**The Woman in the Window**

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*Who is she? And why is she making a sandwich in my kitchen?*

He stared from behind the shrubbery as if he had never seen

a person make a sandwich, her delicate hands fondling

and layering the Swiss, cheddar, turkey, and ham.

He tingled at the thought of being one of the slices.

He pulled his bathrobe tighter and tried to recall

why he had gone outside.

*Who is he? And why is he staring at me?*

She dialed 911.

*Please help me. There’s a man outside my window.*

*What does he look like? Well, he looks kind of sad…and hungry.*

*And he’s got really nice gray hair.*

Then she gave the dispatcher an address.

It was the house in Brooklyn where she was born.

*Now she’s using my phone. Who knows, she’s probably calling*

*some secret lover in Australia.*

He peeked at her again, admiring the way the late morning sun

illuminated her silvery hair. Yes, she would have many lovers.

The thought made him sad, yet happy for her.

But there’s a strange woman in his kitchen.

She looked out the window, but the gardener was gone.

She decided to call him that after recalling the handsome,

gray-haired gardener at the botanical garden she

had visited when she was eight years old, and how he

had tipped his hat and bowed, handing her a gardenia.

Her heart beat like a small bird in the first grip of romance.

She stared at the sandwich. She was not hungry now.

Eating alone was no fun. Had it always been this way?

Tantalizing images flashed before her, just beyond reach,

like looking at someone else’s photo album.

He looked down the street and froze. Nothing looked familiar.

But there was something about that house and

the woman in the window.

A magnolia tree towered over the backyard where somehow

he knew there would be a black iron gate to a garden.

She ate in silence and thought of the gardener.

She imagined him sitting across the table, still wearing

his green-stained, khaki uniform, his hat hanging by the door.

He leaned across the table and planted a gardenia in her hand.

She lifted it to her nose and closed her eyes.

All these years, all the things she had wanted to say.

But when she opened her eyes, he was gone.

Quietly he slipped through the back door. He knew where he was now.

But there was still a strange woman in his kitchen.

He gripped the sides of his father’s old desk and remembered something

he had tucked away, years ago. At last, he found it—a thin cigar box.

Opening it, he gazed at its treasures: a pocketknife,

a fossil Trilobite, two theater tickets,

and a ripped-out page from an old Sears catalog.

He held the page reverently. There she was, still as

beautiful as ever. With silvery hair, a shapely figure and

a kind face, she wore a sleek nylon slip, her legs primly crossed.

She was the woman of his boyhood dreams,

someone who would not laugh at him,

who would understand all his secret longings.

Suddenly he knew who the strange woman was.

He closed the box and placed it back in the drawer. Then he went to

the garden, plucked a gardenia and headed for the kitchen.

She turned as the man entered. When she saw him there

framed by the kitchen archway, she smiled.

*Her gardener was back.*

He bowed and handed her the gardenia.

The woman primly crossed her legs and pulled out a chair.

*Would you like a sandwich?*