

Guardians
Grahame Watt

The rosary hadn't even stopped swaying from the rearview mirror before Peter had freed himself from his booster seat and the backseat, raced whooping to the railing at Battery Spencer, and felt the cold rain on his face as he watched the clouds sail in from the sea. It was his reward for suffering through another weekend of conferences, sitting alone in the lobby with a book while his parents joined others in discussing ways to protect their children from the world. From his perch he could see and hear the traffic lined across the Golden Gate, inching past a dark-haired woman in a white bathrobe, reduced to the size of his thumb by the perspective. Peter watched curiously as she took it off, handed it to her bodyguard, and stood naked and shivering for all to see.

Then the world went black. His mother had her hands over his eyes, her fingernails digging into his nose and cheeks. Tears formed on his face as he was shoved into the backseat of the car, blurring his vision as they sped out of the parking lot. His mother's indignant outrage changed to shrill protests as they turned south towards the bridge, making for San Jose and home.

"We're not driving all the way through Oakland," said Peter's father.

"We're not going past that evil whore."

"I don't want to hear it."

They told Peter to cover his eyes, but he cracked his fingers and watched the woman as their car crawled past. His mother muttered under her breath and glared, while his father held his neck straight and let his eyes wander. Even across two lanes, Peter could see the pimples on her arms, the peach fuzz rising up to catch the evening mist, the red flush on her chest and face, the purple tinge around her lips. Some parts of her body he had seen only in paintings in the art

books at school that he read during recess, never in real life. She didn't look evil, or even mean.

She just looked cold. His mother caught his father looking and started yelling again. Peter pulled

his jacket tight around himself and shivered, while the rain crackled all around the car.