

## We? #5

Helen Phillips

Once there was a person whose sadness was so enormous she knew it would kill her if she didn't squeeze it into a cube one centimeter by one centimeter by one centimeter. Diligently, she set about this task. Alone in her room, she grappled with her sadness. It was quite a beast, alternately foggy and slippery; by the time she managed to grip it, her skin was sleek with sweat, soaked with tears. (The sounds coming from her apartment worried the neighbors. What was that shy little woman up to?) She twisted her sadness like a dishrag. It strained against her, tugged, pulled. She sat on it to shrink it down the way old-fashioned ladies sat on their snakeskin suitcases.

Then, finally, there it was: a small white cube.

She slipped it into her pocket, went outside, noticed orange lichen growing on tenements, ordered lemonade in a cafe. The checkered floor nearly blinded her—it looked exactly like joy, and she almost covered her eyes. But instead, she fingered the thing in her pocket. Her eyes became bright prisms; they made her irresistible, and soon she had a friend. One day, passing some kids in the street who had just lost a die down the sewer, she discovered a die in her pocket. "Wow, lady," they said. "Where'dya get a blank one?"

"Gosh," she said, "I really can't remember." And she couldn't.

You know that book where they went all over the world and took pictures of families in front of their homes along with everything they owned? A hut in Kenya, a suburban house in Texas, a Tokyo apartment? I always loved to see the precious and unprecious items, the woven blankets and the TVs, the families standing nervously alongside. Sometimes I look around our home and imagine everything out on the street. But I hope that someday, when they come to take our picture with everything we own, it will just be us, standing before a building, your arm around me, a blank die in my palm.