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The Central Tendency

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By Daniel Kaysen

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21 July 2003

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First the rain woke me up, loud rain on the

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window. And then the doorbell woke me up too.

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I was supposed to be asleep, but when the doorbell rang I crept to the top of the stairs and watched.

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Amanda Carpenter, my babysitter, opened the door. Outside, it was two rain-wet police wearing big black waterproofs, like sea-lions. They came and stood on the doormat, out of the darkness.

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I listened. I was little. No one saw me.

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I knew what drunks were and I knew what drivers were and so when they said it was a drunk driver I saw in my mind a wobbly swearing

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man in driving gloves. He had hit my parents, the policewoman said. I saw him, not for real but in my head, and he was punching them. An angry

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man in driving gloves, punch, punch, punch. Why would he do that? I didn't understand.

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And I didn't understand why my parents were dead, either, but I knew they were.

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The policewoman carried me in her waterproof arms to the Carpenters' house, next door.

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Amanda Carpenter, 15 and very old, cried. Mrs. Carpenter gave me hot milk I didn't want. Then she and the policewoman talked above me. They had a blue tablecloth I didn't really like.

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andise](#)

"She has precious little kin," said Mrs. Carpenter.

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They were talking about me: precious and little.

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Night there at the Carpenters, in a different bedroom with the door in a different place and the bed and it was strange like holiday or being sick.

[Before Paphos](#)

by Loretta Casteen

8 January 2007

It starts again. The baby begins to cough and choke.

[Locked Doors](#)

by Stephanie Burgis

1 January 2007

You can never let anyone suspect, his mother told him. That was the first rule she taught him, and the last, before she left him here alone with It.

[Heroic Measures](#)

by Matthew Johnson

18 December 2006

Pale as he was, it was hard to believe he would never rise from this bed. Even in the darkest times, she had never really feared for him; he had always been strong, so strong.

[Love Among the Talus](#)

by Elizabeth Bear

11 December 2006

Nilufer raised her eyes to his. It was not what women did to men, but she was a princess, and he was only a bandit. "I want to be a Witch," she said. "A Witch and not a Queen. I wish to be not loved, but wise. Tell your bandit lord, if he can give me that, I might accept his gift."

[Archived Fiction Dating back to 9/1/00](#)

