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His Wife, Folded

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HIS WIFE, FOLDED

A man folded his wife into three sections, put them in his pocket and went walking by the sea. He touched her with his hand, which he kept in his pocket.

Occasionally he would take her out and hold her to his face, as if he were studying a picture from his wallet. Was the man cruel? No, he had often heard her say that she wanted to be something small that he carried in his pocket.

The wife thought that being folded into three sections was like having sisters. Like looking at herself in a mirror with three panels. True mirrors, not like the false ones that turn everything backwards.

As the sun was setting, the man took his wife out of his pocket. He built a little mound of sand. He scooped out a moat around it, and placed her on top like three cards on a table.

Sitting on the beach this way, his wife remembered her childhood by the lake: the wet sand in her fist, cold then warm; her tin bucket, blue with big white stars; her yellow shovel, its serious heft when she pried at the sand. The playfulness of foam touched her ankles like the lacy hem of a gigantic skirt. She could sit there forever.

Aware that she was in a private reverie, the man walked farther down the beach. He brought her here often, although he disliked the ocean. It was, as he once said to his wife, "too big." Perhaps next time he would place her in an envelope... address it to himself. She would like that.