

fire. At that moment I became so hot that I couldn't bear it, so if my shirt were on fire, I wanted to tear off my shirt and toss it down, but then the sky shut closed, and a strong thump sounded, and I was thrown several yards—"

"God, I would have loved to be there, that really was the sublime—"

"They say that for many nights afterward the sky over Asia and Europe was still bright enough to read the paper by."

"Did you answer the letter?"

"I told him I couldn't think of any reason why antimatter wasn't a plausible explanation. Though who was I to answer that question? I wished him luck with his idea. I might even have signed the note 'Love.'"

I lent David three hundred dollars, which seemed confirmation of my having taken advantage of him in some fashion.

Did I then take that movie meeting, all unprepared, after dressing in a way to accentuate my pregnancy, then to downplay it, then changing outfits again to accentuate it? Did I have no ideas? Did I start talking about the Kantian sublime, and about meteors and about love? A transgenerational love story with an old shepherd in Siberia, and a latter-day woman who knits, and a transfigurative event, and the sense that life is an enormous mystery but with secret connections that, you know, knit us all together? I did. All those things I so studiously knew nothing about. Meteors enter the Earth's atmosphere every day. I was betraying so many, I felt so clean.

REAL ESTATE

At first I'd thought nobody else was living there. It had been decided that selling the admittedly pretty run-down five-story town house would be easier if the place could be shown and delivered essentially vacant. That way the prospective buyer could "dream." The building's "good bones" would be made plain. It was a prime location, and a historic one! Maybe a former newsboys' orphanage, I could never remember. A buyer could make, say, two small income-generating apartments per floor; that would mean ten modest, easy-to-rent units for this down economy. Or luxury floor-throughs could be made. Or maybe the top two floors could be converted into an owner's duplex, and the rest made into tidy rental units that would cover expenses. A carriage house could be put up in the garden. The possibilities were endless. It was the ideal choice for someone with imagination! Architects could be recommended.

The building belonged to a distant aunt of mine, a wealthy can-do woman who lived on another continent. And seeing as I lived on this continent, and was in a cash state that left me without a strong opinion on the tax code, I did not decline my aunt's offer of living in the otherwise empty building, making myself available to show the place when opportunities arose, and just generally being there to make sure it was OK. I moved on in. The switch of neighborhoods was somehow reason enough for me to stop seeing any friends. I didn't sign up for

cable, and so had neither Internet nor television. And the radio, I don't know, I've never liked it

At first it seemed a kind of happy decadence, to live like that. But I guess I got a bit out of sorts. I remember a mid-morning when I was regretting an outfit of a particular pair of jeans and a brash yellow sweater, and then, when I stepped out to get the mail, I realized I was in my undershirt and pajama shorts; I realized that I'd never put on the regrettable outfit in the first place. Another afternoon I found myself anxious about the upcoming election, but then, walking past a poster for a newly released action movie, I realized that no, it was March and not October, and the election had been decided months earlier. One Monday: I was under the impression that I had stocked the refrigerator with Armenian string cheese, too much of it, so much of it that I'd need to eat it at two meals a day for a full week in order to keep it from going to waste, and then I went to the refrigerator, I found no string cheese there at all, just a sack of apples that I thought I'd only contemplated buying but then hadn't. That was the day I met my neighbor, Eddy.

When he saw me there in the foyer, he startled. His hair was long and unwashed, and he was carrying *Being and Time*, which didn't immediately make me dislike him, maybe because I liked his hair and maybe because he carried it like it was a cat repair manual. Actually maybe I startled first, before him.

I introduced myself as the niece of the landlady. I felt very nineteenth century doing that.

"Yeah, she's so nice," he said. "She's letting me stay in my place awhile longer."

I figured he was lying, but I also don't kick puppies. He went up the stairs. I went out the front door. Well, good, I thought. I'd been kind of spooked living in that building all alone. After that foyer meeting, when I'd hear all those noises that old buildings inevitably make, I would think, Oh, that

must be Eddy, opening his door, flipping a light switch, pouring water over ramen noodles. Eddy looked through an old photo album, opened seltzer cans, caressed a fussy and small black cat I'd come to believe in. He creased pages in *Being and Time*, the only book, in my mind, that he had. It wasn't exactly love, but it was better than the emotions that had preceded it. I'd rather not go into those emotions.

A week or so later I experienced a repeat of the phantom string cheese episode. Except this time there was only one apple left in the fridge, and it didn't look so great. I put on the brash yellow sweater that I'd not yet had the chance to regret in real life and ventured out. The string cheese mistake reprise had given me a scare, and so I resolved to go farther than the corner grocery. I needed to get out more, I decided. About seven blocks away, I found a little family-run-looking gyro place. I went on in, making the bells that hung on the handle jingle as I did. The sound was as if somewhere an old-fashioned filmstrip needed to be advanced.

At the back of the shop a man was pressing a waxed paper cup against the lever for a fountain Coke. I really love fountain Coke. My whole family does. Maybe that's why I found myself walking straight over there, to right next to that man, to get myself a Coke—I could pay later, it seemed like that kind of place—and then that man—something about the tilt of his neck produced a tingle of recognition—mumbled "goddammit" as foam ran over the edge of his soda cup. Memories ambushed me: endless rounds of gin rummy, my dad drenched in sweat after a run wearing one of his burton-up work shirts, a track made up of old tires submerged in a field, piles of pistachio shells. Sometimes I called up these little father memories on purpose, but they weren't in the habit of arriving unbeckoned. That neck, that "goddammit"—they

were familiar. But it couldn't be my father; he'd been dead for more than a dozen years, a baker's dozen, technically. But even if he'd been dead for just a day, it still would have been dead enough for it not to be him, there, cursing a soda machine.

I walked away from the soda machine, no soda in hand. I went casually about my business. I paid for my canned drink from the cooler, ordered a gyro, paid for that, too, waited, and then, with a filled red plastic basket in hand, I looked around for a seat.

He did look just like my dad. The way my dad looked thirteen years ago anyway. Not a day older. It was even kind of a good hair day for that man, and my dad always looked a bit younger when his hair was on the greasy side, and so a little darker, and that was how this man was looking, with his now mostly emptied wax cup of fountain Coke. He was seated at a corner table. He half smiled at me. Maybe I was staring.

He didn't say my name, or call me little cough drop, or numkin, or ask me how I was doing, or say it's been a long time, hasn't it? He just said to me, lightly, "You should sit here."

Spilled yogurt sauce on our table glistened as if refracting the grandeurs of the sunken city of Atlantis; stray salt crystals reflected fluorescence back at madcap angles. Or at least that was my mood. My father pawed some napkins, wiped his forehead with them; onions always made him sweat.

I asked him if he lived nearby.

"Sort of," he said. Then: "Not really." Then: "Not originally." He finished his meal quickly.

As he exited, those bells on the doorknob rang.

Had I slipped through a wormhole of time? An advertisement poster on the wall showed a blond woman with eighties bangs leaning in to take a bite of gyro while a caption offered pronunciation guidance. But it was hard to take

"yee-ros" as evidence; all the gyro places I've ever visited have been outdated.

That night Eddy paced his apartment. A creaking that increased in pitch, then decreased. Increased, then decreased, like the breathing of an enormous man. He was wondering, I decided, whether he should come pay me a visit.

The next day I returned to the gyros place. When I walked in, that chain of bells jingled so beautifully. Much more beautifully than the day before. I thought of the underwater warbling of sirens. "It's nice to see you again," my dad called out across the narrow restaurant.

I ordered a beer with my lunch, which I never do. I got a Coke, too. My dad's hair didn't look quite as good as it had the day before. But when I asked for the yogurt sauce bottle and he passed it to me, I found myself thinking of the vast distances between nuclei and electrons, the tremendous nothingness of matter, the dizzying transformation of energy, and how magnificent a feat this was, my father passing the yogurt bottle. He was amazing. An amazing man. We were all amazing.

We got to talking about gin rummy, and I guess I invited the man over to play for a bit. We played for hours. What was weird was that it was very normal. And the whole building seemed happy. There was laughter in the stairwell, cloppity footsteps, old music playing; the lyrics to "Georgy Girl" by The Seekers made their way to me. Eddy was having a party? It was like real estate staging taken to another level; someone visiting would have felt impulsively moved to buy, I think. Although on some level all that "life" kind of creeped me out. An old friend of mine, Betsy, once told me a story of having roomed in a haunted house. What she meant by haunted house was that she had heard that everyone who had stayed there had been haunted. There'd once been a suicide, there

was a thought that might be the ghost. Anyhow, Betsy was dreading the haunting. Which didn't arrive, didn't arrive, didn't arrive. Then one night it did. A doorknob rattling, pacing, a low moaning sound . . . the whole works.

But then that was it. Just that one visit, that one night. And Betsy thought, Ghost, why did you leave me? Have I done something right?

Next morning I noticed that the one clock in my place had stopped. It wasn't a fancy grandfather clock, or a charming old windup, or a pocket watch on an old brass chain. Just this little LED thing of mine, which has worked for years and years. Survived many a power surge, many a move. No more. I felt a little discouraged. But having no idea what time it was gave me a valid excuse to seek out Eddy. I could ask Eddy about the time. Just about that.

On the other side of Eddy's door I heard footsteps. I knocked. The footsteps abruptly stopped. "Eddy?" There was no answer. Was he worried I would complain about the noise from the party? "Eddy? It's just that my clock stopped working." Maybe he thought I was going to try to kiss him. Maybe that was his version of a nightmare. I knocked one more time. More nothing.

People have moods; that's certainly something I know firsthand. I try not to judge. I went back down the stairs. For a bit the quiet was, well, deafening, but after a while—obviously I don't know after how long—the pacing upstairs resumed. Other odd noises, too. Squeaks. A couple of chirrups. Something that sounded like newspapers being folded.

Eventually—the sun was still high—I walked out to the gyro place. Those bells jangled in a mediocre way when I entered. That soda fountain was there, also the smell of fresh-cut onions. I didn't recognize any of the patrons. I still haven't seen my father again. Nor have I seen Eddy. It's only been twenty-two weeks or so, though. And the other morning I

thought there was string cheese in the refrigerator, and then there it was, actually there. Maybe it's wrong of me, but I do hope that nobody buys this building for a long time. I have the sense that ghosts like to return to the same places. I, anyhow, like to do that. And there is something about the bones of this place; it really is easier to dream here.