

RON NYREN

SLEEPING UTENSILS

An hour before sunrise on Midsummer's Day, my sister and I crept out of the house to polish our sleeping utensils. To muffle the clinking, we carried them in an old velvet bag meant for chess pieces. Under a laurel bush at the far corner of the yard, where the ground was steepest, a thick rug of moss held just enough dew for our task.

First we polished the spatula that we used for turning over our pillows, when they grew too dank and took on the smell of saliva. Then the barbecue skewers, which we weren't supposed to have, but which we needed in order to pin down the blankets, so they wouldn't come loose and expose our feet. Next the ball-peen hammer, which was necessary as a weapon in nightmares in which Father appeared; sometimes he mistook us for the bears he hunted. The twelve sewing needles had any number of uses: pricking Father in the arm to distract him, or patching holes in recurring dreams we had worn out through overuse—particularly those in which we had wings, or crossed canyons on high

wooden stilts. Sometimes we needed to sew up the paws of our bear costumes, when the seams frayed from too much scurrying across the basement floor.

Next we polished the trowel my sister used for some purpose she refused to mention; and a white rook that had remained in the chess bag by mistake, but which might prove helpful; and a curved broken handlebar with a rubber cap at the end. We hadn't figured out the use of this last item yet, but it seemed the most vital of them all, to have ready to strike out with, or to blow into as a horn, or to ring against the headboard as a signal when all else failed.

It was hard work, polishing those utensils while we crouched, trying not to get grass stains on our pajamas. We hurried so we could get back in bed before our parents woke and noticed we had gone. The moss flattened. We saved the serrated knives for last, because they tore up the moss, and because we hated to think of ever having to stab someone.

It was hard work, sleeping with so many tools always at the ready. We had to count them over and over to be certain none had gotten lost. We had to sleep death-still, taking care not to kick them out from underneath the sheets. They could clatter to the floor, and give away our positions.