

## Wilderness House Literary Review 4/3

*Melanie Haney*  
**On Third Street**

**W**e lived in a town with rusted rail road tracks that ran alongside the Assabet River. Grass and thistle grew between the tracks and no one paid much attention.

Our place was on Third Street, which my wife Ellen took to mean we'd be lucky. Third's the charm isn't it? She said. It was a one bedroom apartment with cracks in the walls and a bathroom with no door. But the utilities were included and Ellen said she could rig a sheet or shower curtain over the toilet.

I got a job at the butcher shop on Nason Street, across town. They'd had a sign on the window, looking for counter help. But when they hired me on the spot, I was put to work with a mop and bucket. Sloshing dingy bubbles over the linoleum, sopping up blood and gristle, curls of shaved meat - I'd come home with a smell that I could not scrub off.

There was a skinny woman in the apartment next to ours. Her name was April and she looked like a wounded bird, angled and bony, bewildered by the world. I'd see her in the morning before work, sitting out in the hallway with a cigarette. She had a baby in the apartment and didn't want to blow her smoke all over him.

"Can you imagine," Ellen asked me shortly after we moved in, her voice hushed to a whisper in our own living room, "having a baby in a place like this?"

I couldn't even imagine having a cat in an apartment like this. I shook my head, and then asked her to go to the bedroom so that I could use the toilet.

We could hear everything through the tissue paper walls between our apartments. At night the baby cried and Ellen and I lay awake listening to the fighting sounds of April and the man she lived with. Beneath the sheets, Ellen held my hand.

I took the bus to work. The route went along the fringe of town, by the old train tracks and then weaved back inward just where the rails curved to follow the river. The man who lived with April rode the bus too. He wore scuffed black boots and sat by the door.

When the town sank into the dredges of summer, April's wardrobe diminished to men's undershirts and panties that sagged from her flat bottom as she leaned over the railing. Her skin was nearly translucent and I wondered if she might be disappearing as well.

On a morning in late September, she wasn't outside the apartment at all. The man she lived with and I boarded the bus as usual. He sat in front; I chose a window seat near the rear. It had rained the night before and the ground was still wet. Through the filmy windows I watched the sunlight glinting in puddles along the muddy ground.

We passed her in a moment. It was April, dressed in white and carrying her baby along the rail road tracks. I turned to the man in the front of the bus. He had seen her too, was just watching from his window as she grew smaller and smaller until the river approached and we turned away.

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That night it was quiet.

Ellen and I watched the news, heard about the woman's body, found with stones in her pockets, mud in her ears, nostrils. We turned it off when they talked about the baby.

Laying in the stillness of our room, Ellen said maybe we should think about moving again. Maybe Third Street wasn't so lucky. Perhaps Seventh would be better, and we'd be closer to downtown. I wouldn't have to take the bus. We might even have a bathroom door.

She spoke as if luck was something we could move toward, and terrible-ness something we could leave behind. I kissed her cheek.

Then I rolled on my side and saw again, the pale slip of a woman with the baby in her arms, bare feet dangling to her waist, almost too much to hold. She walked slowly along the rusted rails, dissolving in the distance as we moved on.

Melanie Haney holds her MFA from Lesley University and her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Family Circle Magazine, Quality Fiction, Blue Earth Review, Eureka Literary Magazine, Relief Journal, Summerset Review, JMWW, Word Riot, Fifth Wednesday Journal and other venues. For more information, please visit: <http://www.melaniehaney.com>