



# MEMOIR

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## SPECIAL IN THIS ISSUE

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SARAH COOMBER

## Love on the Line

*No love, no friendship can cross the path of our destiny without leaving some mark on it forever.*

—Francois Mauriac (1885–1970)

### Age 33

Standing on shore, working his fishing line in the inky, fast-moving river, dreaming of giant sturgeon, my husband suddenly called back to where I was standing, slightly suspicious of big water's power at dusk, and startled me away from noticing the moon. It was shining particularly brightly that evening over northeastern Washington and reminded me of being seventeen and thinking myself in love, half my life and half the world away, and of a boy pointing at that very same moon and suggesting that we think of one another when we look at it, he in Japan, I in Minnesota.

"The moon!" my husband said. And I looked at him, and I looked at the moon, and I thought, yes, there it is, and here he is, and here I am with him every day sharing that very moon and the stars and everything else.

### Today, age 43

A piece of advice: Never, ever associate a heavenly body with a beloved. Better to link him to a point on earth—river or mountain—something from which you can walk away.

### Age 17

Leaving Japan and my Japanese moon-boy pained me in the overwrought way losing a summer romance does. I had fallen for him in English class in July, when it was his turn to greet the summer exchange student and he had stood beside his desk and thoughtfully described the type of girl he liked—warm-hearted, eyes always shining, liked to clean things (for cleaning objects causes us to purify ourselves)—adding that I matched this description. He was busy pitching baseball tournaments, though, and essentially faded away. In August, on my seventeenth birthday, he had reappeared unexpectedly at my host family's home, with gifts and an enormous tub of sushi his mother had made. There was no kiss, no deep conversation (neither of us had harnessed the other's language), but he had held my hand and given me the moon.

It was enough.

### Age 21

I returned to Japan as a college senior, stopping there after spending a

semester with a group of biology students in India, a place to which I swore I would never return.

India had mesmerized me with its sparkling Bay of Bengal waters, its bejeweled dancers spinning ancient stories and its monkeys scolding us from forest perches, but it had been almost too much to handle, moaning with lepers and dusty beggar-children, flowing with murky thigh-deep monsoon waters and leering through the eyes of men who seemed to assume the worst of Western women.

After three months there I had landed in a rural bring-your-own food, water, towels, blankets and toilet paper hospital, where the doctors initially suspected malaria but later determined that my swirling belly, an ocean of sound every time I turned over, harbored at least three separate armies of parasites. I was more than happy to swallow their arsenal of foil-packed pills marked with terse warnings.

Weakened, thin and by that time rather disgusted with the wide world, I had only wanted the sanctity of a Minnesota winter, the purity of snow and temperatures through which no amoeba or worm could possibly survive. But the previous summer, before leaving my Minnesota home, my father and I had given my mother an early Christmas present: He would send her to Japan to meet me, and I would introduce her to a place I had learned to love. I could not renege on this gift. So I flew to Tokyo, found my way to the home of a friend's unsuspecting family, and a few days later shot south to Yamaguchi prefecture, where I had spent the summer I turned seventeen.

Back in my same-age host sister's bed, divested of parasites, soaked and scrubbed clean, I awoke from a vivid dream, an encounter with the moon-boy, now a moon-man. We had sat and talked, and he had hesitantly, sweetly put his arm around me.

On waking, the dream made me smile, but I did not take it as a sign or even a suggestion. Since my high school visit, we had sent a few letters back and forth across the ocean and tried to telephone each other once. Then, there had come nothing but the moon. I got out of bed, dressed, quietly slid open the front door and went for a jog along the beach, happening on the diaphanous shell of a paper nautilus, rising white out of the sand.

Later that post-dream day, I made a courtesy call to the high school, and teachers asked me about the moon-man. I had not expected them to connect him with me. A couple of hours later, my host parents' telephone rang, and my smirking younger host sister handed me the receiver. I heard the moon-man's gentle voice calling from his university near Tokyo: "Sah-lah?" News had traveled fast. Not many days later, wearing the navy suit coat of his university baseball team, he appeared in my host family's *genkan*, smiling and bowing to my host mother before startling to see me slipper-shuffling up behind her.

A happily awkward hello and evaluation—handsome!—in the entryway. A full-family visit—host mom and dad, host grandma, little host sister, the

moon-man and me—on leather sofa and chairs in the sitting room, a place used only for special occasions. I had begun to wonder whether this was the beginning or the end of our time together, when my host mother sent the moon-man and me away, up the steep, narrow staircase to my host sister's room. There we sat on the *tatami* floor facing one another across a small square table. Soon she appeared with a tray, cups of coffee and wrapped chocolates, and then vanished, leaving us to our conversation, a patient mix of English and Japanese, which thankfully I had studied in college. The moon-man detailed for me his previous four years before earnestly asking, "What did you do after you left Japan?"

We became inseparable, meeting for morning jogs along the beach, touring tea houses and shrines, eating in little noodle and coffee shops. He always held my door, walked on the rocky side of the path and paid my way. He took me to his favorite spot by the sea, which, it turned out, overlooked mine. He brought me to his home, introduced me to his surprised mother and played me songs on the piano. I hugged him, and he kissed me. I introduced him to my surprised mother when she arrived. It was fast-forward dating, and when he and my host family waved goodbye through the window of the bullet train that would carry my mother and me to Tokyo, from where we would fly home to the United States, I cried. So did my mother.

We kept in touch for a time, and I dreamily applied for an English teaching job near his university. I heard I was a finalist and would be interviewed for the job. Then I learned I was not a finalist after all.

Still I was stuck with the moon.

### Age 23

As my first marriage deteriorated and hopelessness began creeping in, I placed a framed photograph on the living room bookcase. My husband never asked me about it, so it must have seemed innocuous: a group of Japanese people plus my mother and me smiling happily before a vermilion shrine festooned with colorful flags. The image had been taken New Year's Day just two years earlier. Looking at that photo, I could remember feeling well-matched, complete, like the clams eaten in Japan each March in Girls' Day soup, their bivalve shells fitting perfectly, symbolizing a happily married couple.

My then-husband also probably did not notice that I had switched my keys to a new keyholder, a circle linked to an inch-high lacquered-wood Ouchi doll, which the moon-man had given me the last time we had been together. Pairs of these dolls symbolize harmonious couples; carrying the one lonely doll felt right.

Bringing the photo of the moon-man and his keychain into our home was not the right thing to do, but it reminded me of how happy it was possible to be. It got me through.

An observation: First loves can mess you up, especially first loves that last a brief period and are limited by time and geography. Even worse are first loves revisited a second short time. There are no fights, no money issues, no emerging jealousies, no surprise bad habits, no growing pains. Love so constrained is like a weather pattern, easy to recognize but impossible to conjure, and reality is never as fair.

This is not to say my first marriage would have survived had I not known the moon-man. But maybe without him I would not have chased and expected the high, that impossible thrill of the short-term romance, and tried so quickly to fill the void the moon-man had twice left.

### Age 29

Six and a half years after I placed that photo on my bookcase, my moon-man and the man who would become my second husband bookended the last flight I would take home from Japan as a single woman. One oversaw my departure, the other my arrival.

The handoff was not clean. Pieces of the moon-man stuck to my heart like old masking tape, and the e-mail he sent afterward showed I had stuck to him as well: After I had left him at the security gate, he had gone up to the airport roof and waited there, watching airplanes take off, one by one, until he was sure he had seen mine lift into the afternoon sky and head toward the east. I brought my tacky heart home, and resumed what on the flight I had decided was real, my healthy, happy life on the American Great Plains.

This would require diminishing him, man into memory, the last one being this: sitting on hard pre-departure benches, rushing travelers all around us, his arm encircling me, talking for the first time in more than four years, sitting eye to eye for the first time in more than eight, receiving his cell phone number, hearing him ask me to let him know if I married, to give him more notice the next time I visited Japan; I saying I would, through tears.

In fact, I never did. I had not intended to see him that trip or ever again.

My moon-man was married.

### Age 25

His wedding had occurred nearly five years before that flight from Japan, just days after I had arrived in a rural area an hour's drive from my Japanese hometown. I was there to teach English to junior high school students and decompress, post-divorce.

I had not known of his marriage until a couple of months had passed and I accompanied a friend, a high school classmate of the moon-man, to an autumn festival. She told me the moon-man's big news, not knowing how much it would mean to me. Although I tried to maintain my happy mood, pain shot through my chest, and when we came upon a booth offering blood pressure checks, the nurse frowned at my low reading.

I later reported the news to my same-age host sister, who lived in Tokyo, not far from the moon-man and his wife. Soon my telephone rang. I picked it up and heard the moon-man's tender voice. He told me what I already knew: He was married. His new wife had a baby in her belly. He said he would like to see me again someday. I congratulated him and her too, I wished them well, I hung up the phone.

I came completely undone. Alone in my apartment, I called a new friend, an Englishwoman who was teaching in a nearby city and, bawling, explained to her as well as to myself, that I had not returned to Japan to find the moon-man or any other romance, but now that I knew he was married and soon to be a father, I did not know why the hell I was there. My bewildered friend sent me a note of encouragement and a little stuffed hedgehog.

Had I known what drama had been evolving while I was blithely ensconced in my quiet new town, getting over jet lag, licking my wounds from the previous couple of years, bowing and greeting hundreds of people, new colleagues and students and neighbors and shopkeepers, taking long walks through the rice paddies, I might have pulled a stunt ala Dustin Hoffman in "The Graduate." I imagine myself abandoning my teaching post and tracking down the white-clapboard-look wedding chapel where I envisioned the moon-man's wedding took place. I would have banged on its flimsy doors till someone had let me in, ceremony on hold, guests gawking, and he would have walked toward me, slack-jawed with surprise. We would have fled onto a passing city bus, destined for happily ever after. Or something.

Around Christmastime that year I saw his wedding photos. I no longer remember how I ended up in his childhood home with his mother, who wrapped me in a tearful hug as I stepped out of my host dad's car. She served my same-age host sister, visiting from Tokyo, and me coffee and showed us wedding albums as we sat on her sofa, the same sofa where four years earlier she had embraced me and offered me her indigo and cherry blossom handkerchief while her son, my moon-man, had played the piano and we prepared to say goodbye.

But this visit was a kind of hell, sitting beside the mother-in-law of another woman, paging through photos of her son and his pretty bride. I do not recall crying, but if that is so, it was only because I focused on the garishness of my moon-man's tuxedo—was it lavender or was it yellow?

Some days later, walking the beach, I found a pure-white paper nautilus shell—in my journal I called it a moon shell—only the second I had ever seen. Its resident, an argonaut octopus, crow-pecked and throbbing like a broken heart, was stranded nearby. I did not know how to help.

When my host sister returned to Tokyo, I went with her half anticipating, half dreading a meeting she had set up for the moon-man, his wife and me, a meeting that would never occur.

What is the word for sadness mixed with relief? My host sister did not understand. Hearing that the moon-man and his wife had canceled, she

shifted straight to furious and picked up the phone to call them. It was such a humiliating coda that it was almost gratifying.

Well, I thought, that's the end of that.

• • •

Even before I found out that the moon-man had married, I was spending evenings in my apartment with a new friend, an outdoorsy type who smelled of sunshine and lived in the dormitory downstairs, an employee of the cement company that owned our building. I made him green tea, he brought me music tapes, American and Japanese, Cyndi Lauper and Akiko Yano. He wanted romance, I didn't.

Soon I learned a Japanese proverb, "*kabe ni mimi ari shōji ni me ari*," which means, "The walls have ears and the paper doors have eyes." I knew the walls were thin, mostly because I often heard laughter coming from the smiling older couple whose apartment nestled up to one side of mine. The apartment on the other side loomed quieter. It was home to the *shachō*, the head of that branch of the cement company, and his wife. A month or so after my new friend and I began spending time together, he told me that the *shachō* had forbidden him to visit my apartment; it did not look good for his company, and it did not look good for the Board of Education that had hired me.

I was astounded, not believing that our innocent teatimes were raising eyebrows. Then I was angry that my friend had not seen this coming. This was his culture, his language, his company's dormitory. How could he have let our reputations be sullied—for what? Drinking tea and listening to music?

After some cold days apart, I missed him. But to spend time together, we felt we had to leave town. I slipped downstairs to his sporty station wagon, and we quietly rolled away. We went to dubbed American action movies and visited Buddhist temples, we grabbed meals of squid-ink pasta and ran errands to grocery stores in bigger cities. Once the kerfuffle settled down, he resumed visiting my apartment, tiptoeing up the stairs and sneaking in as I held the door. We listened to music and whispered until we forgot.

After returning from my post-New Year's moon-man debacle in Tokyo, I grew melancholy. My friend suggested we drive till we found snow.

It took some hours, but finding it was exhilarating—the glowing cheeks, the crystalline air. Seeing my friend surrounded by the snow he had brought me to enjoy, I recognized how fantastic he was. Later that evening, we would kiss and then spend the next year mostly as a couple, persevering even after I extended my contract a second year to be with him and he, shortly thereafter, was transferred to faraway Tokyo, in apparent retaliation for our relationship. We would spend our holidays and weekends meeting each other at busy tourist sites and quiet *ryōkan*, sometimes driving his car, its tinted windows

camouflaging us as we sang, bounced and bobbed to his ever-expanding music collection, Sheryl Crow, Lisa Loeb and Yumi Matsutoya. We would meet up in Minnesota for a summer vacation and camping trip to introduce him to my family and friends, and the landscape I called home. Even after the distance got the best of us and we decided to break up—a decision he sadly called “divortion”—he would meet me at the airport to kiss me goodbye when I returned to the United States for good.

But all that was in the future. The evening of the day we found the snow, I decided to complete some old business. We were approaching a small bridge that spanned a stream of rushing snowmelt when I asked my friend to pull over. He parked his car at the side of the road. I took my keys off the moon-man’s Ouchi doll keychain, which by then was so chipped and worn as to be unrecognizable as anything more than a knob of wood, got out of my friend’s car, walked to the bridge and hurled the talisman into the stream, which I imagined would carry it far, far away, and with it my feelings for the moon-man.

But everyone knows there is no way to throw away the moon.

### **Age 29, again**

I had had a mission while visiting Japan my last time as a single woman: to track down some Hanae Mori china for my parents. They had been given a set of white plates decorated with butterflies, but these dishes bugged my mother because there were five of them, as that is the count by which Japanese plates are sold, and her American sensibilities longed for six or eight or ten.

While in Japan, I called the Hanae Mori information line and learned I might find these plates at a certain department store in the Tokyo area. That store happened to be where the moon-man had been working at the time of the New Year’s fiasco nearly five years earlier, when the drama of our canceled meeting had given way to my peace with being alone, and that peace had opened the way for new romance.

I decided that my mother’s plate quandary did not warrant a trip to that store, no matter how unlikely it was that complications would arise. Some days later, though, when I visited newlywed American friends living near Tokyo, we happened to pass by the moon-man’s department store. My stomach leaped.

Deciding it was too much of a coincidence not to stop in and inquire about the plates, I told my friends I needed to visit the china department. We rambled in and found the china, but the woman behind the counter apologized that there were no butterfly plates in stock. We bowed and thanked each other anyway.

Browsing the shelves, I confided to my friends a brief version of the moon-man story and explained that this had been his very store. My friend’s husband



was intrigued and pressed me: Why would I not take this opportunity to say hello to an old friend?

I hesitated and stalled. I bought some wind chimes, one with a fish for my boyfriend, who was waiting for me back in Minnesota. Finally, I returned to my new acquaintance at the china counter and asked her if she knew the moon-man. She consulted with her counter partner and no, they did not, but let us look at the staff directory, oh, here, hmmm, just a moment please. She picked up her company phone, and as I began calculating the awkwardness of what could happen next, she greeted someone on her receiver and handed it to me with a nod.

*“Moshi-moshi?”* I said.

There was a brief pause. *“Sab-lah?”*

• • •

I have long forgotten what I was wearing the last time I left Japan as a single woman, except for one thing: my bra. It stands out for me because when I travel, I dress for comfort, and that precludes a bra with structure, such as an underwire whose binding might distract me from catching a snooze. Usually when I travel I wear a sports bra.

That particular morning, when I was scheduled to leave Japan, I was thinking about more than comfort, more than my usual packing and pre-flight jitters. I was thinking about the moon-man, who had insisted on accompanying me on the bus to the airport. I remember getting dressed at my friends' apartment and, after some internal debate, putting on my lacy black underwire bra with the demi cups, the bra I had purchased to wear to company parties and lucky friends' weddings, my go-to bra when I wanted to impress. I stuffed my sports bra into a pocket of my carry-on bag.

I had no notion that the moon-man would ever see this bra, nor did I want him to. I knew that even without the black bra, seeing him, his wife unaware, put me on shaky ethical ground. But after he had chosen to marry that other woman and had stood me up in Tokyo four and a half years previously, I did not want to show up single, flat-chested and pathetic. Maybe I wanted him to wonder what he had missed.

Do I even need to mention that first loves can mess you up even more when encountered a third time, again for the briefest of periods? Our relationship was less a weather pattern than a particularly bad version of Tanabata, the Japanese summer star festival that celebrates the ancient story of a weaver princess and cow herder prince whose love led them to neglect their duties and run afoul of the king. He placed them on opposite sides of the Amanogawa, literally “the heavenly river,” the Japanese name for the Milky Way, and allowed them to meet only once a year, if it was not raining.

I was no princess and the moon-man was no cow herder, but our connection drew us together once, twice and again, while a river of something kept us from pursuing our relationship. That something had evolved through the years, and it might as well have been a river of stars: language barriers and youth, then lack of focus and maybe imagination, finally commitments and choices already made. The moon-man might tell a completely different story, but regardless, while the nature of the river kept changing, its course never altered. It always flowed between us.

This time, the moon-man met me at the station, where I saw he had developed the body of a well-fed married man but still smiled from that same kind face, those enthusiastic eyes, that broad ingenuous smile, and my friend who had delivered me to the station faded away—did I even say goodbye? We boarded the short airport bus like high school delinquents, prowling all the way to the back seat, and there began to catch up, rapid-fire, on all that had happened to each of us in the previous eight years. He told me he was sorry about my divorce, I told him that his photo had kept my spirits up; he told me his mother still talked about me, I told him to greet her for me; he told me that he knew right away it was my voice on his work phone. I wonder if I told him that I still thought of him nearly every time I saw the moon. We laughed with joy at being together, and then, at the airport, he waited with me until I had absolutely no choice but to enter the secured area and leave him behind. Again.

Before I crossed to the other side that day, we shared a bowl of an-mitsu, cubes of seaweed gelatin, sweet bean paste and fruit, and he left me for a few interminable minutes, returning with a CD, telling me to listen to the seventh track when I got home.

Many hours and thousands of miles later, I would listen and hear the song “Hana”—“Flowers,” which unbeknownst to the moon-man had struck a chord in me around the time I had learned of his marriage:

Kawa wa nagarete doko doko yukuno  
Hito mo nagarete doko doko yukuno  
Sonna nagare ga tsuku koroni wa  
Hana to shite hana to shite sakasete agetai

Naki nasai warai nasai  
itsu no hi ka itsu no hi ka  
hana wo sakaso yo . . .

The song pairs things that flow, rivers and people, tears and love. It tells the listener to go ahead and laugh, go ahead and cry, but know that we must meet these things that flow, and someday, someday, our flowers will bloom.

At the airport that day, my moon-man told me that someday he would tell

his wife we had met, and someday maybe we could all get together. Perhaps if I had daughters, they could meet his sons. Maybe we would see each other again when we get old and romance is the furthest thing from our minds. My tears flowed for whatever it was we had lost and could never regain, and he kissed my cheeks. He held me long and close, and we said goodbye.

I got through security, slipped into a bathroom and changed into my comfortable bra.

• • •

I had been home in my own apartment less than an hour when the doorbell rang. Special delivery: an enormous fruit basket sent by my boyfriend of less than two months, who, seventeen months later, would become my second husband.

In one hand I held a CD with a song about flowing rivers and people and tears and love, and in the opposite I held a heavy basket filled with pears, oranges, bananas and grapes, all ripe, wholesome nutrition. The two gifts, the whiplash of moving between two loves and the jet lag made me laugh and cry all at once, telephoning my mother across town to ask whether it was wrong to listen to the one's CD while eating the other's fruit and what I should do next.

### **Age 43, again**

I think I'm old enough now to offer one more piece of advice: Before you give your heart to your beloved, make certain he stands on the same side of the river.

• • •

After seven years of marriage, career-building and traveling, moving and studying, camping and lazy weekends, my husband and I adopted a three-year-old boy from India, of all places. Seventeen years had passed since I had literally shaken India's dust from my feet, walking out of my sandals and abandoning them before boarding the airplane, when one day we both realized that we had a son waiting for us there.

India was kinder to me the second time around. It went after my husband instead. Against my warnings, he had drunk the fresh-squeezed fruit juice offered at our bed and breakfast mere hours after arriving in the country, and Delhi belly hit hard. After completing our adoption business at the U.S. Embassy, he lost his breakfast in some bushes and then not long afterward at the side of the dusty, litter-strewn road, and then from his bed for what seemed like weeks on end but was only a day or so, till we were both sure he was going to throw up his own guts and die and I would become a single

parent before we had even met our son. He implored me to go on to Chennai without him to pick up our little boy and ship his own spent body home in a wooden box, if it wasn't too much trouble. But then a doctor in a bombed-out-appearing shell of a building gave him a shot in the bum and some pills, and my husband rallied, and a couple of days later, seated two people away from me on our flight to Chennai, he smilingly accepted a glass of—what?—fruit juice from the flight attendant. I came mightily close to coming unglued.

Five flights later, we arrived home with our startlingly beautiful son, who en route had made it clear that my husband's and my halcyon time, which we had not previously recognized as such, was behind us. Over the next couple of years, we were inundated with a frenzy of tantrums and activity from the most challenging child I have ever encountered. If you live in our small town, you likely have seen me haul his screaming, flailing ass out of some public venue, probably Safeway, where he and I have abandoned and retrieved our grocery cart up to three times in a single visit, or the post office, where a certain postal worker has only to catch a glimpse of me, even alone, to burst into laughter at our shared not-too-distant memories of the times I have tried to carry on business while intercepting my son's grabs and wanderings before finally squeezing him spread-eagle, hollering, between me and the counter to pay for a few stamps.

Things have gotten better. The storms are calming, and while my husband is at work, my son and I spend hours on the floor playing blocks and trucks, swinging on his swing set, hiking with other moms and kids, and making chapatis and pizza in the kitchen. And now that I have taken up breathing again, I can see that my son is the person who has probably taught me the most about love, and I do not mean only the love between a parent and a child. He has awakened me just as much or more to the love between a husband and a wife.

I spent much of the first two years of parenthood ranting at my husband. This is surely not what he had signed up for after a patient courtship during which he had unwittingly nearly exorcised me of the vestiges of my moon-man fantasy while renewing my optimism toward the idea of marriage. When he proposed to me in the quiet pine woods of northern Minnesota, surprising me with a ring by the headwaters of the Mississippi River, we both recognized the metaphor flowing before us: Like that clean slip of a river easily crossed stone by stone, we were at the beginning of what would be a long and, at times, crooked trip subjected to countless obstacles and influences, and it would be months and years before we even had a sense of what type of expedition we had embarked upon or where it would take us.

I am thankful we used the first seven years of our wedded journey to enjoy the view, learn to negotiate the inevitable rapids and set our course before embarking on parenthood, which as every parent knows is a channel that

changes everything. Before we went to India, my husband and I had envisioned picking up our castaway, pulling him into our boat, and, after some months of adjustment, sailing on. Turns out we had not signed up for a cruise.

During our protracted transition period, as I traded my old normal schedule—work, lunches out and a gym membership—for life as a stay-at-homer, most days felt so long, each minute hour-like, that no cliché or metaphor would do them justice. The best way to convey the tenor of our household at that time is to admit that when my husband returned home even two minutes later than promised (and every day I made him promise he *would* return—alive, uninjured and on time), I, ecstatic to see him, would yell at him for being late. Then, I would follow him to our bedroom and, while he was in our walk-in closet changing out of his work clothes and our son was banging on the child gate to our bedroom, I would whisper-yell to him about how horrible my day had been and how bleak my outlook was for the rest of this life. I would expect sympathy, and I would exact it, probably because my husband knew his present and our future depended on it.

What is amazing is that my husband kept coming home. He listened to me rage to him and at him, and he did not rage back. He took over parenting duties on arrival. He spent his weekends and rare days off giving me breaks. He supported my occasional girls' nights out. He all but gave up his lifetime hobby, fishing, although we live mere minutes from a wild river, to help keep the organism that is our family sane.

That is love.

It is not the stuff I dreamed of as a girl or even a young woman, flowers, lingerie, long dinners and beach vacations, although I have gotten all of those things too. I had no idea before, but love is when you call your beloved's cell phone twice in the middle of his important work meeting because after four hours of a child's tantrums you are teetering on the brink of insanity and he senses this, excuses himself, answers your call, listens to your hysterics, the beginnings of which were probably overheard by his colleagues, walks out of the building for privacy, talks you off the ceiling and then comes home early to mop up any residual emotional damage.

That is love. And now, thank God, thank my husband and thank my son, I recognize it.

• • •

Fourteen years have passed since the last time I went to Japan as a single woman, since that one ridiculously long day during which I received a CD and a fruit basket. Now my husband—he of the fruit basket—and I and our partly tamed son live in the country, not too far from the city, but far enough away that the moon and the stars shine clearly, especially after our son goes

to bed and my husband and I go down by the fire pit behind the house, away from the yard lights, baby monitor perched on the woodpile, our faces and fingers gooey with marshmallows and chocolate, graham wafer crumbs all over.

We have seen many moons together, and I often think back to the night early in our marriage when he was fishing and I was standing back from the roaring Upper Columbia River, when he startled me out of my reverie, pointing out the moon to me. And I think love is like the oversized sturgeon he dreamed of hooking into that night, an ancient fish torpedoing below the river's roiling surface, swallowing dangling bait and in an instant whizzing out a whole reel's worth of fishing line, and your heart is gone forever on a journey you never could have dreamed.

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