

William Doeski

A View of Equinox

When Caroline abandoned her surgeon-husband with his little white hands she took her two children to Vermont and rented a house with a view of Equinox. She had seemed exotic on the coast of Maine, and looked even more so in the Valley of Vermont. Her carrot hair and slender figure sliced through Arlington and left men be-headed in her wake. After she had lived there six months she invited me to visit. Following a few nights of rough play, she insisted I stick around and find a job.

The Mountain Inn needed a bartender for the lucrative eight PM to two AM shift, so I settled in to flirt with summer tourists, leaf-peepers, snow bunnies, and bored locals. Caroline waitressed and drew huge tips, even better than mine. In her sleek gray waitress outfit she was friendly and efficient. Even the women lusted for her.

She took charge of our joint earnings. "We're saving up," she informed me, "for the college fund." When we got home from work, around two-thirty in the morning, we usually spent another hour giggling like little kids in bed.

Casey and Allen happily adopted me as Dad-in-Residence. We played catch, hiked to the Dorset marble quarries to gaze at the bats, camped on the slope of Glastonbury Peak, and fished for brook trout in the Batten-kill. They called me Freddy-Dad. "Freddy-Dad," they'd say, "If you marry Mom we'll be a real family, won't we?" I asked if they missed their real father. "He never took us fishing," they always responded.

The summer and autumn passed. Winter crawled over the Taconics and flopped in the driveway, gasping like a beached whale. A snowplow rescued us, and we drove to work night after night and collected bigger and bigger tips from the skiers who had spent their afternoons veering down the slopes of Big Bromley or Stratton.

One night Caroline's old Saab skidded on the half-plowed road and slewed into the ditch. We stood staring at the problem until a tow truck arrived. "Hey pretty lady," the driver said. Caroline smiled him silly. After he dragged the car back onto the road we drove home in thoughtful silence. I knew Caroline wasn't about to dump me for a tow truck driver, but I could tell she was thinking about bigger possibilities.

In late December, as I mixed sidecars and martinis, poured draughts of Long Trail ale and glasses of white wine, a blizzard arrived, howling in the treetops. Caroline called home to warn the sitter we'd be late; but already, an hour into the storm, the lines were down. Then the power went out, and the ski crowd disappeared into the snow. "Hey, let's get out of here," she said. It was barely midnight, but the emergency lights cast a feeble yellow glow and there was no point trying to mix drinks for a departed crowd.

In the parking lot the little Saab hunched unhappily under a foot of snow. We swept it clear and started down the long sloped highway toward Manchester. Somehow we got to the center of town, but when we

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tried to turn south toward home we found the highway still unplowed and impassable. We swerved into a restaurant parking lot and huddled together. In our down parkas we wouldn't freeze, but what about the kids in that dark house? The sitter would look after them, surely. "This sucks," was Caroline's only comment. She leaned against the driver's side window and slept.

Dawn came. A pair of huge orange plow trucks shuddered down the highway, clearing a path, and we followed. We turned up Caroline's freshly scraped driveway. The house stood bleak and cold and vacant. The sitter's car had gone, Casey and Allen with it. They would be safe somewhere, probably bundled up in front of a big cheerful fireplace. But Caroline looked at me with stony gaze. "Someone should have been here," she said, her pale blue eyes tracking over me as if examining roadkill. When she had lived in Maine she hadn't had to work. Her surgeon husband had raked in huge fees. Now the alimony and child support weren't enough. I took the hint. We found the kids happy and grinning at the sitter's house, and for a few more days and nights, into the New Year, we stumbled along pretending to be a family.

When the January thaw came I packed my bartender clothes and caught the bus to New York. A friend let me stay with him in Brooklyn heights until I found a job and a cheap room. The rest of the winter passed in a muddle of slush. In April, I heard from mutual friends, and confirmed through a newspaper story, that her new boyfriend, an advertising salesman for Yankee Magazine, had crashed his Volvo on the fast stretch of highway halfway to Rutland. Only Casey and Allen had survived.