

THE BEST AMERICAN SERIES™

2001

THE BEST
AMERICAN
SHORT
STORIES

BARBARA KINGSOLVER

E D I T O R

KATRINA KENISON

S E R I E S E D I T O R

The Best
AMERICAN
SHORT
STORIES
2001

Selected from
U.S. and Canadian Magazines
by BARBARA KINGSOLVER
with KATRINA KENISON

With an Introduction
by Barbara Kingsolver



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON • NEW YORK 2001

Copyright © 2001 by Houghton Mifflin Company
Introduction copyright © 2001 by Barbara Kingsolver

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system without the prior written permission of the copyright owner unless such copying is expressly permitted by federal copyright law. With the exception of nonprofit transcription in Braille, Houghton Mifflin is not authorized to grant permission for further uses of copyrighted selections reprinted in this book without the permission of their owners. Permission must be obtained from the individual copyright owners as identified herein. Address requests for permission to make copies of Houghton Mifflin material to Permissions, Houghton Mifflin Company, 215 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10003.

Visit our Web site: www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com.

ISSN 0067-6233

ISBN 0-395-92689-0

ISBN 0-395-92688-2 (pbk.)

Printed in the United States of America

DOC 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

"Servants of the Map" by Andrea Barrett. First published in *Salmagundi*. Copyright © 2000 by Andrea Barrett. To be published in the collection *Servants of the Map*, reprinted by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

"The Fireman" by Rick Bass. First published in *The Kenyon Review*. Copyright © 2000 by Rick Bass. Reprinted by permission of the author.

"Think of England" by Peter Ho Davies. First published in *Ploughshares*. Copyright © 2000 by Peter Ho Davies. Reprinted by permission of the author.

"Labors of the Heart" by Claire Davis. First published in *Ploughshares*. Copyright © 2000 by Claire Davis. Reprinted by permission of the author.

"The Mourning Door" by Elizabeth Graver. First published in *Ploughshares*. Copyright © 2000 by Elizabeth Graver. Reprinted by permission of The Richard Parks Agency.

"After Cowboy Chicken Came to Town" by Ha Jin. First published in *Triquarterly*. Copyright © 2000 by Ha Jin. Reprinted from the collection *The Bridegroom* by permission of Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

"Brothers and Sisters Around the World" by Andrea Lee. First published in *The New Yorker*. Copyright © 2000 by Andrea Lee. Reprinted by permission of International Creative Management.

"Boys" by Rick Moody. First published in *Elle*. Copyright © 2000 by Rick Moody. Reprinted by permission of Melanie Jackson, LLC.

"Rug Weaver" by Barbara Klein Moss. First published in *The Georgia Review*. Copyright © 2000 by Barbara Klein Moss. Reprinted by permission of the author.

"Post and Beam" by Alice Munro. First published in *The New Yorker*. Copyright © 2000 by Alice Munro. Reprinted by permission of the William Morris Agency.

"Madeline" by Ludwig Bemelmans. Copyright © 1939 by Ludwig Bemelmans. Reprinted by permission of Penguin Putnam, Inc.

"The Raft" by Peter Orner. First published in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Copyright © 2000 by Peter Orner. Reprinted from the collection *Esther Stories* by permission of Houghton Mifflin Company.

"Betty Hutton" by Roy Parvin. First published in *Five Points*. Copyright © 2000 by Roy Parvin. Reprinted from the collection *In the Snow Forest* by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

"Illumination" by Nancy Reisman. First published in *Tin House*. Copyright © 2000 by Nancy Reisman. Reprinted by permission of Brandt & Hochman Literary Agents, Inc.

"The Secrets of Bats" by Jess Row. First published in *Ploughshares*. Copyright © 2000 by Jess Row. Reprinted by permission of the author.

"Nobody Listens When I Talk" by Annette Sanford. First published in *Descant*. Copyright © 2000 by Texas Christian University. Reprinted by permission of the author.

"My Mother's Garden" by Katherine Shonk. First published in *Tin House*. Copyright © 2000 by Katherine Shonk. Reprinted by permission of the author.

"What I Saw from Where I Stood" by Marisa Silver. First published in *The New Yorker*. Copyright © 2000 by Marisa Silver. To be published in the collection *Babe in Paradise*, reprinted by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

"The Apple Tree" by Trevanian. First published in *The Antioch Review*. Copyright © 2000 by Trevanian. Reprinted from the collection *Hot Night in the City* by permission of St. Martin's Press, LLC.

"Personal Archaeology" by John Updike. First published in *The New Yorker*. Copyright © 2000 by John Updike. Reprinted by permission of the author.

"My Baby . . ." by Dorothy West. First published in *The Connecticut Review*.

Brief biography of Dorothy West copyright © 2001 by Lionel Bascom. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Foreword

IN THE 1942 VOLUME of *The Best American Short Stories*, the anthology's new annual editor, Martha Foley, attempted to define the form. "A good short story," she wrote, "is a story which is not too long and which gives the reader the feeling he has undergone a memorable experience."

Over the past eleven years, during my own tenure as annual editor of this eighty-six-year-old series, I've run across numerous other writers' attempts to come up with some sort of standard by which to measure the short story. Few have managed to add much to Ms. Foley's democratic and rather obvious criteria.

At symposiums and writers' conferences, I've learned to duck and weave around the inevitable question "What do you look for in a short story?" I wish I knew! Heart? Soul? Truth? Voice? Integrity of intention and skill in execution? The answer is all of the above, and none of the above. For I don't really "look" for anything; when a story works, I know it in my gut, not in my head, and only then — after laughing, after brushing away a tear, after taking a moment to catch my breath and return to the here and now — do I set about analyzing the successes and failures of a writer's effort. It would certainly be nice to have a checklist, a foolproof grading system, a tally sheet of pluses and minuses. But reading is a subjective activity, even for those of us who are fortunate enough to read for a living. We editors may read more pages than the average American, and we may read faster, but when it comes right down to it, I believe we all read for the same reason: in order to test our own knowledge of life and to enlarge on it.

Out of the three thousand or so short stories I read in any given year, I may file two hundred away. And I always marvel at how precious this stash of chosen fiction seems to me; these are the stories that, for one reason or another, exerted some kind of hold on the priorities of my heart. Even now, I have boxes of old stories, going back a decade and more, stacked up in the basement; I've saved every file card I've filled out since 1990 as well — a treasure trove of stories, a king's ransom of human wisdom caught and held on those hundreds of moldering pages. When it comes to cleaning closets, I'm ruthless. But those stories . . . well, how could I throw them away? Who knows when a particular bit of fiction will prove useful? Someday, I think, someone will need that story about the emotional roller coaster of new motherhood; or this one, which reminds us what sixteen years old really feels like; or that one, which could help a friend prepare for death . . .

Toward year's end, I sift through the current piles and begin to ship batches of tales off to the guest editor, always wondering whether he or she will share my tastes and predilections and curious to know whether the narrative voice that whispered so urgently in my ear will speak with as much power to another. Truth be told, it is an anxious time. Just as, when I was a teenager, I wanted my parents to agree that my boyfriend was indeed Prince Charming, I can't help but hope that the guest editor will share my passion for the year's collection of short story suitors.

I have no clue about Barbara Kingsolver's taste in men, but I discovered right away that she and I could fall in love with the same short stories. And when her introduction to this volume came spooling through my fax machine, I stood there reading it page by page, nodding in agreement with her discoveries and full of gratitude for the pickiness (her word) and devotion she brought to this task of reading, judging, and finally choosing. And then, as the next-to-last page emerged into my waiting hands, I saw it: a new definition for the short story, at last. To Martha Foley's sixty-year-old criteria we can now add Barbara Kingsolver's useful dictum: "A good short story cannot simply be Lit Lite, but the successful execution of large truths delivered in tight spaces." Writers take heed!

In choosing this year's collection of *The Best American Short Stories*, Kingsolver has done writers and readers a great service, for her own love for the form and her exacting standards have resulted in a

volume that is as varied in subject matter, style, voice, and intent as even the most eclectic reader could wish for. Collectively, these stories hum with the energy of twenty disparate voices raised under one roof. They are a testament to our contemporary writers' vigorous engagement with the world and to the robust good health of American short fiction.

Some years ago, John Updike revealed, "Writing fiction, as those of us who do it know, is, beneath the anxious travail of it, a bliss, a healing, an elicitation of order from disorder, a praise of what is, a salvaging of otherwise overlookable truths from the ruthless sweep of generalization, a beating of daily dross into something shimmering and absolute." Mr. Updike, who made his first appearance in *The Best American Short Stories* in 1959, returns this year for the twelfth time as a contributor. (He also served as guest editor in 1984 and coedited *The Best American Short Stories of the Century*, published in 1999.) He is the only writer in the history of the series to appear in these pages for six consecutive decades — an achievement that we feel is worth noting. May he continue to beat the daily dross into such shimmering and absolute works as "Personal Archeology," which begins on page 326.

The stories chosen for this anthology were originally published between January 2000 and January 2001. The qualifications for selection are (1) original publication in nationally distributed American or Canadian periodicals; (2) publication in English by writers who are American or Canadian, or who have made the United States or Canada their home; (3) original publication as short stories (excerpts of novels are not knowingly considered). A list of magazines consulted for this volume appears at the back of the book. Editors who wish their short fiction to be considered for next year's edition should send their publications to Katrina Kenison, c/o The Best American Short Stories, Houghton Mifflin Company, 222 Berkeley Street, Boston, MA 02116.

K.K.

Introduction

I HAVE ALWAYS WONDERED why short stories aren't more popular in this country. We Americans are such busy people you'd think we'd jump at the chance to have our literary wisdom served in doses that fit handily between taking the trash to the curb and waiting for the carpool. We should favor the short story and adore the poem. But we don't. Short story collections rarely sell half as well as novels; they are never blockbusters. They are hardly ever even block-denters. From what I gather, most Americans would sooner read a five-hundred-page book about southern France or a boy attending wizard school or how to make home decor from roadside trash or *anything* than pick up a book offering them a dozen tales of the world complete in twenty pages apiece. And I won't even discuss what they will do to avoid reading poetry.

Why on earth should this be? I enjoy the form so much myself that when I was invited to be the guest editor for this collection, forewarned that it would involve reading thousands of pages of short fiction in a tight three-month period, I decided to do it. This trial by fire, I thought, would disclose to me the heart of the form and all its mysteries. Also, it would nicely fill the space that lay ahead of me at the end of the year 2000, just after my planned completion of a novel and before its publication the following spring. The creative dead space between galley proofs and a book's first review is a dreaded time in an author's life, comparable to the tenth month of a pregnancy. (I've had two post-term babies, so I know what I'm talking about.) I look at the prepublication epoch as a Great Sargasso Sea and always try to fill it with satisfying short-term projects. I reexamined the previous editions of this series on

my shelf and considered the assignment. Amy Tan, who edited *The Best American Short Stories 1999*, described the organized pleasure of reading one story a day for three months. That sounded like a tidy plan to put on my calendar. Editing a story collection, plus a short family vacation to Mexico and a week-long stint lecturing on a ship in the Caribbean, would fill those months perfectly, providing just enough distraction from my prepublication doldrums.

If you ever want to know what it sounds like when the universe goes “Ha! Ha!” just put a tidy plan on your calendar.

My months of anticipated quiet at the end of 2000 turned out to be the most eventful of my life, in which I was called upon to attend to an astonishing number of unexpected duties, celebrations, and crises. I weathered a tour and publicity storm with the release of my new novel, eight months ahead of schedule. While handling this plus the lectures at sea, I learned of a family member’s catastrophic illness, I was invited to have dinner with President and Mrs. Clinton, and I took my eighth-grader to the funeral of her beloved friend — not to mention the normal background noise of family urgencies. These two months of our lives were stitched together by trains, automobiles, the M.S. *Ryndam*, and thirty-two separate airplane flights. (A perverse impulse caused me to save my boarding passes and count them.) Naturally this would be the year when I also experienced a true airplane emergency, and I don’t mean the garden-variety altitude plunge. I mean that I finally got to see what those yellow masks look like.

Through it all, as best I could, I read stories. On a cold Iowa afternoon with the white light of snowfall flooding the windows, sitting quietly with a loved one enduring his new regime of chemotherapy, I read about a nineteenth-century explorer losing his grasp on life in the Himalayas. On another day, when I found myself wide-eyed long after midnight on a ship so racked by storms that the books were diving off the shelves of my cabin, I amused myself with a droll fable about two feuding widows in the Pyrenees. I read my way through a long afternoon sitting on the dirty carpet of Gate B-22 at O’Hare, successfully tuning out all the mayhem and canceled-flight refugees around me, except for one young woman who kept shouting into her cell phone, “I’m almost out of minutes!” (This was not the same day my airplane would lose its oxygen; the screenwriter of my life isn’t *that* corny.) I read through a Saturday while my four-year-old dozed in my lap with a mysterious

fever that plastered her curls to her forehead and burned my skin through her pajamas; I read in the early mornings in Mexico while parrots chattered outside our window. Some days I was able to read no stories at all — when my youngest was *not* asleep on my lap, for instance — and on other days I read many. Eighteen stories got lost in my luggage and took a trip of their very own, but returned to me in time.

My ideas about what I would gain from this experience collapsed as I began to wrestle instead with what I would be able to give to it. How could I read 125 stories amid all this craziness and compare them fairly? In the beginning I marked each one with a ranking of minus, plus, or double-plus. That lasted for exactly three stories. It soon became clear that what looks like double-plus on an ordinary day can be a whole different thing when the oxygen masks are dangling from the overhead compartment. I despaired of my wildly uncontrolled circumstances, thinking constantly, *If this were my story, would I want some editor reading it under these conditions?*

Maybe not. But the problem is, life is like that. Editors, readers, all of us, have to work reading into our busy lives. The best of it can stand up to the challenge — and if anything can do it, it should be the genre of short fiction, with its economy of language and revving plot-driven engine. We catch our reading on the fly, and that is probably the whole point anyway. If we lived in silent white rooms with no emergencies beyond the wilting of the single red rose in the vase, we probably wouldn't need fiction to help us explain the inexplicable things, the storms at sea and deaths of too-young friends. If we lived in a room like that, we would probably just smile and take naps.

What makes writing good? That's easy: the lyrical description, the arresting metaphor, the dialogue that falls so true on the ear it breaks the heart, the plot that winds up exactly where it should. But these stories I was to choose among had been culled from thousands of others, so all were beautifully written. I couldn't favor (or disfavor) the ones by my favorite writers, because their authorship was concealed from me. I knew only that they had been published in magazines in the last year and preselected by the series editor, Katrina Kenison, who had done for me the heroic service of separating distinguished stories from the run-of-the-mill. My task was to choose, among the good, the truly great. How was I supposed to do it?

With a pile of stories on my lap, I sat with this question early on and tried to divine why it is that I love a short story when I do, and the answer came to me quite clearly: I love it for what it tells me about life. If it tells me something I didn't already know, or that I maybe suspected but never framed quite that way, or that never before socked me divinely in the solar plexus, then the story is worth the read.

From that moment my task became simple. I relaxed and read for the pleasure of it, and when I finished each story, I wrote a single sentence on the first page underneath the title, in the space conveniently opened up for me where the author's name had been masked out. Just one sentence of pure truth, if I'd found it, which generally I did. No bumpy air or fevers or chattering parrots could change this one true thing the story had meant to tell me. This is how I began to see the heart of the form. While nearly all the stories were expertly written, and most were pleasant to read, they varied enormously in the weight and value of what they carried — in whether it was sand or gemstones I held in my palm when the words had trickled away. Some beautifully written stories gave me truths so self-evident that when I wrote them down, I was embarrassed. "Young love is mostly selfish," some told me, and others were practically lining up to declare, "Alcoholism ruins lives and devastates children!" In the privacy of my reading, I probably made that special face teenagers make when forced to attend to the obvious. Of all the days of my life, these were the ones in which I was perhaps most acutely aware that time is precious. So please, tell me something I don't already know. Sometimes I couldn't find anything at all to write in that little space under the story's title, but most were clear enough in their intent, and many were interesting enough to give me pause. And then came one that rang like a bell. "An orphaned child needs to find her own peculiar way to her mother's ghost, but then will need an adult to verify it." As soon as I'd jotted that down, I knew this story had given me something I would keep. I slipped it into a pocket of my suitcase, and when I got home I set it on the deep windowsill beside my desk where the sun would fall on it in the morning, and over two months it would grow, I hoped, into a pile of stories. Words that might help me be a better mother, a wiser friend. I felt I'd begun a shrine to new truths, the gifts I was about to receive in a difficult time.

Slowly that pile did grow. Too slowly, I feared at first, for when I'd conquered nearly half my assigned reading, it still seemed very small. I am too picky, I thought. I should relax my standards. But how? You don't lower the bar on enlightenment. I couldn't change my heart, so I didn't count the stories in my shrine, I just let them be what they were. Cautiously, though, I made another pile called "Almost, maybe." If push came to shove, I would reread these later and try to be more moved by them.

If it sounds as if I'm a terribly demanding reader, I am. I make no apologies. Long before I ever heard the words (and I swear this happened; this pilot should go to charm school) "We're going to try an emergency landing at the nearest airport that can read our black box," it had already dawned on me that I'm not going to live forever. This means I may never get through the list of the great books I want to read. Forget about bad ones, or even moderately good ones. With *Middlemarch* and *A Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* in the world, a person should squander her reading time on fashionably ironic books about nothing much? *I'm almost out of minutes!* I'm patient with most corners of my life, but put a book in my hands and suddenly I remind myself of a harrowing dating-game shark, long in the tooth and looking for love *right now*, thank you, get out of my way if you're just going to waste my time and don't really want kids or the long-term commitment. I give a novel thirty pages, and if it's not by that point talking to me of till-death-do-us-part, sorry, buster, this date's over. I've chucked many half-finished books into the donation box. You might be thinking right now that you're glad I was never your writing instructor, and a few former students of mine would agree with you. Once in a workshop after I'd already explained repeatedly that brevity is the soul of everything, writing-wise, and I was still getting fifty-page stories that should have been twenty-page stories, I announced: "Starting tomorrow, I will read twenty-five pages of any story you give me, and then I'll stop. If you think you have the dazzling skill to keep me hanging on for pages twenty-six-plus because my life won't be complete without them, just go ahead and try."

I'm sorry to admit I was such a harpy, but this is a critical lesson for writers. We are nothing if we can't respect our readers. It's audacious enough to send a piece of writing out into the world (which already contains *Middlemarch*), asking readers to sit down,

shut up, ignore kids or work or whatever important things they have going, and listen to *me*. Not for just a minute but for hours, days. It had better be important. The stories in this collection earned every minute I gave them, with interest. A few of them are long, but they dazzled me to the end. Most are short — some only three or four pages — and while they weren't chosen for that reason, I admire them for it. Probably the greatest challenge of the form is to get a story launched and landed efficiently with a whole worthwhile journey in between. The launch is apparently easier than the landing, because I've been entranced by many a first paragraph of a tale that ended with such an unfulfilling thud that I scrambled around for a next page that simply wasn't. It may be that most Americans don't read short stories because they don't like this kind of a ride. A good short story cannot simply be Lit Lite; it is the successful execution of large truths delivered in tight spaces. If all short fiction did it perfectly, more readers would surely sign up.

The stories in this book have survived my harpy eye on all accounts: they've told me something remarkable, they are beautifully executed, and they are nested in truth. The last I mean literally. I can't abide fiction that's too lazy to get its facts straight. People learn from what they read, they trust in words, and this is not a responsibility to take lightly. I've stopped reading books in which birds sang on the wrong continents or full moons appeared two weeks apart (it wasn't set on Jupiter). I've tossed aside fiction because of botched Spanish or French phrases uttered by putative native speakers who were not supposed to be toddlers or illiterates. When faced with a mountain of stories to eliminate, my tools were sharp and unforgiving. One fascinating story was headed for my "Yes!" shrine until its physician narrator informed me authoritatively, "The opposable thumb is the only thing that separates us from lemurs and baboons." Hooey — lemurs and baboons have opposable thumbs; that's part of what defines them (and us) as primates. Biological illiteracy is a problem I care about, and I believe fiction should inform as well as enlighten, and first, do no harm.

For a story to make the cut, I asked a lot from it — asked of it, in fact, what I ask of myself when I sit down to write, and that is to get straight down to it and carve something hugely important into a small enough amulet to fit inside a reader's most sacred psychic pocket. I don't care what it's about, as long as it's not trivial. I once

heard a writer declare from a lectern, "I write about the mysteries of the human heart, which is the only thing a fiction writer has any business addressing." And I thought to myself, *Excuse me?* I had recently begun thinking of myself as a fiction writer and was laboring under the illusion that I could address any mystery that piqued me, including but not limited to the human heart, human risk factors, human rights, and why some people practically have to scrape flesh from their bones to pay the rent while others have it paid for them all their merry days, and how frequently the former are women raising children by themselves even though that wasn't the original plan. The business of fiction is to probe the tender spots of an imperfect world, which is where I live, write, and read. I want to know about the real price of fast food in China, who's paying it, and why. I want to know what it's like in Chernobyl all these years later. Do you? This book will tell you.

Last week in my own living room I finished the last of the stories Katrina had sent me, including several batches of "*very* last ones." After that final page I took a deep breath and went to my office to count the stories in my pile on the windowsill. There were twenty, exactly. I counted again. Unbelievable. I'd been asked to select twenty plus one extra "just in case," but I couldn't bear to go back through the "maybes" and pick an alternate. When life performs acts of grace for you, you don't mess with the program.

I thank these twenty authors and offer their stories to you as pieces of truth that moved me to a new understanding of the world. When I look back now on the process, I understand that editing this collection was not a chore piled onto an already overscheduled piece of my life, but rather a kind of life raft through it. While the people around me in Gate B-22 swore irritably into their cell phones, I was learning how a man in an Iranian prison survived isolation by weaving a rug in his mind. The night after my teenager and I returned from her friend's funeral and she asked me how life could be so unfair, I lay down on my bed to read of the pain and healing of a child from Harlem in 1938. These stories were, for me, both a distraction and an anchor. They were my pleasure, my companionship, my salvation. I hope they will be yours.

BARBARA KINGSOLVER

Contents

Foreword ix

Introduction by Barbara Kingsolver xiii

ANDREA BARRETT. *Servants of the Map* 1
from Salmagundi

RICK BASS. *The Fireman* 44
from The Kenyon Review

PETER HO DAVIES. *Think of England* 62
from Ploughshares

CLAIRE DAVIS. *Labors of the Heart* 78
from Ploughshares

ELIZABETH GRAVER. *The Mourning Door* 95
from Ploughshares

HA JIN. *After Cowboy Chicken Came to Town* 105
from TriQuarterly

ANDREA LEE. *Brothers and Sisters Around the World* 138
from The New Yorker

RICK MOODY. *Boys* 146
from Elle

BARBARA KLEIN MOSS. *Rug Weaver* 152
from The Georgia Review

ALICE MUNRO. <i>Post and Beam</i>	176
<i>from The New Yorker</i>	
PETER ORNER. <i>The Raft</i>	201
<i>from The Atlantic Monthly</i>	
ROY PARVIN. <i>Betty Hutton</i>	205
<i>from Five Points</i>	
NANCY REISMAN. <i>Illumination</i>	241
<i>from Tin House</i>	
JESS ROW. <i>The Secrets of Bats</i>	256
<i>from Ploughshares</i>	
ANNETTE SANFORD. <i>Nobody Listens When I Talk</i>	271
<i>from Descant</i>	
KATHERINE SHONK. <i>My Mother's Garden</i>	275
<i>from Tin House</i>	
MARISA SILVER. <i>What I Saw from Where I Stood</i>	296
<i>from The New Yorker</i>	
TREVANIAN. <i>The Apple Tree</i>	311
<i>from The Antioch Review</i>	
JOHN UPDIKE. <i>Personal Archeology</i>	326
<i>from The New Yorker</i>	
DOROTHY WEST. <i>My Baby . . .</i>	334
<i>from Connecticut Review</i>	
Contributors' Notes	345
100 Other Distinguished Stories of 2000	359
Editorial Addresses of American and Canadian Magazines	
Publishing Short Stories	363

ANDREA BARRETT

Servants of the Map

FROM SALMAGUNDI

1.

HE DOES NOT WRITE to his wife about the body found on a mountain that is numbered but still to be named: not about the bones, the shreds of the tent, the fragile, browning skull. He says nothing about the diary wedged beneath the rock, or about how it felt to turn the rippled pages. Unlike himself, the surveyor thinks, the lost man traveled alone. Not attached to a branch, however small and insignificant, of the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India. On this twig charged to complete the Kashmir Series, he is nothing. A leaf, an apricot, easily replaced; a civil junior sub-assistant in the Himalayan Service.

The surveyor, whose name is Max Vigne, reads through the diary before relinquishing it to his superiors. The handwriting trembled in the final pages, the entries growing shorter and more confused. Hailstorms, lightning storms, the loss of a little shaving mirror meant to send a glinting signal from the summit to the admiring crowds below — after noting these, the lost man wrote:

I have been fasting. Several weeks — the soul detaches from the flesh. The ills of spirit and body are washed away, and here on the roof of the world, in the abode of snow, one becomes greatly strengthened yet as fresh as a child.

Although Max pauses in wonder over these lines, he still doesn't share them with his wife. Instead he writes: