

Passing Trees

by Kyle Kimberlin



“What time is it?”

Taking one hand from the wheel, he started to push back the sleeve of his jacket to see his watch, then stopped. He glanced over at her. She sat looking out her window through the rain, at the trees.

“There’s a clock on the dashboard in front of you.”

“Is it right?”

“Yeah.”

“So you won’t tell me?”

“What’s the use of having a clock in the car, if you always ask me anyway?” But now he did push back his sleeve and look. “The clock on the dash says the world is one minute older than the watch on my wrist. So I’m going with the clock. I’m feeling pretty old right now.”

She frowned and watched the trees, a dark wall and a dark road, a grim and rainy day. She did not look at him, or care about the time. It was only something to say, some excuse to conjure his voice out of the distance between them. It was a good voice, solid and deep, a comfort so often, and always in the dead of night. Sometimes she lay awake and whispered *I love you*, and he would answer in that voice, without waking. *Love you too*.

As they passed the end of the orchard, a field opened up. It was fallow, the earth broken and turned. Far back from the road was a brick house and a barn. The house was brightly lit, and smoke rose from the chimney. It was a stranger’s life sitting quietly surrounded by death, waiting to be swallowed by time and rain. She could not wait to get home, turn on lights and music, make tea, and pretend, like that house pretended, that the world was safe.

“I hate myself for leaving him there.”

He checked the mirror and said, “It’s a nice place.”

She turned at looked at him. “Nice? I hate us both.”

“Now, now. Yes, it’s a decent place, as ...”

“And he hates us too.”

“... as such places go. Pleasant and homey.”

“Well.”

“He’ll come around. It’s very nice. He’ll get used to it, make friends, have activities. You saw they have a piano in the recreation room. And the courtyard will be warm on sunny days. We’ll visit and take him outside. He’ll be fine in no time.”

“He’s never yelled at us like that. Never at anyone, that I can remember. So angry. Like we’re Eskimos, shoving him out on an ice flow.”

“We’ve been over this. Can you really pretend we’ve been thoughtless?”

“Do they even do that, did they ever?”

“What?”

“The Eskimos.”

“I don’t know.”

“He said we’re going to hell.”

“Oh God. Everyone is on their way someplace, but not there. And we’re only doing our best.”

“No. We could do better. We should bring him back. Fix up the spare bedroom.”

“Honey.”

“Rent one of those hospital beds. I could take care of him, I know it. I could quit my job, we’d get by.”

“You couldn’t. You can’t even lift him. Neither can I.”

They passed the end of a narrow road that broke the blur of idle land and disappeared toward the hills. She saw that her hands were resting on her lap palms up, waiting to be filled by something only God could design.

“You know him better than me.”

“Yes,” he said.

“Since the hour of your birth.”

“Jesus.”

“So I hope you’re right. But he’s already haunting me.”

There was another line of trees close against the road. Almonds, dark and full of rain.



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