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Abstract

While she waits for the new psychiatrist to arrive, Ginger distracts herself with thoughts of a dinner she imagines would make that smug-smiling *Cook's Illustrated* editor gnash his teeth and tear at his bow-tie. Whatever people might say about her as a parent, no one can accuse Ginger of a poorly-fed family. Butter roasted chicken stuffed with garlic, lemon and fresh thyme. Cream cheese and chive mashed potatoes seasoned with imported Hungarian paprika. Sautéed green beans and slivered almonds; chocolate mousse. Or perhaps something lighter. Heirloom tomato gazpacho; spinach, avocado, and grapefruit salad. Lately, she cannot get enough of her kitchen. The mountain-like assurance of the granite countertops, the welcoming mouth of her convection oven; the gentle rumbling hum of the refrigerator, some steady, distant train.

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Real Family
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2013 Booth Story Prize Winner

While she waits for the new psychiatrist to arrive, Ginger distracts herself with thoughts of a dinner she imagines would make that smug-smiling *Cook's Illustrated* editor gnash his teeth and tear at his bow-tie. Whatever people might say about her as a parent, no one can accuse Ginger of a poorly-fed family. Butter roasted chicken stuffed with garlic, lemon and fresh thyme. Cream cheese and chive mashed potatoes seasoned with imported Hungarian paprika. Sautéed green beans and slivered almonds; chocolate mousse. Or perhaps something lighter. Heirloom tomato gazpacho; spinach, avocado, and grapefruit salad. Lately, she cannot get enough of her kitchen. The mountain-like assurance of the granite countertops, the welcoming mouth of her convection oven; the gentle rumbling hum of the refrigerator, some steady, distant train.

Beside her Ethan scratches his scalp, sighs. Morning sunlight bleaches the office of color, catching dust particles that sparkle like snow, creating a golden screen Ginger imagines hurtling through, disappearing. File folders are piled atop a laptop computer; diplomas, certifications, and licensures hang willy-nilly on the opposite wall. Clapping her hands, Ginger resists the urge to tidy things up.

The only personal touch in the office is a single framed photograph. It faces outward from the desk, directly across from Ginger so that she cannot escape its image: a spontaneous moment, slightly blurred, of father, mother, and daughter laughing and embracing, a puzzle of arms and elbows, fingers and hands.

Reading her mind, Ethan waves at the photo, mutters: “Imagine getting Robert to sit on your lap like that?”

“He has.”

Ethan laughs. “Oh really? And when exactly was that?”

“Why is it facing toward us anyway? Doesn’t she want to look at her own daughter?”

Ginger flips the photo around. Boston cream pie, she thinks. Blueberry muffins.

The psychiatrist’s name is Rita Blum. Looking at her, Ginger is reminded of posters a college roommate of hers had favored: toddlers dressed up as adults, doing adult things—handing each other roses, kissing under dimly lit streetlamps, wearing neckties and fedoras, feather boas; stethoscope, lab coat. When she offers her hand to Ginger it is soft and smooth, the skin not yet nuanced with age. Her bangs are pinned back close to her hairline with a flowered bobby pin. A dab of something, a remainder of breakfast, clings to her cheek.

Upon Dr. Blum’s arrival Ethan had changed his position and now sits tall with both feet planted on the floor, elbows on chair arms, his mouth twisted as if he’s on the verge of saying something clever. He gives Ginger a tight smile intended to be encouraging but that only makes her emotions bubble and belch against her insides. If only he were on board, she thinks, they wouldn’t be wasting time in this place. But Ethan is insistent. Every day when he comes home from work it seems he has added another business card of some doctor to the refrigerator; they cover the freezer door like quilt squares. She does not ask him where he’s gotten them from because the answer will only confirm her worst suspicions: he’s been talking to people about Robert. Ethan preaches to her of treatment, therapy, medication. “It’s all as American as apple pie,” quips Ginger when she’s feeling rebellious, running her fingers over those sharp rectangles of paper, tossing one or two of them away when Ethan isn’t looking. “Blame it on Robert!” she cries when she’s feeling desperate. “Blame it on our *child!*”

But inside she’s beginning to feel defenseless against her husband. He’s been lining up reasons like soldiers and has organized an impressive army. Blum is soon to become one member of the infantry; Ginger can just feel it in the space between her husband and the doctor, their collegial

smiles and head nods, much like the ones Ethan shared with their pediatrician and the social worker and the teachers at two of Robert's former schools.

Ethan doesn't seem to notice that she is the only one maintaining order, protecting her family from the chaos that would inevitably ensue if she weren't there. Ginger lives what she considers to be a normal life, cares for what she believes is a normal family. There's no need to jump to conclusions, she tells an infuriated Ethan. Children go through stages. And it is her official position that this is what Robert is going through. He's done nothing wrong. Not really. Not in Ginger's opinion at least.

Dr. Blum has opened up a thin file, begun to read. Ginger tilts forward in her seat, squints to get a look at it but is too far away. She glances at Ethan's watch. Nine thirty-five. They've wasted twenty minutes waiting for Dr. Blum to arrive and fifteen before that, sitting in reception. Ethan needs to get to work; Ginger needs to get back home, back to Robert.

"Doctor? I don't mean to be rude, but I'm anxious to get on with my day."

Ethan pinches the bridge of his nose. "*Ginger.*"

"Just a moment more..." says Dr. Blum, her eyes still moving back and forth, reading. She never bothers to look up from the file.

*

The second specialist said the same thing as the first. When the first specialist had said it, Ginger was mute, disbelieving, her vision going fuzzy so that for a moment she thought the electricity in his office had gone out. With the second specialist, she said: "So that's really the term the medical establishment is using these days?" But it was, in fact, her official diagnosis. Bad eggs.

When she heard the words she could not help imagining her eggs as she had when she was a teenager in health class, watching a black and white animated movie entitled *The Miracle of Life*, except that in her mind the eggs had faces, were rogue-like bullies with muscled, tattooed arms and leather jackets, punching the clean-cut cardigan-wearing spermatozoa out of her fallopian tubes. In the doctor's office, while Ethan had covered his trembling lower lip, cast his watery

gaze at his empty lap, Ginger had laughed. Ethan and the doctor exchanged glances. Bad eggs, indeed.

“So what you’re saying is this is my fault?”

“No one’s fault,” the specialist insisted. “Just bad luck.”

Ginger stared at the palm of her left hand and with her index finger traced the shape of her love-line. She couldn’t shake the feeling that he was lying to her.

Ethan reached out, squeezed her hand. “We’ll figure it out, Gin. We’ll find a way.”

She thought this might be code; Ethan had on more than one occasion suggested they could live a childfree life. But Ginger had never believed two married adults constituted a family, at least not a real one.

They considered their savings, their retirement accounts. They sat late into the evening translating the fine print of healthcare plans and finally settled on a clinic. Ginger began treatments. The more time passed, the louder the rooms of their house vibrated with silence. When they spoke, their voices echoed out as if in a canyon. “The house is too big,” she told Ethan. He’d walked in on her trying to drag a sofa across the length of the living room. “It’s too much for me to manage.” But there was nothing she could do to change it, no matter how much she moved the furniture around.

Another appointment; more disappointing news. On the ride home from the doctor’s office one afternoon, Ginger stopped at a bookstore and bought both volumes of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. She’d envisioned family dinners together, something she’d never had growing up, both of her parents absent, one in body, one in mind. She didn’t like to get into the details of it, didn’t like to think about her childhood too much, the future always a better option than the past. She wanted not pasta and sauce from a jar but good, old-fashioned homemade cooking, meals that required hard labor. A table set with polished silverware, cloth napkins; candles. A table made resplendent with shiny perspiring turkeys, midnight hued plums; tomatoes bursting from their seams. Succulence! Succulence! Maybe it was all a matter of the power of persuasion, thought Ginger as she carried the encased tome in the crook of her arm to the cash register. Cook it and they will fertilize.

But hours later pots bubbled over and burned up the stove, black smoke trickled out from a crack in the oven. “Good thing the fire alarms aren’t installed,” Ethan joked when he found Ginger curled up on the bed, her head buried beneath a pillow. “You’ll get better. Maybe beef bourguignon is a little ambitious. How about scrambling an egg first?” He tugged at the pillow until Ginger finally let go.

She lay still while Ethan stroked her hair, closing her eyes when she couldn’t bear to look at him any longer. “What if,” he began, but Ginger knew what he was going to say and snatched the pillow back, covering her face, closing the fabric over her ears.

“Ginger. *Sweetheart.*”

Ethan yanked at the pillow but she refused to let go this time. She inhaled deeply. It smelled of sharp human scents and fabric softener and aging down.

“Can’t we be honest about this?”

She buried her face further into the fabric. Her voice came as if from the past. “*No.*” The adoption agency they finally settled on was headquartered in Michigan; the children were primarily Eastern European and Russian. It took nearly two years and lots of false starts, but eventually they found him in an orphanage in Bucharest, Romania. Ginger signed up for a cooking class, squeezed in three more before his scheduled arrival. He was nine months old, his name was Robert and—Ginger said when she first laid eyes on his picture—he was perfect.

*

Dr. Blum takes a notebook from the side drawer of her desk, picks up a pen. “Tell me more about Robert.”

Ginger rolls her eyes, gestures at the file. “Didn’t that tell you enough?”

Ethan places his hand on her forearm. “Do you want me to start?”

“Be my guest.”

While Ethan speaks, Ginger turns toward the windows and gazes at the large parking lot outside. Heat rises off the asphalt, making anything that passes through its waves wobbly and uncertain. A woman pushes an extravagantly-designed stroller with wheels like giant chocolate donuts; people hustle to and from cars, the scraping sounds of their footsteps on the ground ringing dully in Ginger's ears.

Ethan and Dr. Blum think she isn't paying attention but she is. For each example Ethan gives, in her mind Ginger is stacking up counter-examples from her own childhood to refute his. Her brother went through a biting phase. She once got caught pinching candy bars from a corner store. She had difficulty making friends. She had a habit of getting lost, following distractions. Even now she can recall her mother's face whenever they were reunited, usually at information booths and check-out counters, her complexion white, not from fear but from guilt at allowing it to happen yet again.

Ginger presses her hand to her chest. The air in the office feels thin. A soup with all those extra potatoes, she thinks. A dessert bread using the over-ripe bananas in the bowl on the kitchen table.

"...And then this past week..." she hears Ethan saying and instinctively she knows it is her cue.

"When we were kids my brother stabbed me," she blurts.

Ethan and Dr. Blum blink at her.

"Once—with a fork. It broke skin. Here." She begins to roll up the sleeve of her blouse.

"That was different," Ethan says. He's heard this story before. "Not that your childhood was any model of normalcy but it was an accident. Joe didn't *purposefully* stab you."

"And you think Robert did?"

Ethan doesn't answer her.

"You weren't there," she says. "Maybe if you had been it wouldn't have happened..." She trails off, feeling his eyes moving downward to her lap. One hand over the other, she hides the spot that is covered with gauze and medical tape, the stitches still new. The spot on her hand seems to

pulsate, like the nagging at the back of her mind, something about the past six years that shakes loose her certainty.

“What about ADD?” ventures Ginger. “Learning disabilities? I’ve read there are higher rates of it among adopted children.”

Dr. Blum looks disappointed by this suggestion. “Certainly developmental and learning delays can be symptoms of something more serious. But right now there’s nothing to indicate he might be challenged developmentally. His speech was delayed when he was younger but that’s not unusual for a child coming from his circumstances.”

“But you should have seen the orphanage,” presses Ginger. “It was a terrible place. They tied babies to their cribs.”

Dr. Blum snaps the button on her pen, slips it into the chest pocket on her lab coat. There are three others just like it, their ends poking out like bullets on a holster.

“The teachers at his last school said that he lacked remorse,” Ethan offers. “When he hurt other kids.”

“He was protecting himself!” cries Ginger. “The other children teased him. One of the teachers even told me so.” And yet it was Robert—not the other children—that had been removed from school. The teachers had sat Ginger and Ethan down in the art room at the kiddy-sized tables to tell them the news. Their knees kept knocking against the furniture while the teachers stood over them, looking down on Ginger, their faces failing to hide the obvious accusation: Bad mother. “You can’t tell me the other children weren’t at fault.”

“It wasn’t just the one time...”

“Why is it so hard for you to defend your own son? Is it because he’s adopted?”

Ethan laughs ruefully. “You’re not a cheap person, Ginger. Don’t start acting like one now.”

Ginger wraps her arms around herself, licks her lips. Hot chocolate with whipped cream from a can. Oil-popped popcorn smothered in butter. “He’s a very good eater.” She can hear how she sounds—defensive, desperate—but cannot stop. “Broccoli. Even brussels sprouts.”

Dr. Blum places her elbows on her desk. “Fortunately, we’re addressing Robert’s situation at an early age. Hopefully we can get to work so that he’s ready for some controlled classes. He won’t be ready for mainstream school just yet, but in time.”

School. Only yesterday Robert had thrown a tantrum over the Spiderman backpack he’d seen another boy wearing at the playground; it took all the strength Ginger had to haul him off to the car. It was wrong of her, she thought, to have strong-armed him from the playground; she’d handled it all wrong. She sensed too that other parents thought she had, she could feel their silent judgment even after she’d turned her back on them. If only she’d been more patient, hung in for a few minutes longer, tried to reason with him. Maybe that’s the problem. Patience, her lack of it. When she thinks about it now she knows it was her fault. She’d driven him to it and then been forced to bribe him—lie to him—promising him she’d buy him his own backpack in order to calm him down. She’d told him she’d get him one for school, knowing full well Robert wasn’t going back anytime soon.

“I’d like to see what the three of us can do together first, but I also want to assure you that there are other resources...”

Ginger had never thought of these things happening to Ethan and her. In her mind they happened to people who lived in rural trailer parks in Arkansas or West Virginia, people who left their children in rooms with uncovered electrical outlets and fed them food that had a shelf life of a decade and didn’t bother strapping them into car seats. People with troubled histories, faces ringed like tree stumps with years of failing. People who never thought about whether they wanted children or not, instead leaving family to fate.

“We’ve done everything right,” says Ginger.

“No one’s suggesting that you haven’t.” Dr. Blum catches Ethan’s eye, points at the box of tissues in front of him. Ethan pulls one out then shoves the entire box into Ginger’s lap where it dangles for a moment before falling and landing between her feet.

Ginger stares at the box. It's so light she cannot feel its weight through her shoes. She realizes she'd taken it for granted, being a parent. She'd always assumed it would be easy; she'd believed she had an innate talent for it. "We're not supposed to be here."

Dr. Blum checks her watch. "I'd like to schedule some time with Robert and the two of you over the next several weeks. Fortunately, there are more options today than there were thirty years ago."

"Well thank god it's not nineteen sixty-two," mutters Ginger and gives the tissue box a kick.

As Ethan drives Ginger home, she reconsiders dinner.

"Cupcakes," she says. "Maybe I'll make cupcakes."

Ethan drums his fingers on the steering wheel. "I think Dr. Blum can really help us."

"Did I take the chicken out of the freezer this morning?" Ginger pulls a pencil and small notepad from her purse, taps the eraser end against her lips. "I just can't remember." She waits for the car to ease to a stop before she writes. *Yogurt. Half n' Half.*

"Why don't we just order pizza tonight?"

"Pizza?" *Sea salt. Crushed red pepper.* "I bought chicken. But I could make pizza instead, if that's what you want."

"Not *make* it. Buy it. I thought that maybe you might want a break from cooking for once. We could get a movie, chill out together."

"I bought chicken."

Ethan reaches across the car, his fingers fumbling under Ginger's thick hair. He begins to massage the back of her neck, something he hasn't done in a while. She groans. "Things don't need to be perfect all the time."

Ginger stiffens, shakes off Ethan's hand. If he weren't working so much. If he were around more. If he'd try it her way for once. "It's not about being perfect. I *like* to cook. And if I left the chicken out—"

"—Fine." Ethan slaps his hand back on the steering wheel. "It was just a suggestion. Forget it."

For several minutes they ride in silence, Ethan shifting the gears roughly, the car bucking, suspending Ginger forward, thrusting her back. The seatbelt she is wearing locks, catching across her collarbone, pinning her in place. The next time Ethan shifts only her head moves back and forth with the jerking motion, the rest of her forced to remain still.

They pass by brightly colored Victorians, a community garden, the playground from which she'd earlier had to drag her screaming child. Ginger turns toward Ethan. His appearance stops her short. Fine hairs have begun to sprout from his ears; the skin around his jowls sags slightly, resisting the inevitable tug of gravity. Ginger reaches out and begins to stroke his cheek with the back of a finger.

"You look tired."

"No. Not tired."

Before Robert, it had been their Friday night ritual. They alternated topping and movie selections; one week his, the next hers. She used to fall asleep with her head in his lap, the movie flickering blue against the backs of her eyelids. You're missing the best part, he'd whisper, teasing, his warm hand resting on her belly bursting with pizza and beer.

"Okay," she concedes. "We can order out. Pizza *is* Robert's favorite."

Ethan glances at her. A smooth downshift. "You sure?"

"You're right," Ginger says. "I could use a break. We both could."

"Great. I'll get beer on the way home." At the next stoplight, Ethan leans over and pecks Ginger on the cheek.

While they wait for the pizza to be delivered, Ginger shows Robert how to frost cupcakes. When he'd come home from work, Ethan had stared at the plate cooling on the kitchen table for several minutes, his briefcase and sports jacket dangling at his sides. Then he shook his head. "We still need dessert," Ginger rationalized, the hand mixer she was holding poised over a bowl of frosting. "Tell me they're made from a box," Ethan said. She didn't mention she'd spent the afternoon organizing the refrigerator and freezer, marinating meat and chopping vegetables in anticipation of the next four days' meals.

Ginger finishes mixing the frosting while behind her Robert waits, kneeling on a chair at the kitchen table, his fist gripping a butter knife. She is sometimes asked by strangers if Robert is from Guatemala or Mexico. She knows it is obvious to everyone else that he is not her biological child; Ginger is the physical embodiment of her namesake. But she doesn't mind; she thinks Robert beautiful and covets his thick dark hair, the waves in it, his doe lashes.

She sets the bowl in front of her son. Robert dips his knife into it and roughly smothers first one and then another cupcake with frosting. Ginger pauses before leaning over him so that her chest presses against his back. When he does not flinch, she bends still further, puts her face to his head, closes her eyes, breathes in his scent of bubblegum and sweat and sour milk. She runs a hand along his arm. Recently he has begun to reject her affection, shoving her off of him, batting at her hands. But tonight Robert doesn't seem to notice her touch, so engrossed is he with piling more frosting on the cupcakes, his tongue taut, pushed against one corner of his open mouth. She smiles, relieved, and remains standing so that her body drapes over her son's.

"Here," she says. "Let me show you."

"I can do it," insists Robert. But he doesn't push her away.

Through his shirt she can feel his breath and heart. It always surprises her, the quickness, the rapid flutter. At seven he is still a child, still her baby. At seven he is still only a fraction of who he will be one day; his opinions and ideas, his personality even, not yet fully formed.

"I know you can," assures Ginger even as she takes a cupcake from Robert's hands.

Maybe people are always works in progress, she thinks. She swirls the frosting around so that it creates a pink mountain peak. Her son squeals, dazzled. Maybe she and Ethan—everyone, really—are only shadows of what they will be in two weeks, two years; two decades.

“It’s my turn,” Robert growls, pushing Ginger’s arm away. “*Ma*-ma. It’s. My. Turn.”

“Relax, monkey. Here, let me help.” She places her hand over his. “Relax your arm. That’s right.” She begins to guide him around so that the frosting swirls just the way she wants it to. “See? Isn’t that better?”

But Robert’s eyes have shifted away from their task and now watch the hand that envelopes his own. He presses the tip of his index finger to the white bandage she wears. “I did that.” His tone is flat; it is a statement of fact.

Ginger looks into his eyes even though he refuses to look back. “Yes. But it’s okay. It was a mistake.”

“Does it hurt?”

Ginger wrinkles her nose. “Not really,” she lies. What had surprised her was the sensation not—as she’d expected—of her skin ripping, but of it cracking open, like the shell of an egg. But that was hardly as shocking as what came next: she’d slapped Robert with the back of her hand hard across his cheek. It was in self-defense, she’d told herself afterward. But this only made her feel worse.

Robert eyes the dab of frosting on the edge of his knife and places the tip into his mouth.

“Don’t do that, sweetheart. It’s dangerous.”

The knife slips from Robert’s lips; his dark eyes meet hers. She thinks he is about to say something, but then she thinks his look says it all. She runs her fingers over the bandage covering her hand.

“You didn’t mean to do it.”

Robert shrugs, dips the knife once more into the bowl of frosting, licks the tip.

The doorbell rings.

Ginger kisses the crown of her son's head, rises from the table. "Finish frosting."

As she walks to the front door, she feels the lightness in her arms, the cool wood floor against the bottoms of her bare feet. The water pipes thrum; Ethan's still in the shower. "Pizza's here!" she calls up the stairwell.

When she opens the door she is surprised by how light it still is outside. Somehow she has missed this, the gradual passing of spring. For too long she has been stepping out the door with her head down, trying to make it through this phase of life. She squints into the setting sun, grins at the delivery boy, tips him generously.

Robert's head is still bent over his work when she returns.

"Time to wash up for dinner." She uncaps two bottles of beer, pours them into glasses she's left to frost in the freezer. "Do you want milk or juice?" She picks up the glasses, one in each hand, and swings around.

The first thing she notices is the color of the frosting on the cupcake in his hand, how deep a shade of pink it is, deeper than she recalls having made it. It seems he just keeps circling around and around the top of the cupcake, as if he's dissatisfied with his workmanship, wanting to get the knife strokes perfect.

"Robbie? It's time for dinner."

The water pipes go silent. Upstairs, Ethan is whistling.

The kitchen fills with the humid scent of pizza, making Ginger's mouth water. "Robert." Her voice is stern but cautious. "It's time to put that away."

He continues to ignore her, his back hunched, obstructing her view so that all she can see is the tip of his knife poised over the cupcake. He holds the knife tip just over the dessert, as if he is waiting for something.

Ginger sighs. “Okay. That’s it.”

Drip. Drip. Two red drops fall onto the table drawing her eyes towards a puddle that has suddenly appeared there. The dye, Ginger thinks, but when she looks across to the kitchen countertop the bottle of red food coloring is where she left it, cap on, lined up next to the others of blue, green, and yellow, a row of oversized tears. Robert swipes at the hair that has fallen into his eyes and Ginger sees what has created the liquid puddle.

The sound of the glasses shattering against the tile floor jolts Robert. He drops the knife, twists in his seat. The hand he has injured—the left, just like Ginger’s own damaged hand—grips the back of the chair, the cuts jagged and uneven, the skin sawed through with something blunt—the butter knife he’s been using. The pain he must have endured to do the damage he has done to himself. Blood crawls between his fingers; his hand leaves messy smears on the wood of the chair. Ginger’s view to the table is unobstructed now; it stuns her how easy it is to identify the cupcakes her son has frosted, the rage and sadness of them.

From above, footsteps pound against the hallway floorboards. Ethan calls out: “Everything alright down there?”

Ginger pushes her toe forward, hears the crackling of glass. Just step over it, she tells herself. That’s all you need to do. But she is paralyzed, unable to move toward her son to help him, even though she knows that sooner or later she must.

“Mama?” Robert’s face is contorted, preparing for the next trick of emotion. He lifts his arms up, reaches out to Ginger. “*Mama?*”

“What’s going on?” Ethan is standing in the doorway.

Ginger grabs a dishtowel from the countertop, rushes to Robert before Ethan can. She feels the glass puncture the bottoms of her feet, the pain exploding inside her head. As she steps the slivers of glass sink deeper into her flesh. She throws the dishtowel over Robert’s hand.

“What happened?” Ethan cries.

Robert sobs, his mouth drawn wide, gasping; he cannot get enough air. He pushes at Ginger, tearing at the towel she’s forced over his hand.

“Nothing!” shrieks Ginger, wrapping her arms around her resisting child, stroking his head even as she feels the violent waves, protesting shudders of his body beneath hers. “Hush, Robbie. Hush up now,” she murmurs but it only provokes him more. He struggles, digs his fingers into her locked arms, but she will not let go; she will never let go. She looks up at Ethan but cannot hold his gaze which is, in that moment, telling the story of their lives.

“It’s just a scratch,” she tries and nearly laughs at the absurdity of the words. She doesn’t know what else to say; her mind won’t work beyond tightening her grip around the fierce, vibrating body of her son. *My son*, she thinks and wants to declare out loud so that he understands: *You are my son*. But the words won’t yet come.

Lenore Myka’s fiction was selected as one of the 100 Distinguished Stories by *The Best American Short Stories* and won the 2013 *Cream City Review* fiction contest. Her work has appeared in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *West Branch*, *Massachusetts Review*, *H.O.W. Journal*, *Upstreet Magazine*, *Talking River Review*, and the anthology *Further Fenway Fiction*. She received her MFA from Warren Wilson College.