

*Unbending*

Daniel placed a spoon in front of us, just out of reach. The kitchen table was mottled with orange peels from breakfast, stacks of dirty cereal bowls. It seemed the whole house was in piles. The sink was choked with dishes, mail spread over the counters, trash put on the floor around the can. The laundry room was too full to use, so we had quit changing clothes.

No, he said, musty in week-old pajamas. You do it with your brain. Think it. Then we were quiet, and I did what he did. I stared at the spoon.

We left the table only for more oranges, or to refill on cereal. Sometime that afternoon, it happened. The fat end of the spoon curled up. After hours more, the opposite end. Soon, Daniel could make the top of the spoon curl around to touch the bottom. Soon, he could bend a whole one.

When we told him, Dad wiped the sweat from his forehead with his coat-sleeve. He smelled like sawdust and it was mixed in his curly hair. He didn't say anything, but turned and put his measuring tape to the cereal bowls.

When we showed him the first bent spoon, looking away, he said, You finally did it. When we pointed to the pile of bent spoons, he was already sizing up an umbrella. Squinting to discern its length, he asked us, Was this hers? Daniel offered to give him a live demonstration. Fourteen and three eighths, fourteen and three eighths, Dad recited, walking back to the garage.

The way the spoons shriveled up reminded me of how the leaves looked when Daniel and I put them in the microwave a summer before—before the smoke, before Dad caught us and grabbed us by the backs of our shirts. Before the talk about how smoke was bad for Mom, before she stopped getting out of bed. Before the, Don't you want her to get better?

Dad had been memorializing strange things since then, and the house was a wholesale of wooden boxes, picture frames, altars. On our mantle, a pine box fitted to hold pens rescued from Mom's purse. A walnut display for Mom's toothbrush caulked to

the bathroom wall. Dangling from the porch roof, a wind-chime made of ladies' shoes from Mom's closet. It clopped when the breeze pushed through.

After we bent all the spoons, we started on the butter knives, then the forks. It wasn't until Dad came back with the encased umbrella that he noticed.

Enough, he said. He choked on his words as if they were in a pile, unboxed, somewhere in his throat. It's not healthy. His hair was full of dust. There are stages in the process, he said, but this isn't one of them. He went back to the garage wiping his eyes with dusty sleeves. Back to cutting and sanding, while Daniel and I set to work, unbending spoons for Dad.

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