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The Hermit

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DEER SEASON

November, late afternoon. I’m driving fast, only the parking lights on. A minor infringement of the law. . . .

All along Route 4 men wearing orange step out of the woods after a day of hunting, their rifles pointed toward the ground.

The sky turns red, then purple in the west, and the luminous birches lean over the narrow macadam road.

I cross the little bridge near the pool called The Pork Barrel, where the best fishing is, and pass the Fentons’ farm—the windows of the milking parlor bright, the great silver cooling tank beginning to chill the milk.

I’ve seen the veal calves drink from pails in their stalls. Suppose even the ear of wheat suffers in the mill. . . .

Driving fast in my car at dusk
I plan our evening meal.

THE HERMIT

The meeting ran needlessly late, and while yawns were suppressed around the room the river swelled until it spilled.

When the speaker finished, I made for the car and home as fast as fog would allow—until I came upon a barricade: beyond, black pools eddied over the road. Detour. The last familiar thing I saw—the steaming heaps of bark beside the lumber mill.
No other cars on the narrow, icy lane; no house or barn for miles, until the lights of a Christmas tree shone from the small windows of a trailer. And then I knew I couldn't be far from the East Village and the main road. I was terribly wide awake. . . .

To calm myself I thought of drinking water at the kitchen sink, in the circle of light the little red lamp makes in the evening. . . of half-filling a second glass and splashing it into the dish of white narcissus growing on the sill. In China this flower is called the hermit, and people greet the turning of the year with bowls of freshly-opened blossoms.

**SUN AND MOON**

*for Donald Clark*

Drugged and drowsy but not asleep I heard my blind roommate's daughter helping her with her meal: "What's that? Squash?" "No. It's spinach."

Back from a brain scan she dozed to the sound of the Soaps: amnesia, infidelity, shady business deals, and long, white hospital halls. . . . No separation between life and art.

I heard two nurses whispering; Mr. Malcomson had died. An hour later one of them came to say that a private room was free.