

4TH PLACE
FIFTY-FIFTY FICTION AWARDS*

NANCY LUDMERER

EAVESDROPPING

AFTER THE YELLOW ROSES AND THE CHABLIS Premier Cru and the buttery Chilean sea bass (let's forget it's nearly extinct for one night, darling), after the kisses shivering the back of my neck and hands parting my silk robe, after the Thelonius Monk and the robe falling and the taut sheets, and after my hot mouth singeing the soft, bristly, chocolatey hairs of his belly, there is the baby monitor.

"I'll go," I say, pushing myself up with force. The wailing means she's wet. We have learned her different cries, learned them all.

"No, you stay here. I'll go."

I am lying face down uncovered. My ass, when I turn to look at it, is white and round and to him, I know, perfect and complete, a world unto itself, even if I think it's too big.

"Whatsa matter, baby?" I hear him over the baby monitor. "Whatsa matter? Daddy's here." There is the noise of velcro ripping and diaper gel oozing. "Oh, what a pretty tushy, what a wet pretty tushy." He begins to sing: "Daddy's gonna dry it, yes I am, Lizzie's gotta diet, chub-wub-ham!"

The wailing stops. "That's a good Lizzie," he croons. When he comes back, I'm on my side with the sheet and quilt over me.

He puts his arms around me from behind. Before Lizzie, there were no yellow roses, no Chablis Premier Cru, no nightgowns, no Monk. Before, there was just us.

"You're a prince," I whisper. He massages my shoulders and I feel him rising against my ass, and it's different now, with my back turned, and after his hand drops below my waist, and after he strives against me and after my resistance flags and after our breathing sounds like nothing we've breathed before, there's the baby monitor.

"Shit."

"No," he says. "Not shit; it's the wrong cry." He's right, this is the hungry, stick-your-tit-in-my-face, cry.

"Me," I say. He tries to hold me back, but I slide naked out of bed and run angrily into her room. "All right, all right," I say and take her and sit in the rocker. The wicker is rough against my naked back but she is warm against my breast and when she sucks hard, it feels better than good.

"Oh," I cry. "Oh. Oh."

Right into the baby monitor.