



Fool's Errand: A Novel

Louis Bayard

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An Excerpt

Funny that it began with a nap. Naps usually filled him with a nameless dread. Every time he put his head on a pillow, he would remember something he needed to do--something to clean (though he wasn't really that clean) or a book he'd been meaning to read. Or he'd develop a sudden fear of embarrassing himself: mumbling an old boyfriend's name, say, or drooling or some other act still undreamed of, outside civilization's parameters. But nothing, finally, explained how unacceptable it was to be lying there--in daylight--lying there while the rest of the world was awake. How did people do it?

On the day in question, though, a Sunday in March, Patrick had been trailing clouds of sleep deprivation. All week long he'd been sleeping poorly, and the night before, three teenage boys had broken into his car, which was parked behind his Victorian row house on Capitol Hill. Patrick might have slept till morning unawares except a neighbor on the other side of the back alley saw the crime in progress and yelled at the boys until they ran away. Then he knocked on Patrick's door to explain what had happened, and just as Patrick was about to thank him and go back to bed, the neighbor mentioned that the police had been called and were on their way. Patrick called twice over the next hour, asking the police not to come. Two hours later a patrolman knocked on the door. He and Patrick waited another half hour for the fingerprint specialist. Still wearing his bathrobe, Patrick led them through the backyard to the car. The first thing he noticed was the Oldsmobile's steering column, which had been peeled open like a can. The second thing was the glass from the rear left passenger window, which had resolved itself into smooth, glittering candy pebbles on the gravel.

He fell asleep around 5. Around 6, his downstairs tenant, Deanna, woke him up to tell him about his car: She'd seen it during her morning jog. This left him only a few minutes of sleep before he had to get up for his violin lesson. His teacher--a radiant freckled woman named Sonya, with a river of auburn hair--lived only three blocks away, but 7:30 on Sunday morning was the only time of the week they could get together. Patrick was not improving.

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