

Four Mandalas For My Father



CRAIG J. SATTERLEE

BARBI SCHULICK

1.

My father used to tuck me in at night. It was a ritual I looked forward to throughout my childhood and even into adolescence, when my father became slightly repulsive to me — what with the errant hairs protruding from his nose and ears, and the smacking noise he made while eating. By thirteen I was mostly avoiding his hugs. But I would still agree to be tucked in now and then. Indeed, I would now, were he here to offer.

Here's how it always went: First, feeling small and astray inside my covers, I would yell, "Will you tuck me in, Daddy?" And *poof!* A six-foot, burly, radiant man would appear, a genie in a business suit, his upper lip sweating from the way he took the stairs two at a time, his breath garlicky from my mother's pot roast, his expression jocular, like Jackie Gleason's. In fact, the whole effect was Gleason-like, except that my father wasn't as fat, or as sarcastic, and he smiled as often as he hollered. He also wasn't a celebrity, though he walked like one, with peacock strides and the assumption that people were happy to see him. I certainly was.

"You want the full, super-duper treatment?" he'd ask.

"Yes," I'd say, and he'd begin gathering the bedclothes around me, smoothing them into one thick layer tucked neatly around neck, shoulders, arms, waist, hips, legs — not an inch of my outline ignored. He worked hard, smiling and panting,

with a playful grunt now and then, until I looked like a swaddled babe, lovingly wrapped in wools and cottons from the Sears catalog, right down to my feet. Then he would lift my heels, sliding the remaining section of untamed fabric firmly underneath, the latch that would hold the rest secure.

"Good night," he'd say, and he'd kiss my brow, just a light peck. Then out he'd go, well aware that this was no time to get me giggling or squirming, lest he break the spell and have to start all over. I'd lie there unmoving, sealed in material and absorbed in the memory of his careful, steady movements: a sculpture of sand he'd molded and left, until the tides of sleep washed me away.

Sometimes, if it wasn't a school night, he would reappear ten minutes later, eager to find out if I was still in position, how well his folds were holding up, how distinct my outline was in the dim light. By then he'd smell of coffee and his favorite dessert, checkerboard cake from the bakery. His shirt-tail would be out, his shoes off. His smile would crinkle the corners of his eyes, and if I'd drifted from my spot, a booming laugh would bounce off the walls of my room. He would celebrate the moment with me, the pleasure of unfurling cloth, and we'd laugh at how lovely it is to let go, to let the tightly tucked moments end and the stretching, yawning moments begin.



TOM THOMPSON

2.

It was one thing for an adult to like the early Beatles. “She Loves You” and “Love Me Do” weren’t a far cry from the Everly Brothers, after all. But to like the *White Album*, *Abbey Road*, *Let It Be* — that was different.

By then I was in high school and could take my father’s Cadillac out by myself. I was thrilled to find these tapes in his car (along with *Man of La Mancha* and Andy Williams’s *Moon River*). I was impressed that he might be listening to “Maxwell’s Silver Hammer” even when I wasn’t there. The eight-tracks were large and clunky by today’s standards, but back then only luxury vehicles came equipped with the players. My father took pride in owning that car and loved to share it with me. On New Year’s Day, regardless of the weather, we would drive around town with the windows down, *Abbey Road* blaring. He’d sit in the roomy driver’s seat as if it were an easy chair, the back slightly reclined, plenty of leg room, his feet tapping in white leather loafers. Each time he turned, his star-sapphire pinkie ring would clink against the steering wheel and catch the sun, sending off a spark of greeting. He sang in a smooth baritone, sometimes off-key, but always with gusto. I’d sit beside him, in patched jeans and a peasant blouse, hair in kinks, and howl along. It didn’t matter if I had friends waiting, or how late I’d stayed out the night before. By noon on New Year’s I was with Dad, coasting down Main Street, honoring a tradition only he and I gave two hoots about.

That’s how it often was. When I was in grade school, we spent autumn weekends collecting leaves for a scrapbook on trees, took trips to the art museum to study Degas’s ballerinas, Modigliani’s long-necked beauties, and Utrillo’s women with fat behinds. There were school-day breakfasts spent trying to

guess the surprise endings to O. Henry stories and memorizing phrases in Yiddish. My older sister was too cool to care, my brother too young and, as he grew, unwilling to bow to my father’s demand for an audience. But I bought a lifetime membership in his fan club.

Sitting in the Cadillac’s passenger seat, the soft beige leather making me feel like a queen, I sang along, proud to have a father hip enough to listen to the Beatles, admiring the flush in his cheeks, the beard stubble rubbing his collar, his little row of yellow teeth, his polyester leisure suit — his mass, his wealth, his vigor. The whole length of him could have been painted in waterproof oils. Orange. Turquoise. Colors made to last.

(end of excerpt)