

THE COVE by GINA BERRIAULT

A native of Northern California, GINA BERRIAULT (1926–1999) is the author of four novels and three short story collections. In “The Cove,” a realtor sells an idyllic seaside home to a young, golden family, but fails to disclose the danger haunting its shores. The story was first published in Esquire in 1969 and later in Berriault’s short story collection Women in Their Beds, which received the National Book Critics Circle Award and the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction in 1997.

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S**OMETIMES THE REALTOR’S** listings book will fall open to the photographs of homes not within the means of the couple on the other side of the desk, and the wife will put out her hand, almost instinctively, to see what is beyond them. Of the several properties, the couple will pause longest over a particular house on the leeward side of the island. The woman will wish aloud that they could afford it, laughing, sighing, drooping, indecorous in a time that calls for reserve, while the husband will nod and agree robustly, even goddamning. They select, after the usual excursions with the realtor to several houses within the city and on its expanding edge, a house not much different from the one back home. The property that they coveted is shown only to those fortunate families for whom every hour is opportune. Persons who sometimes roam through houses they cannot afford in order to impress the realtor, or—though they have not met

him before—vindictively waste his time, never venture onto the verdant grounds and across the threshold of that property. It is much too ideal to violate with one’s lack of promise or even with that vindictiveness against the realtor that asks for no reason for itself. Whoever might have in mind to dare an excursion is deterred by what might be suspicion on the part of the realtor: although everything is amiable and potential as they sit around his desk, elbows almost touching, knees almost touching, hands touching over maps and matches, a gulf suddenly divides him and them.

THE REALTOR UNLOCKED the wrought-iron gate, swung it open and stepped aside, waiting until all the members of the family had passed into the garden. Following at a discreet distance in order not to interfere with their breathtaking entry into a domain certain to be theirs and free of intruders such as himself, he bowed his head to choose the next key from the green leather case in the palm of his hand—both case and keys given him by the owner. The father went first along the path, his index finger held by the youngest of the four children, a girl of two who was walking clumsily on her toes. They were followed by the two boys, one twelve, the other nine, both lean, both wearing tan knee shorts and white pullovers edged thinly with red. The eldest, a girl of sixteen, strolled behind the boys, the wide pleats of her short white skirt parting and closing. The mother, young in spite of the number of her children, was the last of the procession except for the realtor who was, respectfully, not a part of it, following the mother by a yard, observing as if

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