

Excerpt from “The Wait”

I pictured him walking through the front door and seeing my note. The note I had so carefully placed in his spot on the far end of the table next to the five empty chairs. I left chicken in the refrigerator so that he would be able to have supper that night if he wanted. He may not eat it. It may end up in the neighbor’s yard or in the liner of the waste paper basket or on the living room floor. I guess it really doesn’t matter now. I won’t be there to clean up the mess. The check was late. I waited and waited. I began to think it would never arrive. My neighbor June and I had a plan. I would make him breakfast like I did every morning and then wait for him to go to work. I prayed that nothing upset him and made him stay late because I needed every minute to pack for the kids. I knew I only had a limited time to get some of our belongings together to leave. I wouldn’t be able to take much because he would notice. He always noticed. He could tell by the way I breathed; by the way I took the plate over and sat it in front of him. He could tell by the way I smiled at him as I laid the plate down onto the table. And I waited.

The mailman was late that morning, but somehow I knew, I knew the check would be coming that day. He had forgotten about it but I remembered what she said. The woman at the welfare building said it would be coming at the same time next month, so I waited. I wondered if it would have his name, or my name or both our names on it, and if it did have both our names on it how would I get the bank to cash it. I let the children sleep in because I knew we had a long journey ahead of us. I told them nothing because I knew if it somehow slipped out we would have no chance of getting away. The seconds ticked away like hours. I watched the clock as my movements become labored. With every stretch of my muscles it felt as though I were lifting one hundred pound weights and I waited.

I searched for our necessities trying to cram them into three small suitcases and one large one. The train I thought would be the cheapest way to go. He might think I had taken the bus but with the children I thought the train would be best. I called the train station to find out if I could buy the tickets the same day that we leave and the voice on the other end of the phone said in such a soft, comforting voice, “Of course you can honey, you just come in and we’ll take care of you.” And we’ll take care of you, she spoke as if she was talking to her daughter or her baby child and I knew it was a sign. I debated if this is the right thing to do. I prayed about it. He really left me no choice. I didn’t mind for myself. I had chosen this life, but the children, they had not. I had to protect them. I had to get away.
