

Terrarium

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Although she never took care of it herself, Hanna sure loved that little fur ball. Why we bought a live rabbit for a five-year-old instead of a plush toy I still couldn't understand. Olivia said it would be good for the family, for us to take care of something, to share in the responsibility, that it would keep the kids busy while we were trapped together with them inside the house. After a week, it was Olivia who was the only one who took care of it—cleaned the cage, fed it twice a day, made sure it had enough clean water to drink. I knew the kids weren't old enough to care for another living thing. Chase was barely old enough to take care of himself, and Hanna, as I reminded Olivia several times, was only five. But, like most things, I was outvoted. She always did seem to have the majority; our kids were her loyal little pledged delegates.

Naturally, when Olivia found it dead in the corner of its cage this morning when she went to feed it, it fell on me to dispose of the body. And since the kids were home all day every day because of the state-mandated lockdown, I couldn't very well just bury it in the backyard. Besides, I was almost certain Chase would end up uncovering the grave while building some battle scene for his plastic army men. Our backyard was dotted with foxholes and bomb craters he'd dug up with

an old snow shovel after I mindlessly gave him permission to use it. At least he wasn't allowed to play in the front yard and it wasn't as if we would be having guests back there anytime soon.

I thought about putting it in a trash bag, one of those heavy-duty ones I used for leaves, and leaving it on the curb, but I'd heard the town was considering doing trash collection only twice a month soon due to layoffs and I wasn't sure if they had already made it official. I couldn't risk it sitting out there for more than a week, roasting each day in the hot sun, crows and turkey vultures pecking at the bag. I guess I could have double-bagged, even triple-bagged, it and maybe sealed it with a roll of duct tape. But Olivia suggested the new animal hospital over by the country club, how they could take care of it, so I headed over there after I had my coffee and cruller in my second-gen Buick Enclave, a corporate lease.

The girl at reception had to be nineteen, twenty at most. Reminded me a little of Olivia before the kids; short, curly blonde hair, big green eyes, thin but not sickly like those lingerie models on television or in the ads I always lingered over in men's magazines.

When I walked up to the counter and plopped the hard-sided carrier down next to the giant bottle of hand sanitizer, I could see that she had a big smile on her face, even though half of it was hidden behind her face mask.

"Hi, there," she said, cheerfully. "Can I have your name please?"

"Daniel Bishop."

"And who's this little fuzzy guy?" she asked, peering through the little steel-wire door.

"It's a girl and it's dead."

"Oh," she said, pulling back. "Uh ..."

"Would you be able to take care of this for me? I was told you do that kind of thing."

"Sorry, Mr., uh ... Bishop. I don't think we can take her." She stood there with her hands together as if she was about to say a prayer. I glanced past her to see if there was anyone else around who could help me, but she was the only one there.

"Why the hell not?" I asked, raising my voice slightly.

"Um ... our freezers are all full, unfortunately."

"What do you mean they're all full? How is that possible?"

"Well, there have been just so many dead pets this week. Like *too* many. It's been really, really hard. Like every day someone comes in with a carrier like this, and I get all excited to see them 'cause I love pets, you know? And then I

look inside and they're just like ... so dead."

"Okay? So what am I supposed to do with this?"

"I can give you the number for the, uh ... pet crematory if you would like for her to be, uh ... cremated. Sorry if that's insensitive. They make me say that. I really hate it here."

"It's all right," I said, lifting the carrier off the counter. "I'll go somewhere else."

"Please don't cremate her," she said in a whisper.

"Excuse me?"

"Sometimes they wake up! They're not really dead!"

"Okay," I said, backing away. "Thanks for your help."

"She might still wake up. You never know. The vet doesn't even know sometimes."

I stopped and lifted the carrier up to meet my eyeline. Its eyes were still shut and it looked a little stiff. "I'm pretty sure it's dead."

"Ah!" she yelled, pushing away from the counter.

"What?"

"She moved! I saw it!"

"Miss, I think you're seeing things. You've just had a tough week."

"No, she moved! When you lifted the carrier."

"Like this?" I asked, jostling the carrier to demonstrate.

"Ah! She moved!" She pointed at the carrier, her skinny arm trembling above the counter. Her face was flush and her eyes pooled with tears. "She's alive! She's alive!"

"Okay. I'm leaving now." I turned and hurried toward the entrance.

"Don't cremate her!" she shouted behind me. "She's not really dead!"

I got back in my Buick and tossed the carrier onto the passenger seat. It bounced when it hit the leather, then turned over on its side. After I switched on the ignition and blasted the A/C, I pulled off my mask, hung it from the rearview mirror, and took a long breath. It felt good to breathe freely within the confines of the climate-controlled cabin, even if it did smell like sweat and old McDonald's french fries, which were rotting somewhere underneath the backseat alongside lollipops and Legos.

Everything seemed so serene from inside my Enclave. My company paid extra for an entire fleet of these new Buicks with something called acoustic laminated glass. It allowed for those of us in upper management to take calls

on the road without our clients being interrupted by car horns or sirens, for the most part. The tinted windows were an added bonus, made everything on the other side of the glass look dulled, almost trivial.

I waited there for a few more minutes, in the mostly empty parking lot, watching the other cars pass by on the avenue, letting the cold air waft over me, wondering where all these people could possibly be going in the middle of a pandemic.

My phone pinged in my pocket. It was Olivia. The text read:

"How's the bunny?"

I looked over at the carrier tilted over on its side.

"Still dead," I typed but stopped before hitting Send.

I reached over and lifted the carrier. The girl at reception had to be delusional. There was no way this thing was still alive.

I spun the carrier around so I could see through the wire door. Its eyes were still shut. I felt a shiver run up my arm, so I shut off the A/C. I looked at it again, that little ball of black and white fur with its big ears pinned back along the spine, that distinct thin white patch between its two eyes narrowed into slits. I tilted the carrier toward me, sliding the rabbit forward until its nose was pressed up against the wire door. Nothing. I tilted the carrier away from me until the rabbit's rear-end slid up against the back of the carrier. Still nothing.

Then I shook it, hard, bouncing that ball of fur up against the top of the carrier. Its claws scraped and clacked against the solid plastic, the same sound it made when it tried to dig its way through the bottom of the cage at home. I stopped shaking it and held the carrier door inches from my face. One of the narrow slits popped open. I hollered and dropped the carrier on the cup holder. It bounced back onto the passenger seat and then onto the floor.

I stared down at the hunk of plastic turned upside down and hesitated for a moment. If it was alive in there, it had to be some kind of miracle. I've heard of animals that could play dead, possums and whatnot, but I had never heard of any breed of rabbit that could do that. I took a breath and reached down and grabbed the carrier.

Slowly, I spun it around and peeked inside. The rabbit's eye was still open but it didn't look to be conscious. The other eye was still shut. I kept my gaze fixed on the rabbit's face while I dug my hand into my jeans pocket, feeling for my house keys. I held the carrier steady, careful not to tilt it even a little, as I slipped my keys from my pocket. I fiddled with them in my free hand and moved them up

toward the front of the carrier. The rabbit didn't blink. I held my breath as I stuck a single key through the wire door and poked the rabbit's nose. Again, nothing. I poked once more. No movement, not even a twitch. I shook the carrier once and peeked inside. Its mouth was slightly agape and I could see its tiny front teeth.

"You're fucking dead as fuck," I said aloud and cackled.

I set the carrier back on the passenger seat and texted back Olivia.

"Still dead."

The little ellipsis danced on the screen and then disappeared. Then I typed:

"Vet wouldn't take her. Have to figure out something at home."

"Great," she replied back. The three little dots danced inside the tiny text bubble for a moment and then disappeared.

I exited the chat and opened a new message. Before I added a contact, I typed my message: "Hey, are you up yet?"

As I watched the cursor blinking blue beside the question mark, I pressed my thumb to my wrist and felt my pulse beginning to rise. I typed her name at the top and hit Send.

She responded almost immediately, "It's only two hours behind here. Of course I'm up! I've gotta make the kids breakfast."

"My bad," I replied. "Can I call you? I really need to hear your voice."

"Sure thing :)"

It rang three times before she finally answered.

"Hey there, handsome."

"You alone right now?"

"Of course," she said, in a hushed tone. "Everyone's in the backyard. Where are you right now?"

"I'm in my car," I said. "This morning's been a real bitch."

"Oh, you poor thing."

"You don't really care."

"I do actually, Danny. It's kind of nice to hear your voice while the sun is still out for once!"

"Hey, hold on," I said, sliding my free hand inside my jeans and over my briefs. "Can you do me a favor?"

"Uh ... depends."

"Can you tell me what you're wearing?"

"Oh," she purred. "This cute little number I got just for you. Do you wanna see?"

"Yes."

I heard her fumbling with her phone—the sound of her soft breathing—the click of the camera. A moment later, my phone pinged in my ear. I lifted it from my cheek and opened the chat. In the photo she'd sent me, she was sitting barefoot on the edge of her bed, legs crossed, wearing bright-pink plaid pajama bottoms and a baggy purple T-shirt with "NYU," our alma mater, printed in big white font.

"Like what you see, Daddy?" she cooed.

"Very sexy," I said, snickering. "Really accentuates your figure."

"I know, doesn't it? You like how fit I am for you? So much more fit than your wife—"

"Hey!" I objected. "I thought we said we weren't gonna go there."

"Right," she said, dropping her voice to its normal register. "Sorry."

"Are you touching yourself right now?" I asked.

"Of course I am."

"You wouldn't lie to me, would you?"

"Danny, what is this?" she asked. "You don't ever call me in the morning. What's going on with you? Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," I said, taking my hand out of my pants. "I just think I'm losing my mind a little."

"Well, you're not alone. It's not great here, either."

"How come we never talk like this?"

"Because you always wanna just shoot your load and go to bed."

"Does that bother you?" I asked.

"Yeah, sometimes," she said, sighing. "But most of the time I want the same thing."

"God, I wish it was always this easy."

"What?"

"Talking. Like ... I don't know the last time I had an honest conversation with anyone."

"You mean Olivia?"

"Please don't say her name."

"Look, Danny. I don't wanna tell you how to live your life—"

"But by all means go ahead."

"You're such a prick sometimes. Forget it."

We were both silent for a moment. I gazed out the window at a young fit

couple loading their groceries into the back of their hatchback a few spaces down. They both looked so stupid and happy in their matching athleisure and designer sunglasses, lifting their paper bags from shopping cart to trunk one bag at a time. After his girlfriend had set down the last bag, the guy reached over and squeezed her butt cheek through the flexible fabric of her yoga pants. She swatted his hand away, laughing with all her perfect teeth. I watched her tight, bouncy backside sway side to side as she rounded the bumper toward the passenger side.

"I saw that picture she posted the other day," she said suddenly. "Of you and the kids. They were so damn little. I can't believe you said Chase is turning eleven soon."

"Yeah, next month."

"You know Hailey just turned nine last month? Maybe one day, after they've gone off to college, they'll bump into each other at Palladium Hall and fall madly in love. Wouldn't that be a hoot?"

"Ha! Yeah, right! You don't want Chase anywhere near her. He's a little shit."

"C'mon. I know he's a monster now, but he's your pride and joy and you know it."

"If you say so."

"Tell me something. Now, this might seem weird, but humor me, okay?"

"Okay?"

"How did it feel when you held him for the first time?"

"Huh? What's that got to do with anything?"

"Anytime I feel overwhelmed, I try to think about what it was like when they were still babies in the hospital. My therapist told me to do that. Remember the woman I've been having phone sessions with?"

"Yeah, I remember."

"So what did it feel like?"

"God," I said, sighing. "I don't know."

"Sure you do," she said. "Try to remember."

"Okay, fine." I closed my eyes and let my mind go blank for a minute.

"Hey? You still with me?"

"Yeah, I'm just thinking ... I guess I mostly remember being afraid. You know how scared I was. I told you that, right?"

"Yeah, that's before you stopped talking to me."

"I'm sorry about that."

"It's fine. Keep going."

“Well, right before Chase was born, I had just lost that investor, remember? And I was terrified it wasn’t going to happen for me—that I’d be like everyone else we knew in school who had these big dreams of running their own start-ups only for it to blow up in their faces.”

“Yeah, I remember you mentioning that.”

“So when Chase was born, all of that just kind of faded away for a moment. I had wanted to be somebody so badly for so long, someone who wasn’t like everyone else just punching in day after day, slowly working their way up one promotion at a time. I wanted to be a fucking rock star. The guy who came through at the bottom of the ninth. But when Chase was born, I forgot about that stuff. And I just thought, this right here, holding him for the first time—this feels pretty damn good.”

“Wow, Daniel.”

“Sorry, did I say too much?”

“No, it was ... really nice actually. Really sweet. Listen, I gotta go. But I’ll talk to you later, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Goodbye, Daniel.”

“Bye, beautiful.”

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On my way back home, it seemed like I was getting caught at every red light. I’d only made it about a quarter of the way there when I found myself stopped at yet another intersection, this time in front of the local McDonald’s. Right before lockdown it had been closed down “temporarily” for renovations. But now the place was left deserted—the old dining area still gutted, the entire structure surrounded by a chain-link fence. As I sat there waiting for the light to change, my eyes fixated on the partially constructed playland, the empty ball pit encased by the web of mesh netting, the array of brightly colored tubes coiling around each other like giant hollow snakes, all of it locked away behind big glass windows.

And that’s when I spotted him, standing there on the sidewalk. I can barely remember his face or even recall what he was wearing, but I can still see the big cardboard sign that he held up with both hands to all of us in our cars stopped at the intersection.

Repent! The end is nigh

It had been months since I'd seen a homeless person. Maybe that's why he stood out. I used to see them every day, back when I was still working in the office. They were everywhere in the city—sleeping on cardboard boxes in the middle of the sidewalk, sitting next to you on the subway. The smell was the worst part, although it wasn't their fault. The city should have done a better job looking after these people. Instead, they were always around, begging for a nickel, trying to sell you their sad stories. I usually tried to give them a dollar or two unless I was in a rush and had to be somewhere, which admittedly was most of the time. But this guy didn't want money, or so it seemed. He just stood there, arms up over his head, cardboard sign flapping in the wind.

Repent! The end is nigh

Eventually the light changed and I drove on past him. As I accelerated out of the intersection, I watched him disappear behind a semi in my rearview mirror.

I pulled into the driveway sometime before noon. The front yard was empty, aside from a few small branches that had fallen from the maple tree. In autumn, after the leaves had turned their seasonal red and orange hues, the whole tree would appear as if it were burning, a flaming torch in front of our white colonial. And when the leaves fell, it was as if the ground was set ablaze, the lawn speckled with brilliant and lustrous color. Now the grass was a dull shade of green and spotted with patches of brown. I'd fired the landscapers a month prior, hoping to trim the budget of any unnecessary expenditures. But since I'd put my back out, we'd hired a neighborhood kid to mow the lawn only. The hedges, the flowers, and the shrubbery would be my responsibility once I got around to doing it.

Inside the garage, I rummaged through several stacks of boxes until I found the extra-large black trash bags. With the rabbit still inside, I shoved the carrier into one of them. Then I bagged it once more and bound the openings with duct tape.

I stood there for a good minute or two, holding the end of the bag with one hand, surveying the garage for some place to store it. Then I heard the freezer chest kick on.

After pulling a few bags of frozen waffles and dinosaur nuggets from their respective cardboard containers, stacking them to one side and tossing the empty containers on the floor, I stuffed the duct-taped bags full of both carrier and carcass deep inside the freezer.

As I closed the lid, I thought to myself, *If it wasn't already dead, it sure as hell is now.*

Then I stacked a couple of cases of spring water on top so Hanna couldn't peek inside if and when she went looking for her popsicles. I pulled a bottle loose and guzzled the whole thing down before going inside the house.

In the kitchen, Olivia was standing at the center island, slicing a ripe lemon. I noticed she was wearing her favorite navy-blue romper with the yellow floral pattern and the low-cut neckline. I couldn't remember the last time she wore anything besides pajamas unless she was going out somewhere. And her hair was down. It was never down anymore. These days she typically had it up in a messy bun with her blonde curls sticking out every which way.

"So, how'd it go?" she asked without looking up, continuing to slice.

"I don't want to talk about it," I said, crushing the bottle into a ball between my hands. "Here, catch!" I softly tossed the ball of crumpled plastic over the island. It bounced off her bare shoulder and fell into the sink. She let go of the half-sliced lemon and laid the chef's knife down on the cutting board with a clank.

"Please don't throw shit at me, Daniel." She reached into the sink and pulled out the crushed bottle. She clutched it tightly in her hand and stared down at it for what felt like much longer than necessary. I guess she wanted to keep me in suspense. But then she just shook off the little droplets of water and dropped it in the trash bin under the sink. It was then I noticed the silence. No pitter-patter of little feet. No shouting or laughing or crying for Mommy.

"Uh, where are the kids?" I asked.

"Hanna's upstairs watching a movie, I think," she said, reaching for the lemon. "Chase is in his room playing with his ant farm."

"His what?"

"His ant farm," she said blankly, slicing into the lemon. "But if you actually paid attention last night during dinner when he was explaining it to you, you'd know the scientific term for it is formicarium."

"Form a what?"

"Formicarium. Like aquarium."

"I thought we got rid of his stupid fish tank," I said. "Remember what happened to the goldfish? He wouldn't stop tapping on the glass, and all of them died after only a day."

"This isn't an aquarium," she said. "It's smaller than that. More like a terrarium."

"See, you keep saying these words—terrarium, aquarium—but all I hear is

that he has ants living in his bedroom. Why does he need to keep them inside the house? There's plenty of ants living right outside if he wants to play with them so badly."

"Just be happy he wants to take care of them instead of trying to melt them with a magnifying glass. You ever think about how it must feel to be *Mrs. Dahmer*?"

"Olivia, darling. You really need to stop watching those true-crime docs before bed."

She set the knife down again and turned her back to me. She pulled open the fridge and took out a large glass pitcher of tea.

"You can have some if you want," she said, glancing up at me with her big green eyes. I could see now that she was wearing mascara.

"Are you planning on going out somewhere?"

"Possibly. Who knows?" She scooped up the lemon slices with both hands and plopped them in the pitcher. I watched as they plunged to the bottom only to float right back up again. As she turned back toward the fridge, I heard the groan of the lawn mower coming from right outside the kitchen window. I stepped farther into the kitchen and peeked past her, through the small window above the counter. Outside was the neighborhood kid in gym shorts and a bleached-stained T-shirt.

"What's the kid doing here?"

"I already told you this morning. We're gonna pay him one last time so your back has more time to heal."

"My back's fine. I've been lugging that fuckin' thing around all morning."

"Oh, what's another twenty bucks? Just let the kid earn some extra cash." She grabbed a glass from the drying rack beside the sink and filled it with tea. "Here, have some. Oh! I forgot the ice!" She took another glass from the rack and turned back to the fridge.

"Did you make this for him?" I asked.

"Oh, Daniel, please," she said, filling the glass with ice from the dispenser on the door. "I made it for me."

"And you're wearing makeup."

"So what if I am? Can't a married woman still feel a little sexy every once in a while?"

"This is unbelievable. You're fucking unbelievable."

"Relax, Daniel. I'm going to Erica's for coffee in a bit. You'll be okay to

watch the kids for a couple of hours, right?" She plucked a few cubes from the glass and dropped them in the other glass filled with tea. Then she poured the rest of the ice into the pitcher.

"And what if I couldn't? What if I had a Zoom call?"

"It's Saturday. And they're fine as long as you're right in the other room." She lifted the glass of now iced tea and held it up over the counter. "Here." She shook the glass, clinking the ice cubes. "Have you eaten anything today? You seem a little hangry."

"I'm gonna go talk to him," I said, marching toward the back door.

"Daniel, just leave him alone."

"Don't worry. I'm just gonna pay the damn kid. Unless you wanted to pay him some other way."

"Fuck you," she said as I opened the back door. The loud groan of the mower kept her from saying anything else.

"Yeah, if only," I said under my breath as I stepped out onto the deck. Then I shut the door.

The kid had finished only one row so far, along the edge of the vinyl fence. He waved to me with a big smile when he spotted me standing there on the deck. I gestured for him to come over and then navigated my way around the oversized lounge chairs and matching ottomans. He shut off the mower and pushed it across the grass toward the deck.

Although he'd barely begun, the sweat was already dripping from his face, his shaggy bangs were slick against his forehead, and his tight T-shirt clung against his chest. He looked scrawny for his age, but he was tall, almost as tall as I was.

"Sup?" he asked, as I came down the steps, like we were best bros hanging out at his locker. "You need somethin'?"

"Yeah, I have a question for you."

"Aight. Shoot."

"How old are you again?" I asked.

"Seventeen," he said grinning with all his teeth showing, his braces gleaming in the midday sun.

"I see. Now, tell me something. You got a girlfriend?"

"Yeah. Well, kinda."

"What do you mean *kinda*?"

"I don't know," he said, sighing. "I haven't seen her since April. I think she's avoiding me."

"Isn't that the point these days? Maybe she's just, you know, social fuckin' distancing."

"Nah, man. She takes forever to text me back. And I think she might've blocked me on social media." He winced when he said this and looked down at the ground.

"Hey," I said, snapping at him so he'd look back up at me. "First of all, it's Mr. Bishop to you, kid. Second, you wanna know how to get her back?"

"Sure. How?"

"When you finish up here, I want you to roll your little push mower back home with you and then I want you to call this girlfriend or booty call or whatever the hell she is. And then, I want you to take her out for some drive-through, get her anything she wants off the dollar menu. Then, after you're finished, I want you to get her in the backseat of that piece-of-shit Honda I seen you zippin' around in all the time. And then I want you to fuck her real good, remind her what she's been missin', you know what I mean?"

The kid smirked nervously and looked away, his cheeks red from more than just a little bit of mowing.

"And then, when she takes you back and you two are fuckin' Facebook official or whatever, I'm gonna need you to do me a favor."

"Sure," he said, chuckling. "Like what? Clean your gutters?"

"No, no, nothing like that. It's super easy, I promise."

"Aight, man—I mean Mr. Bishop," he said, correcting himself. Then he shrugged and said, "I'll do whatever."

I reached up and patted him on the shoulder. Then, with our eyes locked, I gripped the sweaty fabric of his T-shirt tight between my fingertips. And, without blinking, I said to him, "Stay the fuck away from my lawn. And my fuckin' wife. You feel me, bro?" Then I let go.

His mouth was agape and he looked just like the rabbit, completely stiff. I reached into my pocket and pulled out my money clip. I unfurled the roll and handed him a ten. He took it timidly and crumpled it in his hand.

"You'll get the rest when you finish the front yard," I said, patting him hard on the back. "Don't forget to get behind the shed like last time." I turned and went back up the stairs and onto the deck. As I made my way around the deck furniture again, I heard the mower start back up and I couldn't help but smile.

Back inside the kitchen, there was no sign of Olivia. She'd left the pitcher of iced tea on the counter, but the glass was gone. I grabbed the pitcher and took a

sip right from the spout. Tea had never tasted so damn good before. I opened the fridge and saw the box of pizza from a few nights prior tucked under some juice boxes on the bottom shelf. I lifted the lid and grabbed the last slice of pepperoni.

Olivia always hated cold pizza. She couldn't bear to watch me eat it. She used to grimace and stick her tongue out and make a big show of it. At first it was cute, a kind of joke between the two of us. And then it became just something else she couldn't stand about me.

I leaned with my back against the fridge, taking small bites. The pepperoni was a bit more rubbery than usual and the cheese was congealed and smelled like stale grease. And as I was gnawing on a particularly tough piece of pepperoni, I found myself thinking about the homeless man I'd spotted on the way home, that goddamn cardboard sign, those words scribbled in big bold font.

Repent! The end is nigh

He was like one of those fanatics I'd sometimes read about in the paper, who every couple of years or so would predict that the end of the world was upon us and there would soon be this grand reckoning. Some even set dates, said God had spoken to them in a dream or had sent them a message in their alphabet soup. The more I heard about these people, the more ridiculous it sounded. Like those so-called experts on TV, those scientists and virologists with their countless awards and distinguished degrees, talking about how they saw this coming, how they knew it was only a matter of time—they weren't any better than those religious zealots who were holed up, out in the woods somewhere, mailing in their manifestos to newspaper editors, each word written in their own blood and feces. That man on the corner with his cardboard sign, he was no different.

Repent! The end is nigh

As if God had chosen him out of everyone else on Earth to share that message with the few of us sitting in our cars, stopped at a red light, next to an abandoned McDonald's. As if God would choose a person like him. I'm sure he never once stopped to consider the alternative—that maybe God was just a ten-year-old boy tapping on the glass.

I finished my pizza and took another sip from the pitcher to cleanse my palate. That's when I heard it. Screaming. I put down the pitcher and braced myself for whatever was about to happen. The sound of little feet running on the staircase echoed through the house.

"They're loose!" I heard Chase scream. "They're loose!" He emerged from the open doorway and stopped halfway into the kitchen. He was wearing only a pair

of cargo shorts—no shirt, no shoes. He stood there hunched over, both hands on his knees, panting heavily. His shoulder blades stuck out like folded wings. All he needed now was a pair of horns. When he finally caught his breath and stood up, I could see his face was redder than a Jersey Devil. “Dad, they’re loose!”

“Chase, calm down,” I told him. “Take a deep breath. Now tell me, what’s loose?”

“My ants!” he shouted. “All my ants! They’ve escaped!”

