

Seeds

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For the longest time we had wanted him desperately and in the worst way: wanting and wanting, nonstop and from as far back as we could recall. Then when he finally came to us, and loomed at the door, we had the smallest reversal in our thoughts. Well, we thought, maybe we didn't want him all *that* badly. He might have been our father, but all the same there was the undeniable fact of his extreme physical repugnance.

He stood there making a noise.

However, uncertain as we were of our position after all this time, we felt duty-bound. And really what else was there to do? We asked him in. Dad was here suddenly, out of the blue, and we must be proud and we must be happy. Hey! we said to each other excitedly, great! It's Dad! He entered the house to the sound of our many voices lifted in a chord of welcome.

How was it out there? We asked.

Well, he said, it wasn't what I expected.

General happiness amounting almost to a riot broke out when Dad spoke these first words. It wasn't the words themselves or their intelligence so much as it was the historical sound of his voice in our ears. To hear it made us crazy with gladness.

I'm not saying it was easy, Dad said.

At this we became grave, though still feeling the sunshine of his presence.

But sometimes, he said, you've got to put your shoulder to the wheel.

Dad weighed over 400 pounds.

Would you like some fruit? We asked. But he demurred with a wave of his hand. Dad was wearing shorts and a T-shirt and he said: Hungry though. Goddammit I'm hungry.

Ah, of course, we thought, a meal! How utterly apropos! Some steak or liver and onions for the Big Man? Perhaps something in the line of a moderm carbohydrate?

One of us went to prepare the food, while the others gathered round Dad and held various parts of him in our warm, moist grips. Dad seemed to like this, for he smiled broadly. His breath went out of him all at once and his legs fell apart as he relaxed. One of us peeked over his shoulder for a look at Dad's parts where they lay along his thigh. The report that filtered back described a fairly low profile, proportionately speaking, but this didn't sway us in the least or incline us in any way to negative feelings. If there's one thing he drummed into us it's the stupidity of judging- of the act itself and its inevitable harvest of tears and sorrow.

We're an open, loving family although maybe a little bit clannish in our ways.

Dad said, Hey! What a wowzer of a meal! And we swelled—I confess it—with pride as we served him. Expertly we set down plates of steak and liver and rice, attaching a napkin to his neck while we outfitted his hands with a large knife and fork. Behind a curtain of steam we could soon discern these utensils spinning with the smooth, continuous motion of a lathe.

After several minutes we asked a question over the roar. Dad, we said, what are you going to do with your life now? He stopped suddenly looking up at us with his mouth open. There was meat inside it. There were bits of meat sticking also to his hair. Huh? He said, can't you see I'm chowing down?

Dad was ours—for keeps in the universe. No one else had our Dad and it surrounded everything he did with light. We basked in the light. We drew the light to ourselves and looked through it at one another. We could never be upset too long if Dad was around. True, we hung our heads for a moment, abashed at the grossness of our interruption, but as Dad resumed eating with gusto and began soon to make shouting noises, attacking his food, we experienced the realest access of pride in ourselves and our hearts were enlarged with a rare emotion.

No doubt prompted by these feelings, a particularly young and pretty one of us jumped to her feet to fetch Dad a bottle of wine- a move which was greeted by us with huzzahs and light, sustained applause. When she returned she *did* have some small difficulty in attracting Dad's attention, but this was solved through the expedient of an extremely loud noise made close to his ear. We stood on tiptoes, craning our necks, uncertain how he would react to this second interruption and admittedly a little nervous. But Dad took it in stride, trouper that he was, and made motions with his shiny fingers that we should indeed pour for him.

In this manner and amid assorted festal and hydraulic noises, the meal drew on. After approximately one hour Dad's motions slowed, then subsided altogether. Instantly we gathered round to clear the plates and attend to him. But at this point we could contain our curiosity no longer and burst forth with an impassioned volley of questions that shot like humorous, zig zagging rockets across the room. One of the younger ones started it, by saying excitedly; Were you happy all that time away? Another one joined in quickly with, Do all children love their Dads as much as we do? And then another: How did you stay so young-looking? And then another, boldly: What made you return to us now?

It was only after the hoopla had dwindled just a little that we perceived that Dad was in fact deeply asleep and not about to answer our questions at all. What dopes we were! Of *course* a man would want to sleep after a meal of that size. Being just generally overeager and furthermore unable to perceive his eyes, we had "jumped the gun."

Imagine our consternation!

But we took good advantage of the lull to confer among ourselves, quickly deciding our agenda. Six of us lifted him from the chair in which he sat, detaching him in stages from the heated vinyl. We then unbent him slowly flat in the air while two more of

us removed his clothing. Every living thing has a smell and Dad did too. He lay outspread along the platter of our hands clad only in a soiled undergarment. One of the girls essayed a humorous comment but was hushed with a burning look: this is no bystander, woman, this is a father!

Shuffling across the room we gently deposited Dad in a nearby bed. Although this bed then experienced some difficulties in the support area, we were not deterred. One by one the legs of the appliance gave way explosively until only one remained near his head—a configuration which left Dad lying at an angle reminiscent of burial-at-sea. This thought occurred to us simultaneously and one of us was instantly dispatched for a heavy sledge, with which the offending leg was smashed.

Dad then lay comfortably prone and deeply asleep. His breath went in, then out—smoothly, we were reassured to hear. His vital signs were likewise assured by the periodic apparition of a giant bubble of spittle on his lips. Dad broke wind expressively and for several minutes at a time. Meanwhile the women finished clearing his plates and utensils and mopping the area near where he had sat while the older men held a pow-wow over the sudden astonishing appearance of Dad in our life.

The chief reaction consequent upon Dad's arrival was a simple one: surprise. To those who had never seen him before this was understandable. Others had simply forgotten what he looked like. To another faction Dad's appearance was the occasion for their disbelief that he *could* look like that—that he was physically able.

These opinions were expressed with great zest and vividness, many of them involving abrupt motions of the hands and clusterings of the muscles of the face such as were never before seen by us.

Following hard on this interim period, the real work was begun: an impassioned debate as to what sort of group emotion should be presented to Dad when he awoke. Several of the more modern thinkers were inclined towards something heavily weighted with candor: a value-neutral approach stressing the quid pro quo of it: You're here finally So what? Fortunately these firebrands were suppressed by cooler heads, who rejected anything so confrontational out of hand. Also briefly of small popularity were those advocates of an individualistic response to Dad, in which each person went his or her own way and the devil take the hindmost. But this too was finally seen as counterproductive. Because what, after all, about *us*?

Let's tickle him, piped one of the little ones before clutching himself with laughter. After which, all of us were treated to the sound of his flesh being violently impressed in the next room.

During all this time, in the very center of a discussion that occasionally gave way to near-pandemonium and in a room filling rapidly with the thick spiraling clouds of our many cigarettes, Dad slept on, undisturbed.

I have been outside, he said suddenly in a level voice. Instantly the room was still. I have been outside and seen what is there, he said. Light fell continuously. I wore a coat. People helped me ahead. Gradually I entered the modern world. It was warmer there. But

nobody knew me. I passed quickly through—alone but unembittered. Once I saw myself: hands, eyes. But none of this mattered because I was outside. I gave myself to compacts dimly written and undecipherable. In faltering light I read the ancient language. By degrees I recalled the mix of the forms. Then with the mouth of a bird I spoke to the shape of summer. And in the muscle of a horse I found the site of my passion.

All of this, said Dad, obviously refreshed from his sleep and his meal, and for no other reason than love. Love! arising from within and without. Love! touching every living thing without lapse or falter. O my children behold a steady-state of love! A love of particles equally a love of lengths! Passage of the spirit and body-as love! This is my message! You must never forget it!

A signal went through us, something like a shiver. Everyone showed their tiny sets of teeth and hissed. Then as one, moving from every corner of the room, we gathered round Dad in a circle, stepped forward, and began.