

Oregon is the greenest state I've ever seen. Abundant, lush foliage carpets gentle, rolling hills as far as the eye can see. Farmland abuts forested areas. It's breathtakingly gorgeous, and I can definitely see how someone could get lost here.

The green landscape whizzes by and hypnotizes me as my brain begins to wander. I think of my childhood in Pasadena, just off the Caltech campus. We didn't live in opulence, but we lived comfortably. Jen and I went to the private polytechnic school down the street from our house. It was where a lot of the professors' kids went. I don't know how my mom was able to afford to keep sending us there after Dad left, but we spent all twelve years of our education happily ensconced within its walls.

Caltech was my playground when I was very little. My dad taught aeronautics and applied physics. In the summer, I used to run through campus and meet him in the green space in front of Beckman Laboratories for picnics. I remember lying on a blanket next to him discussing the possibility of him shrinking me some day like in the movie *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*.

He used to look around all shifty-eyed before leaning toward me and whispering, "Can you keep a secret?" Of course, I always said I could. He'd respond, "I'm closing in on the technology and I should be able to do it by the end of the year! What do you think we should do with all the money we'll make once I sell the patent to my people-shrinking machine?"

Then we'd plot what to do with our newfound riches. I wanted to spend a month at Disneyland before spending another month at Universal Studios in Orlando. Dad wanted to take my mom on a honeymoon, because they'd never gone on a real one. Then we tried to decide which house we'd buy. I had my eye on one we passed during our weekly walks to Huntington Gardens. It was a two-and-a-half story Spanish Colonial Revival with a pool. My dad joked that

he wasn't sure it would be big enough for the four of us, even though it had to be at least five times the size of our bungalow.

Memories burst through my subconscious like a storm-engorged river breaching a failing dam. As soon as one pops into my mind, at least thirty more push their way forward with unstoppable force. I'm sitting on the plaid blanket we always used for our picnics, and my dad says, "Katie, life is never what you perceive it to be." Then I'm lying in bed and he whispers, "Believe the unbelievable. Things are never what you think they are." Suddenly, I'm flying through the warm Southern California breeze on my bicycle, and he yells out, "Just because you think these are trees, doesn't make them trees. Always be open to the truth. Believe in what you can't see."

In retrospect, it's clear he was trying to prepare me for something. At the time I just remember thinking, *Silly, Daddy, of course they're trees. What else would they be?* In my child's eye, everything was exactly as it appeared. My dad was my rock, my mom and sister were ever-present love and comfort, the sky was blue, and life was good. Until it wasn't.

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