

The Lady Who Remembers the Sick Girl
Y York

"I don't think about this. What's to think about? I don't think about it. Except every day at six o'clock I have to think about it. Takes about a nano second to replay all the scenes and dialogue, somewhat longer to tell, the mind being faster than the tongue. I was fifteen years old; I'd known Becky, Becky what a name. Well, not even really known her. But she'd been there in our same school, since junior high. I didn't know her; nobody knew her. She was hardly ever there. She missed more school every year than I did in twelve years of going. Sickly. Puny. Skinny, got on my nerves. That's how she existed for us, we'd talk about how much we couldn't stand her. One year, sophomore year, she almost dies. The home room teacher makes us send get-well cards to the hospital. Nobody knew what to say. Thirty cards, not one of them said anything besides get well Becky. I didn't even know her last name; I know it now, we all know it now. When she gets back from the hospital she's even more pitiful than before. She walks into the girls' room, we're not even there anymore, we'd just been there, having a smoke. She chokes, she coughs, she gags, she runs out of the building gasping for air. Is somebody supposed to believe that? She uses the teachers' toilet, and all the girls get detention, but that's no problem; something new to think about besides boys. We think about how to get Becky. The showers is how you usually get them. she doesn't take gym. We do reconnaissance. Somebody rides her to school in a car, picks her up, except sometimes she walks, sometimes she walks home on the reservoirs path. Takes us a while to figure this out. I mean you can't ask somebody you're trying to get their schedule. We watch some more. She makes a phone call at lunch. She makes a phone call at lunch every day. Well, guess we just better overhear this telephone call. I stand there, like I'm waiting to use the phone next, while she calls her "mommy." She tells Mommy that she feels pretty bad and Mommy better pick her up after school. Bye, bye. Well, that's simple enough. One day she tells Mommy to skip the ride. Becky heads for her path; there's seven of us. Paula and Janet run through the woods to meet her head on. We surround her; she's pretty feisty. She knows all our names first and last, and she isn't afraid. She ought to be afraid; we are the magnificent seven, and we hate her. On a signal we all get out our cigarettes. A circle of cigarette smoking bad girls. Well then she looks worried. She coughs. She chokes. It's real, that's for sure. You couldn't fake that. When is she going to cry? Or beg? She chokes and looks at us, one at a time, turning in a circle to see who everybody is. What? Memorizing us before she dies? The others back off. Stomp out their cigarettes. Give her some breathing space. It's just her and me. She looks like she feels sorry for me. I want to smash her, shake her, I want to kill her. Somebody calls me away. I expect to get expelled. Nothing happens. Becky moves or transfers, anyway, she stops coming to school. And nobody hears anything about her, until she turns up on channel 7, telling us how it is every night at six. I try to

rustle up that hate I had. I can't. I was ready to kill her and I don't even remember what that felt like. I wonder if she ever remembers me."