

FACES

I remember their faces: those women I was locked in with for ten days. The walls were blank, the room was huge, the whole place was their faces, broken, looking back at me.

There was Bridgette, young and terrified, who would roll on the floor and moan from time to time. Once I fed her pureed slop in plastic dishes.

There was Ann, scratching and digging at herself and sometimes hooting. There was Clara, screaming and bellowing like a witch doing a spell.

There was old Mamie who I once found sprawled in a corner, mucus draining over her lips, her body collapsed as an old rag doll's. I learned that she had been there some thirty years. As I wiped her face I talked to her as one would a desperate child. What made old Mamie so lost, so cut off from the rest of us?

While I was locked up for ten days in the state hospi-

tal, these women became my constant companions. When visitors came they begged without shame like wretched children. Once my mother brought brownies and they were devoured as if by a horde.

Nighttime was a blessed relief. It still is for me. My life is some sort of demented struggle. At night, the time lessens and I feel some sort of relief. There, at the hospital, it was one less day of imprisonment. Darkness was like a veil dropping. We retired about six-thirty. I usually stayed up until seven-thirty, watching television.

It is some years after that time. I remember it, however, vividly. How time dragged slowly, how treatment was just medicine and a baseball game and a new hairdo. How everything was scarred in my mind. How I didn't mind being locked up very much. How lost I had been. How these desperate women brought me back to myself.