
**THE SCRIBNER
ANTHOLOGY OF
CONTEMPORARY
SHORT FICTION**

Fifty North American Stories Since 1970

Lex Williford and
Michael Martone, Editors

SCRIBNER PAPERBACK FICTION
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* * *

Mrs. Bagnoli drives to the barn, parks the tractor, and we walk, side by side, Mrs. Bagnoli in the middle, to the house. Inside, I hunt up one of my white blouses for her to wear, and we sit with gin-and-tonics at the white-painted kitchen table while Floyd calls up Debbie and sets a date for later. "I got news," he says into the phone.

Mrs. Bagnoli and I get acquainted. In answer to my questions, she tells me the story of her husband's ordeal in the cement mixer. Having been so close to death, she says, he eats only steaks now for supper. I learn how many of her kids live in California, and she gets the same sort of information from me.

I will wait until another time to ask her about her future, the plans she has.

"Bye-bye, Deb," Floyd says, and joins us. He sits down and crosses his legs at the ankles. He lifts his gin-and-tonic for a toast.

"To a hell of a driver!" he says.

"Hooray!" I say.

"Hear, hear!" says Mrs. Bagnoli.

Mrs. Bagnoli and I sip at our drinks. We watch Floyd drink down his glass and head outside to start up the motor on the hay elevator. On the back step, he peels off his shirt, rolls it in a ball, and as he goes by his car, he pitches it in through the open window.

"He's steady," I say to Mrs. Bagnoli. "Very helpful."

"And such a smooth back!" she remarks.

"Yes, indeed," I agree.

"Wouldn't you say," Mrs. Bagnoli says carefully, "that he is encouraged by what he has seen of womanhood?"

"I hope so," I say. "Time will tell."

We finish our drinks and step outside. When the wagon's unloaded, it will be nearly dusk and my husband, Lloyd, will be on his way home. By dark, Floyd Dey will be deep into kisses with Debbie, and Mrs. Bagnoli will have driven to and from Bob's Market for steaks.

Already, I'm looking forward to next summer's haying. With Floyd's brother Harry T. and Mrs. Bagnoli, everything should go like clockwork. But we won't forget Floyd. I'll tell her whatever I hear from Kalamazoo. After all, Floyd and I are good friends. He'll visit at Christmas and I'll write him sometimes to keep him informed of Mrs. Bagnoli's progress toward the office of Secretary of State. Floyd is not a boy to be mystified.

Girl

JAMAICA KINCAID (1946–) was born and educated in St. John's, Antigua, in the West Indies. Her first book, *At the Bottom of the River*, a collection of stories, received the Morton Dauwen Zabel Award of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters and was nominated for the PEN/Faulkner Award. Ms. Kincaid's other books are *Annie John*; *A Small Place*; *Lucy*; *My Brother*, a finalist for the National Book Award; and *The Autobiography of My Mother*, a nominee for the National Book Critics Circle Award in fiction, a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award, and the winner of the Cleveland Foundation's Anisfield-Wolf Book Award as well as the *Boston Book Review's* Fisk Fiction prize. Her stories have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Rolling Stone*, and *The Paris Review*. She lives with her husband and two children in Bennington, Vermont.

Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the color clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothesline to dry; don't walk barehead in the hot sun; cook pumpkin fritters in very hot sweet oil; soak your little cloths right after you take them off; when buying cotton to make yourself a nice blouse, be sure that it doesn't have gum on it, because that way it won't hold up well after a wash; soak salt fish overnight before you cook it; is it true that you sing benna in Sunday school?; always eat your food in such a way that it won't turn someone else's stomach; on Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming; don't sing benna in Sunday school; you mustn't speak to wharf-rat boys, not even to give directions; don't eat fruits on the street—flies will follow you; *but I don't sing benna on Sundays at all and never in Sunday school*; this is how to sew on a button; this is how to make a buttonhole for the button you have just sewed on; this is how to hem a dress when you see the hem coming down and so to prevent yourself from looking like the slut I know you are so bent on becoming; this

is how you iron your father's khaki shirt so that it doesn't have a crease; this is how you iron your father's khaki pants so that they don't have a crease; this is how you grow okra—far from the house, because okra tree harbors red ants; when you are growing dasheen, make sure it gets plenty of water or else it makes your throat itch when you are eating it; this is how you sweep a corner; this is how you sweep a whole house; this is how you sweep a yard; this is how you smile to someone you don't like very much; this is how you smile to someone you don't like at all; this is how you smile to someone you like completely; this is how you set a table for tea; this is how you set a table for dinner; this is how you set a table for dinner with an important guest; this is how you set a table for lunch; this is how you set a table for breakfast; this is how to behave in the presence of men who don't know you very well, and this way they won't recognize immediately the slut I have warned you against becoming; be sure to wash every day, even if it is with your own spit; don't squat down to play marbles—you are not a boy, you know; don't pick people's flowers—you might catch something; don't throw stones at blackbirds, because it might not be a blackbird at all; this is how to make a bread pudding; this is how to make doukona; this is how to make pepper pot; this is how to make a good medicine for a cold; this is how to make a good medicine to throw away a child before it even becomes a child; this is how to catch a fish; this is how to throw back a fish you don't like, and that way something bad won't fall on you; this is how to bully a man; this is how a man bullies you; this is how to love a man, and if this doesn't work there are other ways, and if they don't work don't feel too bad about giving up; this is how to spit up in the air if you feel like it, and this is how to move quick so that it doesn't fall on you; this is how to make ends meet; always squeeze bread to make sure it's fresh; *but what if the baker won't let me feel the bread?*; you mean to say that after all you are really going to be the kind of woman who the baker won't let near the bread?

DAVID LEAVITT

Territory

DAVID LEAVITT (1961–) is the author of *Family Dancing*, a finalist for both the National Book Critics Circle Award and the PEN/Faulkner Prize; *The Lost Language of Cranes* (which became a BBC Film); *Equal Affections*; *A Place I've Never Been*; *While England Sleeps*; and *Arkansas*. With Mark Mitchell, he is coeditor of *The Penguin Book of Gay Short Stories* and *Pages Passed from Hand to Hand*, as well as coauthor of *Italian Pleasures*. He is a recipient of fellowships from both the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. He lives in Italy.

Neil's mother, Mrs. Campbell, sits on her lawn chair behind a card table outside the food co-op. Every few minutes, as the sun shifts, she moves the chair and table several inches back so as to remain in the shade. It is a hundred degrees outside, and bright white. Each time someone goes in or out of the co-op a gust of air-conditioning flies out of the automatic doors, raising dust from the cement.

Neil stands just inside, poised over a water fountain, and watches her. She has on a sun hat, and a sweatshirt over her tennis dress; her legs are bare, and shiny with cocoa butter. In front of her, propped against the table, a sign proclaims: MOTHERS, FIGHT FOR YOUR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS—SUPPORT A NON-NUCLEAR FUTURE. Women dressed exactly like her pass by, notice the sign, listen to her brief spiel, finger pamphlets, sign petitions or don't sign petitions, never give money. Her weary eyes are masked by dark glasses. In the age of Reagan, she has declared, keeping up the causes of peace and justice is a futile, tiresome, and unrewarding effort; it is therefore an effort fit only for mothers to keep up. The sun bounces off the window glass through which Neil watches her. His own reflection lines up with her profile.

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