

## WAITRESS

i play with the ashtray in my hands, waiting for the coffee to come, watching the cook scrub the grill with a rag made out of steel. as he works away he puffs on a cigarette, letting it hang from his lips, ashes falling at his feet. he's an old guy, having had no shave in at least five days. i'm waiting too for the waitress to finish her shift. when she brings me my coffee i ask her how much longer she'll be, and she tells me not long honey. she must be some ten years older than me, putting her somewhere in her late forties. when i was in earlier we had talked a bit, like we usually do when i come in for dinner. only this time i had asked her to go out with me when she was finished working. my asking her came as a surprise to both of us, i think. i had often daydreamed about making it with her, and now it looks as though that night is here. and she knows how broke i am too, so i don't have to worry about breaking into my piggy bank to impress her. as we are leaving the diner the last thing we hear is the owner yelling, reminding her that she has the early shift tomorrow. out in the street, walking towards my car, we look at each other and laugh. it hits us that we are in essence complete strangers, even after all the meals she has placed in front of me. she's beautiful though, just beautiful. she reminds me of every waitress i've ever wanted to take home. at my place we throw our coats on the couch, and as she sits down on them i get a bottle out of wine and i open it in front of her on the coffee table, a little embarrassed at the absence of a cork. an hour goes by; the night goes by. toward the end of the third bottle we are laughing more and more, our kisses are careless and sloppy but getting very prolonged. her hair is dyed a very colorful reddish-brown. when i sit close to her i can smell the diner. it's a wonderful perfume. i refuse to let her take a shower. she insists i take one. a wonderful perfume. in the morning i hear the alarm go off, and i see her getting back into her worn turquoise uniform, seemingly in a hurry. roughly she brushes her hair back without mirror. in the pushing light her face looks weary. with pocketbook in hand she comes over to the bed



and touches my forehead as though checking to see if i have a fever. when i open my eyes they meet hers. before giving me a peck on the cheek she reminds me that pot roast is the special for today.

#### THE LONE WOLF VISITS OLD FRIENDS FOR DINNER

i sat at the big table telling my story with what i thought was just the right amount of dramatic flare, but when i looked over at the two people whom i was talking to i noticed very plainly that they were not at all involved in what i was saying. so i tailed off with as little fanfare as possible, and then i yawned as though yawning would somehow show that i was in complete accord with them. so for the rest of the meal we ate in silence, commenting only on the good flavor of the roasted chicken, drinking coffee afterwards, slowly stirring with spoons that seemed to have the ability to hypnotize. it was a dark, dark night outside, and other than the small portion of the woods lit by the floodlights there was nothing else to see. it was a superinsulated house so the rain which was falling could not be heard, not even on the roof. after awhile she put her head down on her arms which were folded on the table and she started to take a snooze, and when he saw this he did likewise, also pushing his coffee mug towards the center of the table where hers was. what could i do but join them. i pushed my mug towards the center, folded my arms, lowered my head and with zero trouble i fell into a deep sleep which must have lasted for at least a few hours. when i woke i was the only one at the table, and the only light that was on was the one on the stove which was used to light the stove's clock. this clock revealed that it was well past midnight. looking around i wondered where the other two had gone to. i found them in their bed locked in each other's arms, sleeping like satisfied babies. as i tiptoed out of the house, suddenly the urge for another bite to eat swept over me, and so i went back into the kitchen and took a chicken leg out of the refrigerator and i ate it with great relish. as i stood there i watched the second hand on the stove's clock as it ran smoothly and quietly and steadily through the seconds.