

nests

by Melissa Corliss DeLorenzo

His wife left behind a mini-muffin tin, a cookie sheet and a gaudy, scratched green metal tray decorated with an artist's renderings of New Hampshire tourist spots. The Old Man in the Mountain, Clark's Trading Post, the Kancamagus Highway. In the kitchen of their old house there were tall and narrow cabinets which flanked the stove, one of which she had forgotten to empty. They intentionally left behind an old upright piano. It was too expensive to move and, besides, they had no room for it in the new, small apartment. They had raised three children in their old house. He had painted that old piano with a creamy white smooth paint. A long time ago. He wondered if the new family kept it. It was very out of tune.

His wife was deeply distressed about the things she left behind. She lamented it, repeated it — to him, to their children, to friends over the phone. It embarrassed him — her bald and passionate grief over a muffin tin, a cookie sheet, a scratched old metal tray. And he couldn't recall the last time, or any time, she ever made bite-sized muffins.

"You never even used that pan," he said to her.

She looked at him hard. "Yes. I did."

"When?" He was sincere, not combative.

"That's not the point," she said.

What *was* the point? In the face of all they had lost. The missteps that had led to this end were so small when examined one at a time. *A pan?* He thought this but had been married long enough not to say it. *Who cares?* he wanted to say, but wouldn't.

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The new family in his old house removed the big juniper bushes and rhododendron from the front of the house. It could not be denied that they were terribly overgrown. But now the house held a naked, vulnerable look.

There were small children in this new family. A baby and some toddlers. Once when he drove by, he saw the new woman corralling one after the other, faces like bright new buttons, into a minivan parked in his old driveway.



It was spring and from the street out front, he could see the edges of the forsythia bushes that encircled the backyard. They peeked from around the sides of the house. Pretty and cheerful every year, they made the backyard seem nicer than it really was. They hid all the overgrown stuff he never managed to get out of there. And in the winter when the bushes were bare of leaves, a simple layer of snow did the trick. The stuff, the accumulated fallen leaves of many autumns, the vines that he did not plant with his own hands but had sprung up on their own. Under the forsythia were discarded and forgotten toys that once belonged to his children, fiercely, thought of as lost or forgotten altogether.

Blue jays nested in those forsythia. Not the same birds year after year but seemingly so. Although he knew this could not be true.

Blue jays are ferociously territorial. They have been known to chase cats, dogs, humans away. They mob owls who get too close. They are large, they are noisy. They are smart. And while those qualities could not be denied, his blue jays shared those same forsythia with cardinals. A spill of colors amongst the yellow and green. Bright and bold in the nakedness of winter over the setting of white.



He began to drive away. He looked at the weathered gray siding of his old house. The new family had painted the shutters a different color since the last time he drove past.

It was just a muffin pan.

All that yellow in bloom now.

Just a pan.
But who was he to say.

