

PAUL
NORA
NICHOLE
DWAIN

START

NICHOLE. Hello, handsome. Come on in.

NORA. Hi, Dwain. Just drop that anywhere.

(DWAIN steps inside and stows his pack in the hallway. He takes off his heavy coat and reveals a sweater vest over a fairly clean shirt and a clip-on tie.)

DWAIN. Am I too early?

NORA. *(Exiting:)* You are exquisitely on time. I'll get the champagne.

DWAIN. I know sometimes on Sunday it's early dinner, leastways in the country, if you know what I mean.

NICHOLE. You got all dressed up. Was that for me?

DWAIN. Not really.

NICHOLE. Of course not. Why would I even think such a thing?

DWAIN. It's not like that. I mean it's not that I don't like you, a lot. It's just sometimes I can't let that be the way. I can't trust what I feel sometimes. Sometimes until it's too late to matter. Do you know what I mean?

NICHOLE. Maybe.

DWAIN. It's not you.

NICHOLE. It never is.

DWAIN. It's my heart. Sometimes I think it isn't there at all. But then it comes out and it's all mangled and sore and I can't deal with it. It's not a pretty thing. It's full of bruises. It's not somethin' to show to people.

NICHOLE. Mine's sort of beat-up too.

DWAIN. You have a good heart. A warm and open heart.

(She smiles and hands him a cupcake.)

NICHOLE. Try one of these. I made it myself. So we, you and me...

DWAIN. I have to go soon. To Ocala.

NICHOLE. Oh. Where?

DWAIN. It's in Florida. The national forest.

NICHOLE. Oh.

DWAIN. I go there every year. It's the Rainbow Gathering.

NICHOLE. Oh right. The hippies.

DWAIN. They're not all hippies.

NICHOLE. Can I go with you?

DWAIN. You wouldn't like it there. Too many bugs.

NICHOLE. Hey, I was in the Brownies. I camped out, once.

DWAIN. They got alligators there, too.

NICHOLE. Oh. Well...

(DWAIN's beard is full of icing.)

DWAIN. This is delicious. What's your secret?

NICHOLE. A warm and open heart.

(NORA enters with a tray of champagne and glasses.)

NORA. Dwain, you're all dressed up for dinner.

DWAIN. Just because it's Sunday.

NORA. Did you go to church?

DWAIN. Nah. I used to but not no more. It ain't like it was before.

NICHOLE. Before what?

DWAIN. Before it got all amplified. It's like a big show now and the singin' ain't as good as before they got all that stuff.

(PAUL enters from the back and stands quietly.)

NORA. But you believe in God, don't you?

DWAIN. I'd be a damned fool if I didn't.

NORA. Someone said that. Who said that?

DWAIN. I did, just now.

PAUL. Dylan Thomas. In response to the same question. Are you quoting Dylan Thomas, Dwain?

DWAIN. If I am, I don't know about it.

PAUL. You're not scamming us are you, Dwain?

DWAIN. What do you mean?

PAUL. You're not some highly-educated genius making fools out of us poor rubes?

DWAIN. I don't think so...

NORA. Paul.

PAUL. It's happened before. I mean isn't it a bit odd that the unknown guy with the breakthrough book just happens to end up

having dinner with the third most important book reviewer outside of New York City. How does something like that happen?

NICHOLE. Fate. Luck. The fortune of fools.

NORA. Who said that?

NICHOLE. I did, just now.

PAUL. We read your book, Dwain, and I think it's brilliant.

NORA. It's wonderful, Dwain. It's an amazing story and the writing is beautiful.

NICHOLE. I haven't read it. I don't read anything, but if these guys like it, it's got to be very, very good.

DWAIN. Well, it's just my thoughts and all. I sure ain't no genius.

(PAUL removes a box from a drawer and carefully extracts the journal.)

PAUL. There're all kinds of genius, Dwain. You may be one and not know it. I want to get this typed up and send some copies to my agent. Let him get it out.

DWAIN. Out where?

PAUL. To publishers. Someone will snap this up pronto. And if they don't the university press will print it for us.

DWAIN. You mean print it like a book?

NORA. Like a bestseller. With your picture on the back flap.

NICHOLE. Yes. We need to get you a pipe and one of those tweed jackets with patches on the elbows.

DWAIN. Yeah, right.

(Everyone has gathered around DWAIN who tries not to show his discomfort with their nearness.)

NORA. You can move to some small town in Maine and live in seclusion in a house near the shore while you work on your next masterpiece.

PAUL. When you're not doing book tours, and signing autographs for young lit groupies.

DWAIN. Yeah, me signin' autographs.

NICHOLE. I want one, inside the cover of your first edition. "To Nichole, who made it all possible."

NORA. "To Nora and Pauline my muses."

STOP