



UNIVERSITY OF
SAN FRANCISCO

Gleeson Library |
Geschke Center

Ontario Review

Volume 67 *Fall/Winter* 2007–08

Article 7

October 2014

The Longing of Paulette Andre

Samuel Cypressi

Follow this and additional works at: <http://repository.usfca.edu/ontarioreview>



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cypressi, Samuel (2014) "The Longing of Paulette Andre," *Ontario Review*: Vol. 67, Article 7.

Available at: <http://repository.usfca.edu/ontarioreview/vol67/iss1/7>

For more information, please contact southerr@usfca.edu.

The Longing of Paulette and Andre

SAMUEL CYPRESSI

I

WHEN PAULETTE BOROVIC FIRST HEARS Bach's Suites for Unaccompanied Cello, she feels the emotional clarity of the isolated melodies, but she is unaware of the extent to which the arc of her life has been altered or that the change will propel all the significant events in her future. Growing up in New York City, Paulette's Russian immigrant parents introduce her to the cello when she is ten, presenting it to her along with weekly lessons. They stand back to see what ignites, encouraging, never insisting, and, in fact, feeling some disappointment in the slow kindling of her interest. Paulette is the typical American adolescent, interested more in her girlfriends, rock 'n roll, field hockey, and an increasing curiosity about that repulsive other half of humanity, boys. In other ways she is not so typical. Her old-world parents expose her to the value they place on the arts, on education, propriety and family loyalty. In high school Paulette discovers Bach, and the deeply sonorous purity of the lone cello awakens feelings she does not know are in her. The music's range of sorrow and quiet joy feels familiar to Paulette, as though it were being revealed from some old ancestral recess.

In high school she is admitted to the Juilliard Saturday school for promising young musicians. Her regular teacher until then tells Paulette's parents that she is gifted and Paulette's father replies dismissively: "Please do not say she is gifted. She is merely competent."—as though she might become tainted by her specialness. For college she stays at Juilliard, studying under the renowned cellist, Elga Cherov. Through her undergraduate years she continues to explore the layers of Bach's Unaccompanied Suites, gently urging from her cello strata of color and feeling that startle even the worldly Elga Cherov. The gift becomes too obvious to be denied even by her protective, proud father.

Her evolving complexity as a musician is entwined with her maturing as a young woman. She longs for experience beyond the

cello, for time with her friends, for exploring the city, attending the theatre, improving her tennis game. She is slender, gangly, six feet tall, plenty of leg to embrace the cello, piles of sun-streaked auburn hair that have never been cut above her middle back. She has a sharp smile that flashes on and off and fills her whole face. Paulette becomes close to the Cherovs, Elga and her husband, Ivan, who is an accomplished pianist and also a teacher at Juilliard. She spends evenings with them at the Cherovs' west side apartment and weekends at their country home in Connecticut, carting instruments along, often playing music late into the evening. The relationship between Ivan and Elga has grown thorny and cold over the years. It is a marriage of habit and complicated history bound up with a love of music. Both are entering their sixth decade, a natural time for introspection and regret. Ivan is athletic and unpredictable, Elga sedentary and methodical. Unintentionally, Paulette and Ivan find themselves alone together. Elga goes to bed early or stays on at school through the evening leaving them alone for dinner. Until one evening Paulette finds her hand in his, then her mouth on his and very soon, on a warm spring evening, while Elga attempts sleep in an adjoining bedroom, Paulette entrusts to tender Ivan the event that so preoccupies girls of her age.

Oblivious to course or consequence, Paulette and Ivan become lovers, finding a way, almost daily, to feed the hunger that is always just below the surface, addled in their obsession with each other, always distracted by the absence, then the presence of the other. Elga, of course, knows. She simply looks the other way, sometimes offering a detached smile to let them know she knows and can care less. She becomes distant from Paulette, growing apart as Paulette completes her final year at Juilliard. But it does not matter as Elga has given Paulette everything she has to give.

After graduation, Paulette is offered the fourth chair with the New York Philharmonic after only two auditions. She continues to study privately under the master cellist, Bernhard Linigke, and continues to see Ivan everyday. Until Ivan can no longer continue in this way and announces he is divorcing Elga and will marry Paulette. Elga makes it easy, continuing her indifference, knowing that after so many empty years with Ivan, life without him will be no less intolerable.

Paulette and Ivan are married less than six months when she becomes pregnant. Paulette decides to take the name Cherov. They

settle into a new apartment overlooking Riverside Park, Ivan continuing to teach at Juilliard, Paulette performing regularly with the Philharmonic, her playing continuing to mature and always applauded by her maestro. Paulette takes temporary leave of the orchestra to give birth to Andre.

II

Ivan, who has been told for years that he was the reason he and Elga could not have children, delights in fatherhood. Paulette delights in watching them. Andre is healthy, bright, handsome, welcoming everything that his new life holds out to him, insulated by his newness from the blemishes of the world which will take him longer than most children to learn about. The years pass. Andre attends a private Manhattan school, he learns tennis from his father, he begins violin lessons before his third birthday, he is surrounded by music and books and the sparkling people his parents bring into his life. At five he is speaking French fluently. By seven he has been to Europe three times. By ten he has a girlfriend, Amy Pearlman, and knows his way around the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Paulette reclaims her chair with the Philharmonic and continues to thrive and expand in the company of so superb an assembly of musicians. Andre dislikes her being away at evening performances and the occasional tours and always greets her return with several days of warm attention, following her around as if doing so will ensure her presence. It is Ivan who provides the daily routine, who is home in the afternoons, does most of the cooking, laundry, cleaning, although he makes Andre and Paulette help with cleanup after meals.

Andre's first lesson in loss comes when he is twelve and Ivan is diagnosed with colon cancer. After a debilitating regimen of chemotherapy, in a hospital room on a storm-wracked night with lightning cracking against a black window, Ivan dies. Andre and Paulette are devastated. She takes a leave from the orchestra and stays home with Andre where they spend whole days in each others arms, consoling, talking about what their life will be like now, reassuring each other. She helps Andre get back to school and he helps Paulette to put the cello back in her embrace, and together

they find their way back into the world. "We have each other," they say and that simple observation is all the comfort they need. Many days Paulette does not leave the apartment, waiting eagerly for Andre's return from school. Some nights, Andre sleeps the entire night with his mother, some nights when the loneliness is so acute, Paulette enters Andre's room and squeezes into his bed. He holds himself tightly against her body, his face buried against her neck and remains that way until the depths of sleep separate them. "I love you, mom," he says, and kisses her face all over. And one night, "I want to kiss you all over your body," and he proceeds to move up and down, kissing through her night gown her stomach and hips and thighs and feet and the warm place between her legs and lingering with several kisses on her breasts, careful to treat both equally, and returning to her face, continuing to kiss, and Paulette, feeling the dampness of his emission, turns him over and, both laughing, she moves down to kiss his wet spot.

III

Paulette returns to her chair with the Philharmonic. Establishing a daily routine is aided by the housekeeper, Rita Plukovski, a fortunate find, a Polish farm girl, now in her fifties, barrel-shaped, muscular, odorous, able and willing to do anything asked of her, including fix meals and stay late on performance nights. Her only requests are that she be permitted to return home at night and have three mornings a week to do her own housework, which suits Paulette.

Andre's transforming boyish body reconstructs itself into that of a hard-muscled young man. On the nights they want to be together, one will tiptoe into the other's room, slip under blankets and embrace until each is consumed by the other. Paulette is amused by his youthful stamina. He expends his passion and moments later, replenished by seemingly endless reserves, his eager member probes her body. The summer before Andre enters high school, they sleep together almost every night, waking in the morning with their naked bodies covered in semen.

One of those summers between soft boy and muscled youth, they spend in Paris and in Arles in the south of France. In Paris, in t-shirts and shorts, they idle away the pleasant mornings on long

walks through the city's various atmospheres. They are obvious tourists, swallowing the sensory onslaught of the Left Bank, strolling the quais, browsing the bouquénistes stalls, falling in with other tourists at the gardens of Arenes or Mouffetard, engaging the natives with their conversational fluency. When mid-day appetites arise, they slip into a street-side café for salads or vegetable-laden omelets or breads and jams. During the hot afternoons they take long naps under the ceiling fan in their hotel room, making love, order afternoons snacks of blueberries and pears and apricots. In the evenings they linger over long dinners and take in concerts or operas or, their favorite, the ballet. Having their fill of city life, they move south to the sun-soaked hills of Provence and the town of Arles where Paulette and Ivan vacationed years ago with their baby son, a place Paulette had loved and always wanted to return to. Summer in Arles is an ongoing festival and the streets are filled daily with parades and music and food. Paulette and Andre spend their days on the narrow beaches of the Mediterranean or hiking over the gentle hills, marveling at the colors of the native vegetation. Paulette is asked to sit in with a local orchestra, which she agrees to do if they will find a violin for Andre. It is in Arles that Andre acquires his first sketch pad and pencils, and, surrounded by so much rainbow-drenched landscape, all he can see to draw is his mother.

In high school Andre plays first violin, makes varsity tennis in his sophomore year and is encouraged by his art teachers to draw. At first he keeps his school life separate from home, never bringing friends home, never encouraging Paulette to attend school functions, although Paulette insists on going to holiday programs and tennis matches when her time allows. But as the years pass the compartments of his life became less important to Andre. His mother has met most of his friends, mostly boys, an occasional "strictly friendship" female, until late in his junior year he arrives home with Julie Birney, a fully bloomed bouquet of laughter, darting glances, and shy maneuverings of a self-conscious body.

"I'm helping Julie with calculus."

"Good. If you're hungry there's fruit in the kitchen and Rita's cookies. The water's still hot for tea."

"Thanks, mom. We'll check it out later."

They spread their books on the dining room table and go to work. Paulette, in her practice room studies the score of Mozart's

Concerto No. 19 for the evening performance. As the dinner hour approaches, she invites Julie to stay for dinner and when she accepts, instructs Julie to call home to let her family know. Paulette takes the phone from Julie and introduces herself to Julie's mother, assuring her that it is no trouble and that Andre will walk Julie home after dinner.

Rita seems the most uncomfortable during dinner, having not yet adjusted to the idea of Andre with girls. She becomes inquisitive, as is her nature, asking Julie questions about herself, which encourages Julie to ask Paulette questions about her work and what it is like to be part of the "glamorous" world of the New York Philharmonic and would she "advise a young person to pursue a career in music." After dinner, Andre and Julie return to their homework. As Paulette leaves for her performance, Rita in a whisper asks, "Shall I stay till he takes her home?" And Paulette replies, "I don't think that will be necessary."

Paulette returns home late. She looks in on sleeping Andre and places a kiss, lightly so as not to wake him, on his lips. Moments after turning off her light, she hears him enter her room and slip in under the covers next to her. "I love you, mom," he says, placing a firm kiss on her neck and receding back into sleep. Later in the night she wakes and feels his hard penis against her leg. She slides down and moistens it in her mouth, then places it inside her. With wet, forceful kisses, she brings him out of his sleep. "I love you, my sweet son. I love you."

IV

Bach must have been willing to impart complete trust to his solo cellist, creating compositions of such melodic complexity, relying entirely on the musician's musical and emotional depth to bring the works to life. He must have wondered where the musicians would come from, who would want to be so challenged. As the years pass, Paulette continues to probe the rhythmic diversity, the austere voices of point, counterpoint, the unexplored ranges of despair and rejoicing. The deeper she goes, the more Bach reveals to her. Paulette is promoted to second chair in the Philharmonic and not long after, Andre goes off to college at Cornell. Without his everyday presence, she needs more to fill the hours and begins

playing with a string quartet, specializing in Schumann and Beethoven. Well into her middle years now, Paulette's imposing appearance, her height and flaring auburn hair, the confident stride of her slender body continues to elicit second looks and inquiries as she sails through the rehearsal halls of Lincoln Center. She has never been an outgoing person. Her friends are mostly musicians who are like Paulette, quiet, self-contained people, with an inward gaze on their musical hearts. She becomes even more introspective after Andre's departure, causing a friend to ask if she is adjusting to his absence, to which she responds, "I miss him. We talk everyday, but it's not the same. I must get used to it, though. After all, every child leaves the nest to make his own life." Stoical on the surface, in her heart she is dazed by despair.

At Cornell Andre's focus turns not to music or art, though he continues to play the violin and to sketch and occasionally paint, but to science. He enters the pre-med program and is completely absorbed by it. He plays rugby, practices with the college orchestra and chamber music group, consumes his fair ration of alcohol and marijuana, and occasionally maneuvers women into evenings of intimacy. Which unavoidably lead to comparisons with the one and only intimacy he has ever known. Which enflames in him a longing for his mother.

To ease the despair, Paulette drives up for visits. They find a bed-and-breakfast in Hammondsport, west of Ithaca, in the heart of the Finger Lakes wine country. The tall, meticulously cared for Victorian house is located on the shore of Keuka Lake. Inside, hallways go off in every direction and rooms on all five floors contain lumpy country beds with fresh linens and adjoining bathrooms with groaning plumbing, perfume soaps, and thick, oversize towels smelling of laundry soap. Outside, a wide porch surrounds the house, the back overlooking the lake, within earshot of the gently lapping water. The house has so many rooms that Will Straightman, the owner, lacks the bookkeeping proficiency to keep track of all the arriving and departing guests. What he lacks in bookkeeping, he makes up for in the handyman skills needed to maintain the house, which the flannel-clad widower devotes himself to fulltime. Will Straightman also plays the violin ever since childhood lessons inflicted on him by his parents. Will becomes infatuated with Paulette using his violin as a pretext for claiming time with her. He plays deplorably and delights in having

Paulette snatch the violin from him and demonstrate the correct way to play a piece.

Between performance seasons, Paulette drives to Ithaca on Friday afternoons, picks up Andre, and continues on to the Straightman bed-and-breakfast for the weekend. They check in as Mr. and Mrs. Cherov, and after an initial look of curiosity from Will Straightman, it is accepted that the beautiful cellist has simply plucked herself a handsome young husband whom she is now putting through college. This is reinforced in Will Straightman's mind by the time the couple spends locked in their room and by the long, arm-in-arm walks they take. He looks forward to their arrivals, so much so that the rule of closing down breakfast at 8:30 is suspended when the Cherovs are guests, allowing Paulette and Andre to sleep late and get breakfast whenever they appear, a display of favoritism that does not please the cook.

Andre chooses the University of Pennsylvania for medical school and stays for his residency. His medical interests are diverse and the area of specialty is difficult to decide on, but he chooses finally to devote himself to a new area of oncology focusing on diseases caused by chromosome abnormalities. After additional graduate work at Johns Hopkins, he returns to the University of Pennsylvania to join a new research team studying cytogenetics. Andre arrives at his new position fully formed, tall like his mother, the same burst of unruly auburn hair, the same fine features and forceful stride. In his new city of Philadelphia he is soon surrounded by new friends and, in time, by a special friend, Susan Hesser, a publicist for the Pennsylvania Ballet, born to a wealthy family in the insurance business. During their courtship, Susan already begins to detect an unusual bond between Andre and his mother, her suspicion stirred by his reluctance to take her along on his weekend visits to New York. Andre and Paulette have become used to seeing much less of each other, especially during the years of medical school and the Philharmonic performance seasons. When they do get an occasional weekend together, in New York or the Straightman house, they are riveted on each other, sealing themselves in their room, often not getting out of bed until late in the afternoon.

Andre and Susan are married and in quick succession have two daughters. In their fourth year of marriage, having settled into a

large, antique-filled house in a correct mainline suburb, Susan gives birth to their third child, a son, Ivan.

V

On one of his weekend visits to New York, Paulette introduces Andre to Christian Abel. He is a specialist in 16th-century Flemish painters, works as an appraiser for Sotheby's, and has been inviting Paulette to dinner and to afternoon outings. He is an affable, good-humored, sharp-edged New Yorker with an air of detachment that makes him easy to be around. Andre is vaguely disturbed, noticing his mother's attention, always focused completely on him, now divided.

Not long after her marriage to Christian Abel, Paulette takes first chair with the New York Philharmonic. When the orchestra is not in performance, she spends long periods touring with the string quartet. The quartet is invited to spend a summer in Germany touring and making a *Deutsche Grammophone* recording of Schumann string compositions.

When little Ivan is five, they manage a family gathering at a house Christian owns in South Hampton. Andre has never seen his mother happier, singing with her granddaughters, reading stories, having long conversations with Ivan who has firm opinions on many subjects. She takes the children for walks on the beach, searching for shells and colorful stones that the children believe are valuable gems. Christian enjoys taking them to dinner to out-of-the-way restaurants that only the most discerning locals know about. Susan, who is mothering full time now, welcomes the diversion and attempts to steal private time with Andre. One afternoon, while everyone is napping, Paulette and Andre slip out for a long walk on the beach. They have not been together for several months and both are thinking the same thing as their bare feet make imprints in the sand, both looking for a place, quickly finding it, a spot of beach between homes, secluded by tall grass and trees. They peel off each others shorts and make long, devouring love as the drone of rolling waves covers their sounds.

Christian's work takes him to London and Amsterdam for long periods. At first their time apart makes their reunions all the more precious. Then with their combined travel, the reunions become

less frequent, the time apart begins to wear on the relationship. "If this is what it must be, then I must accept it," says Paulette. "But I wish I had more of you." "Everything is for its time," says Christian. "It will not always be this way." Paulette accepts and wonders why the men she needs most can never belong completely to her.

VI

At fifty Paulette's hair is dull, streaked with gray, often worn pinned up. She acquires the gaze common in people with accumulated years in need of examination. Those who disturb her gaze often feel they are waking her from a dream. She expects her longing for Andre to subside with age, but it does not. She wants him more than ever and is deliriously happy on their weekends together.

At the bed-and-breakfast, Will Straightman shows them the hiking trails in the hills above the lake and they walk for hours, pausing for a sandwich lunch, napping in the sun-bleached grass. They swim in the lake, read in the afternoons on the back porch rocking chairs, invite Will Straightman to jam on violins. On one of their hikes, they discover a cliff at the edge of the east side of the lake. They crawl out to the ledge and look over at the water below. A bird circles high in the wind above the lake. The afternoon is hot, the area secluded, so they slip out of their clothes and, holding each other, drift away to sleep. Andre wakes and takes up his sketch pad. Paulette is stretched, sleeping on her side, offering Andre a view of her long legs, the rise of her hip and the descent to her slender waist, the breasts lying one atop the other. Andre sketches, completely absorbed, until his mother stirs.

"Do you ever think about us," Paulette says when she awakens. "It's unusual, you have to admit. We talk about everything, but we never talk about what we do."

Andre is amused by her understatement. "Yes, it is unusual. Then again, it's always felt very natural to me. I've never wanted it to be any other way. What's to talk about?"

Paulette takes his hand in hers and kisses it. As they are dressing, she asks, "Do you ever wonder if anyone knows?"

"I think Susan knows."

"She's said something?"

"No. She's never spoken of it. But I think she knows."

"Susan's a perceptive woman," says Paulette. "It wouldn't surprise me that she knows. It doesn't surprise me either that she wouldn't speak of it."

"What about Christian?"

"Christian," Paulette laughs. "He's not around enough to know anything."

Andre knows his mother's marriage is in an unhappy time and does not inquire further.

"I would never want it to be any different," he says, drawing her close to him.

They plant kisses on each others faces causing themselves to laugh. As they leave the cliff, Andre quips, "As long as old Will doesn't figure it out, we're okay."

On the way back, Paulette informs Andre, "When I die, I want my ashes strewn over the lake from our cliff. Will you see to it?"

At 60 Paulette is asked by *Deutsche Grammophon* to record Bach's Suites for Unaccompanied Cello. Although it is never said, it is understood among musicians that the invitation implies recognition of the world's foremost living cellist.

Christian has taken a lover and moves back to his old apartment. When their busy lives permit, they will deal with the details of divorce.

Bernhard Linigke is now in his nineties. Paulette has never stopped playing for him, and though their sessions are less frequent, she asks him to work with her to prepare for the recordings. After all these years, she still benefits from their discussions of interpretation and technique and from his peculiar understanding of the composer's heart. Their rehearsals take place in the music room of Paulette's apartment. Paulette notices that Bernhard is often in tears when she completes a piece.

"Does it make you sad," she asks.

"Oh no," replies Bernhard. "Bach is not about sadness. Musicians think the Cello Suites are about sorrow, they try to play grief, but they are wrong. The Suites are about joy. Unrestrained, naïve joy of a child. The musicians who play the Suites well must possess a great capacity for joy. Like you. It's what makes you who

you are. What you see on my face...these are tears of joy at hearing you play."

Paulette spends two months in Berlin completing the recordings. A year later she stops playing with the string quartet and two years later she retires completely, leaving Lincoln Center with an elegant black-tie party thrown in her honor by the musicians of the Philharmonic.

When Paulette learns she has uterine cancer, she makes light of it with Andre: "All the important events in my life have taken place between my legs. The birth of my son, my cello, now the disease that will kill me."

Andre is involved with the specialists in determining Paulette's treatment. The cancer has spread to her pelvis. Paulette will not allow chemotherapy, the memory of Ivan's ordeal still vivid after all these years. The specialists urge chemo. Andre, whose own specialty is the nature of cells, understands the process and the probability of success as well as anyone. He knows his mother's mind and eventually sides with her. Paulette is made comfortable in her own apartment with round-the-clock nurses and, at the end, with morphine. Andre dismisses the nurse and is alone with his mother, his head on the pillow beside her, feeling the warmth recede from her face, listening to her ever-softening breath, until he wakes and she is gone.

The funeral service is held at the Quaker meeting house on 15th Street. Those who could not fit inside, stand outdoors in the clear fall afternoon. Prepared eulogies are delivered by the maestro of the Philharmonic and by several musicians, fixing their gaze on the urn of ashes at the front of the room, as though she is still present in this new form. Then, in Quaker fashion, after a period of silence, people stand and offer memories of Paulette. In the background a lone cello plays the Suites.

After the service, in an impromptu receiving line, Andre and Susan thank everyone for coming. Will Straightman steps up, shakes Susan's hand, then Andre's, "I'm sorry for the loss of your mother. She was a wonderful woman," he says. He lingers for a moment, teary eyes locked on Andre's, then lets go of Andre's hand and moves on.

Christian Abel is the last to greet them, cradling the urn in his arm. "They gave this to me," he says, "but Paulette said you would know what to do with it." And he hands the urn over to Andre.

VII

Following the loss of his mother, Andre cannot sustain his interest in work. He takes a leave of absence, then, at the age of 48, retires. His interest and energy turn immediately to painting. Susan is relieved and happy that he is returning to life. He sets up a studio in their enclosed sun porch, but quickly outgrows it and moves to an old barn at the edge of town. Susan helps him move. She encourages him in every way, wishes he had more attention for her, believes that in time he will come around and it will be her turn. The two daughters are in graduate school, one in Chicago, one in Boston. Ivan does not go to college. He makes his way playing jazz violin with a group of musicians who marvel when they learn he has never had a music lesson.

In his barn studio Andre spends every day painting. The urn of Paulette's ashes sits high on a shelf against the barn wall out of the way. He tries but is not yet able to return to the lake. Nearing the first anniversary of his mother's death, Andre is told he has an arrhythmia and his doctor puts him on medication.

A New York Gallery takes an immediate interest in Andre's work. Almost as fast as he can produce them, his paintings sell and each sale is at a higher price than the one before. He paints mostly landscapes, scenes from around the Finger Lakes area which he had sketched during hikes with Paulette, or scenes from the Pennsylvania countryside where he and Susan go for Sunday drives. Sometimes he does a portrait from memory of an interesting face he has passed. His agent urges him to work faster. He produces only one picture in several months, and the market wants more. But Andre is not interested in money. Sometimes Susan or his agent wants to visit him at his studio and he refuses. He allows no one to see his work until it is finished and ready to go to the gallery. He will work at his own pace. The world will just have to wait. And as the paintings are released, four or five a year, they are more and more sought after.

The arrhythmia becomes worse and Andre is haphazard about his medication. One day, three years after his mother's passing, his erratic heartbeat takes a final ascent and plunges to a stop.

Andre's instructions are hand written and addressed to Susan. He is to be cremated, his ashes mixed with those of his mother and "the co-mingling is to be given to the wind at our cliff overlooking Keuka Lake." Anticipating that Susan will not know where this is, he advises her to call on Will Straightman to show her the location. Susan tells only Ivan of the instructions, knowing she cannot do it without her son's help. Ivan does the mixing in a large bucket on the workbench in the basement, feeling a nausea rise from his stomach to fill his chest and head, as the particles of bone and ash mix together emitting a peculiar odor which he will smell for the rest of his life.

But before the instructions can be completed, Andre's private studio yields a startling discovery. He was not the slow painter everyone thought. Stored under heavy canvases, secured snugly by rope on the barn's second floor is a collection of fully developed paintings, thirty-seven in all, all of the same subject, Paulette. Two trunks are also concealed under the canvases, one containing hundreds of pencil sketches, the other slack canvases of partially completed paintings, all of Paulette. Some paintings show her in the woods leaning against rocks or under trees, some show her around the Straightman house or in their room, some in her New York apartment. In many she is partially clad or nude: Paulette in the grass at the cliff, Paulette on a beach drying herself, Paulette on a bed among disheveled sheets. Some are close-up portraits capturing expressions, some so subtle that observers can only speculate on their meaning. Andre's agent, a cynical New Yorker quick to boast a long career that has seen it all, is dumbstruck by the collection. He consults the owners of the New York gallery. They gaze over the collection incredulous at the consistent quality of the canvases. All show a fearless use of color, compositions full of idiosyncrasy and, most entrancing, a depth of expression in the face of Paulette. Sometimes it is not even clear where in the face the expression is coming from, but it is there, gripping you, drawing you into its meaning. They rent a special hall in New York and mount the paintings for a press conference and gala unveiling. As they conjure it, "The Paulette Paintings" will be the major art event of the year. And it might have been, creating several weeks of

international attention with stories in art journals and newspapers all over the world. Susan goes into seclusion to avoid the deluge of interview requests by journalists wanting to know about the relationship between Andre and Paulette. She will not speak of it and asks the children, Christian Abel, and everyone who might have known them together, not to speak of it. Interest in the Paulette Paintings spreads to people who never even think about art. A tour is planned, shows in all the major cities in this country, then over to London and Paris and Tokyo. The agent eventually wants to sell the paintings, preferably as a collection, but the value is difficult to calculate. After the Tokyo show, a Japanese collector offers sixteen million dollars for the whole collection. Susan instead donates the paintings to the Metropolitan Museum of Art which promises to create a special room just for the Paulette Paintings.

On a cold day in early spring, Susan and Ivan arrive at the Straightman house. Will leads them to the cliff where they walk over the wind filled grass to the edge. They look out across the lake at the shadows of clouds creeping across the vineyard hills. While Ivan hands the ashes to the wind, Susan examines the open ground around the cliff, the soft grass and wildflowers. On the way back, Will walks ahead. Ivan puts his arm around his mother. He kisses his mother's hair. "I love you, mom," he says, and lifts his face up to the musical breeze.