

Trail, Pool, Snake

by Charles Huschle

She had developed the habit of giving me the finger. Yes - my wife. Whenever she left for the day, there was the finger, raised, pointing up, wordless, and me adrift with the suspicion that she was cranky. She worked hard, my wife, and I'd lost my job 27 months ago, so for her I was a fraud. She said, "You seem too comfortable." That was when she was talking at all, early on; before she started showing signs that to me she was growing allergic. Early on, I looked for work; I walked the want-ad trail. Shuttle-driver, apartment leasing expert, laundry technician, account executive, PHP developer, dog sitter, sleep study subject — I would do anything that seemed steady.

It was late October of last year that I began to rise late, to read a book over coffee, and then, for hours it seemed, instead of scouring craigslist, to gaze at the surface of our pool. Sometimes leaves would scud over its ripples; other times it would be still; the unusually warm weather and the fact that I disdained chlorine allowed it to turn a pleasing pale shade of green. I watched the day lengthen over our house and the hills of the Sierra Nevada and over our pool and enjoyed it all because it was free. I was free. I rose earlier in the mornings and sat on a zafu by the pool before my wife left for work, timing my sitting so that I could prepare coffee for her before she left, before she left for work without saying goodbye save to raise that middle finger. Sometimes she cast a look of hatred my way, her eyes and skin glowing pure, emerald green. More often, nothing but the finger and the accompanying sound of the coffee machine gurgling, dying, the plinking of its drip.

The trees around the pool grew larger and wider, their leaves greener and greener, the underbrush thick, the little copse of dwarf palms lush. There were too many jobs out there, too many possibilities; and besides, each day here, by the pool, in the woods, I would see things: a turkey, deer, an owl, a rattlesnake. One day a rat. I was better alone; there was no group I wanted to join. I saw

the snake eat the rat, bulging; I thought it would sleep or burst, so tumescent and beautiful was its tissue.

