

Katie Rose Guest

Nannies

Little Michael Mahoney keeps running away from his piano lessons. Louie and I schedule his lessons for after lunch each day, at one o'clock, when we hope the food might cool him off enough to listen to us. On the day I'm thinking of Louie and I escort Michael Mahoney from the dining room across the courtyard to the building that serves as the social area for the families. Inside, the piano teacher is waiting. I stop on the porch. Louie and Michael Mahoney enter. Twenty seconds later, the screen door flies open, nearly splitting its antique hinges. Michael Mahoney flies out, his skinny white legs a blur. He runs straight into his parents' cottage and slams the door. Louie steps out onto the porch, both hands in his hair. We look at each other, then head over to the cottage. Michael Mahoney has locked the door to keep us out. We go to find his mother.

I let Louie talk to Patricia Mahoney, because he's been a nanny at the compound longer. I was hired half way through the summer when the Mahoneys' friends arrived. There are eight kids to two nannies, fair odds really. Louie seems able to say anything to Patricia Mahoney without pissing her off. I, on the other hand, can't. The three of us stand in her office.

"Michael skipped his piano lesson again," Louie says.

"Didn't you take him?"

"He walked in, looked at Mrs. Young, then ran back to your house and locked himself in."

Louie and I don't have a key to the Mahoneys' house and never will. We don't rate a key. We're not parental stand-ins. The Mahoneys have other nannies for that stuff: bathing, dressing, tucking in. Louie calls us "migrant worker nannies." We come in the day time to entertain the kids and to keep them from killing each other.

Patricia Mahoney turns back to her desk, the control deck of this private New England resort compound she and her husband own. She has meals to plan, staff to coordinate, payroll to run. She turns back to Louie. "You could tie him up."

I laugh. Louie and Patricia don't.

Just before dinner, Michael Mahoney goes missing again. Most of the kids are sitting in the family area playing video games. We're supposed to have them in the dining room by six, dressed nicely.

"Wait. Where's Billy?" I ask aloud.

Michael Mahoney is eleven. Billy is nine and small. When Michael Mahoney can't find a furry creature to torture, Billy serves well.

"They were at the pond last I saw," Alex says, not looking up from her chess game. Alex is Billy's big sister. Years ago, the Mahoneys built a

small lake on a hill behind the family compound. Louie and I run out of the building and sprint to the pond. We find Michael Mahoney with both hands on Billy's shoulders, trying to hold Billy's head under. Louie dives at Michael Mahoney and they hit the water. I drag Billy, soaking in his shorts and shirt, from the pond. He's crying and I pretend not to notice.

I tell him to hurry and change for dinner and he nods. "Michael will be with us here," I say. Billy runs off.

Michael Mahoney goes to dinner in his wet clothes and no one says anything. Before we go down to the basement where we eat with the other servants, Louie reports to Patricia what we saw. We stand in her office again. Louie has a towel around his neck and his shorts drip pond water on her office floor.

"Michael tried to drown Billy," Louie says.

Patricia nods.

After dinner, Louie and I sit on the porch of the staff cottage where we live. His shirt is draped over a bush to dry. We've pulled apart our wet sneakers and laid them in the sun. Louie chain smokes, adding butts to the pile under the bush from the past weeks. In the distance we can see the large buildings of the compound and the cedar shingles of the family cottages. Beyond the structures the light of the low sun glints off the surface of the pond. I think, *It's really beautiful here.*

"Michael Mahoney needs to have the shit beaten out of him," Louie says.

"Yeah."



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Dave Kuhne
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In 1978, *descant* began its awards program when it inherited the Frank O'Connor Award for short fiction from *Quartet*, which, before it ceased publication, had been edited by Richard Hauer Costa. *descant* now presents three awards in addition to the O'Connor prize: the Betsy Colquitt Award for the best poem in an issue, the Baskerville Publishers Poetry Award for an outstanding poem in an issue, and the Gary Wilson Award for an outstanding story in an issue. The Betsy Colquitt Award honors *descant's* founding editor. The Baskerville Award is presented the Fort Worth press that publishes literary fiction and works about classical music and opera. The Gary Wilson Award, presented by an anonymous donor, remembers Gary Wilson, a brilliant and talented translator and fiction writer in the MFA program at the University of Arkansas in the late 1970s. Wilson died of cancer shortly before finishing his degree at Arkansas. Gary enjoyed fishing, translating Virgil, and writing humorous stories, many of which featured characters and plots from his native Ozark mountains. We thank the donors of all our awards, we congratulate the winners of our poetry and fiction prizes, and we hope our readers enjoy *descant* 2007.

—Dave Kuhne