

## *While He Sleeps*

SARAH (43)

(with gentle detachment)

For more than an hour, I sit up in bed and watch him snore beside me. The old grandfather clock downstairs tells me it's three o'clock, but I ignore its somber, reverberating tones. I'm concentrating. Concentrating on his look. His sounds. His motions.

Even in the darkness, the shadows seem to swarm around his thin, unshaven face. I watch his jaw fall open, as he turns with a bounce of the mattress and buries his face in the soft feather pillow. He lets out a fitful gasp, a soft moan, then silence. I watch a trace of moisture form at the corner of his mouth, escape, and merge with the fabric of the pillowcase. I watch his nostrils flare, as his soft snoring again fills the darkened corners of the room.

I watch.

(not unkindly)

I study his tumble of black hair, as it spills across the pillow. The darting flutter behind the flesh curtain of his eyelids, his subconscious mind chasing dream images I don't dare imagine. I follow the sharp curve of his throat, the pronounced cartilage that sways with every breath. The hollow cheek filled by sullen whiskers. The thick eyebrows. The thin slope of his nose, that in an earlier century might have been called aristocratic. His lips, purple-black in the early morning gloom.

I smell the stale whisky on his breath, a sweet odor turning more foul as the night drags on.

(slowly turning more bitter)

He sleeps, oblivious to my stare.

My face suddenly stings with a bruise that hasn't hurt for hours. My arms fold protectively over my damaged ribs which still ache with every breath. My tongue traces the swelling of my lower lip, and I taste dried blood and bitterness.

He sleeps, and I watch him.

In the early morning gloom, everything about him repulses me. I hate the way he makes those soft clicking noises when he snores. I hate the sinister curl of his lips, even in slumber. And I despise myself for sharing his bed.

This is the only time I come alive...at night.