

THERE'S MAGIC THERE

I've seen it glistening.

Memories then are scattered and scarce, but the astonishment stays:

I remember blue grandma in her blue house; I remember white wicker furniture on her blue porch; I remember him beside her, always happy to see me.

I remember 'Hey! Don't you dare; he's your brother.' And I remember he still loved me anyway.

I remember he towered. I remember he spoke; I remember his voice rumbling. His billy goats were the gruffest.

I remember he questioned and listened; I remember I never could.

I remember he commanded without speaking, attention given without asking or demanding.

But that all came later. First:

I remember toddling about from one 'no, wait, hang on; don't touch that!' to the next.

I remember being lifted sky high in strong hands and I remember 'I've got you now,' and but I remember it was a comfort, knowing that, and not a fright.

I remember parump-parumping through fantastical living room landscapes on his horsey knee.

I remember fumbling manual explorations of that glowing face, smiling down on me.

I remember a revelation, a startling discovery: After that knee-top horsey ride, I one day found that if you push at his nose, from his mouth a wetly fleshy tongue protrudes. I know. Already, I'm impressed. But, wait: there's more!

Tug at his right ear lobe and – THUCK – tongue veers in that direction. Tug at that left lobe and – THOCK – now, it's over there! Tug at his scratchy stubbled Adam's apple and – THUP – the tongue is gone!

I remember astounded infant incomprehension.

I remember a swaddled child with foggy grasp of causality and I remember that this is groundbreaking, mind blowing and earth shattering. I can only imagine the wide-eyed bright whites of amazement, of shock and then glee:

Again! Again!

Push at the nose: TONGUE! Right lobe: THUCK! Left lobe: THOCK! Adam's apple: THUP! The mechanism works flawlessly each time, bound to laws beyond my ken.

Despite my lack of understanding, the spell is long lasting.

Now, as I grow older, wiser and better looking, I find myself attempting to invoke the same charm on any infant foisted upon me by unsuspecting bearers. I find myself involuntarily parump-parumping and I find myself thuck-thock-thupping and I find myself watching as eyes go wide in the same fascinated bewilderment that mine must have.

I call upon him until those children that weren't mine grow crabby or soiled and, either way, primed for return to parents.

But I find I can't do it right. Not like he did. I don't have the gleaming eyes. I don't have the smile and resonant happiness. My stamina of spirit is lacking.

He must have spent hours – months, years – cumulatively in that way with rapt youngsters on his knee; all those children thrust upon him colicky and cranky and yet then deemed docile and enchanted in his hands.

All that time spent indulged in these repetitions, time that spoke and meant and said and only now, too late, do I know the words that worked his spell. And now I cast one of my own:

I love you, too.