

The Green Bench

by Diane Sherlock

Listen to him barking in the night. Fear shifts on the bed next to you, hogging the covers. Stare at the ceiling and wonder what to do. Forget his birthday. Forget he is forty-two. Forget the phone call from Berkeley twenty-one years ago. Forget about the happy little boy with the smooth tan skin and the big green eyes. Those eyes that see things that aren't there, at least not in this dimension. Forget all the tears. Don't think about the years you tried to talk him into leaving the garage.

In the morning, exhausted, make his favorite breakfast: honey nut oatmeal, mango juice, a poached egg on an onion bagel, and strawberries. Use only paper plates and bowls with plastic utensils and put it all on a sturdy cardboard tray. Buy them in bulk. Don't appreciate the color arrangement of orange and red punctuating beige and white. Look at the low bench that you have placed outside the door to the garage, the one with a fresh coat of forest green that you made look new again because at least that was possible. That is the mark you will hit. It is twenty steps from the house to the detached garage. Detach.

Open the back door and walk outside. Gently leave the food on top of the bench and move quickly back inside the house on silent feet and lock the door. Don't knock, don't make noise, don't do anything to disturb the performance, to shatter the illusion of normalcy. True, the police would finally do something, but he might end up on the street after a 72-hour hold and you might end up in the hospital.

Consider sprinkling olanzapine on his food, but then consider that he might taste it and then what? Wonder how someone irrational is supposed to make rational decisions about treating his brain chemistry. Don't bother about fine ethical points. Anything for him to be okay again, for a bit of happiness, for a full night's sleep. Listen to the crashes and screams from the garage, muted by two layers of

Available online at *«<http://fictionaut.com/stories/diane-sherlock/the-green-bench>»*

Copyright © 2011 Diane Sherlock. All rights reserved.

closed doors and windows. The neighbors don't even look any more. Check to make sure your doors are locked, then take a hot shower and get dressed.

It is quiet. Peek out the window and see that the food is gone. Nothing ever comes back out.

Go to a meeting. Go to lots of meetings, at least once a week for fifteen years. This time, when the new faces point out that a judge might see things differently, that you might be seen as endangering him, that you could be seen as abusive, sit with your hands folded and do not speak. Think of yourself, they say, take measures. Know that they don't yet understand that all you can think about is him. Tell yourself that they will in another twenty years.

Go back home to your bed and pull the sheet of despair up to your chin and stare at the ceiling and wonder how you will summon the energy to take measures. Shift slightly when fear puts its chilled arm around you and holds you against its hard ribcage until it's time to get up and make the dinner you will leave on the dark green bench outside the door to your garage.

