

Ravinder

He leaves the suitcase by the door and sinks into his favorite living room chair, ready to fall backward in time, before all the unpleasantness began. Two wine glasses—one drained, one overfilled—keep his magazines company on the side table. He resists the offer to slip into a nonproductive routine—drinking to excess, bickering to exhaustion. Instead he chooses to read about someone’s quest to scale a 3,200-foot-high rock without any rope or harnesses. He marvels at the bravery and discipline required to complete the feat, then flinches at his own lack of courage, which compels him to hide behind reading rather than acknowledge the odor of merlot permeating the room.

As he considers abandoning the article, three dissonant chords resound from the piano across the room. His wife sits on the piano bench in an embroidered titian dress and a camel-colored coat. None of her clothes are recognizable, so he hates that they flatter her. She stares at him with cold expectation, but he refuses to ask the one question she wants to answer.

“His name is Ravinder,” she slurs, answering anyway.

Her husband flips to a new article, ripping a handful of pages in the process, then flings the magazine to the floor. Courage, he decides, is doing what others fear no matter the consequences. By that definition, he was courageous today.

“Not anymore,” he replies.