

What Rabbit Knows

Karen Rowe

My mother spent long hours with Samuel, though she had moved from their shared bedroom to the guest room down the hall. They played cards and discussed plans for the basement and garden. I heard her crying once as I stood in the hallway outside of the door, and I wondered if we – if I, more precisely – was in danger of losing him.

Instead, Gabriel moved into the house.

I was not consulted about this decision, and I struggled to think of a way to ask about it in a way that would force my mother to admit what was going on between them. He took the last room in the house, at the opposite end of the hall from Samuel's, the room with the floor-to-ceiling windows and a view of the woods on the side of the house.

Apparently, the official version was that my mother needed help with Samuel and the house's projects would not get done otherwise. Once able to get out of bed, Samuel needed a wheelchair to get around as he was frail and weak. Gabriel lifted him easily, and I watched, a little startled, as my step-father let this other man do so.

I kept my distance from the carpenter. He was an interloper, a confusion. I was loyal to Samuel because he had opened my mind and treated me like an equal when we so clearly weren't. It was difficult to dismiss him, however. Gabriel was clever in his own way, creative and generous. He never stopped my mother from tending to Samuel, and was deferential to the older man in nearly all interactions. To me, he was as he had ever been: patient and kind, even when I shunned him and ignored him.

When Samuel was finally able to spend most of the day out of bed, he barricaded himself in his study to finish his awful manuscript, sending only for me when he was too exhausted to keep typing. I would take over in the late evenings, transcribing his thoughts, or copying typewritten pages into my laptop for safe keeping. When he fell asleep at his desk, I would call for Gabriel, who would carry him gently to the room he had once shared with my mother, and I would wait outside while my mother helped him into his pyjamas like a sleepy child. Then, when he was in bed with his hot drink, I would sit in the worn armchair nearby and read to him. He let me read whatever I wanted; even bestsellers and grocery store pulp.

As his health improved, I wheeled him up to the headlands in his wheelchair, which he hated. I pushed him through the moss and slick, dark bog in my high boots, slipping with determination to the top of the hill. We sat up there for hours, just us two, not looking back at the house.