

MICHAEL BYERS

*The Last of Dr. Bondoon*

Gordon was only a few years out of college and had only begun to take care of himself in any respectable way, i.e., the acquisition of decent sheets not from the drugstore and writing thank-you notes without an excruciating guilty delay of weeks, with inquiries coming from the parties in question as to whether he had received the package, etc., and in fact he had only managed to see his kind and gentle dentist twice, having first missed both appointments because he was so shitty about keeping track of things, when the office called, he thought to schedule his next appointment or to remind him, wearily, of yet another appointment he'd spaced on, but the voice at the other end was quavery and full of tears. "Dr. Bondoon died yesterday," said this voice, "and we are calling all our patients to inform them - !"

He stammered his sympathies and hung up feeling, as was typical of him in those days, just basically at a loss about how to feel or what to do, but out of some impulse toward self-improvement he at once found another dentist, this one quite a bit closer to work and more convenient, and scheduled himself for a check-up the following week, and when the hygienist who treated him pressed her bosom against his shoulder in a way that seemed not strictly required he sensed an opportunity. Her name was Danni but it was only just before they married that he discovered she had a truly vast extended family in Minnesota and it was among these people that they eventually settled, spending weekend summers at the lake house with the inner tubes stored under the porch among the other family clutter, the fishing poles and tackle and the aluminum rowboat no one ever used, all the million Borglunds stomping up and down the stairs and shouldering themselves into their Scandinavian-scale

vehicles, and they asked nothing of him but to participate in everything as though it were fun, which it was, and why hadn't he seen this before? Who didn't love fishing? Who didn't love chopping wood a little bit? And you could have a dog, you could just like have a dog and love your dog, named Petey, nicknamed Pizzaboy. And after a while it just seemed his life, as though it had come from no origin, as though he carried nothing of his old faulty self within him, though it was also the case that now then in response to some whisper from an unknown or long-unheard from quarter he would open his mouth wide in front of the bathroom mirror and inspect the little gray plugs in his two upper right molars, the fillings that were among Dr. Bondoon's last work, the tiny bit of conscientious repair that had outlasted the good and honorable and tolerant Dr. Bondoon, and that would, in a way that was strangely pleasing to consider, outlast them all.