

Owl, Glass, Deer

by Charles Huschle

He calls it an owl glass: he's allowed: he's six. I flip the owl glass upside down and the sand begins to peel down in its thin stream, which makes me anxious because I have the tendency to think that there's not enough time and watching it pass before me so concretely reinforces that feeling: I want to turn the owl glass on its side, and sometimes I do, and feel better, more relaxed. We're playing Boggle, a game kind of like Scrabble; sixteen cubic dice with letters on them in a box: when the sand timer runs, you see what words you can create. I figure it's a good way to learn words, and to help him learn to print, which he's taken to by himself, without prompting, amazingly. Sometimes he reads words from the car — road signs: "Deer Park Spring Water," matching the images on the sign with what he imagines they mean.

Tonight, somehow, around three sides of the square, he has traced "pregnant," while it remains invisible to me. I see "lock" and "force," words which don't carry as many points as his eight-letter winner. His little brows are fiercely knit as he studies the word tray; his both hands are busy, squishing cubes of cheddar cheese into the Triscuit crumbs in his bowl to mop them up, the remains of crackers he's devoured in this cocktail hour time after nap, before dinner, waiting for his father to arrive home. I would be happy to wait much longer for his father to arrive home, but not him. We play Boggle and time slows down. It becomes a compartment. I drink a glass of white wine and time slows down; I nurse it along: between sips, I place the glass (a Bonne Maman strawberry jam jar from which I steamed away the label) out of reach of my child — more out of reach of his flailing legs: he's on his stomach on the floor, propped on elbows, studying the words, his knees bent and feet swishing back and forth, his calves and clay-tinged white-socked feet like windshield-wipers.

He loves to plant his feet in red clay; the footprints take at least a day to dry and he demands that I bake them to make the time go faster, but it barely helps. "When are we going to grandpa's house?"

he says. How do these questions arrive to him? "I want to take a dip in his pool when we go there," he says. "It's too cold, now," I say. "What about the circus? Will you and daddy take me to the circus this year?" I am fingering my grandmother's fleur de lis brooch, pinned to my gray sweatshirt, a study in contrasts. The circus is the farthest thing from my mind. Rather I think of a concert, a sad violin concerto. It's dark outside. My husband's train will be arriving soon. He'll get in the Volvo and drive home. When the headlights flash up the driveway and into the windows I'll feel like a deer, caught; but my eyes will be down, reading the words my son and I have written tonight.

