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With This Body

Penny Lampson drove from Fairbanks to Delta Junction three times a year to pick up goat milk yogurt for her skin cream business. She took along her son Kelly, so that he could enjoy the goats. The long drive, an hour and a half, was a little boring for him, but in the past year of troubles, Penny's wandering-through-the-desert year she called it, the round trip was a bit of an oasis. Kelly was good at daydreaming, he could make the time pass. Just north of Delta they'd bounce two miles over a rough road to the Old Believers' goat farm, and he'd get to feed peanuts and grass to the goats while mom loaded the gallon tubs of yogurt into her coolers, and paid the Russian woman. The little Alpine goats were like dogs—mild and friendly, they liked people. Loved a scratch down the stiff fur of their handsome noses. They followed Kelly with his handful of peanuts all along the fence.

The Russian woman was younger than Penny. She wore a scarf around her yellow hair, a dress to the middle of her calves, and short rubber boots. She didn't meet Penny's eyes or make small talk.

This sunny October afternoon, the temperature climbed to forty degrees after an overnight cold snap. The birch and aspen trees around the corral were bare now, and the ruts of the muddy lane were crisp. It was so peaceful out here, Penny thought. Would I be happy living this way? The Russian girl didn't seem happy, until they finished loading the yogurt and walked slowly over to the corral to admire the animals and fetch Kelly.

The Russian girl held the belled goat by its collar and scratched the white forehead and smoothed back the brown-and-white ears. The goat and the woman looked at each other, and her expression, formerly flat and without affect, suddenly changed. Her face softened and her eyes focused tenderly, and she seemed to really be looking at her goat, in a way she didn't look at Kelly or Penny. Her wrists were bony and suntanned, her hands surprisingly wide and strong, her nails dirty.

She and Penny always said the same thing to each other. Penny would exclaim over what friendly, sweet animals they were.

The young woman added, "Yes. And good milkers."

"They do okay in the cold weather?"

"They keep warm together. We only have to keep them out of the wind."

Then Penny and Kelly would leave, to make a quick stop at the grocery store in Delta for an ice cream bar before the drive home.

This afternoon, when they studied the selection of ice cream bars, Penny's stomach suddenly turned over. She had to turn aside while Kelly searched for one. Her stomach rebelled at the sight of them in the dairy case—all those additives, chocolate sheathing and chopped nuts like angry studs, and swirls of artificial flavors like poison. She used to like stuff like that.

Something's wrong, she thought. My regrets are poisoning me.

Halfway back to Fairbanks, the music on the car radio disappointed her. She switched it off. They drove in silence for a few minutes, and then Kelly spoke from the passenger seat. "Mom," he said, "Why don't you smile any more?" He was scared.

Her eyes filled with tears. Seven years old.

"Oh honey," she said.

When cigarettes and screwdrivers stopped helping, when they didn't anesthetize her one bit, Penny wondered if she might be pregnant. She remembered from eight years ago how the first indicator was a subtle but undeniable fickleness toward substances you were willing to take into your mouth. Jesus H. Christ, she couldn't bear it if she were pregnant. The divorce was only a matter of time, only waiting until she got her nerve up to insist on it, to say: Orrie I mean it, we need to part, to be away from each other, and would you please agree with me 'cause I haven't the courage to do this alone!

After two weeks of trying to carry on as usual she bought a pregnancy kit.

Thirty-eight years old, mother, wife, owner of her own business (Polished Shell Skin Products: homemade creams, footbaths, masks and massage oils, sold at farmers' markets and bazaars), and a member of the Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce for God's sake, here she was staring at a pregnancy kit like a high school girl. At the positive result she went blank. Utterly blank. Later on that night, she wept with horror.

The first time, too, eight years ago when she was pregnant with her son Kelly—she wept then, too. It was like her gut knew even then, there is something wrong with this direction you're going in. This whole life you have embarked on. This marriage! Why do you rebel, constantly, daily, why does every part of your body that you are not keeping on a tight leash rebel every chance you give it? What is wrong with this life you've chosen for yourself except that you seem not to want it?

How could you not want this life?

It's this life or no life, for Pete's sake! *This is life!*

You love Orrie. You love everything about him, except for, oh God, so many things about him. It's not him, either, it's what he demands of me. What life demands of us. I don't know what it is! But I can't get back to the way it used to be, and nothing helps, nothing ever helps.

When, two years ago, she slept with another man, she thought that would be enough. A lover on the side. That kind of thing. Secrets and mystery and pleasure, off in the corner of her life. Over there, in a separate and private place where it wouldn't hurt anybody else. She didn't call it cheating. It was more like a pressure valve, a safety valve, a private life. She didn't know what to call it.

To feel lust down below, after years of mechanical routines with Orrie, well it felt like the Pentecost. A fire that woke her up. She thought, how could I say no, down boy, douse that flame of life, when I felt alive again, responded to sights and smells around me like a body should?

Why couldn't I feel this way with Orrie? But I couldn't. To want the touch of someone else who wanted me just as much—it was right and good and terribly secret and sinful and common. And turned me into trash.

And when Orrie found out, the guilt was so terrible that whenever he rolled into me at night, when he at least wanted comfort, I could give him that. I held him tight, I let him inside, and there was that time five weeks ago that we were back to front like spoons and we just lay there, with no protection, me holding him inside, and I don't remember him coming or anything. I should think I'd have known if he came. We just lay there. But that had to have been it. That's when it happened. Can guys just leak? Could Orrie have done it absolutely soundlessly and without motion? We huddled like two miserable lonely children who haven't a clue. I had no idea he was coming inside me!

But that had to be it because all other times we are meticulous. We're not ready for another kid.

Orland Lampson always kept the radio on to the country station. In the midst of his own misery it would make him grin, to hear some country star's description of a bad day.

Big advantage to his days at the saw blade shop. In his previous job at the brokerage there was no country music allowed. A little talk radio, sometimes, down low. The pinstripe suits had to strike a tone and show urbanity, even in Fairbanks, Alaska. The patina of control had to be buffed and buffed.

Orrie's boss at the brokerage office arrived every morning with a 24-ounce cup of black coffee, hung up his jacket, rolled up his sleeves and lit a cigarette. Midmorning, midafternoon, he'd unwrap a Hershey bar. He sometimes rested the naked bar of chocolate on his function keys, he didn't care. He ate chocolate and smoked and kept the black stuff handy all day long. Sometimes he'd be consuming all three at once, even with a customer.

"Your fund includes Exxon," he muttered thoughtfully to one woman as he set up her new account. Anyone could tell from her Loben felt boots and her Patagonia clothes that she was greenish in her sympathies. At the mention of Exxon, she went, "Ohh—hmm!" and her hand came up to her mouth. Orrie's boss said, "Don't worry, their stock kept on climbing after the spill. They're doing really well." He had to set down a cigarette to enter data and there was the Hershey bar, right on his filthy keypad, and the Styrofoam cup with that room temperature coffee in it bitter as solvent.

After Penny's investment ideas took some of the pressure off, Orrie got the hell out of that white-collar world. Penny's big idea, ten years ago, was to invest in beauty products. Her grandmother used to make them at home during the Great Depression. Penny said, "No matter how broke and confused people get, no matter what happens to the economy, rich and poor alike will always want a pretty little jar of ointment to put on their skin. It's a comfort that won't break you. The harder and more confusing life gets for people, the more they'll want it. Cause life is hard, and it's really hard on your skin."

They went through the ladies' magazines, *Vegetarian Times*, *Herbal Companion*, *Alternative Health*, and made a list. They studied up at the public library and then bought a few shares of natural cosmetic stocks: Go Natural, Georgia Clay Beauty, Natural Therapy, Lavar, and Honeybee Skin Care. And then Penny—all fired up—went into the business herself, at home. First she made soap with olive oil, hand cream with yogurt and wild rose petals, and a foot soak with juniper berries in it—a natural

antiseptic, she discovered—and everything did pretty well. Now she had a dozen products. She made mouthwash for a while, but her recipe called for vodka, and the two of them kept drinking that up. Penny, mostly. She drank screwdrivers like water sometimes.

Polished Shell products were all for sale out front of the saw blade shop. In the front room, customers dropping off blades to be sharpened could study a selection of skin cream in jars, including a tough, no-nonsense hand cream for Alaskan working men. Polished Shell did all right. It's partly in the packaging and labeling, Penny said, modestly. It's that momentary pleasure of opening a new jar and realizing, I am worth pampering. And for men, an extra little thought: my hands are softer *for her*.

Everyone needs a little softness, she said.

It's not like they were going to get rich. But they had started talking about building a vacation cabin up in the mountains, back when they daydreamed about a future together. Orrie got to leave that brokerage firm and go full time for the gig he really liked, which was sharpening blades. With the radio going, in the big, cool, room behind the saw blade showroom. His partner Jim did welding repairs, and made trailers for people to haul their snowmobiles and their ORVs when they went hunting. When he wasn't helping a customer choose a new Sawzall or chain saw, Orrie sharpened blades, any and all. Table saws, machetes, even garden shears.

He liked it that everybody, rich and poor alike, brought in their blades. The tree-huggers and the rape-ruin-and-run boys, all of them. Skinflints, trash pickers and guys with money to burn—if they had any sense at all they valued good edges. One thing about his customers: they had a conservative streak, intrinsic to their own personalities. A streak of obstinacy, that's what cheapskates have going for them. Some of Orrie's customers tended to remember the Great Depression—not personally, but they'd heard of it. They had a touch of nostalgia for a time when quality mattered in America and you never threw anything out. Guys even brought in blades they'd found in dumpsters.

His uncle back in Minnesota taught him the value of a good edge. His favorite uncle, Lute. Penny never met him. Orrie had suggested that name for Kelly, years ago, Lute Lampson, but Penny, who used to think of herself as Catholic, said you can't name a Catholic kid Luther. Orrie had never thought of that. Did it really matter? Geez I suppose it would.

Only one time he felt uncomfortable at this job. A guy wanted him to sharpen an antique Samurai sword. Orrie didn't get it. What do you do with this, he asked, uncharacteristically. None of his business, really.

The customer was a small, tidy man, a pressed collar showing underneath his wool coat. Maybe in his twenties. A kid with a neatness fetish. Obsessive-compulsive, maybe. Dangerous. He cleared his throat and said,

"I'm living up on the summit and there's been a bear hanging around. Frankly I plan to carry it with me when I use the outhouse."

"Why don't you carry a gun?"

"That seems a little unnecessary. I don't want to invite an encounter. I might be tempted to use a gun when I don't have to."

Sounded to Orrie like the kid really wanted to use this sword. Was looking for a chance. But he went ahead and sharpened the thing and then tried it out on his workbench. He looked around and saw his cheese and turkey hoagie, unwrapped, waiting for lunchtime. He couldn't resist, raised the blade, brought it down. Exquisite! Again and again, he sliced until the sandwich Penny made that morning had turned into ribbons, crumpled shoelaces of turkey, cheese, and white bread.

There was something beautiful about a blade working so well. He and Penny had discovered the work of their hands, at last; she stirred skin creams, he sharpened blades. You'd think they'd be happier. You'd think. She didn't seem to mind sex; even if they were curled up to sleep, she wriggled and moved her bottom against him when his penis nudged the beautiful warm slope of her hip. Though after sex, there was no change. The sadness, the loneliness continued.

He thought of touching the tip of the blade to Penny's skin. To see it against her skin for a minute. He thought of how she'd listen to him then all right. She'd come alert. What a thought. He would never want to hurt her; he wanted to feel, once again, her respect for him. She let his penis inside her like she'd let in a little homeless wanderer looking for a home. That's not what he wanted, when he thought about it.

Course when the homeless wanderer knocked at her door, he usually wasn't thinking too much. Glad enough to get inside. Any pretext at all. Maybe if she could see him touch this sword to something, raise it gently even over something of great value ... even her white skin ... he'd see the barbed wire of her animosity, that porcupine tail she was always flashing, go away.

As if he didn't have the right to be angry after what she did.

Let's not think about that anymore. Don't go back there.

Not submissive to him but tolerant of him. Couldn't she do that much. Just tolerate him. Let him vent around the house once in a while. Years ago he used to tell himself she sparked because she was a redhead. But sometimes, now, it was all sheer blackness, winter when it should be spring, her confusion and grief crowding him out of his own house.

He wanted to touch her skin with this newly sharpened edge because he loved her, and he thought about her first, in everything new. With this blade, Penny, I thee worship. I touch your skin, I pull away. I pull all the sharp edges away. I will always do all I can to pull all sharp edges away from you.

I do not hurt you.

With my body I thee worship, but is that what you want?

Penny had not been to a doctor in years, and her previous one had retired. She picked a good-looking lady doctor from the photographs hanging in the clinic lobby. But when the doctor walked into the examining room, smiled, sat down on the stool, Penny had to fall back and re-group. This woman wasn't even thirty yet! How can you deal with all these complications when you're not even thirty!

The doctor had black braids to her waist, shining brown eyes, a confident smile that went away when it was not returned, long, handsome, golden brown hands. She was a modern woman, she had it together.

This doctor, Penny thought, doesn't know her new patient is a wreck—a boozier, accidentally pregnant, shackled to the wrong man, makes a living buying goat's milk yogurt from a dairy in Delta Junction then selling it back to people with aloe and lavender and urea and propylene glycol stirred in, with a bunch of promises printed on the label. She believed some of those promises herself. But not all. Like with Kelly. She made promises to Kelly she couldn't keep.

"Why don't you smile any more, Mom?"

At the doctor's confirmation of her pregnancy the tears gushed, instantly. Penny gasped in disbelief, again, in shock again. Tears just poured out. Her heart was breaking. Not again. She looked down and shook her head over and over, there was no way to hide it. The young doctor didn't look chagrined. She looked serious and kind, and just waited.

"This is not supposed to be happening," Penny stuttered between gulps of air. "I can't have another baby. We're getting divorced. Past month I've been drinking. A lot. I'm not well. I can't have a baby."

There was silence.

"I can't deal with a—I don't want to be a single mother."

"Well, you're about six weeks. So you have the time to make a decision."

Penny stared.

"If you want me to help you, I will. I'd have to refer you, if you decide not to keep the baby. But I'll do that. Or, if you decide to keep it, I'll help you."

"How can you help me?"

"You're at the very beginning."

"My body's not ready for this at all. My life, my family's not ready."

"How many times have you drunk this month?"

"Uh. Four. Four times. Drank myself to sleep."

"As far as your physical condition," said the doctor. "Your blood pressure is elevated, but I promise you, if you stop drinking and smoking, everything will be all right."

You can't promise me that, Penny thought. I could have a damaged child and sue the pants off of you. Wait till I tell Orrie what you said.

"I don't know what to do."

"You will know. Maybe you just have to find out what your decision is—it'll be there, inside you."

"Are you married?"

"No," said the doctor.

Of course not, Penny thought. A together person like you wouldn't make that huge mistake out of sheer loneliness, like I did. If that's what I did. I don't know what I did or where it went all wrong.

When she told Orrie she was pregnant they just stared at each other. What followed was the strangest three days in the recent years of their marriage; they didn't speak to each other, not because of anger, but because there was nothing to say. For three days she went through her work routine, played checkers and Parcheesi with Kelly, made muffins with jelly centers for his second grade class. She stared at herself in the mirror. You? She thought. You're going to make a decision of this size and importance? Don't make me laugh! What's the world coming to!

She looked in the mirror at the woman who needed to make a decision and saw a ghost. Her cheeks were long and hollow now, lines etched on either side of her mouth. Kelly said it best. Mom why don't you smile any more. Her reddish blonde hair flew out at the ends like straws in a worn-out broom.

She could be pretty again if she put some real hard work into it. She could be a woman on fire, she could send out sparks. But God it was so

much work. It was so hard. And what for, who wanted it, what being pretty led to—men coming after you with their loneliness and their demands.

Better put on a scarf and an ugly dress like the Russian woman at the goat farm. At that thought, despite herself, Penny almost smiled. That wouldn't last long. That would be one place Penny Lampson wouldn't last a week. Right.

She waited for Orrie's input. Orrie's thoughts on the pregnancy. They weren't forthcoming. He said nothing. He walked around the house looking sad and serious. He did the dishes and with the first dusting of snow, took Kelly over to the sledding hill.

It was like something had landed on them. A meteor. Something out of the future. Something from outside their battling. Landed right on top and squashed all the puffery and vanity right out of them.

But every time she thought of what it really meant—a baby and little boy with a single mother, a baby never even to know a family life with two parents, born into separation and loneliness and withdrawal and yes, poverty, because there's no way she could comfortably raise children on what Polished Shell brought in. The Lampsons did all right but only by combining incomes. They both had to work and now she'd have to work her ass off, she'd have to get a paper route or something else. Substitute teach.

Jesus the world wasn't fair, this baby to never know the hearty welcome of a happy family.

Why doesn't Orrie say something?

What does he want, I can use his opinion to steer by. Either for or against, I can use his opinion. But he's not saying anything. He can't. He doesn't know what to do. He's deferring to me.

She sat bolt upright, certain of it.

"Orrie." She shook him. "Orrie!"

Six a.m. She must have dreamt the answer. Who knows. There was the decision, unwrapped, undeniable, as clear and solid as a pearl in the palm of her hand. As big and vivid as a rose in bloom. As a dinner-plate dahlia.

"Hnnnh, what, what? Penny what?" Startled and wild-eyed, ready to take on a midnight prowler, he flailed and came upright. His limbs were still soft and hot. She liked it when he was soft and pliable early in the morning.

"Hey, I'm having the baby. So. The decision's made. We'll take it from there. We're having this baby. Whatever comes. See?"

"Yeah?" He stared at her.

His black hair was all spiked up and she saw the gray underneath. Gray just this past year.

"Yup. That's it." She smiled.

"Oh," he said. "Penny, that's great." He didn't say anything more. He didn't say I thought you would, or that's the best idea. He really had not known what to do.

She remembered, when Kelly was born, how awestruck Orrie was, filled with wonder, and something else—admiration.

She lay back down.

"Go back to sleep, now," she said, and pulled the blankets up to her chin, staring at the ceiling with new eyes. Where is it written what happens next?

"Oh, it's wonderful. I'm happy," he said, and his arm—heavy, pliable, limp—fell across her. "I'm happy."

Well, he didn't know the half of it. My having the baby doesn't mean anything but that. This doesn't mean we don't get divorced. Just because we're not going to fight for nine months doesn't mean we are going to stay together. We have one more thing to do before we part, that's what it means. We have one more thing to do. Or I do, anyway.

Orrie, don't get the wrong idea, she thought.

"We'll schedule an amniocentesis, because of your age," the doctor said, cheerfully, as if she thought it was something Penny would like.

"Why?"

"At 38, at your age ... amnios are often routine. But no, there's no particular cause for alarm right now, none at all. Everything's normal."

"Then we won't do it. No amnio." After grim results from an amniocentesis, it's decision time again. I'm done with that. I didn't make a decision just to be sent right back to make it again. No, no, give me a break. I just won't think about it.

The doctor looked startled.

Aha, Penny thought, I got through her façade! She's got it together but she wasn't expecting that! *I promise you, if you stop drinking and smoking, everything will be all right ... Look, did you mean it or not?*

"Well, all right. I do think an ultrasound ..." the doctor said.

"Let's do that, that's fine. That's great."

Orrie wanted to see the ultrasound, so he said he'd bring Kelly and come on over to the clinic from the saw shop at four o'clock, meet her

there; but of course he didn't show. He didn't ever leave work undone. He could never say to himself, I better not start something new because I'm supposed to meet Penny in half an hour. Jesus could he imagine doing such a thing.

And he could never resist showing off for Kelly around all the cool, dangerous stuff in Daddy's shop. So of course he was late, if he was coming at all, and for once the technicians at the clinic weren't late, and what was Penny supposed to do, hold them off?

Didn't matter, didn't matter. This was something she had go through with. It was between her body and her child's body, it wasn't a matter for anyone else to deal with, she didn't need anyone else, she certainly, as it turns out, did not need Orrie. For the first time in her life, Penny thought, she really wasn't looking back.

There was a song in a movie ... *Tender Mercies*, the movie was called. Robert Duvall strummed this tune on his guitar at a kitchen table. "I've decided to leave here forever," he sang. "Let me know if you're coming along." Then he winked at his new wife and said, "not really."

But me, that is exactly what I want. To leave the old way forever. I don't know exactly what I mean, but that's the only way to do it. Get up and go. You can come or not. Why didn't I ever think of this before?

"Mrs. Lampson?" the technician called out to the waiting room. She was a thin, dark haired woman in a tight sweater and stirrup pants.

"Yes," Penny rose, and dropped an old *Kiplinger's* back onto the coffee table. She began a nervous smile but the technician's lips stayed horizontal and clamped together. Penny abandoned her own smile. The technician was really that, a technician. A connector of wires and squeezer-out of cold gel, a person focused on a screen.

On the table Penny stared at her own rounding, bare tummy with surprise. It was beginning to pooch up like a new volcano forming. She hadn't taken a good look. It was too puzzling, too embarrassing, at her age; it was something you hid for as long as possible, hoping that people weren't eyeballing your thick waist. We think we're on a self-willed trajectory of some kind but we're human, just like our own parents. Oh, fuck! This is just crazy, pregnant at my age!

The technician was very young and stone-faced. Absolutely no nonsense. Not here to make friends. What on earth was her problem?

No problem. Just business. It's just business.

They said nothing to each other. Every few seconds Penny looked at the technician's face, looking for some expression of shock or alarm, as she moved her sensor around the greased dome of her new client's pregnancy.

Maybe this was a deliberate poker face, maybe they're taught at ultrasound school not to give anything away, so as not to raise false hopes or frighten people or anything. Maybe she didn't like her job. Maybe she was heartily sick of other people's need for reassurance all the time.

It was cold in here and very dim, so that the image would show better on the screen. Penny looked at the ceiling.

The technician said in a flat voice,

"Would you like to know the baby's sex?"

Quickly Penny considered. With Kelly, she hadn't known in advance. That was fun. But what the hell, why not do it different this time? This is the last time. Why not try it another way?

"Sure, why not, let's have it."

"It's a boy," said the technician.

A new planet entered Penny's world. A star arrived from light years away. Awestruck at the telescope, she was Galileo, she was Eve. She turned her head and stared at the other woman through tears, her mouth fallen open.

"Oh!" she said. "Oh, Oh! A boy!" Her heart poured out in pure amazement and gratitude, and tears came down like a creek in the mountains, like a song from a thousand secret harps.

The door swung open and Orrie and Kelly were coming in. Some kind of loud, nervous apology from Orrie about being late.

"Orrie! Orrie! It's a boy, it's a boy, it's a boy!" Penny cried, her voice playing along with her sobs like it was meant to be, like Gershwin wrote it that way.

"It's a boy! Oh, that's wonderful, hear that Kelly? and Penny, I have the perfect name! Lute Guthrie Lampson. Not Luther, just Lute. Leave it there. Do you like it?"

"Lute!" said Penny. "Oh, that's a beautiful name. It's perfect. It makes me think of mountain climbers!" Orrie and Kelly were next to her then, staring at the screen, and the technician was trying to show them the baby's parts. Lute's parts. Lute Guthrie Lampson. Penny didn't try to look at the image, she couldn't make sense of it anyway, black and white squirls just didn't sort themselves out for her. It was like the duck and the rabbit puzzle or the vase and the crone. She simply couldn't see what she was supposed to see, so she wouldn't try. Why get frustrated on this day of days.

But she did see the face of the young technician whose left hand still rested lightly on Penny's belly. She wore a grin as wide as a barn door. All unwilling at first, she had joined the party. She had gone from stoic to

soft, just like that. Let herself be affected! She wore a name tag, a plastic rectangle pinned to her tight sweater: Brenda. Brenda was laughing, in spite of herself, as if she was present at an actual birth. Something inside her had been startled into forgiveness. Brenda had the right to think: I'm good at this! Look what I did! Made these three people so happy!

Penny's arm was around Kelly, and her hand squeezing Orrie's as he leaned over her to stare at the first pictures of Lute Lampson swimming toward his family.

Without thought of any future, she fell into the present moment and looked around with joy. There might not be a future for Penny and Orrie. But for now life was abundant. Agony in the past had dug out this space between them, into which satisfaction dropped, a perfect fit.

Why, this is the happiness you're supposed to have. This is the now before all the decisions to come, the divorce and all of it, this is the now, this is it.

Nothing detracted from that day, ever, not even the divorce four years later when Kelly was old enough to punish both parents with his anger, and when Lute's round face and huge blue eyes showed the bewilderment of the innocent. An earthquake rocked the living room one day and Lute shouted, "Mom, what's happening?" with the very face he wore during the divorce. Later on, he associated his parents' distress with a gathering storm, and spent one year screaming whenever the wind picked up. "It's a tornado coming," he would moan, and it didn't help to assure him, "there are no tornadoes in Alaska. No tornadoes here." He knew better.

But one day, when Lute was 5 and Kelly 12, when the sky was still and blue, Kelly took the training wheels off his old bicycle, set Lute on the bicycle seat and spent four hours with him, until the little boy could freewheel down the rutted driveway. They both wore grins that day, and Kelly never once showed impatience. Watching from the deck of their little rented cabin, Penny thought, a rosette for each of you. A badge of honor. We regret what happened, but we're still here. The surprises keep coming.