Hors d'oeuvre

by Ann Bogle

The summer is not a child's summer, not fast and grimy and bored. It is a married woman's summer. I have white-pink fingernails and a pair of good earrings and white pants. I am not going to work or living here. I am a house guest.

There is a boat house and a raft of skis. My husband, when I met him, was an avid tennis player. Now he directs Swedes in camera angles.

It is a fact of my life that I do not know exactly what he does during work hours. I imagine one shot over and over, and it suffices for all the other shots. Bim lifts the model's chin toward the ceiling fan. Behind her is a stand of palm trees, and behind them, a wash of sea paints. There must be more variety and drudgery than that, but I rarely think of it. We are two separate people.

Roger is up and laughing. He is wearing a light knit sweater and white slacks. He isn't handsome, but he is poised, so he seems handsome. Two bold V's in red and navy cut down from his shoulders to his zipper casing. His face is tanned and splintered near the eyes as if he were smiling. Little blond hairs pop up around his watchband. Roger de Souvenir, I call him, but it's really Desuvier.

Roger lives in the house without his wife and children. He doesn't seem divorced; he seems married at a respectful distance.

Karen calls down from a bedroom window. Karen is Roger's friend. They have been seeing each other for almost four months. Roger calls her Our Lady Accountant, and the appositive sticks, like spaghetti to hair. Karen put herself through college and graduate school and never made the mistake of marrying someone to keep track of herself.

Karen and I are becoming friends because Roger and Bim grew up together. If Karen and Roger were to break up, Karen would disappear like mist, and another woman with a different set of interests would replace her.

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Roger's ex-wife, Dana, used to be my friend. I don't ever seem to miss her; she belongs to another era.

Dana called recently, when Bim and I were still in New York, packing for summer. She had misplaced a favorite sauce recipe, one that I had asked for at a dinner party. I found the recipe and read it slowly over the phone.

“That's the part I forgot,” Dana said, and I could see her suddenly, at the end of the table, her suede gray pumps and rich green dress; it was *that* green dress from that year.

Karen tells me that she is afraid of libraries. She orders books by mail. What scares her about libraries are unshelved books, the ones you thumb through while you are waiting for the elevator, because you realize that there are too many books in the world and you are holding that particular book only because it is lost.

I notice that I drink more when Karen is talking. I resonate. Karen reminds me of Gertrude Odrun. Gertrude Odrun talked about paintings and pleasure and symphonies in a way I can remember but not reconstruct.

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Bim is a friendly, good-natured fellow. He is awestruck by light and angles and the night sky. He believes in things. Bim believes in God and loyalty and sports. He was happy as a boy.

I was never happy for more than five minutes; I was always setting up conditions for happiness and breaking them. Karen agrees. She says her childhood was stale, or her childhood was long, and her memories are stale.

Roger is taking off his sweater and dropping his pants. His swimming trunks are underneath, white and opaque. Karen and I will stay behind, lie on the dock in our suits and sunscreen and sip vodka-lemons. Karen is reading Kierkegaard. I am reading Colette. It's too hot. The words belong indoors; outside they aren't real. Nothing registers but the perfect tapping of my fingernails and the rocking in the water after the boat passes. Bim is driving, and Roger is skiing. I lift my head in time to see them wave.