

**Salvatore Scibona**  
**from *The End***

As a boy, visiting his uncle in Michigan, he had to walk with the man for weeks, through the snow and muck, following his trapping line. Every winter for eight years. It was something he was meant to attach himself to sentimentally. They stayed in a one-room cabin with a potbelly stove to heat the place and cook on. They ate opossum stew and turnips. How bored he was in the woods, he complained to his mother when he got home. And she told him something he is reminded of by the word *caption* in his brain, by the moment of release it brings to call a thing what it is—she said, “You’re bored because you don’t know the names of things.”

Therefore he has developed the habit, in moments like this—when the din of all his selves recriminating each other is more than he can bear—of picking out the objects in a room, and naming them to himself.

That piece of furniture holding the spare china is a sideboard. The lower part of the wall with the paneling on it is the dado, the paneling itself is wainscoting. That’s the door.

The jeweler’s mother’s intention had been for him to use the names to affix himself to the world. As in, you do not see the may apple until you know that’s what it’s called and then you see it everywhere, the words teaching you to love the things they name. But he knows this isn’t why he’s telling himself, That’s a samovar, that’s a pencil sharpener. He never used the words as his mother intended. Even as a boy he used them in the way your hands fly up to cover your face when you notice a ball headed at you, or a bird or a fly. He used them to keep material things at bay. But now the words have

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replaced the things themselves. The world he lives in is wholly composed of language and recrimination. He has, for example, been unconvinced of the reality of his body for some time.

Only, there are moments when his nostalgia for the world of door hinges, bull thistle, of his mother dipping the comb in the water of the wash basin and parting his hair while the two of them observe this in the mirror, and his mother with the look on her face of an artisan over her handiwork, moments when his desire to hold a thing, a thing in his hand, to impress himself again with the dumb objectness of something, is so piqued he will do anything his imagination tells him to achieve it.

He wants the world and not the name of the world.

But every time he tries to descend on a hammer, say, or an amethyst, his little interior mouths will start jabbering, asking him, What is the word for this? What does it mean to lift an amethyst in your fingers? Telling him, You should get back to work. Telling him, Put the hammer down, you'll break something.

And finally, the interior conversation is always, always, about should he do this, or shouldn't he?

So that he must ask himself if he dares stir the sugar in his tea.

(He does not.)

If he dares refill the oil in the lamp.

(He does not.)

If he dares lift his head from the pillow and watch his sister depart the room.

(He does not lift his head.)

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So that every mere wish to hold a piece of fruit, and to leave it at that, collapses into accusation, counteraccusation, shame, and dread.

So that—at last—this morning, with the glass from the watchcase glittering up from the toes of his shoes, the jeweler's hammer in the jeweler's grip as if this were fitting, and then charging down the street and then on the streetcar the solution presenting itself to his mind is—at last—as backward as the problem.

Does he dare step off the streetcar.

He does step off the streetcar.

Does he dare follow this woman home, a random, unlucky woman with a burlap onion sac on her shoulder as she goes up the street now (we will all have our misfortunes).

He does follow her.

To do something that the language at your disposal cannot accurately imitate and replace, to descend on the world of objects by way of what you can not say.

The only way around is underneath.

And for once you do what you believe to be evil in the hope that this way you won't ever again have to justify to yourself your own corrupt and pusillanimous intentions. You trade your long-held wish to someday become a decent man for the assurance that you will never again be able to fake having already accomplished this.

Then, afterward, he wanted something sweet. He walked down the block toward the main avenue. It had begun to snow. In an alley two boys were trying to balance another

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much smaller boy on the back of a Dalmatian. He paused on the sidewalk in front of a tiny storefront window behind which lay pastries and intricately decorated cookies in the shapes of summer fruit. It was some kind of cafe or tavern. Inside, the space between the bar and the wall was just wide enough for a man to walk through if he turned himself sideways. The jeweler bought three of the cookies and a newspaper. He sat at the far end of the bar and waited for them to come find him.

He is waiting for them at the bar, which gleams this way, this beautifully, because of the beautiful name of the substance enveloping it—shellac. A word of which records are made and then music is etched into the records. A word over which he has been compelled to pause before, aghast at how lovely it is, and yet how it shows his own face back up at him. Which word, in one of its verbal senses, means, to thrash soundly.