

2 P.M. took the whole morning, and there was their own apartment to keep clean and meals to cook and clear, and she had to have some time to herself. Hadn't they looked for a motel in a small town, a beach town, so that they could have some time free?

She had never minded being alone; indeed she would have enjoyed it, if she had had time to enjoy it. Certainly she hadn't planned to socialize with the guests. That might be what people wanted at these fancy bed-and-breakfasts where there was champagne and orange juice and everybody used first names. But most people at motels wanted to be left alone, she thought; and all she wanted was to greet them in a nice way so they felt at home, take their money and give them their key, and then clean up after them next morning. And she knew what that involved. Working at her first husband's service station in Tucson years ago, she had learned how people use public facilities, not only peeing on the floor and strewing paper around but scraping off paint, unscrewing fixtures, uprooting toilets even, like crazy monkeys wrecking their cage. She didn't expect the cleaning to be pleasant, and sometimes it was disgusting, you wanted to rub their noses in it. But then some people left things neat, the wet towels in a pile, trash in the wastebaskets; sometimes even a dollar bill under the ashtray, as if she was a maid, but they meant well. And nobody came here for big wild parties, like in city motels. Mostly they were just driving through on the coast highway and pulled off for the night—single men, a good many elderly couples, some families with young children. Sometimes women staying with their families in the kitchen units for a couple of nights liked to talk with her while the children were down playing on the beach. Mostly they started out with a complaint about the refrigerator or the shower or they wanted extra cups, but sometimes they also got to talking about their lives; and that was interesting. In some of them she recognized right away the pain and strangeness she felt in her own life, but others interested her because they seemed to be so dull and so familiar, and the women living these lives complained about them comfortably, feeling no strangeness at all. Such conversations usually took place in the front office or at the door-

ALL HALLOWS' EVE

In the great silence of my favorite month,
October—the red of maples, the bronze of oaks,
clear-yellow leaves here and there on birches—
I celebrated the standstill of time.

The vast country of the dead had its beginning everywhere:
At the turn of a tree-lined alley, across park lawns.
But I did not have to enter, I was not called yet.

Motorboats pulled up on the riverbank, paths in pine needles.
It was getting dark early, no lights on the other side.

I was going to attend the ball of ghosts and witches.
A delegation would appear there in masks and wigs,
And dance, unrecognized, in the chorus of the living.

—CZESLAW MILOSZ

(Translated, from the Polish, by the author and
Leonard Nathan.)

way of the units. Once, an elderly lady staying alone for the weekend for a church conference up in Seaside invited her in for a glass of iced tea. Rosemarie did not feel that she should accept the invitation, and did not want to accept it, but she appreciated it.

The apartment kitchen was cramped. The living room was dark, because Bob kept the blind down and the TV on, and it smelled like his socks. Since he was always there to answer the bell, Rosemarie took to spending a good deal of time that fall in the storage room. It had the only west window in the motel, looking down through some big old black Sitka spruce trees to the grassy dunes. You couldn't see the sea, but you could hear it, if you wanted to. Or she would lie down on one of the twin beds in No. 10, a unit they had never filled even

in the summer, saving it till last because its TV and heating unit both acted funny. She would lie down on the bed farther from the door and look at a mail-order catalogue or doze and think at the same time. Sometimes she read science-fiction books or magazines from the secondhand-paperback bookstore in Astoria. She had never liked what they called women's books. She did not like most of these either, the ones that were about wars and drugs and killing like the newspapers and everything else, but some of them told stories about places that were different from here. She wondered where the writers got their ideas from. She spread the untouched pale-green coverlet back across the bed and returned to the storage room to put the wash in the dryer. She looked out at the edge of the land, the dune grass bowing in the sea wind, and pretended that if you walked down the sandy road past the spruce trees and the empty lots and stood there on the edge you would see something entirely different—not the long, wide brown beach and the breakers and the gray horizon but another world. A city with glass towers, maybe. Pointed green glass towers like thin church steeples. A person came up from that green city toward her. He shone, with a kind of shimmering and sparkling at the edges and in his hair, because he was an energy person. Not flesh and blood, not earthly. She did not dare take his hand, although he held it out. She was afraid the touch would destroy her, until he smiled and said, "It's all right."

