

ASHLEY DAVIDSON

On Childlessness

A house sparrow smacks into the window; the cat punches two red holes. I wrap him in tinfoil—this seems dignified—not the cat, feline tin man, moody and ill-humored. No, I wrap the sparrow, the weight of two slices of bread, set him in the trash gently, giving him a pat. You see, I am not completely lacking in maternal instincts. *There, there. I'll unwrap you later and warm you up in the microwave.* Sometimes I hate the cat for the things he does, and because he is a cat. There are issues my husband and I no longer discuss, a small no-man's-land in our marriage only the cat is permitted to cross.

Once, driving down a dirt two-track in Sedona, a family of javelina crossed in front of us, brash, hairy, pompous in their ugliness, and my husband hit one. The mother—or perhaps it was the father—turned and rammed our bumper with her tusks. She nosed the limp pup, glared up at whatever animal she imagined our car to be, but a machine cannot alter the past, cannot ask forgiveness.

I've been thinking of the sparrow, sandwiched in his foil sleeping bag. The dents the javelina left are still visible in the right light. I've been thinking all day; I could use a snack. A songbird on toast. My mother always said humor was an unattractive quality, like buckteeth, said it was really only a kind of meanness. My husband has one of those terrible belly buttons that swells outward like a hernia, but at least he is not too funny.

What you have heard is true: the saddest moments occur privately, lugging the vacuum down the hall, stopping before a closed door. I might have put the sparrow in a shoe box and left him in the spare room. Sometimes the dead come back to us, the way a longing you haven't felt in years quietly returns: *Here I am. Did you forget I live here?*