

**Autumn 1982**

**by**

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My husband is in his office. He has a desk like an island where he stares at accounting books, as if money were hidden there. In the living room, my office, the print-covered sofa cushions are torn. I have a window on the street, which looks out into the Hyde Park night. I've been told it's dangerous to wander the streets alone. Ambulances shriek on their way to Mitchell hospital. On my desk are two photos: one of my father throwing duck decoys in the marsh, another of my mother riding a horse. I feel like a wolf running alone. They say a woman shouldn't drink alone, eat alone, make love alone in her head. The red tail lights of cars pass the window. I tasted burnt cigarette smoke in my mouth. I remember homes—home in England, home on mountains tops: Ben Nevis, Snowdonia, the autumn of 1982 in the mountains.

My anger mixed with the hiss-hiss of the radiator. A black man walks by muttering, "Hub, hub, hub." My hands shake, and I wish for a bottle of wine to thnk away Sandy, all bottle up like perfume, the way men like it, my father's second helping of the second sex. Perhaps I could be more nurturing: walking the pavement in my Burberry raincoat waiting for the rain to begin, remembering holding hands in Queen's Gate Park and kissing among the tombstones of Highgate Cemetery where Marx was buried. I keep my hands in my pockets. Outside a street lamp twinkles. I ruffle though an illustrated Atlas of the World and twist my wedding ring.

Jim said I looked like a whore as we drank a beer last night. He loves his desk and books. The kitchen and my swollen stomach have become battle zones. On the wall of the building across the street is spray-painted: Arise, Ye Wretched. I star at the words, pushing my dirty hair from my face, rubbing my nose, taking a sip of cold coffee. He said to me, "The important thins is microeconomics." In this city, the only wildlife is squirrels. No wolf streak. No wolf death here.

Logos. Jim's desk is his island. The neighborhood is a muddy yard torn up by children playing freeze tag. The apartment smells of Listerine and dust. There's a pattern somewhere. I wish it would snow. "Why can't you be more logical?" Jim asks. It's 5:56 pm and the house is falling down. Last summer Jim made a desk with his own hands out of air-cured walnut from a tree long ago spliced by lightning. The walnut tree was on his family's farm. It was axed and pulled apart: its from became a desk. I have placed a candle the color of blue corn flowers upon it.

Next door we have Kersten Physics Laboratory and the Viral Oncology Lab and the Woodlawn Tap, but no one to drink with. No toasts. Jim answers the phone with his polite, cheerful phone voice and talks to a friend who wants to go to an investment banker's meeting. "The point is," he explains, "to get ahead." "Ahead of what?" I ask. In the city, there's no thunder, no lightning, no splicing; not here, we're civilized. Please. We're young urban professionals with sweet gargled breath talking to each other. We have desks which we call home.

All warmth here comes from the radiator. There's no fire. The chimney is holed up and its hearth laid carefully with three concrete logs. I'll listen to Andean folk music and entertain myself. I remember the autumn when I was in the mountains.

—The End—