

Stillman taught English in our middle school. He wasn't anyone's favorite but he was an okay sort and never gave out much homework, and there was something nice about the way he'd get worked up and go on about *The Odyssey* and Emily Dickinson and *Love's Labor's Lost* the way he did. One summer we heard his wife took their baby and left him a note saying she was going through some difficult things and needed some space, and also it wasn't his baby and she was moving across town to be with her true love, who was named Clive. By the time school started in the Fall, Stillman was drinking a lot, and he'd grown a crazy beard. The drinking was bad, but that beard was nice. We all loved that beard. It was full of snarls and mostly white even though Stillman was just in his forties. He took to wearing a bathrobe to class too, and it wasn't a nice bathrobe either.

At first Stillman spent a lot of time looking out the window and drinking from a thermos and talking about his wife and his baby and Clive, wondering what they were doing right at that moment. Stillman had a good imagination too. Like for example he'd imagine them all on a hayride together, or navigating a topiary maze, or taking sailing lessons, and he'd go into too much detail about the sweet smell of the hay bales, and the sound of the wind rustling against the topiary leaves in autumn, and the lonely cries of the gulls overhead as his baby boy grew to manhood and learned nautical terms like mains'l and lee and starboard from the sailing boat captain, who Stillman said was probably named Jimbo. Jimbo had his own story of tragedy and redemption, centered around an opium addiction and the prostitute with a heart of gold who saved him while he was stationed in Thailand after the war, and so on.

This was better than regular schoolwork and we all started to wonder ourselves what would become of Jimbo, but we knew it wasn't strictly speaking a good thing,

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