

The Suicidal Juggler

by Eric Bosse

Kathleen went for a stroll in the park with Tom. They took a slow lap around the pond, then drifted over to the playground. The sun came out, and leaves quivered in the sky. Children occupied the swings, so Tom and Kathleen walked to a green picnic table off to the side. People had carved initials and obscenities on every inch of the table and its benches. Tom and Kathleen sat with their arms around each other and watched the toddlers orbit their mothers.

"I love kids," Tom said. "Just love 'em." His hand felt damp. His Adam's apple pulsed as he spoke. His breath smelled faintly of blueberry donut. "Hey, check out this guy."

Kathleen looked around. "Who?"

"Him, right there."

Tom pointed at a tall man in green denim overalls and a red thermal shirt. The man wore a bowler hat and stood on an open patch of grass, with a pyramid-shaped stack of baseballs at his feet. He picked up a ball, turned it in his hand, then threw it at the sky. As the ball shot toward the clouds, slowed, and dropped, the man planted his feet and crossed his arms. He waited with a smile, staring straight ahead. The ball hit the grass with a thud, inches from his feet.

Kathleen gasped.

The man gave a clownish shrug and picked up another ball. After looking it over, he hurled it into the air. Again, he folded his arms and waited for the ball to strike. It fell behind him.

"What an idiot," Tom said.

He massaged Kathleen's hands, fingers, and wrists, as she watched ball after ball pound the grass near the man's feet. One ball grazed his arm. He lifted his hat, mimed wiping his brow, and gave the same comical shrug.

Kathleen brushed away a tear with the sleeve of her sweater.

Tom cleared his throat. "This city is full of freaks," he said.

He took her hand and led her back to her apartment, where they had sex again on the living room floor. She liked the way he held her down, but it hurt when he put his hands around her neck. She told him to stop. He kissed her eyelids when he said goodbye. Snow fell all afternoon. White beads clicked and melted on the window. After three days, the snow stood two feet deep. After ten, Tom still had not come for the blue jacket he left draped over the back of a kitchen chair.

