R. Clifton Spargo

Me at J.C. Penney's.

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R. Clifton Spargo

A History of Minor Trespasses

First-Place Winner
Short-Story Award
for New Writers

1.

You should begin with a picture: an older man, still strong in posture, has finished his day's yardwork and reaches for a broom to sweep the dirt from his sidewalks.

Several times a week, with rake in hand and his broom in waiting, Leon Russell would work his yard—for longer stretches now that it was autumn and God and the leaves conspired to make it so there was always more to do. He would tend his dead wife's flower garden, chopping back the stems of the peonies in preparation for the winter, tending the marigolds and fall hydrangeas still in bloom, and fertilizing the tulip bulbs for the spring, and then he would turn his attention to the lawn and rake for hours, creating neat, small piles of crimson and yellow and rust all across the lawn, the piles made more brilliant by the perfectly combed green background on which they sat. What was wonderful about his method of raking leaves was the patience it required. Just look at him as he sets out to bag the leaves. Any teenager in a hurry, having raked two large piles of leaves, would scatter a portion

of his labor, resigned to the inevitability of the leaves; yet Leon makes sure of every leaf. There are those of you who will think it impossible that every leaf should be picked up (surely, a leaf or two will blow away or get scattered, you say, or, his patience exhausting, the man will forget to gather just a few), yet somehow each leaf from each of his many small piles is bagged.

An owner for almost thirty-five years of a small grocery that had become a small chain, Leon had emigrated to the United States from Split, Yugoslavia, years before the spoil and splitting of his homeland, and even when other relatives began to emigrate and demand that he choose his ethnic heritage, he insisted he was, in his own mind, for better or worse, a citizen of Tito's experiment. His skin had possessed in his youth a Mediterranean olive tint that had paled with age and prosperity; his hair was fully preserved and fully grey; and his once-deep eyes had lost their power to startle. Having kept his store neat and orderly for most of his years, Leon had also spent a good portion of his time hurrying suspicious types to a purchase and sweeping young adolescents out the front door. The doorbells would clang and sometimes the broom would catch in the door, causing Leon to mutter something in his foreign tongue about America and young people before pulling the broom inside to another clatter of bells. When he had retired, hoping to live his last years quietly with his wife Lillian, she had taken ill and died two months later. Since their only child had moved away years ago to live a bohemian existence in California, Leon kept mostly to himself, and kept impeccable the house in which he and Lil had lived for twenty-eight years. In the corner of the living room, there was a wedding picture of her, and once in a while he spoke to it. Waking each morning before dawn and finishing his housework, he would spend the late morning on his lawn.

It was only after he had bagged all the leaves and laid aside his rake, as if even this perfection before him were not enough, that he would reach finally for the broom. No, it was not for the lawn itself, but for the sidewalks and driveway and, yes, also the street curb that half circles his corner house. He swept these sidewalks with the love of ownership—if they were the city's, it seemed never to occur to him—and so diligently, as if he would put an end to all the world's dirt. Can't you picture this old man, standing on the corner with that broom in hand, beaming and proud of his day's work? Wouldn't you like to ask him what he has accomplished? Where has he swept the dirt?

For at some point the wind would blow—God in his sanity breathing chaos—redistributing both dirt and leaves, preventing the striving toward completeness. And even if it were just one leaf, it marked time, the occasion of work for another day.

2.

Because it was the street, James always believed that something would come his way—not necessarily good or bad, but something must come down a street if you keep watching long enough. This is true in Iowa even as it is in Connecticut. So he waited on it, had been waiting on it for some years now: he was sixty-five, with just a little grey hair left on a deep brown scalp, an excess of darkened and callused skin that gathered around his perpetually reddened eyes, and his cheek-bones drawn in from too much booze, as if the face had eventually conformed itself to the act of drinking; and he had only stopped waiting for a year when he was too high to remember to wait, and for another, many years before, when he had married and she had died. He had gone back then to a store on a street corner where he had met her, and the man working there had been the same and James

had looked around the place to see if possibly he had made some wrong choice, if perhaps there were a remnant of something else, the something he should have been waiting for over two and a half years ago. The man had asked him, "Can I help you? Did you lose something? Can I help you find something?"

When the fall came, not on the calendar, but on that first day that is chill and sharp and threatens you with the night at midday, James said to a shelter volunteer, "I got to get me a hat. You know it's cold and, well…" (here he paused as if he wanted a favor but was too polite to ask it) "… well you know I'm an old man, but that ain't nothing" (and now he shook his right hand in front of him to guard against the unbelievers), "but, ah, shucks, son, I needs a hat. Never mind, never mind, you don't want to hear me going on, I sure don't want to be a bother. Got a scarf in this old coat that'll do, and it don't matter, got so much junk in this old coat probably couldn't find that hat anyway."

Then the weather seemed to change, went warm and mild, as if God were waiting until James could scrounge up a hat. And when the weather changed, James forgot about the cold, the chill and sharp wind from heaven, and only thought about the hell of the day that was today. He was like that. It was not that he could not remember; it was just that memory had never served him well. In which case God, one might say, chose to remind him. For in one night the temperature dropped more than fifty degrees, from the surprising seventies of aberrant summer to the shocking and unawaited promises of winter. The next morning James swore at himself when he thought of going out into that cold. "I knew it, catches me every time, and now I got to get me a hat. Son, there ain't no hats by chance. Naah, I didn't think so. Well, with the way I move, it could be weeks of this cold on my old and balding head."

(Though the reader may wish to solve this old man's problem by reaching into the closet and pulling out an old knit cap you haven't worn for years and always meant to gather in a bag with all those other clothes you were going to take to the Salvation Army, James's need is eternal and valid apart from the simple question of the hat. Even if you were happy about the donation of a single cap, James will not be satisfied. He will lose your hat or want a new one or one that is warmer, the very one you now place upon your head.)

Imagine the surprise, then, when he returned to the shelter that evening wearing a hat like a rich man, wearing it with pride and dignity and the knowledge that he had won something, however small, back from life. He would not tell where he got it, just stood there silent and smiling. Later that night, speaking so the others could not hear him, he began to talk about his life, about there being many women but only one woman he had loved, about the way in which you can be in the wrong place at the right time, and how scars were like memories. "But it's funny," he said to no one in particular, and then he pulled out his wallet and studied scraps of paper to whispers so low and reverent that they remained his secrets, forever soft and pungently sweet spaces of voice. Perhaps that was the way he wanted it. He wanted the gesture of communication because it was all that made sense and all that had never made sense. If you could love someone deeply, feel hurt deeply, there had to be a way to communicate that feeling to the person. And James perhaps thought that all love was a game of mirrors, and saying I love you was like mouthing sound in a mirror: the audibility of the words did not matter, nor even that someone else receive them. As long as you saw yourself making an effort to love, to communicate, you remained human in your mirror game.

Tired from a day of drinking, he was flipping through his wallet until he finally pulled out a laminated newspaper clip-

ping, words someone else, someone who had never known her, had written about his wife, her name emboldened—**Downes, Claire**—followed by the small newsprint that began, "Suddenly in New Haven."

"I remember buying the paper that day," James said, "and flipping through it, and avoiding turning to the only reason I bought it in the first place, and then I turned to it and I saw she was dead, that the paper said so. There was some kind of poem printed in the column next to it, framed by hearts, and it was from a wife to her husband, dead fifteen years, and I thought how could someone be dead that long, and I said, Claire, someday I'll write you one of those poems. I never did, ain't much of a writer, and besides it's a funny practice, you think about it: who are those poems for? Claire ain't never gonna read it.

"But it is funny that today," he said, "today I should receive a hat. They say God provides."

And, oh, that hat, that rich man's hat. It is a glorious piece of velour, neatly wrapped by a black ribbon a shade darker than the black velour, and a dent on top where the hand fits to place it on or remove it from the head of its bearer. It is a magical hat: any man who wears it becomes rich. James let several people try it on for a moment, and not one of those smiles or those stylish, posed glances was the smile of a poor man. Yes, it is a rich man's hat. No doubt, you say, the hat of a rich man with a dent in his head to match the hat, perhaps lying in an alley or standing in line at a police station. But why should James have taken the hat? Why should it not be a gift from God herself, the God of his wife's memory, who takes away, who provides?

3.

Leon lived on a corner where the city of New Haven becomes suburban—perhaps the neatest corner in all of sub-

urbia—only about fifteen blocks from the heart of downtown New Haven. Yet in all the time that James had lived in New Haven, he had never once trespassed in Leon's neighborhood. Every day that fall James would walk from a homeless shelter in the Hill neighborhood down to the New Haven green to be comforted in nicer weather by the temporary beauty of the New England-style churches and the deciduous trees, which as autumn progressed yielded the northwestern skyline to the stern gothic facade of the Yale campus just beyond the green. You could beg a few dollars downtown at the mall or on the green, and, especially near the beginning of the school year, when sympathy and money were still abundant among the college kids, you could do pretty well on York Street. There were many days when James did not ask for money, just grabbed lunch at a soup kitchen and watched or talked with students, but that was only when he was resting from the drink, set up, for a little while at least, with some money or sure that someone else could get him something.

James covered a lot of ground most days and would once in a while visit people he knew in Newhallville on the opposite side of the city, but to have walked the ten blocks to Leon's end of town was an idea that, if it ever occurred to him, did not seem worth the trouble. No one can tell the precise event, place, or person that will give to each of our lives that little extra meaning, that point of fulfillment, when a person might say, as if the search for meaning were an appetite, Yes, that hit the spot. I am full. I am content. That apple, that car or that house, that woman with the crooked, sexy smile, that man with the beautiful hat, all have combined in this moment to satisfy my desire. Life has been a meal and now I am full. Perhaps such moments do occur for people.

What if that same wind that blew up and gave to James a beautiful hat urged him to take a new direction? Though he cannot be sure just why he has come this way, if you look

down the street just a block or so, you will see an elderly black man with a glorious hat, making his slow and careful progress. This, of course, is James—identifying characteristics: hat (too big), homeless (too long), bottle (too empty).

4.

There was a time, a few years after Lillian's death, when Leon had worked in a soup kitchen at a local church, even went to the Salvation Army and the local homeless shelter to donate clothing and meals, until he grew careless and took his benevolence for granted, as if everyone should recognize that he was working for their improvement. In the back lot of the shelter, Leon was held up at knife point. As the man held the knife to his neck, Leon wanted to explain that he was helping at the shelter, that he had come as a favor to him, to them, to anyone who was not himself and prosperous and white, and suddenly his English collapsed and a foreignness slipped from his tongue, and he sensed that he was losing this man, becoming far from him as he spoke, that this poor black American hated him for being a privileged immigrant. The man looked fiercely, perhaps even helplessly (the last of Leon's compassion for the downtrodden fading with that speculative adverb), into Leon's pleading eyes and waved the knife and said he really needed money.

In the end, the assailant cleared about twenty dollars, since Leon never carried much cash when he was in the area, the symptoms of his mistrust having preceded the cause. Leon went immediately to the police. He did not go inside the shelter to call the police, nor did he ever return to the scene of the crime. The police had a report that gave the time of the incident (6:30 P.M.), the place (back lot of a homeless shelter), the weapon used (knife, six-inch blade), and the persons involved (one middle-aged to elderly white man; one young, "mean looking" black man).

5.

Leon had just finished sweeping. He was standing on the street corner, broom in hand, back to the street, contemplating with satisfaction all that he had done and the dust and dirt that were behind him. "Excuse me, old man, you're taking up a lot of sidewalk." When Leon turned, the smell of wine, beer, and years of a drinking that abused body, neatness, steady thought, and memory hit him as it rushed out of James's entire being like some too-eager spirit.

"This is my house, my sidewalk," Leon said, and he shook like a cornered animal.

"Can't be that, 'cause it's my path you're in," James smiled. "Just passing."

Did he think he owned the world, this nobody, this messy black nobody? Leon stood his ground with the broom clenched at his side, his knuckles wrapped raging red on the autumn-cool wood. He could feel the blood there in his fingertips and his knuckles burning from wind and humiliation. James raised the bottle in his right hand and turned so it would have poured the liquid, had there been any, on to Leon's sidewalk, but there was not a drop, hardly an odor left. All had been incarnated into the body and blood which was James, diligent and fierce.

"If you don't move I'm going to have to hit you with this bottle and lose the deposit."

James's arm grew tired and he flinched at the elbow. Leon crumbled inside, felt the sheer and overwhelming ecstasy of terror, and stared at James, hating him—maybe also loving him for a moment, old and benevolent as he used to feel. Then Leon stepped aside.

A grin slanted across James's face, showing a few odd teeth and a fury of gum. As he walked by, he half-turned, as if to strike the old man, as if to say, I ought to, for the time involved, for the time wasted. He raised the bottle up high, twirling it in the air, now delighted by his show, then raised it a little higher, and all the time he was walking past the old man, no longer thinking of him. When he had passed, James dealt the air two swift blows, the bottle in his hand bouncing quickly off the struck air as he whispered, "Wham! Blam!" like a cartoon sound effect. He laughed, perhaps remembering a time when his actions were more than gestures, but this was infinitely more enjoyable. He repeated the whole scenario in his mind, miming the motions that were already mimed actions—the bottle raised, high, twirled, higher, raised again, then down and down again, the air whistling his glory. He laughed until his thin shoulders seemed to jump out of his coat, and then the wind changed and he made to turn and

head back to town. As if the thought of repetition had never before occurred to James, he looked back several houses wanting to see the incident again, and to his delight he saw that the old man was still sweeping, turned now in the other direction, his back again to James.

6.

As soon as James had passed, Leon had begun sweeping the walk furiously, all the time looking to see if any neighbor had been witness to the afternoon's event. He could not decide whether that person, if she existed, should be his witness in a civil suit or an undesirable witness against his reputation, his failing masculinity. An image of himself as old, as one of the excessively condemned among those already enfeebled and outraged by life, conquered the question of the witness. Let there be no witness. He looked around and tightened his shoulders as if he were expecting a blow. He did not turn his eyes, but he heard steps behind him. He retreated, trying all the time to retain his dignity, not to turn, and yet he was moving more quickly up the walk than he normally would. (James passed at about this time, disappointed that the old man had spoiled the game.) Leon caught one last glimpse of the wino crossing at the corner. He placed his foot on his own doorstep and entered his home.

Had Lillian watched over all of this?

7.

In the morning he found the bottle on the corner of the lawn, just close enough to the street to have passed for an accident.

The bottle was a piece of circumstantial evidence. There is no way of knowing whether or not James put it there. Suffice it to say, however, that for the case the old man was building against James—a case which half longed for a witness, yet

desired absolute secrecy—the bottle served as conclusive evidence. If you lift a bottle to strike a man (or to give the appearance of striking), and hold it as evidence before his eyes, will he not remember its very shape, its very color? Will he not remember the violence of the late morning light as it strikes the bottle? Will he not be certain that the bottle that lies before him on the lawn is the very same bottle?

Leon had not slept much the previous night. Something in him had been set off. He could feel himself exploding into a great void of meaning. All night he imagined that the black man was there, in the space of dream and mind, on the front lawn, perhaps sleeping or taking the place of sleep. Several times Leon woke just as he was about to fall asleep, torn between fear and pleasure, catching his nod in mid-motion and flicking on the light. The light would have startled or frozen the burglar, prowler, or violent vagrant approaching from his front lawn, had there been one. He remembered a time as a boy when he had sensed the presence of a man walking up the stairs of his parents' house to where the family slept too soundly. Only Leon could wake to prevent the burglar, except that he found himself, though aware and wanting to wake up, unable to get beyond his state of half-sleep with its sharp sense of fear. He willed his body into movement, to fight the power and terror of the dream, but it held him like a net underwater, as if fighting it were part of its hold, and all the while the intruder had continued up the stairs. Finally he awoke with a jerk: he turned on a light now as he had then.

The boy he was had gone to the stairs. The family dog had also heard the noise and had begun to bark shortly before or after his violent awakening. As the older Leon now also rose, with no dog to accompany him, he remembered how they—he, the dog, and his finally awakened mother—had found the back door ajar, but nothing missing from the house. That is

the most frightening kind of burglary, the kind in which nothing material is taken. If the robber takes a radio or even a wedding ring, at least the crime is complete. An object has been stolen, it can be reported, the robber is satisfied: he came for something and left with it. But if he leaves with nothing, then forever in his mind he is cheated. He will return again and again because he was interrupted: he has not fulfilled that role which is an extension of himself. The unrobbed also feel cheated, beginning a search that goes on for weeks in the mind: *What haven't I noticed that he might have taken?* Anything misplaced for the next three to four weeks is first thought to be stolen, before it is found.

What Leon could not have anticipated was a villain so unnatural as to give rather than take and, as if the travesty of crime were part of the point, to give what is unwanted. All good burglary depends upon society's unwritten contracts concerning the desirability of objects. Theft is a competition marking greater desire or perhaps greater need, which in the purest of crimes become the same, and one feels a loss for the stolen item that corresponds to the value that has made it worthy of theft. But to give what is unwanted by both parties, that is something beyond crime. Whoever the perpetrator of this crime had been, he never had to step foot on Leon's property. He had carefully placed a bottle at the edge of suspicion, at the border between coincidence and malevolence, there on the corner of Leon's lawn.

8.

Having once altered his course, James stuck to it because in his old age he'd begun to like habit, but also because he'd been possessed by a desire for contact—to thrust himself against the sharp edges of catastrophe and to feel life as something breathing heavily, something both frightened and frightening. And even as he walked that same route—won-

dering if there could be a repetition of that thrill when he had held the bottle, which was not violence or even anger, just curiosity and the will to hold a bottle in such a way that someone would think you were about to do something it had not fully occurred to you to do—even as he walked that same route, he was remembering not so much a path or the steps that had led him to this place, but a particular moment that drew his attention, as it were, both back into the past to discover how he had felt, and into a second past, similar to his future, to learn why and what he had felt.

As he drew near the old white man's home, he found that his desire for conflict, since withheld, was also indescribable and sensual; it had become like those first imaginings of young love when the nearness of another's body arouses slightly forbidden feelings, still unknown, and soon to follow are touch and desire and regret. It may have been that James drew close to Leon's every day longing for repeated tension, but also with the rebirth of a feeling in him that was erotic and had been lost for many years. The old man, awaiting him at the corner, perfectly imagined by James even before he could see him, stood not only for long absent feelings, but for the many years themselves.

He recalled a time when he was young and had wrestled with his younger brother. As if the inevitable outcome of the struggle were too much for the younger wrestler, his brother would try to hurt James beyond the bounds of the match. For the brother, it was a rage lived against the unconquerable, which always fulfilled itself in the same way: he would dig his chin into James's back and press with the force of his outrage. Always James felt the pain as if he stole it from his brother and took the outrage of the world upon himself—that is, physically upon his back—and then he would be glad, if only briefly, until the guilt over the pleasure he took from another person's suffering returned. He had provoked in his brother

his own hatred of the world and had made the brother cease to be a young boy. His brother had entered an oblivious realm ruled by emotions and sensations too large for the world. James would use his greater strength—that injustice which was the very condition of the game—to free himself from his brother's grip and then overtake the younger wrestler, unburdening him of his anger through defeat.

Almost as soon as James reached the corner of Orange and Edwards, which could never again be that original moment or feeling, he would be suddenly past it. The old man's eyes were heavy on his back as he passed, and each time the man avoided James's glance as he approached and stared fiercely thereafter into the small of James's back. (James, of course, had to imagine these latter details because he had too much pride to return the glance. Yet he was as sure of those eyes and exactly how they must stare as he was sure of anything in his life.)

The conflict between these two men was elemental, irresolvable.

9.

The only thing that interrupted this great conflict was that one day Leon—without his broom in hand, and yet reaching out to hold an object that would combat the terror and the vision in darkness he saw before him—died in his sleep. Here is what the *New Haven Register* said of Leon's death:

Leon J. Russell, owner of Leon's Markets

NEW HAVEN — A Mass of Christian burial will be celebrated Tuesday for Leon J. Russell, of 409 Edwards St., who died in his home, November 25, 1994, from natural causes.

Mr. Russell was born in Split, Yugoslavia, and moved to New York with his family in 1953. He was an army veteran of World War II and was an active member of the Knights of

> Columbus for over forty years. Mr. Russell moved to New Haven in 1955 and opened the first franchise of Leon's Markets in 1957.
>
> The mass will be celebrated at 10:00 A.M. in St. Stanislov Church on State St. Burial will follow in All Saints Cemetery, North Haven. Mr. Russell was predeceased by his wife Lillian and is survived by a daughter, Jill Russell Baker.
>
> In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Columbus House Homeless Shelter, 200 Columbus Ave., New Haven, CT 06511.

With its matter-of-fact tone, the obituary imitates the very lessness of death, yet is lesser still. There is one detail, however, that will not be found in the obituaries: a policeman who sometimes works a bonus evening or two at the Columbus House shelter shared the story of an unperpetrated crime. On November 25, 1994, this officer had been called to a crime scene by some local residents who noticed an unusual, even spectacular, amount of garbage on the front lawn of the house at 409 Edwards. They thought it odd because theirs was an exceptionally clean neighborhood (for that much garbage to have gathered in one location it would almost have had to be imported), and also because the property in question belonged to Leon Russell, who since the death of his wife had grown excessive in his neatness, far surpassing even the most scrupulous of his neighbors. The policeman and his partner filed it as a possible littering case, but said they would wait to hear from Mr. Russell himself. They did not.

Three days later, they were again called to the same location, this time by a longtime neighbor who had observed Mr. Russell, for many years and especially since his wife had died, ritualistically devote himself to his lawn. Not only had she not seen him tending to the lawn lately, but the clutter on the lawn proved that he had made no attempt to do so.

Which was, of course, because Leon was dead. The policemen had gone to his door, rung the bell, and as they leaned to knock on the bedroom window, spied the body on the floor. The spectacle of Leon's death included a single police car, which arrived on the scene one half-hour before the ambulance, a small crowd of neighbors—including the rather distraught Mrs. O'Connor who accused herself of failing to visit a lonely old man and of knowing that something was wrong (it just came to her, and the garbage was a sign if ever there was one). The officers spent little time discovering the cause of death, since littering did not seem particularly murderous, but the one officer indulged the suppositions of some of the elderly neighbors who, having failed to notice another's passing, began to fear their own. What did he make of Mr. Russell's peculiar habit, they wanted to know. Suppose Mr. Russell had not always been such a neat man. Suppose this quirky neatness had been more or less recently developed, and, for the sake of convenience and the logical ordering of events, we could say that the habit originated shortly after his wife's death.

The body bag being carried to the ambulance was the main event. Also present at the scene was the one other person who had detected the lack of Leon in recent days—James Downes, who stood across the street at the corner. James had taken his daily route—in fact had probably done so for several days now without result—in the hope of seeing his old man with the broom once again.

James might have sought action to relieve him of his vision—he who would be searching in the early morning of October 29 for a bottle he had misplaced, for a hat he guessed had been stolen, for a memory of why today he could not do what he had done only yesterday—for James would not believe that this old man, the simplest of all his life's very limited pleasures, had also been taken from him. Today he had come

up the street expecting better, expecting the old man to be guarding the lawn with renewed intent, but when he saw the lights of the police car in the distance he gave up hope. He thought of the police car in the driveway as a universal symbol signifying that something was being taken away: his brother to prison at the age of only sixteen; his father, only two years later, found by the train tracks not much beaten (a bruise or two), but with a heart that was quiet and broken enough to pass for dead. Now he stood across the street, at a respectful distance, yet more intimate with this man than any other he knew. The cot, a white sheet covering the body, was loaded into the ambulance. James waited until both emergency vehicles had departed.

Remaining on the other side of the street, he viewed Mr. Russell's property from a distance, surrendering to him in death the sidewalk he had formerly contested.

10.

Fear, like the heart, may surpass itself, growing larger than the occasion of terror or the event of disappointment, coming to stand in the world as a lonely old man. In his fear there is an assertion of existence, realized on the threshold of uselessness, a clinging even to the indifference of the world.

On November 24, Leon chose the time he was to wake up in the morning by holding one button on his alarm clock down and pressing repeatedly a second button. He had taken an afternoon nap in which he dreamed only of simple things and without desire, and so the alarm had to be reset. The hour selected, after some deliberation between six and seven, was seven, so Leon began to press the minute button (seeking some low number to compensate for the extra time he had given himself just a moment ago) when the button suddenly slipped. For some reason—Leon hated the daughter who had given him the clock, the whole of the modern world it represented—the regular time and the alarm time were now both way off. After he had

at last set the alarm, he lay back in bed trying to void the swelling insomnia that was both a loneliness and guilt—a guilt which yet must feel responsible to someone or something. At the edge of the room, he forbade her to be there (as she was when he awoke from nights of total restlessness, and he felt her not as a memory but as an anxiety, an edge pointed at the rest of the world). In another corner of the room he located a fear that was more powerful than his love for a dead woman. It was hallowed, sounding in his chest—the edges which enclosed the sound were carved by vague figurations of knives and bottles—pointing out of the self, perhaps toward God. Again the nervousness grew in him, and he looked toward the window, and not toward the armoire with the mirror where he often gazed when remembering her. Immediately prior to his falling to sleep, he started involuntarily in his bed (there had been a noise in the yard: perhaps a cat in the garbage cans). He fell asleep on his back. The exhausted person eventually falls asleep on his back, with his head propped up to watch sleeplessness or the approach of sleep, until he relaxes his vigilance and sleep is upon him, surprising as a thief. At 11:45 P.M. Leon appeared to wake: his eyes opened but were still veiled by a layer of dream. Then he turned on his side.

He was a young boy running across a field, looking for his sister. He was afraid of a pack of wild dogs, which he could not see but nevertheless knew from the dream's internal memory of previous dreams. Their remoteness was even more ominous because he was inside a familiar dream, and the attack was imminent and inevitable, as in a predictable horror film. A large portion of terror derives from what you know must happen. Now he could hear the dogs barking upwind (it was 11:45 and Leon appeared almost to wake as the neighbor's dog found the cat which had been hiding in Leon's garbage cans). Just then he found his sister, curled up and crying behind some bushes, and when he pulled her to him he recognized the face of his daughter. At first he thought she was afraid of him, but then he saw the fear pointing up

the slope, where the sound of the dogs—throwing scent and fury back against a rough wind—could be heard faintly (at 12:30 A.M. a strong wind blew over a garbage can, spilling just a little paper onto the walk alongside Leon's house).

He was back in the store after having been away, the store which he had owned and managed for so many years. He was trying to remember where things went—on which aisle, which shelf—worrying that a customer would ask him for an item he could not locate. A woman came in and asked for a pack of Dentyne which he found almost immediately behind the counter. Picking up the pack of gum, he looked for a tag and approached the register, prepared if he could not find the price to make one up. Then it came to him, the cost of ten cents, and he punched a key in the register. The woman put a dime on the counter and looked him over carefully: You don't remember me? He did; he could remember her face, a young girl dressed in a wool sweater with a red, black, and yellow pattern, a red bandanna tying back long, free strands of hair, and jeans patched with so-many-colored bandannas. The face was so close to him it was beyond description, almost beyond recognition. (If you ask a man to describe a woman he loves purely, he will have no starting point of reference. He cannot say it is her eyes, for specificity limits and diminishes love, and if he says, Eyes, he cannot really love her. He might say, however, it is the way she looks at me with her eyes). When he looked at this young girl, he felt a knowledge of her that could not name her. Had he forgotten her or had he loved her before she had a name?

Just then another woman entered, and Leon recognized her immediately—the very picture of a young woman he was meeting for the first time, but who was also his wife of all those years. He felt himself much older than she. She kissed the other young woman, and he fell in love with her then. She asked for coffee and he could not remember where it was

or whether she meant by the bag or freshly brewed. She said that he shouldn't worry, she understood how forgetful he could be and she would get it herself.

The dream skipped; she began to walk toward the door (perhaps here the wind blew through the chimes that hung on the front porch just outside Leon's window) and as the door opened, she walked into the store. He recognized her immediately: the very picture of a young woman he was meeting for the first time, but who was also his wife of all those years. When he looked at this young girl, he felt a knowledge of her that could not name her. Had he loved her before she had a name?

When she had gone, a black man entered the store to the sound of clanging bells. (Were there bells in the dream? Does sound belong to this world or is it borrowed from another? Why is it important for us to know whether Leon heard bells clanging in this, his last dream?) Leon was sure that the man would harm him or make some unreasonable demand. The man stood there a little while, looking around to see whether another person besides the two of them was in the store. Was he going to pull a weapon and rob him? Leon asked, Can I help you? Did you lose something? Can I help you find something? The man walked down one of the three aisles to the opposite end of the store and seemed disappointed not to discover anything worth his attention. Leon understood that the man had lost something and hoped, if only it did not take too long, that he might find it in his store. Nonetheless he was relieved when, a little past closing time, the man gave up the search.

He was walking home then and his house came into view. He saw a man in the distance tossing a piece of garbage, maybe a paper bag, onto his front lawn. (Howard Hansen drove south on Orange at approximately ten after one and shouted at his wife about all the shit cluttering up their car.

Then, stopping at the light at Orange and Edwards and reaching behind the seat for the first item he could find, he tossed a perfectly good bag full of pantyhose, razors, and chewing gum just above the bridge of her nose and out the open passenger's window. Brenda Hansen held in a laugh as she thought of telling him the next morning where his razors were. The bag landed at the curb and rolled onto Mr. Leon Russell's property.) He was within shouting distance and thought he recognized the man, but a fear took hold of him. He ought to scream and confront the man with his crime, but wasn't it easier to pick up the garbage himself? What if the man should bring friends next time?

Arriving at his doorstep, he expected to find someone in the house. At first it was a pleasurable anticipation, but it changed quickly to dread. No one was within. Inwardly he began to guard the premises. Now and then he looked outside the door, trying to catch someone in the act of trespassing or littering his lawn. (At quarter after, a man walked east on Edwards, took the last drag from a cigarette, and tossed the butt into the perfect grass of 409 Edwards, having noticed the grass mid-toss and feeling a little guilty as the red dot floated from his opened fingers.) About the third or fourth time Leon stuck his head out the door, he saw that black man again placing—not just dropping, but placing it carefully—a bottle on his lawn. He pretended not to notice the man, but the man gazed back boldly, knowing he had been spotted.

(A car full of teenage boys backfired as it turned right off Orange onto Edwards—from it a garbage bag full of beer cartons and empty cans, tossed onto the lawn of 409—and then accelerated to the tinny, catching sound of the gas pushed too full over the engine valves).

Leon pulled up a little in his bed and listened to the bells clanging in the wind, and just out beyond the perimeter of their echoes he heard many and hurried footsteps across his

lawn. He tried to move himself, but the terror was strings running through his limbs, tied deep and taut inside the mattress. He could sense them at the window, perhaps gazing in at him and then moving away. He was no longer afraid that they might enter his home, but rather that what they did outside was somehow meant to harm him. The inside of the house seemed more empty, and he rose from his bed, knocking a photograph of a woman on the bureau face down and gliding toward the window. He could see it then, the garbage strewn about the front lawn in great heaps, like an entire autumn's leaves left to decay and sweeten. (God had sent a bevy of angels on the wind carrying small items of garbage, such as empty wine bottles and soda cans and Sunday newspapers and pizza boxes and orange peels and coffee grinds and unopened, winning sweepstakes packets—for surely the inside of Leon's dream is an exaggeration—and stray dirty socks and the clean ones lost in dryers and marvelous velour hats and shabby knit caps and handfuls of dirt and garbage bags of leaves and grass, all of which burdened them so much that their wings grew tired and they rested on Leon's lawn. As a group they decided that shifting garbage from place to place was a banal task, and they reported to God their divine and provident laziness.) And Leon saw them then, many men dressed rather poorly, dropping wine bottles and newspapers at the edges of his lawn, their work done carefully, deliberately, now almost complete.

The ending of a dream is purely hypothetical, the consummate unknowable, depending rather on interruption and a melting of memory's image at the edges. The mind sustains itself on the pulling out of dreams, the interruptions which prove the world to us again, but there is God in the continuing dreams, and she breathes on Leon so his eyes will not see, so that sounds subside slowly in his ears. (At 1:30 A.M. the wind blew hard through the chimes, knocking them loudly against the ceiling and tangling the string; at

3:00 A.M. two twelve-year-old boys and a thirteen-year-old girl approached the porch at 409 Edwards, each putting his and her thumb on the doorbell one after the other and pushing several times, then running up the street with laughing and nervous gasps to a group of cheering young cohorts; and at 7:05 A.M. the alarm bleeped and bleeped, although Leon was by then very far away from sound). Leon is all seeing and breathing now, amidst papers and bottles and stale grass and putrid leaves, until there is a sweet nothing of sound and space where once there was too much garbage, and the garbage is great and growing as he passes through, but inside the echo of God's breath it does not bother Leon; he does not care.