

The Kid

The place for kids was alright. I mean, not just alright. It was pretty nice actually. All the children had their own rooms. Me, too. It was long and narrow, like a corridor, with doorjambs but no door in front and a window at the other end which looked out over a lawn with trees. There was a bed in the room and a closet for my clothes. Otherwise the room was completely bare. It was, nonetheless, always warm and cozy and comfortable.

Each of the boys' private rooms was arranged around a common room in the middle, which was also bare without any furniture, having only a cold tile floor which was no good for sitting on. In the morning, the kids would gather in the common room to play before breakfast. There weren't any toys, of course, but we jostled around with each other and pretended we were having fun.

Then a woman who was dressed up like a nurse, but I knew she wasn't really a nurse, would come into the common room and tell us, "Your parents are coming for you soon, so just wait for them. They will be here any day."

Most of the kids believed her, but I knew the nurse was lying. She said that just to keep us from running away. Our parents weren't coming back. They'd left us here to rot or, more charitably, with the hope that one day we would grow up and be able to make it on our own. Well, I wasn't going to wait.

One night, just after lights out, I put on my winter coat, grabbed my blanket from the bed, opened the window, and escaped.

At first I had no idea where I was going and even now no memory of how I found my old house. I just found it. It was on the main road leading north out of town. I stood on the sidewalk looking at it in the dark. No lights were on. The lawn was overgrown. The flowerbeds were filled with weeds.

I went to the front door. The doorbell didn't ring when I pressed it, so I knocked.

"Mom, Dad," I called out. "I'm hooooome!"

I waited for a reply, but there was no answer.

Again I knocked and cried out. Only silence.

I walked from the door to the window and looked in. The living room was completely bare with no furniture. I could see all the way into the dining room, which was also bare. The big table where we'd all eaten together, the same table we used to gather around for Thanksgiving dinner, was gone.

There was nothing to do but wait for them to come back. I lay down in the front lawn close to the sidewalk. In the gray of dawn it began to snow. I pulled the blanket over my head. After a while I could see feet through the folds in the blanket walking past me back and forth. It was morning. People were going to work. One set of feet paused. Whoever it was, was looking at me. But then the feet started walking again.

I was cold and shivering but vowed not to move until my parents returned.

More feet walked past me up and down the sidewalk. Then another set stopped. Someone reached down and touched me. I pulled the blanket away from my face and saw a young man standing over me.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"I'm fine," I said.

"Aren't you cold?"

"A little."

"Do you mind if I join you?"

I looked up at him quizzically.

He smiled. "It would help warm you up."

I lifted a corner of the blanket and the man slid inside beside me. His body was warm. We just lay

there together for a while not saying anything.

“Are you sure you’re all right?” the man asked again.

“I told you I’m fine,” I answered.

The man put his hand on my forehead.

“But you have a fever.”

“It’s nothing. I’m all right.”

“I am a doctor,” the man said. “I can help you.”

“I don’t need any help. For the last time, I’m really OK.”

We lay together in silence for a while more. Then the doctor said abruptly, “They’re not coming back, you know.”

“Yes, they are,” I replied. But I knew the doctor was right.

“Let me take you back.”

“No, I’m going to wait for them.”

“How long will you wait?”

“Forever, if I have to.”

A moment later the doctor pulled the blanket off himself and stood up. “Why don’t you come with me? We can find a place that’s warm and cozy and comfortable for you to sleep.”

I just lay there staring up at the falling snow. He nudged me. I rolled over away from him. He nudged me again. Slowly I pulled myself up and then there I was, standing beside him on the sidewalk.

“Let’s go,” the doctor said.

I picked up my blanket and followed. I have no memory of how we got back to the place for kids. We just did.

When we arrived we found that the building was no longer there. It had burned to the ground during the night. All that remained were smoldering ashes. There was no one there. The nurse had fled. The kids had scattered, with no place to go.

The doctor grabbed my arm and squeezed it.

“I’m sorry to leave you here,” he said. “But it’s the best I can do.”

Then he turned and hurried away, leaving me standing alone in front of what used to be the only place I could call home.

I made two resolutions at that point. The first was to find a warm and cozy and comfortable place to sleep. The second was to become a baseball player when I grew up.