Sylvia Beach Hotel

It was the woman's fourth trip to the Sylvia Beach Hotel and she was getting better at lying every year. The old hotel actually overlooked Nye Beach and neither of its owners was named Sylvia.

The first visit was the hardest. Hard to have no one to share a mountain view or last glance of sun behind ocean.

She entered through a garden, not overly tended but soft, languid, leggy. Cats underfoot atoned by purring. Inside it was cozy and diffuse in contrast to wind-driven sand and blinding sun. The huge wooden front desk a sentinel, the woman behind it welcome, welcome.

"The Emily Dickinson room, how appropriate," she said quietly to herself. Up the stairs into the room, spilling the suitcase on the bed, no one to mind the mess. A tiny writing desk in front of the window looked onto beach stretched north until it ended in a shroud of fog. She could begin to heal here.

She hid herself for hours sketching the desk, the ivy, the beach beyond her window. Sometimes she read in the sunroom while the other guests dined. They came chatting to play cards, work the jigsaw puzzle, sip spiced wine. She slipped out to a restaurant in the town. It was not as lonely alone. The days stretched on like this.

The next time was better. She spoke to the women behind the desk, nodded friendly-shy smiles at the guests, stroked the cats. The beach was unchanged and she walked it, up and down, at all hours. She ventured to add a few pieces to the puzzle then curled up in a worn, overstuffed chair in the sunroom, a book buffering her from conversation. She tried the dining room for breakfast once and a dinner, but passed on playing the game.

Return to the hotel, third visit and old friends now. She roamed the shelves of books in rooms with faded oriental rugs, chatted with guests wrapped in shawls at tea, drew cats onto her lap. She sensed the rhythm of the sea and reluctantly played the dinner game: Two Truths and a Lie.

I am---. I was ----. I am---.