

Joseph Fazio
from *The Girl through the Glass*

It started with a broken cassette recorder that had been on the top shelf of the coat closet for years. Before it stopped working, I had used it to tape songs off the radio. It was a no-risk job—I just unscrewed anything I could, using my father’s Philips head. A mess of plastic, wires, and solder spread over the carpet as I worked cross-legged on the floor. Reassembly was a challenge; I had to force the insides back into the recorder, breaking off a piece of green circuit board in the process. There were screws left over. From then on, I carefully diagrammed my dissections, in pencil on graph paper, and putting things back together became much easier.

When I ran out of broken or unwanted things to take apart, sometime in July, I decided to test my skills on the countertop radio in the kitchen. I worked deliberately, finishing just before my parents came home that night. It was playing when they walked in, both of them tired and smelling like greasy aprons. My father, who cooked at the diner, went straight to the refrigerator for a can of Miller before his shower. My mother, as she always did, put off washing until after dinner, which she now began to prepare.

“Isn’t that a little loud?” she said, meaning the radio. She closed the cupboard lined with boxes of pasta and lowered the volume. The dial turned and turned beneath her finger, with no effect. Karen Carpenter sang, “Baby, baby, baby, baby, oh, baby.”

“That’s odd,” my mother said, and unplugged the radio.

By August, having worked my way through all the digital clocks in the house and most of my mother’s kitchen appliances—having even used my father’s tools to take apart his other tools—I was cocksure. I had begun leaving my initials in tiny permanent-black print on the

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insides of my conquests, and this hidden knowledge made me smile whenever one of my parents twisted a lamp on or snapped the blender to life.

Then, early one afternoon as I considered my next project, a girl about my age walked into the backyard. She moved slowly across the lawn, with her head down as if looking for something small in the grass. After every few steps, she scooped her blonde hair behind her ears.

She wore pink overalls with pants that had been cut into shorts revealing brown knees. I watched her for a few moments, until my breath fogged the window up to my eyes. When she was nearly to the fence that separated the yard from that of our elderly, widower neighbor, Mr. DiPietro, she stooped and grabbed something from the ground. I knocked on the pane, rabbitly quick, drawing her attention and at the same time embarrassing myself. I could have ducked and drawn the curtains before she came to the window, but I didn't. This girl, she was lonely, too.

She stood beneath me, her hands clasped together in a ball. I was about to open the window, but the AC was humming down the hall, and in my head I heard my parents' voices admonishing me for letting out the cold air. So I yelled to the girl through the glass, "What are you looking for?"

She answered unintelligibly, and then repeated herself when I didn't respond. "A little toad," she said. She held up her hands, showing me she had one safely in her grasp.

"Do you want to come in?" I said.

She did.