

hello there, I say. Hello there to you, he says. Nothing about this shouldn't have happened. Nothing about I've missed you, not even that little lie. Sis is visiting; she's lying drunk and passed out upstairs and not even that little lie. I thought I'd come over. Yes, you do that. He comes; we look at each other and we both hold in whatever we've been holding in since that day he went away. You're looking well, he says; and you, too, I say. And there are no apologies, no recriminations, no tears, no hugs; dry lips on my dry cheeks; yes that. And we never discuss it? Never go into why? Never go beyond where we are? We're strangers; we're curious about each other; we leave it at that.

B. I'll never forgive him.

A. (*Wistful, sad*) No; I never do. But we play the game. We dine; he takes me places — mother, son going to formal places. We never ... reminisce. Eventually he lets me talk about when he was a little boy, but he never has an opinion on that; he doesn't seem to have an opinion on much of anything that has to do with us, with me.

B. (*Clenched teeth*) Never!

A. (*To B*) Or with you. (*To C, and sad smile*) Or you.

C. Did we ... did we drive him away? Did I change so?

B. (*Rage*) He left! He packed up his attitudes and he left! And I never want to see him again. (*To him*) Go away! (*Angry, humiliated, tears*)

A. (*Very calm; sad smile*) Well, yes you do, you see. You do want to see him again. Wait twenty years. Be alone except for her upstairs passed out on the floor, and the piano top with the photos in the silver frames, and the butler, and ... be all alone; you do want to see him again, but the terms are too hard. We never forgive him. We let him come, but we never forgive him. (*To him*) I bet you don't know that ... do you?

C. (*To A*) How did we change? (*To him*) Now did I change? (*He strokes "A's" face, shudders a little*)

B. Don't bother yourself. He never belonged.

C. (*Enraged*) I don't believe it!

B. (*Furious*) Let it alone!

C. No! How did I change? What happened to me?

~~START~~
A. (*Sighs*) Oh, God
C. (*Determined*) How did I change?
B. (*Sarcastic; to the audience*) She wants to know how she changed. She wants to know how she turned into me. Next she'll want to know how I turned into her. (*Indicates A*) No; I'll want to know that, maybe I'll want to know that.

A. Hah!

B. Maybe. (*To C*) You want to know how I changed?

C. (*Very alone*) I don't know. Do I?

B. Twenty-six to fifty-two? Double it? Double your pleasure, double your fun? Try this. Try this on for size. They lie to you. You're growing up and they go out of their way to hedge, to qualify, to ... to evade; to avoid — to lie. Never tell it how it is — how it's going to be — when a half-truth can be got in there. Never give the alternatives to the "pleasing prospects," the "what you have to look forward to." God, if they did the streets'd be littered with adolescent corpses! Maybe it's better they don't.

A. (*Mild ridicule*) They? They?

B. Parents, teachers, all the others. You lie to us. You don't tell us things change — that Prince Charming has the morals of a sewer rat, that you're supposed to live with that ... and like it, or give the appearance of liking it. Chasing the chambermaid into closets, the kitchen maid into the root cellar, and God knows what goes on at the stag at the Club! They probably nail the whores to the billiard tables for easy access. Nobody tells you any of this.

A. (*Laying it on*) Poor, poor you.

C. The root cellar?

B. (*To A and C*) Hush. No wonder one day we come back from riding, the horse all slathered, snorting, and he takes the reins, the groom does, and he helps us dismount, the groom does, his hand touching the back of our thigh, and we notice, and he notices we notice, and we remember that we've noticed him before, most especially bare chested that day hearing the straw, those arms, that butt. And no wonder we smile in that way he understands so quickly, and no wonder he leads us into a further stall — into the fucking hay, for God's sake!

— and down we go, and it's revenge and self-pity we're doing it for until we notice it turning into pleasure for its own sake, for *our* own sake, and we're dripping wet and he rides us like we've seen in the pornos and we actually scream, and then we lie there in the straw — which probably has shit on it — cooling down, and tells us he's wanted us a lot, that he likes big women, but he didn't dare, and will he get fired now? And I say, no, no of course you won't and for a month more of it I don't, but then I do; I do have him fired, because it's dangerous not to, because it's a good deal I've got with the penguin, a long-term deal in spite of the crap he pulls, and you'd better keep your nose clean — or polished, anyway — for the *real* battles — for the penguin's *other* lady folk, the *real* ones — the mother who just doesn't like you for no good reason except her daughter hates you, fears you and hates you — *envious* and therefore hates you — dumpy, stupid, whining little bitch! Just *doesn't* like you — maybe in part because she senses the old man's got the leech for you and besides, no girl's good enough for the penguin, not *her* penguin; the first two sure weren't and this one's not going to be either. Try to keep on the good side of the whole wretched family, stand up for your husband when he won't do it for himself, watch out for all the intrigue; start *really* worrying about your sister who's really stopped worrying about herself — about *anything*; watch your own mother begin to change even more than you're aware *you* are, and then try to raise that! (*Points to him.*) That? — gets himself thrown out of every school he can find, even one or two we haven't sent him to, sense he hates you, catch him doing it with your niece-in-law and your nephew-in-law the same week! Start reading the letters he's getting from — how do they call it? — older friends?, telling him how to outwit *you*, how to survive living with his awful family; tell him you'll brain him with the fucking crystal ashtray if he doesn't stop getting letters, doesn't stop saying anything, doesn't stop ... just ... doesn't ... stop? And he sneers, and he says very quietly that he can have me put in jail for opening his mail. Not while you're a minor, I tell him; you just wait, I tell him, you just wait, I'll have you thrown out of this

house so quick it'll make your head spin. *You're* going to fire me, he says, quietly, smiling; You going to *fire* me too? Just like you fired *him*? He's good in bed, isn't he? Of course, *you* wouldn't know about *bed*, he says. He gets up, stops by me, touches my hair. I thought I saw some straw, he says; sorry. And he walks out of the solarium, out of the house, out of our lives. He doesn't say goodbye to either of us. He says goodbye to Mother, upstairs; he says goodbye to the Pekingese, too, I imagine. He packs one bag, and he leaves. (*To him, rage.*) Get out of my house! (*Pause; to C.*) Does that tell you a little something about change? Does that tell you what you want to know?

STOP

C. (*Pause; softly.*) Yes. Thank you. (*Silence.*)
A. (*Curious.*) You want some more?
C. No, thank you.
B. I shouldn't think so.
A. Yes, you *do*; you *want* more.
C. (*Trying to stay polite.*) I said, *no*, thank you.
A. That doesn't cut any ice around here. (*Points to B.*) How you got to *her* is one thing; how you got to me is another. How do you put it ... that *thing* there? (*Points to "A."*)
C. I'm sorry.
A. Well ... maybe.
B. Yeah, I've got a few doubts about *that* route myself.
A. You!
B. Yeah, well. I'm not so bad. There's been shit, but there've been good times, too. Some of the best.
A. (*Oddly bright.*) Of course; there are always good times: like when we broke our back. (*To C.*) You break your back.
B. (*Laughs a little.*) Yeah, you sure *do*.
C. (*Scared of this.*) I do?
B. Snap!
A. (*Smiles.*) Well, not exactly. Snap! Really!
B. I should *know*; it was *only* ten years ago, and ...
A. Riding, yes; jumping. We never liked jumping — hunters, saddle horse, yes, hunters, no. Brutes, every one of them, brutes or hysterics; but hunters it was *that* day, entertaining some damn fools. Brisk, burned leaves in the air, smell of