

Nuts

Jake developed a rash on his legs. He bought almond oil, for the skin, it said, but also, it said food grade. You could drink it. It wouldn't hurt anybody.

He didn't go to doctors anymore. They prescribed medicines, and the medicines made him sick. The doctors scheduled tests. The tests cost hundreds of dollars. Sometimes thousands. Then they didn't know. They said they needed to take more tests.

Almond oil stopped the itching right away. The red bumps got smaller. He put oil everywhere he could reach, wiped off the excess with a towel. He used the oil every day. He didn't say anything about it to Cathy.

Monday, he looked in the mirror. He looked like an almond. A big almond. A very big almond. He thought, *Rub almond oil all over enough times, maybe this is what happens. I turn into a nut.*

Cathy walked in. Jake backed away from her. Cathy really liked almonds. She looked hungry. Jake backed farther from her, turned away from her. "Jake," she said, "Jake. Jake." She sounded like she was barking.

Jake ran. At the unevenness between the edge of the lawn and the curb, he tripped. Carried forward by his running speed, he fell headlong into the street. The bus driver didn't even see Jake, just heard the solid bump when the bus hit and killed him.

Cathy was hysterical when the police questioned her. "I don't know," she said, between body-shaking sobs, "He looked like he was really frightened, but I don't know what he would be frightened of. He ran. I tried to stop him, but I couldn't begin to catch up with him."

The doctor sedated her, and they drove her away in the ambulance. When the police climbed back into their car, the youngest, heaviest one said, "We'll never know why the guy died. He went nuts. He just went nuts, that's all we'll ever know."