

CHRISTINE BYL

Tell Me Something about Arizona

All winter Russell's logs dried out in the shed, two and a half cord worth, salvaged from a friend's property down the Bitterroot after a windstorm late last fall. His small goal: to finish cutting and stacking the firewood before summer ends and school begins again. When Laura calls he sits down on the splitting stump, the maul leaned against his knee.

"Hi, Laura. How's Arizona?"

"It's good." Her voice lurches through the static of her cell phone. "How's home?"

"Oh, it's okay. A little lonely without you. Our son is missing."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I haven't seen him since you left. I know he hasn't been kidnapped because he leaves plates in the sink occasionally. At least I think it's him."

"Give him a break, Russ, he's seventeen. He's got places to be."

"What places? Do you know?"

"Oh, stop it. He's fine."

Russell studies the blisters that rim his palm. "What about me?"

"What about you?"

"I guess I'm fine," says Russell.

Laura clears her throat. "Russ, I can't talk right now, I just wanted to let you know I'm here and settled and I'll call again soon."

"Thanks for calling, sweetie," says Russell. "Is it very hot there?" he begins to ask, but she has already hung up the phone.

His son Anton has a best friend named Jameel, a lanky black kid with round gold spectacles who wears T-shirts that say in large white letters things like: "No, I don't play basketball." Anton has begun to sport similar items, including a button on his army-green canvas satchel that says "If This Were a Bus, I'd Get Off." "What's *This*?" Russell asked him once. Anton shrugged and said, "Whatever you think it is, Dad."

How did I get the kind of kid I envied in high school? Russell often wonders this. Anton is nothing like the teenaged Russell, the boy who watched from the bleachers of football fields, the audience of school plays, the edges of dances in the school gym where the popular kids groped each other inside the painted lines of the basketball court. Earlier in the summer, Anton called Russell a dork. Laura tells him not to take it personally. "We aren't supposed to be interesting to him," she reminded Russell once, "or he'll never reproduce. It's science." But Laura's in Arizona now and by himself, biology is not consoling.

Russell calls Derrick to meet him for din-

ner. They've been friends four years, since Derrick started teaching drama at the private high school where Russell teaches history. The Old Post is a retired Army watering hole with an oak bar and cocked floor planks, air laced with the smell of decades-old linseed oil. Russell slouches in a green leather booth, fingering the brass rivets that bullet the edges of the tabletop. Derrick waits behind the waitress, slides into the booth when she sets down a pitcher.

"Get your wood done?"

"No," says Russell. It's Derrick's property the blown-down logs came from, a ten-acre parcel backed up to state land that Russell envies.

"How're you faring with Laura gone?"

"Fine, I guess. We're used to it." Laura leaves every year in mid-August to go to the desert for an artist's retreat. Why she wants to go to Arizona in August is beyond Russell, though she says in the mountains it's cooler and since Russell has never been, he has to take her word for it.

"Has Frank called you yet?" asks Derrick. Derrick pours himself a glass of beer and drains half of it before Russell answers.

"No. I haven't heard anything."

"Well, not to bring up that subject. I bet he'll call this week. Pour?"

Russell pushes forward his glass. "He better. I can't call him. Humiliating."

"He'll call."

"Well, if he doesn't, he can pay the mortgage. What the hell am I going to do without a job?"

"Listen, I'm changing the subject," says Derrick. "I have a joke for you. Remember all those

'man with no arms and no legs' jokes? Bob, Sandy, Matt? You know them?" Russell remembers the jokes from some roommate in college, a science major with a heavy metal collection.

"You're going to love this one," says Derrick. "What do you call a man with no arms and no legs lying in a pile of leaves?"

He shrugs.

"Come on, take a guess. No? No guess? Okay. Russell."

Russell raises his eyebrows.

"Rustle!" says Derrick. "Lying in a pile of leaves!" He slaps the table with his hand and his nostrils fire in and out. Beer sloshes in the glasses.

"Ha, ha," says Russell. "Hey pal, what if you were a man with no limbs, how'd you like to hear a joke like that?"

"If I had no arms and no legs," says Derrick, lifting his glass in a mock toast, "I'd hope to hell I had a sense of humor."

Laura doesn't call again until the following evening and Russell can tell within seconds that something is off.

"Did the principal call?" she asks as soon as the greetings are out of the way.

"No, nothing yet. Derrick says he probably will this week. I'm just planning to start as usual."

Laura snorts. "Derrick. What does he know?"

"Laura," he says, "tell me something about Arizona—what is it like there? Is it hot?" All Russell can imagine is cactus and sand, a cartoon Laura dragging on her belly with her tongue out, days without water.

"It's very sensual," says Laura. "It's beautiful and harsh. I love it here." Her voice cracks. He thinks she might start to cry.

"Listen, I miss you, babe," he says.

"Russ, I gotta go."

"I really do miss you," he says again. They're both so stubborn.

"I have to go, Russ, I'll call you tomorrow," Laura says and hangs up the phone.

Russell paces, puts on Mahler, loud, then turns it off again. The house feels empty, in need of something. Russell and Laura bought their house right after Anton was born. It's a two-story with leaded glass windows and wood trim, cast-iron grates on the heating vents and a mahogany sliding door as thick as a dictionary separating the living and dining rooms. Lately, with his son and wife mostly gone, Russell wishes for a double-wide like the one he grew up in, tiny windows and carpeted floors. Cheap, unassuming. Somewhere you could hide out, where the light couldn't get you, somewhere you could be alone and it wouldn't feel like anything.

Above the fireplace hangs the only painting of Laura's that she allows in the house. "One is enough," she says. It's a square canvas in muted oranges and browns, like an autumn field would look if you crossed your eyes at it. He thinks of Laura in her studio with her curls sticking out the sides of a stocking cap, a hair snagged on the dried skin of her lip. Some of her paintings he hates, but he likes to watch her while she works, when she doesn't know he's there.

Russell slides in his stocking feet across the

wood floors, skates around the dining room table until his toes ache from trying to balance. When he passes Anton's room on his way to bed, he rattles the door handle but it is locked, and by the dark quiet coming from under the door, he can tell that Anton's not home. He knocks anyway.

In the bathroom brushing his teeth, Russell leans against the counter and watches his reflection in the mirror. He raises one hand and waves it side to side. "Good night everybody," he says.

The previous May, a fourteen-year-old girl in his freshman history class told her parents that Russell touched her in a way that made her uncomfortable. The principal gave him a leave of absence and said they would deal with it over the summer. No one had to know. The school hired a permanent substitute who taught the last month, and Russell went back only once to clean out his desk. In June, Russell appeared before the disciplinary committee for a hearing in which he swore that he had never touched the girl in any way that he deemed inappropriate. He touched all his students perhaps a bit more than some teachers, but just a cuff on the neck here, a hand on the top of the head there. It was jocular, he thought, affectionate.

"If I were a soccer coach, it would be fine, the way I touch the kids," he'd said to the committee. "Ask any of them, it's fine!" He wondered if it could've been the time when he put his hand between the girl's shoulder blades on the way to an assembly. Her shirt was thin and he had felt her warm skin beneath his palm. Sara Lee, her

name was, the adopted Indonesian daughter of a wealthy couple who didn't think not to name their girl after frozen cake.

Russell did not mention to the committee that he thought Mr. Lee was a prick who no doubt made his daughter feel insecure enough to think that any attention at all was inappropriate. He did not mention that if he ever *were* to try and touch a student in an inappropriate way, it would never be Sara Lee, a tiny Q-tip of a girl who wore lacy white blouses and spoke in a voice that could be drowned out by a kid shifting in his seat. He did not mention that if he were to touch a student in an inappropriate way, it would likely be Tamara Reynolds, whose obsidian hair hung down just to the place where her low-slung jeans gapped from her pale back, revealing a strip of satiny underwear, or perhaps Latonya Bailey whose shimmering neck rose out of her tightly packed T-shirts like the perfect curve of a treble clef.

The committee found Russell innocent of sexual harassment charges, partly because Sara Lee would not say any more about it and the Lees were moving out of state so that Mr. Lee could take an upper-level management job at Delta Airlines in Texas, which Russell thought sounded horrid. Frank said he would "be in touch" about Russell's assignment for the next school year.

The months since May have been marked by the worst patch ever in his long marriage to Laura. They've had some rough spots in their years, but Russell has always felt they've been on the same team. Lately he wonders if Laura wants to be traded. Maybe she's been waiting years for an

excuse to leave, and the thought of her husband's broad hands on the body of a high school waif is excuse enough, whether it's true or not. But she'd said, "*I believe you didn't*," and Laura says what she means. So it's something else, but Russell doesn't know what, and he's afraid to talk about it for fear he'll make it real. It might be something that he hasn't even considered.

The Stihl is running rough, sputtering as it idles so Russell has to throttle it between cuts to keep the engine from dying. He knows he should stop and monkey with the carburetor, but the tug of the bar easing down through wood is so satisfying that he keeps cutting. He doesn't hear Derrick approach around the side of the house, but sees him sit down on the edge of the red brick planter that circles an oak tree. Derrick raises a beer can in salute. Russell cuts the engine and pulls out his earplugs, leaving them to dangle on the cord around his neck.

"Your carb needs to be tuned," says Derrick, crushes his empty can against the bricks.

"I know that." Russell wipes his forehead with the crook of his arm. "Do you want a Jack and Coke?"

"Oh yeah, I do," says Derrick. "Just talked to Anton on the way in. Damn, he looks older. I haven't seen him since school ended."

"Neither have I," says Russell. "Where'd you see him?"

"Out front. He and Jameel were heading off with some girls I didn't recognize."

"Which girls?" says Russell. He waits with his

hand on the doorknob for news of his kid, as if he's a relative expected for a short visit.

"You know, girls. Shiny hair, cut-offs, nice tits, nose rings. The kind Anton likes. The kind *I* like."

Russell has often wondered, in the months since the incident with Sara Lee, why Derrick was not the one accused of inappropriate behavior. He drives with a beer in his hand, tells racist jokes, ogles his students. But he doesn't touch them. "That's a slippery slope, man," Derrick says. "One hand on the shoulder turns to two on the hips." Appealing as his students are, Russell can't really imagine their totally naked bodies, their actual smooth skin against his, any one of them propped up in his bed with his sheets at their waists. He's tried, testing himself, but in his mind when he shuts his eyes, the girls seem as false and disembodied as cartoons and the boys just seem like his son. He knows it's not sex he wants from them. It's their possibilities, and the easy way they move, but that isn't his to take, or theirs to give.

Inside, Russell scans the kitchen for some clue that Anton has been there; it's quiet, no dishes on the counter except the popcorn bowl from that afternoon, a smell in the air of Anton's clove cigarettes and the vague drift of sandalwood that Jameel leaves in his wake. On the table, a note.

"Dad: Practice started—Sign this please?" It's a permission slip for early season training. Anton runs cross-country. Last year, he and Anton ran together once a week, but this year, Russell doubts he'll be invited, or if he could even keep

up. He signs the form and leaves it where it sits.

"Frank called yesterday," he tells Derrick when he returns to the yard with two drinks.

"Really. What did the schmuck have to say for himself?"

"He said they're giving my freshman section to the new history teacher and I'll pick up a study hall. I still have my seniors. I guess the young ones are off limits to me for a while. And hands off the students. Nothing, no touching, is what he said. I felt like a kid in a museum or something."

Derrick sips his drink and raises a finger. "You know, it could be worse. At least you're not a band teacher. Then you'd have to touch them, you know, correcting their positions, tapping the beat on their arms. I guess you'd have a baton. Still, if you were a band teacher, they'd probably just fire you."

"They can't *do* that. I never did anything!"

"You're not a band teacher," says Derrick. "I was just hypothesizing."

Russell remembers a woman he went to grad school with, Rochelle duFresne, who had an affair with a sixteen-year-old boy in her practice teaching class. She bragged about quoting Henry Miller, making the boy read from *Song of Solomon* in front of the class, writing racy lines from e.e. cummings on the board. Russell thought of her with the boy in the back of her car, in her apartment, his coltish limbs wrapped around her curving ones. She said it was incredible how he knew exactly what to do. Russell wanted to sleep with her that year, and still remembers her smell,

musky and rumpled, the fine hairs above her upper lip, painted toenails in her Birkenstocks.

"Anyway," says Derrick, "band teachers are fags."

Derrick doesn't think twice about any of it, but Russell does. He sees himself at a pep rally in front of the whole school with a speech prepared in his own defense. But when he opens his mouth at the podium, nothing comes out and he's frozen, looking out at everyone, watching them look back.

Near dark, Russell glances out the front window and sees a car he doesn't recognize at the curb, a dark sedan. The passenger door opens and Anton leans to the driver, then vaults out and jogs across the lawn. The car pulls away and Russell watches his son skirt the porch and enter the bushes. Anton stops underneath his bedroom window on the ground floor at the corner of the house, slides it open, mantles over the sill. He disappears into the room, sneakers last, like a fish re-entering water with a quick flip of its tail. Russell can't believe his eyes. He has heard of sneaking out, of course, but sneaking in? At 8:30 p.m., when he's never even made a tiny scene about Anton coming in with his eyes heavy and red, imagines himself a father who is relaxed, approachable?

He walks down the hallway to Anton's room and gives the knob a twist. The rooms all had burnished brass deadbolts on the insides when they moved in—originals, the realtor said, and under the spell of the house's charm, they never

removed them. Now Russell wishes they'd ripped out the locks back when Anton was a baby, heading off these exact moments, making this kind of inaccessibility that much less likely.

"Anton?" Russell leans close to the door.

"Yeah, Dad, hey, I'm changing," he says.

"Can you let me in?"

"Just a sec, Dad, my ride'll be back in two minutes and I gotta be ready."

Russell hears thumps, a drawer sliding open, the reverberation of the strings as something heavy hits the ground, jarring the guitar he can picture leaning against the wall.

"Hey, I just need to talk to you for a sec, okay?" Russell leans against the door with his elbow near his head. He stifles the urge to whistle.

"Dad, please later, okay? I gotta go."

Russell waits a minute longer and by the time the noise from inside the room stops and he thinks to go to the front door again, the car is at the curb, Anton loping down the lawn. His slightly bow-legged son, clad in dark slim blue jeans and a short-sleeved shirt with a gaping collar, black Converse All-Stars on his feet and the perennial canvas bag slung over his shoulder. *He's beautiful*, Russell thinks. *I should be proud of him*. He stands in the door for a few minutes longer until dark drops over the yard and the crickets begin their fervent moaning, as if to underscore the fact that everyone in the world has someone but Russell. "You little shit," he says. He sits down on the front steps, watching lights go on in neighbors' windows, his feet clenching in his shoes.

"I think our son is having an affair with an older woman," Russell tells Laura when she calls that evening, late. It's been two days since she last phoned. He mutes the re-run of M*A*S*H he has been watching.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because he drives up in a very expensive car I've never seen and then the driver circles the block a few times while he gets ready and then he goes out again, and there's only one person in the car and I'm fairly sure he kissed her." He doesn't mention the window entry and exit.

"Russell, you're over-reacting, I'd guess, and even if he is, why should you care? He's sleeping with *someone*, and you certainly aren't the one to make an issue over age difference."

"What in the hell is that supposed to mean?" Russell sits straight up.

"You exactly know what I mean," she says.

"I don't. If you mean Sara Lee, you are crazy. Jesus, Laura."

"I'm not saying you slept with her, Russell." She pauses. "Listen, I'm sorry. That was bitchy."

"Yes, it was," Russell says. "Mean, actually. Bitchy and mean." He is fuming. They have hardly talked about this since the end of the school year. "The Sara Lee Issue," he calls it, which makes him think of a recalled batch of pies.

He stands up from the couch and tries the psych-speak they've learned from several counselors. "Laura, what are we talking about here?" he asks.

She's quiet for a second. "We aren't talking.

We aren't really talking," she says.

When he first told Laura about the accusation, he cried so hard he could barely speak. He let her hold him and comfort him as he swore to her he'd never touched a child in that way, he *never* would, and aside from that, he'd never cheat on her even with a grown woman, because he adored her, though they both knew that didn't always matter.

The line is quiet. He listens to her breathe.

"Russell, I don't know when I'm coming home. I'm not coming home at the end of August. I need to stay here a little longer. I need to think."

"Are you leaving me?"

"No. I am *not* leaving you. Don't be dramatic, Russell. Don't make this about you. It's hard enough."

"It's way too hard, actually

"What are we supposed to do, Russ? Pretend it will get easier? Just pretend?"

"We could. Sometimes that works. It'll be like practicing." He knows he sounds ridiculous.

"That's fucking perfect, Russell. Let's just pretend. That will solve everything." Laura used to swear beautifully, joyfully, but now the words sound like rotten fruit in her mouth.

Russell shuts his eyes as tight as he can, until he sees spots. The house smells like burnt food, though he hasn't cooked in days. He thinks it, then says it out loud: "I want you to come home."

"I can't."

"Come home."

"Russ. I'll call you tomorrow."

"I love you, Laura."

"Thank you saying for that," she says.

Russell goes to the plate glass window and leans against it with his arms out, both hands sliding a little on the sweat of his palms. He stands that way for a long time, looking out at the back yard, the wood, some stacked, some scattered, the garden behind that, overflowing with too much ripening. No one has weeded in weeks.

Russell falls asleep on the couch and wakes at two in the morning with the cushions and pillows on the floor, his hip ground up against the springs. The moon shines bright in the back yard. Night air eases in the window screen, and Russell wishes he had somewhere he could go. If he had a boat, and a lake, he'd row out to the middle and sleep across the seats with a life jacket under his head, drifting. He closes his eyes again, drags his fingers on the floor, waiting for the cool slip of water over his knuckles.

Russell passes Anton's bedroom on the way to his own and hears muffled voices, music on soft, a high-pitched laugh. He resists the urge to knock. He hadn't heard them come in, would have woken if the door opened. *He would never bring an adult woman in the window*, thinks Russell. He is surprised at the relief he feels, to know his son is with a teenaged girl in his own bedroom, listening to music, laughing, whatever else he is, home.

The last logs lie before Russell in a small heap. He fixed the idle and has been cutting all afternoon, burned through three tanks of gas. Ten

minutes ago, he heard a car pull up and the front door slam. He stopped himself from running into the house to head Anton off in the front hall, but despite his acknowledgment that it's stupid, he's furious, has been since the night before. He shuts the saw off and surveys the logs cut mostly in stove-sized rounds now, some of them balanced upright on their ends.

"Why don't you come help me, Anton?" he shouts towards the house, though Anton's room faces the street. The neighbor's lawn mower muffles his words.

When he goes to the kitchen for another beer, Russell can hear music from Anton's room, booming, a low bass pulsing under his feet. He goes to his son's door and bangs on it. No answer. The music in the hall is louder still, but Russell can't recognize it.

"An-ton!" He hollers this, banging on the wall with his fist. "Let me in your goddamn room!" He can hear Anton singing along. Still nothing. Russell places both hands on the door and pushes as hard as he can, until he strains so hard he's afraid a vein will pop in his head. He imagines the headline: *Pervert high school teacher has aneurysm outside son's door.*

Russell slams out of the house to the back yard and fires up the chainsaw. He puts the chain brake on and pushes the door open with his foot, the saw in front of him. Inside, with no earplugs, the engine is almost unbelievably loud. Russell is reminded of an old grade-school teacher of Anton's who harped constantly about "inside voices!" He looks around the living room at the

books, the glass tabletop, all the small things on shelves. The saw bounces gently in his hand. There's a violence to it, this tool in this house, that he relishes.

At the door to Anton's room, he releases the brake, holds the saw at waist level and plunges the tip of the bar into the door. Running full throttle, the saw is deafening. It spits fine chips and dust in the air, in his eyes, his mouth, and the bar kicks under his hands. The door's varnished oak is much harder than the buttery larch he's been cutting all weekend, and it takes him longer than he'd thought it would to cut a hole the size of a tall pantry cupboard into the middle of it. A minute after he's begun, he wishes he could stop—you idiot—the bar binding awkwardly in the bottom cut, the corners hard to match up, but it's far too late for that kind of considering. When he kills the engine, the hall is dead still. His anger has all but disappeared and he feels stupid. Russell kicks at the cut portion of the door, then again, harder, until the piece falls away from him and into Anton's room.

Russell raps his knuckles on the edge of the frame and sticks his head through the hole. "Knock-knock?" he says. The slab of door leans like a ramp against the bureau.

"Well, Dad, come on in!" says Anton in a fake drama voice, as if he were welcoming a party-goer. He's standing in the middle of the room with his hands folded under his armpits, his chin out. Russell sets the saw down in the hall, hunches and steps through the hole. Woodchips cling to his shoulders. The music is off.

"You are *crazy*, Dad, totally crazy." Anton's voice is disbelieving and he bounces on his toes.

"I just want to talk," says Russell, placing his hands out flat in the air in front of him. "I haven't seen you in days."

There is a long pause while they consider each other, like two people who know each other well but have met out of context, perhaps on an airport layover in a city where neither of them lives.

"You totally could have cut me, you know. What if I was standing by the door?"

"I knew you weren't," says Russell. "Who stands by the door?"

"Who cuts down a door in his own house with a chainsaw?"

It's a good point, thinks Russell.

"Well, you're pissing me off. You're avoiding me. I needed help with the wood, you never even asked. I got a little carried away." Russell despises the plaintive tone he can hear in his voice. He changes tack. "I have a good joke." They have a history of jokes in their family. Laura loves jokes and can tell them perfectly, though she always cracks up before she reaches the end. Anton went through a knock-knock phase when he was five, where for nearly a month everything out of his mouth was a joke. They were so proud.

"Jesus, Dad, this whole *thing* is a joke," says Anton. "You just cut down my door with your chainsaw and you want to tell *me* a joke!" But he sits down on the bed. "What is it?" He leans against the headboard—one that Russell found at a junk shop when Laura was pregnant—and closes his eyes.

"What do you call two men with no arms and no legs hanging on a window frame?"

Anton raises his eyebrows, lids still closed. Russell gives him a minute to think, but Anton cocks his chin, expecting an answer.

"Curt and Rod." Russell laughs despite himself, and even Anton smirks, though he hides it quickly with his hand.

"Jesus," Anton says. "That's kind of an awful joke, Dad."

"I'm kind of an awful guy," says Russell.

"Hardly," says Anton. Russell stands there, his fingers resting in the tops of his front pockets.

"So can we talk for a minute?" he asks.

"What are you going to do, cut up my dresser if I say no?"

"Touché, Anton," Russell says. "I am ridiculous, okay? Just grant me five minutes."

"Okay, Dad." Anton speaks as if to a small child.

"How was practice?" Russell asks. The absolute last thing he wants to consider—all the kids, what they do and don't know. What his son may think about him that he wouldn't say.

Anton shrugs again and Russell is amazed at how versatile his shrugs are. Like the way the word "No," can mean anything, depending on how you put it. After another awkward silence, Russell says, "Do the kids think I'm a jerk?"

Anton looks surprised for a minute. "No. I don't think so. Everyone's forgotten already anyway." But Anton knows exactly what he means.

Russell watches Anton's face, the dark eyebrows arched delicate across the brow, cleft in

the chin, a slight darkness beneath the hollows of his still-hairless cheeks. He realizes that this, more than help or company, is what he wanted. To see his son's face, to look straight at it until he is ready to look away.

"Is Mom really at the artist's refuge?" Anton asks.

Russell opens his lips and closes them again. "Well, I assume she is. I guess I really have no idea. Why?"

"She called me yesterday. On my cell."

"Oh, good, good. You haven't been home when she's called, she wanted to talk." Russell feels sick at the thought that Laura might be in any state but Arizona, where he has pictured her. What would it mean if she were in California, or New Jersey? What if she were alone in a hotel room on the other side of town?

"Did she say she wasn't at the refuge?"

"No," says Anton, his face gone tight again. "I just wondered if—I just wondered."

Russell walks to the bed and stands beside it. He cuffs Anton's neck and pulls his head toward him but Anton stiffens. Russell lets him go, leans a hand instead on the table beside the bed.

"She's coming back," Russell tells him. He is struck by the stillness in his son—arms crossed over his chest, eyes straight ahead. Russell wonders what he sees.

"Dad?"

"What."

"I have to get ready. Jameel'll be here in ten minutes." Anton smooths his shorts over his knees. Russell holds this modesty up against

the memory of Anton's child body, naked and tanned, playing in the sprinkler long Augusts ago.

Russell moves toward the door, then stops and surveys the room, the greasy film of sawdust, the board. "Your room is *such* a mess, A."

"Ha-ha," says Anton.

"I'll clean up while you're gone." Russell twists the lock and opens the door, which swings light on the hinge.

"Close it behind you, please," says Anton.

In the hallway, the chainsaw sits near the wall, the orange powerhead grimy against the pale wood floor. Saw chips coat the baseboards, the

door frame, collecting in the grooves between the floor planks. Russell wipes a streak of bar oil from the doorjamb with the hem of his shirt. He pauses in the hall, then turns, and looking back through the hole, he can see into Anton's room and out the open window to the street beyond, where two neighbor children chase each other, doubling back, darting from each other's reach. It is so quiet, it's hard for Russell to imagine that Anton is just on the other side of the hole, almost close enough to touch.

"Dad?"

"Bye," says Russell. He picks up the chainsaw and goes to the kitchen to find a broom. 