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## How it Might Have Been

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## How it Might Have Been

He never proposed. "It just seems like the next step Mardi." My mother's name is Mardi. The first time they met he asked if it was short for anything. She said no, but that it meant Tuesday in French. He was impressed. My mother hates it when people fuss over her. She doesn't like notions of tradition or convention. She feels like a mime in an invisible box.

They'd stop by a local antique shop, unplanned, maybe while they were out picking up groceries at Giant Eagle. He knew he'd get discount at an antique shop. His father sold and collected antiques so he knew other's who did in town as well. My father probably had a one in mind, ancient, brassy with an ever-fading luster, worn to the point that the shine was drained from it. My mother would think of her mother and the jewelry she left on the bath towel that covered her dresser; rings with the same cloudy surface as the one she was about to try on her finger. She would think that perhaps the woman who used to own it cleaned as much as her mother did, sponging down dishes, buffing them nearly sterile, scrubbing the grout between the tiles in the bathroom, polishing windows. My mother would finger it with her nail as it sat on the velvet show cloth

barely glinting like a withering star. But she'd be thinking about the ice cream melting in the brown paper grocery bag that sat in the square of sunlight coming through the car window

That is how my father is, likes to spoil the people he cares about. But he doesn't use my mother as his personal display, doesn't buy her a kitschy ring with metal so burnished it slips around on her finger, top-heavy so the stone in the center falls into the space between her finger. He knew he could afford a ring like that but had no interest in buying my mother something she would wear just to make him happy. He knew she preferred store brand shampoo, was content with a scoop of vanilla in a sugar cone and didn't like patterns on her clothing. Though through their years of contact with each other, their collisions would color her black and white world.

Modest but striking to complement my mother's hands, my father would struggle to get the band around her large pre-arthritis knuckle. My mother hated the fingers she inherited. She thought they looked like a primate's, stubby, deep lines like grooves in wood. She would try not to think about them and how misplaced the ring would look. My father would hand over a check to the man behind the scratched glass counter

and they'd walk out of the store, the bell dingling as the door opened and close behind them. In the car the square pebble would catch light reflecting off the review mirror as it sat in the middle of its gold orbit on her finger. My father would try and catch a sideways glance of my mother's face for a sign of something to tell him what to say next as he turns a corner and takes the turn a little too sharply. Groceries would topple out of the bags in the backseat and my mother would twist around to retrieve them from the floor of the car. The ring would cast fragments of light over a raw chicken breast. He'd cook for her that night, she'd eat half and they'd share the carton of ice cream later that didn't melt after all. Maybe that night would be the first time she'd add chocolate syrup and spill a little on her ring. My father would lick it off and she'd smile. Maybe that's how it was.

Halle Murcek, 2009