

HUSBANDRY

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My mother recalls her four ex-husbands in reverse order: the one who loved her because of her lupus, the one who left her because of her lupus, the one who was too interested in me, the one who wasn't interested in me at all ('That one was your daddy,' my mother likes to say). She shows me the anti-malarial drugs the doctors give her, the ones that stop the pain and the lesions but cause the weakness and blurred vision. 'See?' she says, 'I get to take this stuff without having to shit in an outhouse with a tarantula.' She's talking about my college trip to Kenya, about twenty years ago. Her hands weaken around the bottle of pills and she lets it drop to her lap. She can't do much of what she wants to for herself anymore. She's heard about these capuchin monkeys. They're from Peru, just like the quinine in the anti-malarial pills, but the monkeys are bred and trained to help people open magazines, and microwave leftovers, and stick straws in soda cans. 'I saw a show,' she says. 'The trainer yelled "Change!" and the little monkey switched out a DVD for a new one. The monkey wears a diaper. I think it must know how to change itself.' My mother wants me to get her a capuchin monkey that can change itself. She wants to get it right the fifth time.