How could we be wrong?

Amanda Eyre Ward

The University of Montana

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How Could We Be Wrong?

by

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B.A. Williams College, 1994

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

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Approved by:

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Prologue

May, 1980

We were small when my father held us over the edge of the ferry, his fingers pressing into the soft joint that held our arms to our bodies. It was the beginning of a summer; my skin was hot from a day of driving in the sun. The smell of tar burned in my nostrils.

The back seat of the car was covered with coloring books, melting crayons, and candy wrappers. My little sister Aislin had fallen asleep before we had driven over the drawbridge onto the ferry. It took an hour from the Cape to the island.

We got out of the car and went into the lounge. It was twilight; inside the ferry it was cool and wood-panelled. Our mother looked beautiful before the sun had set. She was dressed for the first day of summer. She wore a linen skirt and a sleeveless blouse that showed her brown shoulders. Her hair was curled around her face and her lipstick was frosted. She drank white wine in a tall cold glass.

His face was flushed. He wore a green shirt, and drank Johnny Walker Red. The bartender's hands moved over glass and ice and the splashing of the amber whiskey. Glass and ice and the splashing. Glass and ice and please Larry, please, it's early.

We went to sit on a bench outside. The wind was salty and cold. We had left our raincoats in the car below. It was fast becoming night. Let's go to the very top! he said.

Oh, Larry, let's be still, said my mother, but he took our hands and pulled us, sleepy, to the upper deck, miles above the sea. The sound of my mother's shoes on the metal staircase behind us.

A game, he said, who wants to fly?

No one answered, but he said, oldest first, he said, age before beauty. His hands were thick under my arms and he carried me, in front of him like an offering, to the edge of the deck. No Larry, please, Larry, please, Larry! And my mother
screamed as he pulled me up and over the bars and held me above the ocean and he laughed I know because his hands were shaking.

You can fly now, go ahead, he said and my legs hung in the air, his meaty fingers in my wet skin. Below was just black. There were no waves; it was a hole. Above were stars, too far away. The water would be cold in my throat.

Too scared? he said finally and he banged my legs back over and when I tried to stand I fell, the splintered boards digging into my legs.

Through the railing then I saw her feet. Aislin’s feet--so small in pink sneakers--moved between the bars, she kicked where I had frozen still. Drop me! she said, Just do it you hate me I know just let go!

Oh, Aislin, Larry, please and my mother’s last word stretched out until Aislin was next to me on the terrace floor, her arms around me, pulling tight.

I hate him, I said.

It will be alright, said Aislin, she was six years old. Her voice, as even as steel: I’m going to kill him, said my sister.
Part One: June

I.
June, 1992

Jen convinced me to ask my parents if we could live in the Vineyard house for the summer. We were finishing our freshman year at Williams, and were appalled by the thought of going home. "It'll be one...big...party," said Jen, who tended to enunciate her words carefully, punctuating them, as if always on stage. "It'll be beer...babes...and...um, boats," she said.

"We don't have a boat," I told her.

"Whatever," said Jen, throwing my stuffed giraffe in the air above my bed and catching it. "Just ask them," she said.

My mother called one Saturday to say she was coming up for the night—a "spur of the moment thing" she said. She was to arrive at my dorm at five, and by four thirty, Jen was in my room, dressed in a conservative plaid skirt, so that my mother could see how responsible a person she was. My mother was late, as usual. By the time she knocked on my door, Jen had abandoned her perch in front of my computer, and was lying on the floor reading *The Awakening*. As Jen sat up and smoothed her skirt, I opened my door.

"Sweetheart!" said my mother, blowing in like a long-held breath. She sat and my bed and unpinned her hat from her head. Her black curls fell over her shoulders. She put her hands, enclosed in kid gloves, in front of her mouth. "Oooh!" she said, "It's cooold out there!"

"Well, it's January," I said.

"And I do so love to drive with the window open," she said, shaking her head. "Not that I don't adore you," she said, "but I wish I were in Florida." She rubbed her hands together, and then pressed her fingers to her cheeks. Her face was flushed and rosy. Her lips were full and red; a new lipstick. She was wearing large gold earrings.

"I am Jennifer," said Jen.
“Oh, sweetie!” said my mother, “Forgive me! It’s a pleasure. What a cute skirt.” She held out her hand, and Jen shook it. Jen looked at me.

“Well, we’re late,” I said.

“And are you joining us for dinner?” my mother asked Jen.

“No, no,” said Jen.

“I insist,” said my mother.

The Williams Inn had a fire simmering in the dining room. We ordered red meat and two bottles of wine. My mother was in high spirits. She told a long story about a man at the grocery store who had come up behind her and had given her a big hug because he mistook her for his girlfriend. “Just came up and grabbed me!” said my mother. “Don’t think I wasn’t flattered,” she said, “His girlfriend couldn’t be more than eighteen, though his skin wasn’t the greatest, so I don’t know.” She drank wine and told me about Jimmy Spees, who had gotten Lauralee Jacobs pregnant and now he had to marry her.

Before dessert, Jen and I went to the bathroom. “Eva,” said Jen, from the stall next to me, “Are you gonna ask or what?”

“Oh, Jeez,” I said. Jen banged out of her stall and turned on the water. I stood next to her and lathered my hands with the sweet-smelling soap. “I will, okay,” I said.

“Look, I don’t...want... to push,” she said. In the mirror, I could see that Jen’s color was high. She had frizzy red hair, and wore black mascara over her pale lashes. Her lips were pursed, and she rubbed her hands together vigorously.

“I’ll ask right now,” I said, and kissed her on the cheek.

“Not that I care,” she said.

My mother paused thoughtfully, her fork tapping on the side of her ice-cream sundae. “That sounds like a wonderful idea,” she said, after a time. She raised her eyebrows and grinned at Jen. “You two can take Aislin and have a ball,” she said.
“Aislin?” I said.

“Honey,” said my mother, “I think your father and I could use some time together. To get to know each other again. Without you two. I mean, to remember why we undertook this thing in the first place.” I sighed. My mother started to talk about her summers in Savannah when she was my age and had not yet had her deb ball. Jen appeared to be listening intently. I tried to work my little sister into the pictures I had created. Me in a Jeep with a tan and long-haired boy. Van Morrison playing on the tape deck. In the back, on the laps of other boys, Jen and Aislin. Aislin would wear one if those bikinis. My boy would turn towards her.

On the beach: a bonfire and green bottles of beer. Girls who went to boarding school around me, giggling and roasting marshmallows. There is Aislin, in the middle of them all, telling a story that shocks even the boarding school girls out of their cool boredom. “Your sister is so funny!” they exclaim, and I eat marshmallow after burned marshmallow. My hands get sticky and I feel too sick to go dancing later.

My mother dropped me off at my dorm. “That Jen is sweet,” said my mother. I nodded. As she stopped the car, my mother said, “Things are pretty awful at home. I just thought you should be aware.” She turned and looked at me, and put her hand over mine. The silver of her wedding rings was cold.

“What do you mean?” I said.

“Well, Aislin is out of control, for one thing,” she said, “Though I was a bit crazy myself when I was seventeen.” She shakes her head. “But I don’t know, she worries me, is what it comes down to.”

“How?” I said.

“Well, that whole Lars thing. It’s thrown her for a loop. I walk into her room and she’s staring at his picture, moving her lips...it’s a shrine, or something, in there.”

“I’ll call her tomorrow,” I said.
“And your father,” she said. “I don’t know sometimes.” She breathed out through her nose and began to cry. “He’s so mean!” she said. “I didn’t know someone could be so mean!” she said. I unclipped my seat belt and leaned across to hold her. She cried, her cheek pressed to my shoulder. Her hair fell across my chest, as if it was my own. I held her and then she sat up. She dried her eyes.

“I wish there was something I could say,” I said.

“Oh, sweetie, you’re my rock of Gibraltar,” she said, “You really, truly are.” She dried her eyes with a handkerchief, and pushed her hair back from her face. “Well!” she said. She squeezed my hand. I climbed out of the car, and before she pulled away, my mother rolled down the window to call, gaily, “It’s all going to be fine, sweetie! Don’t you worry!”

She drove away, the Jeep handling nicely in the snow, and I felt heavy, as if I’d been given a rock to hold.
II.

We had three study days before final exams. I went to Manhattan to stay with my aunt, to get away from it all. She lived in the East Village, and took me out to dinner every night. The final night, we went to Milan for Indian food. The menu had soup for 30 cents.

"You'll find your own way to shine," Aunt Betty told me, "Look at me and your mama, for Christs' sake. What the hell are these?"

"Onions."

"But they're red!"

"Dyed onions. Trust me. But you have a talent, you know?" I said. Betty was a photographer. She traveled all over the world. She had lost her wedding ring finger to frostbite on the South Pole. She fascinated me.

"Don't you think," she said, holding a piece of bread midair, "That sometimes I'd rather be married and beautiful?"

"You are beautiful!"

"Yeah, yeah, in my own way, etcetera. Look at this hair!" Betty had grey hair which she pulled into a rubber band. She wore green eyeshadow, large silver earrings, and workman's pants with a tight halter top. Her stomach showed: soft and tanned. Her perfume was strong and musky. She had the same high cheekbones as my mother, and the same Georgia drawl, but that was all. Her beauty was frightening, to me, where my mother's was intimidating, but essentially comforting. My mother was beautiful for other's sake. "What I'm saying honey, these are onions! Is that you can't try to compete with Aislin. You say, OK, she's different. You two, and I love you both, are in different games entirely." Betty looked at me. She had heavy eyelids, and always looked sleepy.

I nodded. The light inside the restaurant was red, and added fiery light to Betty's hair. Her fingernails were short and neat, and where her finger should have been, there was a neat seam. In the background, sitar music played. It made me nervous. Betty put her hand over mine. "Hey," she said, "You'll find things for yourself. I'm going to Kenya, by the way."
“Really?”

“The Maasi warriors are said to be the sexiest men in the world,” she said, and raised an eyebrow. I laughed. “Seriously, Eva,” she said, “I tried for years to get your mama’s boyfriends.”

“And?” I said.

She shook her head, and looked down at her plate. “I never got a one,” she said, loudly. She not not look at me. She pulled her pita through the spinach curry absenty. Then she looked up.

“OK, listen to this one, sweetpea,” she said.

“The Howdy Doody story?” I said. She smiled.

“You know that one, do you?” she said. I nodded. My mother still told us indignantly about the time when Aunt Betty was chosen to appear on the Howdy Doody show, won the grand prize, and humiliated the family by choosing the gun and holster set instead of the china-faced doll. “I’ll bet your mama never told you about the lingerie.”

“No,” I said. Aunt Betty smiled sadly.

“This was summertime, in Vernon View,” she said. I nodded. Betty and my mother had spent summers on the Vernon River, twenty minutes from their home in Savannah. My mother had told me wistfully of days spent crabbing and fishing off the dock. “As you can imagine,” said Betty, “your mama was the most popular girl in town. That was the Johnny Mercer summer.”

Johnny Mercer had lived down the river. He had written songs for my mother, and spent all summer singing them outside her window, which was also Betty’s window. My mother had not chosen skinny, small Johnny Mercer. She still listened to his records when my father was gone.

“Well, there came a day when a boy liked me,” Betty continued, “His name was Pat. Patrick, but we called him Pat. Of course your mama thought his ears were too big, and that his voice was thin--thin! she called it that, I remember!--I loved him. He took me to ice cream near every night. It was heaven. I was probably sixteen, and your mama would be seventeen, then.” She took a sip of her
wine, and breathed in. "So then there was the night of the Vernon Magnolia Ball. I didn't think things like that were silly then, honey, I just wanted to belong. So my mama--your grandmama--bought me a lemon chiffon dress."

I leaned my elbows on the table. I knew where this story would go, though I had not heard it before. Betty's features were growing hard, and her mouth was tight, as if her lips were too small for her teeth. "Pat arrived," she said, "and I came out in my beautiful dress. But before he could even look at me, your mama came flying down the stairs. She had gone out somehow, to the same store and bought the same lemon dress, with her own money. And she had a dress! My mama-your grandmama--had bought her a fine dress of her own! And her bust filled it out, and her waist nipped it in, and she said, "Pat, darlin'!" and that was the end of it. I stood in my dress like a sack, and all night your mama sweet-talked poor Pat, and by the end of the ball, the two of them were kissing in the dark."

Betty picked up her wine. Her hand was shaking. She put down her wine, and opened her woven bag for a cigarette. She drew in on it and exhaled harshly. She shook her head and her earrings flashed in the red light. She looked like she was shaking something--anger, tears--from her head. Maybe she had forgotten I was there.

"I went home early from that ball," she said, "And I found the scissors in the kitchen drawer. I took those scissors and I went to our room and I cut all her panties to ribbons. The I cut her bras, and her favorite little dresses. It was like I couldn't stop." Betty smiled without showing her teeth. "I cut her teddy bear to stuffing," she said.

I didn't know what to say. I had never cut Aislin's clothes. I ate some pita, and drank my wine. Our waiter stood in the corner, watching us restlessly. "So!" said Betty, "She dumped him not a week later, of course." She lit another cigarette. "So!" she said.

"Tell me about Kenya," I said.

That night, I slept on Betty's couch. Her apartment was small and perfect.
Her walls were covered with woven hangings, and she had bought her mahogany coffee table in Thailand. She had covered me with a thick Mexican blanket. Outside her open window, the lights of the city blinked brighter than stars. I could hear cars and sirens and music from somewhere. The lyrics to the music were not in English, but the horns underneath them made sense to me.
III.

Jen and I packed up my Volkswagen Rabbit, an old white thing I called Selma, with bikinis and rayon dresses. We drank wine while we packed, and were late checking out of our dorms. We stopped by Jen's house in Scarsdale to take the television they kept in the den, and headed to Rye to pick up Aislin. As soon as we pulled in the driveway, Aislin came running outside. Her blonde hair was tied into a ponytail, and she wore a tiny sundress. Her feet were bare. "Jesus!" said Aislin, "Where have you been?" As she loaded her bags into the car, I went inside to say goodbye to my mother. When I passed the den door, my father called out. "Eva!" he said, "Come say hello!"

"What are you doing home?" I said, and then I saw Bernard. He was sitting on the couch, holding a cigarette, and he smiled at the sound of my voice.

"I dragged your dad home early," he said, "How are you, Eva?"

"I'm, I'm fine," I said.

"She's about to go ransack the Vineyard house," said my father.

"Is that right?" said Bernard.

I nodded. I said, "Yes." The room was filled with smoke, and my father patted the footrest: a command: sit and be an attentive daughter. I sat.

I was in love with Bernard, even then. My father had met Bernard in St. Mary's Hospital. They were both in the rehab program: Bernard was a heroin addict and my father, a drunk. They struck up an unlikely friendship, and Bernard came to our house occasionally, his worn and greasy fingers looking out of place on our polished table tops. Bernard was a jazz saxophonist, somewhere in his thirties, and had had a difficult life, according to my father. Though my father considered the entire rehab program absurd, and began drinking again the day he left, he and Bernard remained in touch.

"You and Aislin, alone in the Vineyard," said Bernard, "I can only imagine!"

"They'll raise holy hell is what they'll do," said my father. His face was drawn, and his eyes were puffy. But the drink in front of him was a can of 7up.
"You should come visit us, Bernard," I said. I was pressing my nails into my hands too hard. It hurt.

"Maybe I'll do that," Bernard said quietly, "I'd like to do that."

"Stop flirting, Eva," said my father, "Go kiss your mother goodbye." I wanted to punch my father. I thought about taking a poker from the fireplace and hitting him on the head, cracking his skull. I thought about smashing in his nose with the heel of my shoe. "Well?" said my father. He pushed my back with his hand and I stood up.

"Have a wonderful summer," said Bernard. He looked at me, and my chest froze. I knew he could see it in my eyes: my secret.

"I will," I said. "Thank you," I said. I did not look at my father as I closed the door. I imagined Bernard watching my back, my rounded buttocks in jean shorts, my long arms and fingers lingering on the doorframe.

My mother sat at the kitchen table, staring at the closed refrigerator.

"Hello," I said. "It's me, your oldest daughter. I'm leaving you indefinitely."

She turned to me. Her eyes had grey shadows around them. "Oh, sweetie," she said, "Don't be so melodramatic."

"Well weren't you going to say goodbye?" I asked.

"Of course. I'm sorry, honey, I was just...thinking."

"Are you okay mom?" I said.

"I'm okay," she said then, and I knew that if I had pushed farther she would have told me the story I knew so well. But I was in a hurry to have a beer and a cigarette and to drive fast and to find a boy to worry about and to fuck. To take my mind off Bernard. I didn't want her to tell me to be careful, careful, of turning out like her. So I said, "good, then," and I out my arms around her, her shoulders caving inward with my hug, as if she had not been touched in a while. "Bye, mom," I said, and when I left her, she turned back to stare blankly at the closed refrigerator door.
Aislin put one of her lovely hands on each worn car seat. She leaned forward, one knee touching the gear shift, and turned to me, her eyebrows rising to emphasize the excitement of her discovery. "And she doesn’t sleep! I swear, Eva, she walks around her room at night in circles," she said.

"Where’s dad, then?" I asked.

"He sleeps in the den every night now," she said. Our house in New York had a den as well, and my father had always stayed inside it, drinking, until nearly dawn, dozing and waking and yelling at anyone who disturbed him. I could hear the ice from the ice matching rumble into his glass, clinking as it fell, as I tried to sleep. But my mother had always retired early, sometimes as early as seven, to sit upright in their bed, reading or watching television. Past seven, my father became irrational, and if we were not in our rooms, we were easy targets.

Once, he dragged me down the stairs by my ankles, my cotton nightgown hiked to my armpits. I had run up the stairs, an activity that made too much Goddamned noise, and he had seen me.

Once, my mother made the wrong fucking kind of pasta. Too thin, the noodles were, and he worked all day to come home to this? He threw his bowl of pasta against the wall, and the red sauce dripped in clotted pieces to the parquet floor.

Aislin said Fuck You to my father once. He ran after her to the second floor, and he took her shoulders and pushed her to the ground. "You will never. Swear. In. This. House. Again," he said, picking up her shoulders and smashing them to the floor with each word.

One night Aislin and I made a plan. Around dawn, we marched resolutely down the stairs. Aislin was the mouth, and I was the one who would make him see that his was not just a fly-by-night-like-your-mother idea of Aislin’s. I knocked on the door to the den. There was no answer, and I knocked again. "What?" he said, angrily.

"It’s me," I said. I was ten, Aislin eight, and we knew that he would not open the door at this hour to Aislin and one of her fly-by-night-like-your-mother
"Come in," he said. I turned the knob that made your hand smell like brass polish, and pushed the dark door open. Aislin followed me into the den.

The sun was rising outside the two den windows. Everything looked pink and dewy outside. The den was smoky and sour. My father sat in his red leather chair wearing his navy bathrobe. He didn’t wear anything underneath it, which I knew because sometimes it fell open for a minute and it made me nervous. His hair was not combed, and his eyes were runny. The television was showing a black and white movie, but the sound was off. My father ran his fingers through his hair and then ran them over his face. He shook his head. "What’s up, troops?" he said.

"We have an announcement," said Aislin. My father looked at me and I nodded. He sighed. "Yes?" he said.

Aislin put her hands on her hips. I remember, she wore the white flannel nightgown with a red strawberry on it, which means I was wearing that one too. "We want you to stop drinking," said Aislin. "If you love us," she said, "You will."

I breathed in and out. You never knew with my father. I breathed in and out and I wished for this to be one of the times that he would grab us like a bear and say, "AAAARG!" and laugh and say, "I love little girls to eat!" as he held us aloft, one in each arm. I breathed in and out.

"You know I love you," said my father, in a tired voice.

Aislin began to cry. "Then stop it!" she said. "You’re an alcoholic!" she said. Aislin had showed me the pamphlet she had found in the church lobby. It had a picture of a bottle on the front, and inside had a list called "You’re An Alcoholic If..." Aislin had checked all the statements that applied to my father. She had eight check marks. The back of the pamphlet said, "If you check one or more of the warning signs inside, you or someone you love could be an alcohol abuser." Aislin had brought the checklist down with us, ammunition.

"You’ve got to be kidding me," my father was saying. "I work all Goddamn day," he said. I took the pamphlet from Aislin, and I held it out to my
“Look,” I said. He took the paper, and he scanned it. Color ran to his cheeks.

“For the love of Christ,” he said. The paper shook in his hand. “HAVE YOU EVER SEEN ME FALL?” he said. “DO I STUMBLE AROUND THIS HOUSE?” he said. “DO I GO TO BARS?” he said.

“But, daddy,” I said. I was shivering all over, but it was not cold. The sun was almost up, and soon it would be time to go to school and my father would be gone to the train and we would eat cereal in the kitchen with my mother drinking coffee next to us in her quilted pink robe.

Aislin was sobbing. “DO I EVER DO THIS?” said my father, and he stood up fast and grabbed us and pulled us out of the den and to the liquor cabinet. He opened the cabinet and Aislin said, “I hate you,” and I said, “Please, please, forget it, please,” and my throat hurt and I couldn’t breathe.

“We have to go to school,” I said, and my father took a bottle of Johnny Walker Red and said, “DO I EVER DO THIS?” and unscrewed the cap. Aislin stood still and watched him, here eyes still and her mouth still. I breathed and couldn’t breathe and tried to breathe and my father took the bottle and put it to his lips and he drank it. He made a gulping sound and some whiskey fell on the floor and some came out his mouth. The he put the bottle—slam~on the counter and said, “THAT IS WHAT AN ALCOHOLIC DOES,” and he looked at us.

“You’re an asshole,” said Aislin, and he slapped her. Then she ran like a puppy upstairs, hands and feet and I said, “I’m sorry,” to my father.

“It’s okay, baby girl,” he said. And then he went back to the den and closed the door hard and when I climbed in bed with my mother, Aislin was already there. Aislin was talking and crying and my mother was saying, “Oh please, I can’t bear this at six in the morning.”

In the car, Jen said, “So they both walk around all night? God, that’s almost romantic in a sick..sort..of way.”
"And she doesn’t listen when you talk to her," said Aislin.

"I know," I said. "She was staring at the refrigerator when I left."

"She stares at things, yeah," said Aislin, "and it's like she doesn’t hear you, or somebody else is talking to her from her brain or something."

"Have you seen The Exorcist?" said Jen.

"It's scary," said Aislin. "I'm worried," she said.

"And now we're leaving her with dad," I said.

"I know," said Aislin, "I'm worried."

"We can call her as soon as we get there," said Jen, "don't worry, you guys."

"Look, you just don't want your big old summer ruined," said Aislin.

"Aislin!" I said.

"Sorry," said Jen. "I was just trying...to...help," she said to me.

"I know," I said.

"Sometimes I hate you," said Aislin.

"Don't you dare say that to my best friend!" I said.

"I'm not," said Aislin. She reached into her bag and pulled out a pack of Camel cigarettes.

"Oh joy, and she smokes too," said Jen.

We had to wait for an hour before they loaded us onto the ferry. "How long is this ride?" said Jen, as we parked the car.

"Three hours," I said.

"Hurry up!" said Aislin, "We'll miss the sendoff!" She ran towards the deck.

"It's sort of a big deal." I told Jen, "You know, the whole heading out to sea thing."

"Whatever," said Jen.

We giggled and hugged as the boat pulled away from shore, and we watched the white, churning tornadoes in the water below us. My sister and I
wrapped our arms around each other as if we were children, in the white pinafore dresses of our childhood pictures, as if we were standing by the white picket fence of our first house. Roses grew thick around the pickets, and if my mother took any pictures when the roses were not in bloom, I have not seen them.

Jen said, “It’s fucking freezing,” and went inside to nap, soon after the wind began to whip over the deck. My sister and I sat outside on a paint-chipped bench. It was glorious to watch the land recede, and the Atlantic Ocean surround us like arms. The sun set while we sat there, and we could see its circle become a semi-circle of orange, a sliver, and then just a glow of remembrance. I stuck my legs through the hole between railings, and sat on the wet lower bar, and Aislin stood next to me, leaning into the wind. She wore a purple synchilla jacket over her sundress, and I rested my cheek against its nubby fabric, putting my arm around her back and leaning into the place under Aislin’s arm. Her hair blew around my face, and I could smell the tart apple shampoo she used. Aislin put her arm over my head and took my hand, drew it from the folds of my plastic raincoat. She squeezed her fingers around mine.

“Oh, Eva,” said Aislin. I squeezed her hand.

“Yes?”

“I want to be in love,” said Aislin.

We drove off the ferry in the fading evening. Jen pressed her fingers to the window as we drove through Edgartown. “It’s so damn quaint,” she said. The narrow road through Edgartown was empty, except for a few cars parked outside restaurants. “Let’s go get a drink,” said Aislin, pointing to the Edgartown Bar and Grille.

“Let’s get settled in,” I said. Aislin shrugged.

“Fair enough,” she said.

The road to Oak Bluffs and then Vineyard Haven ran along the beach. The sun had finished setting, and on either side of us, there was water. Rolled down
her window. "My God," she said, "Smell this air!"

I rolled down my window and breathed in. The air was warm and salty; the smell of sand. We drove through the town of Oak Bluffs, and Aislin pointed to Mama's Pizzeria. "Good plan," I said, and pulled in.

Mama's was empty. A young girl manned the counter. She wore a red shirt with a name tag that said, "ARIEL--WEST VIRGINIA."

"Can I help you?" she said. She wore cowboy boots.

"You're from West Virginia?" said Aislin. The girl nodded. She stifled a yawn in a pink fist. "How interesting," said Aislin.

"Why?" said the girl.

Aislin looked shocked, pulled out of her polite banter. "It's just something to say," said Aislin.

"Yeah," said the girl.

Vineyard Haven was largely undeveloped, and we had to drive down a dirt road bordered on either side by forest to reach our house. The trees were lush and crickets sounded in the depths of the woods. When it rained, our road became unmanageable, its packed dirt turned to slippery mud. The smell of the air was less salty here. I had tried to bottle the air here once, opening an empty soda bottle in New York expecting the earthy smell of summer. The bottle had smelled of sugary soda still.

We took the third fork off the road. As we turned off, I slowed. "Roll down the window and grab the mail?" I said to Jen. I stopped next to the metal mailbox. Along its edge, "DOHERTY" was painted in red; the "Y" was almost worn off. Jen pulled the mailbox door open with a sharp sound and pulled a few letters from inside.

"Give them here," said Aislin. "Bill, bill, gardening catalog, letter," said Aislin. I put the car in drive and she opened the letter. "We're cordially invited to a baby shower for Mindy Finnegan," she said.

"Who the hell is that?" I said.
Anyway, it was in March,” said Aislin. I drove slowly along the de that led to our house.

“Hear the waves?” said Aislin. We were on the far end of the island.

“No,” said Jen.

“Well, I hear them,” said Aislin, “Anyway.”

Our house was on the edge of the forest and the edge of the sea. It had three bedrooms, and a screen porch that ran along the whole house. We had redone the plumbing years before, but when Aislin and I were small, the only shower had been outdoors. I pulled next to the garage and turned off the motor. Inside the garage were rusty bikes, gardening and fishing gear, assorted flip flops, a hammock, and foul weather gear for sailing. My parents had bought the house when they were first married; it held our lifetime of stuff.

The moon shone through the branches of trees and glinted off the windows of the house. The silence around us was wrapped in the sound of ocean waves and pierced by bird and cricket cries. “God,” said Jen. I smiled at her.

The first day of summer always made me happy. The key to the house was underneath a flat rock, its imprint hard in the mud. We unlocked the house and turned on all the lights. In the living room, there was a painting of my mother, Aislin, and me. We are sitting next to a picket fence and a rosebush in bloom. My mother is serene; my father sent the painting back three times because my mother’s smile was “too pretty.” It is just a trace of a smile now. Aislin was a baby, and my mother persuaded the painter to add blonde curls where her soft pate was bare. I am looking down at a rose in my hand. The rose looks like a crumpled piece of paper. Whenever I see the painting, I am surprised. In it, we are so lovely.

“We’re HOME!” said Aislin. She stood in the living room with her hands on her hips. “Let’s eat,” she said. I went into the kitchen and got plates and silverware.

“We need to go shopping,” I said. We opened the cardboard pizza box, and we ate, the grease slipping over our lips and fingers.
We called our mother, and she sounded fine, if a bit tired. She was going out to dinner with the Albert's, to a new restaurant in Port Chester. “Everyone is raving about it,” she told me, “It’s called Republic. Some kind of funky Chinese, apparently.”

“She’s going out to funky Chinese,” I said to Aislin, who sat next to me on the bed in our parent’s room. “In Scarsdale,” I said.

“Republic?” said Aislin. I nodded. She rolled her eyes. “It’s Thai,” she said.

“Mom,” I said, “It’s Thai food.”

“Oh,” she said, “Well take care, you two. And don’t run the vacuum cleaner and the air conditioner at the same time. What, Larry? Hold on,” I heard my father’s low tone in the background. “He says not to eat all his macadamia nuts.”

“Okay,” I said.

“Let me talk to her,” said Aislin.

“I love you, mommy,” I said, and handed Aislin the phone.

“Mom, has anybody called for me?” she said. “Well can you get them?” she said. “Oh, Jesus. Well, call tomorrow, okay? I’m sorry, I’m sorry. Jeppers, I meant,” Aislin looked at me and shook her head. “Mom,” she said, “Will you be careful? No, really, I mean it. I’m worried about you, I feel like something bad is going to happen. Okay. But, wait, will you call us tomorrow? Okay, okay, say hello to Mrs. Albert, okay? But wait, mom, I love you. Call tomorrow, don’t forget. Bye, wait mom, it’s Thai food, which is different than Chinese. Okay, bye.” She hung up the phone.

“What’s the matter with you?” I asked her.

“I can’t explain it,” she said.

Aislin and I slept in our room, and Jen slept on the pull-out couch. “Sleep in the guest room, for Christ’s sake,” Aislin told Jen, but Jen said that she would rather sleep on the couch. Aislin rolled her eyes. In our room, she told me, “Your
friend is way too intense.”

“We’ll rearrange tomorrow,” I told her. I unpacked my clothes and lay them in piles in the corner. There was an old dressing table in our room, and when Aislin went into the living room to read her trashy romance novel, I looked into the mirror for a time. My eyes looked like my mother’s, before hers had become ruined with lines.

Later, I watched my sister’s body against the sky. She moved every once in a while, to push a strand of hair from her brow where the breeze had blown it, or to roll over, rising on her side to pull her notepad from the bedside table. As she moved, her body blocked parts of the window from me: when she lay flat, I could see the glow from the moon above us, and the outlines of leafy trees. When she rose to write, she covered the moon, and I could only see her body—the full breasts, the round buttocks, the curve of her short nose—and the darkness around it. The sound of waves accompanied her rustling movement.

She was writing a list in that notebook: Want Ads, Waitressing? Call Mom. What she scribbled now, late at night, I would not see until morning. She wrote phrases that came to her half-dreaming; she liked the way that words fit together. Sometimes she wrote words that she thought she had conjured in her dreaming but in the morning she would laugh and tell me, look at this, Eva! I wrote the words to that song and I thought they were my very own! That sort of a mistake would make me upset and sad, but Aislin thought it was funny. She found it amusing that her imagination was littered with pieces of the radio or television shows. This is an example of why people thought Aislin was stupid. She was not, and I knew, because she was my sister.

I did worry about Aislin, though. She was prone to days of sadness, and often became afraid that people around her would die. In her short life, six persons close to her had died. I knew she thought about them, and as I watched her in the dark, I wondered which ghost she was dreaming of.
IV.
A Week of Aislin’s Dreams
a.k.a. The Seven People Aislin Has Known That Have Died

Sunday is Granpa. He was the first, and also he was religious. Aislin no longer attends mass (I still go once in a while, when my Catholic guilt overwhelms my personal integrity), so this dream will be a scary one, in which Granpa comes back from the dead to chastise Aislin and call her sinful. Granpa was brought up on a farm in Northern Ireland, and he and Carole, my grandmother, had a farm in Illinois. Granpa was a quiet man who used the belt when necessary. He gave the farm cats bones to pick the meat off of, and kicked the dogs but only when they deserved it. Granpa was always kind to us; we were girls and therefore did not need as much discipline. He was a tall fellow, but he stooped in his old age, and we only knew him in his old age. His hair was black once, but was grey and thin when we knew him. His eyes scared us. They were vacant, as if the strong-willed man who pulled metal tools through earth and made things grow had been gone—no, lost—before we were ever born. I know that Granpa did not like my mother. She was not Catholic and insanity ran in her family bloodline. She did not know the value of hard work, and made it clear in no uncertain terms (at the punch-and-cookies reception my Granpa and Carole gave for her, when she visited the farm for the first time in her frills and finery) that she was not the least bit interested in domestic duties, much less the backbreaking work of running a farm, thank you very much.

Granpa blamed my father’s problems on my mother, of course, and there was an Illinois farm girl named Betsy Brine who was mentioned more than once at family gatherings. Betsy, it seemed, never married, and ran the Children’s Room at the local library. “Now that is a good woman,” my Granpa would say. “And whoever knows,” he said, “what time might bring.” But by the time my mother was dead, so was Granpa, and perhaps he had his moment of glee wherever he was, in heaven, in the air, in the earth he so loved. The glee was short lived, I’m
sure, because my father never called Betsy, or any other woman. It seemed that my mother took all the love out of him, when she left.

But Monday night's dream: Aislin is sitting in a pew. She has gone to church, for once, and feels scared and nauseous. She always used to get dizzy and nauseous in church, and I thought in seventh grade, when I began to watch horror movies, that it meant she was the Devil's spawn. But nothing ever came of that hypothesis, though it did make my life interesting for while, always waiting for Aislin to reveal herself by bleeding green blood or screaming when my mother made garlic bread.

The church in the dream is dark. Granpa comes out of a confessional booth in a white robe. No, in the faded jeans he wore around the farm, and in his mud-caked boots. He carries a pitchfork. Aislin sees Granpa and tries to pray. She cannot remember a single prayer, because in Sunday School she always wrote notes to the boys instead of listening to Sister Francine. She begins to get frantic: if she could remember just one prayer, she thinks, Granpa would go away. But the words do not come. And the pitchfork comes closer. Granpa aims the tines at Aislin and begins to pick up his pace towards her. The sharp tines come closer and closer and Aislin can't remember just one single word to a prayer and the tines and she screams and the tines go into her but she doesn't feel a thing.

"I'm dead," says Granpa, "Remember? I'm gone." And he laughs, and it is even sadder than being killed by a pitchfork, and Aislin cries until morning.

Monday would have to be Jeremy Lowen. He was a classmate of Aislin's, and he died in sixth grade of leukemia. He was not very close to Aislin, but she went to visit him in the hospital when he got really ill, and became somber (for perhaps the first time in her life, as opposed to sullen, which she had been often during her formative years) in Jeremy's last weeks. Jeremy was in the chorus with Aislin, one of the few boys. He survives in a picture Aislin has tacked to her corkboard: third row, sixth from the right: a short thin boy with wire-rimmed glasses and a tie that is too big for his frail neck. He was in remission during the
Christmas concert, but a few months after he and Aislin sang hymns, open-mouthed, Jeremy was back in the hospital. Aislin told me about it, and the dream would surely be in Jeremy’s bright hospital room.

He did not share the room with anybody (the Lowens had money) and the empty bed in Jeremy’s room was covered with stuffed animals that his relatives had brought him. Of the four hundred and twenty students at Rye High School, only four came to visit Jeremy during his last hospital stretch. Aislin was indignant, and made my mother drive her every afternoon after school to St. Roosevelt’s. She brought Jeremy comic books and candy. She brought him her stuffed bear and her favorite T-shirt. She made a card and got as many students as she could to sign it, carrying it with her to classes and after-school ballet club and chorus for three days.

The dream begins on the last day she carried the card. She got all the teachers to sign it, and fastened two balloons from Card N’ Gift to the top. Jeremy was very sick by now, and though his paled skin and bony elbows and knees would be the stuff of late night dreaming, he will not appear. For when Aislin reached St. Roosevelt’s, holding the card in her hand, the balloons following her down the hallway to Jeremy’s bright room, and she opened the heavy door, there was no body in the wide, crisp bed. The sheets were folded back, the blue cotton spread smoothed. “Where’s Jeremy?” Aislin will say, said, already, and she cried, and will cry, tears down her beautiful face, before anyone answers.

Wednesday is Mrs. Johannsen, Aislin’s eighth grade art teacher. She taught Aislin to make paper-mache hands, stone rubbings, collages, and pottery. Drawing was to have been in June, but Mrs. Johannsen was dead before then, and her replacement just taught them pottery again. Mrs. Johannsen was a heavyset woman with thick fingernails and a mole on her cheek. Aislin put rubber cement in her coffee, to make Kim Holsen laugh, and when Mrs. Johannsen got cancer of the uterine lining, my mother had to take out three anatomy books from the library to prove to Aislin that the rubber cement had nothing to do with Mrs. Johannsen’s condition. Aislin made a pottery heart, the second time her class learned pottery,
and wrote "I Love You Mrs. Johannsen" on it. She keeps it on her desk, its glaze a glaring orange. Undoubtedly, the dream will have to do with the undeniable fact that Aislin did not love Mrs. Johannsen. She disliked her, truly, and made fun of her mole and even dressed up in a bathrobe and stuffed socks in a bra and imitated Mrs. Johannsen during the fall trip to Niagara Falls. The Wednesday dream will be in Niagara Falls, and it will be a happy dream, because instead of making fun of Mrs. Johannsen when Mrs. Johannsen pulls Aislin aside after the bus trip and tells Aislin to shut her trap, Aislin will hug her and say, "I love you, Mrs. Johannsen!" and then she will lead her class in a round of "For She's a Jolly Good Fellow." Mrs. Johannsen will blush, and the bus driver will give her a kiss on the cheek.

But I have forgotten Tuesday: Kim Holsen’s father. He died of a heart attack before Mrs. Johannsen. He was playing golf and was struck dead right there, in the sun. Tuesday’s dream will be a watching: Aislin will stand in a dim corner of a gymnasium which is decorated by colored streamers. She will sip a tangy punch and smell the rubber smell of sneakers and basketballs while she watches Kim, a girl with fine blonde hair, twirl around the dance floor in the arms of her father. Kim’s father was sneaky and short, with big nostrils. He will close his eyes and smile a small, contented smile. Aislin will be jealous of Kim and her father, but then she will remember, and she will not be jealous any more.

Thursday night is an explosion of flames. Joey Nichols drove into a wall on the way home from a party and killed his girlfriend, who was putting on lip gloss in the passenger seat. They were all seniors, older than me, but we had all seen Joey and Stacey (the girl friend) holding hands and kissing in the pizza parlor where Joey worked. Stacey had worn short skirts and tight sweaters, and Joey was the star of the basketball team. My father had known Stacey’s father, and we went to the wake. Joey Nichols did not die. He stood by the coffins (pictures of Stacey in her cheerleading skirt pinned to the walls) and wailed, a low and quiet sound that will be a part of Thursday’s dream. Aislin will imagine the fiery crash,
flames eating the Dodge car and part of Stacey’s sweet face, and Aislin will hear the sound that came from Stacey’s ravaged mouth. I hear that sound sometimes, and I shake my head, but sometimes it takes a while to go away.

Friday is Aislin’s best friend Lars. He was a lanky boy with a shy expression that changed quickly to a sneer if you turned your back. He moved to Rye when he was sixteen, and he played the guitar, sitting in our living room and strumming as Aislin sang nonsense words and lay with her head in his lap. He drove too fast and smoked all sorts of things. He came to the house with his eyes fogged over and his hair greasy. My mother used to say that if Lars didn’t clean up his act she’d close her door to him forever, but Lars would clean up periodically, combing his hair into clean furrows and bringing my mother chocolate or bouquets of crocuses. My mother would giggle and say, “Oh, Lars, you devil.” Aislin claims that she and Lars were only friends, but they twined their bodies around each other as if it were instinctive. Aislin always had his hand in hers, or her hands on his shoulder or his knee. They would drive off in the night and come back late and murmuring. In the October of Aislin’s sophomore year, she woke me in the middle of the night. “Oh, please, oh, please,” she said. She wore a gray wool sweater over jeans, and her hair was pulled back in a silver barrette. Her eyes were wide and vague. She was drunk, I could tell.

“Oh, what?” I said. I had a presentation on William Blake in my AP English class the next day.

“Oh, please,” she said, “Lars is sick.” We went down the stairs and into the kitchen. The door to the den was closed. Lars lay on the kitchen floor.

“Jesus,” I said, “What happened?”

“Oh, oh, please,” said Aislin. She slapped Lars’ face and rocked his shoulders back and forth. “I think he took something,” she said.

“We’re calling an ambulance,” I said.

“Oh, no, no,” said Aislin, but I picked up the phone. Lars’ face was grey, and he had dried yellow stuff on the sides of his mouth and around his nose.
"What did he take?" I asked, when the ambulances were on their way.

"I don't know, I don't know," said Aislin. She lay her body on top of Lars' and fit her cheek next to his. She said she was keeping him warm. It took the ambulance fifteen minutes to get to our house. When they rang the doorbell, my father came out of the den rubbing his face. He didn't say a word while they carried Lars past him on a stretcher.

Lars had snorted heroin, and it took a shot of adrenalin to save him. It took him another year to die. His mother was making coffee on a Wednesday morning. She went to turn off the television, and found Lars dead on the couch. He had choked on his own vomit, heroin running through his veins.

Aislin has a picture of Lars by her bed. It is a black and white picture, and he pays guitar on a lawn somewhere. Every night, Aislin listens to his favorite song--Moondance--five times. She kisses the picture and talks to Lars. When she thinks of him in the daytime, she kisses her fingers and touches them to her forehead. In her dreams of Lars, his year of being cruel is forgotten, the black nights of his shaking, clammy skin. Friday night is for the other days: flowers for my mother, and long drives in Lars' truck. Friday is the time before God really turned on Aislin.

Saturday is blank.
V.

When I waked, Aislin was already moving about the room, pulling silky corners out of her canvas bags, grabbing barrettes and earrings in handfuls. She was naked, pink from the shower, her hair in wet curls along her back. Her limbs moved independently of one another, one rosy thigh rising to step towards the dressing table while an arm reaches towards the closet. Her skin was not yet puckered, like mine is, along her thighs: it stretched tight as a helium balloon. Her body inspired in me both awe and a clenching envy: why did my mother and father’s genes, combining in twisting strands, take until the second child to manifest themselves in beauty?

The breasts especially. When it came down to it, as it always had, it was Aislin’s shuddering breasts--and the cavernous, inviting darkness between them--that I shied away from thinking about. I felt the desire that they inspired, the imagined running of one’s hands over the skin, filling one’s palm with flesh, one’s mouth. And because I understood the desire, I also had to acknowledge the wry disappointment that my own small breasts encouraged. I was loved despite, when I was loved.

“Up?” asked Aislin. She sat on the side of my bed and then reclined, her back sandwiching my comforter to my body. “We’re home,” said Aislin, and I brought an arm out from underneath the feathery warmth and I held her. I scratched her back, the way our mother used to do.

Jen and I filled out job applications all day. We rode our bikes to Edgartown and worked our way through Oak Bluffs back to Vineyard Haven. Aislin had applied for a lifeguard positions, and was waiting to hear. Jen and I had no skills, which was problematic. The coffee shops were nonplused with our technical naivete, and the restaurants didn’t want to gamble on homely girls who shrugged a lot. Jen and I weren’t ugly, but we weren’t knock-out, that’s for sure. We both had problems with self-esteem. A day of filling out applications for minimum-wage jobs and putting them into thick piles of the same made us edgy.
In Vineyard Haven, Jen said, “We deserve an egg cream.”
“I agree,” I said, “We certainly do.”

We went to The Royal Cafe and ordered chocolate egg creams. “Only in Massachusetts,” said Jen, “Can you order an egg cream and not get an insult or a milkshake.”

“Well, New York,” I said.
She nodded. “Maybe Chicago,” she said. I shrugged. “The job scene does not look promising,” said Jen, “If you don’t mind my saying so.”

“It’ll work out,” I said.

“Famous last words,” she said. Our egg creams arrived, with tall silver spoons. It was not yet hot outside, and we sat on the deck in the sun. Even away from the ocean, salt hung in the air, and the smell of burned coffee beans.

“Okay,” said Jen, after a sip, “The thing is, I need a man.”

“Me too,” I said.

“You need to have sex,” said Jen. She pointed her spoon at me accusingly. “You’re nineteen!” she said. “That’s pathetic,” she said. Jen had had sex three times already: Bill Larken (next door neighbor, hot summer night in tenth grade, in her backyard hammock), Sam Zarou (yearbook editor, Junior Prom night, his Dodge Dart), and Xander Smith (understudy for Wall in the Williams’ Players production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream, a leafy fall night, behind the Sociology shelves at the library).

“It’s not that I couldn’t have had sex,” I said.

“This morality thing,” said Jen, “You have got to get over it.”

“It’s hard,” I said, “You’re not Catholic.”

“Yeah, yeah,” she waved her spoon dismissively, and then leaned in towards me. “What’s the point, exactly?” she asked.

“Well,” I said, “Sex is better with love, is the point.”


“Well, I guess if I’m not in love then I’d rather be doing something else,” I
said. "I know it sounds dumb," I said.

"It doesn't sound dumb," said Jen. She picked up her cup and drained her egg cream. "But you should fall in love, then," she said.

"That's true," I said.

That night, I told her about Bernard. I had never talked about it before. We had just made dinner, and were sitting on the rug by the phone waiting for a job offer to call. Jen had made stir fry, with broccoli and carrots. We balanced the plates on our laps, and tried to eat with chopsticks.

We had been discussing the merits of cashier jobs (cute guys buying groceries, easy to steal staple items, low potential for embarrassing fuck-ups) versus waitress jobs (lots of money, cute guys buying dinner, easy to pick uneaten food off plates, high potential for friend-making at staff parties and softball games). Jen had said, "But then there's the pouring of wine," and I had said, a propos of nothing, "There is somebody I sort of love." There was a silence.

"What?" said Jen.

"Bernard," I said.

"What?" said Jen.

"He's a friend of my dad's," I said, "From when he was in rehab."

"A friend of your dad?" said Jen, "Gross."
I offered, "He's a jazz musician." Jen chewed thoughtfully.

"That's cool," she said.

"He's older. And he's tall with long hair. There's something about him, I don't know. I love him, is the thing."

"But a friend of your dad?" Jen said. She shook her head, her red hair swinging, her eyebrows raised. She speared a carrot. She appeared to be thinking.

"The question is," said Jen, after a moment, "Does this Bernard love you?"

"I don't know," I said. "It doesn't really seem like it," I said.

Jen nodded. "Hmm," she said.

"But maybe," I said. Jen kept nodding. I took a breath. "But I wouldn't--
do you think—God wouldn’t make me fall in love with someone who wouldn’t love back, you know?”

“Honey,” said Jen, “God has nothing to do with this.” I was getting annoyed.

“This isn’t a joke, Jen,” I said, “There’s really something there--really.”

“What does it feel like?” asked Jen.

“Like it’s a constant strain not to think about him,” I said, “Like it’s killing me.”

“Wow,” said Jen.

“I’m not trying to impress you,” I said, “I’m serious. I sound like I’m kidding, but I’m serious.

“I hear you,” said Jen, “What can I do?”

“Help me,” I said.

“Do you want to stop loving him?” she said.

After a moment, I said, “No.”

“This is a tough one,” said Jen. It was then that the phone rang, and it was Vineyard Clambake Catering. They offered Jen a job, and I finished my dinner while she discussed logistics with her new boss. I washed my plate and cup, and I heard Jen call her mother with the news. I went upstairs and tried to read. There was nothing Jen could tell me.

Murdick’s Fudge called the next morning. I was asleep. Aislin came and shook me awake. “Get up! Get up!” said Aislin, “Murdick’s Fudge is on the phone!”

I shook my head to clear the sleep from it. Aislin put the plastic receiver next to my ear. “Hello?” I said.

“Hello!” said the man, “Murdick’s Fudge, here! Is this Eva Doherty?”

“Yes,” I said.

“How would you like to be the new member of the Murdick’s Team?” said the man.
"I'd love to," I said. Aislin mouthed, Fudge? She covered her mouth and began to laugh. I scowled at her.

The man gave me the details: come in the next day at eight. Be clean, and have my hair in a well-groomed ponytail. "None of that headband crap!" said the man, "None of that bandanna business!" I was to wear sneakers, and to have a smile in my pocket. "We're run out of Mackinaw Island, Michigan," the man told me. "We're a Midwestern business, and we're a family business, and you're a part of our family now."

"Thank you," I said.

"See you bright and early!" said the man. "Ask for me--George. My wife Bess and I run the operation."

"Thanks," I said. I hung up the phone.

"Jen!" yelled Aislin, "Eva's going to be making FUDGE!"

"Shut up!" said Jen, running into the room.

"Yeah, big sister!" said Aislin.

"Shut up," I said, "All of you." I rolled over and covered my head with the sheet.

"Fudge," said Aislin, "Can you believe it?" Her skinny lifeguard bathing suit hung by the door.
VI.

Aislin got us a free pass to the Edgartown Beach Club, and Jen and I went for the day. It was hot and humid, and we brought a cooler full of Diet Coke. Jen knew that I was afraid of swimming, and when we went in the water, we only went up to our waists. The waves were mild and lapped around us. “Isn’t this fabulous?” said Jen.

“Sure is,” I said.

“Why don’t you learn to swim this summer,” said Jen, “I’ll teach you.”

“No,” I said, “That’s okay.”

“Really, come on,” said Jen. Water had always terrified me, and I had nightmares of being submerged with no way to breathe. “We can have a private clinic, just for us,” said Jen. I sighed. I had had years of lessons at our golf club, and had never been able to assuage my terror of having my head under water, despite the diligent efforts of teenaged lifeguards who my mother would pay five dollars an hour to coach me.

“This is the first kid I’ve failed with,” said one, a blonde short boy with a thin moustache. My mother had sighed and taken me by the hand.

“I’ve tried hard enough,” she said, “I’ve done all I can do. You’re on your own from here on out, Eva.” I had nodded, and I have not been more than waist-deep since.

“Jen, I really don’t want to.”

“Come here,” she said. She stood behind me and put her hands under my armpits. “Now lean back, she said.

“I really don’t--” I said. She tugged back.

“Lean!” she said. I did as told. I kept my feet on the ground and bent my knees awkwardly as she lowered my back to the water. “Let your feet float,” said Jen.

“I can’t,” I said.

“You can,” said Jen. I lifted one foot. I lifted the other. I floated on my back for a second, and then I panicked. I kicked my feet back to the ground.
“See?” said Jen, “You did it!”

“Okay, good,” I said.

“The first step,” said Jen, “We’ll have you swimming by the end of the summer!”

“Whatever,” I said, and I heard the whistle. I looked up to see Aislin standing on the guard chair. She had the binoculars to her eyes and I followed her line of vision. A man was stuck in a Sunfish sailboat, the wind dead and the man miserably paddling towards shore. Aislin blew her whistle again and ran towards the water. She dove in and swam towards the man with sure, even strokes.
June 1992  
Vineyard Haven  

Dear Aunt Betty,  

How are you? I don't know when you'll get this, but I wanted you to know that I'm doing my best to be happy here in the Vineyard. You'll understand, I know, how tough it is that Aislin always has men hanging around, and Jen and I basically stand around her feeling dumb. I don't know what I would do without Jen, though.

I got a job at Murdick's Fudge. I wear a brown-and-white checkered apron, and I have to smile and serve up the gooey stuff. I thought that I would get sick of it, but I haven't yet!!

So, I need some advice. I can't stop thinking about this guy that lives in New York. He's older than me, and most people, I know, would say it was childish or silly, but I really think I love him. So, what would you suggest? It's kind of tearing me up all the time. Should I tell him? Should I play it cool?

I just don't know what to do in things like this, and my mom and Aislin know it all so well that they can barely understand how to explain--you know? I'm just hoping you can help me.

Love,

Eva
Aislin found a beautiful new boyfriend. His name was Jim, and he lifeguards with her at the Beach Club. Jim was tall and had blonde hair that stuck straight up. He always looked bored, and only spoke to Aislin, whispering wetly in her ear. She always had an arm or a leg wrapped around him, no matter what.

Aislin's eighteenth birthday was on July first. A week or so before, we were making enchiladas in the kitchen. Jim was chopping chicken with a paring knife. He wore a tank top. His shoulders were tanned already from the beach, and his hair was wet from showering. The back of his neck was red. I said, "So, Aislin, what should we do for your birthday?" and Jim said, "You can buy us all beer at the Safeway, baby," and I started laughing.

Aislin was sitting on the tall metal stool and she threw a tomato at me, and Jim said, "Why is your sister laughing?"

I opened the oven door and the heat hit my face and I said, "Have you seen her license?"

Jim said, "No."

Aislin was wearing those tiny jean shorts and her feet were bare and she stretched out her gorgeous legs and she wrapped them around that boy. She pulled him to her, and his arms went around her, his tanned biceps pulling at his fresh white shirt, and she said, "It's a terrible picture," and she kissed him without any tongue but a little too long, like a promise, and she held him there with her legs around his waist, daring him to disbelieve her.

"Okay, whatever," said Jim, and when I left and went up to my room, they were still wrapped around each other. I knew Aislin would mess up dinner but I didn't care.
IX.

It was at a party at someone's house. Jen and I had driven over in my little car. We had parked in the throng of cars and walked towards the house. We could hear loud reggae music, and the beat ran through me and made my heart beat fast. I had bought a new perfume that smelled of lavender and lemon. My hair was still damp from my shower, and I wore jean shorts with sandals and a tight T-shirt. Jen wore a miniskirt and a T-shirt. She had braided her hair into low pigtails. On the drive over, we had sung show tunes into the rushing wind.

"Whose house is this anyway?" said Jen.

"Beats me," I said. There were people everywhere. It was a hot night, and most faces glistened with sweat. There was a keg on the side of a long wooden deck. I went into the kitchen and got two ceramic mugs from a cabinet. The kitchen smelled of tomatoes. Jen and I filled our mugs at the keg. We stood awkwardly by the screen door. We didn't know anybody. Aislin was supposed to meet us.

"Hey, girls," said a tan boy with black hair.

"Hey," said Jen.

"This is my house," said the boy, "I'm Bruce."

We shook hands. "If you ladies need anything, just ask," said Bruce, and he smiled and went away. He looked back and yelled, "There's hard stuff in the basement!"

Jen looked at me and I shrugged. "In a little while," I said. She nodded. We stood and listened to the hum of voices. We drank beer. After a while, I said, "Oh, fuck, let's go have a few shots."

"Where the hell is your sister?" said Jen. It was hard for both of us that people liked Aislin better. We pushed through the kitchen to the basement stairs. They were wooden and unstable. In the basement, there was a makeshift bar, and it was unbearably hot. Aislin was sitting on a boy's lap with a bottle of vodka in her hand. She wore a silky tank top with ribbons for straps. She was not wearing a bra. Her hair tumbled over her shoulders like a waterfall.
“Aislin!” said Jen. Aislin and the boy turned around. The boy was not Jim. Aislin put her fingers over her forehead like an awning.

“Oh hey!” she said, “It’s my big sister!” Suddenly, I did not know what to do with my arms. They felt awkward at my sides. I put my hands on my hips. The basement smelled of pot. It was dark and grey. I could not smell my perfume, or my shampoo.

“Want a drink, guys?” said Aislin. She waved the vodka bottle. In one hand, she held the bottle and a lit cigarette.

“Yes,” said Jen. She wrenched the bottle from Aislin and took a long swallow. She held it out to me. I took a sip, and my throat burned. Aislin’s pupils were wide; she was stoned.

“I’m Eva,” I said, holding out my hand to the boy underneath my sister. He stared at me.

Jen said, “Hello?”

“He’s a little fucked up,” said Aislin in a stage whisper. She kissed the boy’s cheek. “Aren’t you, Ben?” she said, “Ben works with me at the club.”

“Really,” I said.

“Ben,” said Aislin, “My sister can’t even swim!”

Ben started laughing, and then laughing harder. Aislin slapped his knee and giggled. “Not a stroke!” she said, “A stroke, not a stroke,” she said, and caressed his arm, “Not a stoke like a poke,” she said. Ben looked puzzled, but laughed anyway.

“I’m going upstairs,” I said.

“Let’s go,” said Jen, and then she turned to Aislin. “You’re a real bitch, you know that?” she said.

“Oh, yeah, I know that,” said Aislin. She laughed louder.

Ben said, “I know that, too."

Jen and I stood around the kitchen, where we had found some of Jen’s friends from work. She had gotten a great job setting up clambakes for a catering
company. Her friends were quiet and vegetarian. They stood around the kitchen uncomfortably. One boy held his beer to the light. He looked at me. He said, “What hops are used in this beer, for example.”

I did not know what to say. I had nothing to say.

“Hops,” he said, “Are more important than most people think.”

“I suppose so,” I said. I couldn’t stop thinking about Aislin, and what she was doing in that dark basement.

“It’s true,” said the boy.

Around midnight, I had to go to the bathroom. I knocked on the door, but nobody answered. I opened it a crack. “Hello?” I said. There was no answer and I pushed it open.

The bathroom was not empty. Aislin and Ben were kneeling on the floor, snorting lines from a mirror that they had balanced on the toilet seat. Ben did not look up as I came in.

“Hey, sister!” said Aislin. I stared at her. She had white around her nose and her face was flushed. She leaned over the toilet in her short skirt, and I could see her underwear. “That’s my sister,” she said to Ben. He nodded. “Or it’s a dream,” she said. She laughed. She looked right at me, and her eyes were wild.

“Ais, what are you doing?” I said. Ben laughed.

“Ais, what are you doing,” said Aislin in a singsong voice. “What are you doing,” she said, “Is the question.”

I stood in the doorway for a minute, trying to think of just one thing to say. Aislin ignored me, leaning over the toilet and holding her hair back with one hand. She breathed quickly and expertly through a rolled tube of paper. I couldn’t think of any words. I slammed the door and ran.

I went outside to be by myself. The night was spinning, and I realized I was drunk. I shook my head to clear it; Aislin needed me now. I knew her like this, because she was just like my father, and I knew him well.

I went inside to find Jen and ask for her help. We had to get away from this party, I knew, and lay Aislin down until she calmed. Jen was not in the kitchen.

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She was not in the bathroom. I took a breath and went down to the basement. The smoke was thick by now, and the reggae music was deafening. My eyes burned.

After a time, I became accustomed to the darkness. I could see groups of people against the walls, bending over bong pipes and gesturing with their hands. The voices and laughter were deafening. I knew I would find Aislin in this place. She was in the middle of a group of people, talking quickly and animatedly. I heard her voice before I saw her. “And I was like, I’m a woman, you know? I don’t need this shit, you know?” she was saying. Everyone was laughing, some leaning over and holding their stomachs. They couldn’t stop laughing. “I’m a woman, you know?” said Aislin. Ben stood behind her. He put his arms around her small waist and pulled her towards him. He kissed her neck, and his hand—his fleshy hand—moved up her stomach. “Somebody give me a fucking cigarette,” said Aislin. Ben’s hand moved over her breast and she turned around to kiss him deeply, her jawbone sharp in the muted light. Someone handed her a lit cigarette and she smoked it. Her eyes were terrifyingly wide. Ben moved his fingers over her breast. I wanted to take her away from all this. I wanted her to be alone with me, and I wanted to be her, in a throng. I drank from my mug of beer, and I stood alone in the corner of a dark basement. I watched my beautiful sister.

The cops came around three. When they heard the sirens, people ran for their cars. I was pushed up the stairs of the basement, and down the deck steps. I lost sight of Aislin, but by my car I found Jen. “Where are they keys?” said Jen, “Let’s go!”

“What about Aislin?” I said.

“She’s got her own deal,” said Jen.

“What do you mean?” I said.

“She deserves to be arrested,” said Jen.

“She does not,” I said. People ran by the car, and three police cars pulled into the driveway, lights flashing.

“Can we discuss this at another time?” said Jen, “Can we please vamos?”

“I can’t just leave her,” I said.
"At least pull down the road," said Jen. I nodded. I started the car, and then I heard her.

"Get the fuck OFF ME!" yelled Aislin.

"Here we go," said Jen. She put her head in her hands. Two cops were coming towards the parking lot, each holding one of Aislin’s arms. Her hands were cuffed behind her. She was screaming and kicking wildly, her hair like snakes. The policemen looked bored.

"Oh, God," I said. Jen’s lips were pressed together. She shook her head.

"We have to go get her," I said.

"We don’t have to," said Jen.

"What?" I said.

"Maybe she could use a fall," said Jen.

"She’s my sister," I said, "We’re in this together. You’ll never understand that." Jen looked at me.

"Fuck you, Eva," she said.

"You’re an only child!" I said, "That’s all I meant. It’s not like I wouldn’t get you out of jail!"

"I know," said Jen. "The difference is," she said, "I wouldn’t put you in this position."

"Well, Aislin is different," I said.

"You’re telling me," said Jen.

They wouldn’t let us see Aislin at the police station. They had arrested ten people from the party, and they told us to come back in the morning. "In the morning?" I said, "You’ve got to be kidding me."

"Not only that," said the policeman, "But you’re going to need five hundred dollars for bail."

"That’s insane!" said Jen.

"Your sister’s gotta whole lot of charges against her," he said. "Why don’t you kids go home and get some sleep. Come back with the money in the
morning." Jen and I walked out of the jail. It was still dark. We sat on the steps and I lit a cigarette.

"Well this sucks," Jen said.

"I'm afraid," I said, "She's in a jail cell, my God." The steps were warm from the previous day's sun, but they were hard and I could feel my bones against the marble. I sighed. "How the hell are we going to get five hundred dollars?" I said. I knew that Jen got paid in cash. She didn't say anything. "What should we do?" I said.

"I've got a hundred," said Jen, "at the house. You know I do."

I looked down. Jen put her hand on her knees. "Well," she said, standing up, "we've got some people to visit."

We went to our house first. Jen got her hundred dollars from her underwear drawer. I had twenty dollars in my backpack. We made a thermos of coffee. Jen sat down at the kitchen table. She took a pencil from the jar by the phone and wrote on a piece of newspaper. "We have a mission," she said. I sat at the table with her.

"Thanks," I said, "I know Aislin will appreciate this."

"You know I'm doing this for you," said Jen. I nodded. I knew.

First on the list was Jim. He was rich, and he had friends. Then we would try Danny, who worked with me at the fudge shop, and the guys he lived with. Jen's friends would be next, and then any ideas Jim could come up with. At worst, I had the key to Murdick's fudge. "I am not," said Jen, "robbing a fudge store."

Jim lived in Edgartown, in a huge compound by the water that his family owned. There was a locked gate at the front. We parked outside it. "Jesus," said Jen, "What if there's an attack dog or something?"

"I'll go," I said. I scaled the fence. I jumped down onto a soft lawn. There was no sound. The compound had three houses, and there were no lights on in any of them. In the middle, there was a pool, which glowed eerily. Nothing attacked me.
"No dogs," I said. Jen jumped down next to me.

"I hate your sister," she said, but she was grinning. She loved adventure. Her braids had become loose, and tendril framed her face. "Which is Jimmy boy's?" she said.

"Aislin said it's the closest one to the water," I said. We looked at the three houses, spaced evenly along the shore. Jen raised her eyebrows. We started to laugh.

"Let's begin with the mansion on the far right," said Jen. We ran past the pool. We found twigs on the lawn and were trying to decide which window to throw them at when we heard a door open. A light in the middle house went on. I dove to the ground and Jen followed. We held hands in the grass, my heart beating fast. Jen was giggling.

"This isn't funny," I whispered, "Who's going to bail us out?"

"Hello?" said a voice. It was Jim. I sighed, and got to my knees. "Who's there?" said Jim, "Aislin?"

"It's me," I said, "Eva."


"Hey, guys," he said. He did not seem the least bit disturbed to find us on our knees on his lawn in the middle of the night. "What's up?" he said. He was wearing cotton shorts and a polo shirt. He had a beer can in his hand.


"You guys want to come in?" he said. We followed him into his house. The entrance hallway had high ceilings and wooden floors. He led us to the living room, where he pointed to a green leather couch. "Want anything?" he said.

"Jim," I said, "Aislin is in jail."

"I think I'll have another brewski," said Jim. I looked at Jen, and she shrugged.

"I'll have a gin and tonic," she said.

"Sure thing," said Jim. He went to the bar and placed ice cubes in a glass with tongs.
“Eva?” he said.

“Fine, sure,” I said. He mixed two strong drinks, and got himself a beer from the tiny refrigerator. He sat down in a leather chair opposite ours.

“So I missed a good party,” he said.

“Aren’t you worried?” I said.

“It’s just Edgartown,” he said, “She’ll be out in the morning, what fifty dollars bail?”


“Five hundred?” he said.

“There was a lot of fucked up shit going on,” I said.

“We need another four hundred dollars,” said Jen.

Jim nodded. We gave him a minute to let things sink in. I sipped my gin and tonic. Jim had put a nice big wedge of lime in it. I picture Aislin here, sipping a cool drink. I pictured her leaning over a toilet, her underwear showing.

“I’ve got some money here,” said Jim. He got up and left the room.

“I hope he doesn’t break up with her,” I said. Jen looked at me, incredulous.

“She doesn’t deserve this,” said Jen, waving her hand. She picked up an ashtray. “This,” she said, shaking it, “This alone is worth your fucking car,” she said.

“We all deserve this,” I said. I leaned back and put my feet, wet with mud, on the glass-topped coffee table. I sipped my drink. “Ah, the good life,” I said.

Jen put her feet next to mine. “But you’d have to talk to Jim all day,” she said.

I laughed. “Good point,” I said.

“I’d rather give up the ashtray,” said Jen. I smiled. It wasn’t true. We both wanted someone to love us.

Jim came back with his hands full of money. “All the hiding spots,” he said. He lay it on the table and we counted: three hundred dollars and change.

“We just need another eighty or so,” I said.
"Should we go to Danny's?" said Jen.

"We could," I said, "But I barely know the guy."

"We can go to my friend Paolo's," said Jim, "He loves Aislin."

We took Jim's Jeep. He had taken the doors and roof off, and the wind was warm on my face. Paolo was a friend of Jim's from Yale, and he lived with a bunch of people along the main street in Oak Bluffs. "Paolo's Italian," said Jim. Jen and I looked at each other and grinned. "But he's still cool," said Jim, "You can hardly even tell."

Paolo's house was still lit up. In the living room, a group of guys was watching TV and smoking pot. The house smelled like sour laundry. We walked in, and nobody looked up. There was cartoon on the television. Some of the guys were hot.

"Where's Paolo?" said Jim. One boy, who was not hot, raised his arm and pointed to the back of the house. A cartoon character said, "Well I'll be," and they all chuckled.

"Come on," said Jim. He knocked on a door.

"Yeah?" said a deep voice.

"Paolo, it's Jim."

"Come in," said Paolo, and Jim pushed the door open. Paolo was sitting on the floor of a small room. He had thin black hair, which was loose around his face. He had a spare beard and was as pale as milk. His face was like a child's: smooth and not quite finished. His chest was skinny and bare, and a sleeping bag covered him. He was reading The Sheltering Sky. A water glass filled with red wine rested on the floor next to an empty ashtray. There were no windows in the room, and a picture of Elvis was taped on the wall.

"Nice room," said Jen.

"It's a closet, honey," said Paolo.

"I see," said Jen. She looked at me and rolled her eyes.

"We need a favor, man," said Jim, "This is Aislin's sister Eva, and this is
“Charmed,” said Paolo.

“Aislin’s in jail,” said Jim, “and we need some bail money.”


“Anyway,” said Jim, “Have you got any cash?”

“I do,” said Paolo. He reached over to a pile of books, upon which rested a cigar box. He opened the cigar box and said, “How much?”

“A hundred,” said Jen. Paolo counted five bills and closed the box. He handed the money to Jim.

“I’ll pay you back,” said Jim. Paolo nodded.

“Nice to meet you,” said Jen.

“It was,” said Paolo. As we closed the door, Paolo said, “Eva!”

I leaned back inside. He looked at me. “It was nice to meet you,” he said.

“Me too,” I said. I didn’t know quite what was happening. Paolo looked at me.

“Come on,” said Jen. I left.

“Oh thank God,” said Aislin, when she came out escorted by a skinny policeman. The jail smelled like Lysol, and its hallways were light blue. Aislin was wearing her same tank top and skirt, and the officer handed her a plastic bag with her earrings and money. She signed some forms. She had a court date in six weeks. She was charged with drunken and disorderly behavior. She had not had any drugs on her person. “Take this as a damn sure warning,” said the police officer.

“So I shared a cell with this woman,” said Aislin in the car. Her hand was on Jim’s knee. He was driving. “She had been arrested for putting her husband’s face in a fan”

“Wow,” said Jim. He was wearing sunglasses and smiling. His arm was around the back of Aislin’s seat, and his fingers touched her hair.
“She told me,” said Aislin, breaking into a growling voice, “She said, ‘I’d kill all a youse guys to get outta here.’ She was fat, too. It was a nightmare, and absolute nightmare.”

“You did get in a fight with police officers,” said Jen.

“My little criminal,” said Jim. Aislin did not look at me.
Hello Girls!
Hope you're having an absolute ball in the Vineyard--don't eat too much lobster!
Things here are busy, what with golf and tennis and the Twig Show... Tory had me over for dinner last night--we had fabulous shrimp pasta and wine. Kimberly is staying home this summer and working for her dad in the city. She says she wants to come visit you all. Here is twenty dollars--go buy yourselves some ice cream!
Your father sends all his love, I'm sure.
XXOO Mom

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Eva & Aislin--Wish you could come--thinking of you--
Part Two: July

I.

My mother arrived at the house during Aislin’s birthday party. Though we didn’t know many people, the party was large—word travels fast on a small island. Jen told me later that four people told her they had heard about the party from the liquor store. “Nothing to do on a Saturday,” one boy told her, “You just stop in at the package store and ask where they’re delivering a keg.” This is the type of people we were dealing with. This is the type of people my mother walked into, expecting a refuge from her shattered life.

Jen and I had planned the party for a week. Jen’s job was getting better and better. She got to meet all the famous people who came to Martha’s Vineyard, and one night, James Taylor bought her a beer. She brought home the leftovers sometimes and we’d have a feast at three in the morning, eating clams and cornbread and fudge that I had stolen. The night my mother came, a clambake had been canceled and we had bought all the food for half-price. Jen’s bosses had come over, my friends from the fudge store, and all the Edgartown Beach Club staff, even the cabana boy, who was ten. We had a keg and people were dancing and kissing and groping all over the house that my mother and my father had bought to grow old in. The night ferry comes in at midnight, so my mother got to the house at twelve-thirty.

I was upstairs when she arrived. I was in my room talking to the short boy named Danny who worked with me at Murdick’s Fudge. He made the fudge, stirring it and spreading it with a long, wooden pole, and I sold it. We worked from four to eleven p.m., so all day we went to the beach. Aislin got me in for free, and Danny brought beer in his red cooler. On the days Jen was off, Danny’s friend Colo would come, and we would spread out a scratchy blanket and Colo would play guitar. I had to work at four, and I was usually drunk by then. Once I forgot my shoes and had to stand with my feet under the popcorn pot until the
owner left, so he wouldn’t see my toes and fire me. Danny and I both wore brown and white checkered aprons, and smelled like fudge even on our days off. “Does it help you,” I asked Danny, “Or hurt you, in terms of scoring?”

“Oh, jeez,” said Danny. He had freckles and long brown hair that he had made into dreadlocks. I thought that he was cute, but I wished that he was taller. “I guess the fudge smell should be a turn on,” he said, “Don’t you think?” I believe that this was Danny’s way of flirting. He was smoking an unfiltered cigarette, and ashing into a vase. “This is really nice house,” he said, “By the way.”

“Thanks,” I said.

I did not notice that the music had stopped. Danny was telling me a story about his fraternity brothers at Brown, and Aislin told me later that she and Jim had been arguing at the end of the driveway, so she had seen the cab’s headlights as they twisted towards the house. Jim had said, “Oh good, someone called a cab,” and Aislin had said, “Don’t you leave don’t you dare walk away from me,” and Jim had stood upright, his hands on his hips, deciding, as the cab pulled into the drive and stopped. My mother got out, dressed in a hat and a matching summer coat, and, her body outlined in the glare of the cab’s lights, she said, “Hello, dear. You must be Jim,” and she held out her hand.

I do not tell my mother about my life. I tell her I’m fine, or I’m not fine. I tell her if I am sick, and how my classes are. But Aislin talks on the phone with my mother for hours, analyzing her relationships, and giving lurid details. I get to hear my mother’s fears and tragedies, and Aislin bombards my mother with her own. It is not a fair arrangement.

I’m sure Jim, even drunk, found the right thing to say. He was well-trained in greeting adults. My mother said to me later, “nice face, but a bit thin around the edges,” when I asked her how she liked him.

The first thing I heard was Jen’s voice, yelling. “Eva!” she said, “Your mom is here!” I thought it was a dream, and Danny said, “They’re fucking with you. Just listen to what we did then. So we were on the roof.” and my mother came up to her sewing room and found me on the floor in a pile of sleeping bags,
half-drunk and half-listening, deciding whether or not to kiss a short fraternity boy.

“My, my, my,” was what she said, and Danny looked up and focused his eyes on my mother, her summer coat off but her hat still on, and he said, “Ma’am?”

“I expect this house will be neat by morning,” said my mother, and I said “Okay,” and she turned smartly and her heels clicked down the hall and she opened her bedroom door and then shut it.

We kicked everyone except Jim and Danny out of the house, and cleaned up all the plastic cups and cigarette butts. “What the fuck?” Aislin kept saying.

“Is your mother, like, spontaneous?” said Jim.

“I’m just going to ignore that,” said Aislin. It seemed that she and Jim were still in a fight. It was hard to tell what the reason was. Aislin had a tendency, when she was drunk, to become melodramatic, to think she saw problems in every corner. And she would not listen to reason at these times; the problems or tragedies she suddenly notices were as real as rain to her. I wanted to pull Jim aside and tell him, “Don’t worry, this will pass,” but I knew he would not listen. I had never been in love, but I knew it then anyway: people in love can’t just wait, like the rest of us, for fear to pass.

We went to bed nervously--Aislin and Jim, who had been sleeping in my parents’ room, took sleeping bags behind the house. Jen went into my room, and Danny and I sat on the couch. “This is weird,” I told him, “I’m sorry, you can go.”

“I don’t want to go,” said Danny. He folded his knuckles and ran them along my cheek.

“I’m pretty fucked up,” I said, “My family, I mean.” Danny wore jeans that were too big for him, and beaded necklaces that we had bought in Oak Bluffs. I wanted to love Danny, but as he sat on my couch, his warmth around me, I realized that I did not. “I think you should go,” I told Danny, and I put my head in his lap. My mousy hair was thin, and he ran his fingers along my jawbone, along my too-big chin. At least my skin was fairly clear.
"Go to sleep," said Danny, and I stretched out my legs and felt his fingers in my hair and I slept. When I woke up, he was gone.
The Beginning of the Story I Know So Well
Savannah, 1963

Imagine her in her prime. A slight and well-bred Southern belle at her
debutante ball, moving across the floor of the Oglethorpe Club in Savannah,
looking up into they eyes of her father, a man who adored and paid for her.
Imagine the smile, the bright eyes that scarcely suspected people could be cruel.
The pixie haircut, smoothed over her ears moments before by the large and clumsy
hands her beaux, a wealthy boy who had been her playmate since childhood.

That summer, her beaux was Remy Barnhard. He was tall and rope-thin,
and wore suede buck shoes. He kept a flask of bourbon in his pocket, the same
flask that his father had kept in his pocket for the same sorts of occasions: slow, hot
dances on porches surrounded by azaleas. Yearning nights of over-clever words
between the girls and the boys, words twisted and tangled up, given and pulled
back like a tug of war.

Remy and my mother would almost have sex that night, her hand hot in his
through the course of the evening, her pearly fingernails grazing his chin and
raising the hairs on the back of his neck when they passed into the shadows of the
large ballroom, his skin flushed under his cool linen suit. She would let him almost
inside her, but not quite, leaving him writhing like her cat Sebastian, aching for her.
He would say, “Jesus Mary and Joseph, I need to find myself a Northern girl,” and
he would light a cigarette and fall back into his elbows, blowing smoke into the
thick summer sky.

My mother would laugh. She told me that she laughed for two reasons.
She had no doubt that he’d never leave her, for one thing; she knew the power of
her sparkling eyes and tight calves. She knew a secret, as well, for though Remy
would remain forever in Savannah, when fall came, my mother was heading to
New York. She would be a Northern girl, but she would no longer have any use
for Remy.

There is a picture of my mother leaving for the North. She stands on the

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platform of the train and blows a kiss to her father. He took the picture, it is his handwriting on the back of the filmy shot. My grandmother would have been too weak to stand in the crisp of the fall and the soot of technology. Doubtless, she was teary-eyed at home, sipping a cup of tea that Bea (or was it Betty by then?) had prepared when the picture was taken.

It is there, all of it: the wind of possibility curling the ends of her hair, the hat held on her head by narrow fingers, the abandonment of her outstretched arm throwing a kiss as if she had an unlimited supply. The North awaited her: new clothes, a clever husband (a Harvard man, perhaps, like her father), and vague thrilling activities that would eclipse the boiling stillness of long summer days with absolutely nothing to do.

It was not a thought in her mind. The casual open mouth in the picture—calling out a joke, perhaps, or a last goodbye—is testimony to the fact that a dark future was not a possibility she entertained. A mean husband, children who did not respect her, a sagging of her youth into bitterness that showed around her eyes and in her soft chin. It is not a possibility. Her future is bright, and she waves goodbye.
The house smelled of bacon: a greasy smell. Sunlight slanted over the living room couch, and I heard my mother's voice above the sizzle of breakfast. It had been a long time since I had eaten breakfast. My mother was singing a show tune. It sounded like a ballad; her voice made a reedy plaintive sound over the long vowels.

I walked to the kitchen door. "Mom," I said, "What's going on?"

"Good morning honey," she said, and she kissed my forehead. Her lips were dry; the kiss was perfunctory.

"Mom?" I said.

"Can't a mother visit her children?" said my mother, "Can't a woman vacation in her vacation house?" She looked at me, her eyebrow cocked. She looked terrible. The roots of her hair--a fragile grey--had grown out an inch or two, and the rich black of her dyed hair looked startlingly fake. She was still in her nightgown and the silk robe that matched it. I could see the fine bones of her arms outlined by the thin fabric. She was too thin, and looked like a girl; her womanliness suddenly something that she had always worn, like a coat, and that could be stripped from her, leaving her naked. She teased eggs in a frying pan, and the bones in her wrist stuck out.

I ate a piece of bacon from the paper towel on the counter. My mother's cat Billie ran in the sliding glass door. "You brought Billie?" I said.

"Are you kidding me?" said my mother. "Honey," she said, "Your father feeds him chicken bones." She imitated my father, he hands on her hips and her voice gruff, "On the farm, the cats picked the meat off the bones. Hell, we just threw 'em a carcass and let 'em at it!" She laughed too hard.

I was nervous. I had never seen her make fun of my father before, and this side of her scared me. She had never seemed angry, through all the fights, and I sensed that if she let her defeat turn the boiling corner into anger, there might be no end to it. It was better just to accept the way things were--she had told me that herself. "Sweetie," she told me once, "You've earned yourself a perfect life. I had
a perfect childhood, and I got a terrible adulthood. You," she had smiled sadly. "You get a perfect life once you leave."

My mother slid the eggs onto a plate. "Your sister and that lifeguard aren’t keeping any secrets from me, that’s for sure," said my mother, pointing out the door to the sleeping bags, barely visible through the trees. "Curled all up in each other," she said, "As if being outside makes it all OK." She shook her head. "Times have changed," she said.

I leaned sat on a stool and my back was sore. How long had Danny stayed, I wondered. I could still feel his fingers in my hair. I didn’t have to love him, after all, I told myself. I rubbed my eyes, and felt the slow pounding of a hangover. My throat was scratchy from cigarettes. I did not want my mother to smell me—my sins—and I said, "I think I’d like a shower!"

She didn’t answer. She stood with one hand on her hip and one holding an empty frying pan in the air. She hadn’t heard me. "Mom," I said, loud.

“Oh,” she said, and she put the frying pan down. "Ready for some breakfast?” she said. She smiled cheerily.

"Are you here for the weekend?” I said.

She picked up the newspaper from the counter. It was still rolled tightly and held with a rubber band. She rolled the band slowly off the paper, as if she were opening a gift and saving the paper and tape. She lay the paper on the counter next to the eggs and pushed it flat with her fingertips. "Wow," she said, "a girl got into a moped accident in Oak Bluffs."

"Mom," I said.

She looked up. "Honey, who knows?” she said, "Now do you want some yummy breakfast or what?"

I didn’t answer. Her bacon and eggs and her fresh orange juice made me mad. Her sallow skin and her eyes rimmed with shadows. I did feel sorry for her, a twinge of compassion, and I wanted to touch her, to run my fingers through her hair, but I also wanted to kick her—to take my foot from off the ground and kick her for ruining another summer, for blocking another way out. I closed my eyes.
"What happened?" I said slowly. She had never left him before, and I figured it had to be bad.

"Honey, what?" she said, serving me a plate and wrapping a fork and a knife in a cloth napkin.

"What the fuck?" I said. She put her hand, splayed, on her chest.

"Well, somebody's in a fine mood," she said. "Eat something and come back in a better mood, why don't you?" she said. She held the plate out to me. I sighed. I took the plate.

I went into the living room to eat, and the eggs were good. My mother began to sing in the kitchen. It occurred to me that maybe everything was fine. The orange juice was sweet, and I could hear birds outside the door.

"You don't even want to know, anyway," my mother yelled from the kitchen, "Believe me, you don't."

Aislin came in and I took my head out of my hands. "Sorry," I said, "I was just pulling my hair out." Aislin sat next to me on the couch and bit a piece of toast.

"Where's Jimmy boy?" I asked.

"Beach," she said.

"Mom saw you," I said.

"Grow up, Eva," said Aislin. She still wore her party outfit: a tight black T-shirt and worn blue jeans. She had buttoned her jeans wrong, and there was a gap in between the second and third buttonholes. Maybe Jim had buttoned them wrong.

My mother came into the room with a plate of food for Aislin. "Do you think this is a brothel?" she said to my sister.

"Isn't he cute?" said Aislin, and my mother said, "Well, I'll have to admit that." They laughed. "So, Mom," said Aislin, "What are you doing here?"

"What is the problem," said my mother, "with a little visit from your mom?"

"Fair enough," said Aislin. She ate her eggs. My mother sat on the love seat and played with her hands. "You look awful, you know," Aislin said. "For
example, your hair.”

“Oh this is just the support I need!” yelled my mother.

I said, “I’ll put some coffee on,” and my mother said, “You won’t.”

“Far be it from me to say anything against your father,” she said, and I stood up. Aislin scowled at me and mouthed SIT DOWN. Her hair was matted from Jim’s sweet kisses. I sat.

“Well, this is hard for me, as you can imagine,” said my mother.

“Maybe some coffee,” I said.

“OK! OK, Eva! Make some coffee, if that’s what you want!” said my mother. I stood up, and went into the kitchen. I parted a clean, white filter and I slipped it into the coffee maker. I measured out seven scoops of coffee and put them carefully into the filter. The coffee was rich and brown against the paper. I filled the pot with water and poured it in. I turned pushed the red button on and it glowed.

“Sometimes that girl!” I heard my mother say from the living room.

“I know,” said Aislin. I waited for the coffee to percolate. Should I have sex with Danny, I wondered. I remembered being small and hugging my doll in bed, promising God that I would not have sex until I was married. I remembered willing my grown-up self, clutching my doll until my arms hurt with the strain, to please, please be good and not sin and become impure. I chanted it: I will not have sex I will not have sex I will not have sex and I fell asleep, my dreams throbbing with the fierce words.

I was sick of being good, but I did not know what to do about it. The coffee made a boiling sound. When it quieted, I poured three mugs full. I added sugar and milk to mine and my mother’s. Aislin drank hers black.

“Well, here we go,” I said, bringing the mugs into the living room. It was sunny outside, and I wanted to go to beach and drink beer.

“You know,” said my mother, “I don’t even want to talk about it, at this point.”

“Now, mommy,” said Aislin.
"Truly," said my mother, "I have nothing to say." She stood up and went into her room.

"Good fucking job," said Aislin.
Three men wanted to marry my mother. There was her father's choice, a man named Miltos Yeroulano. Miltos had been brought up in New York, but his parents, like my grandfather, were from Greece. Miltos was short, and put palmfuls of pomade in his black hair. His pants were too short, but he wore lovely leather shoes. He was an accountant, but he also loved to paint. My mother went on five dates with Miltos, and despite my father's protests, stopped seeing him when he proposed by hiding a ring inside a tulip. "He handed me the bunch," said my mother, "And he kept standing on one foot and then the other and saying 'Look at the tulips! Will you look at the tulips, Anita!' until finally he grabbed them back and turned them over and a big diamond ring fell on my shag carpet." Though he was very sweet, my mother did not marry Miltos, in the end, because of his height and because of his short pants. "Oh, oh," my mother said to me, putting her hand over her eyes, "I was very shallow then."

The second man was a piano player. He played at weddings and at clubs. He sang show tunes and he made up songs for my mother and played them on his piano when she came to his apartment on the Upper West Side for dinner. He made chicken and baked beans from a can, and they drank gin and tonics and sang songs, sitting close on the piano bench. My mother was a model, and she always wore the latest fashions. Her skirts were always very short, and she had matching purses for almost all of her dresses.

The piano player's name was Maurice, and he asked my mother to marry him one night on the piano bench. He hadn't even bought a ring. "I adored Maurice," said my mother, "but I was not going to spend the rest of my life scrimping to be the wife of a piano player, I can tell you that." Maurice wore felt hats, and sometimes my mother wishes she had said yes that night on the piano bench. "Maurice," my mother said, "was a wonderful kisser."

The last one was my father. He was the life of every party, and the best-
looking man in New York. They were set up on a blind date, and when my mother answered the door of her apartment, wearing a new blue dress with a blue bow ribboned in her hair (she wore her hair long then, and she ironed it on the dining room table before wrapping the ends around orange juice cans for bounce), my father said, “Well, you sure do go for the little girl look, don’t you?”

My mother said she giggled, because she wasn’t quite sure what to do. She said it took her until about a year after the wedding to realize that his “ribbing,” as she called it, was a plain and simple lack of a heart.

My father asked my mother to marry him at The Carlyle Hotel. He was drunk, and he got down on one knee and yelled, “Excuse me! Excuse me!” waving his arms until everyone became quiet and even Bobby Short stopped singing for a moment. He asked her loudly to be his wife and she pulled him up and held him and said, no, no, not like this, you’re drunk.

Late that night, after she had dropped him off and paid for the cab herself, my mother called my father. She loved him, she told me, and she said, “Larry! I changed my mind! The answer is yes! Yes!” and he said, “Too late, Anita, you had your chance.”

“What?” said my mother, and he said, “You’ll have to wait until I ask you again.”

Three weeks later, he got drunk at the Carlyle Hotel. He asked my mother, loudly, if she would be his wife, and she said yes.
“How can you leave the house at a time like this?” said Aislin.

“You’re leaving,” I said. Aislin stood at the door to our bedroom in a long T-shirt with green flip-flops. Her fist was balled and resting on her hip.

“I have to go,” she said, “It’s my job,” she said.

“What, and my job is mom?” I said.

“Essentially,” said Aislin. Jen walked in and spun around with her hands over her head.

“New bikini day,” she said.

“I like it,” I said. It was yellow; the first bikini Jen had ever owned. It looked nice on her. The ruffles even made it look like she had a figure.

“Yellow?” said Aislin.

“What about it?” said Jen.

“Interesting,” said Aislin.

“Your sister,” said Jen.

“Anyway, I don’t have the time.” said Aislin. “Bring Mom to the beach, whatever. Don’t leave her here alone, that’s all I’m saying.”

“Mom...to...the beach?” said Jen.

“Later,” said Aislin. She walked away, her flip-flops slapping against the floorboards.

“OK,” said Jen, “What’s up with the mom situation?”

“I don’t know,” I said. Jen stood in front of my mirror.

“Does the butt look big?” she said.

“I think she’s divorcing him or something,” I said.

“Bad news or good news?” she said.

“I guess good, I don’t know. It’s weird.”

“Your dad’s an asshole.”

“I know.”

“Does the butt look big?”

“No!”
"Really?"

"Jen," I said, "I'm having a crisis here."

"Well, what can you do? I mean, there's really nothing you can do."

"Did you see her?"

"No way, kept clear," said Jen.

"She looks terrible."

"So, what happened with Danny?"

"He slept with me on the couch. That's not the issue at hand, here."

"Are you going to sleep with him?" said Jen. She sat on the bed and examined her feet. "Should I polish my toes?" she said.

"Do you think Danny'd be a good first?"

"He's got dreadlocks. That's unique."

"You think so?"

"You've got to go with your heart," said Jen, "I mean it."

"Yeah," I said.

"I should do your medicine cards," said Jen, "What about Bernard?"

"That's the thing. I mean, what if I'm making all that up?"

Jen nodded. "Ready to beach it, baby?" she said. I shrugged. She came over to me and put her arms around me. "It will work itself out," she said, "All of it."

The door to my mother's room was locked. "Mom?" I called, "Want to go to the beach?" There was no sound. "It's a gorgeous day," I said. I looked at Jen.

"Don't ask me," she said. I knocked harder.

"Mom!" I yelled. There was no answer. "She's probably asleep," I said.

"The ferry and all," said Jen, "Okay, knock ten more times and then we'll go."

I knocked fifteen times. We left, and rode the bikes that my parents had bought for moonlight riding to the beach.
VI.

Jen leaned her bike against the house. “I’m just saying,” she said, “That you shouldn’t jump...to...conclusions.”
“I’m a loser. It’s that simple,” I said.
“Eva,” she said, “You didn’t even know that you liked him. He didn’t even know you’d be at the beach.”
“I always go to the beach. Danny is always there.”
“Maybe something huge came up,” said Jen. She pressed her fingers to her pink skin and they left marks. She held out her arm to me.
“Impressive,” I said.
“And my virgin stomach,” said Jen, “Is fried.”
“Don’t even say the V word,” I said.
“Oops, sorry,” said Jen.

The windows were steamy and my mother was sauteeing in the kitchen. We slipped off our shoes and tossed our towels onto the couch.
“I just can’t believe he sat home all day just to show me positively that I’m a loser,” I said. I could smell olive oil and sizzling vegetables. “I wanted to make myself a nice frozen pizza,” I said.
“Tough life,” said Jen, “I feel really sorry for you, here.”
“Oh, girls!” called my mother in a singsong voice.
“What?” I said.
“How’s my favorite sourpuss?” she said, coming into the living room in an apron, a glistening spatula in one hand, “Jennifer, how lovely to see you again.”
“Hi, Mrs. Doherty,” said Jen, “I’m really sorry about the, um, party last night.”

My mother leaned towards Jen and said in a mock whisper, “I know it wasn’t your fault, dear.” Jen smiled nervously. Her red hair looked pale next to her flaming skin.
“You missed the sun, mom,” I said.
“Well,” she said, “Who needs it anyway?” My mother had always loved the sun, had waked before the rest of us and headed to the beach with a reflector and baby oil.

“Mom,” I said, “I have never seen you miss a day in the sun.” She shrugged. Her face was white. She wore a bright pink lipstick, and her hair had not been brushed. It hung around her face in oily strands.

“Well, something smells great!” said Jen. I could hear an edge in her voice. Was my mother’s state alarming even to Jen, who did not know her?

“Oh, yes!” said my mother. She gestured with the spatula. “Cornish game hens and sweet potatoes and greens.” She winked. “Martha Stewart Quick Cook,” she said.

“You brought it with you?” I said.

“I brought all my cookbooks,” she said. She smiled. There was lipstick on her teeth. She was bouncing up and down on the balls of her feet. “Well, back to the grindstone,” she said, “as they say.”

“I wanted a frozen pizza,” I said.

Jen said, “I know.”

“Set the table for six!” my mother called from the kitchen, “That Danny from the fudge shop called and I invited him to dinner!”

Aislin was in our room putting lotion on her shoulders. “Don’t even tell me,” she said, “Mom invited Jim, too.”

“What the hell?” I said. I sat on the bed.

Jen said, “I’m going to take a shower.” She took Aislin’s wet towel from the floor and wrapped it around her shoulders. She pulled the door shut.

“I don’t even want to talk about it,” said Aislin, “I have nothing to say.” She poured perfumed lotion into her palm. She smoothed it over her calf. The room smelled like lavender.

“Aislin,” I said, “She doesn’t cook.”

“You think I don’t know that?” she said, “You think I didn’t grow up on
microwave meals and...cookies, and those fucking spaghetti in a can deals?"

“Well, what’s going on?”

Aislin rubbed her arms vigorously with the lotion, as if she were keeping warm. “I have no clue,” she said.

“I know she talks to you,” I said, “I won’t be mad, Just tell me.”

Aislin looked at me, “She always tells me things, I know,” she said. Her eyes darted around the room. She rubbed her hands together. “She won’t tell me anything. I called dad and he’s not at the office and he’s not at home. Or he’s not answering. She says she wants some goddamn sun is what she says. But she didn’t even go outside all day. When I came home she was still in bed. You could have done something, Eva! It’s not that hard to do something!”

“What could I do?” I said. Aislin was shaking, now, though her skin was still flushed with heat.

“I don’t know,” said Aislin. “I don’t know anything,” she said.

I put on a red sundress with small straps. My face was burned but my nose was white from where I had put sunblock. I did not wear shoes. Jen said, “Lookin’ good, mama,” and I lent her my Tawny Rose lipstick. Aislin was wearing thin cotton pants and a halter top. Her back was brown from the sun. Jen squeezed into a pair of Aislin’s jean shorts.

“I guess my date would be your mom,” she said. She pulled her hair, still wet from the shower, into a tortoiseshell barrette.

“You look pretty,” I said to Jen. She put on her lipstick in the bathroom mirror, and I stood on the scale.

“In vain,” she said. She pointed to my feet. “You have ten minutes ‘till loverboy,” she said. “Let’s paint those toenails,” she said.

I lay on the bed and Jen carefully ran polish over my toes with the small brush. She held my foot to the light to make sure there were no mistakes. “This is sort of a strange situation,” I said.

Jen did not look up. She lay on her stomach across the bed sideways, and I
lay on my back lengthwise. “The mom deal or the Danny deal?” she said.

“Mom deal,” I said, “Mostly.” Jen furrowed her brow in concentration.

She would not look at me.

“Don’t you think it seems, like, fucked up in some way?” I said.

“I don’t know what it’s supposed to be like,” said Jen. After a moment, she said, “Yeah, I’ll admit there’s a weird vibe around.”

“I’m sorry,” I said.

Jen sat up. “Finito,” she said, opening her palm to display my painted toes.

“Anyway,” she said, “Let’s find me a man, why don’t we?”

“Maybe not tonight,” I said.

“Hope springs eternal,” she said.

I heard my mother exclaiming over Danny’s dreadlocks. “Can I just touch one?” she said.

“Oh, God,” I said, and jumped up.

“Save him!” said Jen, following me into the living room. This is the picture: Danny, wearing a button-down oxford and khaki shorts. My mother, showered and wearing a pink pantsuit, running her short fingers over his head.

“They’re so scratchy!” she exclaimed.

My mother had made swans out of the napkins. She had made place cards by folding index cards and writing our names in a flowery script. There was a pitcher of martinis on the sideboard. She had bought olives. When Jim arrived, my mother said, “Now who would care for a drink before dinner?” She gestured to the martini glasses on the sideboard (which I had never seen before) and the pitcher, dripping with beads of cold moisture.

“I’d love one,” said Aislin, and she went to the sideboard. She had decided to pretend that nothing was wrong. She had decided to pretend that my mother always fixed us martinis and cornish game hens. Aislin’s shoulder muscles moved fluidly as she poured the drink. She speared an olive with a toothpick and dropped
it in. She whirled around and took a big sip. Only I could see the hesitation in her swallow. "Mmmm," she said, "Jim, honey, will you join me?"

Jim had worn a tie. He grinned amiably. Perhaps his parents did feed him martinis. He sipped his with relish. "You've really got a knack for this," he told my mother, "Best martini I've ever had!" My mother glowed.

"Can I have a beer?" said Danny.

"No," I said.

"Why, Eva!" said my mother, "How rude! I'll run get you a nice beer, Dan. What kind would you like?"

"Well, what have you got?"

"We don't have any beer," I said. "That's the issue, here. My mom's going to go to the store."

"Oh," said Danny.

"It's no bother, really," said my mother.

"No, no, I'd rather a martini," said Danny, "Um, if there are any available."

"No problem at all!" said my mother, "I have a pitcher right here!" She went to the sideboard and poured. "Jennifer, dear?" she said.

"Sure," said Jen.

"And I'm really in a martini mood," I said.

"That's a good thing," said my mother.

The table glowed with candlelight. Outside, I could see the outline of trees against the moonlight. The room smelled of melted butter and oregano, and Danny, sitting next to me, smelled of a lemony aftershave. My plate was arranged carefully: flesh-colored yams, green buttery beans, and a cornish game hen in the center. "How do you eat this thing?" I asked.

"Eva!" said my mother, "You'll make our guests think you don't know how to eat gourmet!" She smiled winningly.

"I don't," I said. Aislin glared at me from across the table.

"I must say, Mrs. Doherty," said Jim, "that this is one of my favorite
meals.” His face was flushed from his second martini. He stuck his fork into the small bird gaily. He wrenched a piece of meat free and chewed it with relish.

“Oh, it’s spur of the moment,” said my mother, “They couldn’t be easier.”

“It looks delicious,” said Danny. He eyed Jim and eyed his utensils.

“So Danny,” said my mother, “Tell me about yourself.”

“Well, there’s not much to tell,” said Danny. He filled his mouth with beans.

“Where are you from?” said my mother.

“Um, Kentucky,” said Danny.

“Really!” said my mother, “Aislin, is there a problem with your dinner?”

“Well, I don’t eat meat anymore,” said Aislin. She primly slid her bird onto Jim’s plate.

“What?” I said. My mother stopped cutting her meat.

“I’ve been thinking a lot about it,” said Aislin, her eyebrows raised, “And I just don’t need that kind of guilt.”

“You had a chicken sandwich on Tuesday,” said Jen.

“I felt differently then,” said Aislin.

“Well,” said Jim, “more for the rest of us.” My mother placed her knife and fork down.

“If you do not enjoy my cooking,” she said, “then you need only say so.”

Danny looked at me. His eyes were a deer’s, caught in a car’s headlights. I thought, does he love me?

“That’s not true,” said Aislin. I cut my hen. The tiny arms fell away from the body with a slice of my knife. Danny’s knee was next to mine. I could put my fingers on his tan skin. I could take his hand and pull him outside into the night.

“How about you, dear?” said my mother.

“It’s wonderful,” I said. I felt an anger boiling in my stomach, but I knew it would go away if I just ignored it.

“Mrs. Doherty, tell us about what the island used to be like,” said Jen. My mother finished her martini and said, “Do you really want to hear about that old
news?"

“Yes!” said Danny, loudly.

“Well, there used to be more trees, for one thing,” said my mother, “And the deer would nibble at the leaves.” She took a swallow of her drink. “Larry and I,” she said, “Walked by the sea.”

“That’s romantic, all right,” said Jim. He was almost finished with Aislin’s hen. The yams tasted greasy in my mouth. When I sipped my martini, the vapors burned my nose from the inside.

“We used to walk in the woods, as well,” said my mother. I twisted my napkin. “We used to,” said my mother, and I held my breath. “Well, we never ate cornish game hens, as far as I can remember,” said my mother. She laughed, and her laughter sounded okay. I let go of my napkin.
VII.

The Third Part of the Story I Know So Well

The tragedy that befell my mother was just the next in a long line of tragedies that befell descendants of the Roux clan. My grandmother Jean-Marie was a Roux, and she was crazy. She had begun to have visions when she was a child, and embarrassed her wealthy Southern family with her grunts and wails during Sunday mass. There was an Easter Sunday when she yelled, “Burn!” to old Mrs. Howells, mistaking her for Satan in her large mauve hat.

Jean-Marie was diagnosed as depressed, because she cried all the time, and the Roux family felt lucky to marry her off at all when my grandfather, a scientist from Cambridge, asked for her hand. My grandfather, the child of Greek immigrants, had fallen in love with the willowy Jean-Marie during a Founder’s Day Parade through the streets of Savannah. Jean-Marie was not in the parade—though her beauty would have won her a place on any float, her penchant for foul language necessitated her entrapment in her father’s Packard, the window half-rolled down. My grandfather, whose name is John, was in Savannah on business—he felt ill at ease in his crisp suit and hat—but one look at my grandmother made him renounce his snowy Boston forever.

As the story goes, they danced to “Starlight Melody” at the Club dance that evening; it was my grandmother’s song. When the strains of “Starlight Melody” began, the floor cleared, forming a circle around my grandmother and her partner. My short and dark grandfather stuck out in the well-heeled crowd (there were reports of giggles), but he moved with grace, and he held my grandmother tenderly.

After three weekends of wooing and a short conference during which my grandfather promised to move to Savannah and denounce the Greek Orthodox church, John and Jean-Marie were wed. She is tall and stately in the photographs—a bit dreamy-eyed—and he is shining, his flesh hands clasped around her arm, a cigar between his lips.

By the time my mother went to college, my grandmother rarely got out of
bed. My grandfather bought her expensive silk nightgowns, and boxes of chocolates and books. "She is a fragile woman, as delicate as china," he told me, and he loved her and cared for her until she took too many sleeping pills and slept her way into heaven. My mother said that my grandfather slept on the couch almost every night of his life, but once in a while the couch would be empty in the morning, or my mother would find her parents both curled on the couch, warm against each other like kittens.

My mother's mother hated my father so much that she wasn't allowed to come to the wedding. When she saw my father she would yell at him, or cry. She would yell terrible things, but I don't know what. She would yell in Spanish (which she had learned in her years at Savannah Country Day School), and I do know she called him Diablo which means the devil.

My mother took the family wedding dress and cut it above her knees. She unsewed the sleeves and gave it a fashionable high waist. On the day of her wedding, in the St. James Episcopal church in New York, my mother was the most fashionable bride in the world. The family veil—a long thin sheet of lace—was pinned to her hair with bobby pins.

My father was too drunk the night before. He was asleep an hour before the ceremony, and Jim Collins, his best man, had to hold his head under a cold shower stream. Before he entered the church, where my mother waited, sweet as a rose, he saw a gravestone outside. It was a granite stone, and carved neatly into it were the letters of his name. "Oh, if I had listened to the fates," my father says at cocktail parties when he tells this story. Everyone laughs when he said that. In the wedding pictures, my mother smiles at the camera, and my father is usually making a face. There is a picture, though, in which they look at each other. They are getting in the limousine, and my mother has her hand on my father's wrist. He is bending down over her, whispering something. They look like they're in love. "We were, we were," my mother says.

I asked my father once why he married my mother. I thought I knew what he would say: she was pretty, she giggled at his jokes, he was supposed to marry
someone just like her. But he thought for a moment.

"I really thought we'd make a good team," he said. He was looking to the side of me, his eyes unfocused, seeing another place, perhaps.

"Because she was pretty?" I said.

My father shook his head. "I know what you think," he said, "But I'm not a stupid man," he said.

"I know, Dad, I'm not--"

"I thought long and hard," said my father. "Your mother had...qualities," he said, "that I needed. I never could have imagined," he said, and then he stopped. He lit a cigarette, and when he ordered another drink, I did not say a word. "Of course I loved your mother," my father said, "I thought--I really thought--that we were the right team."
We had finished the berry torte and almost all of the gin. I was still at the table, sitting awkwardly next to Danny, and Jim was going through the trunk that stood in the corner of the living room. “Old records, hey!” he yelled.

“Watch out for that wine glass,” I said. He had begun to drink wine, and his glass tilted on the soft rug.

“Mrs. Doherty!” said Jim, “How about a dance?” I heard my mother’s laughter over the run water in the kitchen. Jim put a record on: Ella Fitzgerald. He tuned it up loud and laughed maniacally. “Come on, baby,” he said to Jen, and pulled her to her feet. They danced clumsily and far apart.

“You want to dance?” I said to Danny.

“I really shouldn’t.”

“Why?”

“Oh, you know,” he said. I did not know, but I remained silent. Aislin came from the kitchen and grabbed Jim around the waist. I filled my martini glass with wine. Jen danced by herself, eyes closed, swaying her hips.

“Somebody stole my partner,” said my mother. She was standing in the doorway. Her voice was slurred, and her eyes were half-shut. She pointed her finger towards Jim, and her arm flopped like a broken wing.

“True, true,” said Jim. He laughed, and his arms remained around Aislin. My mother walked to the center of the room with measured steps.

“At the end of the song,” said Aislin, when my mother tapped her on the shoulder.

“No,” said my mother. She looked at Aislin and Jim, dancing close, and ran her hand along Aislin’s back. I saw her wrap her fingers around Aislin’s hair, gathering it into a ponytail, and I felt the familiar twinge of jealousy, but then my mother yanked with all her might and Aislin screamed as her head was jerked back.

“Oh, my God!” said Aislin, “What the hell?” My mother stood still, her hand still around Aislin’s hair. Aislin jerked free, and crossed her arms, covering her bare shoulders with her hands. “What the fuck is the matter with you?” Aislin
screamed.

My mother looked confused. Her arm remained raised, though her fingers held nothing. “Answer me!” shrieked Aislin. She was shaking.

My mother said, “I’m so tired,” and she walked slowly to her room. No one stopped her as she closed the door. She would not come out for three days.

“She’s fucking loony!” said Aislin. She sobbed, and Jim held her, his face impassive. The record began to skip.

“I really should be going,” said Danny.

“Danny, I’m so sorry,” I said.

“What?” he said, “Don’t worry about it.” He stood, and put on his coat.

“I’ll see you at work, okay?” he said, and left out the back door.

“It is late,” said Jim, and Aislin looked up at him, her face red and wet.

“What?” she said.

“You know, I’ve got to work early tomorrow and all,” said Jim.

“You have got to be fucking kidding me,” said Aislin.

“Now, honey--”

“GET OUT!” she screamed. I looked at my hands. Jen sat on the rug. I could see her back, and her shoulders had caved forward. Aislin screamed again, “Get out! I hate you, I hate you!” and Jim dragged her outside by her arm. We heard Jim’s low voice and Aislin saying: It’s over! I hate you! and finally: NO! This last was a howl that ended in sobs. Aislin came in and slammed the door.

When I looked up, she said, “What?”

“Nothing,” I said.

We had been in bed for at least an hour when Aislin said, “What’s going on?”

I did not answer her. I pretended I was asleep.
IX.
An Almost Love Affair

It was not until Paolo told me that I realized it was almost the fourth of July. We were in his house in Oak Bluffs, and he was reading *The Vineyard Gazette*. Jim had given him my number, and we had been on two dates. I loved the fact that he was Italian; the intrigue this lent him overshadowed his arrogance and weak nose. Also, he seemed to like me. Danny had begun dating a small-nosed blonde who worked at the marina.

Paolo sat on the floor, the sleeping bag he called his bed pulled over his legs. One knee was bent, and he rested the pages of the newspaper on his even stomach. He sipped dark coffee from a blue mug, which he kept upright on his stomach by hooking his thumb through the handle. Paolo usually wore his black hair pulled back with a rubber band. "Tomorrow is your Independence Day," he said.

"What?" I said. I was looking through one of his photography books, trying to think of impressive questions to ask.

"Your Independence Day," said Paolo. "The day you won the war with England."

"Fourth of July," I said. "Shit," I said, "I've only known you a week?"

"I suppose so," said Paolo. He did not know I lived with my mother. My not spending the night was going to be an issue, I could tell.

"Well, we'll have to get fireworks," I said.

"Is that right?" said Paolo.

"Yes. And hot dogs," I said. "That's what you eat on the Fourth of July."

"What if I don't want to celebrate your independence?" said Paolo. "What if I think you should still be a colony?"

"If that's what you think," I said, "Then I hope you get burned with a Roman Candle."

"A what?" said Paolo.

"I've never though about that," I said. "Why is a Roman candle called a
Roman candle?"

"Eva, you’ve lost me," he said, and he shook his head and looked down at the paper.

We got turkey sandwiches and went to the local beach. I did not want to Paolo to see Aislin, and her red suit that skimmed over her browning body. The sun was hot, and everyone around us on blankets was drunk. Paolo did not want to take off his oxford shirt. I unbuttoned it, and he let me. "I wanted to be an actor," said Paolo.

"Really?"

"Yes, yes. I wanted to act in Shakespeare and then become a star in your Hollywood."

"Why didn’t you? You could still," I said.

"Oh no," said Paolo. "I would never stay in America."

"What do you mean?" I said, "What’s so bad about America?"

"You want to know?"

"Yes." I crossed my legs. I was wearing a green one-piece bathing suit. My long hair was rolled at the back of my head, making my chin look less heavy, I thought. My skin had cleared up. Next to me, I had a man.

"The people," he said. "They are like children. They have no history, and no sadness. Like petulant babies." He looked down, and took a bite of his sandwich. He had an overbite, and crooked bottom teeth.

I did not know what to say. "Am I like a baby?" I said.

"It is not something that is your fault," he said, "It is not your fault that you haven’t known grief."

"Paolo," I said, "My whole childhood was fucked up. I have known grief."

"Yes, yes," he said, wiping his lips with a napkin. "I mean war," said Paolo.
I called my mother covertly, finding a pay phone in the shade. “Where are you?” she said. “I feel like I haven’t seen you,” she said. Aislin had talked to my father. He said he had no idea what was going on. “She needed a vacation, I suppose,” was what he said, and that he did not know how long she would stay. He vehemently denied that anything was wrong.

“Mom, I had to work this morning,” I said.

“How does tacos for dinner sound?” she said. There was a needy edge to her voice, and I hated her for it.

“I have plans,” I said, “Sorry.”

“Oh,” she said. I could see her in the kitchen, blowing thin streams of smoke out into the salt-smelling air. She would have her ankles crossed on the rung of a tall stool, and the ingredients for tacos--orange cheese, a head of crisp lettuce, defrosting hamburger--laid out hopefully before her on the oak counter top. Her head would dip with the knowledge that there would be no house full of people, no dirty pile of food-stained plates and reddened wine glasses.

“Maybe you could rent a movie,” I said.

“Okay,” she said, “Okay.”

“Good night, mom,” I said.

“Okay,” she said, and I hung up the phone. I took a breath and I called her back.

“I’m sorry,” I said, “It’s just that I have plans.”

“Do you remember the intervention?” she said.

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“I was just thinking about it,” she said, “That’s where it all went wrong, I think.”

“Mom, don’t think about that.”

“I’m all alone,” she said, “What else is there to think of?” I tapped my fingers on the metal phone booth.

“I’ve got to run,” I said.
“Oh, okay, then,” she said. I hung up the phone before she could cry.

I made dinner on Paolo’s stove. His roommates were away. The burner smelled of oil: a dangerous smell. Paolo lit candles and placed them on a sheet on the ground. We made a bowl of crisp salad with olives and linguine with a creamy sauce.

From Paolo’s window, I could see the muted sun setting. The small alley behind Paolo’s house glowed with a cinnamon light. I thought about the canals of Venice, Paolo’s home. I thought about about floating down a canal in a gondola, being pushed along by the pole of a tall man in a ribboned hat. From the bar next door, I heard slow music. Paolo came up next to me and put his warm palm of my shoulder. He smelled of garlic. We stood at the window, and I wished, with a sudden and overwhelming desire, that I knew how to paint, how to move the colors of the sky on a canvas.
Act One:
The stage is dark. There is a long, black wig center stage. Eva, an eleven-year old girl, enters stage right. She is in her “awkward stage,” and her hair is parted in the middle and fastened with beaded barrettes. She wears corduroy overalls and a striped turtleneck. She is confident but contemplative. She does not know yet that her “awkward stage” will never end. Spotlight should follow her from stage right to stage center. When she reaches the center, she twirls slowly, holding her hands like a ballerina. She performs a graceful arabesque, and then stands upright. In a quiet voice, she begins to speak.

Eva:  So I told him, I did, that he had to follow me into the dining room. We had a big heavy swinging door (move hands to outline the door), and all I had to do was push on that door—push it in (make pushing movement), walk through it (mime walking through), let it swing closed, and he would be caught. Then I was off the hook. (Pause. Look down, then up and around, as if watching a flying bird.)

My mother had a parakeet when she was little. It was green and yellow, chirpy and small. She loved that parakeet. Its name was Peetie. She would take it out of its wire cage and let it fly around. It followed her everywhere, like it was tied to her with a ribbon. “There’s Anita and her bird!” people said, I guess, but I made that part up. I also made up the dresses I think she wore: flowing dresses made of see-through fabrics like tulle. (Flutter hands as if playing with a skirt.)

Anyway, she lived in this house. The thick door is that old. (Pick up wig from floor and put on.) And one day she ran through the door with her hair streaming behind her like a veil (Run in place, in slow motion. Optional: fan from backstage blows wig.), and Peetie came along behind her. Maybe he was singing. Who fucking knows. She pushed that door (Pushing motion) and it swung back (Turn head slowly) and caught Peetie (Pause.) in the neck. (Begin speaking rapidly, as if traumatized.) He was half in the hallway and half in the dining room and that door shut the life out of him. He (voice rises.) DIED! Right there in the DOOR! Splay arms out, grabbing wig, with last word, and then slowly gather...
arms around body. In a quiet voice:

All my mom had to do was lean against the door and he fell onto the floor (Drop wig.), a dead bunch of feathers. That is when she stopped wearing swinging dresses, I think. That is when she began to smoke and run her fingers through her hair and rest her head in her hands and shake like there wasn’t a tomorrow. Like that’s all there was. Pause. In an earnest voice: Today.

Eva again turns in a circle, arms outstretched. She plies. The, she continues:

So that was the door. And my father got home with a crackling brown bag of bottles. He was wearing that beige vest—it could barely hold in his stomach--and jeans, I guess. He was laughing, and I was scared. I had it all rehearsed--I had practiced with my mom and the counselor. I try not to ask myself why they made me betray him, and that’s what it was, plain and simple.

Our kitchen was blondewood. Looks around stage as if in kitchen.

My mom had redone it and it had just been finished and she kept saying into the phone, “Oh! It’s all blondewood! So sunny.” There were wooden stools and I was sitting on one when he came in with the bag. He put it on the table, and he said, “Hi, Ev.” I was wearing pink and purple. It was all I would wear, and turquoise. I had corduroy pants and sweaters in pink and purple and turquoise. I would mix and match and sometimes wear all one color. I was not the most fashionable child in the world.

In an earnest voice: I thought of not saying it. I thought of just sitting there and maybe he’d hang out with me or just leave me alone. But then he pulled open a cabinet--blondewood--and got one of the glasses. (Holds a pretend glass to the light.) They were cut glass. Short and thin, and he would fill them halfway. Only halfway as if that meant something. When he got the glass I knew what would happen. He would open the freezer and the ice. From backstage, sound of ice in a glass. Over the sound: I couldn’t bear it. That fucking damn clink, clink, clink and then the Johnny Walker over it, hissing.

I know not that it couldn’t have hissed. That is absurd, I know. But I thought it did--really--and maybe it just should have. Ice sounds stop.

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So it was just that simple, then. When he took out the glass and it shone all clean and beautiful and I knew that I'd hear that ice. It was like a reaction—that rubber hammer on your knee, the if you touch a burner it sends a message in your neurons: Very loud: No! No!

So I did it. I said, “Dad?” and it made him stop on his way to the freezer. “Um,” I said, “we made you breakfast. In the dining room.” He turned around and looked at me. He knew, I think, that I was lying. But there was a part of him that wanted to believe me, that did believe me, even, and that bothers me even now. Because of course I was lying, I hated him, and he didn’t know it. Or maybe didn’t want to or was just too dumb. How could he not know?

So he said, “Really Ev?” and I said, yes. Then I led him through that door.

Stage goes dark. Curtains close.

Act Two:
The curtains open on a dining room. EVA enters stage right with LARRY, father of EVA. He is wearing a beige vest, and he is overweight. Nonetheless, he is very handsome. He wears tasseled loafers. Around a large table sit:
ANITA, mother of EVA. She is very thin, and smokes throughout the scene. She wears a fashionable outfit. Her black hair is long and curled at the ends.
CAROLE, mother of LARRY. She has grey hair set in an unfashionable permanent. Her clothes are polyester and her shoes are thick. You can tell she is wearing cheap floral perfume.
JIM COLLINS, friend of Larry. He has a red face and thin hair. He fidgets as if he would rather be playing golf which, in fact, he would.
THE COUNSELOR, a young bland woman who speaks with inane naivete and embarrassing sincerity.

LARRY With sarcasm: Oh, ho. I see. An intervention. Isn’t this a surprise. Thanks, Ev.

EVA Quietly: I’m sorry. ANITA pulls out the chair next to her, and EVA sinks into it. EVA addresses audience: I will never forgive them for making me betray my father. I will carry the bitterness from this scenario far into my adulthood years.

COUNSELOR you very much.

LARRY Give me a fucking break. He lights a cigarette.

COUNSELOR Larry, you are correct. This is an intervention. What is said
in this room will never leave this room.

LARRY  
*With sarcasm:* That's reassuring.

ANITA  
*Shaking, lighting a cigarette.* Larry, please.

LARRY  
For Christ's sake, Anita! You expect me to take this crap--

ANITA  
*Wailing:* Pleeease... Begins to cry.

COUNSELOR  
It is important for you to know, Larry, that the people around this table love you very much.

ANITA  
*In between sobs:* It's true.

*Larry leans back in his chair and puts his feet on the table.*

CAROLE  
Larry, get your feet off the table.

LARRY  
No.

CAROLE  
*To Jim Collins* See?

Jim Collins looks nervous, and crosses one leg over the other, linking his fingers over the top knee.

COUNSELOR  
I feel that we should begin with definitions. An intervention is the name for a meeting of a substance abuser's loved ones in which they confront the substance abuser and attempt to convince him or her to commence treatment immediately.

LARRY  
Him.

COUNSELOR  
Um, yes.

EVA  
*To audience:* I will begin to hate even my own mother, and to doubt the existence of a God.

COUNSELOR  
We will go around the table, Larry, and each individual will tell you why they feel you have a substance abuse problem, and what they feel they can do to help you commence treatment. Do you understand?

LARRY  
Yes, indeedy. Why don't we start with my best pal Jim?

JIM COLLINS  
Oh, now, I don't think.

COUNSELOR  
That will be fine.

JIM COLLINS  
*Uncrossing legs and putting elbows on table, leaning in but not looking Larry in the eye.* Well, jeez. Okay, then. Okay. Larry, I've known you since Colgate. We drank a lot then, we sure did. And I'm the first one to admit that in our bachelor days I was right there with you, pal, I sure was, getting
more beer than booty, that's for sure, ha ha ha. To CAROLE: Excuse me, ma'am.

CAROLE  Benevolently: That's just fine, Jim.

JIM COLLINS  Well, to get right down to it, Larry, old pal, things have changed. I sure wish they hadn't sometimes, I sure do, but they have. And you've, well, you've gotten mean. And the Sinnots barbeque, for example, falling off your chair and all. And Anita, well she's one fine lady and sometimes, Larry, the things you say to her. Well, that's what I have to say. And your work is suffering, I know that for a fact. Larry, I see you on the train in the morning, I sure do, and damned if you're not drunk on the 7:59 express. Breathes deeply. This isn't easy, Larry, I can tell you that, and I hope you know that I (voice wavers) I love you like a brother, Larry. I do, I really do.

COUNSELOR  Very good, Jim. Thank you.

JIM COLLINS  You're welcome.

COUNSELOR  Now Jim, are there any ways in which you can help your friend commence recovery?

JIM COLLINS  Oh, um, yes, yes. I brought a plant ticket for you, Larry, I did. A plant ticket to Minnesota, and I'll pay for the whole thing. There's a one-month live-in program at St. Mary's Hospital in Minnesota, and it will cure your right up. So here you go. Slides a thick envelope across table to Larry.

LARRY  I'll bet Maureen sure is proud of you for helping me out here.

JIM COLLINS  Visibly shaken: Now, Larry, I don't see.

LARRY  Oh, I'll just bet she'll love it when you tell her the story tonight, in her posh Greenwich pad, after telling Jan and the kids that you've gone--what do you say?--to get the paper? Working late?

ANITA  I simply can't take this.

CAROLE  What's going on?

JIM COLLINS  Now, Larry, I.

LARRY  And will she let you play the daddy game, there, Jim? Or will she just prance around in the diamonds you buy her?

JIM COLLINS  I'm, I'm leaving. Larry Doherty you are no friend of mine.

EVA  To audience: Oh, the tangled webs we weave, oh.

COUNSELOR  I feel that I am losing control of the situation. This is a bad feeling.

JIM COLLINS  Gathering his coat: Anita, I can only hope that what was
said in this room will remain, forever, within this room.

**COUNSELOR** Don’t worry, Jim. That is one of the ground rules.

**ANITA** Oh, Jim.

**JIM COLLINS** I must take my leave of you. Adieu. *Jim Collins bows, places his fedora on his head, and exits stage right. The door swings ominously.*

**CAROLE** He’s got some chippy stashed in Greenwich. Wouldn’t you know it. Men!

**EVA** Ah, the pall that comments such as those will cast over my future tangled and tragic dealings with men.

**COUNSELOR** I feel that I should interject here.

**LARRY** Come on, lady, it’s just getting good.

**ANITA** Larry, stop acting out! *Looks to COUNSELOR.*

**COUNSELOR** Very good, Anita. Let’s move on to Carole.

**CAROLE** Well, Larry, as you know, I’ve known you for a long time. I mean, from the day we got you at the orphanage, you were a good boy at heart. And Lord knows I have some bones to pick with your hoity-toity life here. Why any young couple needs three cars...

**ANITA** Mom, please.

**CAROLE** Okay, Okay. But I know that you have strayed from the church. Marrying a--I don’t want to say heathen, Anita, but...

**ANITA** Oh, just say it! Just say it!

**CAROLE** Anyway, Larry, you need to find your way back to the fold. I don’t know if this fancy schmancy clinic is the answer...

**ANITA** It’s called St. Mary’s, mom! It’s a Catholic establishment!

**CAROLE** Well I know now, honey, don’t get all upset. Larry, it’s time to let the Lord be your guide.

**COUNSELOR** *Standing, holding hand over heart:* God grant me the strength to ...

**CAROLE** That’s absolutely right, young lady. So, I don’t have some big checkbook, Larry, or any threats or ballyhooing. I know you’re sick, son, and I want you to get better. I’m going to pray for you, and my prayer group is praying for you, and Father Greer is saying a special prayer for you, and putting you in the leaflet this Sunday.
LARRY Good Lord.

CAROLE Don't you dare use the Lord's name, but anyway, to tie it up now, son, I love you and I want you to get better. And you can always come to Florida and live with me. There's not too much room, but Betty has a pull-out couch, and there's... Becomes teary: There's always some hot cocoa for you.

LARRY Thanks, mom. Takes his feet off the table. Looks down.

CAROLE Well now, son.

COUNSELOR Smiling: Thank you very much, Carole. I feel we're making progress here. Who would like to speak their heart next? Anita begins to cry softly. How about you, Eva?

EVA To audience: It seems that my time to join this circus is nigh. I will attempt to bravely speak my heart, and to do my family justice as the eldest child. To Larry: You're always drunk. I don't know what to say. And you're mean to me and to mom, especially. If you loved me you'd stop drinking. To audience: Alas! I have failed! When words were my only weapon to strike at the black heart of alcohol abuse, I dulled their razor edge with the sandpaper that is fear! I will forever be attracted to men with mental problems because of my inability to save my father from the dragon that is alcohol abuse! Alas!

LARRY Well, Anita, I see you've even brainwashed my child. Thanks, F, for standing by your dad when he needed you.

Eva puts her head in her hands. Two angels enter stage left. They wear white, and have large feathered wings. Each wears a sign board. Signboards of Angel #1 reads, "CONSTANT INSECURITY." Signboards of Angel #2 reads "OVERWHELMING ATTRACTION TO IMPOSSIBLE MEN THAT YOU KNOW WILL MAKE YOU MISERABLE." They wear toe shoes, and perform a lovely ballet, surrounding Eva.

ANGEL #1 Eva! Eva! We are here to take you away from the pain!

ANGEL #2 Embrace us as part of your life and we will shield you from the venomous spider that is alcohol abuse!

ANGELS #1 & #2 In a compelling lullaby: Embrace us! Embrace us!

EVA Okay.

ANGELS #1 & #2 In a compelling lullaby: Hooray! Hooray! They sit on either side of Eva and shield her with their arms.

COUNSELOR I feel that it is time for you to speak, Anita.

LARRY Go ahead, Anita. I can't wait to hear this.
ANITA Calms herself for a moment, and then speaks in an even tone:
Larry, I love you. I have since the day I met you. I did not want to believe that there was a problem. I thought that it was my fault. But it isn’t anyone’s fault. Looks at counselor. Counselor nods approval. We can get through this. You can get treatment and I can help you. I beg you, for our marriage, for our children, for...love.

LARRY As if you have any idea, Anita, on God’s earth, what love is. As if you have any Goddamn right...

CAROLE Now, Larry, don’t you use the Lord’s name in vain!

LARRY Sorry, mom.

CAROLE Benevolently: That’s just fine, son.

ANITA If you do not go, I will leave.

LARRY And where, pray tell, will you go?

ANITA I will leave.

ANGELS #1 & #2 In a compelling lullaby: If only they knew! If only they knew!

COUNSELOR: Are you finished, Anita?

ANITA Oh, I don’t know. I just don’t know. I can’t bear this. Larry, please. Please.

COUNSELOR Thank you, Anita. Well, I feel that this is the time, Larry, for you to make a decision. You can fly tonight to St. Mary’s a pleasant residential clinic with many luxurious features including a pool and golf course, or you may continue to abuse alcohol at your own peril. The choice is yours.

ANITA Larry, I beg you.

LARRY Goddamn you all, I have that to say. After I work my ass off, I get this..bullshit for a thank you. Well, Goddamn you all. If you’re going to force me into a corner like a Goddamn child, then I’ll act like a Goddamn child. You want to pay for me to play golf? Fine, then. If it will get you off my back for once, Anita, I’ll go. Give me the Goddamn ticket.

ANITA Oh, thank you, Larry. She rushes to embrace him. All rise and hug, and from stage right, confetti fills the air. Close curtain.
XI.
*What Happened With Paolo*

It was Paolo who wanted to go to Chappaquidick. Some of his friends were having a party there, and we caught the ferry at sunset. Aislin and Jen and my mother were having a barbeque at our house. A soon as we got off the boat, and began the trek along the beach to the party, I wished that I had stayed home. Paolo's parties were always full of people who were too thin and drank gin.

I could hear opera music before I even saw the brightly-lit house. Paolo's friends were older and raised their eyebrows a lot. I stood in the corner and ate olives. I wished that I had worn stockings. The olives tasted oily and sharp. "I used to hate olives," I told Paolo, when he finally came over to talk to me.

"Really?"

"I used to hate cheese, too."

"How in the world," said Paolo, "Can someone hate cheese?"

"I don't know," I said. Paolo had combed his hair, and it hung around his shoulders. He wore a new cologne, which made me dizzy. He had not worn anything underneath his V-neck sweater. "Want to walk on the beach?" I asked.

He looked back at his friends, who leaned towards one another, speaking in low and important tones. He nodded, and took a bottle of wine from the table.

The moon was bright as day. "I hope there are fireworks," I said. Paolo nodded disinterestedly. "I wish I wasn't wearing leather shoes," I said.

"We can go back."

"No," I said. I took off my shoes and pressed my toes into the sand. "Yippee!" I said. I held the hem of my dress above my knees. I pulled it up to my waist quickly, and then let it back down. I wasn't wearing underwear. "I'm becoming Italian," I said.

"No," said Paolo, "You're not."

We lay down next to a dune. "It's hot alright," I said, as Paolo opened the
wine. I lay down on the blanket, and let my hair fan around me. It was getting long. I could tie it in a knot on the top of my head. Paolo did not mind my dimpled thighs, so I draped one over his lap. Paolo held the wine to his lips and drank.

"You have to sit up to have some," he said, "Sit up, American girl."

I opened my mouth and closed my eyes. "Just pour it in," I said. After a moment, I opened my eyes and saw that Paolo was crying, his eyes covered with his fingers.

"My God," I said, "What's the matter?" I sat up. I put my arms around him.

"My heart hurts," said Paolo. He uncovered his eyes and looked at me, his dark eyes as familiar now as a brother's.

"What's wrong?" I said.

"Oh I must be true," said Paolo. "I have a wife," said Paolo.

After a time, I said, "I think I'll catch the ferry back." The ground felt wet beneath the blanket.

"Love is such suffering," said Paolo, "Oh, it's true."

We did not have sex.
June 15
Lamu Island, KENYA
Aislin, darling,

Isn’t this a great picture? This is Mount Kenya, which I hiked last week. Now, I’m wearing a bikini on the beach by the Indian Ocean—I can hardly believe it myself! How are things in the Vineyard? I’m sure you’re having a ball. Can’t wait to tell you about all my adventures. Thinking of you. XXOO Aunt Betty

June 15
Lamu Island, KENYA
Dearest Eva,

How are you? How is the lovely Vineyard? As you can imagine, it’s hotter here. I’m on an island now, called Lamu. I’m enjoying ten days R&R before heading home. Let me tell you about the adventures I’ve been having! I thought about you the whole time, and I wish you could have been here with me. I flew into Nairobi (they call it Nai-ROBBERY!) and stayed in the lovely Hilton there. It was crazy—imagine Manhattan with chickens and pigs in the street!

I went to the Maasai Mara to do the article. The “tents” you stay in there have electricity and showers, and, as promised, the Maasai men were glorious. They only eat meat and drink blood and milk, and they are skinny as beans. They performed a dance where they jumped up and down and made throaty noises—like humming—it was incredible. I’ll show you the pictures. Maybe I’ll come visit you on the island?

I’ve been thinking about our talk over Indian food (thank you for a lovely evening, by the way), and I have some important ideas for you. I do think that I’ve spent much of my life trying to be your mama, to be like her and as good as her. Please don’t make this mistake.

But there is another mistake you should be careful of. I can see now that many of the choices I made in my life were so I wouldn’t be like your mama. I think, in retrospect, I cut of parts of myself that I should have explored, because they were too much your mama’s ground. Does that make any sense? Just be sure to do what you want always, whether or not is is something Aislin would want to do. In other words, NOT doing things that she would be good at is still letting yourself be controlled by the situation. Anyway, I’ve had too much time to think!

I’ll call as soon as I get home,
Love always,
Betty

June 25
Martha’s Vineyard
Hey Bernard!

What's up? Things here are fine, and I just found this postcard and thought I'd thought of you. Not because it's an alligator or anything but because I've been thinking of you in general, I mean. I've been thinking of you. It is very hot here, but luckily we can swim. Do you think you'll be coming to visit? Because I'd really enjoy if you did. This is retarded. I'm not going to send this. The point is, do you love me?

June 25
Martha's Vineyard

Hey Bernard!

How are you? I just found this postcard and thought I'd say hello. Hope all is well in New York.
Thinking of you,
Eva
P.S. Come see us!
XIII.

My mother began to spend all of her time in her room, asleep or just lying, curled up, and looking at the wall. She stopped, after a while, coming out for dinner. If we brought her food, she would eat it. My father called a few times, and my mother would not come to the phone. Aislin yelled at my mother, cried, and sat next to her and held her hand. For once, my mother wouldn’t open up, not even to Aislin. One night, Aislin and Jen went out dancing. I stayed home to read. My mother was in her room, as usual. I had almost forgotten about her until the phone rang. It was my father.

“Eva, how’s the old summer going?” he said. He made no mention of the fact that we had not spoken in a month.

“Fine,” I said.

“Working at the fudge shop,” he said, “huh?”

“Yup.”

“Can you grab your mom for me?” he said.

“Oh.” I pulled the phone to the door of my mother’s room. I knocked. There was no sound. “Mom?” I said, into the phone, I said, “Let me pick up her extension. I think she’s asleep.”

“No problemo.”

“Hold on,” I said.

“Aislin tells me she’s been getting plenty of shut-eye.”

“Yes, hold on.”

I opened the door. The lights on the bedside tables were off, but the bathroom light was on, casting an orange triangle of light onto the bed. The bed was empty, the cotton sheets like frozen waves in my mother’s wake. “Mom?” I said. The room smelled stale. I turned on the overhead light. My mother was asleep on the floor by the bathroom. In her white nightgown, she lay on the navy rug. I almost kicked her—I wanted to—but I leaned down and put my hand on her shoulder. Her skin was clammy. “Mom!” I said, “Wake up.” She rolled toward me and opened her eyes a bit.

“Where am I?” she said.

“On the floor,” I said. She sat up slowly. Her nightgown was dirty, and her
movement let a sweaty smell rise from her. She squinted in the bright light. Her face was pocked where it had pressed against the carpet. Her eyelids were swollen with too much sleep. In the light, I saw the lines that ran out from her eyes towards her hair, as if she were breaking apart at the seams. She moved a hand over her eyes.

"Oh yes," she said, "I wanted a bath."

"Dad's on the phone," I said. She kept the hand over her eyes. Her fingernails, always manicured, had grown ragged and yellow. She sighed, and lay back down.

"Will you run me a bath, angel?" she said.

"Dad is on the phone," I said loudly. She closed her eyes. I stood up and grabbed the phone from the bedside table. I picked up the reciever. "Here she is!" I said to my father. I held the phone next to my mother's ear. She did not move. I heard my father saying, "Hello! 'Nita? Hello? Hello?" I mashed the reciever into her ear. Her face was turned away from me. My father was talking in a low murmur. I sat back but kept the phone against her ear.

"Please," whispered my mother. I wished I didn't have to be in the middle of this. "Angel, please," said my mother, and I realized that she was talking to me. Her shoulders heaved, and my father's voice grew louder. I heard him say, "Listen!" and then my mother turned towards me. Her face was wet with tears. It was like she was too weak to push the phone away. Into the mouthpiece but looking at me, she said, "Hang up, baby."

She was my mother. I hung up the phone. I did not answer it when it rang again. "He's been mean always," I said, "I don't understand."

My mother shook her head and pressed her lips together. She bunched up her face like a horrible mask and she cried. "Please run me a bath, baby girl," she said in-between sobs. I ran her a bath. I poured lavender crystals in the water. I did not ask any more questions. If I had, and Aislin would have, maybe everything would have turned out differently.

In college, I was studying Physics. There is a theory that every time you make a decision, the universe splits, and though you exist in one universe, there is another one running along your life in which you chose differently. Somewhere, I am having lunch with my mother, or sitting next to her by the ocean. I think this is true. There is a universe
where I pushed harder that night, or did something--anything--differently.

But in this universe, I helped my mother into the bathroom and shut the door. I did not want to see her naked, and I went into the living room and read a book about a woman with seventeen personalities. I drank hot chocolate--the spill that occurred when Jen’s return startled me is still on the pages. By the time I checked on my mother, she was asleep again, in bed. We never talked about what was happening to her, and how I could keep it from happening, someday, to me.
The first day of stillness after the storm, before we knew, I remember the T-shirt sellers along the Edgartown dock. They sold colorful T-shirts which slapped against each other in the breeze from the waves below. The T-shirts said: I Got Blown By Bob, I Survived Hurricane Bob on Martha’s Vineyard, and Bob Blew Martha and I Was There. I remember thinking I should buy one of those T-shirts, that my friends at Williams would think it was funny. The man selling them was old and he wore a grey baseball cap. He sat on the dock, his back to the torn-apart boats and the houses half-fallen into the sea. In front of the devastation, the man sat, his T-shirts and his rueful grin a testament to the grains of hope embedded in the day after despair.
Danny worked with me on Thursday afternoons. Most days, he made the fudge on a marble table, catching the soft batter as it rushed, steaming, towards the edge of the table. He wielded a wooden spatula, and turned the fudge and kept it from hitting the floor with a grace that had begun to amaze me. Tourists with video cameras trained their lenses on him, but as soon as they focused, he would have moved outside of the frame. I stood behind the counter and sold the fudge that had hardened and been cut into slabs. "It's beautiful," I had told Jen, "the way he turns the fudge." She had looked at me, head cocked, as if examining a museum exhibit.

"Wow," she had said, "That's all I have to say."

Since the incident with my mother, and his new relationship with the small girl from the marina, Danny had not paid any attention to me.

That afternoon, Danny was working behind the counter with me. The owners, a curmudgeonly couple from Macinac Island, Michigan, were getting ready to leave the island for a long weekend in Boston. "Have you got the calamine lotion?" said Bess. George was cleaning the little picket fence that ran the length of the store, to keep the throng of fudge fans from bruising Danny and his partners (all men) in their avid appreciation. There was no fudge-making on Thursdays. I do not know the reason for this.

"I said, do you have the calamine lotion?" said Bess.

"We're going to the metropolis," said George, rolling his eyes. He stepped back and nodded at his accomplishment: a row of gleaming pickets.

"What?" said Bess. Her voice was edged with a rasp that said: nobody has ever listened to me, and dammit, you will. It said: I have given up wanting to be liked, and now I just want to be acknowledged.

"I'll get it, just hold on, will you?" George had no hair. The chain of fudge stores had been his grandfather's. "Can I leave the two of you to be responsible?" he said, gesturing towards our responsibility: fence, copper tub of popcorn, rows of fudge, jellybeans...
“Yes, sir, you can,” I said. Danny bit at a fingernail.

“Young man?”

“Yes,” said Danny. He was the quiet type.

“Well, I hope I can count on you both,” he said. They were going to a seminar called, “Running Your Small Business With Power and Pizazz.” They had been talking about their “appointment” in Boston since the beginning of the summer, and it had been a matter of great speculation (marriage counselor? divorce lawyer? an operation of some gory or private sort?) with all of us fudge workers. A guy named Tip found the brochure on George and Bess’s desk. On the cover, a man with big teeth and a flower in his buttonhole grinned and held his fist high. We were all a little afraid.

“Looks like we’re ready to roll,” said George. His cheeks and forehead were flushed, and his face had begun to shine. His whole head had begun to shine. I thought: Interesting—when you sweat, you sweat all over your skull. This was not something I had not known, perhaps, but it was something that had never occurred to me.

Bess had put on her glasses. She pinned them to her hair with barettes. The ferry left at three. She pointed to the three lumpy suitcases on the floor. Bess and George lived behind the store. “Let’s go, dear,” she said. George picked up the luggage, and the screen door snapped shut behind them.

“Sianora,” said Danny. “Get me some fudge, will you babe?”

“Get your own fudge,” I said. I slid open the rack and threw him a piece of rocky road.

“I’ve got a present.” Danny had become increasingly cool as the summer had progressed. He peppered his phrases with cool words that he had leaned. To signify that he was happy, Danny would say, “Par-ty!” He had begun to talk as if he were stoned when he was not: a low, drawling flatness that pulled out the syllables in each word past the stretching point. I didn’t know quite what to do about his evolution. He had never tried to kiss me again.

“What’d you get?” I said.

He bent over his backpack, which was underneath the counter. His hair almost reached to the middle of his back, and his T-shirt was worn thin enough so that the brown
of his shoulders shone underneath it. He pulled out a jelly jar, and shook it.

"Vodka?" I said. He nodded. There were no customers in the store. I liked vodka.

We poured plastic cups half-full of the punch that we sold out of self-mixing containers that made an incessant rushing sound. We added the vodka. We drank.

"This is really nice," I said. I meant it. I was happy.

"I like gin," said Danny. I laughed, and was afraid it sounded false. I ran my fingers through my hair, and tried to puff it out some.

"Are you happy?" I said.

"Sure," said Danny.

"I meant, with this."

"What?"

"Um, I mean us." Danny looked at me, and there were many things he could have said.

"Why wouldn't I be?" he said. I sighed.

I rode my bike home in the gathering night. Danny and I had made plans to shower and meet for drinks at the Edgartown Grill and Bar, where the bouncer always asked your sign when he checked your ID. My real sign was Taurus. My fake ID made me a Pisces.

The rod from Oak Bluffs to Vineyard Haven runs along the sea. The waves were choppy, and the water was dark. I sang my favorite song as I pedaled: *I'm trying to forget you but it just won't work*...

I pulled into our driveway and leaned my bike on the house. There was steam rising from our tar driveway. The leaves in the trees around our house were green and shivering. Yes, I felt that something was happening.

The door to the house was open, and my mother's Billie Holiday record was playing. The house smelled like suntan lotion and air freshener. My mother had cleaned the house. Books that had been balanced on the edge of the sofa had been put away. All the coffee cups and plates that had not been washed were gone. The green afghan was folded on the back of the couch, and the glass-topped table was shiny and clean, empty.
The blue darkness outside cast unfamiliar shadows around the house, and the volume on
the record player was too loud. I dropped my backpack and shut the record player off.
There was a heavy silence, and then I heard clicking footsteps across the kitchen floor.

“What happened to my music?” called my mother a second before she appeared in
the kitchen doorway. She was made-up. She had colored the gray out of her hair. She
wore a yellow sundress, and matching yellow sandals. I remembered the dress against her
mahogany skin in summers past. Her skin was pale now, and the yellow made her look
more sickly. Perhaps to compensate, she had rouged her cheeks to a peony pink.

“Well?” she said. She put a hand on her hip and raised her eyebrows. She had
painted her nails. Her wedding ring was gone. She looked at me for a moment and shook
her head. “Shower up, buttercup,” she said, “We’re going out to dinner.” She moved to
the sideboard and picked up her purse. She opened it, and rummaged around. She pulled
out a tube of lipstick.

“I have plans,” I said, weakly.

“This,” said my mother, snapping shut her purse, “Is important.”

“Fuck,” I said. She was putting on lipstick in the mirror. “I said fuck,” I repeated.
She moved her lips over one other. “Where is a napkin,” she said, and went into
the kitchen.

In our bedroom, I found Aislin plucking her eyebrows. She didn’t turn when I
came in, but said to the mirror, “Something bad is going on.”

“It’s just dinner, Ais,” I said, “Jesus.”

She turned towards me, one eyebrow half-plucked, the tweezers suspended in
midair. She wore a black silk shirt. “Listen to me for once,” she said.

“I’m sick of your fucking predictions,” I said. “I’m sick of this crazy fucking
family,” I said. “I was supposed to go out,” I said.

“You’ll be sorry someday,” said Aislin. She twisted her hair and secured it along
her head with barrettes.

“What does that mean?” I said. “What have I done, here?”

“Look,” said Aislin, “I just think mom needs us now. Just take my word on
something for once.”
"I said I'd go, didn't I?" I said. I pulled off my brown and white checkered apron. It was frilled around the edges and said "MURDICK'S FUDGE" on the front. I threw the apron on the bed. "What the hell is going on here?" I said. Aislin didn't answer, and plucked hairs one by one, wincing slightly after each pull. "Is she a nut case, or what?" I could hear my mother humming. "She's fucking loony," I said. Aislin had stopped plucking.

"Shut up!" she said, "Just shut the fuck up!" She slammed down the tweezers, and then picked them up and slammed them down again. "I don't know," she said, quietly, "I don't know what."

I went and sat next to my sister. She wore a musky perfume, and she had a brown powder that sparkled brushed across her cheekbones. She was beautiful in the mirror next to me, my heavy chin and rough skin a gruesome mutation of her same face. She stared at me in the mirror. "I'm scared," she said.

"Don't be."

"Something bad is going on," she said. I sighed. Aislin picked up the makeup brush and dipped it into the powder, running the soft bristles across my cheeks. She began to cry as she unscrewed the top of a lipstick tube and pressed the cold color into my lips. She put pearl earrings into my ears.

"I'm in the mood for lobster!" said my mother. "How about you girls?" she said.

"Sure," I said. Aislin didn't say anything. She was watching our mother with a frightening intensity, as if memorizing her: flushed neck, cords defined, strong jawbone, jutting chin, thin lips, wide, slightly crooked teeth, narrow nose, dark eyes in the middle of dark shadows like the center of a dark flowers, high forehead, a bit of greying hair, pale green hat, long hair spilling out underneath the hat, bony shoulders, hands gripping steering wheel tightly, back not touching the seat...

"I just love a good lobster," said my mother. "Your father and I used to go to the Lobster House when we first bought the house," she said, "We'd ride our rickety bicycles-there was no road out here then--and his legs looked so funny, all white, pumping away!" Her voice had a singsong quality, and it was a few notes higher than usual. I felt like I was

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in a movie. I felt like she would laugh, and become her wry self again at any time. I waited for it.

The Lobster House had a deck which overlooked the water. There were no liquor permits in Vineyard Haven, so we had driven to the Oak Bluffs Package Store to buy a bottle of buttery chardonnay. My mother had wanted champagne, exclaiming over a bottle with flowers painted on it, but I had grabbed my mother's hand and pulled her down the dusty aisle and to the refrigerated section. "Oh, what's wrong with a little champagne once in a while?" she had said, straightening her hat.

"The wine is chilled," I said.

"Champagne and lobster?" said Aislin, "Yuck."

My mother laughed then, and it was a gorgeous, throaty laugh, and I smiled without meaning to and the clerk, a short man in overalls, smiled too, looking up from his book.

It had begun to rain while we were inside the store. "I don't know if you ladies should be out tonight," said the man behind the counter while he rang up our wine.

"Rain never stopped us," said my mother.

"This is no rain," said the man. "This is a hurricane. Don't you have a television?"

"Yes," said my mother, "But I don't believe in watching it. A hurricane, you say?"

"Don't you have a radio?" said the man. He turned the knob of a big radio which sat next to the counter. It's antenna was askew, held together with electrical tape. "They thought about evacuating," he said.

"Good Lord," said my mother.

"Cool," said Aislin.

The radio described the movement of Hurricane Bob. It was headed to the island, and should arrive at midnight. Islanders were warned to turn off electrical appliances, stockpile water, and stay inside. Roads would be closed at eleven, and watching the storm from anywhere outside a safe home was extremely Arthurgerous.

My mother looked at her watch. "It's six," she said.

"Let's just go home," I said, "and we can make lasagna."
“I’m not going to let a little storm stop me!” said my mother, and the clerk shrugged, and we got in the car. “We can park at home and walk to the restaurant,” said my mother.

“It’s raining!” said Aislin. The restaurant was about a mile from our house.

“No excuses, girls,” said my mother. “We have umbrellas,” she said.

We found galoshes in the basement, and enough umbrellas for us each to have one.

“This is insane,” I said, and Aislin said, “Oh buck up.” She loved things like this: difficult scenarios and Arthurgerous warnings. As we walked to the restaurant, Mr. LeRoy saw us and honked, pulling his Chrysler to the side of the road.

“Where are you lovely Doherty ladies going this evening?”

“We’re going to dinner,” said my mother, “and we refuse to let a little natural disaster ruin our plans!” Mr. LeRoy laughed, and gave us a ride to the Lobster House.

“Your mother,” he said to me, as we climbed out. “She’s a character,” he said.

The restaurant was empty. “I was going to close,” said the owner, Jem Farrow.

“Oh, pretty please, just a lobster or two?” said my mother, and Jem smiled and held his hands up.

“Only for you, Anita,” he said.

The waiter, a guy about my age, brought us a metal bucket filled with ice and a corkscrew. “May I have a Shirley Temple with two cherries?” said Aislin, and my mother said, “Oh, honey, live a little,” and Aislin looked at me and opened her mouth in surprise and said, “Forget it then, bring me a wine glass,” to the waiter. The waiter smiled. His smile was sweet—his front teeth overlapped a tiny bit.

“In Paris,” said my mother, “Even babies drink wine.”

The lobsters were a fiery orange. They cracked cleanly and the meat was tender and fine. We dipped the meat in bowls of melted butter and wore plastic bibs. Butter ran down our chins and our wine glasses grew slick with it. The waiter’s name was Sam, and my mother flirted with him and he brought us a second bottle of wine from his car. “I was just going to drink it by myself anyway,” he said, and my mother made him take a long sip from her glass when nobody was watching. My mother began to laugh too much, and her
words slurred together. Her faint Southern accent grew pronounced, drawling. She rubbed her eyes with an awkward motion, as though her hand was stiff and paralyzed. Her mascara smeared.

"I've been thinking about love," she said, over strawberry shortcake and coffee.

"Is that right?" said Aislin.

"Love," she said, "That's right, alright. There was an article," she said, leaning towards us. Her eyes were wide, and the pupils were large. For a moment, I thought she was stoned. "It's about people, and how they can leave their bodies at night, while they're dreaming, and meet up with each other, and fly around, watch other bodies. It's their souls. There's a book about it--lots of books."

There was a silence, and then Aislin said, "I don't get it, mommy."

My mother splayed her hands on the table, as if about to push herself forward into something. "Okay, let me...it's like the myth of Cupid and Psyche. Psyche was a lovely girl. A maiden, so lovely that she blinded people who looked at her for too long, like the sun. She was like staring at the sun. Her hair was long, and--well, there was a girl in Savannah like that. Audrey Hollins, she walked like she had wings. And Cupid, who you know from the cards and all--the one with the arrow. He came and captured Psyche while she slept in a silken bed. As he carried her away, her hair brushed over the starry sky. He lay her down in the most beautiful castle in the world. There were gold doorknobs, and feathery beds--the floor was made of feathers."

"How's that dessert ladies?" said our waiter, and my mother blinked and looked up at him.

"It's just fine," I said, loudly.

"Even the floor was feathered," said my mother. "You see, it was like this boy--a cupid boy."

The waiter stood awkwardly, shifting his weight from one foot to another. His smile never wavered. "More coffee?" he said.

"Look at those cheekbones," said my mother. She was staring at the waiter.

"We're all set, here," I said.

"Okay then," said the waiter. He walked quickly through the swinging door into

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the kitchen.

"Mommy," said Ailsin, "Let's go home." I wanted Aislin to slap my mother. It seemed like what would happen, but Aislin shrank in her seat. She looked down at her fork.

"Cupid came every night to the beautiful maiden," said my mother. "And they made beautiful love all night long. She cried with love."

"Mom!" I said. "What the fuck--"

"But Psyche couldn't stay with Cupid. It was not enough. Cupid gave her everything she could ever want, golden candlesticks were lit around her bed. But Psyche was stupid, and shallow. She called her sister, and they planned to catch the golden boy." My mother stopped, and raised her eyebrows. Aislin was chewing her shortcake and looking at her.

"Mom, are you losing it? Is that what's going on, here?" I said.

"Eva!" said Aislin, "Finish your story, Mom. It's good." Aislin's fingers clamped my knee under the table. I wanted to cry. "I'm older," I said.

"Jesus," said Aislin with disgust. I felt like an idiot. I felt as if I were a child: powerless, angry, hopeless. My face burned.

"They waited with traps late at night, when the moon was full," said my mother.

"Hello? Am I sitting here?" I said.

"They had nets, and a metal hook that would pierce his fragile skin," said my mother, "but he would not bleed. He was a soul, like the article. He was not a body, but a spirit. They waited for him, and when he drifted in, wanting to make love with the maiden, they grabbed him. They beat him and cut him and they killed love. A spirit was not enough for them, see? They couldn't take the gift they had been given." My mother looked like she had just said the saddest thing in the world. "They had to have more," she said, "That's what love is, really. That's what I've figured out. That's what I can give to you girls."

"Thanks, mom," said Aislin.

"I'm going to get some air," I said. Outside, the air was electric. It was raining in sheets, and wind whipped my hair into my face. I could barely breathe, and everything felt
wrong, like the world was coming unhinged. I couldn’t cry, and I stood in the wind, trying just to breathe.

I could see my mother and Aislin inside the restaurant. In the warm candlelight, they laughed and ate dessert. I hated Aislin, then, and I hated my mother. Aislin was holding my mother’s hand. They looked like best friends celebrating a birthday. It is not that I forgot I was one of them. But that moment, with the rain pounding a thrilling cadence on the wooden deck of the restaurant, I knew: Aislin and my mother were the same, and I was different. I would not be like them, lovely and tortured and connected, like a current of the same emotions ran through them both. I was alone.

Sam came up behind me suddenly. “Hey,” he said, and I jumped. “I’m sorry,” he said, “I brought you this.” He held out a black raincoat.

“I’m fine,” I said.

“Oh, okay,” he said, “I didn’t mean to bother you. I just wanted a cigarette, myself.” He draped the raincoat over my shoulders, and walked to the edge of the deck, climbing down onto the sand. His hands were in his pockets, and he watched the storm. He walked a few steps towards the ocean and then he stopped. His blue shirt grew wet. He was thinking his own thoughts, I could tell. He didn’t fidget, or kick the ground, the way I would if I knew I was being watched.

I did not think about it, I promise. I climbed off the deck and I went to Sam. I put my arm around his waist. I leaned my head against his shoulder. We watched the rain.

“Quite a storm,” said Sam.

“Yeah,” I said. After a minute, the rain slowed. In the sudden silence, I dropped my arm and stepped away from Sam. I said, “I don’t know what I’m doing. This isn’t me.”

Sam didn’t say anything. Then he laughed sadly. “Should have known,” he said.

“What?”

“Nothing,” said Sam. “I mean, somebody comes up to me, in the middle of a hurricane—”

“It’s not that it wasn’t me,” I said, “I just, I’m shy, usually.”

“It’s not like you kissed me, or anything,” said Sam. He was short—an inch or so
shorter than me—and his hair was wet and pressed to his forehead. His skin was olive, and
his nose and cheekbones jutted out sharply. His lips were full, and I brought my hand to
the back of his neck and tilted his face to mine and I kissed him. I touched his lips with the
tips of my tongue and he opened them to me. His hands went around my waist tentatively.
I breathed in and pressed my body to his. His thumbs moved over my ribcage, towards
my breasts, and I said, “Sam,” and kissed him slowly. Salt and rain got mixed up in our
mouths.

I pulled back, and Sam said, “My God,” and I laughed. I felt drunk then, and the
night around me spun. “What’s your name?” said Sam.

“I’m Eva,” I said. I held out my hand and Sam shook it. I couldn’t stop laughing.
“This is the most fucked up night of my life,” I said.

“This is unexpected, I must say,” said Sam.

“My mother is going crazy in there,” I said.

“She’s tipsy,” said Sam, “it happens.”

“No,” I said. Sam looked at me and I could tell he was about to kiss me again
when Aislin yelled, “EVA!” I turned and saw her on the deck. Outlined by the lit
restaurant, her shape was dark. I did not answer. “EVA!” she yelled angrily. I knew she
could not see us in the dark. I kissed Sam. He moved his thick fingers over the nipples of
my breasts. He was breathing heavily, his wet groin hard against mine. I felt the tip of his
penis and I couldn’t get enough air in my lungs. I felt my own heart pounding in my ears.

“EVA!” yelled Aislin. Her voice wavered; she was scared.

“I’m here!” I called, and Sam’s kisses trailed to my neck. “I’m coming!” I called.
I kissed Sam openmouthed for another long minute, and then I pulled myself away and
ran, laughing, to the deck. I went to the door of the restaurant, sand in my shoes and my
dress wet against my flushed skin. Aislin stood in the doorway, her arms crossed over her
chest.

“Where did you get that raincoat?” she said. Her lips were pressed together. She
was accusing me of something.

“That waiter,” I said. “He said he’d drive us home,” I said.

“Well, I’m ready,” said Aislin, “and Mom is definitely ready.”
I didn’t ask what she meant. I didn’t want to know.

Jem Farrow waved from the front porch as we piled into Sam’s Dodge Dart. My mother opened the passenger window, letting the rain cover her face. “There’s something exciting about a storm,” she said, her eyes pressed shut. She sat in the passenger seat, and rummaged through the tapes in the glove compartment. “Oh, Elvis!” she said, “Sam, turn it loud.”

Sam turned the stereo up loud, and drove fast. “Heatbreak hotel,” said my mother, “They ain’t kidding.” She sang out loud, and Aislin and I joined her, sitting on top of books and papers in Sam’s back seat. Sam looked nervous, but sang along with us, and when we pulled up in front of our house, my mother pouted.

“Oh, I want to drive some more,” she said.

“Get out mommy,” said Aislin.

“No,” said my mother.

Sam pulled the emergency brake and got out of the car. “Excuse me kindly,” he said. “A lady never opens her own door.” He ran to my mother’s side of the door and opened it. He looked at me and winked as he held out his hand. “May I have this Arthurce?” he said.

“Oh, you’re a card,” said my mother. She took his hand and he pulled her to her feet. She stumbled, and Sam held her waist firmly. His hand held my mother’s waist.

“Jesus,” said Aislin. She kicked Sam’s seat forward and climbed out. The car smelled of fast food. Sam and my mother were halfway to the door. Aislin opened the purse hanging from my mother’s shoulder and pulled out the house key. She opened the door, and Sam led my mother inside. Aislin turned towards me and shaded her eyes with her fingers. “Eva!” she said, “What are you doing out there?” I sighed, and climbed out of the car.

I walked through the wind—even stronger now—and reached the front door. “I’m sorry, ma’am, maybe another time,” Sam was saying.

“Tomorrow!” said my mother. She was lying on the couch, her legs crossed and her shoes off.
"Well, okay then," said Sam. He tapped his foot.

"Come for dinner," said my mother.

"I sure will, then," said Sam. He gave me a pleading look.

"Goodnight," I said. He smiled.

"Goodnight," he said. He pulled away from our house with a squeal.

"Drive careful, now," said my mother.

"He’s gone," said Aislin.

"Isn’t that the truth," said my mother. She closed her eyes. Aislin and I went into our room to change into dry nightgowns.

"Fucking the waiter on the beach?" said Aislin, "That’s lovely." I didn’t answer. Aislin brushed her hair hard and fast. "Well she told me," she said.

"Told you what?"

"Why she’s here." She sighed.

"Why?" I asked.

"I don’t know if I should tell you," said Aislin. I closed my eyes and breathed in. My fists clutched the sides of the mattress I was sitting on. "Dad’s having an affair," she said.

"Come on," I said.

Aislin looked at me, her eyes narrowed. "Can you tell me," she said, "That you honestly didn’t know?"

"How would I--"

Aislin shook her head. "I think I’ve always known," she said.

"What?"

"You just amaze me," said my sister, "I am utterly amazed." She ran into the living room. I could tell she was about to cry. I looked in the mirror for a long time.

Aislin and I undressed my mother. I slipped off her gold sandals. She wore no pantyhose; her legs were pale and smooth and cool. She murmured something when we turned her body to reach her zipper; it slid down easily and exposed the bones of her shoulders. Her breasts were withered, and her skin was loose, and hung in folds around
her arms and stomach. Underneath her perfume, there was a smell—rotten, and decaying. Her body was old, and it disgusted me. I was angry at myself for feeling this way, but I did not want to touch her. Asleep, she was close to death. It frightened me.

"Help," said Aislin, pleadingly. We pulled the red nubby nightgown over her head and down her body. Her underwear was torn and its elastic sagged. I got a blanket from the closet, and tucked it around her, folding it under her small feet. Her feet did not belong to the rest of her: they were smooth and young as a girl's. They were pained with pink polish. Aislin and I sat on either side of her for a long time. We watched the storm out the window, and Aislin scratched my mother's back. My mother put her head in my lap, and I smoothed her hair. She opened her eyes as I got up to follow Aislin into our room.

"You're the big girl," she said to me. "You're my baby," she said.

In the morning, she was gone.

When Aislin and I woke that morning, the sun was shining strong, and outside our house--too far from the ocean to have been hit--everything looked normal. Even Aislin, for all her supernatural powers, her ability to feel when something bad was going to happen, rolled over in her bed and told me about her dream. "It was raining," she said, "well, obviously, and I was lost in the woods, like a red riding hood sort of thing, and I had to get somewhere. But I don't know where. Anyway, I was walking along and I had a basket of those turkey sandwiches they make in the snack bar at the Club, and so I came upon a little man, and his name was Euphrates. And we Arthurced and Arthurced and then I woke up."

"Thrilling," I said.

"No, wait—he had a big present for me! Oh, I hate that! That always happens--I wake up without getting the present!"

"I'm hungry," I said, "and I have to work at eleven."

"I'm going back to sleep," said Aislin, "Wake me if Jim calls."

I figured that she had waked on the couch and walked the stairs to sleep in her room. I made pancakes quietly. On special occasions--birthdays, Mother's Days--we
made pancakes and brought them to each other in bed. I don't know how I knew—and I've thought about it often—that this was a special day. I mixed the eggs and oil into the Bisquick batter, and the cakes sizzled wetly on the griddle. I set out a tray for my mom: napkin in a holder, little vase with a rose from the garden, monogrammed fork and knife, cut-glass syrup holder. I gave her a big mug of coffee with milk and sugar. There was no paper on the front step. I walked upstairs balancing the tray, and I nudged my mom's door open with my foot.

"Good morning to you, good morning to you," I sang, but stopped when I saw the bed was made, the comforter pulled taut and the pillows fluffed above it. I remember thinking: Oh my God, she slept in the sewing room. This was the worst thing I could think of: a new symptom of her neurosis. I put the tray down.

There was no scream of realization; there was no body. Maybe it would have been easier to have found her dead that morning. There would have been something so horrible in finding her, fallen down the stairs in a heap, or drowned in the bathtub, her long hair floating in the water, that it would have been bearable. I would have a shock, an image of her death to deal with. Instead I got: walking to the sewing room, expecting her curled up there, or watering the garden with her green watering can, or down the road buying the paper, asleep in the car, talking to Aislin, in the closet, knocking at the doors of neighbors, sleepy-eyed looks as a fear more terrible than any sight could have been grew in my gut.

I called my father. His secretary told me he could not be disturbed. "Listen, you bitch," I said, "Put him on the phone." I had known my father's secretary since I was six years old. She made rum cakes for Christmas each year.

"My goodness, Eva," she said, and a few seconds later my father clicked on the line.

"Eva, did you call Sally a bitch?" he said. It was the first time I had spoken to him in a month.

"Mom's gone," I said.

"What?"

"Mom's gone, Dad. I don't know what's going on."

"Gone? What do you mean gone?"
"We woke up this morning and she was—we don't know where she is--" Aislin grabbed the phone.

"Get out here, damn you," she said, "This is all your fault!" Her face went red. "I don’t know, get a plane--she’s gone, do you understand? She could be dead!" Aislin's shoulders were shaking. "Okay, okay," she said, and she slammed the phone into its cradle. She looked at me. "He's coming," she said.

The police told us to wait, and my father was due in at five that evening. Jen waited at home, in case she had gone for a walk, and Aislin and I drove the station wagon around the streets, waiting to see her eating at an outdoor table or slipping into a store, her hair following her in a rush. We bought cigarettes and smoked them one after another.

We stopped at the Edgartown Market to call Jen. Aislin got change from Jeanine Gustafson who worked at the counter. Her parents owned the Edgartown Market.

"I heard your mom’s missing," said Jeanine.

"Yeah," said Aislin.

"It’s probably nothing," I said.

"Well, I don’t know," said Jeanine, shaking her head. Her hair was close-cropped and she had terrible skin.

"What do you mean by that?" said Aislin.

"Well, you remember my grandmother," said Jeanine. We did. Arlene Gustafson had walked off one of the Oak Bluffs cliffs under a moonless sky. She had crashed to her death on the stones below, leaving behind a bewildered family. "Accidents happen," said Jeanine. My mother had claimed that Arlene's death was a suicide.

"She could not take the munArthurity of life," my mother had said. "Look at her lump of a husband, for example," she had said. Thinking of my mother, he wry voice, made me want to cry. I took a quarter and called Jen.

"No news," said Jen, "I’m sorry." I bought onion chips and ate them on the porch of the market. The sidewalks were filled with people. Aislin brought me a Coke.

"God, that story about Jeanine’s grandmother," she said.

"Aislin," I said, "Do you think she ran away?"

"No," said Aislin. Tears came to the corners of her eyes. "I hope so," she said.

III
My father flew out that afternoon. Bernard called to tell us he would be coming too, if that was alright with us. I knew Bernard was coming to keep my father from drinking himself to death. We said that was fine.

As we were getting ready to go to the airport, the phone rang, and we froze. “Oh God,” said Ailsin, and I told her I’d get it. “Hello?” I said, into the receiver.

“Darling, I heard,” said my Aunt Betty.

“I know,” I said. I started to cry.

“Who is it?” whispered Ailsin.

“It’s Aunt Betty, don’t worry,” I said. Ailsin looked at the floor.

“I’m trying to book flights from here,” she said, “Don’t cry, baby.” My mother’s sister still lived in Georgia, all alone in our grandmother’s house since. We saw Betty every year at Christmas, when she flew up North to visit friends. She was a fiercely independent woman, and had never married. She had travelled all over the world; had lost a finger to frostbite in Alaska. She fascinated me.

“What if she’s dead?” I said. I was sobbing. I didn’t care.

“Honey, now, you just shush about that. She’s fine, I’m sure of it. I’d know, honey, I’m her sister. Don’t you know I’d know?”

“We’re late,” said Ailsin.

“We’re going to get my dad,” I said, “We’ve got to go now.”

“I’ll be there in two shakes,” said Betty, “Don’t you worry about a thing.”

Ailsin drove to the airport. She stared through the airport window as my father climbed out of the plane and walked towards us over the runway. His hair blew in the wind, and he looked tired.

“Why the fuck is he wearing a suit?” said Ailsin. I didn’t have an answer.

When he walked through the door, the three of us held each other. I could not remember the last time I had touched my father’s skin. He smelled of whiskey. “My girls,” he said. He pressed his lips to my scalp.

“We don’t know what to do, here,” said Ailsin, “We don’t know what’s going on or what to do.” She blinked rapidly. “Help us, here,” she said, and the tears began. She
had not cried yet, and she kept blinking soundlessly as if she didn’t know that her cheeks were wet.

“I’ll take care—” said my father. I could see that he was about to cry as well. “let’s get some lunch or something,” said my father.

“Lunch,” said Aislin flatly. She started to laugh. “Lunch!” she said. She laughed and wiped the tears that ran down her face.

“Bernard is coming in at five,” I said.

“What about Betty?” said my father.

“She doesn’t know yet. She called a few minutes ago.”

“So,” said my father, “I assume that you’re not hungry.”

“What the fuck ever,” said Aislin. My father sighed. When he stopped at the package store on the way home, we didn’t protest.

We sat in the living room and my father made himself a drink. “Tell me everything,” he said. I told him, and Aislin didn’t say a word. I told him how she had arrived in the middle of the night (“We had an argument,” he said), and how she had stopped getting out of bed. I told him about the last night at the Lobster House. My father made several more drinks. He listened, and Aislin listened, watching me with a steely gaze. My father called the police. There was nothing to report. When Bernard called from the airport, my father answered the phone. “Thank God for you,” he said, almost crying. He had slipped into a sentimental rather than a mean drunk, and I was glad of that. He hung up the phone and said, “Now where are my shoes?”

Aislin spoke for the first time in hours. “You are not driving,” she said. My father looked at her and blinked.

“I’ll go,” I said. I grabbed the keys from the table.

“I am not drunk, little miss,” said my father, and I ran out the door.

The night smelled of pine needles. The air was wet and heavy. I drove along the sea to the airport. I did not think of anything: not my mother, not Bernard. I listened to the rush of the car wheels along the road and breathed the salt from the sea. The moon was
low and full.

I pulled into the parking lot of the airport and saw him. Bernard was leaning back against the airport door, which was locked with a heavy chain. He was smoking a cigarette, and one of his legs was crossed over the other. He wore sandals. His shirt was covered with flowers. He came to the car as soon as I slowed. He knocked on my window, and I rolled it down.

"Get out," he said. I opened the door, and as I climbed out, he took me in his arms. I let out all the air inside me; Bernard held me up. I felt his bones, and breathed in his scent: cigarettes and his skin, which smelled like the paper in a brand new book. I didn’t cry, but I pressed my face into his shoulder. He was a full head taller than me. "It’s OK," he said, smoothing my hair with the flat of his hand. We stood there for a time.

When I pulled back, I did not look up into his eyes. I looked at the ground, and I said, "She’s going to be fine."

"Of course, yes," said Bernard. He ran to get his duffel; he ran awkwardly, as if he were not used to running.

"Roll down your window," I said, once Bernard was in the car, "Smell the ocean." We did not talk on the way home, but let the air move over our faces.

"What a place this is," said Bernard. We drove through the woods towards our house and I saw it all with new eyes: lovely, but menacing. Could my mother be lost in this wood? The police, I knew, had combed the island, but what if they had missed one place?

The house was dark when we pulled into the driveway. We walked in the front door. In the light from the window, I could see my father in his chair, his glass and the whiskey bottle on the floor next to him. His ashtray was full, and the living room was thick with smoke. "Why are the lights out?" I said, loudly. "That’s funny," I said, "Who would turn out the lights?"

Bernard put his hand on my shoulder. "It’s OK, Eva," he said. Words ran through my head: clean towels, guest room, make yourself at home...

"You must be hungry," I said. I started to cry.

"Go to sleep, baby," said Bernard. I nodded. He cupped my forehead in the dark
hallway, and I felt his lips on my eyebrow. He kissed me twice, and I went to bed. I did
not say anything. I cried myself to sleep, Aislin breathing evenly in the bed next to me.

When I woke up, I smelled bacon and I knew that my mother was dead. I could
not remember my dream, which must have been important. Aislin's bed was empty.

Betty was in the kitchen, frying bacon. "Hi," I said.

"Oh, sweetpea," she said. She hugged me, the cooking fork in her hand. She
wore jeans and bare feet. She smelled of perfume, and her hair hung down her back. She
had no makeup on.

I sat on a stool. "When did you get in?" I said.

"Late, late," she said, "I took a cab. Do you want breakfast?" she gestures feebly
to the pan.

"Not really."

"I know, I know," she said. She sighed. "I didn't know what to do with myself."

"Is Ailsin--"

"I think she went for a walk on the beach," said Betty. I nodded.

"She's dead," I said.

Betty turned to me, her mouth open. "Honey, that is not true! We haven't had any
such news," she said, "Don't you dare!"

I looked out the window. "I know it," I said. Betty opened the refrigerator.

"Oh good, here's some juice," she said.

"Where's Dad and Bernard?"

"Asleep, I suppose," she said. It was strange for her to be in our kitchen. I could
not remember her having been here before. Her toenails were colored maroon, and they
clashed with the floor linoleum. I thought of Bernard, asleep in the guest room. I
wondered if he had pajamas. I thought about Sam, working at the restaurant. He had not
called me. Maybe he knew that my mother was dead--he had been the last man to hold her.
Maybe he just didn't like me.

I went into the living room. The bottle was empty and upright on the floor. The
ashtray had been emptied. Someone had unfolded the afghan and it lay open on the couch.
I went to the record player and found a Johnny Mercer album. I played it. I sat on the
couch and pulled the afghan around my shoulders. I listened to the music, and thought about Johnny Mercer standing on my grandmother's lawn. He would have a guitar slung across his bony hips, and hair pomaded to a careful sweep. He would know that my mother was lying under the same hot night on her fresh sheets. My mother would belying on her side, her hair trailing over the pillow like waves. Johnny wore an ironed shirt, and colored shorts that showed his bony knees. The line of his jaw would shine in the moonlight as he sang to my mother: *When my sugar walks down the street, all the little birdies go tweet, tweet, tweet...*

I turned the record player as loud as it would go. I went to the screen door. I yelled, "She's DEAD!" and I ran outside, the afghan flapping behind me like I was some superhero. Aislin sat on the beach, her feet in the water. Jim sat next to her, his hand on the small of her back. She was curled tight: not giving him anything to hold onto. She looked down, and he looked towards the water—was he imagining my mother, blue-faced and tossing in the surf? His hair blew in the wind. He moved his hand slowly over my sister's back. I knew that they made love. I stood far behind them and pulled the afghan tight. I was alone.

The record player was still blaring. Nobody saw me as I went to the guest room door. I opened it with a small sound like opening a can of peanuts. Bernard was asleep under the blue sheets my mother had washed and ironed. His skin looked ashy. He did not look peaceful. I thought of climbing under the covers. He was naked. I watched him from the doorway.

I don't know why I loved Bernard. Objectively, he was dirty and smelled of smoke. The sun beat relentlessly against the thin windowshades; I could feel it fighting to get in. The room was soft-colored in the murky haze; I could make out Bernard's silk shirt in a heap on the floor. I went into the bathroom.

Bernard had used one of the rose-shaped soaps from the sky-blue dish. He had left a near-empty tube of toothpaste on the lip of the sink. The toilet seat was up. Bernard's toothbrush was red, and it's bristles were mashed. There was a thick film around the toothbrush where the foam from his mouth had not been rinsed off. I picked at the film,
and some came off underneath my fingernail. I tasted it. It tasted like toothpaste.

Bernard had used one striped face towel and one large towel. He must have showered after the sweaty airplane ride. Maybe he showered every night, and never in the day, so that the beating hot water would calm him down. I once put a chair in the shower so that I could feel the drops on my back like rain.

He had pulled the shower curtain closed. I opened it, and there were still drops from his shower. They were cold, and I touched them to my cheeks. A bottle of dandruff shampoo was open on the edge of the tub—it was not ours. The mint shampoo my mother left for guests was not open.

Bernard must have gone to bed late, and it seemed strange that he had showered. I got inside the shower and thought of his body against mine. His chest, its dark hair wet and scratchy, and his lips on my shoulderblades. I remembered Sam’s penis against my belly. I though of Bernard lifting me up and sliding me against him as the water ran down.

My feet were wet when I climbed out of the tub. Bernard had not unfolded the bath mat from the side of the tub. I saw his bag on the floor, and picked it up. What did I care? My mother was dead.

Inside, there was a razor, shaving cream, two rubber bands tied together, a pen, a small pad which had musical notes scribbled onto makeshift bars. There were matches, tic tacs, and a small bottle of lotion. There was a brown woven hairband. Inside the zippered side pouch, I found five lubricated condoms, a worn envelope, and an earring. It was a woman’s earring: an ornate gold design with a green stone in the middle. I opened the envelope. Inside was a bit of white powder and a picture. The picture was of my family.

I remembered the picture being taken, years ago. In the picture, we sit under a red and white striped umbrella. We are at a hamburger restaurant in Edgartown. The waitress took the picture. My father is pink-faced and his hair is combed and wet. He has his hand over my mother’s shoulder, and he wears a fake, smirking smile. My mother flashes her brilliant smile: it is the same in every picture. She wears a dress with red spaghetti straps over her cinnamon-colored shoulders. Aislin has her eyebrows raised. For years she gave the camera this come-hither stare. She refused to smile. My hair is parted unevenly in the middle, and pulled back into beaded barrettes. I have braces, and I am grinning openly. This
was the day I beat Aislin swimming to the raft at the Edgartown Yacht Club. It was a small victory which filled me with simple joy.

I tasted the powder. I knew it was either cocaine or heroin. It burned my tongue, but I did not feel anything. I put the envelope back. I put the bag on the floor.

I closed the toilet seat and sat down, pushing the door closed with my foot. Whose earring was in Bernard’s bag? Had he taken it in his teeth while making love to a woman who had winked at him during one of his concerts? I had heard tapes of Bernard’s playing, and it had filled me with an ache, like I wanted something but I didn’t know what it was, much less how to get it. And the condoms—had he brought them for me? I knew that most likely he had not.

Bernard kept a picture of my family. I didn’t know what to think about that. Maybe he had never had a family. How could our family be anyone’s ideal? Did he ever look at me in the picture? My eyes were still the same, my smile. Could he see that I was the only one who was different, and true?

Did he use heroin still? My father had told me that he had quit after rehab. Bernard had been an addict for many years. He needed to escape, my father told me.

I wondered if Bernard had opened our medicine cabinet. I opened it, to see what he could see of us. It was carefully arranged: powder, mouthwash, extra soap, two new tooth brushes, aloe for sunburn. My mother was careful about how she presented us. My mother had been careful. My mother was dead.

I came out of the bathroom and Bernard was still asleep. He breathed unevenly, and made snorting sounds through his nose. He didn’t exactly snore, which I was glad about. The room smelled of his smell: new paper. I left him alone.

The day became grey; a small reminder of the storm. My father sat by the window of our house as the rain coursed down the pane. He was waiting for my mother to come home. Jen got a five hundred piece puzzle from somewhere and I sat cross-legged on the rug and tried to put it in order. The pieces were all green, the color of fresh leaves. Their rounded corners and sharp edges kept me from thinking about anything but the way they could fit together, and I would often put one piece inside another piece, and then realize later
that its connection was wrong. In out thick orange rug, I spread the pieces. Bernard took
pages of the Vineyard Gazette and lay them on the rug, pressing them flat with his palms.
"For some stability, Eva," he said. I spent all day working on the puzzle. I think everyone
knew to leave me alone, or maybe they just didn't think of me at all. Ailsin came home for
her jacket, and then went out again. She said she was going to drive around and keep
looking. She said that, keep looking. When I looked at her, I knew she was lying. She
was going to go somewhere secluded with Jim. She was going to let him fuck her brains
out, I knew this. I saw her bright eyes and reddened cheeks.

My Aunt Betty, Jen, and Bernard sat in the kitchen. They made small, spare
collection. I was glad that Bernard was close by. My father drank steadily through the
day, and even before his bottle ran out, Betty had gone to the package store and come back,
hers arms full with groceries in snapping paper bags, and placed a full bottle beside him.
She did not look at him as she did this. She knew as instinctually as the rest of us: this
was not the time to complain of his drinking.

At dinner time, I had not finished the puzzle. All day, between bad rock songs, the
radio had given reports about my mother's disappearance and the mystery surrounding it.
"The isolated community of Martha's Vineyard is left wondering why," said one radio
voice. "Some surmise it was a getaway, carefully planned to elude family and friends.
Some believe it was a suicide attempt, or cold-blooded murder. The body has not been
found, and Anita Doherty's family refuses to speak to the press." It was true that we had
taken the phone off the hook, but only one reporter had tried to come to the house, and
Betty had turned him away kindly.

Betty and Jen came out of the kitchen with the cookbook. It was one of my
mother's old ones, and they had chosen a complicated recipe: mu shu pork with curry
pancakes. "Bernard will go to the store," said Betty,"What do you think?" She and Jen
looked at me hopefully. I shrugged. I had begun to be angry at Aislin for leaving me here.
It was all I was thinking about.

"I'm not hungry," said my father, angrily.

"Nobody asked you," I said, quietly.

"Oh, I see how it is," said my father.
“Do you want to come to the store?” said Bernard, “Come on, I have your coat.” I stood up. My legs were wobbly. Bernard slid the coat over my shoulders. Jen watched me with wide eyes. “I’m fine,” I told her. I said, “Jesus! You’d think somebody died!” I laughed. Jen looked at the ground. Betty put her arms around me, and I shrugged her off more fiercely than I had meant to. I kept laughing.

“Will you all shut up?” said my father. He said it quietly, under his breath. I was trying to find an answer when Bernard took hold of my elbow and pulled me outside. The door slammed shut.

“What an asshole,” I said. Bernard didn’t answer. He still held on to me as if I would run away. “He is, Bernard,” I said, “I’m just saying.”

He watched me carefully and let go of my arm to open the car door. I climbed in.

“I’m not going anywhere,” I said, “Why would I go anywhere?” Bernard didn’t answer. He turned on the engine and the windshield wipers. The rain beat down steadily, the wipers went clunk and clunk and we sat there. “Put the car in gear,” I said, “What’s the matter with you, buddy?”

Bernard looked at me with the same wide eyes as Jen. “I’m worried,” he said.

“About what? Whom, I mean.”

“About you, Eva,” he said. I was quiet for a moment. Why the hell would he be worried about me? My mom was surely dead, my sister was a nut sex-fiend, and my father wa drinking himself into a grave. I was the least of everyone’s problems.

“You don’t have to worry about me,” I said. I laughed, and then I said, “Bernard, get with the program. Nobody worries about me.”

Bernard put the car in reverse. “I do,” he said, simply, and I didn’t know itf I should be flattered or insulted and I was too tired to care. I turned on the radio and Carly Simon sang and we drove, through the rain, to the store.

“Cart or basket?” said Bernard. The supermarket was small, and had a terrible produce section. I was embarassed for Bernad to see it. I was afraid he would call it quaint, or that he would say something, anything wrong. Suddenly, I needed him to be perfect: my ticket out. I could bear the chaos around me if Bernard could serve, however
temporarily or superficially, as my beacon.

"Cart, of course."

"Whatever you say, my dear." Bernard gestured to a cart, and I surveyed it and nodded.

"Bernard?" I said.

"Yes?"

"Let's get lots and lots of food." And we did. We went down each aisle and took whatever looked appealing. I had no appetite. It was simple gratification that I craved. If I wanted Lorna Doone cookies, I put five in the cart. I filled a bag with terrifyingly bright oranges. We bought Coke and Pepsi and generic Cola. We bought chips and dips in airtight containers and ten ears of corn. We bought spices. We bought meat: chicken, pork, family size ground beef. Bernard threw me a box of Smurf cereal and I cried, "Of course!" He ran around the store with a manic glee. I laughed until I had to put my hand on my knees and caught my breath. It was like we had to outrun something, and the louder we were, the farther away it would retreat. We bought three boxes of microwave popcorn.

I didn't know the clerk behind the counter. He watched us tiredly. He couldn't have been more than sixteen years old. He looked as if we would walk out without paying and he wouldn't know what to do besides hang his head. When we reached the counter, with a basket piled high with groceries, I said, "Give me a carton of Marlboro's." Bernard looked at me, an eyebrow cocked. "What?" I said, smiling.

The boy nervously handed me the carton. He was supposed to ask for my lisece, but I could tell he was afraid. Usually, I would feel terrible, but today I felt powerful. "Matches?" I said. He handed me a pack. "May I have a light, dear?" I said to Bernard.

"Of course, dear," he said, and I unwrapped a carton, and then a pack, and I tapped it on my wrist and took one slim cigarette out. Bernard reached toward me with a flame.

The hot smell of wet pavement hit me as soon as we walked out of the store. The absense of salt in the air, here in the center of town, filled me suddenly with sadness. I don't know what was behind the rush of tears that came to my eyes; I suppose it was a million things. But I cried, in the parking lot. I began to sob, and Bernard put his bags on
the ground and took mine from my arms. Then he put his arms around me and hugged me. I cried into his thin cotton sweater. “She’s dead,” I said, and he said, “You don’t know,” and I said, “I do,” and he kissed me. He was brushing my tears away with his chin and his lips just came down and he pressed them to mine. There was wetness behind the kiss, but we did not open our mouths. I turned away and pushed him with my forearms. I was crying, still.

“What are you doing?” I yelled. I stood in the parking lot of the supermarket with sagging bags of groceries all around me, oranges rolling on the pavement, the smell of rain about to fall again. There were low dark clouds and I hadn’t combed my hair and my mother would never talk to me again, but secretly I hoped she would be home and I could tell her what I knew about the thin man in front of me with tears in his eyes as scared as mine.

“This is not the fucking time,” I said, and I picked up a bag and ran across the lot to catch the oranges.

Of course there was no word. My father had met with the police once, and then Betty had volunteered to check in every few hours. My father was more than happy to stare out the window and drink. It was the longest time I had ever seen him sit quietly. Betty had been phoning from the bedroom every few hours and then coming out and shaking her head. When Bernard and I came back from the store, she was in the bedroom again. “Can you finish?” I said to Bernard, putting my armful of groceries on the kitchen counter.

“Of course,” he said, and then he said, “Eva?”

“What?”

“I’m sorry, I mean...”

“Just wait, okay?” I said, “I can’t really deal with anything--”

“Of course,” he said. I went into the bedroom. Betty was sitting on the bed, her arms around her knees, her head down, crying.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” I said, and she looked up.

“No, no,” she said, “I’m fine, I’m fine.” I went and sat next to her on the bed.
"We got all this food," I said. "Meant, and Smurf cereal, those pudding pops."

She didn’t answer. Her hair was pulled back, and she wore gold hoop earrings. She looked like my mother suddenly—her eyes, the way they crinkled, were the same.

"What do you think, Ev?" she said, "Did she run away?"

"She wouldn’t leave me—us," I said, "I wish she had, or could have, or... but I know, I know it," I said.

She looked at me, and I could see the sadness move from her jaw through her lips and cheeks to her eyes. "You think she’s..."

"Yeah," I said. I was calm.

"But did she want to die, do you think? How could she?"

I remembered my mother, on the floor, listening to my father’s voice and too weak to turn away. I had held the phone to her ear. She was like a baby. "She wanted to die," I said.

Betty hugged her knees tight. "No," she said, "No!" She looked scared. "It’s not true," she said. I held her, but she didn’t cry.

Aislin did not come home for dinner. Jen and Bernard and I cooked, and Betty sat beside my father by the window. She pulled up a chair. "What do they expect to see?" I asked, "What, like some ghost walking up the path?"

"Are you okay?" said Jen.


"I just don’t know what to do," said Jen.

"Chop the onions," said Bernard. Jen did. I mixed flour, sesame oil, and curry powder with my fingers. I mixed in water and rolled the dough. I cut it into pieces and rolled out tortillas. I heated peanut oil in our round metal wok. The oil steamed and we added ginger, scallions, and mushrooms. The sizzling sound mesmerized me, and I tossed the vegetables with my spatula. Bernard slowly poured in the pork with its soy sauce, sugar, and Marsala wine marinade. The smell was wonderful and strange. Bernard stood close to me and I thought of my exposed neck, of his lips upon my neck as I stirred the vegetables and stood above the steam.
“Plum sauce, voila,” said Jen. She held out a bowl. She had diced fresh plums and a clove of garlic, and mixed in sesame seeds and vinegar. I poured the pork onto a china service dish. Bernard had wrapped silverware in napkins. We brought out the fragrant food.

“Come on, guys,” I said. Betty was holding my father’s hand. He did not seem to notice. His bottle was almost done. They both had their eyes closed.

“Oh,” said Betty. She opened her eyes. She looked surprised at her hand in my father’s, and she dropped it. He did not wake. Betty stood slowly and stretched. “My, my!” she said, “Doesn’t that smell divine!” Her voice was hoarse.

“Don’t you think your dad should, um, eat something?” said Jen.

“He’ll be fine,” I said. We ate. I chewed each bite slowly, and while everyone praised the food, I stayed silent. When dinner was over, there would be nothing to do until morning. Food in my mouth, at least, was something to do.

The Murphy’s brought us their TV while we ate. “Thought you might want to...” said Mr. Murphy, “You know, something’s always on.” He smiled. We thanked him.

“You all ok, here?” he said.

“Oh, yes,” said Betty, “We’re just fine, considering.”

“Good, glad to hear,” said Mr. Murphy, and he left quickly. A week ago—two days ago—he would have been invited in for a drink or a story. Vineyard nights were famous for such “stopping-by’s” that lasted all night. Tonight, he was headed home in minutes.

Bernard plugged in the television, and turned the dial away from the news. We knew the news. There was no news. Betty went into the bedroom to call the police. Jen sat next to me on the rug, where I had begun to work on the puzzle again. She put her hand over mine. “Eva,” she said, “Want to go out for a drink or something?”

“What?” I said, “Am I hearing you?”

“I’m sorry, I just thought that maybe it would be good to get out, or something.” She looked crestfallen, but I didn’t care. It was a strange feeling, as I was used to caring
too much about everyone else’s feelings. I could walk into a room, usually, and know that someone in the corner was upset, and I would spend all night trying to make them feel better. But now, I look at Jen, my best friend, and I saw her pain and confusion, and I couldn’t have cared less. It was like she was a show on television that had no connection to me. I felt objectively sad: poor girl. I did not want to make the small gestures (squeezing her hand, or smiling at her) that could have made her feel fine.

Instead, my mouth opened and said, “You want me to drink. That’s a fabulous idea.” I laughed, a bitter sound.

Jen said, “I’m so sorry.” She sat next to me miserably for a moment, and then she went into the kitchen. I could see her, sitting on a stool with her knees pulled up and her mouth trembling like it did before she cried. I didn’t care. She could cry all day, for all I cared.

Bernard found a television movie. It was called “True Lies.” It was about a woman who ran lie detector tests. She fell in love with a murderer who failed the test. Her belief in the test and in herself was in question. She had blonde hair.

During a commercial, my father said, “Where the hell is Aislin?” Bernard and I ignored him, and watched intently as a man sang about decaf in the morning. Bernard was sitting on the couch behind me. I could feel the heat of his body, and the weight of his eyes on me. “Where is she?” my father said, louder.

“How should we know?” I said.

“Don’t get smart,” said my father.

“Shut the fuck up,” I said, quietly.


“Nothing,” I said.

Betty was sitting with Jen in my room when I went to change into my pajamas. I had left Bernard sitting sadly on the couch. When I came in, they stopped talking. I went to the bureau and pulled out plaid pajama bottoms. I picked a T-shirt off the ground. Jen and Betty were looking at me. “You guys missed a great movie,” I said.

“Tell us about it,” said Betty, in a false cheery voice.
"This murderer seduces a woman who can’t figure out what the truth is,” I say, "But it’s not over yet. Maybe she’ll get killed or something."

Betty and Jen didn’t seem to have anything to say about that. Jen was already under the covers, as if she were about to go to sleep. Her hair was wet and combed, and her face looked scrubbed raw. Her eyes were puffy. "Going to sleep, Jen?” I said.

"Why? Did you want to do something, or talk, or--" I said.

"No,” I said meanly, “Go to bed. Sweet dreams.” She started to tear up. “Can I ask you one question?” I said. She nodded. “I just want to know,” I said, “I’m just wondering, what you have to cry about.” She stopped sniveling and her mouth opened. I could see her crooked bottom teeth. She shook her head. “I’m just wondering,” I said.

“Eva, you are not helping matters,” said Betty.

“The point is,” I said, “I don’t really give a shit.” I left the room. In the bathroom, I changed into my pajamas. Bernard was still watching television. My father had moved his drinking into his room. The chair was mashed down where he had sat for so long. His ashtray was gone. There was nothing outside the window but dark.

I sat next to Bernard on the couch. He looked at me and smiled. He was shivering. “Are you cold?” I said, but he shook his head.

“Sometimes,” he said, “It’s hard for me to be clean.” I didn’t say anything. “I used heroin for close to seven years,” he said, and shook his head, as if amazed.

“How long has it been?” I said.

“You know, Eva, three years.”

“Oh yeah, ever since my dad went dry,” I said.

“He’s doing his best,” said Bernard, “This is a hard time.”

“He’s not,” I said, “doing his best. And he’s like this all the time, if you really want to know.”

“I suppose I knew that,” said Bernard. His hands were on either side of him on the couch, and he was kneading the cushions.

“Do you write music?” I said.

“I used to,” said Bernard.

“When did you stop?”
"When everything got simple, I suppose," he said. He was silent for a moment, and then he said, "Things just stopped being important, I guess." He looked at me. "Does that make sense?" he said. I didn't answer. I didn't know.

"It’s so much easier," he said, "Just not to...let things hurt. Basically, I think about getting high. That’s about all I think about. All my energy is about trying to live this way. I wrote music before heroin. Then, I felt things. But now..." he shrugged, "There’s no music anymore, but nothing hurts, really."

The movie on television had ended, and there was a talk show. The people on the screen were bright and charming. "So, do you want to fuck me?" I said.

"Eva, come on now," said Bernard.

"I’m serious. I want you to," I said. Bernard put his hand on my knee.

"Not this way," he said.

"I guess the thing is," I said, "What other way is there?" He took a cigarette from the pack on the coffee table. He lit it.

"There are other ways," he said.

"Like what?" I said.

Bernard’s breathing was ragged at the edges. "I don’t know," he said. "Eva, I don’t know." Then he stood up. He took my hand and held it. "I’m sure of one thing," he said, "and that is that if I fucked you, as you put it, tonight, I would always be sorry."

"Great," I said, "That’s a good fucking thing to know." I laughed. I took one of his cigarettes.

"Eva, you have so much beauty," said Bernard, "Don’t get old and tired too soon." I squeezed his hand, and pulled him to me. I pulled his lips to mine, and I kissed him.

"What if I love you?" I said.

Bernard smiled. His face was close to mine. "Then you’ll still want to fuck me when all of this is over," he said.

I kissed him again. He tasted like cigarettes and oranges. "What if it doesn’t end?" I said. He kissed me, but he did not answer. He stood up and said, "Good night." He went into his room, and I was alone.
I had fallen asleep on the couch by the time Aislin came home. I heard the door open, and I heard it shut softly. I heard Aislin’s footsteps. I said, “Hey,” and she stopped. In the moonlight, she looked ethereal. The edges of her curly hair caught the light and glowed. She came and sat next to me on the couch. She could not keep her eyes open. She was drunk, and there was sand in her hair and on her clothes.

“Where have you been?” I said. She laughed softly, and her head rolled forward on her neck. She could barely sit up. “You’re a mess,” I said.

“Oh fuck, yeah,” she said. She lay back across me, shaking with laughter like a fit of coughing. “Take care of me, big sister,” she said.

“Aislin, come here,” I said, holding out my arms.

“If you knew what I knew,” she said in a sing-song voice, “Do you hear what I hear.”

“Aislin, honey,” I said.

“Oh, my big sister,” she said, and lay down next to me. I brushed the sand from her face and smoothed her hair. “Our mother’s dead,” she said.

“We don’t know,” I said, “Come on now, Aislin.”

“I know,” said Ailsin.

“What? Did you hear something?” I said, “Where have you been?”

“I’ve been with Jimmy,” she said, “Jim Jim Jimmy boy.” She laughed. “And then I’ve been with Johnny and Joey and Joleney.”

I sighed. Aislin started to cough. She sat up and coughed, great hacking coughs that shook her tiny shoulders. She turned and looked at me when the coughing died out.

“He killed her,” she said, “You know that, right?”


“You. Know. Who,” she said slowly, and the her arm flew up to point towards my father’s chair.

“He did not,” I said, “Calm down now.”

“We’ve got to kill him,” she said. I didn’t say anything. Aislin lay back down.

“We should drown him,” she said, “But I’d rather shoot him. Or stab him through his heart.”
"Shhh, baby," I said. I was too tired for this. I wanted her to fall asleep.

"Do you think we should kill her too?" said Aislin.

"What?" I said, "Who?"

"Oh yes," said Aislin, smiling with her eyes closed. "The big bad sister doesn't know," she said.

"Know what?" I said. Aislin began to breathe deeply. I shook her, "Know what?" I said.

"Goodnight," said Aislin. She was passing out.

I said, "What?" loudly, and she said, "Wait, wait," and she was asleep. I untangled myself and stood up. It had cleared; I could see the moon outside the window. I went outside, and sat in the hammock we had strung between two trees. My mother had brought it with her, when she had come this summer. I didn't want to think about my mother. I wanted to know that she was somewhere, and okay. She would be coming in for the weekend, and then leaving again, going home to my father. She would arrive, her arms full of gifts: wine, new suntan lotion, her favorite cookies which they didn't sell on the island. They were called Le Petit Ecolier--Little Schoolboys, we called them. On top of a buttery cookie there was a rich chocolate. My mother allowed herself one every other day, except at Christmastime. She helped out with ballroom dancing classes, leading the young girls in white gloves to their nervous partners, and the ballroom dancing school gave her a huge box of Godiva chocolates every Christmas. The Little Schoolboys were put on hiatus as she chose a chocolate each night from the gold foil box. Aislin and I would take chocolates from the last layer, so she wouldn't catch us until the box was nearly empty. She never said anything about the missing caramels (my favorite) and nut clusters (Aislin's favorite). She pretended not to notice the paper wrappers that held nothing but a smudge.

I thought about her, and what she loved, how much joy she got from little things. What could take that joy away, I wondered. I wondered how she could leave me to clean up our broken family. I listened to the waves. Harsh breezes rushed around me, and then there would be calm.

The next day, there was sun. It shone bright as nails, and I woke in the hammock
at daybreak. Aislin was still asleep on the couch, and I went into my room. Jen was curled into a ball on her bed. I felt sorry for her. It was time for her to leave. This was my mess, and I didn’t want her to see it anymore. I sat next to her.

"Jen," I said, softly. She opened her eyes. "I’m sorry," I said. She shook her head. Her curls had matted on one side of her head. I sighed. "I think you should go," I said, "This is just too fucked up."

"It’s okay," she said, "Let me help you."

I laughed. "What is there to do, here?" I said. "I my family the most fucked up or what?"

She sat up and hugged me. I let her. She said in my ear, "They’re a little loony." I smiled.

"Where do you think your mom is?" she said.

"I just don’t know. I don’t know what to think.

"But don’t you," she paused. She moved her hands around in the air, like she was trying to show something. "Do you feel anything?" she said.

"There’s just nothing," I said, "Like this isn’t happening." I lay my head on her stomach. She put her fingers in my hair. "I think she’s dead," I said.

But I had always thought the worst. When I got a cold, the thrill of dying loomed near. I had never broken a bone but yearned to. "It’s like I just see the idea of it all," I said, "The funeral, the whole tragic deal. But I can’t really imagine that I’ll never see her again. God."

"What can I do, Ev?"

"I really do think you should go," I said, but I didn’t mean it anymore. I wanted to go with her, to go back to school and my dorm and my life. I said, "Is Bernard hot or what?"

"Fuck yeah," she said, "Do you still love him?"

"I do," I said.

"Am I missing anything, here?" she said.

"My God! My mother could be dead! You think I’m having sex?"

"Aislin is."

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“Good point,” I said, “but she came home last night. She was saying some fucked up stuff.”

“Like what?”

“Who knows,” I said, “She was drunk.” Jen didn’t say anything. I knew she was thinking about my father and the bottles piling up on the kitchen counter. But she hadn’t seen anything. He’d been quiet.

“Let’s make coffee,” I said.

“Do you really want me to leave?” said Jen.

“Why the fuck would you want to stay?” I said.

“I love you,” she said. She took my hand and squeezed it. “And hotter men her than Minnesota,” she said.

Aislin came into the kitchen and poured herself a cup of coffee. She leaned against the counter and sipped. “Jesus,” she said, making a face, “You make this, Jen?”

“Why?” I said.

“No reason,” said Ailsin.

“Aislin, why don’t you take a shower or something?” said Jen. Aislin looked down at herself. She reeked of smoke and liquor, and her makeup was smeared. Her dress was creased and sandy. She looked up, and I closed my eyes. I didn’t need them fighting this morning.

“Probably a good plan,” Aislin said, and she smiled. My stomach eased when I saw her smile. Her teeth were wide and even.

“Let’s make home-made granola,” said Jen, when Aislin had gone. We got out the ingredients, and my father and Betty came into the kitchen in bathrobes.

“Coffee, thank heaven,” said Betty. My father leaned against the refrigerator and rubbed his eyes with one hand. His bathrobe was red, and tied underneath his belly. His skin was yellow. Betty handed him a pink mug filled with coffee and he took it.

“Just called the cops,” said my father.

“We’re going to make granola!” I said.

“They gave us an unlisted phone number,” he said, “Which just goes to show
they’re earning their salaries, hard on the case.”

“Larry, now,” said Betty.

“Well where the hell can she have gone?” said my father, “She can’t swim to fucking Tahiti.”

“I still think she’s lost, or something,” said Betty brightly.

“That is an asinine thing to say,” said my father.

“Dad!” I said. I looked at Betty, but she was looking at the floor.

Ailsin came in, drying her hair with a towel.

“Well, well, well,” said my father, “What have we here?” Aislin picked up the mug that she had left on the counter. She wrapped the towel around her neck. She sipped her coffee, which must have been cold. “Have anything to say for yourself?” said my father.

“How about you,” said Aislin. Her voice was hard and mean. “What do you have to say for yourself?”

“I beg your pardon young lady, but I wasn’t out gallavanting until all hours with some stupid rich boy who just wanted to get into my panties.” Jen had begun to measure brown sugar into a bowl. She looked intently at the recipe.

Aislin was pacing back and forth across the linoleum. Her ankles and wrists were still pink from the shower. Her hair lay in fat ringlets along her shoulders. “I know, Dad,” she said. She had stopped right in front of him, close to him. She put her hands on her hips. My father looked straight at her, a smile on his face and his eyebrow cocked. He was loving this: a battle. “I’m not afraid of you, you fucking murderer,” said Ailsin.

“Aislin!” said Betty. She looked pale.

“Dear Aunt Betty,” said Aislin, “How sweet of you to be here. But tell me, where did you sleep last night?”

“Ais, what the fuck, now,” I said.

“Big sister,” she said, “You’re the only one I feel sorry for. You’re the only one who doesn’t know.” She looked at me, and she looked scared.

“What?” I said, “Just tell me, I can handle it.”

“What the fuck are you rambling about?” said my father. His face was red. Betty was wringing her hands.
“Tell me,” I whispered. Betty had begun to cry. I said, “No.”

“This is fucking ludicrous,” said my father.

Aislin looked at me. It was like we were the only ones in the room. I said, “No.”

“It’s true, Ev,” she said, “Mom told me.”

“Out with it!” said my father, “What preposterous thing are you going to come up with now?” He had lit a cigarette and had a sip from a glass which he had left, half-finished, the night before. His hand shook, and the whiskey in the glass caught the light.

“Betty?” I said. She wouldn’t look at me. She was sobbing, now. “She was your sister,” I said.

“Your mother was a fine woman,” said my father, “But she had her problems, believe you me.” He took a drag of his cigarette. Quick as a flash, Aislin picked up a glass and threw it at him. It exploded on the wall behind him. He stood calmly.

“You fucked her sister until she killed herself,” said Aislin, “Don’t you say a word about her. You have no right.”

Betty was on her hands and knees, picking up glass. “Betty, you slept with...she was your sister, my God, and...” Words poured from my mouth. Betty frantically picked up shards of glass. Her hands began to bleed. I clutched the edge of the counter. “Of course,” I said, “Of course, of course...”

“Betty and I love each other,” said my father, “Now there’s nothing that can be said against that. End of story.”

“You deserve to die,” said Aislin, “Both of you. I hope you both die!”

Betty sat on the floor clutching the glass in her hands. Tears ran down her cheeks.

“Eva, she said, “Your mama didn’t know. It’s not true. She didn’t love him, now, you know that.” She was looking up at me, pleading.

“I’m so sorry, Eva,” said Aislin. She looked at me. Jen was smoothing over a tablespoon of salt, holding it up to the light. She was humming.

“How long?” I said.

“What, Dad, ten years?”

“My God!” I said, “My God.”

“Your mother and I had some very specific problems from the start,” said my
father, “And I don’t want to hear--”

“Fuck you,” I said.

“Please, baby, she didn’t know,” said Betty. “I give you my word. She didn’t
know, I swear, I do, honey, it’s gonna be fine, now.” She was shaking, sitting back on
her haunches like a dog. Her robe had fallen open.

“You bitch,” I said.

“Please,” said Betty, and she stretched it out like a siren: Pleeceeeeeease...

She cried. Her blood was welling up on the kitchen floor. I kicked her, and then I
kicked her again. I walked out of the kitchen and through the living room and into the
guest room. I lay next to Bernard and I cried and I cried and he didn’t say a word and he
held me.

I woke up with my head spitting like I was hung over. The shades were drawn. I
forgot where I was, and I forgot everything in a blessed moment of confusion. Then I
remembered: my mother was gone. Then I remembered: my father and my aunt were
lovers. I lay in the dark, with a weight on my stomach like someone were standing on me.

Someone had put granola on a tray by the door like a prison meal. There was a
folded napkin and a glass of juice. I locked the door. I ate the granola. I don’t know why
I did this: I picked up the phone. I knew the number of Mama Zoola’s Pizza by heart. I
called the number.

“Mama Zoola’s can I help you?”

“Yes,” I said, “Can I have five--no seven--pizzas?” I gave the address. I gave my
father’s name.

I heard the bell ring from inside the bedroom. I heard my father say, “What?” and
then say, “You’ve got to be kidding me.” A few minutes later, the window opened and Jen
and Bernard climbed in.

“Nice work,” said Bernard.

“You’re a freak show,” said Jen. They had brought me pepperoni and mushrooms,
my favorite.

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The phone rang--it was ten eighteen, I looked at my watch--and I think we knew. I was in the guest room playing Scrabble with Jen and Bernard. Aislin had just come home, and was changing into her nightgown. It could have been the Murphys, of course, or my grandfather, or the Club calling about a change in the lifeguard rotation. But we all stopped talking, and I went into the living room. Aislin was standing at the door to the bathroom. Her spine was so straight and her eyes so old and knowing and she was only seventeen. She looked at me and my father picked up the phone and said, “Yes?” and then said, “Yes,” and put the phone down. I watched Aislin close her eyes and her head fall back and her shoulders cave in and she wailed as my father said, “They found a body.”

I remember wanting Jen to leave. I didn’t want her to see this—to see our broken family. I wanted to keep the whole thing a secret, and she made that impossible. I didn’t think about Bernard at all. My father sat down in his chair and took the bottle from the ground and filled his glass. He didn’t say anything. “It’ll be okay, you guys,” I said, and Aislin was no more than a sobbing pile of bones.

“Well be okay!” I said, and I looked at Jen, rolling my eyes at my family’s grief. She came over to me and stood next to me by the couch. “Finish your game,” I said. “Don’t just stop in the middle,” I said. “Keep playing the game!” I said, and she just looked at me like I was the sorriest thing in the world. “What?” I said, “What the fuck is your problem?” and I started to cry, and I said, “Get the fuck out of my house,” and “Daddy!” and my father said “I just don’t know,” and Jen grabbed me, wrapping her arms around my shaking body and holding me tight. “What the fuck is your problem?” I said, and then I said, “Oh, God, oh God, I hate you.”

I wanted to see the body at the morgue, but my father wouldn’t let me come. I suppose that I will never quite believe that she is dead, even though I know, from reading, how a body drowned in the sea is bloated and blue and battered. They say it might have been her own hair that strangled her, once she got too far out in the water.