

## Wilderness House Literary Review 14/4

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### Family Abandoned

**L**ucille knew she was being excessively assertive, but it made her feel good to slam the BMW's door. Her eye twitched in time to her espadrilles trip-tripping up the flagstones to the kitchen door. "I'm back," she called to Thomas shooting hoops by the garage.

"Real estate guy is here," he shouted without looking at her.

"Love ya," she called back.

The house she shared with her husband and son was five thousand square feet of Romanesque and Georgian architectural excess. Neighbors privately called the place a hedge-fund manager's monstrosity, a dog's breakfast, an explosion in a brickyard.

She dropped the grocery bags on the counter. This had been home. *Their* home. Once, when Michael was still here. Before the Feds sent him down to Butner Correctional Facility in Raleigh.

Her world shattered when Michael's Ponzi scheme came unraveled in the trial. There had been enough shock to atomize the financial markets while obliterating every one of Lucille's friendships. Screw the neighbors and their nail-biter mortgages and scabrous children who turned up their noses now. Fuck the Soccer Moms and Dashing Dans. Let them try to pay a balloon mortgage when the Feds have locked up their life savings.

"Lucille." Allen came into of the kitchen that had once held everything Williams-Sonoma offered. "I tried calling. Twice, when my wife went out." He was wearing a pink shirt, white sleeveless sweater and khaki pants.

"Christ, Allen, you look like you escaped from a tennis court in a retirement ghetto."

"Lucille, our affair has to stop. I had a long heart-to-heart with Carolyn. I have to think about my — our — kids. One's finishing high school and going to Amherst. And the housing market is sinking faster than...."

"Affair? What the hell do you mean *stop*?" Did she sound over-caffeinated? "Stop what? Stop seeing me? Stop saying you love me, unlike the way my husband was always too busy to care?"

"Don't go hysterical on me. I mean...."

"Get out! Get out of my house."

"I have a prospect coming by later. He's serious about buying."

"It's not for sale now. Not by you or your agency."

"We have a contract," he said, turning on his businessman's voice. She remembered his lover's voice, his companion's voice.

"We have nothing." She pointed a finger at the still-open door. "Out! Go back to your...." Words failed her. "To your tennis court."

The room was spinning as she sank to the floor, imagining Allen diminish as he executed a long tracking shot out of her life. The irony of

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losing two men in one month brought a spastic tic to her upper lip. Now, there was only Thomas, plucking at his T-shirt with tiny spasms the doctors said could be medicated.

"Mom?" Thomas's voice floated into the house. "Are you okay?"

She swiveled into a yoga pose. Her son's gawkiness was accentuated by blimp-size sneakers, wrinkled shorts and too-big T-shirt.

"Hey," she said. "My big loveable guy." He twitched impatiently. She felt sad that Thomas was controlled by invisible strings whenever he wasn't shooting baskets or rocketing around on his skates with a hockey stick. Her life preserver was a beautiful mind trapped in the body of a marionette.

"I need you to take me to the mall. Gotta get some stuff for school."

"Need me?" Need was such a teensy word to carry so much baggage. Right now it was she who had requirements, demands, necessities — and, goddammit, she thought, *hopes*.

"Yeah. I guess so. House looks pretty empty, huh?"

"Time to move on, Thomas. You're the man of the house. Time for memories later."

The oaks cast long shadows across the lawn as she threw gravel accelerating down the hill. Neither of them looked back. Abandoned means you've been rejected, cast off like last year's swimsuit. She could tally other ways she had been forsaken — by Michael's duplicity, by Allen's hypocrisy, by the promises of things that never delivered while hope receded from her reach. But, with Thomas by her side, she was warmed by the feeling that she hadn't been totally deserted.

"I know you feel lonely," he said. "Dad — well, he screwed us all. Ripping off his clients. He promised me a Corvette for my birthday. He always promised. Never delivered."

She thought fleetingly of Michael eating prison gruel while Allen sipped martinis at the tennis court. Now only Thomas was left. "Your father loves you, Tom."

"He double-crossed me, just like he screwed his clients. The real profit and loss shit — the fake trading records — was hidden on his laptop."

"Laptop? What are you talking about?" She almost missed a curve glancing at Thomas. He could never keep his mouth from flapping when he didn't take his Ritalin.

Slowly, he realized the magnitude of what he had blurted out.

"Who do you think tipped off the Feds?" he shouted in her face. "Who taught him a lesson? You don't break a promise. Not never!"