

Precisely

by Gita M. Smith

She tells me to be more precise when I speak. I can't imagine that I have been unclear, so I am puzzled. She sees the puzzlement on my face but interprets it, somehow, as slyness. She thinks I am searching for another underhanded way of saying whatever is coming next.

"I was precise," I say, repeating my previous sentence, just a little bit more slowly. This she takes for insubordination. Her face twists with rage.

"You are a liar. You lie every time you open your mouth."

Ah, now I have gone from speaking unclearly to lying. I can see there is no way to salvage this confrontation. So I take the only course left to me and go mute. We stand there in her airless office with the dying plant on the sill and the desk on which every object is placed precisely. Is it my imagination, or is her chair afraid of her?

Time passes as she waits for me to speak. No chance of that. I left my body 45 seconds earlier, although she doesn't know it, and I'm kayaking the Nantahala on a warm spring afternoon where rainbow trout snap at Mayflies floating past their waiting mouths.

This woman who is my boss is afflicted with incurable anger. I, by contrast, am paddling around an eddy, joyful and free, every stroke designed precisely to move away from danger.

