

## MIRROR

I'm lying on this hard hospital delivery bed with only a small thin robe over my body. My legs, even my knees, are all uncovered, and my bare feet are in these stirrups. It's indecent, how you must be to give birth. In India do they cover the women more? I don't know, but here in America, no one cares, they go about in shorts and swimming suits anyway, even the old fat ladies do it, exposing all their white wrinkled flesh just like that.

My hands and arms are cold. My stomach is a big mountain. Every so often it gets hard and I know I'm having a contraction. It doesn't hurt at all. They gave me a shot in my back. It is called an epidural. I'm glad. I was afraid I would scream and embarrass myself.

The American nurse comes in. She's thin and tall. She wears a short white skirt and white stockings and white shoes and a white cap. She smiles. I have gotten used to these Americans smiling all the time. When I first came here in

## AT HOME

*Summer, 1974*

Amiya looked out the kitchen window. There was a playground next to their new townhouse: swing-set, metal slide, and monkey bars, with sand all around. Next to that, a square of black paving with a bottomless basket on top of a tall pole. She wondered what that was for. Behind her, at the rented kitchen table, her mother drank coffee with Mrs. Kaminski.

“I did not think we would have to come back to America,” her mother said.

Amiya was bored with this statement. Mommy had been saying it for months, ever since they’d decided to move back to the US.

“We went there with the idea of settling down,” her mother said. “Somehow it was not meant to be.”

“You’ll get settled here soon,” Mrs. Kaminski soothed.

## REVOLUTION

Neel was thirteen and his sister, Anita, was ten, when their parents split up. On a chilly day in March, his mother picked him up after his astronomy club meeting and told him. As he sat in the front seat listening to her, Neel tried to keep his mind on the fact that he, his mother, the car, and the freeway were, at that moment, spinning through space at 30 kilometers per second on their journey around the sun.

In the months before the divorce was final, when Dad had moved out and was living on the other side of Newark in an unfurnished efficiency apartment, which contained almost nothing but a beanbag chair and empty Chinese food take-out boxes, Neel asked his parents many times why they were getting divorced.

His father, T. Gopalakrishnan, would rub his small pot belly slowly and say, in his thick Indian accent, rolling his R's and enunciating each consonant strongly, "Your mother has decided she does not want to be married to me anymore."

## DREAMS

Don't say it, Malini thinks as she spoons up her cereal and milk. Across the table, her twin brother stabs his cornflakes with the tip of his spoon. "I dreamed," he begins. His voice is a loud drone. "I was driving a race car in the desert, and going incredibly fast, way way too fast, and everything was passing me in a total black blur."

He wears an old pair of sweatpants and no shirt. He's so thin, he looks like a question mark above his cereal bowl. Malini does not want to hear about another of his terrifying dreams.

"And no matter how hard I stomped on the brakes," he chants, "the car wouldn't slow down, and the steering wheel didn't work either, and then I was heading for the edge of this cliff and I still couldn't stop, and—"

"I hope that is not how you will be driving next year," their father booms. "If so, maybe we will have to put off the driver's education."

## THE SWEATER

I don't care what Mom says—this is good yarn. It's directly from the sheep. No dyes, no treatments. Completely natural. Mom could care less about all of that, of course. I bought it from a woman who raises sheep near here. There was a craft fair on campus a few weeks ago, and she had a table there.

Mom asked, "Why did you buy such a dull color?" It's sort of a mottled tan, a mix of the white and black sheep wools. And she said, "It's so rough." Well, it's not lambswool.

I went to visit Mom and Dad last weekend. I don't know why I bothered. I guess I had nothing better to do, since Josh left. I didn't tell them about Josh leaving, of course. I'm not supposed to be dating him. I'm supposed to "get to know some nice Indian boys." I can't stand going to those India Student Association events, with everyone all concerned about who's going to make the most money.

Josh had to go home to help his mother sell her house

## MRS. RAGHAVENDRA'S DAUGHTER

Mrs. Raghavendra has discovered the purpose of life. She's sitting at her kitchen table considering her discovery while drinking her afternoon coffee. As she thinks, she presses her fingertip over a mess of crumbs sprinkled on the placemat, which shows a view of Niagara Falls. This placemat was bought back when her husband was alive, back when she still took trips to see tourist attractions.

The crumbs are from the one vanilla cookie she has just eaten, as she does every afternoon. She would have liked to eat a chocolate chip cookie, but three years ago she made a vow to give up chocolate until her daughter, Anjana, got married. She deposits the crumbs into a small pile in one corner of the placemat.

Mrs. Raghavendra has lived alone for the past seven years, ever since Anjana went to college. She still lives in the same tract house that she and her husband built fifteen years ago, with their own choice of carpet colors and wallpaper pat-



## CRYSTAL VASE: SNAPSHOTS

Revati stumbled as she entered the back door of her newly renovated kitchen-dining area clutching the thick stems of ivory tulips. The screen door clicked shut and she stopped to take a breath. The kitchen was redolent with the scent of baking cheese and garlic from the lasagna in the oven. Her husband, Bernard, ripped romaine lettuce at the counter.

“Hold these while I fill up the vase.” She thrust the flowers at him.

He accepted the stems. “Calm down.”

“I am calm.” She climbed a stool to reach the cabinet above the fridge.

“I’m ready, Mommy.” Her five-year-old daughter appeared at her side.

“You might be hot in that velvet dress.” Revati stepped down with a tall, sleek rectangular glass vase pressed to her chest.

“I want to look beautiful for your friend Liz.”

## PERFECT SUNDAY

At the end of the day yesterday, as we were eating dinner at the only open restaurant in Elk River (an old logging town-turned-hunter's vacation paradise), my seven-year-old son, Ranjan, said, "This was the best Sunday I've ever had in my entire life."

We had decided on a whim to go see Elk Creek Falls. I came home around noon from taking the kids to Sunday school. Ranjan attended a Jewish session, and I took the three-year-old, Samir, to a little Hindu "baby chanting" class while we waited for Ranjan to be done. Who would have thought we'd find both Jewish and Hindu communities here in this little college town in northern Idaho? I tried not to think about how we might have to move away soon.

I'd brought home Ranjan's Sunday school friend, Elliot, for the afternoon. My husband, Daniel, was sweeping out the garage, so we left the car in the driveway and got out. It was a sunny, breezy day, the yard dappled with yellow aspen leaves.



## HAWK

*JULY*

On the morning of a clear day at the outskirts of a Midwestern city, an elderly but still vigorous woman watched a large bird through her bedroom window. She'd awoken early and was already showered and dressed, although there was no longer anywhere she needed to be. The bird glided on a drift of air over the path by the creek, the distinct scallops of the dark wings and tail outlined against the sky.

The woman wore black stretch pants and a polo shirt which displayed, above her left breast, the logo of the Lincoln County Medical Center. Her hair was a short gray cap. Her tan skin didn't look wrinkled so much as carved. On her wrist was a watch with a round white dial and red second hand. She wore no jewelry. She stood with her feet apart, hands on hips, as though ready to order someone into action.

Once the bird floated out of sight, she turned to face