

acta
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victoriana

Aloe and Lily

If you see a guy walking around the neighbourhood dragging a sleigh full of plastic toys, you let me know. If he's not right and staggering, or if he's grinning and vain, you must let me know. Look for a four-foot high Santa or a flock of speckled deer, the two foot-high electrified Noel candles, look at the fifteen plastic bird fountains, the rain-faded Jesus next to the shriveled Lilliputian gnomes, the row of deer positioned so they nudge each other's asses with sad eyes. Look long and hard at your own heart and now stand back and watch it unfold into the plastic of your gorgeous collection.

Ben, it was fair enough, you got bored and at least you were kind and sensible about it. The mayor was glad you typed up a neat little sign and pasted it on all the neighbourhood blocks: "Lost a friend, lately? Come to Wells Hill Park Wednesday at 7:30 a.m. sharp. Claim what's yours." The mayor was glad his only son hadn't totally lost it.

You took Dad's car, all ninety-six plastic lawn ornaments crammed in, and arranged them neatly in the park, in the half-wet darkness of the most lonely hour of the night. You made Jesus take the hand of a shriveled Michael Jackson gnome and dropped the freckle-shelled turtles all around the graveled swimming pond. All the stately dalmations

with their shoddy spots stood in the hollow of the plantless clay pots. When the sun rose that morning, a runny yolk backlighting the home-fated, you slipped back into the car and waited.

They came out in a trickle at first, bleary eyed women and angry-suited men in their work clothes claiming their lawn ornaments in silence, in the half-mast of the morning. A nun drove up in a chauffeured car and crossed herself as she dragged her glowing Jesus away. Max, the neighbourhood bum, showed up in his usual doctor's coat and dragged his collection of small fowl away, fondling them with his stethoscope. When the sun was bright on the perimeter of the park three hours later, everyone was gone except for the Michael Jackson gnome who stood with his rubber arm extended, his fingers laced into no one's. Ben, you were in the back seat of Dad's Impala and your smile was grave and impressive. Your eyes were hooded with a need for affection.

Your lover was empty and used his hands well. Coming by the house from June to the next April, casting his spell, the soles of his gorgeous penny-loafers planting seeds of the cruelest flowers on the lawn. Timmy—his cheeks were high and bold, and he brought you blue carnations and drugstore menthes wrapped in gold. When he left you I think you

grieved those chocolates—you'd eaten them right away. Now you had no other reminder of him. His hands were so good you forgot the way they felt as soon as they left your body and you loved him so much it must have been your fault for sure when he left you. You tried to fake it with women, but it wouldn't come out right, my favourite was Maria who worked at TopCuts and gave you Luke Perry hair but she couldn't last. Kissing her, you said, felt like Alice falling through the looking-glass.

Thank God the psychiatrist wrote you a note, or else you would have been charged. It became a joke in the family, you an ex-con, out on probation and watering the lawn, in a fireman's suit with old Doctor Max, living on welfare, saving on the tax. You were twenty years old and everyone thought you'd be the family genius when you peaked at grade one. And you would've too if life minus heartache is the measured sum.

We knew what had happened because the shower was on, the hours were passing, and then came dawn. Dad, in his parka, climbed onto the roof, and slid

down the siding to the ledge of roof, where the window of the bathroom was half-opened, laughing. The shower was still on.

At the end Ben, you just watched talk shows in the deep of the old armchair, eyes hapless and stuck in your sandman stare. No one would have recognized you and maybe Mom was glad that you never went out, she never could get over those lawn animals—It was sad the way Dad had to pull you out.

Why someone would need all those fancy shampoos with one inch of hair, I don't have a clue. You must have needed them. Like they were protection. The way Dad found you was the same as when I walked in the room. You were sunk in the bottles, the air hung with perfume. There was pro-vitamin B5 and Thicker, Fuller Hair, Flex and Pert Plus Finesse and V-O5 Deluxe, Swimmers Cure and Halsal, Head and Shoulders and Pears, St. Ives and Outrageous and No Name Aloe and Lily I noticed most of all, that was draining on your chest when you died that Fall.