no one will know what that means. I haven't explained it within the text."

Dr. Joel tossed me a frown, then gave up, for the time being, on trying to improve me. "So what does it mean?" he asked Chrystal kindly. He liked her more than he did the rest of us, but in a way she seemed to bring out disappointment in him and a tricky sort of grief. At times she would consult with him in our class about her homework for that other class, and when he'd look at her pictures he'd lose some of his muscle



tone. And besides that, he was a widower and probably wanted to go out with her but couldn't because of departmental policy.

"Gadzooks," said Chrystal, "is a contraction of 'God's hooks,' and *those* are the nails of the cross."

That did cause a hubbub as everybody remarked for the hundredth time that semester on all the words Chrystal was able to turn up in the dictionary. I was proud of her. Even though I barely knew her, really, I liked her, though I can't say why. I don't know what makes anybody like someone at first, before they know what they can expect from them.

Maybe it was that I was impressed by Chrystal, because she had some talents. Like her creative writing and being crazy enough over art to have the nerve to pose in her underclothes for a room full of people who might talk about her. Even if she didn't draw just the way Dr. Joel thought she should. And she had recently bragged on a painting of mine done just the week before, of my sweet gum tree back home, and I believed she and I could have interests in common.

My sweet gum tree. It was much of my mind and that's why I'd painted it. I could gaze at it from inside my childhood bedroom window at Mother's house, where Mother still lived and where Earnest and I had lived, too, from the time we were sixteen till we moved to Weatherford in the southwest part of the state so he could get a decent job, working on the rigs. At that point I got turned into a cleaning lady and college student.

But anyway, whenever I could afford the bus ticket to go back and visit my mother and supposedly Earnest's grave, I still loved to look at my tree, especially in the fall. At its spikey green-gold balls and its orange leaves that faded into purple before your eyes. Just that past weekend I'd gone home and it was the best it had ever been. The branches on the top half of the tree seemed to be throwing up a thousand hands and shouting "Hallelujah!" And that's how I felt, too,

every time I saw it, only now every time I wanted to look out at my sweet gum tree, I saw past it to the Rushes' shack. Where Sula Rush lived, the girl who stole my husband, Earnest.

Sula Rush who looked like a smiling snake, the way her mouth was the first part of her face and she kept her lips together. She was not even smart enough to know how to smile. And we would let her come over, Mother and me, just to be charitable and let her have some amusement, and she'd tour our house, staring at every visible object from the refrigerator to the alarm clock as though she'd never seen it or anything like it before in her life.

Meanwhile Earnest would be sitting, a mound of innocence, on the couch like he did every evening with his shirt off, his nipples as big as June bugs. He'd get me to nurse on them, later in the night, of course, something I understood and admitted later that no man should permit. But I'd do anything for him when he'd wake me up around twelve saying "Oh I love you, Floretta, you're my sweet honey," nosing around on me. Such mouthwatering words on such stinky breath. At that hour his breath was deadly, He could have knocked a spider off the wall with it. But I learned that even bad breath can be endured in a loved one. And all that time I was assuming he took no interest whatever in Sula Rush, unless he wondered sometimes what on earth had wandered into our house.

Everything was calm in the art studio, everybody had settled down and so had Chrystal and she was getting drawn. I was at it with my crayons, working on her hair, making it look like hair and not like a scarf like a lot of the students were prone to. Making it a hot brown, a chestnut color, very accurate. The whole time Dr. Joel kept tossing a pink eraser up and down in his hand and delivering his views on art like he did every class period, giving us things like "The regeneration of the artist's personal themes and motifs can sometimes include revision" and "The luck of the artist is always

exhaustible" and lesser things like "Yellow and blue don't really go together," which I for one didn't need to have spelled out.

There's no telling what all he said or for what purpose. Somebody had turned the radio on and Beethoven and then Mozart was playing the piano, and the fan made its racket like rain, and Chrystal's word "Gadzooks" was twirling around in my head, snagging its hooks into my every thought. I had my mind on the whole Earnest affair like I generally did.

I do remember that about twenty minutes into the first hour Dr. Joel said to some girl about her still-life assignment, "It's the everyday things, a spoon or a bowl, that remind you most powerfully of someone who's not there." And even that sent my hooked thoughts back to Earnest, because one of his favorite jokes at suppertime was to catch a lentil pea on his thumbnail, claim it was a tick, and then mash it against the lip of his *bowl*. If anybody in the studio ever found out that I'd laughed at that, I just wouldn't have been able to think up a hideous enough way to kill myself.

Here is what happened when Earnest took a powder. First, the phone rang. I picked it up and he said hello. We made a little chitchat, I expecting him to describe the deer he must have shot back home where he'd gone for the weekend. I was standing around waiting to be bored, but like a good wife, without showing it. And after a little, Earnest said, "Floretta, I am tired of your fat and slovenly ways. I am moving in with Sula Rush and her folks."

Nothing, *nothing*, could have surprised me more. I thought he liked me plump and I certainly was no more slovenly than Sula Rush, who didn't have the sense it took to drain bath water. There was something wrong with that girl.

So after Earnest told me this I couldn't breathe at first, and then I drew in one long breath that was hot

or cold, I couldn't tell which, but I was sure it broke my lungs. I remember watching a whole flock of sparrows up in the air outside the window of our garage apartment, all crawling through the wind, and then I got so upset I couldn't see through the glass. Suddenly I was all, "You DON'T know what you're doing. Earnest, you don't KNOW what you're doing." But he was stubborn, and I ended up calling him and Sula Rush two recessives. A word I'd learned in biology the week before.

Earnest said, "You are too educated."

He hung up on me and left me there by myself, leaning against the wall. "I love more than I'm loved," I told myself out loud over and over. And then also I said, "My feelings are hurt."

When the art class took a rest between the first and second hour, I stood at the row of windows that made up most of the top half of the far wall and looked down at the vacant lot across the street. Grass grew at a slant, too tall down there, with heads that drooped. The wind stirred it, and it was a pretty sight, but the grass was a long way down and the wind didn't touch me, let alone cool me. The grass might as well have been waving around on the moon, or in the time of Jesus, or Epicurus, who was even older. And Dr. Joel, who never quit offering us things of importance even at break time, walked right past me and said, he thought to somebody else, "No one ever fully believes in the soul until he commits a terrible sin."

It was the truest thing Dr. Joel had ever said, and I repeated it to myself four or five times without really putting my mind to it, dreading the consequences of soaking it in, and trying to listen to the radio which only set Dr. Joel's words to whatever tune was playing, Tchaikovsky as I recall. And at last I thought I was going to scream, from hearing this thing or deciding not to, because all the evil in me came washing over

me like a fever. I sweated nastiness. I exhaled it. My own breath poisoned my nose, worse than Earnest's at midnight.

Because it bothered me, keeping up a lie like saying I was a widow, even though what I was was nobody else's business. My mother, if she'd realized what I was up to away from her, here in Weatherford, would have criticized me immediately. And also lately I'd been finding myself a little astounded that I had it in me to hate anybody as much as I did Earnest and Sula Rush, and that in an entire year I hadn't hated either of them enough to satisfy myself. On top of everything else, I knew that when it came right down to it I shouldn't have called Earnest dead. It was like lusting after a woman in your heart being exactly equal to ditching your wife for her. Of course, what I'd lusted after was a stabbing antler, but I might just as well have punched it through him with my own hands.

Never mind that he had called me fat and slovenly which hadn't made me feel good at all. Never mind that he'd lied himself — really he must have left me because I knew things he never would, unless I told him, or else he wouldn't have called me too educated. Never mind that I'd nearly died of poverty, trying to continue my classes he was so scared of and buy art supplies on a cleaning lady's pay. Because I couldn't get him to send me any money, not that he had any in southeast Oklahoma. There weren't any good *jobs* in southeast Oklahoma. There was just that cabbagehead, Sula Rush.

And on the plus side, never mind that I got some sympathy for being bereaved. I could hardly open my mouth to speak to anybody for fear of inattentively confessing to some small detail or even a big one that would alert that person to the truth. The truth and everything it would show me to be. Yes, I said to myself. I know for a fact that I have a soul. I just don't know where it took off to.

I was staring down at the grass and wind in the

vacant lot, asking myself, why, why, why? when Chrystal came, wrapped in a robe, and stood about three feet away, also facing the window. She was trying to scrape a fluff of blanket lint off her tongue without anybody noticing, I could tell, but it didn't matter if I saw because she sensed that I liked her. I looked at her, knowing I was really awful. Like Earnest knew he was, because I'd written him a letter now and then to make sure he did.

What would it be like if somebody took pains to explain it to me like I have to him? I wondered. That was what anybody would do if it was learned that my story was just a story. Chrystal Anderson standing right there beside me picking her tongue — she was very gentle-looking, but for all I knew, she'd been born just to set me straight. She had words fit to cover absolutely anything. I sighed out a moan that I hadn't intended and Chrystal shot me a look, one of her rare fast ones. She had big circles under her moon eyes that I hadn't noticed earlier, and I didn't know whether it was because the light was stronger at the window or because she was falling sick all of a sudden or what.

"You're yellow under your eyes," I told her, not to be rude but because the yellow worried me as much as I could get worried about somebody else at that moment, and because I didn't want her to ask me about my moaning. "Feeling all right?"

"Physically," she said, "my only ailment is heat rash." I made tch, tch noises and fanned myself with one hand and waited for her to go on. She gave me a couple of her slow, open glances and pretty soon she said, "Oh, I'm sort of tired. I drove over to see my parents last night. They're only an hour and a half away, in Hennessey . . . which is not *so* far . . . but after I got back to the dorm I stayed awake a good while. At home I'd been sitting on the porch, watching this little girl I know blowing bubbles after dark out on our sidewalk with one of those little pipes. I'd picked up the pipe and the bubble mixture for her on the way over, be-

cause I hadn't seen her in two or three weeks."

"What little girl?" I asked.

"Her name's Ellie Dill. I wish you could've seen those bubbles, Floretta. They were black in the dark, but they just shimmered when they drifted in under the porch light. They had teal, magenta, and purple floating around the black. Ellie and I were freezing our tails out there at 8:00, but we didn't even care. Floretta? Has anybody ever needed you, and you didn't understand it at first, and then when you did understand, it didn't make much difference because there was nothing you could do?"

I couldn't remember anything like that. Earnest maybe could, I thought, except for the not understanding part and the nothing you could do part. Though I'd have liked to give Chrystal company, I had to say, "No."

"Ellie is twelve. Her mother abandoned her before I ever knew her, and she's living with her grandmother who's a hundred per cent senile. Her dad just shows up occasionally. The town is heavily populated with other Dills, but Ellie had bad habits when she was little, and she ended up the black sheep of the family. The black lamb," said Chrystal, reconsidering.

"What bad habits?" I asked.

"Looking around in people's houses when they were gone. Fibbing. Pilfering." Chrystal shrugged as though Ellie's faults didn't amount to a hill of beans once she'd finished listing them and giving them nice names. "Ellie," Chrystal explained, "is like a tadpole. She has hundreds of relatives but no family. She hung around our apartment the whole time I was in high school."

I could imagine this Ellie, a child who looked like she'd been around a thousand years. And I didn't have to imagine Chrystal not being in high school any more and thus leaving Ellie pretty much on her own. She was right there beside me, yellow under the eyes from total weariness over lying awake for someone who had no one except her when she could make it home. Lying there in the dark acknowledging guilt and fretting about

it.

And she was telling me all this very naturally. Sadly, sure, but as though she realized I'd never make small talk of it with the other students. When I could have yelled across the studio to Dr. Joel, "Miss Anderson here is one who believes in her soul!" Instead I said to Chrystal, "You have paid a price for coming to college."

She turned her moon eyes away from me and rubbed the side of her hand against a smear on the window pane, slowly and firmly, as though she thought she could really wipe it off that way. "Your conscience bothers you," I said.

"It makes me sick to think about leaving Ellie alone. Of course I have to work a lot of weekends, down at the union cafeteria . . . but still . . ."

Words of remorse! Spoken out loud! Somehow they were like a hammer to my head that could pound my soul back into me, an example I could learn from, and then I suddenly thought right out of the blue, maybe she's someone I can tell about Earnest. There wasn't time to think and plan a way to begin, already I was fixing to chicken out, and I heard myself saying, "Do you remember how you told us the other day about how a word for bat used to be 'reremouse'?"

Chrystal nodded her head and rubbed the window some more.

"Well, I went home and enjoyed myself half to death the rest of that afternoon saying, 'Earnest has REREmice in his belfry.'"

"Earnest?" asked Chrystal. She stopped cleaning the window. "Your husband Earnest?"

"Yes," I said, in a big rush but suddenly not able to go on from there. Because what I found I wanted to tell her next was, Give me some more words. Ones that will be excuses and some to forgive me and as many as it takes to get me out of my mess.

And then, almost to my relief and nearly as much to my disappointment, Dr. Joel called out, "Miss Anderson, are you ready to sit for us again?"



Chrystal was on her stomach on the blanket, using the crook of her arm for a pillow for her face and with one knee bent so the foot that went with it stuck up in the air. Sometimes I did that with both my feet at night, when I'd been standing up too much during the day and my legs ached, and I knew it was very comfortable, more so than it looked. She must have taken that position because she had to give us a long and interesting pose, and she was already tired from her trouble with Ellie.

Dabbing brushloads of oil paints onto the paper, having difficulties mixing them into the right flesh color, I thought over Chrystal's problem and all of mine.

What would happen if she quit school and could look after that Ellie of hers full time? What would happen if I quit school so Earnest wouldn't need that dummy Sula Rush to make him feel smart? And so I could go back home where I'd never told a serious lie and therefore didn't have to keep doing it? And so once I had Earnest again I wouldn't have to hate his guts and make heartless wishes, and I'd have turned the tables on Sula Rush? Not that I deceived myself that she'd ever have the brains to appreciate what had happened. And so forth. I thought a long time and came up with no answers and no insight but one.

Quitting school with its homework assignments might end up to mean quitting art, because there's something to do around the house besides drawing and painting which takes so much time. But when you're always on the lookout for something to draw, subject matter, the world is forever running up and jumping up and down on you like one of those simpleminded dogs, scratching your legs and shredding your pantyhose. Everything in the world loves you then. Everything in the world gives you a little attention. That was sure, when everything that would happen if Chrystal and I quit school was unsure, and I thought I'd better point that out to her.

Of course I couldn't just start discussing all that

with her lying out in the middle of the studio, when all the others who didn't know what was going on would think I was showing off or trying to compete with Dr. Joel. What I meant to do was gather my pencils up off the table behind me, cross the room near her to get to the pencil sharpener, and on the way say, "Hey Chrystal, I need to talk to you after class." And that's exactly what I did do. In fact, as far as the last part went I spoke to her twice, but then I figured out she'd drifted off to sleep.

It kind of threw me, and I dawdled there at her foot end, looking at her. And what I'd gone out in the middle of the room to invite her to hear, those things I'd been telling myself about the world giving you attention, rose up around me and I saw the purplish coarse skin of her heel, her toes like peanuts in the shell, the limpness of her calf muscles, the tiny bumps the heat rash pushed up against her beige underpants, and the scallops of her spine. Without even thinking about it I slipped my fingers between her toes. For a second her toes curled around my fingers the way a baby can grip and hand on to a pinkie, strong and surprising.

Then I extracted myself with a flick of my wrist, or maybe Chrystal did it by jerking up and over and away. When she came to rest she was sitting on her feet. And whatever I'd planned to say to her was gone, and I stood in front of her squeezing my pencils in my left hand so hard it's a wonder they didn't break in two and now wanting to say: If, after someone has left, and you don't feel what you'd have guessed you would feel — if instead you feel all things people said you would in songs and in ordinary conversation, if instead you realize the terrible truth you'd never dreamed you'd end up learning for yourself, then you will hope and listen for something else.

Only I could see that I would need to change the words enough to apply to her situation as well as mine or else she would think I was trying to make her feel bad about Ellie. Only I couldn't on the spur of the mo-

ment, never mind that my necessity was there. My necessity strangled me.

For a second Chrystal laughed, without smiling, horrible. I came back to myself a little then, and I felt awful. I couldn't imagine what had possessed me to sneak up on her so dreadfully like that. I remembered what I hadn't known at the moment, that I'd only meant to wiggle one toe to get her attention. What was I supposed to do, tap her on the bare shoulder? Touch her actual *body*? I'd only meant to wiggle one toe, but I'd made her more moon-eyed than ever, and I knew I'd blown that opportunity to comfort us both. I could just hear her saying "Gadzooks" in her mind, or something worse yet. I could feel Dr. Joel and everybody in the studio staring at us like we were being crushed under stones. Nobody said a word. I couldn't hear the fan. I couldn't even hear the radio.

"I had something to tell you," I whispered. I still couldn't remember what, and in the hot quiet studio I felt ancient and puckered. I could see inside my head where mold was growing on the lobes of my brain.

"Yes?" she said.

"Sprinkle some corn flour starch on that heat rash when you get out of here," I said, I was trying to speak in a normal voice, and it came out about ten times as loud as I meant for it to. Then I went back to my easel, feeling like a blithering weirdo, my pencils unsharpened. Luckily they hadn't needed it to begin with.

After a while, after I'd told myself over and over and over, okay, I made a mistake, I calmed myself down. And I got myself to see that there was a moral to the situation. One big new mistake, I observed, wipes out some of the memory of a big old one. I could hardly concentrate on Earnest and Sula Rush at all.

But I sure wanted to make it up to Chrystal. I wanted her to like me. I needed to give her something. But

she kept looking at me from the edges of her moon eyes from where she was standing in a stiff pose with her elbows jutting out, and I knew I'd better not go up to her again for the time being. I picked out my best pencil, and though I felt like I ought to nail myself to the wall with it and dangle by it until I dried out into a life-size flap of leather, I began to draw her picture with it instead.

Dr. Joel came up to me and watched. After a while he told the class, "Sometimes students don't take art very seriously. This is an advanced class. This is not Vacation Bible School. We will not be gluing macaroni onto cardboard." Then practically in the same breath and just a little less publicly he said, "Look. No more of these harsh black lines like you're trying to hammer down the edges of the model. Try to make her look three-dimensional. She's not a paper doll. All you have to do is put some shading and line variation in your drawings to make them much more professional." He stared at me for a minute. "Are you ever going to do that, Floretta?"

I didn't answer but kept on drawing. I could tell he was more displeased with me than usual because of the toe thing. Finally he said very low so nobody else would hear, "Just grip the pencil in your hand and mark."

All that was uncalled for, but I had other things to worry about. And even though he'd been ugly to me, I didn't hold it against him because my bothering Chrystal's toes would upset anybody. So I still liked him enough that part of me dreaded what was coming next, because I was about to hurt his feelings but it simply couldn't be helped. Because while he was talking I'd had an idea and I had to act on it. I said, past him, to Chrystal, "Bring me a snapshot of you and your little friend. I'll do a portrait of the two of you. I'll do it any style you like."

For a second there was no change in Chrystal, and then she smiled, just a little, just a hint. I told myself joyfully, I'm a winner, chicken for dinner, and I fell

straight into a reverie where I told Sula Rush, I have a friend with such depth of mind she makes your brain look like a cookie sheet.

I glanced over at Dr. Joel and he looked like an old man, as though he'd traded places with his future self. His curly black hair seemed dull and lank, and his lips were stretched and droopy. No homework of Chrystal's had ever made him look so slack. I'd defeated him like I'd feared I would, when I wasn't interested in doing so, when it was just a happenstance.

I wished I could remind him that already in his class I'd turned out every kind of picture of Chrystal. Pastels, acrylics, crayons. Watercolors, the tints so sheer they looked like wet tissues. Oils, the hues so clotted they looked like mud. In the future I'd gladly master clay and stained glass, I would put Chrystal's image together by the damp handful and in fragments. And some time I'd do a line drawing in so many shades of gray nobody would be able to tell it from a photograph.

But for that afternoon and that piece I balanced myself behind my pencil and put just enough weight on it, so much and no more, so that the lines were thin, black, and clear. In that picture I gave Chrystal no shadows to hide in. I gave her nothing to hide.