



MORNING WILL COME

by Jennifer Kircher Carr

“SHUSH!” my husband David snips over his shoulder as we crouch on the damp grass of late night. “Wait until the next cloud covers the moon.”

It takes a long time for the next cloud to crest the waning moon.

“I don’t think we should do this,” I say for the hundredth time.

“Hand me the wire clippers,” he says as he crouches by the compost.

He’s stressed, but tonight I’m more irritated than mad. He’s planning we’ll steal from the Sunshine Community Garden to see what it feels like to have to steal food to feed our family. He’s trying to finish his thesis on *Traveling People Culture and the Rise of the American Midwest*. It’s

stalled. He's been working on it for five years. When he finishes, he feels he will achieve the college professor equivalent of a union card, entrée into the Academy. I'm not so sure, but it doesn't help to say.

"The trouble with our culture—we're too placid." He rips some weeds from the chain link fence and tosses them to the side, but in a neat pile, like he does at home. "Too fat and lazy."

"Hey," I say.

"Not you," he says, but he pauses a second when he glances back. Then he re-focuses on the darkened garden behind the chain-link fence. "The Rom had to make their own way in this world. We should learn a lesson from them."

I'm quiet while the moon is unshielded again. When the cloud starts to cross, I suck in my breath. There is never a good time to say what I've planned to say.

"David, I have something to tell you."

He looks straight ahead and doesn't glance back. "Don't," he says.

We sit there in the blue-grey light with the blurred hum of the freeway in the distance. When we started out tonight, there were fireflies in the field

across the street. Now it's just night. If I don't say what I have planned to say, it's just a night. A regular night.

He said *don't*. So, for now, I don't.



It wasn't so long ago, really, that his brother Jake stayed with us. Nothing happened, no matter what David believes. But I can't control what David thinks.

There are other things I can't control, including the look of disappointment that crosses his eyes before the still smile, before the enthusiastic "Congratulations" at my every success. I've had a lot lately—whatever. More than my share? Is there some big measuring cup in the sky and if I take too much there won't be enough for others? Who knows. I think there should be a big universal metronome that shifts the balance of success back and forth between husband and wife, keeping married partners unified and satisfied. But if there is one, it doesn't work right, and the only way I've found to maintain a semblance of balance is to keep my mouth shut.

What I don't tell him: while my little graphic design business continues with steady clients, more and more I am selling my art. Initially, he chuckled when I put three consignments up at the local coffee shop. One was of a coffee mug with some spilled grounds on the counter. When it sold, he scoffed: of course that's going to sell in a *coffee* shop. Since then, I don't mention when they sell. I just quietly take in another painting, then another, and more. Can I help it? They sell.



At the garden, after I hand David the wire clippers, he tries to make a cut at the bottom, but it's harder than he expected, and he writhes the clippers around and around the wire, trying to get a good grip and pry it apart.

“I think if you actually turn the clippers and cut from the edge—” I say.

He gives me a hard stare.

I take in a breath. “Don't go straight, like scissors. Angle it—use the edge.”

“Do you want to be in charge of this?” he asks without dropping his stare. Those same eyes I know are hazel, but they look dark in the night.

“No,” I say.

“Because if you want to be in charge, be my guest.” He holds out the clippers and jerks his chin to me like a high school football coach giving a player a silent signal.

“This is your project,” I say. It’s late, very late, and the grass is now completely wet with dew. It soaks through my jeans as I kneel.

“Is it?”

“David. I was just trying to help.”

“I can do it myself.”

I don’t say: Then why am I here? Instead, I quietly say, *I’m sorry*. He turns back to the fence. After a moment, he holds the tool as I suggested, and before long has clipped out a small opening.



When my daughter Caitlyn is home from school, she sometimes joins me in my art studio, which is really just two easels in a corner of the spare

bedroom. Though only in first grade, already she has a method. As we're setting up the easels, we chat, but when she starts to draw, I've learned to respect the silence. If I start to talk, she says, "In a minute, Mommy. Right now it's in my head." This is how I know that she has it, too, and respecting the silence is something she has taught me.



When David removes the portion of the fence and says, "Go ahead," I hesitate.

Unexpectedly, he smiles then, and this time it's a smile I remember from long ago. He reaches out to brush the hair from my cheek, and I'm flooded with a sudden longing for a night long ago, many nights, any night, how many nights he touched my cheek in the dark. I take his hand and hold it to my face. Close my eyes.

"Hey," he says. "It's okay, sweetheart." He rubs my cheek gently with the back of his fingers. "We'll get through this."

I think of how we first started, how we'd talk until dawn on that little fire escape overlooking the city. The way we slept in a single bed, and I

would close my eyes and tuck my head into his chest, and feel his arms surround me. The nights, many nights, we sat out on the front porch of our first little house, listening to the rain on the roof, on the street, in the dim light, holding hands.

I open my eyes, and he's watching me. How I wish we were lying on the ground in our own backyard, or our backyard from years ago, any of many backyards, before everything had tumbled down these rambled paths and led us so far away from where we started that it's like a maze to get back.

Suddenly, I want to believe. I lie flat on my stomach in the wet grass and army-crawl through the hole.



There's a memory I allow myself. Once in a while. When Caitlyn is at school, and my art pauses as it does, I remember how it felt to have Jake's hands so near to mine. I shouldn't feel that way about any man—especially the brother of my husband. And yet.

When he first came to stay with us, after his own private catastrophe David explained away as a mid-life thing—the leaving of the wife, the relocation from states away (the miles being what David said had kept them apart)—and left us never really knowing this brother, even over the years. Until one morning when he showed up at our door via airport taxi with a large duffel and a long story that David didn't really want to give him a platform to share. I felt badly David was so rude, and perhaps that's why I made the second pot of coffee on the second day when David finally left for work. Perhaps that's the reason I encouraged him to talk.

When he did talk, his was a story of heartbreak, as many are. Two people, falling out of love at mid-age. It's sad, terribly sad. Especially when it happens to you.

What happened is he told the story, and later he mentioned the easel in the corner of the spare bedroom where he stayed. What happened is he asked if I was an artist. "No," I said. "I just like to draw. And paint." He asked to see my work. Over the next few days, he asked me to get more from the closet, then from the corner of the attic. He asked me about colors and lines. He asked me to take him to town so he could see my art on the walls of the coffee shop, and he congratulated me when he saw the prices in little placards on the side. He said, "You should be very proud."

What happened is after the coffee shop, when I got home, he asked if he could feel my art. It was a crazy thing to ask, and a crazy thing to do. But, we went upstairs. He sat on the edge of the bed, and I could feel him watching me.

I stood with my back to him, facing the sketch pad. For a long time, I was too distracted to draw, even in the silence. It was a complicated silence, like in a church. Then finally it came to me, a tree, a simple tree, the firm straight lines of the trunk, the curving swoop of the hollow, the wisps and motions of the leaves. When he joined me, mirroring me, it caught me at first but after a moment I didn't remember he was there at all, and the strength of the image in my mind's eye carried me, my hand acting on its own, shaping, shading, adding lines, curves, my fingers speaking to the page in a way I can never anticipate. And it emerged before me: a tree. I felt myself breathe again and I hadn't realized I'd been holding it in.

And then I noticed his hand was still over mine. He was close, but yet he didn't touch. I could feel his breath on my neck. I walked quickly from the room.



The garden in the dark is more beautiful than I expected, a continuum of raised beds separated by a brick path, and the leaves are tangled and gray blue in the night. Each bed seems to have its own personality, some wild and seemingly overgrown, some neat and orderly, some vines clinging to fences to make the most of the small space. A few boxes have little signs—family names, I realize, when I get up close. A few have stone rabbits or bird houses on a pole. One has a cement star with a child’s handprint. It’s wrong that we are stealing, but double, triple wrong we are stealing from children. “This is wrong,” I say to David, under my breath but he hears.

“That’s the point,” he says. “We have to trespass in order to see how it feels to trespass. We have to steal in order to see how it feels to steal.” He pauses. “We will see how it feels to betray.”

There’s that word again: betray. I pretend to not hear it. “It seems like if we really want to recreate the experience, we should do this in the daylight while people are here.”

He says in a measured tone, “This will suffice.”

The eggplant and squash and peppers are indistinguishable in the darkness.

“I don’t feel comfortable,” I say, “I don’t like this.”

He sighs, loudly. “Can’t you ever support me?”

“I do support you,” I say. “I want you to finish your thesis—I’ve helped research online.”

“I need hands on experience,” he says.

“Can’t you just interview someone?” I say.

He turns from me. “That’s not the point.”



The next day, with Jake, we were quiet with each other, almost shy. Though we didn’t do anything wrong. He never touched me, I told myself.

It was the same type of morning I’d been having. He’d been there nearly a week, at that point. David had left for work and after I put Caitlyn on the bus, I went for my run. When I got back, the house was quiet. I went upstairs to shower—same as usual. Though these last few days, Jake was in the kitchen or the living room, somewhere to say “hi” when I returned. I tried not to think of it. Normal, normal. I turned on the water, stepping in. Washing my hair, letting the suds slide down my body, Washing

my body, taking my time, turning off the water, stepping out, toweling myself off, normal, normal. It didn't surprise me to hear a knock at the door. I didn't move quickly, but deliberately. I pulled the towel around my middle, tucking it in over my chest. I brushed back my hair, dark and sleek in the fog of the mirror. Then I opened the door.

Jake was there. He looked at my eyes and nowhere else. "Can I play you a song I wrote?" he said.

I held his gaze. "I'd prefer to put on my robe."

I shut the door. Right now, I was still okay—but I didn't know how each action would cascade when I opened the door. I put on the robe.

When I opened the door, he turned down the hall, and my stomach lurched as I followed him. Had I just agreed?

In the spare bedroom, he had already taken the yellow comforter from the bed and laid it out on the floor. As I entered the room, he closed the door behind me and discreetly clicked the lock. My head felt light, dizzy. "Let's sit," he said.

He sat down cross-legged on one side of the blanket and I across from him, trying to keep the robe covering me. He smiled, a fluttery

glimpse in the scruff of his unshaven face, and I thought he was nervous, too. He patted his guitar.

“I found this in a second hand shop in Boise,” he said as he pulled the guitar onto his lap. “They call it a cowboy guitar. I bought it on impulse, because it was so pretty. Quilted maple.” He turned it so I could see the wood on the bulbous frame that looked like a curvy version of a regular guitar. It was beautiful, a luminescent gold with amber ripples that caught the light as he angled it. “But I grew up on rosewood,” he said. “That’s more mellow. Maple is a harder wood. Louder, brighter.” He settled the guitar on his lap and moved his fingers along the frets without strumming. “You can’t always plan what you want.” He met my eye. “I learned that.”

He tapped a spot and motioned me to place my fingertips on the front of the guitar. As he started to strum I closed my eyes and felt the vibrations of the chords through the wood, slowly at first, the movement of the music braising my fingertips, a slow arc that then skittered down the frets. The reverberations moved through my fingers, my body until he ended on a lone chord that trailed into quiet.

I opened my eyes. He didn’t touch me. He didn’t hold me. He only nodded and looked away.



In the blue moonlight, the vegetables look dark and smooth. I pick an eggplant, its vine leaving little pin pricks in my fingers.

“There,” I say. “I’ve stolen. Can we go?”

“You haven’t had the full experience yet,” David says. “You haven’t been turned against.”

His words tumble in my brain, dance, line up, fall down again. I feel a headache coming on.

“David,” I say, “I think the point is—what would we do if our family was hungry? Truly hungry. We can’t replicate that—we have a refrigerator full of food at home, and we know it. We don’t have the same need.”

When he speaks his voice is rough. “You have no idea what I need.”

I swallow. It may happen right now, right here, in this dark garden.

“David—” I start.

Suddenly a glare of light floods the space. Everything is hazy green under a bright white orb.

“Stay where you are, you two!” says a male voice. I turn to see an older man in a straw hat. “I’ll call the police!” My heart leaps to my throat.

David raises his hands like the cops are already here, pointing guns. “Sir, please let me explain.”

“No explaining necessary—I caught you red-handed!”

I’m holding the stupid eggplant. David’s hands are empty. I walk over to the raised bed and nestle it back down into the leaves.

“Don’t touch another thing,” the man shouts at me. “Stay where you are!”

“Annie—seriously!” David scowls at me. Then he turns to the man. “I’m sorry, sir. Things have gotten a little out of control. If you’ll allow me to explain.” He pauses, and the man doesn’t respond. “I’m an associate professor at WCC—”

“You work at the community college?” says the man.

“Yes, sir. I do.”

The man seems at a loss for a moment. We all stand in the moonlight, that goes dark with a cloud, then bright again. “Well what on earth is a college professor—especially a *community* college professor—doing robbing a *community* garden?”

David smiles. "It's a funny story," he says. He gestures his arm to me. "I'm here with my wife." I raise my hand and smile. "I'm David Hamilton, and this is my wife, Anne." He takes a couple of steps toward me so that he can loop his arm in mine, like we are just on a merry stroll. "Sir, if you'd allow us to explain, perhaps you could even help."

That seems to break through. We all end up on green folding chairs in the little garden shed/admin building, and David explains his research project. He tells about the Traveling People, or Rom, and tells how there is a wide prejudice against them, though the nomadic lifestyle was not a choice but really a consequence of being forbidden in many places from owning land. The man nods earnestly.

David taps his fingers together, makes a triangle. "I'm passionate about the subject, sir, you see, because my great grandmother Lucille was a Rom traveler."

I glance at the clock above the desk with the man. 2:15. I am not sure about the Grandma Lucille story. The story came about with the research. I say a silent thanks that my sister is spending the night tonight with Caitlyn while we're on this mission, though I hope she doesn't notice what time we come in.

“Their skills, their wealth—it all had to be portable. Not attached to the land,” David says. “Take metallurgy, for example. This is why the Rom were often skilled in metal-working, and horse trading. And basket making, for that matter.” He lifts his hands. “What I hope to achieve in this dissertation,” he says, leaning in, voice rising, “is to show the prejudices against the culture, and how a culture may take these prejudices and actually turn them around as part of its own evolution.” He glances over at me. “And the flip side, the cruel irony of how it can happen that you can *actually become* what people expect of you.” He slaps the desk with this last point.

I sink back into my chair.

The man clears his throat, and nods slowly. “My mother had some experiences with gypsies as well, when she was a child out in Minnesota.”

“Rom,” David says.

“What’s that?” the man says.

“Rom. They prefer to be called Rom.”

The man opens his hands on the desk, toward David. “Maybe you could meet with her sometime. She’s over at St. Luke’s home, but I’m sure

she'd love to talk to you." He pauses. "An interview, of sorts. That kind of information would likely help your project."

David stares at the man. I can feel the tension rising off his arm. He's on the cusp of saying something irreversible—I know it. It's happened before. I reach out and touch his arm, and he jolts.

"Sir," I say to the man, my voice hollow-sounding and too high-pitched in the small room with the concrete floor, "Please forgive our intrusion. If there is any way we could put this behind us..."

The man nods. "If you do talk to my mother, that would probably mean a lot to her, to be able to share her experiences."

"We certainly will," I tell the man as I take the number he recites.

As we walk out, I loop my arm through David's, and walk this way the mile home. He doesn't hold me back, but he doesn't pull away, either. He lets me hold him. I wish I wanted to hold him.



The day after Jake's guitar, I returned to my easel, ready to transfer my tree drawing from the sketch pad to a canvas. The air felt heavy, like a storm, or

a ghost. I picked up my pencil and began to sketch the image I had created. But I couldn't work. I just stood there with the image.

That night, when David returned from work, he told Jake to leave, to pack his things and go—not even stay for dinner, just go. Jake didn't argue. He left David standing out on the deck and walked right past me in the kitchen. I put a cartoon on for Caitlyn, who was so shocked at the grown-ups that she quickly obeyed, and then I followed Jake up the stairs to the spare room. For a brief moment, I didn't care who knew what or what happened next or what anyone would think. I couldn't believe I'd only known this man for a few weeks and yet it felt like a part of me was being ripped away. As he started putting his clothes into his duffel, I reached out and touched his arm.

He turned to me. "We shouldn't touch," he said. And yet all I wanted was to touch him, to fall into him. I didn't move my hand from his arm, and he didn't move, either. "Unless you come with me," he said. "I want you to come with me. And bring Caitlyn."

It was insane, *insane*. To walk out the front door and leave the whole house and all the clothes and toys and pots and pans and art supplies and college yearbooks and winter boots. And yet, I could.

Still, my husband. I didn't not love my husband. I didn't feel the same energy, the same sweet thrill at his proximity—this was true. It was also true that we were in a rough patch—yes, yes, the worst yet. But I did care for him, and we had a life together. I had a life, I understood suddenly, that I was not ready to leave. It was too much, for all I felt, *Jake* was too much. I was scared of how I felt. All the reasons to stay, all the reasons to be safe. I took my hand from his arm.

“Oh, Annie.” He breathed out. “You’re killing me,” he said. He seemed to deflate right in front of me, become smaller.

“Be well,” I said. It was true, what I hoped for him. But I meant so much more.

He looked at me one last time with his shadowed eyes. “Yeah. You too.”



The days continue. So do the nights. When I lie awake in bed with my eyes closed, sometimes I think of him, remembering how it felt to be asked about my work, how it felt to have someone want to know me. I didn't

realize how much I was craving it until I had it. You can have houses, clothes, All-Clad pans, but come to find out it's this one simple thing: to be known. When I think of him, I have to be careful to keep my face blank, because if I smile my husband will ask what I'm thinking about. And I don't want to lie.

So, it becomes my secret in this world. Someday, maybe I will want to burst out, maybe I will want to shatter this family and have a man who makes my heart sing or my own gallery for my art or both. But I have to kill something precious to get those things and it's still just on a chance. I'm not yet ready to kill. So, I will continue and continue and continue, until one day I will tip one way or another. This I have learned: balance between twin desires is unsustainable.



Tonight, returned from the garden venture, David clomps upstairs and leaves me alone in the kitchen, alone to lock up, turn the lights off. I do.

The house is dark and we both undress and climb into bed without words. He turns away from me, toward the darkened window with no

shades pulled down tonight and I don't get up to fix it. I climb into my side of the bed and lay flat, my hands folded on my stomach.

“David?” I whisper it.

In the silence I wish I had someone to comfort me. I wish actually that I had David to comfort me, but the old David, the one who kept me up until dawn, talking, the one who first encouraged my art.

I reach over and tuck my body in behind his, curl my knees behind his knees, loop my arm under his arm, press my chest against his back. Years ago, he would have pulled me tight to him, or rolled onto his back and gathered me in.

“What?” he whispers.

To hear his voice startles me. What could I tell him? To say that I am in love with someone else suddenly seems foolish and not at all true. Could I tell him that I want my husband back—the one from years ago, our first little house? Or that I understand suddenly how fragile it all is? That I understand now that tonight can never be just another night?

I don't answer. Instead, I pull my body closer to his. My head pounds, my heart aches. I press my forehead to his back, kiss between his shoulder blades. I wrap my arm around his chest and hold him close, and this time

he pulls my arm tighter around him, covers my hand with his, and I know that sleep won't come tonight, but now this feels like a small gift. I'm not ready yet to face the other side of this moment. And yet I know that morning will come—grey light is already leaking over the horizon, behind the darkened trees. For tonight, these last few minutes or hours, I close my eyes and hold on.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennifer Kircher Carr is a fiction writer whose work is published in numerous literary journals, including *Prairie Schooner*, *North American Review*, *Hobart*, *Monkeybicycle*, *Jellyfish Review*, *Alaska Quarterly*, *Ghost Parachute*, and *The Nebraska Review*, where she also won the Fiction Prize. Her work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, and she holds an MFA from Emerson College. She is currently working on a novel and a collection of linked fiction, which includes this story.

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