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THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD

making love to my wife is amusingly intense; with my mistress, it's intensely amusing

ON A MOONLESS NIGHT in March, returning to The Keep, I took the coast road from Bath to Belfast in Maine, the road that goes by Camden. In every cove was fog and it covered one's vision like a winding sheet, a fog more than worthy of the long rock shelf offshore where sailing ships used to founder. When I could not see at all, I would pull the car over; then the grinding of the buoys would sound as mournful as the lowing of cattle in a rain-drenched field. The silence of the mist came down on me. You could hear the groan of a drowning sailor in the lapping of that silence. I think you had to be demented to take the coast road on a night like this.

Past Camden, the wind sprang up, the fog departed, and soon the driving was worse. With the shift in the weather, a cold rain came. On some of those curves, the highway had turned to ice. Going into skids, my tires sang like a choir in a country church surrounded by forest demons. Now and again would appear a shuttered town where each streetlight was equal to a beacon at sea. Empty summer houses, immanent as a row of tombs, stood in witness.

I was full of bad conscience. The road had become a lie. It would offer traction, then turn to glass. Driving that car by the touch of my finger tips, I began to think once more that lying was an art and fine

fiction

By **NORMAN MAILER**

lying had to be a fine art. The finest liar in the land must be the ice monarch who sat in dominion on the curve of the road.

My mistress was behind me in Bath, and my wife awaited me near the island of Mount Desert. I was a fine liar. The ice monarch had installed his agents in my heart. I will spare you the story I told Kittredge about transactions that would occupy me in Portland until evening and so cause my late return to Mount Desert. No, all business had been transacted in Bath, and in the merry arms of one of the wives of Bath. By acceptable measure, she did not have much to offer against my mate. The woman in Bath was pretty, whereas my dear wife was a beauty. Chloe was cheerful and Kittredge was—I apologize for so self-serving a word—distinguished. Of Kittredge's family and mine, you have heard a little—we were only third cousins, but even our noses looked alike. Whereas Chloe was common. (I hate the word but know its hold on me.) She was common as gravy and heartening to taste. Buxom, bountiful, goodhearted, she worked in summer as a waitress in a Yankee inn. (Let us say: a Yankee-inn-type restaurant run by a Greek.) One night a week, on the hostess's night off, Chloe was proud to serve as pro-tem hostess. I helped her funds a bit. Perhaps other men did, too. I hardly knew. I hardly cared. She was like a dish I had to consume once or twice a month. I do not know if it would have been three times and more a week if she lived just over the hill, but Bath was considerably more than 100 miles from the back side (our word for the back shore) of Mount Desert, and so I saw her when I could.

A liaison with a mistress that is kept so infrequently tends, I think, to serve civilization. If it had been any marriage but my own, I would have remarked that a double life lived with such moderation ought to be excellent—it might make both halves more interesting. One could remain deeply, if not wholly, in love with one's wife. My occupation offered wisdom on such matters, after all. Did we begin by speaking of ghosts? My father commenced a family line that I continue: spooks. In Intelligence, it is not uncommon to discover the natural fragmentation of the heart. We made an in-depth psychological study once in the CIA and learned to our dismay (it was really horror!) that one third of the men and women who could pass our security clearance might be nonetheless viable—if approached properly—to be turned into agents of a foreign power. "Potential defectors are at least as plentiful as potential alcoholics," was the cheerful rule of thumb we ended with on that one.

After so many years of work with imperfect people, I had learned, therefore, to live a little with the lapses of others so

long as they did not endanger too much. Yet my own defection from the marital absolute left me ill with fear. On this night of blind driving to which I have introduced you, I was half certain that the car and I would have a wreck. I felt caught in invisible and monstrous transactions. It seemed—suspend all logic—that dreadful things might happen to others if I stayed alive. Can you understand? I do not pretend: I think something of the logic of the suicide is in such thoughts. Kittredge, who has a fine mind, full of *apergus*, once remarked that all extreme acts—suicide, murder and the rest of the taboo—might be better understood on the assumption that one of two opposed motives is likely to be at the root. There is, for example, not one answer to the cause of suicide but two: People may kill themselves for the obvious reason that they are washed up, spiritually humiliated down to zero; equally, they can see their suicide as an honorable termination of deep-seated terror. Some people, said Kittredge, become so ghost-ridden, so mired in evil spirits, that they believe they can destroy whole armies of malignity by their own demise. It is like burning an infested barn to wipe out the termites who might otherwise get to the house.

Say much the same for murder. An abominable act that, nonetheless, can be patriotic. Kittredge and I did not talk about murder. It was a family embarrassment. My father had once spent two years trying to get Fidel Castro assassinated.

Let me return, however, to that icy road. There, if my sense of preservation kept a light touch on the wheel, my conscience was ready to crush it. I had shattered more than a marriage vow. I had broken a lover's vow. Kittredge and I had been fabulous lovers, by which I do not intend anything so grandiose as banging away till the dogs howl. No, back to the root of the word. We were *fabulous* lovers. Our marriage was the conclusion to one of those stern myths that instruct us in tragedy. If I sound like the wind of an ass in whistling about myself on such a high note, it is because I do not have the habit of describing our love. Normally, I cannot refer to it. Happiness and absolute sorrow flow together from the common wound of our life.

Let me give the facts. They are brutal, but better than sentimental obfuscation. Kittredge had had but two men in her life—her first husband and myself. We began our affair while she was still married to him. Only a few months after she betrayed him—and he was the kind of man who would certainly think in terms of betrayal—he took a terrible fall in a rock climb and broke his back. He had been the lead, and when he went, the youth who was belaying him from the

ledge below was pulled along. The anchor jerked out of the rock. Christopher, the adolescent killed in the fall, was their only child.

Kittredge could never forgive her husband. Christopher was sixteen and not especially well coordinated. He should never have been taken along on that particular rock face. But then, how could she forgive herself? Our affair sat over her head. She took care of the funeral, buried Christopher and watched over her husband during the twenty weeks he was in the hospital. Soon after he came home, Kittredge chose to get into a warm bath one night and cut each of her wrists with a sharp kitchen blade, after which she lay back and prepared to bleed to death in her tub. But she was saved.

By me. She had allowed no communication since the day of the fall. News so terrible had divided the ground between us like a fissure in earth that leaves two neighboring homes a gaping mile apart. God might as well have spoken. She told me not to see her. I did not try. On the night, however, that she took the knife to her wrists, I had (on a mounting sense of unease) flown up from Washington, D.C., to Boston, then to Bangor, and rented a car to go on to Mount Desert. I heard her calling to me from caverns so deep in herself she was never aware of her own voice. I arrived at a silent house and let myself in through a window. Back on the first floor was an invalid and his nurse; on the second, a wife presumably asleep in a far-off bed. When her bathroom door was locked and she did not reply, I broke in. Ten minutes more would have been too late.

We went back to our affair. Now there was no question. Shocked by tragedy, certified by loss and offered dignity by thoughts we could send to each other, we were profoundly in love.

The Mormons believe that you enter into marriage not only for this life but, if you are married in the Temple, will spend eternity with your mate. I am no Mormon, but even by their elevated measure, we were in love. I could not conceive that I would ever be bored in her presence either side of the grave. Time spent with her would live forever in the sensuous sea of time; other people impinged upon us as if they entered our room holding a clock in their hand.

We had not begun in so inspired a place. Before the disaster on the rock face, we had liked each other enormously, we were third cousins kissing. The tincture of incest enriched the bliss. But it was qualified stuff. We were not ready to die for one another, just off on a wicked streak. Her husband, Hugh Montague, took on more importance, after
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CHANGING OF THE GUARD

(continued from page 88)

"I could spend hours slopping and sliding on the over-friendly breast and belly of Chloe."

all, in my psyche than my own poor ego. He had been my mentor, my godfather, my surrogate father and my boss. I was then 37 and felt half that age in his presence. Cohabiting with his wife, I was like a hermit crab just moved into a more impressive carapace, and waiting to be dislodged.

Naturally, like any new lover in so disruptive an affair, I did not ask for her motive. It was enough that she had chosen me. But now, after 13 years with Kittredge, 11 in marriage, I can give a reason. To be married to a good woman is to live with tender surprise. I love Kittredge for her beauty and—I will say it—her profundity. We know there is more depth to her thought than to mine. All the same, I am frequently disconcerted by some astonishing space in the fine workings of her mind. Attribute it to background. She has not had a career like other women. I do not know all so many Radcliffe graduates who have been high-echelon CIA.

Item: On the night 13 years ago when we first made love, I performed that simple act of homage with one's lips and tongue that 75 percent of all American col-

lege graduates (or is it now 90 percent?) manage to offer in the course of a sexual act. Kittredge, feeling some wholly unaccustomed set of sensations in the arch from thigh to thigh, said, "Oh. I didn't know one could do that!" She soon made a point of telling me I was the next thing to pagan perfection. "You're devil's heaven," she said. (Give me Scotch blood every time!) She looked no older on our first night than 27 but had been married already for 16 and a half of her 39 years. Hugh Montague was, she told me (and who could not believe her?), the only man she had ever known, and he was 18 years her senior. His accomplishments insulated him from her. He was very high echelon. He had worked with double and triple agents. His skill in life was to have a finer sense of his opponents' lies than they could ever have of his. Since, by now, he trusted no one, no one around him ever knew when he was telling the truth. Kittredge would complain to me in those bygone days that she couldn't say if he were a paragon of fidelity, a gorgon of infidelity or a closet pederast. I think she began her affair with

me (if we are to choose the bad motive rather than the good) because she wanted to learn whether she could run an operation under his nose and get away with it.

Her good motive came later. She fell in love with me not so much because I saved her life as because I had been sensitive to the fatal desperation of her spirit. I am finally wise enough to know that that is enough for almost all of us. So our affair commenced again. But now we were in love. She was the kind of woman who could not conceive of continuing in such a state for long without marriage. Love was a grace to be protected by sacramental walls.

She felt obliged, therefore, to tell him. We went to Hugh Tremont Montague and he agreed to divorce. That may have been the poorest hour of my life. I was afraid of him. I had the well-founded dread one feels for a man who is probably able to arrange for the termination of people he deems are mortally in error. Before the accident, when he was tall and thin and seemed put together of the best tack and gear, he always carried himself as if he had sanction. Someone on high had done the anointing.

Now, stove in at the waist so that he conformed to the line of the wheelchair, he still had sanction. That, however, was hardly the worst of it. I was not only afraid of him but loved him. He had been my boss, yet also my master in the only spiritual art that American men and boys practice dependably—we do not hope to peer into the pond of revelation so much as to pass through the iron gate of virility. He had been my guru in *machismo*. He gave life courses in grace under pressure. The interval that Kittredge and I spent together on either side of his wheelchair is an abrasion on the flesh of memory. I remember that he cried before we were done.

I could not believe it. Kittredge told me later it was the only time she ever saw him weep. Hugh's shoulders racked, his diaphragm heaved, his spavined legs remained motionless. He was a cripple stripped down to his sorrow. I never lost that image. Abominable memories may be comparable to bruises, but since they are not visited on one's skin but one's psyche, they do not fade. They grow darker. We were sentenced to maintain a great love.

Kittredge had faith. It was teleological. To believe in the existence of the absurd was, for her, a pure subscription to the Devil. We were here to be judged; such judgment was the foundation of order. So our marriage would be measured by the heights it could climb from the dungeon of its inception. I subscribe to her faith. For us, it was the only set of beliefs possible.

How, then, could I spend hours slopping and sliding on the overfriendly breast and belly of Chloe? Her kisses were like taffy, soft and sticky, endlessly wet. From high school on, she had doubtless been making



"On nights like this, you suddenly begin to savor the taste of real power."

love with her mouth to both ends of her friends. Her groove was a marrow of good grease, her eyes luminous only when libidinal. So soon as we subsided for a bit, she would talk away in the merriest voice about whatever came into her head. Her talk was all of trailer homes (she lived in one), how ready they were to go up in flames, and of truckers with big rigs who ordered coffee while sitting on enough self-importance to run the Teamsters. She told anecdotes about old boyfriends she ran into at the drugstore. "Boy, I said to myself, has he been shoveling it in! Fat! Then, I had to ask myself: Chloe, is your butt that far behind? I put the blame on Bath. There's nothing to do here in winter except eat, and look for hungry guys like you," at which she gave a friendly clap to my buttocks as if we were playing on a team together—the old small-town sense that you heft a person's worth—and we were off again. There was one yearning in my flesh (for the common people) that she kept at trigger trip. Skid and slide and sing in unison, while the forest demons yowl.

I had met her in the off season in the big restaurant where she worked. It was a quiet night, and I was not only alone at my table but the only diner in my section. She waited on me with a quiet friendliness which was much at home with the notion that a meal that tasted right for me was better wages for her than a meal that tasted wrong. Like other good materialistic people before her, she was also maternalistic: She saw money as coming in all kinds of emotional flavors. It took happy money to buy a dependable appliance.

When I ordered the shrimp cocktail, she shook her head. "You don't want the shrimp," she said. "They've died and risen three times. Take the chowder." I did. She guided me through the meal. She wanted my drinks to be right. She did it all with no great fuss—I was free to stay in my private thoughts, she in hers. We talked with whatever surplus was in our moods. Perhaps one waitress in ten could enjoy a lonely customer as much as Chloe. I realized after a while that on pickup acquaintance, which was never my style, I was surprisingly com-

fortable with her.

I stopped off again at the restaurant on another quiet night and she sat and had dessert and coffee with me. I learned of her life. She had two sons, 21 and 22; they dwelt in Manchester, New Hampshire, and worked in the mills. She was 39 (I made her for 42) and she claimed to have had the first boy before she was 18. Her husband broke up with her five years ago. Caught her cheating. "He was right. I was a boozier then, and you can't trust a boozier. My heels were as round as roller skates." She laughed with great good humor, as if she were watching her own pornographic romp. "I didn't really care. I was bored stiff with the guy. In fact, I cut down drastically on the sauce once I got over the shock and

that, considering the uniqueness and magnitude of my marital breach, there was only a hint of sag from time to time in the good man below. I was starved, in truth, for what Chloe had to offer.

Let me see if I can explain. Lovemaking with Kittredge was a sacrament. I do not feel at ease trying to speak of it. Whereas I can give all of it away in talking about the good cruise, Bang-Bang, with Chloe; a roll in the hay is, after all, a roll in the hay, and we were like kids in the barn; Chloe even smelled of earth and straw. But there was ceremony to embracing Kittredge.

I do not mean that we were solemn or measured. If it did not come to real desire, we might not make love for a month. When it happened, however, it certainly did; after

all our years together, we still flew at each other. We were fierce. Kittredge, indeed, was as fierce as one of those wood animals with claws and sharp teeth and fine fur that you can never quite tame. At its worst, there were times when I felt like a raccoon. My tongue (key to devil's heaven) was rarely in the center of her thoughts—rather, our act was subservient to coming together, cruelty to cruelty, love to love. I'd see God when the lightning flashed and we jolted our beleaguered souls into one another. Afterward was tenderness, and the sweetest domestic knowledge of how curious and wonderful we were for one another, but it was not in the least like getting it on

with Chloe. With Chloe, it was old valve seats unsticking, gaskets about to blow, get ready for the rush, get ready for the sale, whoo-ee, gushers, we'd hit oil together. Recuperating, it felt low-down and slimy and rich as the earth. You could grow flowers out of your ass.

Driving that car, my heart in my teeth and the road ice in my ice-cold fingers, I knew all over again what Chloe gave me. It was equality. We had nothing in common but our equality. If they brought us up for judgment, we could go hand in hand, we were playmates. Our bodies were matched in depth to one another, and we felt the affection of carrots and peas in the same meat soup. I had never known a woman so



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started to live alone."

We went home together to her trailer. I have an ability developed, I believe, by my profession. I can concentrate on what is before me. Interoffice flaps, bureaucratic infringements, security leaks, even such assaults on the unconscious as my first infidelity to Kittredge, can be ignored. I have a personal instrument I think of as average, a good soldier no larger nor punier than the average man, a dick as vulnerable as any other. It throbs with encouragement and droops with the oncoming of guilt. So it is testimony to the power of my concentration and to Chloe's voluptuous exposures (call it a crime against the public pleasure she has to wear clothes)

much my physical equal as Chloe.

Whereas Kittredge was the former consort of a knight, now a crippled knight. I felt like a squire in a medieval romance. My knight was away on crusades and so I entertained his lady. We had found a way to pick the lock of her chastity belt, but I was still her quarry and she remained my noblewoman. I could not make love without having to mount the steps. We might see lightning and stars, but our bedroom was her chamber. The walls were stone. Our ecstasy was as austere as the glow of phosphorescent lights in Maine waters. I did not see creation (and, sad truth, we were childless); rather, I had glimpses of the divine. To know happiness with Kittredge was to be a striping on the palimpsests of the heavens. With Chloe, I felt like one more driver with a heavy rig. And, in truth, if Chloe had known my real line of work, it would have blasted her panties clear off her pubes. Forgive me. She was vulgarity itself, God bless her. And vulgarity is infectious. Maybe it is the culture dish for all our other germs.

Thoughts unrolled before me like 30-second, have-to-get-your-attention commercials. On a night of driving as terrible as this—with sleet on the cusp of freezing—there was no way to meditate for long, only in bursts. I saw suddenly that Chloe had the true shape of a wife (if we are to invoke archetypes) and Kittredge was still my far-off love. In each affair, I decided, there were elements unique to the two people and parts that were exchangeable with other relationships. A kiss could belong to one soul or bring back every

mouth you had ever known. It lubricated a marriage, I now decided, if you had a wife who could allow you to live not only with herself but with ten other women she could remind you of. What was a sweet fucky marriage but the sublimation of orgies never undertaken? This was absent with Kittredge. I had been missing the promiscuity of making love to one woman who could serve for many.

Needless to say, this was not Kittredge's view. Once, about a month after we were married, she said to me, "There's nothing I hate worse than the breaking of vows. I always feel as if the universe is held together by the few vows that are kept. Hugh was awful. You could never trust a word of his. I shouldn't tell you, darling, but when you and I first began, it was such an achievement for me. I suppose it was the bravest thing I'd ever done."

"Don't ever be that brave with me," I said, and it was no threat. At the uneasy center of my voice, I was begging her.

"I won't. I won't ever." She would have had the clear blue eyes of an angel but for a touch of haze in the iris that gave her the expression of a philosopher who is forever trying to perceive objects at a great distance. Thoughtful and a little misty was her look. "No," she said, "let's make a pledge. Absolute honesty between us. No transgressions of our word. If either of us ever has anything to do with someone else, we must tell."

"I pledge," I said.



SEX STARS

(continued from page 18)

around into something more fun but rather less comfortable. Is that Dick and Liz over there, or Sly and Gitta? Did you say that singer who's on the balcony with another Woman was the Fifties' Frank Sinatra or the Eighties' Bruce Springsteen, out for a romp with backup singer Patti Scialfa—to the dismay of his 1985 bride, Julianne Phillips, who filed for divorce? Has Clark Gable come back as Kevin Costner? If gossip died with Hedda, Luella and Walter, who are Grah, Phil and Gerald?

There's definitely something otherworldly about the engagement, off and on, of Brigitte Nielsen and N.Y. Jets' defensive end Mark Gastineau. The pair met at the Super Bowl, fell madly in lust and broke up—but not before they'd had each other's names tattooed on their rear ends. Possibly realizing that this could limit their future love lives, they renewed the engagement pending Gastineau's divorce from his model wife, Lisa, who graciously commented, "They're cut from the same mold, both publicity conscious. I can't see him with any person who has a past—and, God, she has a past!"

Gitta's past, of course, includes several *Playboy* appearances, an ex-husband and a child in her native Denmark and a reported \$800,000 settlement in her divorce last year from hubby number two, Sylvester Stallone. Not to be outdone in graciousness by Mrs. Gastineau, Stallone's mother, Jackie, observed, "Gitta is the poorest example of a female I've ever known."

Sly consoled himself for a while with Alana Hamilton Stewart, ex of George Hamilton and Rod Stewart, then took up with socialite Cornelia Guest. Lying under a tank during the shooting of *Rambo III*, Stallone told how he psychs himself up for one more action shot: "I'm saying, Come on, Sly, one more time. . . . That'll be the one. Hang on." Presumably, he says much the same thing about his love life.

Nielsen—who ended up with a tasteful engagement ring with diamonds in the shape of a nine to remind her of Mark's jersey number, 99—wasn't the only beauty to fall for a jock. Not since Joe DiMaggio wed Marilyn Monroe have so many celebrity athletes been romancing actresses, with similarly mixed success. Spirited Robin Givens, star of ABC's *Head of the Class* and frequent companion to such stars as Eddie Murphy, wed heavyweight champ Mike Tyson and the two of them almost went down for the count in the tabloids. Their courtship and marriage were marred by tales of alleged fights with each other, and with family and business associates, culminating in the crash of his luxury car. Givens denied that they'd been fighting at the time of the wreck but concedes that Tyson was so disgusted that he gave the \$180,000 auto to the police. Her wifely explanation: "It was just a man going, 'Ugh! Forget it! He didn't want to drive the car, you know, [his



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