

THE MOONSHOT TAPE by Lanford Wilson

DIANE, at thirty-two, is a hard-drinking, serious-smoking writer who has already achieved fame.

She has come back to her home town to move her mother into a nursing home. She reads from a list of typed questions from her high school newspaper for which she has agreed to do an interview.

SCENE: A room at the Ozark Cabins Motel in Mountain Grove, Mississippi.

TIME: A recent spring. Late on a drizzling afternoon.

DIANE: *(She looks at the list.)* "Where do you get your ideas for stories?" *(She sighs, then thinks seriously.)* Well, why not? To begin with most of my critics would have you believe I've never *had* an idea for a story. And, you know, for all I know or care they're right. "Where do I get"...I'm gonna try to answer this truthfully. I've lied to dozens of interviewers about it. A lot of the time they're flat-out portraits of people I know; things in their lives they've been foolish enough to tell me or I've witnessed or surmised. Then I swear it isn't them, how could they think I'd do that? Or, you know, sometimes it's just raw speculation. You see someone; you start making up a story about them. There's a little old woman, probably lives with fifty cats. That guy is a wife beater. Someone on the subway, it's a game, you know, I've always done it. Like the song: *(Singing conversationally.)* "Laughing on the bus, playing games with the strangers. You said the man in the gabardine suit was a spy. I said, 'Be careful, his bow tie is really a camera..." It makes them less of a stranger. Or at least it's easier than the trouble it would take to meet them. It's a good exercise to get the imagination going. And sometimes it ends with a story. Or, you know, sometimes—well, it's *always*, unfortunately, just yourself you're writing about, but sometimes they're *blatantly* autobiographical. My side of the story, that's always fun. Never underestimate the power and excitement of revenge. *(Without a beat she breaks Off)* What in the hell is Edith taking so much—probably dishing me to filth. In that superior Christian tone. She's what? Holy

Roller, whatever it is, there's a name for it. No lipstick, no movies. Probably married him just so she'd have a legitimate excuse not to read my work. Fiction, good God forbid, the devil's door; and salacious fiction at that. They don't know the half of it. I could curl her toes good but what's the point? Mom married Edith's dad when Edith was about two, I was eleven. Tom, Edith's dad, was a case. Well, actually he was only about three six-packs. And half a fifth of J.W. Dant. The smell still turns my gut. It didn't keep me from drinking, but it kept me from drinking J.W. Dant. "Where do I get my ideas?" Sometimes I start writing something, it turns into a piece that's been kicking me around forever; and I think, oh, good, I'm finally doing that. Then I'll go months with nothing. One thing I haven't done, at least in years, is sit in front of a blank sheet of paper—or now a blank PC screen—and force myself to write. "Now is the time for all good women to come to the aid of their party." If they had one. I always wait till I'm—well, I started to say inspired, that's a little sweeping—at least until I have someone or some incident or some place or some event in mind. Like if you weren't here now I might be writing a story about a woman coming home to help her mother move into a Nursing Home. Or just coming back for a visit and seeing the town or someone from school, or any of the things coming back home does to you. Being invaded by those memories, those times, those voices, the pictures. The moonshot, watching it on TV, imagining that silence, that airlessness, weightlessness, kicking up that dust that hadn't been kicked up before and doesn't settle immediately because of the weak gravity. That barren place. Or graduation; *that* barren place. Or being interviewed by a terminally shy young high school reporter and filling her tape with maundering stories of the first moonshot.—And the various lies you tell of your history to protect the guilty. But probably coming back to this particular town I'd just be getting drunk so don't feel you're usurping my time; no other interviewer has. I'd more likely be watching TV. We get channels two, seven and almost ten. So. (*She looks at the paper again, tired of this, exasperated, almost pissed.*) "How much of an influence has Mountain Grove been on your writing comma your life?" Buckets. Whole bucketsful. (*Pause.*) I'm sorry. You've caught me at low ebb, or a bad time. I have all these feelings, guilt-trips, ghosts, bombarding me here. How much of an influence has Mountain Grove been? Never underestimate that either, and in

little ways. The first boyfriend I had at B.U.—for all **our free love &** in high school, I'd managed to remain a virgin, squirming **out from** under basketball players in the back seats of Camaros. Anyway, I had this boyfriend for about a month. We went on a picnic, walking through the woods. The poor guy had never been in the country before in his life. I'm stomping through the underbrush, I look back and this bastard is getting slapped in the face with every sapling in the forest. He had no idea how to walk in the woods. So I lost some respect for him in that hidden place where we judge men, and didn't see him much after that. I'd say over by the oak tree and he'd say, which one is that. No. I couldn't seriously consider someone who can't tell a birch from a beech. I was thankful that he took my virginity with him, but that was about it.