

# FICTION SUPPLEMENT

## The Man Without A Memory

*A Story by Helen Weinzwieg*

Alfred Mulgrave is at the windows, his left hand is placed firmly on the horse cast in bronze, the other hand raises the binoculars resting on his chest and focuses them on his parking lot twenty-two storeys below; it is his parking lot not only because that is where his Buick is parked, but also because he owns the very pavement on which all those cars are sitting; he surveys the large square lot with pride, everything in order, the cement smooth and clean, not a scrap of paper, the white lines freshly painted, marking spaces for 160 cars if each is properly parked. Mulgrave raises his binoculars slightly and tips them toward the farther distance, to the fieldstone house, the word nestling comes to him, the little house nestling in the north west end of the lot, it must be 8:30 now, there is Helga, husband off to work, children off to school, there she is, an apron covering the front of a print dress, sweeping the three front steps, shaking out the mat, oblivious, as she is supposed to be, to the cars driving around her.

The motherly woman in an apron taking care of his home.

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What do you think I like it no neighbours, Henry standing in the middle of the empty parking lot, all this space, he has to

shout because Helga has wasted no time and is heading for the stone house at the end of the lot, It's Sunday, she shouts back, that's why the lot's empty, the chain is still on, and Henry, you'd think he'd get one of those electronic arms that go up and down; by now Helga has unlocked the door and has disappeared even as Henry is telling her that they'll have to leave the van out on the street overnight; Henry now inside the house finds Helga upstairs in the bedroom, he, excited, the whole house is ours for one whole year, the whole place is ours; Helga has pulled down the green cloth window blinds between the ruffled curtains, there are three windows facing the office building; she, that Mulgrave isn't going to see us in bed, where Henry is already stretched out on top of the patched quilt, bouncing, saying, the springs have no spring, and Helga beside him but between the sheets says, the mattress is lumpy.

The sun this Sunday at one point is on the stone house and Henry and Helga are in a kitchen suddenly bright, they make no remarks about the wooden ice-box with its massive block of ice inside a separate compartment, although Henry said to himself then and said later, each and every time, the ice-man cometh; they are silent before a tall white cupboard with a porcelain counter edged in blue diamond shapes, they open two little doors at the

bottom and find tin canisters marked flour, tea and sugar; they see a long shallow white enamel sink with exposed metal pipes beneath. Henry, this is what my father must have walked out on, I've come full circle you think you're making momentous decisions to become a full-time writer, you're going to change your life dramatically, and all you're doing is going back to where you started from, and she, examining pots and pans in a squat cupboard beside the sink, I'm going to be doing what my mother hated doing, and Henry, my mother never complained, even when my father walked out, and she, I've never really kept house before. Henry was looking out the kitchen window at the parking lot, at the gray and spotted pavement, patches of oil glistened where the sun hit, otherwise the lot was in shadows cast by the surrounding buildings. He, it's the best part of the city, now that we're in a real house maybe I can get the kids back, wait'll they see this, their own rooms, and Helga points out she hopes his wife will agree, that her daughter can take the bus from St. Catharines, without kids it's no deal, but Henry, not listening, remarks that Dickens called a home an island in a nasty world, and she, an island in a nasty parking lot, adding quickly, because Henry turned around, looking uncertain, let's check out the parlor, that's what they called the living room, didn't they, the

parlor, I'm sure it's authentic Depression, like the rest of this place, it's going to be easy to live out his imagined past and write his happy family script, and Henry repeated that his mother never complained, adding, we'll never pull it off if you're going to be cynical, but she is walking about pointing to this and that, the anti-macassars on the overstuffed furniture, the china figurines, the sepia faces in dark varnished oval frames, you'll have to help me with the dusting, she said, and Henry, I'm supposed to be the *pater familias*, I don't do dusting, then quickly, just joking, we'll work something out, Mulgrave can't see anywhere with those binoculars; listen, I don't know any more about family life than you do, there'll be lots of research, you like to read, it's a nice walk from here to the Metro Library, something to do while the kids are in school; and she, no, that won't work, I have to be at home, in case of emergency the children must know their mother is there, that's what he said.

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Alfred Mulgrave is at the windows, his left hand holding on to the bronze horse, in his other hand are the binoculars, a long loving look at the stone house, the lenses are inched along the stones, one by one, the stones speak to him of tradition, an upward tilt to admire the three gabled windows on the second floor, downwards to the small green lawns on either side of the steps, extending all the way back to the rear of the house, protected by a white iron fence, a small replica of the iron fence surrounding Osgoode Hall, and an iron gate through which you move in one direction, then turn through another opening towards the house, the kind of gate designed to keep out cows. Memo: have roses clambering up a trellis on either side of the steps. Only a man of vision could have located the little stone house, had it dug up, transported a hundred kilometers; to have dug a foundation for this house right on his own parking lot; to have had the first floor gutted and the kitchen, the dining room and the parlor made to face his office windows; the wiring, the plumbing; find authentic Depression furnishings, plant a lawn, locate a foundry for the iron fence and gate — it took some doing, but he did create a home he could be proud of.

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So the next day, Henry and Helga in Mulgrave's office, the children weren't

with them, they're with my mother Helga said until we get settled, and Mulgrave, but there's nothing to settle, everything is in, furniture, linens, everything, but our personal things, they're in too, even clothing in your sizes for the farm, 1928 to 1932, my early years, for the city 1932 to 1942, my adolescence; and then began the embarrassment of having to read from a list headed Personal Items, Male and Personal Items, Female; after all, he reminded them you will have to live as people did fifty years ago, there must be nothing fictitious in my autobiography, there will be no tv, although I did find a 1932 Philco radio; vintage books only; for my part, Mulgrave assured them, certain memories were not important enough to burden the mind or I would have recalled them; however, for purposes of my autobiography I shall observe your family life and make notes which Henry will elaborate into professional prose; above all, avoid melodrama, there is nothing missing in my life, waving an arm around, on every one of the 42 floors of this building, behind every door, in every cubicle, there is evidence of my many achievements, which I find more satisfying than dreams of happiness.

Well, here we are, what do you think? I like it, plunk in the middle of this great city, great theatres, great restaurants, great shops, everything, no neighbours, alone at night, it'll be like camping in the wilderness, you and I and space, imagine, all this is ours, libraries, too, you can walk down in ten minutes to the Reference Library, we'll have a wonderful year, we will be an "island in a nasty world"; and Helga looking from Henry to the parking lot outside the window, back and forth, sees Henry and his eagerness and sees also the slow parade of cars on the lot, admits that the idea of an island in a nasty world is poetic and appealing right now, then Henry says it is only a figure of speech by Charles Dickens; and she turns from the window and says, just when I think you are really telling me something I need to hear, it turns out to be a quote, I never know whether it's you or some other writer; and Henry, I've started research, that's all, I have to get the right tone for his memoirs, I think I've got it, he wants a dream of "living in a cozy little knot of human beings who love us more than they love anybody else," and she, nothing wrong with a dream like that, and he, sorry, that's a quote too.

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At this time of the day all the curtains

are drawn against his view. Mulgrave has agreed to specific hours for watching family life, a concession to Henry-Helga, who stood before him a week after their arrival, they were no longer the amiable couple of the interview, Henry glaring, you haven't got enough money for this kind of invasion of privacy; and Helga, red-cheeked and bright-eyed, we have lives, too, you know, lives of our own to live, not only the lives you want from us; and Mulgrave, please don't cry, I see no reason for secrecy in a kitchen where you cook or in a dining room where you eat or quiet family times in the parlor; and Henry, we have our rights; and Mulgrave concluded that this kind of petty self-assertion, all these platitudes about violations of privacy, merely attested to his shrewd choice: they were a typical middle class couple of no worldly experience. A new contract would be drawn up, naming exact hours Mulgrave could see their family life. They relaxed, Henry said he found Mulgrave's notes helpful and Helga invited him to dinner some night, not for turnips and shepherd's pie, but for wine and gourmet delicacies. They left pleased with themselves.

A passion for safety.

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Again the pull towards the windows, Mulgrave prepares to enter a memory, if not his own, any memory will do, but today he elaborates on the morning ritual: no calls he says into the inter-com, then, is if expecting a visitor, he washes up, combs his hair, buttons his jacket, wipes the lens of the binoculars, and holding on to the sculpture at his left, trains the binoculars on the solid stone house at the north west end of the parking lot, facing the windows of the kitchen, dining room, parlor and the master bedroom upstairs, it is 7:45, the white kitchen curtains are parted, he can see Helga standing at the gas stove, stirring something, it is a hot nourishing breakfast; then the children come in one by one, washed and dressed fresh, the boys' hair brushed down, the girl's long hair tied with a red ribbon at the back, which is visible each time the child turns her head, then Henry, yawning, dressed for the office in a dark suit and white shirt and muted tie, joins the children at the table, he speaks to them and they reply, and when Helga sits down for her breakfast, the children become quiet while their parents have a conversation about the day ahead, which gives the observer an opportunity to make a few quick notes; then, breakfast over, the

children gather their books held together with leather straps, Helga hands them little lunch pails (an anachronism here, Mulgrave wonders), kisses them one by one, they leave, walking carefully, single file, across the parking lot, against the arrows to the left of the aisle, as instructed exiting at the walkway on Heath Street, then five minutes later Henry Kisses Helga and leaves, carrying his briefcase, exiting at the walkway on Yonge Street, where, in the notebook, he takes a street car south to Wellington Street and walks over to Bay Street to his office, where he has a position writing geological reports for a company promoting stocks in a gold mine. (Henry came up with this idea for a scenario when the farm is lost during the Depression but the father, they discussed, could always find work because of his fine appearance and superior intelligence).

Helga can be seen clearing the dishes, washing them in a dishpan in the sink, after which she emerges from the front door, an apron over her housedress, in cold weather and on the farm she will wear a heavy cardigan, and in full view she proceeds to sweep the front steps and shake the mat, indifferent to the cars that pass on all sides as she wields the broom and when she is finished she stands for a moment and looks into the distance, making Mulgrave reach for his notebook and rapidly write gazing out at the fields yielding their growth to the morning sun, Mulgrave has no problems with chronology, after all, memory operates outside time, he has several hard covered note-

books, one of which will be for the farm at Elora before the Depression drove the family to the City, in the meantime Helga has reentered the house.

The kitchen curtains closed.

He went on making notes, snippets really, his mother coming down the stairs, from one year to the next, she comes down the stairs, and when she gives him a hug and a kiss, her skin is slightly moist, but no more than a flower in bloom is moist: you cannot put down in words such desires for all the world to read, and her skin has a fragrance of its own, he can feel and smell her skin, his pen stays in mid-air, but he cannot see her features, and trying to put a face on the body was like being under an anaesthetic counting backwards from ten, he halts at number seven, he has a vision, a woman weeping, don't stop now, the doctor urges, go on, six, five, four...

As if he sought oblivion.

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For one thing, the dark blinds at the bedroom windows hung slightly away from the glass, bits of light from the parking lot floodlight penetrated the room, Henry in bed beside Helga in the semi-darkness knows she is awake, wants to comfort her, tells her, we can love each other anywhere, we've slept together in stranger places, remember the time you were locked out and we slept in the shoe store where I worked? so that Helga drew a little closer, she, I can't even read in bed with that silly little lamp, and Henry,

that's the way it used to be, saving on electricity, I suppose, it's an authentic lamp of the period, Henry wanting to hold her, nothing has changed between us, then after a while he asked what's the matter and Helga said I just can't relax, I keep hearing motors and car doors slamming, we're supposed to be living in a farm house 'way out in the county, in peace and silence, he, we could get ear plugs, and she, then we might as well stay in separate rooms if I can't hear you sleep, he, you mean I snore? she, no, no, you make sounds I'm used to, I can tell by your breathing if you're having a good dream or a bad one, or how your writing's going, your breathing keeps changing and I want to hear it, even in my sleep, and he, drawing away, says, it's just for a year.

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It was after months of monotony, moving the kitchen curtains back and forth for the binoculars, that Helga decided to leave the curtains permanently parted; if she was going to be stuck in the house the rest of the year, she too would use binoculars, there is that grey Oldsmobile again, she thought he was an elderly man with his daughter, but just now he leaned over and gave the girl a non-paternal lingering kiss full on the mouth before opening the doors; in her sights now is a couple in a white Audi 5000, she crying, he staring straight ahead through the windshield; perhaps Helga will also write a book, *Life on the Parking Lot* or something like that.

# Dark of the Moon

*A Story by Sharon Butala*

Janet and her friend, Livie, and Livie's boyfriend, Nathan, get out of Nathan's car and then stand uncertainly listening to the faint laughter and occasional muted shriek coming from the darkness on the far side of the parking lot, across the space that must be grass, between them and the tall black pines whose uppermost silhouette they can see hard against the starry, luminous sky.

"No moon tonight," Livie says.

"The dark of the moon," Janet says

softly, and shivers. The summer night is cool at this altitude, out here on the edge of the forest.

"Can't see a goddamn thing," Nathan says. "Well, let's strike out. They aren't going to come for us." Crickets, or is it frogs, are singing loudly and steadily with an immediacy that the human voices don't have. The three of them stumble across the gravelled parking lot behind the row of parked cars, trying to find their way in the dark. When they reach the

slowly rising sweep of grass — they hear it against their sandals and feel it on their bare ankles — they suddenly see firelight not so far ahead, just inside the forest's edge. It flickers and glows between the straight black trunks of the lodgepole pines. There must be a clearing ahead. It's been so dry up here that open fires are forbidden except where the park attendants have dug pits and circled them with rocks.

"Those stars are incredible," Janet says.