



## When the Women Come Out to Dance

By Elmore Leonard  
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### Introduction

So there's this former rock star whose house has burned down in a fire that ravaged a rich Californian subdivision. Her husband's already dead, and she hated all those Asian (you can't say oriental) antiques anyway. Problem is, there are some suspicious circumstances. What will insurance agent Joe Caravan do? Have her arrested or accept her offer to split the settlement? The outcome of "Sparks," the opening story in this collection, is a bit iffy. We are in Elmore Leonard territory, and everything is a bit iffy. These characters know how to mess up their lives but good. Sometimes they're smart about it; sometimes they're so dumb you have to wonder if their heads hit the linoleum when they were born. Either way, you laugh or cry, or sometimes just sit there wondering what gets into the human race.

These characters are so full of life that you're bound to see in them something of yourself. In "Hanging Out At the Buena Vista," two retirement village residents get down to basics with a blessed lack of time to spare. And in the disturbing title story, two women, one rich and one poor, share circumstances in a way that will make your skin crawl. Don't count on anything turning out as you think it should with these characters, and don't sell them short.

You know how you occasionally surprise yourself by coming through in a pinch? It's like that. Read these stories and savor these characters; they'll remind you that you're just like everyone else, trying to hang in there.

### Questions for Discussion

1. In the title story, does Lourdes seem sinister to you? When in the story do you begin to sense that she might not be what she seems?
2. Using the characters in "Fire in the Hole," discuss religion and the ways in which people tend to turn it to their own needs. With so many personal versions of religion loose, how would one know which ones were genuine?
3. What's your opinion of Karen Sisco ("Karen Makes Out")? Is she just unlucky, or is she a poor judge of men?
4. Discuss the issue of intelligence in "Hurrah for Capt. Early." What makes Bo Catlett so different from the young cowboys he encounters, other than race? Are the boys just born stupid?
5. Why does Ruben Vega help Sarah Isham in "The Tonto Woman"?
6. How does Leonard's economic way with language add to the atmosphere in these stories? How would you describe it?
7. On page 165, Ruben Vega says to Sarah Isham, "We spend all our lives learning customs. Then they change them." How does this insight play a part in the lives of all of Leonard's characters?
8. In "Tenkiller," is Ben a hero? What, if anything, complicates about this understanding of his character?