

I never once took them seriously. I thought he was just joking. Really, I did.

Of course, he wasn't. I found that out once and for all the day I got the two biggest pieces of news I'll probably ever get: that I was hired for a tenure-track position, that my book was accepted for publication. An hour after I told him, Calvin dumped me.

Now, I know you're shaking your heads at this. Impossible, you say, not the Calvin I know! A misogynist! Never! These are just the lies of a bitter woman, with an agenda! But stop for a minute. Yes, I am bitter, and yes I do have an agenda, but this doesn't mean that I'm not right. It's a fact: Dr. Calvin Stamps, the close personal friend of Gloria Steinem, the tireless defender of the rights of all minorities you can think of and a few that you can't, the writer of two "witty, postmodern feminist mystery novels," the man I spent five years worshipping and who broke my heart in five seconds flat, does not respect women. Never did, never will. But don't take my word for it: ask him yourself. Ask him, and make him look you in the eyes when he answers.

And while you look in his watery blue eyes, you might want to remember that this man, sixty-five years old last month, is now dating a twenty-two-year-old graduate student. That, every few years for the past three decades, this man has started dating a new twenty-two-year-old graduate student. Look in those watery blue eyes, I tell you, and decide for yourself. And, if you decide you believe me, then you need to ask yourself some questions. *What kind of person are you? What kind of world do you want to live in? Do you, or do you not, agree that the world needs more strippers?*

It seems to me that this is a fundamental dividing line, and all of us need to decide which side of it we stand on, and we need to wage war on the other side. If you think, as I do, if you are in fact quite sure, as I am, that there are more than enough strippers in this world, then the fight begins here and now, with Dr. Calvin Stamps. To all my fellow-believers, I ask you: *What are we going to do about Calvin, and when are we going to do it?*

## FROBISHER LARAMIE

Monday morning, 9:14.

Stan, in the cubicle opposite mine, pushes off from his desk, sliding his chair out on the hard plastic mat, obstructing me as I walk past. *Look at little Frobisher Laramie all dolled up and ready to go, oooh-wee.* In a high pitched vaguely Southern accent, he repeats, *Frobisher Laramie, oooh-wee.*

I have no idea from which compartment of the popular culture Frobisher Laramie is drawn, but he is clearly meant to be a dandy, a fop, a slick young fellow. Stan, nodding his head, continues, *Frobisher Laramie must have a young lady he's a courtin'.* Nicole, afraid she is missing something, drops a spent tea bag in the trash, swivels round in her chair, removes her headset and looks at me sympathetically. *Frobisher Laramie, spends so much time in front of the mirror, he's late for work. Now, how about that?*

And why all this from Stan? What spectacle do I present? True, I had gotten my hair cut on the weekend, and I was wearing a maroon shirt that reflected the overhead fluorescent light slightly. But there is no young lady, and I hadn't spent time preening in front of the mirror.

I hang up my coat and Nicole remarks that my haircut looks very nice, providing Stan another opening. *All the ladies love young Frobisher, with his fancy clothes and fashionable hair-do, they just won't let him be.* I issue a smile and turn on my computer. Stan, satiated for the moment, slides his chair back to his desk and opens a file. Throughout the morning he occasionally looks in my direction and mouths *Frobisher*. I engage in some half



hearted repartee, but the joke is truly played out by the time I approach the coffee maker after lunch and Stan, his fingers arranged in the shape of a gun, barks *Frobisher* as if he were a drill sergeant.

Just after three, Stan slips into Desmond's office to discuss a football pool. I Google "Frobisher Laramie." Nothing. Nicole, noticing Stan's absence, walks over to my desk, places a large hand on my chair and says that Stan is very immature. I shift in my seat, look at my monitor and explain that it's nothing; Stan is just kidding around. She nods, and I feign needing to make a photocopy.

At 5:30 Stan, on his way out the door, again brings up Frobisher Laramie; Nicole makes sure that I see her shaking her head. Ten minutes later I leave and find Stan still lingering in the lobby, joking with our receptionist Kent and calling him *Thermometer Jackson*. Kent is black and this *Thermometer Jackson* stuff seems somehow racist, but not in a way that one could specify precisely. Stan and I trade *later dudes* and I'm gone, gobbling up the parking lot in quick strides.

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## ROUTINES

Shadows move behind curtains across the street,  
lives, stories I do not know—  
men, women who may be choosing  
a shirt, a book, take sugar in morning coffee,  
yawn at the starting day.

Time bends one way, the other,  
ordinary, dramatic.  
I push things away, or pull then in—  
emails, the telephone,  
in the tyrannical expectation of being.

Do people across the street watch light battling  
against the panes?  
Do they too, reinvent the past at night?  
Their days may be arranged  
in orderly sequence, or random lines.

Hours move in circles for me,  
ritualistic gestures encompassed in arches,  
dream-like.  
I cull a sense of security from daily rhythms—  
mornings at the table with *The New York Times*,  
afternoons at the desk—

my wonderful order, objects adjusted  
against the wind,  
my children's lives arranged,  
rearranged by them,  
my hands uncertain in changing light.