

To Walk Backwards

by I. R. Thibodeau

Three nights later, Tom asked Lynn if she was going to come to bed. She did, and although it took him more than a few minutes to inch closer to her in the dark, when Tom wrapped his arm around his wife she didn't shy away. She molded her body into his torso and placed a foot between his under the sheets. Tom felt her deflate as she breathed a long breath. He buried his face in her hair and inhaled. She hadn't used his daughter's shampoo, and she smelled sweet, almost artificial. He kissed the back of her neck, beneath her ear.

He remembered a story his father told him.

There was a man who gave his son a watch for the boy's eleventh birthday. It was a nice watch. It had roman numerals and three miniature watch faces on it. It glowed in the dark. The man told the boy that since he was getting older, it was important that he pay attention to time. Always clean and polish the watch, and make sure the glass doesn't get scratched. For weeks, the boy wore it on his left wrist, only taking it off when he went to sleep. He listened to it tick during vocabulary lessons, and answered whenever someone asked for the time.

But the boy broke the watch one day.

The small, metallic dial flew into a mound of snow on the playground, leaving a thin, brittle piece of metal sticking out of the side of the watch. The boy cried. The watch didn't tick, but the boy found that when he turned the thin metal bar sticking out of the side, the arms on the watch moved. For two days, the boy turned the watch by hand so he didn't have to tell his father it was broken. For those two days, the boy watched people move while he twisted the little piece of metal between his fingers and changed the time. Tom's father said that the boy told himself he could control time, and that his watch was enchanted.

Tom held Lynn and wondered if the boy ever wound the watch backwards. If for even a second the boy thought that by some magic

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he could go back to when he broke the watch and erase the accident altogether.

Tom wondered if the boy ever tried something wonderful.
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