

The End of All Sadness
by Ursula Hegi
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And when I saw him that first time sleeping on the ground by the pond there was light all around him and I stood watching him till he opened his eyes and poured me the light and then he strapped his clothes and blanket into his tarp and followed me to my apartment and the food he cooked for me nourished me more than anything I had eaten for years. Already the weight of the lonely flesh was falling from me as his beauty filled me and even at the mall my customers said I had a glow that lit up the whole Sears. He was kind to my daughter and though she's ten he let her ride on his bare shoulders when we walked down the hill to swim in the pond and after one week we were a family and soon we had a canary and two hamsters that a woman gave us at the Laundromat and he found work in custodial at the mall and bought salmon for us and I borrowed three wedges of lemon from my cousin next door and he grilled the salmon on the balcony in the evening while my daughter painted her toenails purple and pink and when we rode in my car to get ice cream we looked like a family and it was the end of all sadness.

Outside the kitchen window he fastened a hummingbird feeder and we watched the Jesus-birds hang from the sky like fire lanterns with their chests skin instead of feathers and their long beaks immersed in the sweet red and their wings whirring waiting as if someone had folded them around the core of a heart. He wept when he left marks on my face because I'd smiled at the UPS man the way my mama had taught me about being polite and smiling when someone is nice to you and he told me he'd rather kill himself than ever hurt me again and that he ought to leave me except he loved me too much and I held his head between my palms and kissed his eyes and cried stay with me. All that night he held me and brushed my hair for me in the morning and brought me French toast in bed and after my daughter went to school he loved me as if I were expensive glass and I felt his light pour through me as I rose to the surface of my skin. I slept and when I woke my daughter was lying on her bed shivering and wrapped in my raincoat though it was summer and I explained to her how he couldn't bear to watch me talk to other men and he came into her room and gave us money for white dresses and married me that Sunday by the pond. My cousin said she couldn't come but he said you have me now and the minister stood with his back to the water but we could see the green ripples were wind swished across the surface and the green glint of sun in broken bottle glass and I marveled that a man so beautiful had come to choose me. After being loved like that I knew I'd die if I ever had to return to the sadness and when my daughter wouldn't speak to him at the Denny's where he took us in our white dresses for our wedding lunch he reminded me that she would not always be with me but that he would.

He was my husband then and he painted the front door and fixed the TV and disconnected the phone and hung a ceiling fan above our bed that spun its wings all night till the room pulsed like a Jesus-bird and I could see the reflection of the pulse in the windows and in his eyes and feel it low in my belly He took us to the carnival and bought my daughter cotton candy and a monkey-on-a-stick and he kept my keys and drove me to work and picked me up with his beautiful jealous love that no one has ever loved me with and I felt strong and special as I walked beneath his gaze and when my cousin turned from his greeting though he looked respectable now I stopped visiting next door and he said there's a tree in Arizona where miracles are starting to happen and maybe we'll move there and start over without suspicious neighbors but he didn't know what kind of tree and what kind of miracles only that it was south of Tucson and that someone in jail had told him and he was sorry he hadn't thought to ask. He cashed our paychecks and shopped for our food and cooked for the three of us my own family he said my very own while my daughter did her homework and when we ate he asked her to tell him about school but the happier I got the smaller my daughter looked and I said give her time when she wouldn't talk to him and he slapped her mouth and I said no but I understood that he was like those women in India who jumped off a burning tram and were hit by an oncoming tram I read about them in the paper a long time ago but I think of them often and when I told him about them and I said that's just like you getting away from one misfortune only to fall right in the path of the next he said but it's different now because you've come along.

I don't tell him that sometimes I'm grateful he had his hard- luck life that kept him away from the world even though it's un just because it began when his fiancée cheated on him and he shook her wanting to hear the truth and then she was dead but it means he has come to me new and that I'm his only wife ever because if he hadn't been in jail all these years another woman would have found him long before me and married him. And even now when I see the rage climb into his eyes it's never for long and most of the time I know how to ease him out of it by taking his hands and bringing them around my breasts and motioning my daughter out of the living room as I pull him into me because then his rage spins into light and fills me and makes me powerful and even when I can't harness his rage and it crushes both of us I always remind myself that he'll only love me so much more the next day. What I've come to recognize is that moment when the power can shift and when he'll either move into me or shatter me with his rage and it's that moment that has become the most exciting things in my life because if I can turn that rage into light I own him and each time I own him adds to the sum of holding him. And whenever he talks of leaving because he is afraid of hurting me worse I smile and pull him toward me and some- times I forget my daughter is in the room because there's no air for anyone but me and him but then his hands are on me and I feel her shrinking away a silent shadow in my raincoat. Some nights she walks in her sleep and I find her on the sidewalk with her hamsters and I hold her and tilt her face to the night and show her how to watch for a shooting star so she can make her secret wish for a miracle of her own.

