

The Sad and Lonely Death of Katydid Desrosiers

By Michael Fine

Copyright © 2023 Michael Fine

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, locales, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

It wasn't much of a car to begin with. It was a 1994 Saturn with 257,000 miles on it. It had bald tires and one of the doors was white, not dull green like the rest of the car. The car's inspection sticker was three years lapsed, so Katy drove it only at night. She didn't drive it very far.

She had her places. There was a section off Mineral Spring Avenue in Pawtucket, down a road you couldn't see from Mineral Spring, near a junk yard that was way back in the middle of no place, a place nobody drove by at night. Then there was a place in the industrial park in Cranston, near the ACI. Katy knew to avoid Atwells Avenue near the port in Providence, which

looked deserted at night but where all sorts of people gathered in groups of two and three to transact business, their business, of one sort or another.

But out Silver Lake Avenue in Providence, near that big city park with the Native American name nobody can pronounce, were a few good dark streets. Sometimes she used the parking lot of the Walmart in Cranston, back behind the building where the trucks came to unload, which was okay if you went into a far corner and inched out of the light, so it looked like your car was one of the associate's cars. But there was too much light there anyway, which made it hard to sleep. The trucks came and went all night. They made lots of noise, bumping and clanging, which made it harder to sleep yet.

You could also try one of the back streets just off Lonsdale Avenue, the streets that dead end at Lincoln Woods and sit where Pawtucket, North Providence and Lincoln all come together, where the cops don't come much because nobody can figure out which town is which. But you have to park near houses over there. Eventually some cop raps on your window with a flashlight and tells you to move on. Not many bushes over there. Not much privacy. It's best if you move every day or every other day. That way nobody notices.

Katy thought of driving to Florida in the winter. Florida or Georgia, or even Mississippi, somewhere on the Gulf Coast. She had a sister who used to go to Panama City for two weeks every winter. But she didn't know if the car would make it that far, and she didn't know how she'd pay for gas.

No medicine now. There wasn't money for medicine. No restaurants either. Katy drove from place to place at dawn or dusk and parked the car.

She walked all day long to try to stay warm. She had her libraries. They were warm in the winter. She knew the parks. If you walk in the parks nobody knows you are there. She thought. She left people alone. They left her alone. It was better now. The car had a radio she listened to at night so she'd know what was happening in the world.

Her job was to figure things out. All she had to do was think. There must be a purpose to all this human life, she thought. The reason we are all here. My job is to figure that out, and then I can come back and be with people again.

Vernon Jenkins first noticed the car the day after Thanksgiving, after the relatives had come and gone. He skipped breakfast, thinking to save an appetite for the leftovers, which filled the refrigerator in the kitchen and the overflow fridge in the garage after Jane she cleaned up from dinner, Vernon helped as much as Jane let him, which meant drying the dishes, washing the pots, and putting the fancy china away, back in boxes to go to the porch where it would sit for another month before it was used once more and then would be delivered back to the attic to sit gathering dust for another year.

It was an old green Saturn with a sagging suspension and one white door. The finish was dull. The car sat a little crooked on the street, like a cat with an inner ear problem that couldn't hold its head straight. The back seat was jammed with clothing. There were books and magazines stuffed between the windshield and the dash. Vernon noticed the car when he went out to walk the dog just as the eastern horizon was red with that rosy fingered dawn, a twinge of hope after a cold night, when there was enough light to see by but before the chill was out of the air, before the sun, low on the horizon because it was December, glinted into his vision and made Vern squint.

He didn't make much of the woman sitting in the driver's seat. He couldn't really see her face. She moved while he was watching. She reached up to scratch her face, her eyes closed, so he knew she was alive and he could relax and not think any more about her.

The car was gone by mid-morning. But it was back again a few days later, parked down the block. Different place, same car.

Curious, Vernon thought. Not really an issue though. Like a garbage can left on the street. You just note it, wish the person who owned it would roll it back inside, wonder if the people were away for a few days, and then don't think any more about it.

No ideas but in things. That was what Katy used to believe. Ideas didn't matter. People matter. Actions matter. All she could see, once upon a time, was how to get things done, back when she was a woman who let nothing stand in her way.

The world unfolds. She saw herself twelve, barely awake, in the middle school chorus room in Rutherford, New Jersey, the New York City skyline still visible through the windows as the sun was going down, boys playing basketball in the school yard, cars driving up and down Park Avenue in Rutherford to the traffic circle. She could also see those boys who would be in those cars in the summer five and six years later, circling, leering, looking too cool for words and she felt her heart beat hard when she saw them. And then a picture of a man in a red car with its top down in the summer, all these ideas and pictures coming together, mixing and then separating, as if her brain was constantly shuffling cards.

At twelve again, she saw herself sing when she was told to sing, quietly at first, because she didn't want anyone to hear her, or look at her: she was still a girl in a boy's thin and bony body, the daughter of a dentist and a school teacher now retired from that work, the third of five children, the quietest and least important of the five, happy to find a corner where she could hide and read a book, happiest if no one looked at her to see just how ordinary, just how plain she was, that she was just a little white girl, pale as paper and even more ordinary. She sang as she was commanded to sing, a soprano in the chorus, the same part everyone else was singing, quietly so as not to be heard, invisible as one of thirty or forty middle school students who all looked alike. She loved the feeling of that singing anyway. She loved to sing in secret, when no one could hear her. She felt her soul rise as she sang, however quietly.

That day, something was different. The other voices began to fall away. Then she was singing alone and people around her were listening. They were mouthing the words. They just let her sing. They were looking at *her*, wanting to hear *her* voice. Katy was ashamed, unclear why they were quiet though she was still singing. Even so her voice grew stronger.

The woman who came out of the studio in Cranston didn't even see the car. It was cold and just after dark. She wore a heavy cloth coat with a faux fur collar and pearls, with white shoes that had red soles, beautiful shoes that she hated to wear as she walked across the parking lot, shoes she would take off as soon as she got to her own car, a large white SUV with a round insignia on its rear door, a door that opened electronically as she approached, as the car itself unlocked automatically as soon as that key fob was a few feet away.

There wasn't time to do anything besides change out of those shoes. Then the woman was going to the gym. She'd shower at home, redo her makeup and change, and would put on another pair of shoes, less comfortable perhaps but more noticeable. Then there was an event at which there would be dinner, or at least, the hors d'oeuvres out of which a meal could be constructed, quickly, so she could devote her time at her table to listening to the people around her, so she could be seen and seen listening. She'd speak a little at a time, strategically, and no one would notice that she was barely eating herself.

She owned a Saturn once. Her first car. Not much to look at. Inherited from her step-father in St. Louis, who died in a room alone in Las Vegas after her mother threw him out. She drove it to Providence for her internship when she was just starting out. You couldn't kill that car. It ran and it ran and it ran. The suspension wore out early and you could feel every bump. She drove it all three times she worked in the district offices – first Greenville, then West Bay, then East Bay, forever hoping for a turn at the City Desk or the Washington Bureau, which never came before she jumped to television news, the paper crumbling under her feet after it was sold to that impossible conglomerate in Texas, the business model of newspapers have been decimated by Craigslist. By Craigslist, by God. The place where people looking for a one-night stand went, as the on-line world supplanted the real world, as it pushed aside all those years of wisdom that lived at the paper, all that smart street savvy, all those people and their stories and their focus on getting at the truth, truth oiled with Irish whiskey and lots of good stories. All that was history now. She never thought about it.

The Saturn was green like her car had been, the one she called ‘sweetheart’ and kept on running until she started to be on television, when she could afford a new car for the first time, until television itself was eviscerated. This one had one white door. Hard to believe that old car, her old sweetheart was still on the road. You never know. Rhode Island, one degree of separation. This one had bald tires and a sagging suspension, but that happens to cars over time, even quicker than it happens to humans, to women. Perhaps someone had come through a stop sign and smacked into the passenger side door, shoving it in, and perhaps they replaced it with a white door from a junkyard. Silly to think this was the same car. It was parked on the street, across from the office parking lot, after everyone else went home. Non-descript. Maybe there was someone sitting in it. The engine was off. Maybe a person in the front seat with the flashlight from her phone on, looking at what, a map? People don’t use maps anymore. A magazine? A book? When was the last time the woman herself had read a book. Emojis, maybe, as she ran from place to place. Twitter, absolutely. Instagram. And TikTok, the tools of the trade.

She drove past. And picked out her ensemble for the evening in her mind as she drove by.

They went together to Memphis, which seemed like the place to go if you were a singer, or that was what James said. Memphis, Nashville, or Detroit. Back before hip-hop. We’ll get you a gig singing backup and me playing sessions and we can build it from there, James said. Just wait until them people hear you sing.

You don’t know a person until you know a person. You don’t know yourself, don’t have any idea that you can be twisted and bent like a sapling or a trumpet vine, turned around and into something and someone you don’t know and never met, just because you feel something for

someone and want to please them, the way you hope and believe that they want to please you. Even when they don't.

The sad truth was that James wasn't who he appeared to be. Or there were parts to him that Katy didn't see and could never have imagined. He appeared to be confident and connected. He appeared to be completely into Katy, a man who found her in a little band and saw something in her that she didn't see in herself. She thought she was a plain white girl who could sing a little. James acted like he thought she walked on the moon. Or that was what he said. When I dream, I dream of you. He appeared to be a man who would twist himself into knots for her, who would sacrifice himself and his future, just to be with her, as if only she mattered.

Maybe some of it was true, at least at the beginning. But it didn't last. There wasn't any back-up work for a white girl singer in Memphis. Most people knew that. There were white girl backup singers for rock bands in LA, girls who could sing with a little blue-eyed soul, but Katy and James had moved to Memphis, not LA, and Katy had a voice that was too big for most backup. Too big for back-up but a voice that needed its own songs. But Katy was a singer, not a songwriter.

So they tried Nashville for a little while. It was only four hours away. They found out quick that white girl singers were a-dollar-a-dozen there, and they all had big voices, they all could sing, and they all had loser boyfriends like James who were using them to try to be what those men could never be themselves. That it wasn't who you were but who you knew. And what you would do for them today. Katy wasn't country. If anything she was jazz. A torch singer. They were nowhere near New York or Chicago or New Orleans. Katy didn't know jazz people anyway, and they didn't know her.

As Katy would learn later, what happened next was so common it was almost trite. Of course their money ran out. Of course James took to dealing. He had been dealing at home, small-time, only to friends, mostly musicians, so he knew the ropes. This time he had bigger dreams. Of course he went out to see a guy and Katy stayed in the cheap motel, trying to write country songs, but all she could see in her mind was the New York City skyline, the one she could see out the window of her school and of her house, and the way the buildings across the river glistened in the sunlight beneath red and purple clouds as the sun set behind her to the west. She could see the Christmas tree over the skating rink at Rockefeller Center, and the humps of

yellow cabs on Fifth Avenue, darting from here to there in the rain. Nothing about trucks, truck stops, pickup trucks, trains, or prison. Nothing about some other woman stealing your man, who was better off gone, truth be told.

Of course James traded around for what he had to sell. With whomever. For whatever. Of course, of course, of course. Katy twisted herself around, trying to make it right, trying to make it normal and natural and healthy and good. Until James tried to trade her.

And then something inside her let go and she snapped back like a rubber band. This isn't me, that something inside her said. This isn't real. James is a small-time drug dealer, not a bass player. And I'm not singing torch songs on a well-lit stage, standing in a glittering dress.

His grandfather had come with nothing and turned nothing into an empire. Junk. What other people threw away.

His grandfather could barely read or write when he came here. He wasn't aristocracy. His people weren't rabbis or scholars or even the managers of estates. They weren't even grain merchants or shopkeepers. His great-grandfather was a simple cowherd and woodcutter who died of tuberculosis when his grandfather was ten, leaving his grandfather in a hovel at the edge of a tiny village in Galicia, a hovel with a dirt floor and a straw roof that was always leaking, where they stuffed old cloths and newspapers into the cracks between the boards to keep the wind from blowing through the house in the winter. Poor children didn't wear shoes in the summer. In the winter they bound their feet in rags or wore wooden soled shoes when they could get them. They wore hand-me-down clothes that didn't fit. They existed on charity and a

garden. Jake's great-grandmother made soup from potatoes and onions, and sometimes they drank the milk from one cow that Jake's grandfather would lead each morning to the commons in the center of the village and lead back and put in the cowshed at night, a cowshed that was just a lean-to off their tiny hovel. All under one roof.

They were almost too poor to be Jews: Jake's grandfather didn't go to the school in the next larger town when he was three or seven like most Jews. He didn't go to live with an aunt or a grandparent because there were too many mouths to feed. He didn't go to school. He spent most of his childhood hungry and cold until he ran away when he was twelve. And then he was still hungry and cold but no longer trapped and abandoned. Where was he going? He didn't know. Who would he live with? He didn't know that either. All he knew was that he had to get out.

Jake's grandfather walked. And he begged. He slept in wheatfields and in barns. He traded work—digging postholes, cutting and loading hay, picking apples and cherries – for food, as he made his way west. Even he, ignoramus that he was, dirt poor and uneducated, without friends or family, had heard about this place, this America. He didn't know anything about streets paved with gold. All he knew was that it was different, and different and far had to be better than hungry and cold all the time. He made his way to Gdansk, what the German's called Danzig. And stowed away in a boat thinking he was going to America, a boat that put him off in Liverpool. In Liverpool he did what he always did. He hustled.

That was where Jake's grandfather learned a little about rags and bones and the rag trade. That was where he learned to survive on junk, to make something what other people throw away, like a cockroach in the cervices, a cockroach that survives, a species that existed millions of years before humanity and will outlast us. That was where he learned the golden rule, that he who has the gold makes the rules, where he got a little cash and used it to bribe his way onto another boat and stowaway again. First to Montreal, and then, one night in the summer, across the border, walking and sleeping in the fields. First to Albany. Then, because he could hitch a ride with a trucker, to Providence. In 1912. Jake's grandfather was fourteen when he came to Rhode Island. He spoke Yiddish, Ukrainian, a little Polish, a little Russian and a little German. He taught himself English and a little Italian, so soon he could speak to anyone and everyone in Providence and Pawtucket, Rhode Island, where he became the king of junk, of rags

and bones. Junk turned into scrap metal which turned into recycled materials, and into paper recycling, plastics recycling, auto recycling and that all turned into real estate, with a little division for software and hardware engineering because one of Jake's cousins was good at tech, and now there was an art gallery in Newport, for another cousin, because all of them, it seemed, had inherited Jake's grandfather's gift for making something out of nothing, for understanding that one person's trash is another person's treasure, for understanding as well that there is a sucker born every minute, and that time and tides wait for no man or woman either.

Jake had done pretty well for himself, building on what he got from his parents and grandparents. He was like his grandfather. He was not an intellectual. They sent him to Moses Brown and then he went to URI. And finished, more or less, with a degree in engineering.

Jake thought with his hands. He could see upside where many other people couldn't, and he knew how to cut his losses, how not to throw good money after bad when a deal turned sour, as some do. Just the cost of doing business. No harm done, nothing ventured, nothing gained but you just got to know when to cash out or shut something down. You don't let a partner take advantage of you. Never. They have to believe you will take their house if they mess with you. Take their house or mess up their kids or worse.

He kept his office in the yard in Pawtucket, in what some people called a junkyard, and he liked nothing better than to put on work clothes and heavy gloves on a cold day in the fall or winter, and spend an afternoon working with the guys, unloading the trucks full of scrap as they came in, breaking rusted machines apart or running the compactor. He liked to get his hands dirty. It made him feel real.

The house with the barn and fancy horse, that was his too, and he knew how to run even the horses for upside, but somehow, that house and barn was not quite so real. His grandfather would have looked over his glasses at Jake when he saw that, and muttered to himself in Yiddish or in Ukrainian, but then he would have tussled Jake's hair and smiled to himself, because what Jake's grandfather loved most was that that he himself had survived, and he loved that he had survived when he thought of all those high and mighty people, the teachers and the rabbis and the shopkeepers and the grain merchants and the little factory owners who didn't. Let the boy have a horse, his grandfather would have said. What's the problem? His grandfather never let

his doubts or fears slow him down, but he never forgot who he was or where he came from, and Jake didn't either.

The car had one white door. Parked on the road leading to their place. Nobody ever parked there at night. Maybe someone had left it there for the morning, hoping to push it in and get a few bucks for it on its way to the crusher. They weren't worth much, those Saturns. They ran and ran. But once they gave out, they had no resale value at all, other than for scrap.

You never know what you are made of until you find out by making a choice and acting on it. There wasn't one moment or one event that got Katy going. She just woke up one day in Nashville, saw James for who he was, saw herself for who she was, and knew this wasn't the choice she had made, this had all just happened by itself.

Then she walked out. Took a bus home.

You don't just "go" to New York from Nashville. You put your money down – it was \$40 then, which seemed like a lot – and then you sit in a hot smoky smelly bus that stops in half the little towns in Tennessee and Virginia, places nobody ever heard of, places surely God forgot, and you see and sit with all kinds of people, with all kinds of lives and all kinds of thoughts, urges, behaviors, desires, hopes and perhaps, even dreams. Tired people. Old people. Young people. Black and Mexican people. People who travel by bus move about the country as if the bus was the night, as if when you go by bus, nobody sees you.

It was different then. People had no expectation of being treated decent. People only hoped they could slip in and slip out of places and stay invisible, because invisible was safer than

the other choices, all things considered. Cookeville, Tennessee. Crossville, Tennessee. Knoxville, Bulls Gap, Greenville, and Bristol, Tennessee. Wytheville, Virginia. Roanoke, Lynchburg and Charlottesville, Virginia. Then you wait in Richmond for three hours for the bus to Washington, Baltimore, Wilmington, Philadelphia Newark and New York.

You see a different country in those places, different from the nation of yellow cabs, neon signs, fast food restaurants, and strip malls. You see a county of people for whom life isn't easy, people who live with the complexities of what they've got, layered over by urges and choices made mostly in darkness. You smell their sweat and the diesel exhaust that comes from buses and trucks, and you hear the rumble and belch of tractor trailers as they thunder up and down the interstates.

The library was about a mile away from where she spent the night, parked on that hidden and abandoned back street near the junkyard in Pawtucket. The sun was out again after three days of cold rain. The sun was low in the sky: it was winter. Very cold nights, when nothing moved, were coming.

One foot in front of the next.

The hill after Lorraine Mills was tough. It made her stop after every block, a little short of breath, and walk slowly, but that's how you go forward, one step at a time, one foot in front of the next. She listened to the music inside her as she walked, those old torch songs she loved: Summertime, This is a Fine Romance, and It Ain't Necessarily So. She heard Ella Fitzgerald and Louie Armstrong, singing with pride and confidence, as if they lived a life of elegance on Fifth Avenue instead of just performing for people who did. She walked past the gas station on the corner of Lonsdale Avenue, and the McDonald's across the street.

She'd built her own life. Made her own choices. Her own mistakes, perhaps, but there were no mistakes. Just opportunities to learn something new about the world.

Katy got home. She got herself into community college. She got herself a job as a nurse's aide in the fancy nursing home in Allendale. Then she got herself a car and an apartment in Hackensack. And got herself into nursing school – classes during the day, then eleven to seven at night. You can study, sometimes, when the old people are asleep. And sometimes you can sleep yourself, your head on a table or leaning back in a chair in the break room, even though you are not supposed to. You are not supposed to, but everyone does. The good thing about eleven to seven is that the old people do sleep, most of them, or at least stay in their beds until morning, except for a few who wander. But aides and nurses take turns listening out and nobody gets hurt, most of the time. The people who fall and break a hip, well, that happens, but you can't really prevent it. They fall getting in and out of bed, and they don't call you before they do that, so they will fall whether the nurses and CNAs are awake or not. Sometimes they die in bed, in the middle of the night, but there's nothing you can do to prevent that either. Everybody dies of something. You close their eyes when you find them and call the doctor to sign the death certificate, call the admin on call and call the next of kin. All pretty routine.

It was the eighties, and people were wild in the streets. They didn't call it hooking up then, but that's what it was: the joyous celebration of life, the delight in sensation, revealing what was hidden, discovering the other and other bodies, how they worked and what they wanted and what you could do with what you have. An explosion.

Everybody's libido was on overdrive. The pill wasn't that new but people were learning how to use it. HIV was still a gay men's disease and you didn't think much about that then because people weren't dying in droves from it yet.

Not much of that happened in the nursing home on eleven to seven, but as soon as Katy got her degree, before she even got a license, she got a gig as a graduate nurse at Hackensack Hospital, and over there, *everything* was happening. Residents with nurses and aides in the storerooms, back when nurses wore prim little uniforms and just a few residents were women.

Residents with residents. Nurses with respiratory techs and x-ray techs. Nurses with chaplains, with priests and rabbis. You name it. There was one male nurse with long blond hair and a tricked-out van he parked in the nurses' parking lot away from the street light, and every night when the three to eleven shift was over he'd be there with somebody new, that van just bouncing up and down and shaking side to side because, though it had a slick paint job, the suspension of that van wasn't any good -- and there was lots of intense up-and-down and back-and-forth and oohing and ahing going on inside.

Katy kept herself away from *that* craziness. She had been to *that* mountain with James. And learned that men were dangerous to her, that she could fall in love at the drop of a hat with almost anybody, with a baseball bat or a flat tire. Falling in love for Katy meant she gave herself away, She became different, a person she didn't recognize, didn't trust and didn't know. Too dangerous. It was the straight and narrow for her now. Just work and school and then just work. There was plenty of time to discover the world later.

You got to hustle if you want to make out. Mineral Spring Avenue in Pawtucket ain't Fifth Avenue New York. It ain't no shopping mall. If you want the ladies to come in, you got to do more than just hang up some sign and pay some rent. Too much rent. You got to have chairs. You got to have stylists. You got to make sure them ladies show up to work, drama or no drama, the hell with what is going on in their lives at the moment, children, boyfriends, mamas, sisters and husbands, in about that order. You got to work it on social media, posting shit every day, so it looks like your little shop on Mineral Spring Avenue is the thing, some combination of home and women talking around a kitchen table, and a club with them lights and that music on a Saturday night. Music. Thumping music. But not too loud, you know, so the ladies can hear each other, because you don't never want some woman to say she was surprised by what she got and she don't like it. Like hair don't grow back. Them ladies got no idea what they actually look like, so when they get some glimpse of themselves they weren't expecting, they quick to

blame their hairdresser. They forget that we are here to cover up what they actually look like, to create a distraction, a mirage.

Then there are the communities to manage, the Cape Verdeans, the Liberians, the Nigerians, the Spanish and everybody else. Everybody wants to feel like this is their shop, that the people in the shop are there just for them. So you got languages to manage and services: you got to know what women want and make sure you match the ladies behind the chairs to the ladies who come through the door. And get the money right. And get everybody paid on time. Pay the electric, pay the gas, pay the phone bill and the landlord.

Tina saw that old woman out of the corner of her eye, that eye that never misses a trick, She saw that woman through the shop window, tottering along on the street. First thing she thinks, 'chairs are full, one of my ladies is late so I'm going to step in. We got no time for one more. She going to have to wait.' Next thing Tina thinks is, 'that baby looking mighty sketchy, mighty weak. Barely putting one foot in front of the other. Is that old lady okay?' Next thing she thinks is, 'keep your eye out. Don't want no old lady fallin out on my sidewalk, in front of my shop, on my property. There's insurance. But people cast blame and sue your ass at the drop of a hat.'

That woman kept walking though. She was running on empty, but she kept walking. That last girl came in through the back door, all flustered about this and that, all full of excuses.

Past the cemetery and that little park where Mineral Spring connects to Main Street. It seemed like the road would never end.

Katy's feet were tired and aching. Her fingers were numb from the cold. She felt a little chill in her chest.

She walked to the left. That way she wouldn't go down a hill that she'd have to climb again to get to the library. She imagined what this place must have looked like before the mills and people, the roads and stores arrived. Low hills giving way to a river. A river gurgling, the water rushing to the sea. Shore birds and sea birds, following the river north. Huge trees and open meadows. Deer grazing.

All that was so long gone that no one ever thought of it. Even the mills, which had blackened the skies and turned the river a disgusting shade of yellow-green had gone silent. Shells for many years. Many burned to the ground. Now lofts. The river ran clean again.

She listened to music in her brain. Keeps your mind clear.

She thought about what she'd heard on the radio to keep her mind off her feet and hands. The Donald was making lots of his usual noise but didn't seem to matter as much now after all his people lost in the election. The pandemic was there and not there: people still seemed afraid of one another, never sure whether to touch or hug, to shake hands or to bump fists. The Russians were still invading Ukraine or trying to. They had been pushed back by the Ukrainians, who looked like the people we always wanted to be: wily, courageous, never giving up, and focused on freedom. So now the Russians were just bombing indiscriminately, the radio said, bombing schools and hospitals and knocking out power stations, as punishment, thinking they would make the Ukrainians cower. But that only made the Ukrainians stronger. Slave Ukraini! I can survive the cold, Katy thought. They will too. Surviving makes you stronger.

Todd was in the Navy. He came from Lodi, a tough town where people learned not to take prisoners, and looking backward, that was the best thing she could say about him, that he was tough and uncompromising.

But the heart is undisciplined, unlikely, unruly, unpredictable, and unceasing. It does not quit until it is too late and it doesn't quit even then. Todd was a scruffy motorhead and Katy should never have thought twice about him when they met, when he broke his ankle and had to get it pinned. He stayed in the hospital for a day after his surgery on an IV drip, refusing pain meds. If she thought about him once she shouldn't have thought about him a second time.

"It's bone pain," she said. "Nothing worse besides childbirth and kidney stones."

"Bullshit," he said, sweating from the pain but refusing to give in.

She fell for him. Fell hard for that stubborn intransience, right then and there. But she didn't let on, or so she thought. This one is trouble, she said to herself.

And so he was. Three days out of the hospital, on crutches, before he had a walking cast, there he was at the door to the parking lot, waiting for her, asking for her phone number. He was a patient. It wasn't ethical, appropriate, or safe to date patients, she thought and knew. She knew that it would be a mistake. Todd is a patient, she told herself again. She kept that in her mind, to focus.

She wondered whether she should call security as he walked her to her car, as he told her why she should go out with him, because he was suave and good-looking, he said, smiling meekly. Right, she said and walked past him. She rebuffed him just like she told herself she would.

But Todd refused to stay rebuffed. He turned up every day at the same time to walk her to her car, until she finally agreed to have coffee with him because she didn't want to make a scene. It's the only way I can make him go away, she told herself. And acknowledged to herself her self-deceit.

The heart is unruly. It latches on. The world narrows to this one person. One person's wants and needs inject themselves into your own wishes and hopes and overtake them, like an infection, or like a cancer that spreads unseen. That person's reality becomes your reality,

whether you want it to or not. The self is plastic, like playdough or clay that is molded in the hands of the potter.

That lady looks rough, Jaime thought. He had a truck and he never stopped, not for one second. He had a woman who had two kids and another woman who had his kids so he had lots of mouths to feed. There was nothing he couldn't do. The truck lived at night in a yard off Chestnut Street in Central Falls and he kept it running himself. You got to hustle if you want to make out. He did the brakes and he changed the oil and he rebuilt the carburetor. Once when the damn thing blew a cylinder head he pulled out the engine and replaced it. Redrilled the block. Bear of a job. Took him two weeks of nights in the summer. Would have been smarter to just buy a new engine but they wanted 6K for that and he didn't have the cash. Spent two weeks of days working for his buddy José, throwing furniture and appliances around. Nights on his back on the floor of that old garage. You live and you learn and you do what you need to do.

He was unloading refrigerators and stoves for the appliance guy after a run to Millis Mass, to the distributor's warehouse there, when he saw her. She looked rough. Dirty green down coat. Brown hat. Gray-white hair sticking out from under the hat. What bugged him was how slow she walked, one foot in front of the next, one little step at a time, like she was walking on ice. And there wasn't no ice, not right there.

Maybe she needed a ride someplace. To sit down for a cup of coffee. He'd be done in unloading in about twenty minutes. Maybe he could give her a ride, if he could get her up into the cab of the truck.

"Hey lady!" he called.

But that woman, she just kept walking. Maybe she didn't hear him.

Then George, the appliance guy, called him from inside the store.

“Yo,” George said. “You go to sleep on me? The door is open. We gonna freeze.”

So Jaime turned around.

Ricky was fifteen when Katy left Todd, but Todd had left her in a different way years before, left her to drinking, to disappointment and to cruelty. They had moved up to Rhode Island by then. Were moved, by the Navy, first to Quonset, then to North Kingstown, into a little house that used to be a summer cottage near the sea, a quirky little place that Katy tried to make a home out of.

Todd never saw himself as an admiral, but he also never expected his life to turn out the way it did. He was a working class kid from Lodi, New Jersey, tough as nails, a linebacker in high school, strong enough to make a tackle but never quick enough to get there in time. A man with a strong back and forearms like steel cables, a man who was born with a crewcut and who didn't ever take no for an answer. Not from anyone. But that first fall, into the bowels of a ship when a hatch gave way as he jumped from ship to ship, broke his courage along with his ankle: his ankle never healed right and had to be fused; and then five years later he hurt the strong back he was so proud of by lifting a barrel of machine oil that was too heavy for two men.

The surgery that followed, another fusion, and the pain that came next left Todd a drinking man. The disappointment ate at him, when he couldn't go to sea anymore and was left behind by the Navy in Newport, keeping up two decommissioned destroyers -- a janitor, not a sailor now. That disappointment grew into anger and that anger reduced him to a man in an easy chair with a bottle in front of a TV set, a man who swung at Katy with the back of his hand from time to time, when he was drunk enough to forget that she could and would give as good as she got. When he forgot who she was, as if he ever knew her or listened to who she was in the first place.

Katy walked slowly, one foot in front of the next, humming to herself. *Midnight Train to Georgia. Baby It's Cold Outside. You've Changed. Crazy. Crazy.* She sat down to rest every time there was a bench or a low wall. It wasn't exactly shortness of breath, but it wasn't easy breathing either. No chest pain. So her heart was fine, she told herself. Had to be fine. This wasn't a heart attack. Women don't get heart attacks, right?

But she tired quickly now. And her breath felt inadequate. The old nurse in her noticed that. But the rest of her refused it. The rest of her, who always made the best out of what she had. Who always made the abnormal adequate. Who accepted, saw the beauty in the moment, and went on. Carried on. Always just carry on. Time straightens out all difficulties, and life is a gift. Time heals all wounds and wounds all heels. This moment is different than any before it. It's now.

She was grateful when she came through the automatic doors at the Pawtucket Library at last. The woman behind the desk and the library looked up and smiled. These are my people, Katy thought. They were always good to her.

Ricky was who Katy loved and lived for, and if she hadn't needed to work all those years, first eleven to seven so she'd be home when Ricky was a young child, and then day shift when Ricky was in school so she'd be there as he got off the bus, perhaps none of what followed would have happened.

Ricky took after Katy and her side of the family. Slight and wiry, not tall and broad. Quick on his feet and thinking, not lumberous and overbearing. Her child. He liked to be hugged and held. He never swatted her away. But he was also bold and inquisitive, a child who wanted to explore the world. A soccer player, not a football player like his father. Chess and scrabble, in those years, not checkers or poker. Ricky learned early how to avoid his father's backhand by staying six feet away, always out of reach, just far enough away from that easy chair.

When Todd wasn't looking, Katy remade their old house, as Todd sat in the den watching TV and drinking beer. She scraped and painted. Exposed old oak floors. Put in walnut wainscoting and stripped the banister on the staircase. Painted the trim. Stenciled designs just below the trim. Found antique wooden furniture with character. Hung beautiful old mirrors. Exposed the brick of the fireplace, all so their little house looked like an elegant house that was far older than it was, elegant and comfortable at once. So their house was a place Ricky could bring his friends to, so their mothers would ooh and ah.

Ricky prospered then, in that safe moment. Grew and prospered. Katy was the den mother and the cheerleader, the car-pooler and the chaperone, watching her son make friends and lead them, explore the world, do science experiments and play sports like there was no limit to his world, as if nothing would ever hold him back and he was on a highway to the sky. Invincible. Unstoppable. Even immortal, or that's how it felt. Katy felt that Ricky would grow up, prosper and live forever. Which made Katy's life seem livable, even with its disappointments and limitations.

She found a reading chair off to the left, the one under the heating duct, took off her coat and fell asleep. And dreamt of the summer, of insects flitting in the warm sun. And then of a policeman, knocking on her window, telling her to move on.

She woke at two-thirty when middle schoolers began to fill the computer desks and library tables and got rowdy with one another, the days of absolute quiet in a library long gone. She became aware of two librarians who appeared to be coming in to check on her, taking turns. Perhaps she had been snoring. Perhaps she looked even more pale than she thought, and they were checking to see if she was still alive.

She *was* older now. Her fingers ached. Her back ached. Her ankles and knees hurt so much that it was often torture to walk, at least at first, and her balance was about gone, so she had to walk very slowly. Her energy and her breathing were weaker than they had been, perhaps, but she coped. Slow and steady. That was how she went. You can do anything, one little bit at a time. You can tolerate anything if you take it in tiny bits, one day, one hour or one moment at a time. There is nothing to fear but fear itself. This moment is different from any before it. The next moment will be different from this.

She woke with a start. Can't overstay my welcome, Katy thought. So she stood up, put on her coat, and walked slowly outside again.

There are other libraries, she thought. Perhaps I can get as far as Hope Street. And then back to the car after dark.

It was a fool's errand and Katy knew it right from the start. Phil was a married man. There was no future with him. He had cheated before and would cheat again. Cheaters never prosper. He wasn't all that good looking, to tell the truth.

Phil was about five-nine but built like a tank. Fifty. A full head of graying dark hair that he wore swept back and rimless glasses, so he looked like a college professor, not an oncologist.

A doctor. Katy knew to stay away from doctors. She hated their arrogance, the way they assumed that the world turns around them. She remembered nursing school, when nurses wore little white hats and were expected to give up their seats when doctors came on the ward, as if their work was so much more important than nurses work, when the truth was the other way around.

No hesitation when Phil stepped into a room. No humility. Katy liked smart men, the kind of arrogant misogynic men who were pulled up short by her curiosity and fearlessness and found themselves liking it, despite themselves. The challenge of making fools of them excited her imagination.

But Phil was different. Several degrees more arrogant, of more self-satisfied ego. Quite the challenge. She knew he was trouble the moment he looked at her, let his eyes sweep over her and then fixated on her eyes without any apology, with the arrogance that said, I want that, without waiting for her to look back, without caring about how she responded to him, because he was so sure of himself that he knew how she'd respond. It troubled her that she responded exactly that way. But that didn't stop what her heart did next. As much as she tried to suppress it.

The heart is an unpredictable beast ravaging through the underbrush. They had a patient together, a woman who was dying of her lung cancer, whose body was overwhelmed but who wouldn't quit. We do terrible things to people at the end of their lives unless you stop us, Phil told the woman. We'll stick a tube in your throat unless you stop us. We'll stick needles in your arms, sometimes in your legs, sometimes in your groin. Sometimes we tie you down. Sometimes we sedate you with medicines that keep you from thinking. If your heart stops, we break all your ribs, trying to restart it, although restarting it almost never works. Most people want their families around them, to be as awake as possible, to get medicine for pain but not be tied down.

He said these things with Katy in the room, not unkindly but with a little more detail than was called for, but the woman rebuffed him anyway, angry at him, at the world, at everyone. She wanted everything done. It was her life. No one could tell her how to end it. She had

disowned her family. She was going to die alone. I'll sue you all, she said, if you don't give me everything I have coming to me, everything I deserve. She somehow didn't understand or acknowledge that soon there would be no plaintiff, that she was going to die and her will, her wants, her personality, was about to evaporate.

"You have to live with your choices," Phil said to the woman, pulling no punches and taking no prisoners. "I don't. I just write the orders in your chart and then I go home. I'm not the one who is going to be stuck in a bed with a tube down my throat, with my arms tied down, full of needles and tubes."

Phil was so damn sure of himself. And frank at the same time, and clear, which took courage. When Phil turned his attention to Katy, on the other hand, he was all present, as present as he had been with the dying woman only more so and in a different sort of way. Suddenly, as if transferring his energy from that woman to Katy, he seemed completely absorbed by Katy, and by wanting her. Call me when that woman dies, he said, and gave Katy his cellphone number. Fuck you, she said to herself. Don't come on to me when a woman is dying.

The woman didn't die on Katy's shift. Instead, she got transferred to the Intensive Care Unit to be intubated, which was where she stayed for two more months, intubated and sedated, just consuming resources, just because she could.

Katy called Phil to tell him about the transfer, which wasn't entirely necessary, but it was polite. She called from her cellphone, so now he had the number, and the rest, as they say, is history.

What a mess. One bad decision after the next. Meetings in parking lots. Drives to the beach, where Phil had a beach house but borrowed a friend's beach house anyway, just to be safe, which meant so he didn't have to worry about his wife walking in. Late night dinners in hidden little restaurants, back-alley places in Cranston and Warren, dark and romantic places despite their obscurity, Italian and Portuguese places with white tablecloths and rich food where Phil sat with his back to the door and to the window on the street so he wouldn't be recognized. Late night phone calls. Intimate details about each other's lives, about their marriages and

families, and long stories about the things they'd done and loved doing that they couldn't tell anyone else about.

People at work could tell. The other nurses and the ward secretaries all knew without being told, but Katy didn't care. She was with this beautiful man. She was sitting in the catbird seat. She was having her cake and eating it, and the rest, well, they were just jealous.

It ended badly, of course. Really badly. Phil's wife knocked on their door in North Kingstown late one fall afternoon just after the sun had set, when an insistent wind was blowing a cold rain. Ricky opened the door. The woman started screaming at him, loud enough to get Todd up from his easy chair in the den.

Things went downhill from there. Katy didn't care one whit about what Todd thought or did. She could give as well as she got, and he was a broken-down old man by then. But Ricky never looked at her the same way again and that hurt worse than breaking it off with Phil, who she realized was just a stuffed shirt as soon as she took a moment to think about it, after the sting of being caught doing something wrong had faded, after Phil just turned tail and ran from her instead of standing up like the man he wasn't and leaving his wife for her, which a part of her wanted and a part of her feared. No part of her ever really expected Phil to leave his wife for her, because she always knew who Phil was, even when she wasn't admitting it to herself. And most of her knew that living with Phil and his insatiable raging ego would have been a disaster.

Down the hill. The sun was out for a moment, thank goodness. There was a cold wind but Katy's core had warmed. The wind hadn't found its way inside her coat yet. Down the hill and along East Avenue. Then up the hill again, a slow torturous walk, so she could cross the highway from the Hampton Inn and Murphy's Law side to the Checks Cashed and the Mr. USA Cleaners side.

Katy hadn't counted on the wind over the highway, which was fierce enough to stop her from time to time. The cold pierced her coat again. Her fingers and feet started to go numb. She started to shiver, just a little, and cursed her body for doing that to her.

A squat white woman and a thin Black man were standing across the street with signs, panhandling the cars as they stopped at the streetlight before they came barreling across George Street to get on the highway or turned left to head into Pawtucket. There but for fortune, Katy thought. But then realized she was no better off than they were. They looked a little strung out, she thought, but at least they have the energy to hustle, and at least they have each other.

Then she went left onto East Avenue, and walked down a little hill but then up the hill in front of the high school. A short low hill that felt long and tortuous. One foot in front of the next. One foot at a time.

Meredith was the house on Blackstone Boulevard before she was the house on East Avenue, that grand old Queen Anne Victorian with a full acre of grounds, with a butterfly garden and a gazebo behind it. Her friends thought she was crazy to live in Pawtucket, of course, but crazy is as crazy does and what is life for if you can't live it large. Meredith and Ev didn't stay there very much, truth be told. Narragansett and Nantucket in the summer. Beachfront in Palm Beach in the winter. With a little time in St. Moritz or Vail. Country mouse and city mouse.

The house on East Avenue was a civics project, if you must know, civic beautification, for the general good. Too painful to let a grand old lady like that one fall into ruins. The painting alone was a major project: finding the right palate for the property, so the house could

sit gracefully amongst those tall pines and hundred year old maples. It took real work to find colors that complemented one another and reflected the beauty of that spot, on a hill, set back from the road but visible, commanding but modest, colors that catch the light of the rising sun which falls on the house in the morning, and colors that amplify the beauty of the dusk and the ponderousness of the shade -- so yellows and greens and browns, a splash of pink and purple. The house itself was a marvel, the complex layers of shingles and siding a study in contrasts, in possibilities.

The woman sat on her low stone wall, the wall that ran along the East Avenue side of the property and had slivers of sharp stone cemented into the top of the wall placed there on purpose, exactly to keep this from happening, to keep passersby from sitting on the wall. The woman herself was non-descript. A generic white woman with no particular defining feature, nothing that would let her stand out from the crowd. She was wearing a tired green down jacket and a brown hat. The down jacket was not in any way revealing or complimentary: it didn't show her shape. She had gray hair that hung out of the hat on both sides of her head, flat, without body, in a manner that suggested she needed a shower. Meredith couldn't imagine how she could be comfortable, sitting on that wall, but she also couldn't imagine how a person let herself go out looking like that,

The police could be called. The police can always be called. Perhaps the woman was someone with mental health issues, so common now. People do hallucinate. She seemed old, for a heroin addict, but one never knows these days. Perhaps an ambulance. But the woman did not appear to be in any distress, and one hates to cause a scene. The world is full of people who have their own problems, their own lives, who walk about, cause no real trouble but never seem to get anywhere, to have any real impact.

So Meredith waited. When she looked out the window a second time, the woman was still there, and she thought again about the police. Then her phone rang.

When Meredith looked out the window again, perhaps twenty of thirty minutes later, the woman was gone, and Meredith never gave her another thought.

Ricky's eyes. That was what hurt most. You don't think about the unintended consequences when you are in it, when love and lust and passion get you in their grip, when a man's or a woman's voice, a lover's voice, overtakes your own voice and your own reason. What happened next just happened, as if to someone else.

First Ricky moved out to stay with friends until he finished high school. Then he moved to Seattle, as far away as he could get. He shipped out instead of going to college, working on oil rigs and tramp steamers, following his father's footsteps. The message was clear. I hate you now and everything about you. I hate your words and your stories and your love, so called. You shamed me and you shamed us and you lied to me all throughout my growing up. That's what Ricky believed even though little of it was true. Doesn't a woman deserve a little joy, even later in her life. Didn't Katy deserve this one little thing for herself? Even if it was built on illusion? But Ricky had become a man like his father, and like a man who thought that the world, which turned only around him, had deserted him and then disappointed him, and he became an angry young man, as angry as he had once been loving as he had been as a child, now distant instead of sweet.

The pills were just one at a time, at first, medicines that patients refused. One became two. You can fudge an inventory. They weren't as strict with pill counts in those days. I'll put it back, she told herself. I'll put it all back. Katy was working in a nursing home then, eleven to seven again, because she couldn't stay at the Miriam after Phil. She couldn't stand the way people looked at her, the way they turned their eyes behind her back.

Then she got caught. Then she lost her nursing license. Then Ricky overdosed on Fentanyl-laced crystal meth in Seattle and died. Then Todd died and Katy lost the house.

Katy stopped singing torch songs in her brain. Now she was singing the blues, when she was singing in her brain at all. Born Under a Bad Sign. Crying Time Again. And, I Wish I Was a Headlight on a Southbound Train. I Wish I Knew How It Feels to Be Free.

And Katy herself disappeared.

They were also nice to her in the Rochambeau Library. That branch is busier than Pawtucket, but the librarians there are also respectful and kind, just like the librarians in Pawtucket, only in a different way. More ethereal. Off in their own worlds, but respectful of Katy's space and privacy just the same. They were also clearly there to help, not that Katy was looking for help or notice of any kind. Librarians are like that. They listen and they know and they are there to help, but they respect your space and privacy. Where would the rest of us be without them?

The reading room in Rochambeau is brighter than the one in Pawtucket. Lots of direct sun. There are more people going in and out. Katy picked up that day's issue of The Wall Street Journal and the Financial Times and set them on her lap until her chest warmed in the light of the late afternoon, flowing through the windows. Then she took off her coat. And fell asleep. No one will bother a person who reads the Wall Street Journal and the Financial Times. Regardless of how they are dressed or what they look like.

The walk back was long and slow. The sun was going down now. A cold wind came up, damp and chilling. The trunks of the trees lining the street were no protection. They were naked, like tombstones. They say a cold wind blows right through you but that isn't so. A cold wind blows into you, into your back and your pelvis and your chest, sucking out all the fire inside, the way a child will suck out the last little bit of liquid when she is drinking a milkshake through a straw.

Katy shivered. It felt like her heart was slowing. She sat down on a chair someone had put out on the street as garbage, Then she stood again and walked. It doesn't work, walking to

stay warm. It doesn't warm you. It's another lie you tell yourself to keep going. One step at a time. One foot in front of the next.

People don't see the sweep of the land now. They don't feel the land with their feet. Most people just push a pedal and the space between places disappears.

But Katy felt every step.

She walked past the Miriam Hospital, and shivered a little to be back there, the wound from that place never having healed. Doctors wearing white coats, nurses in scrubs at the end of their shifts, and patients tottering behind walkers walked in and out. A part of her wanted to be recognized. A part of her knew she wouldn't be.

She was old now. None of the sparkle that was in her eyes then. Phil had packed up and moved on to another job, a bigger job in Boston. He's probably getting ready to retire, Katy thought. She imagined his retirement party and the speeches that would be made by colleagues and grateful patients. If only they knew the whole truth.

But none of that mattered now. No one in the hospital was looking outside to see what was happening around it. Everyone inside was flat out, just trying to survive the flood of people who were flowing into the place. Legends in their own minds.

She walked down the hill on Fifth Street, walked on North Main for a little while and then crossed the highway on Smithfield Avenue. Route 95 was full of cars, their headlights like the eyes of swarming insects. The wind whipped through her again. The cold wrapped itself around her face and neck.

You don't see the people in cars as they drive on a highway after dark. You don't see the people in cars in daylight either. Just bugs. Carapaces. Shells with headlights. Hard on the outside. Empty on the inside. An endless line of cars. Like a swarm of insects, moving through the darkness, tunneling into the night. That's all people are, really, Katy thought. Swarms of bugs. Moving about. Going nowhere fast.

One foot in front of the other. One step at a time.

Smithfield Avenue, on the other side of the highway, is a lonely place. There were houses on the hill straight ahead, but Katy turned right, to go north. It might be North

Providence over there, not Pawtucket. Some of the houses had porch lights on. Big TVs showed through the living room windows of other houses, the bright colors in constant motion, the people acting in the movies on those TVs the only signs of life in the universe right then. Houses are like cars that way. You don't see the people inside. Just shells with lights on. Humps of wood and glass and black or grey roof shingles, with a chimney, antenna, or a little satellite dish on top. Nothing warm. Empty on the inside. Only boxes. Little boxes. All made out of ticky-tacky. All look just the same.

There was a florist on one side of the street. A graveyard and then schools on the other. Katy sat on a bench near one of the schools. And dozed for a few moments.

Standing up seemed impossible. But then she stood with what felt like superhuman effort. I just have to get up, she thought. Can't stay here. Hypothermia and all that.

She imagined herself as a puppet, being pulled up by the hand of God, which was astounding because she didn't believe in God. Only man. And woman. And the earth her feet walked on.

The schools seemed cruel because their grounds are endless. Maybe half a mile of walking. Maybe a mile. Probably only a few hundred feet. It didn't matter. It felt like forever. Any distance is too much when you are so cold inside, when all the energy, all the life force, has been drained from you.

Then she passed a fire station as she turned the corner. Then the baseball diamond and the park on one side and little houses, little boxes, on the other.

Katy imagined the heat being on in those houses. She imagined sitting in a bright yellow kitchen listening to the radio as she made dinner, the oven on, the heat from the oven making the kitchen the warmest room in the house. She imagined that she was making meatloaf at first, and then she remembered that Ricky never liked meatloaf, so she imagined making pecan pie.

She'd start the car when she got back to it. Turn the heat on full blast. Sleep for a little bit. And then move it up to Lincoln, to those houses on the hill to the left as you go north, among those houses where the police don't always come.

She noticed she couldn't feel her feet anymore but that her legs kept moving, one foot in front of the next. She was cold all the way through. Her back was cold, the center of her chest was cold and she imagined that her heart was still, just barely beating, its ventricles fluttering as if they were wings and not a fist contracting and then releasing, a butterfly, not a pump. The car was there, right around the corner. She'd arrive, start the engine, and all would be good.

Katy turned the corner.

There was no car.

Impossible, she thought, I know I left it here.

She walked a block, stumbling, searching every inch, as though she were looking for keys or eyeglasses she had misplaced. Perhaps I am remembering wrong, Katy thought. Perhaps I left the damn car in Lincoln or in the Walmart parking lot. Maybe I am just old and confused. My mind isn't what it used to be. The damn car is here. It has to be here.

But there was no car.

They towed it, she thought. They finally fucking towed it. Don't they know? She wondered. Don't they understand?

She turned and walked north toward Mineral Spring Avenue, putting one foot in front of the next. She sat down when she reached a bench in front of Lorraine Mills.

She was alone, but not lonely then. There was no one around. She could sleep in peace. Nothing was wrong. Time straightens out all difficulties, and life is a gift. This moment is different than any before it. It's now.

The temperature dropped to twenty degrees that night. People drove by the woman all night long. She was sitting bolt upright on the bench and seemed fine. You don't want to interrupt anyone's privacy. Better to mind your own business.

In the morning, school kids who came from across the street to meet the school bus saw her and saw she was blue.

The police were called.

Please click [here](#) to receive Michael Fine's monthly short story and intermittent Covid-19 updates. Please invite others to join by sending them the link [here](#). Information about Michael's books, stories, posts, talks and performances is available at www.MichaelFineMD.com or by clicking. Join us!