That Summer in Toronto

Jan Ball

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I pressed my ear against the wall
to better hear the couple next door
arguing in the middle of the night,
then returned to you in bed lamenting
like a mourner at a funeral, “I can’t
stand it, I can’t stand it,” but managed
to fall back asleep, anyway.

After one dinner, we soaked the black
paper mache salad bowls in the kitchen
sink overnight so they disintegrated like
cardboard in the rain, then we unsuccessfully
searched China Town for a set to replace
them. With dentist dread, we called
the couple we’d sublet from. Even though
they were nice about it they did inform us
that the bowls were a wedding present
and told us that we could leave
the replacement check on the left side
of the mahogany entrance table.

Later in the summer, your Australian
best friend, Ian, and his girlfriend came
to visit from Montreal so we brought
them to the department reception with
your summer colleagues. When I introduced
Annick as French, everyone simultaneously
felt warm so they moved to the balcony
except for the four of us who remained
standing around the table nibbling celery
and carrot sticks dipped in that onion/sour
cream mixture I still like so much.
After Annick returned to Montreal on Monday, it seemed that Ian talked his whole remaining three days: about his travels in Zaire, his parents in Sydney, his engineering job, Annick, and, like a self-centered teen-ager, never asked me one question about myself, while you assiduously taught your course at the University of Toronto and I listened like a recording device (I realize now). I cooked liver with green peppers from that Time/Life Middle-Eastern cookbook with the sliced pomegranate on the cover, but, although Ian had three helpings, I never cooked liver with green peppers again.

-Jan Ball
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