

Mitzvah On Saturday Morning

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You're on 14th Street headed west
to buy a new seat for your bicycle.
In Casper, Wyoming, a hospice nurse
backs her car out of your parents'
driveway. Your father calls out

from his bed. What would you
have done if you'd caught the thief,
wrench in one hand, your bike seat in
the other? "Lorraine!" your father calls
again. You would've taught the guy

another use for that wrench. Your
mother carries a plate, a cup of water.
"Here I am," she sings, entering
the bedroom. Last month someone
stole the bell from your handlebars.

Your mother cuts a muffin in half.
Maybe I should buy a bell, too, you think.
Last year, when your father could
still walk, they took the whole bike.
"Try to eat it all," your mother says,

tucking a napkin under his chin.
You wait for the light to change
at First Avenue. *What next?* Exhaust
from a passing bus, roasted cashews.
"This muffin tastes like dirt," your father

says. He takes another bite.
The bike-shop bag goes *scrish-scrish*
against your leg as you head home,
slipping into Sloan's for extra-sharp
cheddar and a six-pack of Corona.

Your father's hand trembles, reaching
for the water glass. All morning
he watched a show about polar bears,
then switched to the Weather Channel.
A woman at the supermarket insists

to the cashier, "These aren't the Concord
grapes. These grapes are organic." "Polar
bears eat penguins!" your father says.
Your mother is in the den. She holds
a book, but really she is napping. Now

the woman with the grapes is in a tizzy:
her necklace has burst; it's raining silver
charms. "It's raining in Denver,"
your father says. You scan the floor
for small, shiny objects. "It's twenty-five

in New York," says your father. Your
mother is in the kitchen, counting pills.
Here's something strange: a stone trinket,
an evil eye. You fear the woman might
hug you as you hand it over. "Lorraine,"

your father says, "I'm too tired to play my
flute." You wonder if it was bad luck to touch
that thing. "Do you know the Hebrew word
for 'good deed'?" asks the woman. Your
father's face is angelic in the TV light.