



## The Fourth Summer (A Short Story)

*Emma Smith-Stevens*

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*This story was originally published in Day One, a weekly literary journal dedicated to short fiction and poetry from emerging writers.*

If *going well* means no longer fighting, then things are going well.

Ever since James's return from an eight-month business trip, his wife, Lena, had been constantly upset. Now their arguments have dwindled to polite silence, opening a rift between them that James tries to ignore. But when Lena announces that she is going to spend the summer at her parents' home in the Adirondacks, he truly starts to worry.

Once she's gone, James feels lost. Determined to win back his wife's love, he decides to improve himself and their home. Yet the cause of Lena's distress remains a mystery to him, one that he is too cowardly to solve—until it's too late.

Told with poignant realism and humor, *The Fourth Summer* speaks to the slow decline of a marriage in the face of habitual passivity, benign narcissism, and the inability to see what's most obvious.

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