

VALENTINE'S DAY 1994

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he finished chopping, laid the logs neatly, turned,
looked in the window

he could see her in the rocker, by the lamplight, chin
on her chest, smiling, murmuring something

he dreaded leaving, with the baby so small and the
others really not much bigger

he tipped his hat back, looked up into billions of
swirling flakes, smelled the cleanness of that hill the
pines the stream

he put his axe away, squared his shoulders
with a quick, quick prayer, smiled at the heavens and
hoped they were smiling back

he came to the door, pulled on it and felt the tremor of
warm air scurrying out to him, put his head in, "it's
time"

"ah hell, we been down this road twice and come to
the same place: we can't eat if I don't." he too averted
his eyes, drinking up the texture of the broad ceiling
beams, wide floorboards, wood stove...

he laughed with joy and sorrow at the odd poetry of
her heart, he knew somehow without knowing why
that the road ahead would be very hard, harder than he
could now imagine, but

he would come back to her, no matter what it would
take, whatever it would cost him, he would come back,
to her, to them, to home

he loved her, above all else

she sang him softly, his eyes closed, small fingers
wrapped around her thumb

she started to smile, felt something, looked out, past the
big snowflakes drifting with a hush, and saw him

she could feel him leaving, though his feet were planted
square, she already saw him riding down that road

she heard the crackling bump of burning logs settling,
the quiet hiss of the lamp, the dog moving in his sleep,
the laughter of daughters readying for nighttime

she was afraid this moment couldn't last, this peace, this
fullness, could not last, she wanted to put it on ice to still
the hurrying on of time, relentless pitiless time

"can't you," she urged, "can't you just this once not go?"
she gently buried her face in the baby's sleeping
stomach, smelled his scent, blotting out other senses,
erasing any reason for urgency and departures

"yes I know I yes okay but keep me in your heart and"
she sighed, "go with god, okay?"

she could feel him gather wind to set sail and she wanted
to stay him for one forever time, because the journey
would bring changes, but

he would come back to her and she would keep the fire
alive, the children fed, the home safe against all others

she loved him and would be strong

* **ROBERT T. McLAUGHLIN, Ph.D.**, chaired Rivier College's education division in 2008. He oversees professional educator preparation program approval for the NH Dept. of Education. His three children, he enjoys telling them, are usually cute and adorable; with his wife he provides a home for four border collies, who all are cute and adorable. He founded and chaired the International Society for Technology in Education's interest groups on innovative learning technologies and digital equity, serves on the national commission on technology and the future of teacher education, and is senior fellow for the Stokes Institute for Opportunity in STEM Education.