

Julie Marie Wade

## ADVENT

### *Dark*

By 4:30. Earlier on overcast days. 3:30 sometimes if it's raining, water racing to fill the roadside drains. I like the dark despite the way adults complain. Bleak puddles call for bright galoshes. And the word *galoshes*, too, for *galumph* and *slosh*, the way our slickered bodies slide toward recess, galoshing. After school, my mother is always late. The teachers linger against their will. I hear them whisper, groan: *not paid to stay, not a babysitting service*. No yellow buses for private school, just yellow raincoats. I slump under the awning, snapped and toggled, watching the rain drip down, the dark spreading over the world. I could almost disappear but for my bus-bright. If it's Grandma's day, she's early, steering her long white boat of a car. Finned as it is, I trust we will always float. She brings me taffy. Her headlights delve into the damp-cold, parsing the sudden night. *This is December*, I think. Daylight fizzles, and I don't miss it. All the way home windows glow. Lights flicker and beam. We spot tinsel around a doorframe, a sleigh perched on a sloping front lawn. Magic is watching. I'm peering into lives not mine, glimpsing their unfamiliar incandescence.

### *Candelabrum*

Indoor dark is different. I dread the hall lights dimming, the porch light gone out like a star, parent-bodies receding to their bedroom, thick with quiet thereafter. I sleep by nightlight—so the indoor dark cannot wrap its restless arms around. Still, any room altered by shadows becomes an unsafe place. Rocker creaks inexplicably. Stuffed bears swell to twice their normal height. Mirror beckons me to look, but I refuse. All night, which is the long night of childhood, I wait for morning to spill its pink secrets under the shade. Then December, and suddenly candle-trees appear—five green glass bulbs on plastic branches, each tethered to an ecru cord. My father crawls beneath the basement stairs, plumbs a box filled with newspaper, places them on every windowsill. So much green light: *permission granted*. Relief floods my small body like the rain. I will sleep better now than I do all year; every

stoplight in my dreams is set to go. Then Grandma says, “Just look at that lovely candelabrum.” *Can-de-la-brum*. I fork the syllables onto my tongue, one by one, repeat *candelabrum* like a spell. But is it a spell I am casting or breaking? This I cannot tell.

#### *Upstairs Tree*

My father flocks the tree. No birds involved, though I flap my arms and caw: *Flock! Flock!* “Be careful with that word,” he warns, though I don’t know why. Long after we have ceased this ritual, I will. Our new tree is also artificial—imposter green, tiny white lights, inedible sugar plums. But when I am still small and the tree is still flocked, I belong to my father. Preparing to shave in the peptic-pink bathroom he shares with my mother, he fills the sink, splashes his face, shakes the bright green Barbasol tin until it yields a beard of foam. For years, my father lets me rub shaving cream all over the counters as he takes a manual razor to his throat. Sometimes he makes a gash, and I flinch at the red of him seeping through all that soft white. I run to the cabinet, but he refuses every Band-aid I offer. Flocked or unflocked, our tree never becomes a believable fiction. In this way, it resembles our family. One day deep in the future, my father shouts, “Let me out of this *fucking* car!” My mother fumes in the front seat. “*Flocking* car,” I softly correct him.

#### *Holiday Soiree*

The living room is where my mother entertains: tea parties, garden clubs, powdered women who recite their letters like a pledge: *AAUW, Delta Kappa Gamma*. She is always president or treasurer or running again until the day she is ousted from office. Then the chapter changes, and new women arrive, bearing their gifts of Bundt cake, gingerbread, and toffee. My mother always hosts the Christmas party. She explains how no one else is equal to the task. See her in the basement, defrosting cheeseballs, searching for the short-handled knives engraved with cherubim. There she is in the kitchen, washing Lenox plates. They have gold-leaf edges, hand-painted holly. She has already promised me four place settings for when I marry well. Meanwhile, before the doorbell rings, I dim the chandelier and light the candles in all the votive cups. Our fireplace matches are long as leashes, pink at their pretty tips. I whisk sheets away from couches, toss them in the closet. I gather plastic runners from the carpet, place cotton balls doused with perfume alongside

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all the baseboards. Instead of our bell, someone uses the knocker. *Pound. Pound. Pound.* I don my mother's apron, greet her guests at the door.

### *Church*

Greeters in the narthex wear name tags, shake hands, smile. They fuss over me because there aren't many children—ruffling my curls and asking my mother if they're natural. "Naturally!" she replies. In the sanctuary, red carpet, like an awards show takes place. Tiny pencils in every pew. Cards for writing prayer requests or stories. So much music—organ and piano, maracas and tambourines. On special Sundays, Jeff plays his trumpet in the loft and startles everyone. At Christmastime, a real tree sweeps the ceiling, christened with a star. Its branches dip toward the altar, bearing gold and silver globes. I love when we sing about the angels, our chorus of "Glo-ooooo-oooo-oooo-oooo-ria . . ." so long and slow everyone loses their breath, even the pastor. We are Lutherans, like Martin Luther. My parents married in one Lutheran church, then moved to another, and another after that. When we leave, no reason is ever given, though Grandma mentions my mother has trouble getting along: "Her way or the highway." At Christmastime, there's a wreath with purple candles. On Christmas Day, they light the pink one in the middle. If I'm good we can go and see it, my mother says. I still have never been.

### *Egg Nog*

Blenders, two on the counter at once: eggs, cream, sugar, heaps of ice. Dark liquids in glass bottles. A cinnamon swirl or even a stick. The only Christmas drink served cold, the most delicious. "It's too rich," my mother gripes but keeps making it. When I ask for more and more, my father calls me Oliver Twist. My mother says I'm at risk for growing up fat like my father. We both look down at our skinny legs, our skinny arms. "You're fine," he promises. "I'm the one with the paunch." This time my mother's family is coming. "They *never* come here," she mutters. Uncle Thor saunters into the kitchen, says, "You can skip the nog and give me more of the brown stuff." His daughter is about my age. We bounce on his lap, his chest. He is long as a log, stretched out on the couch. His wife mentions twice the sweater she gave him. "*Cashmere.*" I didn't know I had to go. My body gives way on the soft fabric. Now Aunt Sharon finger-wags: "She's five years old, for Christ's

sake! Isn't she potty-trained?" My wet tights around my ankles, sobbing in the bathroom when they leave.

### *Cupboard Cutouts*

My favorite part of decorating for Christmas happens in the kitchen. My mother opens an envelope with a little red string to reveal a dozen brightly colored cardboard cutouts of holiday scenes: Santa feeding Rudolph a carrot. A jaunty snowman smoking a pipe. A Victorian-looking family roasting chestnuts at their hearth. My mother hands me the folder with a roll of masking tape. Four pieces usually does the trick. I can stick them anywhere, on any cupboard I please, high or low. She is busy hanging icicles from curtain rods, weaving garland around our abalone shells. Before long, a red wreath covered with peppermint candies will take its place on the back-porch door. *Sometimes my mother is fun*, I marvel. Before I was born, she taught school. When I ask what this was like, she says, "My students loved me. They really did." One day we are shopping at Sears, and a man with long sideburns gallops toward us. "Mrs. Wade, do you remember me?" He is her student, all grown up. He hugs her, kisses both her cheeks, then turns to me: "Your mother was the best teacher I ever had!" I have no choice but to believe him.

### *Rearranging Furniture*

In first grade, I misspell *furniture* in the schoolwide spelling bee. My shame is hot to the touch for hours, like the teapot my mother keeps in her cozy. "F-u-r-r-n" like *furnace*, she explains, not "F-e-r-r-n" like the ruffled plant growing rampant in our garden. Three times a year we rearrange the furniture in my bedroom. I can choose where my bed goes on one of three walls—under the window (best for summer with the outside breeze), across from the vanity (fine for anytime really), or next to the door (ideal for Christmas). My father carries everything out, so we can vacuum. The pink carpet is dimpled from the legs of the desk chair. It bears a square from my bureau, a rectangle from my trunk. We dust everything, check the lightbulbs, scrub the windowsill, and drop a fresh sachet in each drawer. The first night I'm actually eager to slip beneath the sheets. If I lie on my left side, I can peek through the crack in the door. I can listen for footsteps, trace conversation threads. Each year I

resolve how when Santa comes, I will not sleep; I will leap into the hall and intercept him.

### *Mall Santa*

For years, I've asked Santa to bring me a baby sister. Following tradition, I perch on his lap at The Bon Marché in a plum velvet dress with a white bib collar. I stare into his black wire spectacles through my pink plastic spectacles and explain again, "Santa, I really need your help to make this happen." He pats my shoulder with his big gloved hand. We pause a moment, smile for the camera. When I'm seven, Santa says, "How would you like it if I brought you a Cabbage Patch doll? Wouldn't that be just as nice as a sister? You wouldn't even have to share your toys." I shake my head. "I *want* to share. I *want* someone else to have to—" He hands me a candy cane the size of a bribe. "I'll get my elves to make one special, so she looks just like you: brown hair, blue eyes, even a dimple in her left cheek." Time's up. Mrs. Claus beckons from the Polar Palace. Sure enough, on Christmas morning, my look-a-like's propped under the tree. Her birth certificate reads *Julia Marie*. My parents seem pleased. "To think your names only differ by one letter!"

### *Presents*

My mother always says no to "boy toys," like the Skeletor action figure with the backpack catapult of slime. ("Please, Mom! She-Ra doesn't have anything as cool!") No to Reebok high-tops you could "pump up" by squeezing basketballs on the shoes' plump tongues. ("Please, Mom! They'll help me jump!") No especially to my long obsession with Everlast boxing gloves, the classic red kind—though I would have settled for pink as a gesture of compromise—and a body-sized punching bag. ("We could hang it under the deck! It wouldn't be in your way! Don't you want me to exercise?") But every year I can count on a Life Savers storybook from Pay 'n' Save, replete with twelve assorted candy rolls. I sprawl on the living room rug in a slow state of suck and chew. This is before people speak of *self-soothe*. Instead, I *life-savor*, amused by the pun, through Barbie's glow-in-the-dark canopy bed, Ken's shiny Corvette, Skipper's closet. I *life-savor* through notebook paper refills and glossy pocket folders, each sporting a different boy's denim-clad backside. By late morning my mother wails, citing my ingratitude. I thank her twice for the candy, save butter rum, my favorite flavor, for last.

*Country Christmas*

My mother's family lives in a wooded place beyond the city called Black Diamond. On ski slopes, I learn black diamonds mean danger. "Advanced," my father corrects me as we both pull back, watching my mother soar over moguls. When we arrive in the country, my spine straightens up like a pin. Mean Grandma power-walks through the neighborhood, pumping her hand weights and scowling. There are no sidewalks here, just dogs growling behind fences, kids hollering from truckbeds, a dearth of kindness. My grandfather's name is Elwood, which seems both fitting and strange. A carpenter by trade, he cuts down a pine tree, drags it into the house. Needles fall around him like rain. For twenty years, he hasn't spoken, and no one seems to care. My pretty blond cousin lives in the house next door. She wears fleece-lined boots and skin-tight jeans, a T-shirt that reads, *Dear Santa, I want it all!* Mean Grandma wraps our presents in newspaper, shreds the comics into bows. Mute Grandpa watches football and grunts when his beer gets warm. When I notice the absence of a stocking with my name, Mean Grandma says, "Looks like I forgot you again." She says this every time.

*It's a Wonderful Life*

We watch the film together once a year—mostly in black-and-white, one time in color. My father whistles whenever Donna Reed steps into screen light, says things like "My, oh my, isn't she something?" and "That Mary Hatch is quite a looker!" I think about the word hatch, which means an opening that allows for passage from one place into another. Imagine if Mary Hatch had been a fellow passenger with George Bailey instead of a bolt and a latch. Imagine if they had gone traveling instead of lassoing the stork; left the Bailey Building and Loan to George's brother, Harry; turned that giant suitcase into a raft. Wrapping presents at the card table, my mother makes snide remarks about the Granville House—how she couldn't imagine wishing to live in a place like that. I enjoy the snow in the movie, of course, the surreal montage, even the little ditty about angels getting their wings. *But is this really a happy ending?* I wonder, sadness creeping up in my throat. Potter gets eight thousand dollars richer from Uncle Billy's mistake, and after everyone drinks rum punch and sings "Auld Lang Syne," won't their status quo of struggle still remain?

*Nativity*

Every year I steal Jesus. Not Mary or Joseph, the shepherds or wise men. Not the donkeys or sheep or the impressive, porcelain camels. Not even the angel with wings outstretched, teetering on the roof of the barn. *Jesus*—who is always a baby in December, though he’s somehow a man by Easter—bearded and sad, nearly naked as he dangles from the cross. I steal the baby and hide him in my pencil case or the tissue box in the bathroom. When confronted about it, I lie. It’s then, precisely, my mischief transmutes into sin. “Put him back!” my mother shouts, stomping around the house so dainty things in hutches start to rattle. “The manger *can not* be empty when the guests come!” She makes it two words, though it is really one. I don’t know why I *cannot* resist this temptation. Perhaps because God has refused my prayers for a sister—a brother would do in a pinch. Or perhaps I feel sorry for him—another only child whose parents demand too much. One year, by accident, I sever his tiny head from his body. My mother reassembles Jesus with the glue gun. “Our Christmas miracle,” she says.

*Eve*

Not the Bible Lady, but spelled the same. I would like to call it *Christmas Cusp*, for the double-Cs, or maybe *The Edge of Christmas*. Some families open presents on their Eve. Not us. We confuse anticipation with temptation, stay ungratified another day. My mother dons her reindeer vest, red-threaded earrings with jingle bells. Pleasant, at first, their tinkling—but later in the evening, not so much. Sometimes my father is denied second helpings because my mother is watching his weight. That’s when Grandma says, “But Bill’s a growing boy!” and my mother replies, “That’s what I’m afraid of.” Sometimes Grandma walks with her cane, and sometimes she doesn’t. Sometimes Aunt Linda has *frosted hair*, and sometimes she is *in between frostings*. She and my mother have the same name. One day I realize they have never liked each other. Their denial only confirms my suspicion—how they look sideways, murmur, “Of course not!” and “No, she’s all right.” The grown-ups drink wine poured from a big Carlo Rossi jug. We toast, sing carols, clear the table. My mother tells my father he’s gaining again as she slices the apple cake. He whispers, “Take those *G-D bells* out of your ears.”

*Snow*

Mountain-snow, not city-snow—my parents agree this is best. Sometimes “flurries,” the newspeople say, or “freezing rain” overnight. I sulk in my jammies and slipper-socks. *Isn't rain that freezes snow?* “In Montana, we always had a white Christmas,” my father recalls. “Of course, I didn’t have to drive in it then.” I toss pennies into wells, wishing for snow. I kneel beside my bed, praying for snow. I even send a Space Needle postcard to Santa Claus, asking him to express a North Pole cloud’s-worth please. “Like from the story-poem we read every year,” I print in labored letters. I want to see *the moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow—the luster of midday*, too. “You spelled everything right,” my mother approves before mailing. Then, one year, it happens. The sky is lavender when I wake. Real icicles dangle from the awnings. Our street seems dusted with sugar. “It’s not much,” my father says, “maybe half an inch.” In the grass, I try to make an angel, flinging my limbs, but the snow is more doily than cloak. “Cocoa with marshmallows?” my mother offers. The chimney wears a little white cap, but wherever I step turns green again.

*Santa Claus Breakfast*

We leave early in the morning, when it’s still dark, so dark it might as well be night. Outside I hear my father warming the car while my mother pins hot rollers in my hair. We have tickets, but there is still a long line—parents and children snaking around the Frederick & Nelson’s downtown. Every year I bring my tin of pennies and nickels, so I’ll always have something to offer when strangers ask for change. This bothers my parents, but they can’t explain why. “The pastor tells us to tithe,” I say. They exchange glances, sigh. “We give at church, honey. In the collection plate.” When the doors open, it’s a frenzy of patent leather footwear. On a high floor, we are seated in the fancy dining hall. I remember hot chocolate with quick-melting cream, a sugar cookie where the toast should be. Later, there’s a commotion as Santa arrives, ho-ho-hoing and jingle-jangling, flashing a Polaroid of Prancer. One year when he stops at our table, I ask: “Santa, do you give toys to the homeless kids, too?” His eyes dart. He pauses too long. “Well, of course I do.” It bothers me that I don’t believe him.

*Presents, Redux*

One year I got exactly what I wanted: racecars with intricate racing track, remote controls, batteries tucked inside my stocking. “Mom!” I shout, ecstatic. She sips her tea, rolls her eyes, says only, “Santa and I had a disagreement, and this year it seems he won.” My father and I set up the racetrack in the basement, as the sticky note (*Basement Use Only*) requires. There’s a picture of us grinning in our matching PJs—button-down shirts, button-fly pants, festive red-and-green plaid—controllers cinched in our hands. But soon, there’s an argument about something. *Did we not help clean up enough, sorting the paper and ribbons? Did we ignore my mother when she posed on the landing, flashing her shoes with the new rhinestone clip-on bows?* By lunchtime, like every other year, I’ve locked myself in the bathroom. I’ve taken a book sent by my father’s friend. *Sex After 50*, it’s called. My mother’s screaming at my father. My father’s pounding on the door, screaming at me. “Put that down, Julie! It’s a gag gift! Linda, *help me*—Roger’s corrupting our little girl’s innocence!” I stick out my tongue—furious first, but soon disappointed. All the book’s pages are blank.

*St. Nicholas*

In fourth grade, Mrs. Miller asks who knows the story of St. Nicholas. A few hands shoot up, without solid leads. Mostly, we raise our hands because we like her, not because we know. “Well, today we’re going to read a book about the real man who inspired the legend of Santa Claus—or *Saint* Claus—or *Saint Nick*-Claus,” she smiles. The morning has been nice so far: cutting out snowflakes for a window display, Amy Grant on the record player, gingerbread and donut holes for snack. Now something isn’t sitting right in my stomach. Now my hand is flapping overhead like a flag. “When you say *real man* and *legend*, what exactly are you talking about?” Carl turns around. “Duh! She’s talking about how Santa’s made up, but our parents aren’t bad for lying to us. They had to, on account of tradition.” Now Lana gasps, and Selena covers her mouth. “You don’t still believe in Santa Claus, do you?” I’m shaking my head, but my eyes won’t lie. The water just keeps seeping out of them. Later, I’ll hear Mrs. Miller on the auxiliary phone: “It just never occurred to me that anyone her age would still believe.”

*Poinsettia*

It's a hard word to spell. Most people say *point*, like "point and stare," but it's really *point* without the "t." Some say *setta*, like "set a table," but there's actually an "i" that adds an extra syllable. At Christmas, we buy poinsettias by the dozen. My mother takes me with her to the Kmart Garden Shop, where I push the cart and load the trunk—box-tops full of ugly plants in crinkly foil. She says, "Did you know another name for poinsettia is Christmas star?" She says this every year. They come in white, pale pink, reds both dark and light and sometimes dappled. I find them boring, a distinctive non-delight—no lily's mystery, or tulip's candor, and no sweet scent of rose—in fact, no scent at all. My mother arranges poinsettias in front of the fireplace, on the lid of the grand piano, and one scarlet row as centerpiece beneath the dining room chandelier. "They're the guinea pigs of plants," my father whispers to me. "Have you ever seen one in the wild?" We laugh, and now we have a running joke. If caught standing near a poinsettia, one person shrugs. The other asks, "What's the point?"

*National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*

My mother thinks Chevy Chase is funny, and my father thinks Beverly D'Angelo is cute. That's why we watch the first time. When a neighbor brags about meeting Randy Quaid, we buy a copy on VHS for annual screenings. I like the Griswold family well enough, especially their attic with the ceiling pull-string, the ladder that drops straight down. I also like that none of the women in this movie, or even the teenaged girl, have caused that scratchy feeling under my skin—so peculiar and persistent it once prompted my mother to ask if I had stinging nettles again. But the title is confusing. "What does *lampoon* mean?" I ask my father as he slips the cassette from its sleeve. "Oh, you know—to make fun of something. Isn't that right, Linda?" She hands me three cold Shastas from the fridge. "A satire," she nods. What I can't decide is what's being satirized exactly. Holiday bonuses? Rampant consumption? Notions of *biggest and best*, like the mammoth Christmas tree, the grid-defying light display? Maybe even family togetherness itself? "Cool it, young lady," my father says, suddenly stern. To my mother, he murmurs: "Has she always read this much into things?"

*Mistletoe*

One cluster in the entry hall. Another at the bottom of the stairs. Plastic, of course, as my mother prefers. “No muss, no fuss,” she says when slipping the dusty berries back in their original box. I want to believe this plant holds magical powers for people fated to fall or stay in love, but in school we learn that mistletoe is actually a parasite, pretty to look at but harmful to its host. At ten, the boy I “go with”—though mostly just to school—kisses me under the mistletoe beside our gleaming Christmas village. It’s a short kiss, “stolen” like they say, while our parents sip Andre champagne in the dining room only a few feet away. Later, a friend will ask, “If you could kiss anyone under the mistletoe, who would it be? Celebrities included.” I try to think of someone male, someone interesting and contemporary. Dylan from *90210*? Joey from *New Kids on the Block*—or is it Jordan? I can never remember which one we’re supposed to like. “Clock’s ticking,” she prods, so I have to do it. I say, “Well, I already kissed Lee Bennett under the mistletoe, so basically I’m living the dream.”

*Downstairs Tree*

My mother doesn’t entertain in the basement, so we can take off our shoes and watch a movie, shoot pool, play chess, or hop on the trampoline. None of the furniture even has to be covered before we sit down. Eventually, we will prepare all our meals here and eat them on TV trays. My mother will take to calling the upstairs kitchen “the company kitchen”—never used and therefore always clean. In the basement, we celebrate an “old-fashioned Christmas.” The tree, though artificial, is decked out with colorful lights. We tie red bows and candy canes to all the branches, string popcorn, and toss tinsel wherever we please. Every ornament I have ever made is here, including an angel with a Styrofoam ball for a face, pipe cleaners with tulle for wings. “Have you ever noticed how angels in the Bible are always men, but in decorations, they’re always women in glowing gowns?” My father says he hadn’t thought of it, but women are “the fairer sex,” so maybe we just like to look at women more. My mother says she couldn’t agree less. “If it weren’t sacrilegious, I’d put Joe Penny or Sly Stallone on top of that tree!”

*The Christmas Game*

Though I’ve never liked Monopoly, I love The Christmas Game. It’s still pure

capitalism—the first one to complete their Christmas shopping wins. But the board is 1980s bright with word-plays that tickle me pink. One square shows a picture of mistletoe with a caption that reads, “Kiss \$10 goodbye.” At the post office, you miss a turn because the line is so long—a thrilling example of verisimilitude. And if you land on the Christmas tree, you’re instructed to “Collect \$5 for lighting up everyone’s life.” There are traffic jams and gift-wrap stands, just like our trips to the mall. I play with my parents after dinner all December long. Depending on your dice-roll, you may have to draw one of three different kinds of cards. Santa is always good, Scrooge is always bad, but the Reindeer is not so easily categorized. *Is there a word for this?* I wonder. Even in March or July, when the game is stowed away with our other seasonalities, I can’t stop thinking about that Reindeer. What would it mean not to be a hero or a villain? What would it mean to start every sentence conditionally, with a *Maybe* or an *If*?

#### Swedish Christmas

I revise the song—*Over the hill and 'round the bend to Grandmother's house we go!* Four minutes on foot. Twenty seconds by car. There’s an after-lunch truce between my parents and me, a new set of presents under a real tree. Crab dip and something Aunt Linda makes with honey and cream cheese. Grandma buys fancy-brand crackers. Mom can’t taste the difference, but I can. This house is more cozy than fancy, though the tree does wear a skirt. “Could it wear pants if it wanted?” I ask, and everybody laughs. Sometimes Great Aunt Ruth takes a boat all the way from Canada. Dad and I pick her up at the harbor—frail and thin in her three-piece suit, a fruitcake under her hat. “I smuggled it through customs,” she smiles impishly. “They don’t mess with sweet old ladies.” Sometime before dinner, Aunt Linda opens her record case. “Who’s ready for Swedish tradition?” It’s our cue to sing along with Stan Boreson: *I Yust Go Nuts at Christmas!* My mother isn’t Swedish like the rest of us. She stands at the pass-through, arms akimbo. Despite her glitz and glamor, I wonder if she has ever had a “yolly holiday.”

#### Calendar

The chocolate is always waxy, the object hard to discern, but what matters is not the taste or the shape but the ritual. Every morning for twenty-five days I come to the table eager. I scan the cartoon cover for the number that

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matches the date. Then, the best part: pressing down and popping out the edges of the perforated square—a dent in the larger picture, propping open a tiny door. My father explains this tradition is religious, but my mother buys secular calendars in bulk on December 26th at the drugstore. Sometimes the chocolate is so old it turns white, but I still eat it. I'm hungry for some kind of design. If the events of one day were the size of one door, I know I could make sense of everything. Why in December am I allowed to eat chocolate for breakfast, before even oatmeal and my Flintstone vitamin? Or why, every morning, does my mother tell me "Hurry up! We're going to be late!" when she's always late in the afternoon? Is this what my father means when he says there is only one moral to every story, and that moral is *Hurry up and wait*?