

When I opened my eyes, the light in the room was fading, and I saw only the man's silhouette. He wore a baseball cap, not a fedora, and there was no aura around his head. David then, my husband.

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That night when I went downstairs, I found David sitting on top of the duvet, leaning against the headboard. Candles were lit on both of our nightstands. "Come here," he said.

I appreciated his attempt at seduction. He'd brought home *tom kha gai* soup for dinner—my favorite, not his—and as we ate he suggested planning a trip. Rome, maybe, or Croatia, both places I'd mentioned previously.

I was flattered, but the most I could muster was the desire to be interested.

"Come here," he said again and moved to the side of the bed.

I stood in front of him, straddling his knees. He unbuttoned my blouse and bent to kiss my breast. I hoped my black lace bra helped compensate for my lack of enthusiasm.

When he started to unzip my skirt, I stepped away. "I'm cold. Let's get in bed."

We undressed separately and got under the covers. I reached up and turned off the light. We kissed and caressed; I started to enjoy myself. And then it was just the two of us, moving together in the familiar rhythm, breaking down walls and stripping the furniture bare.

Afterward, we lay next to each other holding hands. "I don't want to lose you," he said.

"You heard the doctor. I'm just having some tests. We don't know enough yet to worry."

He kissed me and turned on his side. I matched my body to the curve of his back and rubbed my hand along his flank, past the smooth skin on his hips and down the rougher skin on his leg where the hair started. He caught my hand and pulled it across him.

"I love you," he said. The words seemed to float from a parallel plane.

I heard footsteps on the stairs and pulled the pillow over my head, determined not to listen. The steps grew louder, then suddenly stopped.

I waited a moment and then sat up. I found myself in the center of a wide hallway. To my right was a wooden staircase, its thick polished boards pegged together like fine furniture.

I longed to reach up and spread my arms across the joinery, rest my cheek against the wood and absorb its secrets. It had been here all this time, beneath the surface of my life, solid and unchanged.

I walked down the wide hall, Persian carpets cushioning my footsteps. In the living room, a large beam created an alcove in front of the tiled fireplace. "Queen-post truss," a voice said in my right ear. "Spans longer distances than the king's truss." Vickers pointed to an alcove by the window. "We repeated the truss on the other side of the room."

"It's beautiful."

He nodded. "Considered a showplace in its time. Let me show you the dining room."

"Wait. You are taking me back, aren't you?"

He shrugged. "If that's what you want."

I could spend eternity in this house checking out the woodwork. Across the hall the cherries in the stained glass window caught the light and glowed like rubies. At home I knew every stain on the carpet, every scratch in the furniture. When I felt Vickers's hand on my arm, I turned.

"You need to choose," he said.

I felt a chill spreading from my forearm to my chest. My throat constricted. I shook my head, struggling for breath. There was a quick kick followed by deep stillness. I was home in bed. I sensed the familiar curve of David's back, the indentation at the base of his spine.

He sat and looked down at me. "Barb, what happened? Are you okay?"

I stretched my arm toward him, but it didn't move.

"Barb?"

Yes, I thought, yes.

**Karen Ackland's** stories and essays have appeared in *Catamaran*, *StoryQuarterly*, *Summerset Review*, *Salon*, and other journals. She holds an MFA in fiction from Pacific University in Oregon. She is grateful to fellow participants of the Catamaran Writing Conference, where a previous draft of "Old Haunt" was workshopped, and especially for the encouragement and insight of workshop instructor Elizabeth McKenzie.

## ROBERT BILENSKY

*Del Rio*, 2017  
Oil on Wood Panel, 48 x 48 in



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