

REAL WRITER

My mother calls and tells me that my short story about the child left on the freeway has come true. that in Los Angeles, a mother and father did just that. left their three year old daughter on a freeway. and my mother is almost happy telling the story, as if I knew something deep and important by writing that story before the real story happened. and how did I know that parents did things like that. like deserting their little girl on a freeway. how did I know. how did I predict the future. and maybe, she says, you're a witch, a psychic, or a real writer after all.

ITCH

She had an itch. It was in the middle of her back. A place she couldn't reach. She tried. She couldn't reach it. It was 12:00 a.m. A Friday. They were in bed, under the sheet, watching a talk show with the lights off. The man was laughing at the talk show. at the host. The host was talking about a fat woman in a red bikini on Malibu beach. how fat the woman was. how offended by her fat the host was. how every man on the beach was offended by the woman's fat.

Why? the man asked. Why would she wear that. you wouldn't wear a red bikini, not now, would you?

My back. she said, I have an itch. right here. And she had her arm twisted behind her. was pointing to the middle of her back where the itch was. saying, right here, scratch it. ooh, please. right here.

I'm watching television. the man said. This guy's funny, I want to watch him.

Please. the woman said, scratch it. I'm itching.

And the man said, No. No, the man said.

SWEET

On Sundays my step-father made his baked spaghetti. It was a bland, dry dish that he was very proud of. Had he seen my mother at the counter with her plate of food. with her sugar packet ripped open. with the sugar on top of his dish like a white hill. with her fork mixing the sugar into his carefully spiced tomato sauce. he would have been incensed.

I discovered her there at the counter. like a guilty girl.

and until that moment, no one had known her secret, or if anyone knew, he or she didn't mention it. Her behavior with sugar was her private habit, like the blue and yellow pills she took to keep her awake and thin, and she wanted no one, not even me, to find her out. I did the right thing when I returned to the dining room table with the can of cheese and looked at my brother and step-father blankly, not uttering a word about what I had seen.

Within time, my reward became apparent; my mother grew comfortable around me, and sugared her food, her beef, her baked chicken, her salad dressings, easily and often, secure that I would not judge her, secure in knowing that I lived there too, that I understood the sweetness she needed was necessary.

— Lisa Glatt

New York NY

THE APPLE

I played the Cagney prison scene
with my son.

We were in the auditorium
of a former mental institution,
turned medium security prison.
We sat at card table A-5,
ate junk from vending machines
and played double solitaire.

I left prison with an apple
shrink-wrapped in plastic.
Are naked apples dangerous?
Should prisoners be protected
from that wet, sweet juiciness?

I put the apple on my mantle
where it stayed for two months.
It rotted very slowly
without smelling
or attracting gnats.

I could have kept it longer
but the metaphors
disgusted me.