



I don't have to ask him not to leave because he doesn't want to go anywhere. His captivity speaks of an omission about life before he came here, a life I understand he is hiding from me. We haven't talked about it beyond the first morning when I asked him about calling a family. I understand now that he remembers his life before here and his home or homelessness, his life alone. He remembers a phone number, his age, his shoe size—many numbers. He knew them and withheld them. I fill in his story, working backwards from the night in the field.

Shoeless? No good answer for that. It stays in the grey area of trauma. He must be a widower because of how comfortable he is in the home, with me feeding him. He had shared his space with a woman. He knew her breakfast and the scraping of crumbs from the table into his cupped palm. And the night fire seemed habitual. I had never fallen into these rituals of time spent with another. To couple up is a way to keep static and not develop, a way to keep a moment of clarity, only a moment, of clarity repeating each day. A place held at the table.

Did I know that I was the type of person to get angry over newspapers spread all over the house, that I would come home and straighten them, fold them back up and add them to the recycling without saying a word? Did I know I would leave notes in the bathroom about not leaving globs of toothpaste in the sink? It doesn't matter that I now know this about myself. Knowing does not change anything. It is the same as not knowing, collecting the newspapers is the same as not spreading them around the house in the first place. The end is the same.

His gender and age—a lifetime of gathered habits all pointing back at me, showing me my own gender and age and habits. I accumulated these habits in isolation and did not always enjoy learning just how cut off I had been.

His past. A widower, but not a father. I often watch him after he has fallen asleep in front of the fire, the dogs at his feet and a book in his lap. I try to see children and their first days at school. I try to imagine a house full of miniature things—shoes, pants, elephants. I try to imagine the hurt a parent experiences when their children reject them. I'm not sure how this would show in his sleeping face, but I look anyway. He looks younger by at least a few years when sleeping, a fairly common thing, I think, because the muscles relax and worry lines become less pronounced, the frown lines become softer. The more I look, the more certain I become of his story: his wife of many years had died a slow death. He moved from their house into an apartment. He adjusted to the smallness of his new life. He retired, collected Social Security. No pension? What work did he do? Impossible to imagine him in an office. This part of his history doesn't interest me anyway. I have never driven myself hard enough to wedge into one thing or another. My job at the arboretum is enough—a place where I could see the results of my efforts.

Everything in his life had been a march toward this. I was grateful to feel this, to feel the weight of caring for another person.

Sometimes I rewrite things. I had called 9-1-1 and reported that a confused barefoot man was walking in the field across my house. I had watched their approach, lights but no sirens. I had watched them wrap him in thick brown blankets and wheel him into the back of the ambulance. I saw silhouettes taking his blood pressure and temperature. Finally, I had watched them secure the gurney and shut the double doors. I write in feelings of relief and pride about doing the right thing. I saved him from frostbite, worse. I imagine going to bed, turning off the light, and then waking to the same world I had known.

I try to let myself think of how pleased I am to have him staying with me, how it is temporary and how eventually I will notify someone. Am I so insensitive as to keep him? Maybe he has a brother or sister. Maybe he has his wife's gravestone to visit. What about when he dies? How would I hide that? How would I bury him? I would have to bring people into my home to take him away and record his death, to make documents certifying it. I would need to explain that I don't know his last name or if the first name I call him is really his. I will need to explain why I didn't call the police when I found him wandering.

I already imagine my life without him and how I will be changed by his leaving. I try to remember that everything is the same, will be the same, that knowing him is the same as the not knowing him.

My grandmother's closets were still full of her husband's clothing. I had never met him; he passed away or left, it wasn't clear, before I was born. The stiff pants and pressed shirts were horrifying. The penny loafers and folded sweaters, ties hung on

the back of the closet door. She didn't even see them anymore; they were just part of the door. She walked past them to get her own clothing. My mother saw them, though. She demanded that her mother donate the clothing and offered to bag it up. She offered to take a few of the nicer pieces to a consignment shop.

Grandmother would then close the door to the closet and then the door to the bedroom, shuttling us out, muttering words in another language. She and my mother were trapped. I escaped them by walking my grandmother's dog. When I returned, red-cheeked and winded, the women would be sitting together at the table having coffee. They had moved on but kept their grief ready to replay.

I would be upset with my mother and confused by my grandmother. Why would she insist on getting rid of her father's things? Why were his things the only things they would talk about on these visits? There was a picture of a dark haired man on my grandmother's dresser. My mom couldn't look at the pictures. I wasn't sure if she was aware of her avoidance. Her aversion made me focus on the picture. I would end up holding it and asking about him. The photo had been retouched with blue in his eyes and blush on his cheeks.

"His eyes weren't blue, they were hazel," she told me. "The army airbrushed them in these things." She would take the photo and put it back in its place. And that was it.

But, Martin, his silence was endearing because it allowed me to create his story. I was able to craft the person who sat across from me, the person who ate all that was put in front of him, made me cook even better meals, and put on a little happy weight.

I sometimes wished he would ask me more about myself, but, whenever he did, I shut down, afraid he wouldn't like the answers. I was afraid he would judge me in some way. I wanted

us to agree to never apologize. Apologizing meant someone had been misunderstood. I wanted only clarity, even if that meant we created the other person's intentions in our heads. It was real enough.