

Jeanine Rosenberg
215 Gunson Street
East Lansing, MI 48823
(517) 332-1272

DOMINION

Jeremy had not hunted for two years. His loaded guns hung in the gun rack above the fireplace **in his cabin**, and he never took them down. He had even put his hunting trophies--a stuffed red **fox**, the mounted head of a ten-point buck, a wildcat **with** its mouth **fixed** in a snarl--in the storage shack **behind** his bedroom.

Yet he had been an ecstatic hunter since he was a boy. He could recall every detail of the woods where he had walked into the sanctuaries of his prey, flushed them out, and brought them to him suddenly as he raised his gun to his shoulder and fired with **his quick right** hand. It had excited him too to cast his line into the river and feel a fish take the lure, **responding to him, flailing** but still graceful, from the dark depths under the rushing water.

He taught mathematics in a small high school that served several tiny towns in one district. He had taken the job because the school was deep in the north, and the woods was only a few miles away in any direction. In the classroom

he was rigorous because his instinct told him that among the **region's** native **teenagers**, the sons and daughters of farmers and of businessmen who depended for their **livelihoods** on tourists **passing** through to resorts, there were some who had natural gifts for abstract **logic**. He was singleminded and almost merciless in his teaching. He **damanded** hard work from his students; he tracked their ideas carefully and then surprised them **with** questions that he hoped would startle them into using their talents.

But in the spring after his guns had been silent for the second **hunting** season **in a row**, he began to be gentle and even dreamy in class. He smiled indulgently at wrong answers, pointed out complicated paths to solutions, and let his students work as long as they could without **his interference**.

That same **spring** he surprised himself by going out of his way to avoid stepping on **wildflowers** as he approached his cabin. He had scarcely noticed before, when he left the path in the woods, that his big boots were crushing spring **beauties** and **violets** and even the great **white petals** of **trilliums**. Now he concentrated on placing his feet on mud or rocks or **fallen logs**.

One day when these strange new moods were especially strong in him, he decided to give his mare more room to run. He had more than fifty acres of cleared land around his cabin and another hundred of woods; but he had fenced in

a small paddock where she **walked, grazing** and occasionally lifting her exquisite head to look out over the **fields. It** would be more difficult to catch her if he gave her more room, but he had not ridden her all winter and did not **think** he would be riding her soon. But before he released her into the backwoods he would have to mend the fence at the edge of his property so she wouldn't be lost, for his fence had gaps in it where the barbed wire had rusted through and the posts had rotted and fallen down.

The next Saturday he drove to the hardware store at the center of town to buy some fencing. He parked his pickup truck directly in front of the building, and as he was putting coins in the parking meter, he saw a woman leaving the store with her hands full of small packages of flower seeds. Jeremy watched her without moving, keeping his head bent over the meter. She was long-limbed, and she had a narrow face and dark hair that fell below her shoulders. When she passed **him** she looked at him shyly but did not quicken her pace. He could see that her hair was a little tangled at the ends, and he could imagine burrs caught in it. He thought he had seen her before, perhaps years ago.

He was tempted to ask the clerk in the hardware store if he knew her name, who she was, where she came from, but he picked out **his** fencing in **silence, nodded** and wrote out a check when the clerk handed him his sales **slip**.

Jeremy worked on the fence all the next afternoon; he

used his **posthole** digger to penetrate the soil that was thickened by decaying leaves, drove in the posts, and strung strand after strand of new wire. Then he took his truck up the dirt road that led from his back acres to his neighbor's land and **finally** to his **cabin**.

As he drove around a curve that emerged in open fields, he saw the woman walking toward him on the gravel beside the **ditch**. She was wearing a long, full gray skirt and a red sweater. He recognized her at once from her long dark hair and her quiet manner. It seemed to him that her **footsteps, even** on the gravel, would not break the stillness around her. For this reason he was not even tempted to blow **his** horn, but he **raised** his hand as he drove past.

As soon as he had reached his cabin and parked his truck, he went out **into** the paddock and opened the gate that led to the woods. The mare looked up at him and pointed her small, finely shaped ears in his direction, then put her head down and continued grazing. But by morning she had **disappeared** into the tall trees.

The next night Jeremy dreamt that he was hunting for deer in a forest that grew darker as he penetrated it; leaves that hung down from the beech trees lining his path grew more and more enormous. He heard a stirring in the leaves ahead of him, then shot and **realized** too late that he had **hit** the mare. He came upon her where she was lying on her side in the path; she was bleeding through her silky coat just below

her neck. He knelt down to put his hand on the wound, and she folded her feet under **her, rose** and fled, becoming two horses as she reached the **horizon** and **circled** back.

The woman's image flashed through his mind time after time during the next few months, but he **didn't** see her **again** until the end of the summer. One day when he was walking through town with Virgil Foster', a lanky, bespectacled history teacher from the **high** school, he **saw** her leaving a restaurant with an older woman. He turned quickly to Virgil. "Who is that woman **just** ahead of us--do you know?"

"The younger one, I guess you mean?"

"Yes."

"That's Phoebe Claire. The woman with her is her aunt, Gladys Stevens."

"Is she from around here--Phoebe?"

"Yes, from Green **Lake**. She lost both of her parents while she was still in college, and she's come back to live **with** the aunt."

"Does she work somewhere?"

"She helps Gladys some on the farm, and I believe she **gives** piano lessons." **Virgil** took a long stride to the curb and went to **his** car, parked near the corner of the main street. "I don't suppose you'd like to hunt some birds this **weekend**," he said.

"No."

"Don't forget about my party then."

"Right--so long."

Jeremy followed the two women for another block and kept far enough behind them so that they would be unlikely to notice him even if they turned around. But he was suddenly overcome with shame at his stalking, and he went down a side street and walked in the opposite direction.

Virgil's party, an annual gathering for the high school faculty and his friends from the towns in the district, was on the next Friday. Jeremy was sorry that he had agreed to go. He knew he would be late, but he ran for five miles in the woods, showered, and then took his time getting dressed, sitting with his shirt off and reading the two-year-old issues of Field and Stream that were stacked on his coffee table.

When he finally drove his truck up to Virgil's house, the street was lined with cars on both sides, and he had to park around the **block**. As soon as he walked up to the **house**, **Virgil** came to the door. "Good to see you at last," he said.

The room was crowded with people drinking beer or wine, and it was hot and noisy. Jeremy felt pressured, almost trapped, and he was tempted to turn around and go back out the **door**, but suddenly his heart sounded **in** his ears like a partridge flushed from shelter. The woman --Phoebe--was sitting in an armchair in the corner. She was wearing a **dark, short** dress, and her hair was pulled back and pinned in a bun, so that for a moment he hadn't recognized her--

but yes, there she was. **Virgil** put his long arm around Jeremy's **shoulders, then** motioned with his head toward the corner where the woman was sitting. "Jer, **that's** the girl you were asking me about the other day--Phoebe Claire. **D'you** want to meet her?"

Jeremy nodded and followed **him. After** she was **introduced**, Phoebe gave him her hand casually, but when he looked directly into her eyes, darker now in the shadow where she sat, he saw that she recognized him and was startled.

"Virgil told me that you moved here not long ago," Jeremy **said.**

"Yes."

"Are you finding it boring? There's not much to do around here."

"**Oh, no.** This is my home--I'm from Green **Lake.**" Sadness passed across her face. "I was raised only a few miles from **here.**"

"It's beautiful country."

"Yes--I used to take my horse out and **ride** through the woods or the fields all day sometimes."

"Do you still ride--do you ride now?"

"I do when I have the chance. My parents sold my horse when I went away to college."

Jeremy glanced to his side and saw two young women **approaching.** "I have a **horse, an** Arabian mare--" But the women

were already in front of Phoebe's chair.

"Phoebe! What are you doing here?" one of the women was saying, "Where have you been? We haven't seen you forever."

Jeremy walked back across the room and left her to explain, listened to her quiet voice explaining. He spent another five minutes talking to Virgil and then left.

When he got home he looked in the phone book for Phoebe's number. Her name wasn't listed, but he found her aunt's number under Gladys Stevens, Route 3, Green Lake. He called the farm on Saturday and Phoebe herself answered. Her quiet voice made her suddenly, vividly present in his cabin. He invited her to ride his mare the next afternoon, and she hesitated, then agreed. He wanted to prolong the moment, but his imagination failed him and he decided to end the conversation.

On Sunday Phoebe walked into his barn before noon; she was wearing sneakers and jeans that fit loosely over her long legs and narrow hips. He took a bridle from a hook near the mare's stall and walked with Phoebe through the pasture. "Don't you have any boots with heels?" he asked, looking down at her delicate bare ankles. "Those sneakers might slip through the stirrups."

"I was hoping you'd let me ride bareback."

"All right, if you're used to it."

"Yes--I am."

The mare was grazing in open pasture, and he whistled to her, holding the bridle behind his back. She trotted over

and ate the apple he had brought **in his jacket** pocket. She didn't resist the bridle when he caught her forelock and slipped the bit **in her mouth;but** she had not been **ridden in months, and** she circled around, trying to avoid being **mounted. Jeremy** finally tied the reins to a fence, and making a cup of his hands for Phoebe's foot, boosted her up. He untied the reins and slipped them over the mare's head into Phoebe's hands, then walked ahead of them to the open gate. When the mare walked through it, Phoebe immediately touched the heel of her sneaker to her barrel. The mare sprung into a gallop and began **running across** the field.

"Too fast, too fast--rein her in!" Jeremy shouted. But Phoebe was riding ably, easily. She took the mare to the road and let her have her head until she slowed down on her own, cantering, **trotting**, then walking **quickly**. Phoebe turned her back and rode slowly around the field several times, finally walking her back to the gate where Jeremy was standing. He looked up at Phoebe's flushed cheeks and tangled dark hair.

"You were going pretty fast."

"Yes, I think she liked being let out."

"Do you want me to give you a hand down?"

"Of course not." Phoebe slid lightly to the **ground. "Don't** you want to ride yourself?"

"No, I'll just walk her a little more to cool her down."

Phoebe walked with him around the paddock, the mare padding nervously behind them. "I want to see you **again**," Jeremy **said**.

Phoebe looked at him shyly without **turning** her head. "Yes, all right."

They began spending every weekend together. He rented a horse so he could ride with her when she rode the mare; they sat through every movie that came to Green Lake, Jeremy missing whole lines of **dialogue** when **their** shoulders touched in the dark. Sometimes they went deep in the woods to pick berries or mushrooms, and she would disappear into the trees ahead of him, and then circle back so quickly that he was startled to find her at **his side**. Yet he rarely **kissed** her or even touched her during these long seasons. He waited to be sure of her response to him, waited for her to come to him unawares.

One spring day when they had eaten lunch together in town, they went for a walk on a hill where the grass was already **growing**. The wind was blowing, and Phoebe was having trouble **walking uphill** and around rocks because she was dressed in her long gray skirt.

"You should have changed clothes before we came up here," Jeremy said.

"Yes." She sat down on a boulder and he bent over her and kissed her hair and then her face and her mouth.

"I want you to marry me," he said suddenly. He saw his **mistake immediately**.

"No." He wanted to pull her down off the rock and lie

in the grass with **her**, pressing the whole length of her body to his. But he restrained himself and sat down next to her.

"Do you see those gentians over there?" he asked. They were at some distance, at the edge of the woods, but he had trained his already sharp sight while he was a hunter, and he could see their long slender stems and the violet-blue petals that he knew bore delicate fringes.

"Yes, I see them," Phoebe said.

He sat quietly for some time before he spoke again. "You are really beautiful."

"Oh! You know I'm not--"

"Yes you **are, though.**"

She stood up suddenly and ran, her skirt drawn up to her knees. Jeremy could have caught up with her easily, but he put **his** fists in **his** jacket pockets and let her go.

When he spoke of marriage again it was almost **midsummer**. He was with her beside a little stream that flowed through her aunt's **property**. He stopped and leaned against a great maple tree and pulled her to him, then asked her to marry him **again** and **again, holding her, kissing her, pleading coaxing.**

"Phoebe, why do you resist me--why?"

She looked directly at **him** and spoke **without hesitating**. "Because you're dangerous." He felt the justice and the calumny of this.

"Well, you're free."

"No, not anymore."

"Yes—I'll stop the pursuit."

"Can't you see that I'm already wounded? I was free, I was content to be alone. I liked being alone. Now I think about you all the time. I long for you when I'm not with you."

"Marry me then."

"No."

"You're afraid I'll go on wounding you?"

"Yes, I'm certain of it."

"I haven't been unkind to you."

"No, but you want to have me, capture me."

"Of course I do."

She stood in silence watching the brook. He went on, knowing that his own silence would have been a better strategy. "Phoebe, surely you don't want to be alone for the rest of your life."

"No, perhaps not. But I could marry someone who would let me live in peace."

"Someone you didn't like much, you mean?"

"Someone who wouldn't want to enter my world and track me down." She was quiet again, thinking. "There's a place in this woods where I like to go," she said at last, "where I feel sheltered and hidden. There's a pond there, a very still, deep pond. It mirrors the trees, and in the fall their leaves drop onto it and float in the water."

"You feel safe there."

"Yes, I feel at peace there. But not as much as I did, even last **fall**. It would all be ruined if I began to care too much about whether you understand me, whether I could lose you in one way or another."

"Well, it's true I might die, as people do." He regretted his words even before he saw her flinch.

I don't want you trampling on my feelings, not knowing."

"I do know."

"How sure you are, how arrogant."

"What's wrong, Phoebe?"

"I don't want **this--any** of **it**. Her eyes filled with tears at last, but he was already stung, and he picked up a rock and threw it into the stream. "All **right, goddamn it**. Sit by your pond and brood. Sit there all alone. I won't scare you out, you can be sure of that."

They walked together at a quick pace out of the woods in silence, and when they came to the driveway of the farm, Jeremy jumped into his pickup, banged the door shut, and drove away.

He did not see her again until the fall, one day when there was a heavy rain and wind. He had just brought his mare into the barn, and he was sitting in his cabin watching the small pines in the distance bending under lashing rain. Wet red leaves from the maples blew against

his window. He heard quick knocks at his door and pulled it open. Phoebe was standing in the rain with her car keys in her hand, her long dark hair hanging in wet strands over her blouse.

"My car stalled up the road," she said.

"Come in then." He took a stack of towels from his closet. "Would you like to change into some of my clothes? I have some sweatshirts--"

"No, I'll dry out."

"Take off those wet shoes, at least. I'll get you some dry socks." He longed to hold her narrow feet in his hands to slip the socks over them, but he gave the socks to her. He felt as if a deer had stumbled through his door, frantic for shelter; he was almost afraid she would thrash about and try to escape through the window. "Phoebe, go ahead and change," he said. "Here are my running clothes."

"No." She put her wet shoes back on over the dry socks. "Please take me to my car."

"All right."

They drove in his pickup to the car, which was parked about two miles away on a dirt road. They stood in the rain together, looking under the hood. "I think it's the generator belt," he said. "Did you have your lights on?"

"Yes."

"Come back to my cabin and we can call somebody."

"No."

"Phoebe."

"Take me to town."

He got into the pickup and slammed the door. She climbed into the passenger seat and shut her door quietly. Then she turned her face away and began sobbing.

"What? What is it?" he said. She didn't answer, and he put his arm around her and gave her a kleenex from the box he kept on his dashboard. "Tell me, please." She went on crying. "Phoebe, goddamn it."

"I missed you unbelievably, unbearably."

"Good."

"You--you don't even know what it's like to be that lonely."

"Yes I do," he said, filled with gratitude for having her with him now, under the small roof of his pickup, leaning against him with her soaked clothes as the rain hit the metal harder and harder.

"No you don't," she said.

"What's there to be afraid of?"

"Everything. I thought I had it in me to be free."

"You can come to me freely now."

"No--I'm coming to you because I can't imagine living without you anymore--I'm lost." She began crying again, and he held her and kissed her eyes and the long, wet strands of her hair.

When at last she was his wife by law, by her own consent, because of her longing to be with **him**, he approached his marriage bed almost with dread, for he knew that it was her solitary **wildness** that had made him seek her **out**. **They lay** naked together on the bed for a long time before he began making love, kissing her mouth and shoulders and breasts, then putting **his** hands on her hips and looking into her dark pupils as he entered her body. She looked **startled, then** closed her eyes.

"Phoebe, forgive me."

"No--I want you **now--close**, closer," she said, and with these words his seed shot from him wildly, out of control. He held **her, relaxed** and docile, and stroked her long throat and her dark hair spread over the **pillow**.

"Forgive me Phoebe," he said again.

"No, **its** all **right--**I belong with you. I've been searching for you all my life." Her answer comforted him but **surprised him, and** he was suddenly **filled with relief** and longing, for he realized that he would *never* know her completely.

One night when they were lying in bed in the dark in the dead of winter--she had been pregnant for more than four months--she reached over and took his hand and held it against her body. His heart sped up. Beneath his fingers felt, like a strike on the line deep in the waters, a kick, a stirring of limbs from the dark **womb**. **His child**, conceived **in knowledge** and ignorance and **in** was unfolding its mysterious life.

In the darkness outside, his mare was bedded down, dreaming her strange, deep animal dreams, and above the wild, snow-filled woods the night sky shone, unknown and indomitable.