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Annmarie Masters

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Little Miss Shorecrest

Annmarie Masters

Tumbling backwards now past the big houses with the circular drives, past the foreign cars and jasmine-covered mailboxes, past the professional landscaping, hurtling now faster and faster past inner city brownstones, past one bedroom apartments and studios in doormen buildings, garden apartments and cement block dorm rooms back to a suburban neighborhood with cyclone fencing and above ground pools, with cul-de-sacs inhabited by split levels, back to the sixties. Houses framed by poplar trees and a railroad track in back. 1962. A girl at the window. A man on the porch. That was me. That was my father.

Now I'm in my childhood bedroom wearing the same pink dress and white pinafore that I wore in the "Little Miss Shorecrest" contest. My mother is asking, "Who do you want to live with?" I look down. If I say "you," I will betray my father. If I say "Dad," I will betray her. All I can think of is if I had won the pageant, and not come in First Runner Up my Dad wouldn't be leaving. I remain mute. My father moves out. I am 6. Every Sunday Dad

**A girl at the window. A man on the porch. That was me.
That was my father.**

comes and brings us to Mass. In the beginning we go to my grandparents' house where he is staying. After a while, months, years, we go to his apartment. He's remarried now to an Italian lady. She was his secretary. This angers my mother greatly. The Italian lady is nice to us at first. All five of us. She cooks us great Italian Sunday dinners. Then they have a baby and buy a house. Dad doesn't bring us to Mass anymore. He brings us to the Home Depot instead. We walk around the huge store for hours looking at things he needs for his home. Sometimes we get six hot chocolates with whipped cream at Friendly's. 'But why can't we see the baby?' "When the house is finished, we'll wait until then. See you next Sunday."

The baby grows up, and then another. The unseen nursery becomes a soccer field, a Boy Scout campout, a graduation stage. We knew of them but they knew nothing of us. He was the master of his own deception; our exile the sacrifice for his salvation. In the end, there were just seven standing in a cemetery on a rock hard February day.