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First Morning

You tell your husband you want to get away. You need time to think about the marriage. Two decades of living together. He says let's end it right now and be done. He's angry, but he doesn't clench his fist.

You move out ten miles away to a sunny apartment on the third floor facing Moon Bay. The first morning after all the boxes have been stacked on the carpet, you look out to see a blue heron posing, as if frozen, on a piling. You abandon the boxes and take the stairs down to visit the heron. You say your name is Jane and you've just moved here. That your sixteen-year-old daughter is furious. And that you're afraid of being alone.

You look around. The neighborhood seems so strange. Your mind returns to the empty kitchen, your empty stomach. The fridge is clean, but bare. You didn't take time to find the closest supermarket. Right now you'd do anything for coffee and a warm Danish.

The bay water is full of lily pads and frogs. Cherry trees are budding. Looking up at your apartment from the bay, you spy your bicycle on the deck where the movers have put it. You have an idea. A short ride takes you to a little coffee shop three blocks away.

Turns out it's a small market with a coffee stand in front where you get a warm cinnamon roll and coffee with real cream. With the first taste, the sweetness of the roll and the bitterness of the coffee comfort you.

In the store, you find milk, bread, eggs and a box of tissues. By the checkout are a few white writing pads about the size of the paperbacks displayed to the left of the counter. You set one pad among your purchases as you scan the book covers.

The bag easily fits into your Schwinn basket. You cruise home. After putting the eggs and butter in the fridge, you leave the bread and tissue box in the bag and rush to sit on the deck. You must not miss the heron. Bending over the railing, you spot the bird. Maybe you could try drawing it.

You go back in the kitchen and realize the white pad never made it into the bag. You paid for it, but there's no receipt. You want to go back. But you worry about facing the clerk.

Just forget it. Don't worry about a couple of dollars. You can always get a better notebook, once you discover where the big stores are.

Best to attack the boxes and put everything in its place. You open a few with a box cutter.

First box you tackle is marked "Dishes." The busy pattern you never liked. But you put all the plates and bowls in the kitchen cabinets and go on to the next box,

bedding that fits easily into the linen closet. Two boxes of books spill open. If only a pad were among them.

You break up the boxes you've emptied and stack them in the hall by the door, ready to go out.

But where is the recycle bin? You look out the window to check and glimpse that blue heron again. The bird turns toward you. What an elegant, proud creature. You've got to draw it. Better go back and fetch that pad.

You wheel the bike from the deck through the apartment and out the door. Seems like a long ride down the elevator.

At the little market, the pad's still on the counter. The others are all gone. But the person behind the register is someone different. This one's old, has a grizzled beard and glum face. Maybe he's the boss and owns the store. Your heart begins to race as you point to the pad. The old man stares as if you're an imposter. You try to explain that you just paid for this notebook, didn't get a receipt and the other clerk forgot to include it in the bag.

The old guy doesn't seem to understand English. You want to grab the pad because it belongs to you. But your heart pounds and the coffee you had earlier churns in your stomach.

In a minute there's your chance. The old man turns around to straighten some Marlboros on the shelf. Now go for it. Snatch the pad and run!

Pedaling back home, you turn to see if the man might be chasing you. Makes no sense, a man his age. You arrive at your building, notebook in hand.

Up the elevator you go, through your apartment and out onto the deck. There you find the blue heron still sitting on the piling by the bay, right where you left it.

You pick up the pad and a pencil. But your hands tremble. Maybe the old man has managed to follow you and is downstairs. How crazy. All for a two-dollar notebook.

Relax. It's only your first morning.

So you open the pad. It has no lines. Good. Your hand is still shaky. You tell it to stop.

And finally it obeys. The pencil in your hand glides over the blank page, creating the line of the heron's long neck, just as it turns its head toward you.

Hello beautiful, you say. Don't move until I'm through.