

Just So
Curt Eriksen

There it is, the phone ringing again. But there's no way I'm going to answer that now. They should have known better than to mess with me. They should have buttoned their lips and minded their own goddamn business. How dare they suggest that I *ingress* myself, that I *commit* myself, like a fucking lunatic? You've got enough money now, that's what they said, to pay for 'rehabilitation.' We only scattered Mom's ashes the other day—what was it Monday, Tuesday? What's today? Hell, who cares? The point is she's gone now, and there's nothing but the three of us left. The three fucking musketeers, that's what we're supposed to be: one for all, and all for one! But then they go and tell me, with their dippy wives signing on, that they're *concerned* about me, they're *worried* I might destroy my liver, just like Dad did. Hell, I'm only topping off. And it's red wine, for Christ's sake, some vintage Malbec that he used to drink and she would never touch, being a white wine lady herself. While Tom and Joe were upstairs going through the closets—with Susan and Patty already bickering over the pearls—I found a case covered with fly shit in the basement that must have been there since we buried Dad, fifteen years ago. It'd only go to waste so I decided that it might as well be part of *my* inheritance. Tom won't touch anything stronger than Diet Coke and Joe's a beer man himself, hence the gut (I didn't mention *that* when they cornered me, but I could have done!). And besides, it's past noon already, nearly three o'clock. I thought I might stroll over to Plain View and take a look at the magnolia they said they were going to plant in Mom's memory. Those were the good ladies from Trinity, the same ones who

looked at me all cockeyed when Tom whispered in their ears after the service. I remember staring down at the glass in my hand and getting so angry all of a sudden at the shame they were suggesting, so fed up with it all, that I drained the port in one swallow. I don't suppose they ever stopped to think how much they contribute to a man's paranoia, what with all their secret conversations and pseudo-trickster-psychology. They're just waiting to trip me up, that's all, hoping I'll fall on my face and make a fool out of myself so that they can feel self-satisfied and wholly justified in having condemned their big brother to a life of lonely destitution. Or maybe it's my share of the trust they're after? That's it! They're driving me to drink, they *say* they care about me but what they really want me to do is keep on chugging away until I drop. Well, I got news for them. Starting tomorrow I'm giving it all up, I'm going to jump on that wagon and thumb my nose at big-belly Joe. I'm going to outlive all of them, and in the end I'll be wearing Mom's pearls around my neck and drinking Perrier when we tamp down the earth on the last of them, including the hens. But first I'm going to finish that case of vintage Malbec, in Mom and Dad's memory. He was always telling us how to do things anyway, "just like this," he'd say, "just so."

Originally appeared in *The Hamilton Stone Review*
Winter 2011 (Issue No. 23)
<http://www.hamiltonstone.org/hsr23.html>