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Bandroom

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BANDROOM

For Ben Peloquin

I don't know, I guess it could have been anything we saw.

Megan, me and David were waiting outside the bandroom for our parents to pick us up. We'd always tell them to come a little later, so we could hang out there, talking. The bandroom was the west-most building on campus, and we were waiting there after seven-thirty, so the sun was already starting to set over Swickard Park, past the old Catholic church where Megan's family used to pray. I went there once with Megan, and the priest had me cross myself with holy water. Megan looked at me wide-eyed, and I did it to be respectful. Later, at Megan's graduation party, I saw that the priest had marked his beer cup with a drawn-on crucifix.

The three of us had just returned from a mock-trial tournament in the city. David and me played defense attorneys for this young guy who stabbed a videogame sales clerk with a screwdriver because he was so affected by the resolution of a videogame. Or something like that. We argued about it all day, David and me, but we were so unprepared that we were humiliated mostly. Megan played bailiff. She always liked to play it safe. Never liked to take her chances.

Once a few years ago—we've been married almost twenty years—I came home and found Megan pulling black curly hairs from the sheets in our bed. She was alarmed when she saw me, embarrassed a little. She looks so cute when she gets nervous. She couldn't find the vacuum but she knew I was allergic to dogs (the Garcia kids still like to bring over their black Labrador). I told her I wasn't really that allergic but she insisted we play it safe and let her finish with the black hairs. I was just wondering why she would let a dog in our bedroom, or in our bed. We like to shut the door when guests come over.

We were waiting for our parents when David pointed out to the pond built between the bandroom and old 161. The city built it thinking they could create both a practical and aesthetically unobtrusive flood drain. Maybe it was practical; I'm not sure. There was a radiator on the

north side of the pond so loud that students wouldn't congregate there. Couldn't hear one another talking.

David said, "There's an animal or something in the water." He was rubbing his stomach slowly with one hand like he always did. He had a beard (the first in our class) and he wore a dark colored tee shirt celebrating any one of the thousand 'stick it to the man' metal bands that came to represent that tragic and wonderfully bygone era in American music. He had removed his hat.

Megan said, "I saw it too." She had on my favorite boots of hers. Her October boots, she said. I said I'd go check.

I approached the water slowly. It was getting dark and had started to rain, so I couldn't see too well, but the water wasn't stirring like it should have been if David and Megan saw a man-size anything swimming around. That's the first thing I noticed, that right after they saw it I couldn't see the water stirring. If there were something, I would have seen the water stirring. I would have seen it.

I've never been quite sure what happened next. Megan said I was going crazy from paranoia. What happened is I walked up to the water and Megan and David stayed behind. David said be careful and I was careful, approaching the water slow and all, like you're supposed to when you're not sure. I wanted to appear bolder than David, so Megan could see. We had been dating only a few weeks at that point and she had met David at just about the same time as she met me. I was always wondering about those two, their natural compatibility, how they always laughed a lot together. When I got up to the water, I crouched down with my knees and waited for a few seconds, and finally, when I turned around, I swear what I saw was Megan in the final movements of pulling away from David's face, which—and I've never been quite sure here—she had been kissing moments prior.

Years later, after we got married, I asked Megan about it again. One more time, I said. She said it was nothing, that I was seeing things. Said it was raining hard—which it was—and that I was projecting my anxieties about David through the subconscious and into consciousness. When she said these things I didn't argue. She got her psychology degree from Hopkins.

When I saw them letting go of each other I turned to face the water again. I turned quickly, like how they taught us to pivot in marching band. I crouched down again with my knees and put my face low, to the water line, hearing the rain and the radiator. Looking out across the water, an orange moon beginning to materialize overhead, I could see mosquitoes scurrying in their angry blood-haze, and so far into the year, there in the final days of October.