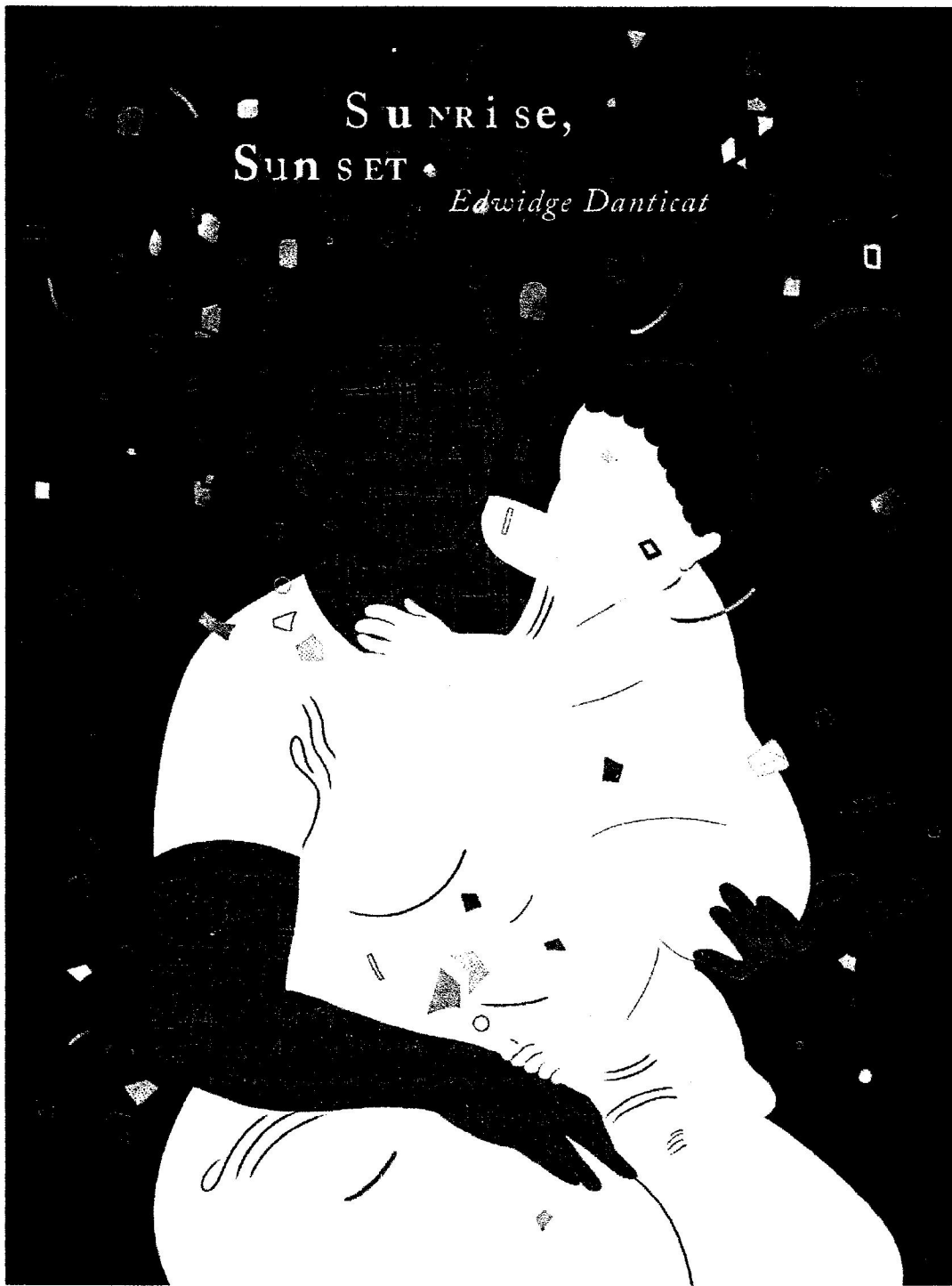


FICTION



Sunrise,  
Sunset •  
*Edwidge Danticat*

It comes on again on her grandson's christening day. A lost moment, a blank spot, one that Carole does not know how to measure. She is there one second, then she is not. She knows exactly where she is, then she does not. Her older church friends tell similar stories about their surgeries, how they count backward from ten with an oxygen mask over their faces, then wake up before reaching one, only to find that hours, and sometimes even days, have gone by. She feels as though she were experiencing the same thing.

Her son-in-law, James, a dreadlocked high-school math teacher, is holding her grandson, Jude, who has inherited her daughter's globe-shaped head, penny-colored skin, and long fingers, which he wraps around Carole's chin whenever she holds him. Jude is a lively giggler. His whole body shakes when he laughs. Carole often stares at him for hours, hoping that his chubby face will bring back memories of her own children at that age, memories that are quickly slipping away.

Her daughter, Jeanne, is still about sixty pounds overweight on Jude's christening day, seven months after his birth. Jeanne is so miserable about this—and who knows what else—that she spends most days in her bedroom, hiding.

Since her daughter is stuck in a state of mental fragility, Carole welcomes the opportunity to join Jude's other grandmother, Grace, in watching their grandson as often as she's asked. Carole likes to entertain Jude with whatever children's songs and peekaboo games she can still remember, including one she calls *Solèy Leve, Solèy Kouche*—Sunrise, Sunset—which she used to play with her children. She drapes a black sheet over her grandson's playpen and pronounces it "sunset," then takes the sheet off and calls it "sunrise." Her grandson does not seem to mind when she gets confused and reverses the order. He doesn't know the difference anyway.

Sometimes Carole forgets who Grace is and mistakes her for the nanny. She does, however, remember that Grace disapproved of her son's marrying Jeanne, whom she believed was beneath him. That censure now seems justified by Jeanne's failures as a mother.

Jeanne, Carole thinks, has never known real tragedy. Growing up in a

country ruled by a merciless dictator, Carole watched her neighbors being dragged out of their houses by the dictator's denim-uniformed henchmen. One of her aunts was beaten almost to death for throwing herself in front of her husband as he was being arrested. Carole's father left the country for Cuba when she was twelve and never returned. Her mother's only means of survival was cleaning the houses of people who were barely able to pay her. Carole's best friend lived next door, in another tin-roofed room, rented separately from the same landlord. During the night, while her mother slept, Carole often heard her friend being screamed at by her own mother, who seemed to hate her for being a burden. Carole tried so hard to protect her U.S.-born children from these stories that they are now incapable of overcoming any kind of sadness. Not so much her son, Paul, who is a minister, but Jeanne, whom she named after her childhood friend. Her daughter's psyche is so feeble that anything can rattle her. Doesn't she realize that the life she is living is an accident of fortune? Doesn't she know that she is an exception in this world, where it is normal to be unhappy, to be hungry, to work non-stop and earn next to nothing, and to suffer the whims of everything from tyrants to hurricanes and earthquakes?

The morning of her grandson's christening, Carole is wearing a long-sleeved white lace dress that she can't recall putting on. She has combed her hair back in a tight bun that now hurts a little.

Earlier in the week, she watched from the terrace of her daughter's third-floor apartment as Jeanne dipped her feet in the condo's kidney-shaped communal pool. She'd walked out onto the terrace to look at the water, the unusual cobalt-blue color it becomes in late afternoon and the slow ripple of its surface, even when untouched by a breeze or bodies.

"I won't christen him!" Jeanne was shouting on the phone. "That's her thing, not ours."

"We're up soon," James says, snapping Carole out of her reverie. He is using the tone of voice with which he speaks to Jude. It's clear that this is not the first time he's told her this.

Her daughter is looking neither at her nor at the congregation full of Carole's friends. She's not even looking at Jude, who has been dressed, most likely by James, in a plain white romper. Jeanne stares at the floor, as others take turns holding Jude and keeping him quiet in the church: first Grace, then Carole's husband, Victor, then James's younger sister, Zoe, who is the godmother, then James's best friend, Marcos, the godfather.

Carole keeps reminding herself that her daughter is still young. Only thirty-two. Jeanne was once a happy young woman, a guidance counsellor at the school where James teaches. (When James and Jeanne were first married, their friends called them J.J.; then Jude was born, and the three of them became Triple J.) "She used to like children, right?" Carole sometimes asks Victor. "Before she had her son?"

When Jude's name is called from the pulpit by his uncle Paul, James motions for them to approach the altar. Paul, dressed in a long white ministerial robe, steps down from the pulpit and, while Jude is still in his father's arms, traces a cross on his forehead with scented oil. The oil bothers Jude's eyes and he wails. Undeterred, Paul takes Jude and begins praying so loudly that he shocks Jude into silence. After the prayer, he hands Jude back to his mother. Jeanne kisses her son's oil-soaked forehead and her eyes balloon with tears, either from the strong smell of the oil or from the emotions of the day.

Carole knows that her daughter is not enjoying any of this, but she has found comfort in such rituals and she believes that her grandson will not be protected against the world's evils—including his mother's lack of interest in him—until this one is performed.

Later, at the post-christening lunch at her daughter's apartment, Carole spots James and Jeanne walking out of their bedroom. Jude is in Jeanne's arms. They have changed the boy out of his plain romper into an even plainer sleeveless onesie. Jeanne stops in the doorway and lowers a bib over Jude's face and murmurs, "Sunset." Then she raises the bib and squeals, "Sunrise!" Watching her daughter play this game with the baby, Carole feels as though

she herself were going through the motions, raising and lowering the bib. Not at this very moment but at some point in the hazy past. It's as if Jeanne had become Carole and James had become her once dapper and lanky husband, Victor, who now walks with a cane that he is always tapping against the ground. All is not lost, Carole thinks. Her daughter has learned a few things from her, after all. Then it returns again, that now familiar sensation of herself wanting. What if this is the last day that she recalls anything? What if she never recognizes anyone again? What if she forgets her husband? What if she stops remembering what it's like to love him, a feeling that has changed so much over the years, in ways that her daughter's love for her own husband seems also to be changing, even though James, like Victor, is patient. She's never seen him shout at or scold Jeanne. He doesn't even tell her to get out of bed or pay more attention to their child. He tells Carole and his own mother that Jeanne just needs time. But how long will this kind of tolerance last? How long can anyone bear to live with someone whose mind wanders off to a place where their love no longer exists?

Carole's husband is the only one who knows how far along she is. He is constantly subjected to her sudden mood changes, her bursts of anger followed by total stillness. He has tried for years to help her hide her symptoms, or lessen them with puzzles and other educational games, with coconut oil and omega-3 supplements, which she takes with special juices and teas. He is always turning off appliances, finding keys she's stored in unusual places like the bathtub, the oven, or the freezer. He helps her finish sentences, nudges her to let her know if she has repeated something a few times. But maybe one day he will grow tired of this and put her in a home, where strangers will have to take care of her.

When Jude was born, Victor bought her a doll so that she could practice taking care of their grandson. It's a brown boy doll with a round face and tight peppercorn curls, like Jude's. When she puts the doll in the bath, its hair clings to its scalp, just like Jude's. Bathing the doll, then dressing it before bed, makes her feel calm, helps her sleep more soundly. But

this, like her illness, is still a secret between her husband and her, a secret that they may not be able to keep much longer.

How do you become a good mother? Jeanne wants to ask someone, anyone. She wishes she'd been brave enough to ask her mother before her dementia, or whatever it is that she is suffering from, set in. Her mother refuses to have tests done and get a definitive diagnosis, and her father is fine with that.

"You don't poke around for something you don't want to find," he's told her a few times.

Her father offers the first toast at the christening lunch. "To Jude, who brought us together today," he says in Creole, then in English.

James hands Jeanne a champagne glass, which she has trouble balancing while holding their son. Her mother puts her own glass down and reaches over and takes Jude from Jeanne's arms.

"I'll toast with him," Carole says, and Jeanne fears her mother may actually believe that Jude's body is a champagne glass. She is afraid these days to let her mother hold her son, to leave them alone together, but since she and James are close by and Jude isn't fussing or fidgeting she does not protest.

After the toast, James asks if he can get Jeanne and her mother a plate of food. Carole nods, then quickly changes her mind. "Maybe later," she says. Jude is looking up at her now, his baby eyes fixed on her wrinkled and weary-looking face.

Carole isn't eating much these days. Jeanne, on the other hand, feels as though a deep and sour hole were burrowing through her body, an abyss that is always demanding to be filled.

Her husband doesn't insist. It's not his style. Throughout their courtship and marriage, he's never pressured her to do anything. Everything is always presented to her as a suggestion or a recommendation. It's as if he were constantly practicing being patient for the rowdy kids he teaches at school. Even there, he never loses his temper. Her mother, on the other hand, has been lashing out lately, though afterward she seems unable to remember doing it. She has always been a quiet woman. She is certainly kinder than James's mother, who wouldn't have given

Jeanne or Carole the time of day if it weren't for James.

Jeanne often wonders if her mother was happier in Haiti. She doubts it. Jeanne has no right to be sad, her mother has often told her. Only Carole has the right to be sad, because she has seen and heard terrible things. Jeanne's father's approach to life is different. He is more interested than anybody Jeanne knows in the pleasure of joy, or the joy of pleasure, however you want to put it. It's as if he had sworn to enjoy every second of his life—to wear the best clothes he can afford, to eat the best food, to go to dances where his favorite Haitian bands are playing.

Victor drove a city bus for most of Jeanne's childhood, then when he got older he switched to driving a taxicab. Between fares, he sat in the parking lot at Miami International Airport, discussing Haitian politics with his cabdriver friends. Perhaps her mother wouldn't be losing her mind if she'd worked outside their home. Church committees and family were her life's work, a luxury they'd been able to afford because Victor worked double shifts and took extra weekend jobs. Carole could have worked, if she'd wanted to, as a lunch lady in a school cafeteria or as an elder companion or a nanny, like many of her church friends.

Jeanne never wanted to be a housewife like her mother, but here she is now, stuck at home with her son. She doesn't leave the house much anymore, except for her son's doctor's appointments. Most of the time, she's afraid to leave her bed, afraid even to hold her son, for fear that she might drop him or hug him too tightly and smother him. Then the fatigue sets in, an exhaustion so forceful it doesn't even allow her to sleep. Motherhood is a kind of foggy bubble she can't step out of long enough to wrap her arms around her child. Oddly enough, he's an easy child. He's been sleeping through the night since the day they brought him home. He naps regularly. He isn't colicky or difficult. He is just there.

James decides to offer a toast of his own. He taps his champagne glass with a spoon to catch everyone's attention.

"I want to make a toast to my wife, not only for being a phenomenal wife and mother but for bravely bringing Jude into our lives," he says.

Why does he want to think of her as brave? Perhaps he's thinking of the

twenty-six hours of labor that ended in a C-section, during which her son was pulled out with the umbilical cord wrapped around his neck. He had nearly died, the doctor told her, because of her stubborn insistence on a natural birth.

The pregnancy had also been easy. She'd worked a regular schedule until the day she went into labor. The pain was intense, pulsating, throbbing, but bearable, even after the twenty-fifth hour. First babies can put you through the wringer, the nurses kept telling her, but the second one will be easier.

She was lucky, blessed, her mother said, that the baby was saved in time.

After his toast, her husband kisses her cheek.

"Hear, hear," her brother says in his booming minister's voice.

Jeanne's eyes meet her husband's and she wishes that a new spark would pass between them, something to connect them still, besides their child. She feels like crying, but she does not want to incite one of her mother's rants about her being a spoiled brat who needs to stop sulking and get on with her life. In all the time since her child was born and she realized that his birth would not necessarily make her joyful, and in all the time since she became aware that her mother's mind, as well as her mother's love, was slipping away, today at the church was the first time she has cried.

A week before Jude was born, Carole went to the Opa Locka Hialeah Flea Market, which Haitians called Ti Mache, and got some eucalyptus leaves and sour oranges for her daughter's first postpartum bath. She bought her daughter a corset and a few yards of white muslin, which she sewed into a *bando* for Jeanne to wrap around her belly. But because of the C-section neither the bath nor the binding was possible, which was why her daughter's belly did not go back the way it had been before. Jeanne became larger, in fact, because she refused to drink the fennel and aniseed infusions that both Carole and Grace brewed for her. And she refused to breastfeed, which would not only have melted her extra fat but would also have made her feel less sad.

When Jeanne and Paul were babies, no other woman was around to help. Car-



ole didn't have the luxury of lying in bed while relatives took care of her and her children. Her husband did the best he could. He went out and got her the leaves and made her the teas. He gave her the baths himself. He helped her retie the *bando* every morning before he left for work, but during the hours that he was gone she was so lonely and homesick that she kept kissing her babies' faces, as if their cheeks were plots of land in the country she'd left behind.

She couldn't imagine life without her children. She would have felt even more lost and purposeless without them. She wanted them both to have everything they desired. And whenever money was tight, especially after she and Victor bought their house in Miami's Little Haiti, she would clean other people's homes while her children were at school and her husband was at work, something her husband never knew about.

Her secret income made him admire her even more. Every week, before he handed her the allowance for household expenses, he would proudly tell the children, "Your man-

man sure knows how to stretch a dollar."

Her cleaning money also paid for all the things her daughter believed she'd be a pariah without—brand-name sneakers and clothes, class rings, prom dresses. Her son wasn't interested in anything but books, and only library books at that. He would happily walk around with holes in his cheap shoes.

She should have told her daughter about the sacrifices she'd made. If she had, it would be easier now to tell her that she couldn't stay sad forever. Where would the family be if Carole had stayed sad when she arrived in this country? Sometimes you just have to shake the devil off you, whatever that devil is. Even if you don't feel like living for yourself, you have to start living for your child, for your children.

Jeanne doesn't realize that her husband and her mother have wandered off with Jude until she finds herself alone with her father.

She hasn't discussed her mother's

condition with him for some time. She does not want to tell him or her husband how earlier in the week, when her mother was visiting, she'd forced herself to go out and sit by the pool while her son was napping. As soon as she put her feet in the water, she glanced up and saw her mother watching her from the terrace. Her mother looked bewildered, as though she had no idea where she was. Jeanne was in the middle of a phone call with James. She ended the call quickly and ran upstairs, and by the time she reached the apartment her mother was standing by the door. She pushed the door shut, grabbed Jeanne by the shoulders, and slammed her into it. Had Carole been bigger, she might have cracked open Jeanne's head. Jeanne kept saying, "Manman, Manman," like an incantation, until it brought her back.

"What happened?" her mother asked.

Jeanne wanted to call an ambulance, or at least her father, but she was in shock and her mother seemed fine the rest of the day. Jeanne avoided her as much as she could, let her watch a talk show she liked, and made sure that she was not left alone with Jude.

The next day, her mother showed up after James had gone to work and began shouting at her in Creole. "You have to fight the devil," she yelled. "Stop being selfish and living for yourself. Start living for your child."

Those incidents have made Jeanne afraid both of and for her mother. She agreed to go through with the christening in the hope that it might help. Maybe her mother was only pretending to be losing her mind in order to get her way.

Sitting next to James on their living-room sofa, with Jude in her arms, Carole appears calmer than she has all week. Paul is sitting on the other side of her, and the three of them seem to be talking about Jude, or about children in general. Then James's friend Marcos joins them, and Jude reaches out for his big cloud of an Afro.

Jeanne wonders how her brother could fail to notice that their mother is deteriorating. In all their conversations about the christening, he never mentioned Carole's state of mind. Was it because he was used to seeing her as a pious woman, not as his mother but as his "sister" in the Lord? Paul has never paid much attention to practical things. He spent most

## ROAD TRIP

Of course we stole  
the motel soap. Weren't

we supposed to? So  
we could go home

and try to hold  
those slippery

slivers, which,  
like everything

we pretended  
was ours, touched

us, and vanished?

—*Andrea Cohen*

of their childhood reading books that even the adults they knew had never heard of, obscure novels and anthropological studies, the biographies of famous theologians and saints. Before he officially joined their mother's church, when he was a senior in high school, he had considered becoming a priest. He was always more concerned about the next world than he was about this one.

Her mother motions for Paul to scoot over, then lowers Jude into the space between them on the sofa. Jude turns his face back and forth and keeps looking up at the adults, especially at James.

"How are you these days?" Jeanne's father asks. As he speaks to Jeanne, he's looking at her mother in a way she has never seen before, with neither admiration nor love but alarm, or even distress.

"O.K.," she says. Usually that is enough for him. Her father, like her husband, doesn't usually push. But this time he does.

"Why do all this today?" her father asks, though he already knows the answer. "Did you have this child for her, too? Because she won't be able to take care of him for you. You'll have to do it for yourself."

"Of course I didn't have my son for her," Jeanne says.

"Then why have him?" he asks. "It doesn't seem like you want him."

This, whatever it is that she is feel-

ing, she wants to tell him, isn't about not wanting her son. It's about not being up to the task; the job is too grand, too permanent, even with her husband's help. It's hard to explain to her father or to anyone else, but something that was supposed to kick in, maybe a light that was meant to turn on in her head, never did. Despite her complete physical transformation, at times she feels as though she had not given birth at all. It's not that she doesn't want her son, or wishes he hadn't been born; it's just that she can't believe that he is truly hers.

She's desperate to change the subject. "What's really wrong with Manman?" she asks.

"We're not done talking about you," her father says.

"What's wrong with her?" she insists.

"She's not herself," he says.

"It's more than that."

"What do you want me to say?"

"We need to know the truth."

"We," he says, pointing to her mother, then to himself, "already know the truth."

Jeanne hears her mother laughing, softly at first then louder, at something that either James or Marcos has said. She realizes that possibly there have been doctors, a diagnosis, one that her parents are keeping to themselves.

"What are you saying?" she asks.

"I'll soon have to put her somewhere," he says.

She thinks of the expense and how her mother will not be the only one who is dislocated. Her father may have to sell the house in order to afford a decent place where her mother won't be neglected or abused. She thinks of the irony of her family's not being able to take care of her mother, who has dedicated so much of her life to them.

"I'm not saying it will happen tomorrow, but we'll have to put her somewhere one day."

Jeanne hasn't seen the pain in her father's face before, because she hasn't been looking for it. She hasn't been thinking about other people's pain at all. But now she can see the change in him. His hair is grayer and his voice drags. His eyes are red from lack of sleep, his face weathered with worry.

Carole and her childhood friend Jeanne used to talk to each other through a hole they'd poked in the plywood that separated their rooms. In the morning, when Jeanne went to fetch water at the neighborhood tap, she would whistle a wake-up call to Carole. Jeanne's whistle sounded like the squeaky chirping of a pipirit gri, the gray kingbirds that flew around the area until boys knocked them down with slingshots, roasted them in fire-pits, and ate them.

One morning, Jeanne did not whistle, and Carole never saw her again. The boys in the neighborhood said that her mother had killed her and buried her, then disappeared, but Jeanne's mother had probably just been unable to make the rent and skipped out before daylight.

The next occupant of that room was Victor. Victor's father worked on a ship that often travelled to Miami, and everyone in the neighborhood knew that Victor would be going there, too, one day. His father brought back suitcases full of clothes a couple of times a year, and Victor would always come over with some T-shirts or dresses that his mother said she had no use for, or a plate of food that she claimed would go uneaten if Carole and her mother didn't take it off her hands. Victor soon discovered the hole in the plywood and would slip his finger through and wave it at her. Then she would whistle to him, like the

last kingbird of their neighborhood.

Carole knew from the moment she met Victor that he would take care of her. She never thought he'd conspire against her, or even threaten to put her away. But here he is now, plotting against her with a woman she does not know, a fleshy, pretty woman, just the way he once liked them, just the way she was, when he liked her most.

Her husband and this woman are speaking in whispers. What are they talking about? And why is she sitting next to this peppercorn-haired doll that her husband sometimes uses to trick her, pretending it's a real baby. Her real babies are gone. They disappeared with her friend Jeanne, and all she has left is this doll her husband bought her.

She looks around the room to see if anyone else can see what's going on, how this young woman is trying to steal her husband from her right under her nose, while she is stuck on this sofa between strangers and a propped-up baby doll. She grabs the doll by its armpits and raises it to her shoulder. The doll's facial expressions are so real, so lifelike, that its lips curl and its cheeks crumple as though it were actually about to cry. To calm it down, she whistles the pipirit's spirited squeak.

Carole is trying to explain all this to the men on either side of her, but they can't understand her. One of them holds his hands out to her as if he wanted her to return the doll to him.

They are crowding around her now. The fleshy young woman, too, is moving closer. Carole doesn't understand what all the fuss is about. She just wants to take the doll out to the yard, the way she often does when her husband isn't around. She wants to feel the sun-filled breeze on her face and see the midday lustre of the pool. She wants to prove to everyone that not only can she take care of herself but she can take care of this doll, too.

How does her mother get past James and Paul and run to the terrace with Jude in her arms? Jude is squirming and wailing, his bare pudgy legs cycling erratically as her mother

dangles him over the terrace railing.

Her father is the first to reach the terrace, followed by James and everyone else. Though Carole is standing on the shady side of the terrace, she is sweating. Her bun has loosened as though Jude, or someone else, had been pulling at it.

Jeanne isn't sure how long her mother's bony arms will be able to support her son, especially since Jude is crying and twisting, all while turning his head toward the faces on the terrace as though he knew how desperate they were to have him back inside.

Paul has rushed downstairs, and Jeanne is now looking down at his face as she tries to figure out where her son might land if her mother drops him. The possibility of his landing in Paul's arms is as slim or as great as his landing in the pool or on the ficus hedge below the terrace.

Marcos also appears down by the pool, as does James's sister, Zoe, adding more hands for a possible rescue. James is on the phone with the police. Grace has Jeanne caged in her arms, as if to keep her from crumbling to the floor. Her father is standing a few feet from her mother, begging, pleading.

Once James is off the phone, he switches places with her father. Jude balls his small fists, reopens them, then aims both his hands at his father. He stops crying for a moment, as if waiting for James to grab him.

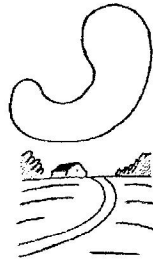
When James reaches for him, Carole pushes him farther out. Everyone gasps and, once Grace releases Jeanne, she doubles over, as if she had been sliced in two.

"Manman, please," James says.

"Manman, please," Jeanne echoes, straightening herself up. "Souple, Manman. Manman. Please. *Tanpri*, Manman. Manman, please."

Other tenants come out of their apartments. Some are already on their terraces. Others are by the pool with Paul, Zoe, and Marcos. There are now many hands ready to catch Jude should he be dropped or slip from her mother's grasp.

Her son at his last checkup weighed twenty-seven pounds, which is about a fifth of her mother's current weight. Her





mother will not be able to hold on to him much longer.

Jeanne walks toward her husband, approaching carefully, brushing past her father, who appears to be in shock.

"Manman, please give me my baby," Jeanne says. She tries to speak in a firm and steady voice, one that will not frighten her son.

Her mother regards her with the dazed look that is now too familiar.

"Let me have him, Carole," Jeanne says. Maybe not being her daughter will give her more authority in her mother's eyes. Her mother may think that Jeanne is someone she has to listen to, someone she must obey.

"Baby," her mother says, and it sounds more like a term of endearment for Jeanne than like the realization that she's holding a small child.

"Yes, Manman," Jeanne says. "It's a baby. My baby." She is trying not to shout over the wails of her child.

"Your baby?" Carole asks, her arms wavering now, as if she were finally feeling Jude's full weight.

"Yes." Jeanne lowers her voice. "He's my child, Manman. Please give him to me."

Jeanne can see in the loosening of her mother's arms that she is returning. But her mother is still not fully back, and, if she returns too suddenly, she may get confused and drop Jude. While her mother's eyes are focussed on her, she signals with a nod for her husband to move in, and, with one synchronized lurch, her father reaches for her mother and her husband grabs their son. Her mother relaxes her grip on Jude only after he is safely back across the railing.

James collapses on the terrace floor, his still crying son pressed tightly against his chest. Jeanne's father takes her mother by the hand and leads her back inside. He sits with her on the sofa and wraps his arms around her as she calmly rests her head on his shoulder.

Two police officers, a black woman and a white man, arrive soon after. They are followed by E.M.T.s. A light is shined in her mother's pupils by one of the E.M.T.s, then her blood pressure is taken. Though her mother seems to have snapped out of her episode and now only looks tired, it's determined that Carole needs psychiatric evaluation. Jude is examined and has only some

bruising under his armpits from his grandmother's tight grip.

Jeanne sees the dazed look return to her mother's eyes as she climbs onto the lowered gurney, with some help from Victor and from Paul. Her father asks that her mother not be strapped down, but the head E.M.T. insists that it is procedure and promises not to hurt her.

Jeanne had hoped that her mother was only trying to teach her a lesson, to shock her out of her blues and remind her that she is capable of loving her son, but then she sees her mother's eyes as she is being strapped to the gurney. They are bleary and empty. She seems to be looking at Jeanne but is actually looking past her, at the wall, then at the ceiling.

Carole's body goes limp as the straps are snapped over her wrists and ankles, and it seems as though she were surrendering, letting go completely, giving in to whatever has been ailing her. She seems to know that she'll never be back here, at least not in the way she was before. She seems to know, too, that this moment, unlike a birth, is no new beginning.

Carole thought she'd never see this again. Yet here they are, her daughter and her son-in-law with their baby boy. James's arms are wrapped around his wife, as she holds their son, who has fallen asleep. Perhaps Jeanne will now realize how indispensable her son is to her, how she can't survive without him. Carole regrets not telling her daughter a few of her stories. Now she will never get to tell them to her grandson, either. She will never play with him again.

The first time her husband took her to the doctor, before all the brain scans and spinal taps, the doctor asked about her family's medical history. He asked whether her parents or her grandparents had suffered from any mental illnesses, Alzheimer's, or dementia. She had not been able to answer any of his questions, because when he asked she could not remember anything about herself.

"She's not a good historian," the doctor told her husband, which was, according to Victor, the doctor's way of saying that she was incapable of telling her own life story.

She is not a good historian. She never has been. Even when she was well. Now she will never get a chance to be. Her grandson will grow up not knowing her. The single most memorable story that will exist about her and him will be of her dangling him off a terrace, in what some might see as an attempt to kill him. For her, all this will soon evaporate, fade away. But everyone else will remember.

They are about to roll her out of the apartment on the gurney. Although her wrists are strapped down, her son is holding her left hand tightly. Jeanne gives Jude to his other grandmother and walks over to the gurney. She moves her face so close to Carole's that Carole thinks she is going to bite her. But then Jeanne pulls back and it occurs to Carole that she is playing *Alo, Bye*, another peekaboo game her children used to enjoy. With their faces nearly touching, Jeanne crinkles her nose and whispers, "Alo, Manman," then "Bye, Manman."

It would be appropriate, if only she could make herself believe that this is what her daughter is actually doing. It would be a fitting close to her family life, or at least to her life with children. You are always saying hello to them while preparing them to say goodbye to you. You are always dreading the separations, while cheering them on, to get bigger, smarter, to crawl, babble, walk, speak, to have birthdays that you hope you'll live to see, that you pray they'll live to see. Jeanne will now know what it's like to live that way, to have a part of yourself walking around unattached to you, and to love that part so much that you sometimes feel as though you were losing your mind.

Her daughter reaches down and takes her right hand, so that both of her children are now holding her scrawny, shaky hands, which seem not to belong to her at all.

"*Misi*, Manman," her daughter says. "Thank you."

There is nothing to thank her for. She has only done her job, her duty as a parent. There is no longer any need for hellos or goodbyes, either. Soon there will be nothing left, no past to cling to, no future to hope for, only now. ♦

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Edwidge Danticat on her short story from this issue.