

(*Li'l Bit stumbles. PECK swoops her up in his arms.*)

PECK: Okay. I think we're going to take a more direct route. (*Li'l Bit closes her eyes.*) Dizzy? (*She nods her head.*) Don't look at the ground. Almost there—do you feel sick to your stomach? (*Li'l Bit nods. They reach the "car."*) PECK gently, deposits her on the front seat.) Just settle here a little while until things stop spinning. (*Li'l Bit opens her eyes.*)

LI'L BIT: What are we doing?

PECK: We're just going to sit here until your tummy settles down.

LI'L BIT: It's such nice upholstry—

PECK: Think you can go for a ride, now?

LI'L BIT: Where are you taking me?

PECK: Home.

LI'L BIT: You're not taking me—upstairs? There's no room at the inn? (*Li'l Bit giggles.*)

PECK: Do you want to go upstairs? (*Li'l Bit doesn't answer.*) Or home?

LI'L BIT:—This isn't right, Uncle Peck.

PECK: What isn't right?

LI'L BIT: What we're doing. It's wrong. It's very wrong.

PECK: What are we doing? (*Li'l Bit does not answer.*) We're just going out to dinner.

LI'L BIT: You know. It's not nice to Aunt Mary.

PECK: You let me be the judge of what's nice and not nice to my wife.

(*Beat.*)

LI'L BIT: Now you're mad.

PECK: I'm not mad. It's just that I thought you . . . understood me, Li'l Bit. I think you're the only one who does.

LI'L BIT: Someone will get hurt.

PECK: Have I forced you to do anything?

How I Learned to Drive

BY PAULA VOGEL

Li'l Bit—so called because she was a very small infant—is seven-teen, pretty, smart, and having a romance of sorts with her Uncle Peck, who has been teaching her to drive. Li'l Bit lives in "suburban Maryland," is in her last year of high school, and plans to go to college to study Shakespeare and lots of other interesting things. Peck, her uncle by marriage, is an attractive, interesting, and sensitive man in his forties. So far their sexual encounters have been more playful than passionate, but she has let him fondle and kiss her breasts, and he has let her know that he would like to go further—but only when she feels ready.

To celebrate Li'l Bit's passing the test for her driver's license on the first try, Peck has taken her to a fancy restaurant in a historically famous inn. Li'l Bit has had a lot to drink, but Peck, who has vowed not to drink around her, hasn't. They are now in the parking lot headed back toward the car. Li'l Bit is quite tipsy.

(*PECK is slowly propping up Li'l Bit as they work their way to his car in the parking lot of the inn.*)

PECK: How are you doing, missy?

LI'L BIT: It's so far to the car, Uncle Peck. Like the lanterns in the trees the British fired on . . .

(There is a long pause as Li'L BIT tries to get sober enough to think this through.)

LI'L BIT: . . . I guess not.

PECK: We are just enjoying each other's company. I've told you, nothing is going to happen between us until you want it to. Do you know that?

LI'L BIT: Yes.

PECK: Nothing is going to happen until you want it to. (A second more, with PECK staring ahead at the river while seated at the wheel of his car. Then, softly:) Do you want something to happen?

(PECK reaches over and strokes her face, very gently. Li'L BIT softens, reaches for him, and buries her head in his neck. Then she kisses him. Then she moves away, dizzy again.)

LI'L BIT: . . . I don't know.

(PECK smiles; this has been good news for him—it hasn't been a "no.")

PECK: Then I'll wait. I'm a very patient man. I've been waiting for a long time. I don't mind waiting.

LI'L BIT: Someone is going to get hurt.

PECK: No one is going to get hurt. (Li'L BIT closes her eyes.) Are you feeling sick?

LI'L BIT: Sleepy.

(Carefully, PECK props Li'L BIT up on the seat.)

PECK: Stay here a second.

LI'L BIT: Where're you going?

PECK: I'm getting something from the backseat.

LI'L BIT: (scared, too loud) What? What are you going to do?

(PECK reappears in the front seat with a lap rug.)

PECK: Shhhh. (PECK covers Li'L BIT. She calms down.) There. Think you can sleep?

(Li'L BIT nods. She slides over to rest on his shoulder. With a look of happiness, PECK turns the ignition key.)