

manager" that high school teams sometimes have, the unathletic kid who assists the coaches and wears a jacket and necktie to games and gets to stand on the sideline with a clipboard. Jocks tend to tolerate this kind of manager because he's invariably a deep student of the game, and this seemed to be one element of the Walter-Richard nexus, because Richard, irritable and unreliable though he was in most respects, was helplessly serious about his music, and Walter had the connoisseurial equipment necessary to be a fan of stuff like Richard's. Later, as Patty got to know them better, she saw that they were maybe not so different underneath—that both were struggling, albeit in very different ways, to be good people.

Patty met the eraser on a muggy August Sunday morning when she returned from her run and found him sitting on the living-room sofa, diminishing it with his largeness, while Eliza showered in their unspeakable bathroom. Richard was wearing a black T-shirt and reading a paperback novel with a big *V* on the cover. His first words to Patty, uttered only after she'd filled a glass with iced tea and was standing there all sweat-soaked, drinking it, were: "And what are you."

"I beg your pardon?"

"What are you doing here?"

"I *live* here," she said.

"Right, I see that." Richard looked her over carefully, piece by piece. It felt to her as if, with each new piece of her that his eyes alit on, she was being further tacked to the wall behind her, so that, when he was done looking over all of her, she had been rendered entirely two-dimensional and fastened to the wall. "Have you seen the scrapbook?" he said.

"Um. Scrapbook?"

"I'll show it to you," he said. "You'll be interested."

He went into Eliza's room, came back and handed Patty a three-ring binder, and sat down again with his novel as if he'd forgotten she was there. The binder was the old-fashioned kind with a pale-blue cloth cover, on which the word PATTY was inked in block letters. It contained, as far as Patty could tell, every picture of her ever published in the sports pages of the *Minnesota Daily*; every postcard she'd ever sent Eliza; every photo strip the two of them had ever squeezed into a booth for; and every flash snapshot of them being stoned on the brownie weekend. The book