

irretrievably broken down. I have to say it, to confront him. "Who is this other woman?" The raw energy in the accusation spurs me on, lifting me onto my feet to stand and stare him in the face, but he sits staring rigidly ahead. I hear him swallow, and the amber liquid flushing down his throat, before he speaks. "Oh God," he sighs leaning forward, cradling his head in his hands. "Why can't you go away and leave me alone?"

"I feel like I'm being pushed out of my home," I yell, approaching the chair. "There's someone else here, in this house, taking over my things, moving my possessions."

He sits there, in the dusk, made strangely bright by the snow, like a midsummer night lit by the moon, his cheek leaning against the wing of the chair offering him a rigid wedge of tapestried upholstery, which along with the redundant hearth offers a small comfort to his misery.

"Why don't you answer me?" I shriek, drawing nearer to him. That makes him look up; his eyes dart about the room, like two dark angry swallows sensing the onset of a storm.

"I'm going," he announces to the room, for he still doesn't seem to see me. He stands and makes his way across the lounge, stumbling as he makes his way outside, the front door flung open behind him. An aroma of alcohol streams from his breath, left suspended in the air.

"Darling, don't leave me, don't go!" My plea drowns to a whisper, murmuring painful and slow.

I fly out the open door after him, the horror of this abandonment driving me outside in an attempt to bring him home. My voice rasps raw and thin in the cold air, calling his name, as I turn around every so often to chance a glimpse of him, but he is gone. I know where to find him, the place he always goes where the stream meets the river and runs close to the road.

By the time I have driven away from the house, a thick veil of snow has already settled on the windscreen of the car. The wipers scrape the flakes the side, a pair of opened curtains in a puppet show, which keep reopening and closing for the final curtain call. I find him, hands in pockets, bent over like a beggar in the cold. He walks along the edge of the road. It is as though he leads me here again, to the place where the stream meets the dark angry river and the ice glazes over the road. I hear those arpeggio scale climbing and falling inside my head, a nagging reminder of something I should remember, something I should not forget and now I remember what was he said: "Now is not a good time, I will arrange something..."

The brake pedal feels spongy, slumping all the way to the floor. The car has a mind of its own, pulling to one side when I try to slow down. It glances off the trunk of the great fir tree with a thud and seems to skid forever as it slides across the road, before tumbling down towards the river below. Inching down toward the water, with each inward and outward breath promising I have never the longing to drink to forgetfulness. I drift with a lightness I have never known, wondering in which direction I should go. I seem to float from a distant dream, my voice murmuring insipid and slow from a poem remembered from long ago. Where that river will eventually emerge is a mystery to me. Somewhere it too will fade into oblivion when it is absorbed into the greater flow of the ocean. ●

ELLEN QUEEN

THE JURY BOX (Continued from page 111)

*** Jonathan Holt, *The Abduction*, Harper, \$26.99. The underage daughter of a U.S. Army colonel attends a party at an underground Venetian sex club and is abducted and held by a mysterious group of masked captors. When videos of her treatment begin appearing online, Venetian police captain Kat Tapp teams up with U.S. intelligence analyst Holly Boland and the genius webmaster whose virtual world has been exploited by the sadists. The second volume in the Carnivia trilogy. *The Abduction* is a frightening and intriguing roller-coaster ride through conspiracies and secret worlds. Also just out in paperback is book one of the trilogy, *The Abomination* (Harper, \$14.99), which introduces readers to the virtual 3-D world of an alternative Venice.

*** Paul Halter, *The Invisible Circle*, Locked Room International, \$19.99. Originally published in French as *Le Cercle Invisible* (1996) and rendered into English by John Pugmire, *The Invisible Circle* is a standalone locked-room thriller set in 1936 England. Seven guests are invited to a castle in Cornwall to reenact the story of King Arthur—complete with round table, a sword in a stone, and the Holy Grail. After the host announces that he will be murdered by one of the guests, he locks himself in a room and seals all the openings with wax. One hour later he is found with the sword through his heart. In the spirit of John Dickson Carr and Agatha Christie, Halter layers his story with impossible deaths, mistaken identities, and devilish plots.

*** Karin Fossum, *I Can See in the Dark*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$25.00. Set in Norway, and translated from the Norwegian by James Anderson, *I Can See in the Dark* is the nar-

rative of a nursing-home order with a narrow grip on reality. Lonely, tortured, at turns tender and deranged, Riktor is guilty of many crimes. But he pleads his absolute innocence when he's arrested for the murder of an elderly blind woman who was in his care. Fossum's readers inside an unstable part Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov part Kafka's Gregor Samsa. Story is haunting, twisted, and redemptive.

**** Parker Bilal, *The Runner*, Bloomsbury, \$27.00. Chandler's Los Angeles and Lee Burke's New Iberia, Louisiana, the Egyptian landscape part Parker Bilal is lavish, beautiful, corrupt. The ghosts of his are conjured up when private investigator Makana, a refugee from encounters the badly burned a seventeen-year-old girl, an ent victim of an honor killing. Chandler and Burke, Bilal a style that is thoughtfully, callously poetic, all the while unforgettable setting of the oasis village of S paints a world in which streets meet a thousand nights.

*** Henry Chang, *Death Crime*, \$25.00. Chang's for NYPD Detective Jack parts police procedural town noir. When the body man is found floating in river, Yu is assigned the one to follow the rules, tense, pressure, and the unpredictable hard-drink to follow a trail of undoes and falsely documented gang rivalry, strip clubs, tunetellers. Chang writes tight style and shares a look at Chinese-American cul-

THE JURY BOX: Steve Steinbock