

ETHEL

Ethel was a dwarf. She lived in an apartment above a dress shop. Each morning she'd arrive home from her night job at the hospital, park her car in the handicapped spot in front of *Elaine Bouvier's*, and begin the process. The driver's door would open and there would be Ethel, perched at the edge of the driver's seat, legs thrust out into the air, keys in her mouth, handbag strapped around one shoulder, right hand reaching for the arm rest, the other clutching the edge of the seat as she began her slide. Once she hit the floor of the car, she'd turn and slip the rest of the way on her stomach until her feet touched the street. Then she'd shut the door and waddle around the front of the car to the curb.

When she walked, her chin was turned slightly upward in a haughty way, although the affect was not arrogance but sternness and the keeping of some kind of secret that was not revealed, but suggested, by the way she carried herself. Once she got to the curb, she'd swing the shoulder with the handbag forward to create momentum to lift her leg high enough. In one motion, the bag would swing up and forward revealing the force exerted, then back, initiating the lift of the other leg. When both feet were on the sidewalk, she regained composure so quickly as she continued down the path to her apartment, an observer did not have time to appreciate the accomplishment.

Ethel knew she was being watched. From the moment she began to watch herself, she watched others watching her too. The assumption she was a curiosity was so embedded, the world of others had merged with her own view of herself. And then, at some point, it all went blank. It didn't matter. This way, that way, this tall, that, you, me. She moved. Her true opponent was invisible, had always been. So when she reached the steps, she sort of laughed to herself. To get to her apartment she had to walk up two flights of stairs situated on the outside of the building. The first consisted of thirteen steps, the second, seven. Finding an apartment was not easy, too many considerations to mention had to be taken into account. So when she found this one, she chuckled. Instead of a bathroom without storage space low enough to reach extra toilet paper easily, she could entertain her audience by waddling up twenty steps. That way they could think back to the curb and marvel at the persistence of the little person who, upon reaching the top of the second flight, stood on tip toes to flip the top of the mailbox open and reach in.

The mail was delivered shortly before Ethel left for work, but postal regulations prevented the mailperson from being required to make the ascent to her mailbox. So Ethel's mail was dropped off at *Elaine Bouvier's*. The cashier from Elaine's was kind enough to bring the mail up, but usually she was not able to do it until the end of the day after Ethel went to work.