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Slipping Away from Superman

MINDY WOLF-TAYLOR

There are fathers who excuse themselves from the family room, the den or the bathroom where their children make beards of bubbles in the tub. Bowing slightly, they back out of these rooms so quietly that their wives and children never know. Our father backed out of the TV room where we sat cross-legged watching Superman. We didn't need to turn our heads to see him because we knew he stretched his feet out behind us and filled the room with cigar smoke and the wisdom we might lay claim to if we lived long enough. When we next looked, he was gone. The slight indentation in the couch was rising ever so slightly, the lampshade quivered from his heavy footsteps (how had we not noticed?). An errand, we knew, could not feel so final. This felt final, like telling a friend who had wronged you that you'd never play with him again. Looking out the window, we saw heavy snow filling his tire tracks. Soon there would be no sign of his leave-taking, and we wanted signs, symbols of sorrow like empty drawers, open suitcases filled with clothes, hangers jangling in a chorus of loneliness or tire tracks, the last of his we might ever see, filling with snow. We wondered what one did when one was left behind. Tears would not come yet.

Superman was back. We couldn't help but turn away from the window to watch as Lois Lane moved from holding Superman's waist, his arm, his wrist, then only his finger, until she slipped and plunged into the blackness beneath the clouds, shrieking. We looked at each other and wondered what we'd have to do to earn that.