



Their Second Home

DAVE EGGERS

Hollis and his father broke the upper crust with each step. Below the crust the snow was dry and granular, a feel of both cotton and sand. Hollis and his father were walking home from his grandmother's house, where they had turned her over and washed her.

Hollis's family was now in a new house. Two months ago they had moved from their grandmother's house, where they had lived the nine years of Hollis's life, to this new house, about three miles away. The air was heavy with cold, and breathing it in felt to Hollis like inhaling glass and expelling wool.

Sixteen inches of snow had fallen in two days and nothing had been plowed. The car Hollis's father drove would not make it through this, so they had walked. Their grandmother was alone but for the neighbor girl, Kelly, who was fine but sometimes needed relief. They were walking up a hill in the park, a shortcut that would take them under the highway and to a field that led through the incorporated area and to their house.

"I figured out how to scare your mom," Hollis's father said.

It was the first thing Hollis or his father had said during the walk.

"How do you mean?" Hollis said.

"You know that window next to her desk?"

Hollis did. His mother's office was on the second floor. He nodded.

"Well, she's not used to anything happening right out her window, right?"

Hollis nodded again. His mother's window, over her desk where she did bookkeeping and tax returns, overlooked the backyard, and beyond it, the unincorporated land.

"Well, I've been thinking that a great way to really scare her would be to jump out right there and yell like crazy. She'd scream like a banshee."

Hollis didn't know what a banshee was, but his father had said this before, so he assumed a banshee was either someone who screamed a lot, or screamed loudly and well. Hollis pictured his mother screaming. "I would

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MICHAEL RAEDECKER, *MONUMENT*,
1998, acrylic and thread on canvas, 55 7/8 x 72".

just get up on the ladder and pop out, and yell Wah!" his father said.

They were walking under the highway now and his father's voice was louder, and his Wah! stayed in the underpass for some time.

As they were passing through the dim corridor Hollis wondered how loudly his mother would scream, and how long afterward she would calm down. He wondered if his mother would find the scaring funny, or if she would be angry.

Hollis wanted to scare his mother.

"I want to scare her," he said.

"You can watch me do it," his father said. They were now in the light again. "Actually, maybe it's not such a great idea. Your mom doesn't like being scared."

Hollis took in a quick breath.

"She does!" Hollis said.

"No, I don't think she does. That one time I did it she was mad for a pretty long while."

Hollis remembered hearing about that afterward. After seeing a suspenseful movie on TV, his father had hidden in the back seat of the car. He knew Hollis's mom would go to the convenience store, which she did every night to get fresh bagels for the next morning, so he snuck out to the car and had hidden in the back seat. He had stayed there, in the back seat, while she started out on the highway and then exited onto the frontage road. He waited until the third stop light, when the road was dark and quiet. Then he jumped up and yelled "Wah!"

They had stayed there, at the intersection, for an hour afterward.

"She'll like it this time," Hollis said.

"No, I don't think so," his father said. "It was a bad idea."

Hollis was furious. He couldn't believe this possibility was being taken from him. The scaring was something that was about to happen, the event looming ahead like a holiday, and now it would not happen. He felt dizzy. He would have to argue with his father to ensure any possibility of it happening, and even then it probably would not happen.

MICHAEL RAEDECKER, *INS AND OUT*,
2000, acrylic and thread on canvas, 130 x 78".



As they walked, the snow breaking underfoot, Hollis explored other ways he could jump in front of his mother's window. He could do it himself, but the ladder was too heavy for him to lift and raise. He could jump from the tree nearby, but that was too far. He could somehow swing from the rooftop from a rope, perhaps tied to the chimney. He couldn't remember if they had any rope that would be strong enough.

As they came across the field and saw the house in the distance, Hollis pleaded with his father to scare his mother. His father told him to drop it. Hollis begged. His father stopped responding. He was finished with the subject.

When they pushed through the hedge at the perimeter of their yard, they could see Hollis's mother in her second-floor window, her soft oval face painted in ochre. She was reading something under her grandfather's ancient lamp, steam from her tea rising around her face like creeping ivy.

Hollis's father went inside, stomping his feet on the porch, releasing the snow. Hollis went to the garage and found the dead frog he'd been keeping in a jar. He dropped it onto his father's worktable and cut its belly stem to stern.

Michael Raedecker



*MICHAEL RAEDECKER, ECHO, 2000,
acrylic and thread on canvas, 100 x 78".*



*MICHAEL RAEDECKER, SYNCHRONICITY, 1998,
acrylic and thread on canvas, diptych, 67 x 149 5/8".*