

Faye's illness had transformed her in a way no diet or face-lift could have. After days of nausea, vertigo, diarrhea; a fast of toast and tea; fever; dreams that came and went more like mirages; an aching lethargy that demanded fourteen-hour sleeping spells from which she'd wake confused, but only too aware of how terribly alone she was, Faye felt better.

The usual grim weariness was gone from around her lips. Her eyes no longer peered out like a miner's from

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sallow tunnels smudged with mascara. They seemed enlarged with light, glowing limpidly from her pale face. Even the shadow beneath her chin, where her darkness most accumulated, had burned away. It was as if everything unessential had burned away. "What happened to you?" Aldo blurted, startled by the sight of her sitting, legs crossed, back behind the reception desk.

"Flu," Faye said. "Everybody's getting it. I mean, you sit up here in front all day and you're going to come in contact with everything anybody walks in with."

"Everybody should get so sick," Aldo said.

It seemed to Faye an odd remark at the time, but she ignored it and kept talking, about the job, the weather, the flu epidemic. It was the first conversation she'd had since she'd been sick and she clung to it, needing desperately to talk, aware the entire time of how Aldo was watching her.

And later, when people would ask them how they met and fell in love, it was always Aldo who would answer. "Flu." He'd smile earnestly. "It all started with flu. I still haven't recovered."

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Changing the Channel

E. Ethelbert Miller

My father and I have pillows behind our backs. The television is on but we talk without looking at each other. It is better this way, easier for my father to find words, which interrupt his breath like commercials. It is one of those strange moments when our small apartment in the Bronx is empty. My sister is on a date with a boy she can't bring home. My brother is at church lighting candles and saying prayers which will not lengthen his life. My mother is selecting lamb chops over pork in a

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nearby store, and the price has nothing to do with our health. Now is the time when my father has a good job in the post office and this miracle of rest is what we share while watching old movies that offer no resemblance to who we are.

*Worry***Ron Wallace**

She worried about people; he worried about things. And between them, that about covered it.

"What would you think of our daughter sleeping around?" she said.

"The porch steps are rotting," he replied. "Someone's going to fall through."

They were lying in bed together, talking. They had been lying in bed together talking these twenty-five years. First about whether to have children, he wanted to (although the roof was going fast); she didn't (Down's syndrome, leukemia, microcephaly, mumps). Then, after their daughter was born, a healthy seven pounds eleven

ounces ("She's not eating enough"; "The furnace is failing"), they talked about family matters, mostly ("Her friends are hoodlums, her room is a disaster"; "There's something about the brakes, the water heater's rusting out").

Worry grew between them like a son, with his own small insitencies and then more pressing demands. They stroked and coddled him; they set a place for him at the table; they sent him to kindergarten, private school, and college. Because he failed at nearly everything and always returned home, they loved him. After all, he was their son.

"I've been reading her diary. She does drugs. She sleeps around."

"I just don't think I can fix them myself. Where will we find a carpenter?"

Their daughter married her high school sweetheart, had a family, and started a health food store in a distant town. Although she recalled her childhood as fondly as anyone—how good her parents had been and how they worried for her, how old and infirm they must be growing, their house going to ruin—she rarely called or visited. She had worries of her own.

BEDTIME STORY

“Careful, honey, it’s loaded,” he said, re-entering the bedroom.

Her back rested against the headboard.

“This for your wife?”

“No. Too chancy. I’m hiring a professional.”

“How about me?”

He smirked. “Cute. But who’d be dumb enough to hire a lady hit man?”

She wet her lips, sighting along the barrel.

“Your wife.”

JEFFREY WHITMORE

WHAT THE DEVIL WANTED

The two boys stood watching Satan walk away, the power of his hypnotic eyes still in their minds.

“Geez, what’d he want from you?”

“My soul. How ’bout you?”

“A quarter to call home.”

“Oh. Wanna go get something to eat?”

“Yeah, but I can’t. Now I’m out of money.”

“No problem. I’ve got plenty.”

BRIAN NEWELL