

cowboy hats, colored western shirts, and tennis shoes. I tip my beer to them, and the one in a purple cactus pattern nods his eyes and looks away. I'm nothing but a pale face, I think. They could probably care less. They're discussing John Wayne movies. *The Green Berets*, where the sun sets in the east. "That's something you don't see every day," the purple shirt one says.

A girl I used to know said that I was always eavesdropping. I was seventeen years old and she was the most beautiful girl at our high school. She had short brown hair and a sweet smile. She used to bake me cookies and invite me on family outings to the Great Lakes. I was a loner, though. Kind of a dorky, serious kid with an interest in keeping things tidy and to myself. She'd tease me and say that I did it so that I could always be eavesdropping. "Maybe you're a spy," she had said.

One time when we had been making out in my car after a movie she told me that she could picture herself married to me. "It'll never happen," I had said.

Dad had liked her, had smiled his big smile that he saved for strangers and company every time that she came into our house. She represented some kind of preservation for him, and he'd show her pictures from photo albums and hang out with us on the living room couch.

After that, I would sometimes dream that her and I were standing in a small, Methodist church in our wedding clothes. My Dad was there, and he was so proud of me. Proud of this beautiful girl being in love with me and proud of

the fact that I was everything that a good man is supposed to be. You could see it in his eyes that I had achieved his dreams. An image of the face of God would appear in my curtains and ask me if he could forgive me. "I want to be a good man, Father," I'd say, but it always turned out to be just a dream.

James from the Texaco station comes in just then. "Evening fellas," he says to the Indians.

He's smooth and elegant and they both tip their hats and say, "Evening, James."

He sits down on the stool next to mine and orders himself a whiskey straight with a beer to chase. "You pay," he says smiling. "I'll get the next round."

I'm smiling back, touching my face to find a connection, to stay awake, to focus on what I'm doing here beside this man who knows me. "Beer six, señor," I say to the bartender.

"It's seven, guy."

Everything's obsessively seven, I think. I face east out the window and begin to sing under my breath while James taps the metal sides of his barstool. Our souls feel meshed here in this smoky, grainy place, and I've put a few beers in me. I picture a minister preaching about the Holy Trinity. "I love you," I say.

"Whatever you say," he says smiling.

Everything is swimming and surreal and the bar is turning on its side and fading in and out of my vision in conscious streams. What could happen, I think. He knows me, I know he knows

