

Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the World Wide Web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis.

Matthew Fennell

4/18/11

Grace

by

Matthew Fennell

Benjamin Reiss
Adviser

Department of English-Creative Writing

Benjamin Reiss
Adviser

Jim Grimsley
Committee Member

Eddy Von Mueller
Committee Member

4/18/11

Grace

By

Matthew Fennell

Benjamin Reiss

Adviser

An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Department of English-Creative Writing

2011

Abstract

Grace
By Matthew Fennell

Grace is the beginning.

Grace

By

Matthew Fennell

Benjamin Reiss

Adviser

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Department of English-Creative Writing

2011

Acknowledgements

For my family, friends, and instructors, for showing me the possibility in my world.

Grace

Honors Thesis Submission For Creative Writing/English
Matthew Fennell
2011

It was March 2nd, 1993 when I drove into Manhattan. It had been three days since the attack. It had been hours since she had called to tell me my brother was in the hospital. I almost didn't recognize her voice when I answered the phone.

- Hello? Who is this?

- Grace, its George. Caleb's hurt, she said.

It wasn't her. It had been over a year since I had last heard her voice but I knew for certain the woman on the other side could not be Georgia Hunt.

And yet it was. There was the scratch of her cigarette stained throat. There was the erratic sweetness that seemed to ebb in and out from her words. There still was the dagger against dagger shriek that sounded up every time she raised her voice. Now it was she and suddenly all of the hatred I had suffocated inside myself was given air.

- Go fuck yourself. If you need money I don't have it.

She brought it out in me. I couldn't help but cuss at her. It had been her eyes that had first summoned that crass, that street, that poor Grace from within me, those pouting owl pupils, massive and seemingly always brimming with tears. I would have kissed them if they could have remained shut. When she stared it was as if she saw too much of me, as if with her gaze she couldn't miss a thing. I couldn't bear being that exposed so I would react much in the same way any cornered animal would: with teeth. Yet even though I could imagine her eyes unblinking at that very moment, I cussed now because of what she'd done and the gall she had to think she could call me and mention his name.

- Grace I'm serious, I wouldn't call for no reason if it wasn't, you know I wouldn't.

Her scathingly shrill voice cracked as she spoke. I held the earpiece away from my head and whispered into the receiver so as not to wake up Leena.

- I really don't care whether you think you're serious or not. I told you I was done with you two.

- He's in the hospital; I'm calling from it right now. I can get the doctor if you don't believe me. Grace I don't know what to do.

- If you need money I don't have it, I said again, looking over my shoulder to see if Leena was awake.

- Could you just come down here, I'm scared, she said.

- For what, Georgia? For you? To comfort you? If I even believed you that Cal was in the hospital I wouldn't come within a mile of the city. I know what you're doing; do you think I'd just forget the last time you got me to drive down there?

- He was in the tower. The bombing, Grace, he was there, you got to believe me.

I shot up at this. Leena stirred but simply rolled from me, wrapping her in the black sheets. Swinging my legs from the bed, I grabbed the phone base by the crutch and walked to the bathroom. I strung the wire down to the bottom of the doorframe then closed the door. I didn't turn the lights on as I sat on the floor and shivered as the cold tiles touched my bare ass. George's grating voice stung the air still so I wrapped my hand about the earpiece to muffle the sound.

- Grace? Grace, are you there? Did you hear what I said?

- Quiet George, I said

- Jesus. I thought you'd hung up.

- I'm here. Georgia...

- Did you hear what I said?

I paused for a moment. My eyes began to adjust to the all-dark of the bathroom.

- George I heard you but I don't think you know what you said.

- I know what I said, he was in the tower, I ain't lying.

- That was two days ago; why the hell didn't you call me sooner? And what was Caleb doing downtown? What was he doing in the tower?

- I don't know, I don't know. It was stupid. Her voice began to crack again. I ripped the phone from its press on my ear. I didn't even listen to her as she spoke.

- God damn it I don't care George; just tell me he's ok. I don't care anymore. About us, about what happened. Just tell me my brother's ok.

She was silent for over a minute. The bathroom was silent and I flattened my ear to my head with the phone until it hurt and yet all I could hear was Georgia Hunt's soft breaths intertwining with static. She brought it out in me.

-You skinny white bitch answer me right now, I seethed into the receiver.

She exhaled quickly and it hit like a hammer against the earpiece. She spoke.

- I just think you need to come down here, Grace, her voice receded into the black of the phone until it was only sounding out as squeaks.

-Tell me what happened to my brother, I said, hearing her start to whimper on the other end, I don't need to see you. I don't even know what that'd do to me, seeing you. I can't think about it now. I just need to hear about my brother. You need to tell me what happened in the tower, George.

- I don't know, I don't know, he hasn't woke up yet. Doctors said he got some kind of trauma to his head. And the debris too. Got into his lungs they said. I don't

know baby, I just don't. I get in there and look at him and just don't hear or feel a thing. I don't hear what they say, I just stare and I won't stop staring until they make me leave the room. I can't quit thinking he's going and where am I supposed to go if I can't follow him? What am I supposed to do if I can't follow him, huh?

The bitch knew where to cut me. I hated her for it. For everything my brother had done, I had been willing to forgive him, and more. Even when I had screamed at him in JFK to never speak a word to me again. I had accepted his collect-call a week later as if it hadn't been my fault security had to be called to wrench him away from me in the airport. He had and always would be that bloated toad of a baby to me. The fat little thing that had stared up at me from his crib with those piercing blue eyes. Blue like robin's eggs. Blue so light they shouldn't belong to a black man. Colored like sky seamed through cirrus, causing every teacher, every classmate he ever had to ask him- 'where's your daddy from, what's he look like?' He would always be that child to me. I hated her for it, but she knew. I couldn't let my life go on, slow or fast as it would be, without knowing if Caleb was all right.

- I should have hung up the phone as soon as I heard you speak. But I love my brother. I love him even when I shouldn't. I just want to make that clear. I'm doing this for him. If I don't have to see or hear you the entire time I'm in the city then I'll be happier than you can imagine...

- Thank you so much baby, she whimpered across the line, thank you, thank you...

- I'm not doing this for you George, don't you dare thank me. You never could know what you did to me. You never will. It's beyond you. I ask myself sometimes if you even remember loving me. If there were even a memory of us inside you, you'd

think... shit. But you did it anyway like you couldn't remember a thing, like it had never happened for us. Two years George, and you just stopped loving me like the memory of us was something to be erased, just cut from your mind. I'll never understand and you'll never understand what exactly you did. That's just something it's come to. I don't want to even talk about it anymore and I certainly don't want to hear a fucking syllable about it when I'm with my brother, do you hear me?

- Baby...

- Fuck George, don't. Just don't. Just tell me the hospital you're at so I can start packing.

- Sorry Grace, she said, we're at New York Downtown. It's 170 Williams Street. If you take the train in I can meet...

- I'll drive.

- Grace, I'm so happy I can't tell you. I didn't think you'd forgive Caleb, much less me.

- I haven't forgiven you shit. What I think of my brother's our business, not yours.

- It'll be all of our business soon, baby, she whispered.

- The fuck is that supposed to mean?

I heard the soft click of the hospital phone replaced to its cradle.

- Cunt, I said, a bit louder than I'd anticipated. If she hadn't been awakened by the conversation, Leena would be now. I picked up the phone. I opened the bathroom tentatively. I winced gripping the clear glass of the handle. My finger was still broken. I hadn't told Leena what'd happened. Hadn't seen a doctor either. If she didn't ask

about it there was no need to worry her, and if I didn't tell her than there was no reason for her to tell me I should go to a doctor. Saved me twice the time, I figured.

The door crawled open. What little moonlight crawled in through the cracks in Leena's jet-black drapes snuck up to the bed and found Leena sitting on its edge. She faced away from the bathroom with her hands like stilts dug into the down comforter. I slowed into the room and placed the phone on the nightstand, knocking the picture of the two of us at Rockefeller Center off the side. It hit the cold wood paneled floor flat snapping out like a whiplash.

- Shit, I said as I reached for the fallen frame.

Leena had made no move. It was as if she didn't hear our faces slamming into the floor. She continued to stare at the drapes closed across the window.

- Sorry, sorry, I said, did I wake you?

- Who was it? Her head shook as she spoke, her black hair shimmering down the length of her back.

I perched the picture frame back on top of the stand. I flicked out the kick and let it sit and didn't answer her.

- Who was it? She asked. Was that Caleb?

- No. His girlfriend.

- What'd she want? She turned her head so I could catch the curve of her high cheekbones in my sight.

- She said Caleb was in the tower when the bomb went off. He's in the hospital. I'm going to the city in the morning.

- Jesus Christ. She rose off the bed, her hair unfolding and curling about the curve of her ass. She hadn't let a scissor in the same room with her since she was twelve. The vast sweep of her hair lengthened from her head as if it was its own dark being. I fell silent at times, when she would swing this black tail about her body, sling it over her body as if a scarf, or run her fingers through the full of it as if this action released any hold upon her. Her lips would curl up when she did this. Not even half a smile but teeth enough to know she was sharing with the world some private happiness within herself.

She circled the bed until she came face to face with me. I flinched as she took her hand to my forehead. She stopped with her arm crooked and raised as if she was blocking the sun, inches from my skin. I couldn't see her eyes but I could see her mouth and it curved upward slightly. I don't know why I flinched. I assumed it was because I expected some sort of reaction, some sort of punishment for speaking to Georgia. Yet how could she know? There had not been one thing I wouldn't tell her, not one thing now or then. That. I wouldn't tell her about Georgia Hunt. If it was to mask some weakness within me then that's what it would have to be. To keep some semblance of strength I couldn't allow her to know just how deeply I had hurt for that girl. What would she think of me, if I put her in that memory? I only knew what I had thought of myself, and still did.

She let her arm fall like a ribbon about my shoulder and brought me close, pulling my face down onto her shoulder. It was strange, her being so much shorter than I was, but I always was the one being comforted, I was the one in constant need of holding.

- I'm so sorry, she whispered, what do you need me to do?

If I could have told her then it would have been fine. Yet even as I formed the words, even as I began to think of Georgia again, the memory of that hurt, that evil, rose up like some great internal fog and I lost any will I had to even say her name.

- Nothing, you don't have to do a thing. I just need to go into the city for a few days.

- Do you want me to come with you? She slunk her hand down to the small of my back, her nails subtle like pinpricks against my skin.

- You know I do. But you shouldn't take off work. Not for this.

She stopped holding me and looked up. Even though the bedroom was removed of light I could still see her thin eyebrows furrow.

- What would be a good reason to take off work? Your brother's in the hospital. I think I'll be fine taking a few days away. Let me do this for you.

I thought then of how badly I wished I had never answered the phone but awoken all the same if but to place my lips on hers. If I had, I would have brought my face close to hers and let her hot sleeping breath slip into my mouth. I would have kissed her then and hopefully left her in her sleep but to shape the contours of her lips with my own. She was beautiful, especially in this darkened room, in this pallid moonlight. What small glimmer of her form my eyes could find was indescribably precious to me. I could forget the memory of my brother, of the hospital, of Georgia Hunt, all of it in the sight of her. It surprised me sometimes, my devotion to her. There were moments I believed fully she was just this way, and needed to be, for me to love her, that is was destined, yet at the same time there were thoughts of my needing something, anything, different than Georgia and I looked for these things and heightened them in my mind. Perhaps she,

and this love, was merely my creation. Shadows to distract me from thoughts of my brother, asleep in the city. With her. At least they might have been at one point, but now, I would never be able to tell whether the reason I loved Leena was because of what she kept me from remembering. I had thought then of allowing her to come with me for just this reason. There was a chance that her presence would dampen my hate, or perhaps prevent me from being affected by seeing George and Caleb together. Yet, as I saw that instance of my explaining to Leena why exactly I so feared returning to the city, I realized, almost as soon as I had thought it, that this could never happen.

Leena still looked at me with that question lingering in the air about our heads. It stayed like translucent fog, blocking me from seeing how desperately, earnestly, she wished to help me.

- I couldn't ask you to do that. I'll be fine. Trust me, I said.

She took her hands from my shoulders.

- It's your family, Grace, of course. I know you'll be fine but I keep thinking there's something there you don't want me to see.

- What do you mean? I'm not hiding anything.

- It's not that you're hiding something. It's not like that. I feel like there's a place that only you've been and only you know what it takes to go there, or be there, and you don't think I'm ready for it...

- You've been to the city, I said, interrupting her.

- You know I don't mean it like that. She walked away from me. In her absence it was like all the cold in the room formed an abscess in the place she just stood. I ran my palms up and down my bare arms. My hair raised and pinpricks of bumps riddled

my skin. Leena moved to the large mahogany dresser and began to pull clothes from the drawer she had designated mine. She had a story about the dresser, like most objects she owned. I was never sure if this was an Indian thing. Leena had taken me through her entire house the day we met. It took us almost three hours to reach the bedroom, for me to remove her blouse and run my tongue along the length of her collarbone. She had stopped at almost every table, every chair, and this dresser especially. Each one was from a great-grandmother, or passed down from a famous friend of her father. A story for each of them. It was her entire history in plates and curtains and ottomans. There never seemed to be a darker turn to these histories—each one ending with the object passing to her, more times than usual as a gift, but sometimes in the death of loved one. Yet even these memories were never stained with tears. It was as if the family members' souls had not perished but lived on for Leena in the objects left for her, not containing the memories, but letting them diffuse about her house like morning sunlight. I couldn't remember a single thing I'd owned that had as much memory as was in one of Leena's necklaces. I thought the absence of my own personal memory indescribably sad when I'd first moved in. I would sit on her armchair which had been her mother's who'd known a President (I can't recall which one, nor do I linger too much on the truth of the story—how did a Bengali woman who had brought to America by her engineer husband, who spoke only passing English, happen to not only meet but host a future President of the United States? It didn't matter. Leena believed it, that was enough) but who had apparently hosted the man in their house in Poughkeepsie and feel as if I had no right to be there at all. Not if I could not even remember my own parents. There is a respect for history that I'll never own. It comes from having none of yourself to look back upon.

No mother, no grandmother's mother to tell me that the chair is not just the chair, it's everything that's happened in this room, and everything that's happened to everyone who has ever been in this room. I could only remember the Millers. And then the Raboniwitzs, and the Hallidays after them. But they never let me share in their memories, and shit if my skin didn't tell me soon enough that I didn't belong in sharing it neither. Leena continued to sift through the drawer.

- Leena? I couldn't see much of her beyond the edge of the bed, yet a pair of socks or a dress or a sweater would fly out from behind the sheets, float for a moment above the bed and then fall to the satin like it was shot from the sky.

- What? Her voice surfaced from behind the bed

- What are you doing? I asked.

- Helping you pack for the city.

- Looks like you're throwing me out.

For a moment she was silent and the rustle of fabrics vanished from the bedroom.

- They look the same, don't they?

I drove early that next morning to the offices of Perch, Ingles, and Northwood. I had been working there for almost two months at this point, or perhaps closer to three. It was more to be closer to Leena than anything. Working as an assistant to William Perch had been nothing if not degrading. This was, of course, before the transpiring of events a few days prior that caused me to drive not to the city first, but to these offices. Degrading

seemed too small, too inaccurate a word to use. I thought back to that moment, and wondered if it had been accident or intent in Perch's eyes as he'd slammed my car door down upon my finger still hanging outside in the cold, crunching the bones between metal and metal.

I wasn't planning on staying long so kept my coat and gloves on as I passed by Margaret Winchell, the front desk secretary.

-Grace? I didn't think you'd be in today, Margaret said, Mr. Perch said you'd be out of the office indefinitely.

-I'm sure he did, I replied.

-Should I buzz and let him know you're here?

-If you want, Margaret, I said watching her reach for the red button on her intercom, Actually, don't. Hopefully he'll be surprised.

-Okay Grace, but you know there's good chance he'll be on the phone, so. Especially now, after the attack. Just insanity. Pure insanity.

Margaret was in her late twenties and thus had that chimera of disappointment and lingering hope that seemed to afflict everyone I had met nearing or enduring their own quarter-life crisis. If my early twenties had been spent attending a top- ten university paid for with a smattering of loans but mostly funds drawn straight from a present father's yearly salary than perhaps I would have been like Margaret Winchell. However, I'd spent the majority of that time running from child-protective services trying to take my brother away from me. Grace Miller has just begun as far as I see it, she thought. And yet here I am, quitting my job and driving to New York. To protect my brother once again. Grace Miller would have to begin again

-I know, I've been watching.

-Do you have any family in the city? I couldn't bear it, you know, having someone that close. Isn't that where you're from?

-No, I lied, I mean, yes, that's where I'm from but no I don't have anybody there.

-Could you imagine?

-Never. I turned and began to walk down the hall to the elevator.

-I hope you're feeling better, Grace.

-What? I stopped.

-I said I hope you're feeling better. Or you. Don't know how I forgot to say it, should've been the first thing. My mind must be on the news, it's all I can watch, you know. Margaret smiled, her snaggletooth hanging out over her bottom lip.

-I'm sure it is. I'm feeling fine, Margaret. Why do you ask?

-Mr. Perch said you weren't feeling well, Margaret said. Confusion spread across her face and her smile flickered for a moment, relaxing the wrinkles creasing her face, but she regained her composure. Did she know? As if he'd tell her. Don't be so fucking paranoid, Grace.

-Thanks. I appreciate it. Stay safe, Margaret.

I rode the elevator to the third floor. It was empty—Dan Ingles taking a vacation and Jerome Northwood in the city on a deposition until next Saturday. William Perch was here, however. His door was cocked a sliver from the lock and the light from his fireplace laced out through to the garish brown carpet, turning the stripe of illumination the color of a carrot left out to spoil for weeks. I stopped at my soon to be former desk. It was empty but for the lamp the firm had provided for me upon my hiring. I had

cleared it out only days ago yet looking at it now I couldn't recall what shape it had been in when I'd left. Did I have any pictures on it? Maybe the one of Caleb and me at Liberty Island. We had chosen to take a photograph by the boat instead of the statue. It hadn't been a flattering picture. I had straightened my hair that day, back when it still hung about the bottom of my ears, but had chosen to hide it underneath a Yankees cap. I think Caleb had bought it for me that day and I don't know why I wore it at all. I had never looked any good in hats.

“What does it matter, Grace?” He'd said when he'd presented it to me, “It's a gift, I'm not asking you to love it, just enjoy that it's from me. That so hard?”

“I don't even like baseball. I've never even been in a stadium. It's a waste of money, Caleb. Don't be such an idiot.” I tried to hand it back to him.

He put his big hands up and smirked.

“Take it. Take it!”

“You're just going to have to wear it, I'm not taking it, that'd be Indian giving,” He backed away from me, laughing, “How could I bring myself to bring myself to tell that poor street vendor that my sister thinks his hats ain't good enough for her? You'd make me do that would you?”

“I really don't care, Caleb, stop being such a child.”

“Hey man, could you take our picture?” Caleb approached a rail thin kid with a Mohawk and a Polaroid, “I’ll pay you for it.”

The kid looked at the looming, black man with the piercing blue eyes with what looked like a mix of fear and derision at what Caleb was wearing (a bright yellow sweater and a pair of brown dress pants: a muscled, Nubian Charlie Brown).

“How much?” Mohawk said after a moment.

“How’s a dollar?”

“Five”

“Fuck you Caleb I’m not taking a picture.”

“You’re taking a picture and you’re wearing the hat, how’s two?”

“Yeah, whatever man, two’s fine.”

“Godammit Caleb.”

“You’re going to like having this, Grace. Trust me.”

There was no flash. A click and a churn within the camera as the film was developed then wagged its tongue out of the front of the Polaroid. There it was. I looked as dour as I’ve ever looked, the shade of the Yankee cap slung like a sheet over my eyes. Caleb grinned and wrapped his arm around my shoulders and pulled me in close and fitted me up beneath his armpit so that my whole body was canted and my leg struck out from my thin hips like a kickstand. For all my complaints with Caleb’s purchase, my refusal to stand next to him for a picture, every time I would glance at the photo I couldn’t guard myself from the realization that in that frozen instant it was I that was the child. As Caleb gripped me close then, twenty-four years of adulthood ended. For the first time, I looked like the one who needed him. Maybe I felt that way too.

Under the glare emanating from beneath the baseball hat there was a woman thankful to not give up her experience. Relinquishing my understanding, my protection, my self-appointed motherhood should have been enough in that moment.

“Enough, Caleb,” I said, “ Let me go.”

“Fine,” He stopped smiling.

We had decided to take a day for ourselves in April. It was Caleb’s idea. He’d begun working for almost a month, two jobs at a time, one legitimate (handling bags at the airport) the other I didn’t ask about (it involved obtaining computers in bulk and reselling them to local accounting firms—how the computers were obtained I let Caleb deal with). It had been one of my concessions as pseudo-parent. I’d let him keep making the majority of his money off of the latter if he kept going to the former. He seemed to enjoy the work, however, and he’d become independent enough that I’d even stopped following him to work to make sure that he actually went. So I’d agreed when he’d brought up the two of us visiting the statue. Sightseeing had never been one of my interests. It didn’t matter how far Caleb had gone, what towns, what cities we’d seen over our life, I’d never thought to take him to anything deemed worth visiting. Not that I wouldn’t have wanted my brother to experience these things. No, I would rather he lived. And when he was ready and I was gone, he could explore all the corners I’d shielded him from for his entire life, or so I’d thought. It had been good then. George was another three years on for me and another two for him and we were together. This trip was another concession I supposed at the time. This was one corner I could allow.

I took the photo out of my pocket what must have been a hundred times that day, bending it against the sunlight, hoping to do some damage to the emulsion, any reason to

get rid of it, and yet, I don't know if I ever really tried. I brought the photo home. I had it framed. And perhaps I'd brought it here. Or it could have been another one—had there been another one? I could see every hour of that day as if they were inked down the length of my arms, yet I could not recall a single picture beyond that one. We'd seen Mohawk again, wandering about the base of the statue. I was sure Caleb would have approached him but we'd sauntered past without even a word. Caleb didn't even glance at him, he had simply continued pointing at the green giant and elucidate on it's creation, a history I cared little for but tolerated anyway, the burden I would have to carry for insisting on us both being members at the New York Public Library.

He had spent hours the weekend before our visit scouring the rows for anything he could find on Her. I've never been the bibliophile he's become. It wasn't a chore as much as it was a necessity. A duty. Something intrinsic to protecting Caleb. On the other hand, I hadn't seen more than door's slamming and flung open—the departures and inevitable return of my brother since giving him the membership card. We'd never spoken much at meals, or I at least didn't like to interrupt the constant influx of whatever fast food I'd managed to pick up before returning to our apartment in Brooklyn Heights. It was as if that card was all that was needed to stop the two of us from cramming food down our throats long enough to speak—or at least for Caleb to speak.

He would spend his time between jobs at the library, returning home only for dinner and to serenade me with whatever world he had slipped into in the few short hours he had been curled up between bookshelves. He would bring some of the novels home every once in awhile and when I'd return home I'd find him awake with the lone lamp we owned trained on the head board of his bed and he'd lay there reading until I cursed at

him to go to sleep. He would hold whatever he was reading like no one I had ever seen. His right hand would splay its fingers equally about the back of the spine, his right thumb crooked in the seam of the pages he was gazing it. His left arm would be tucked and cradled about the crest and his hand would grip about the right-most pages as if the book, as if he was nursing a small child. When I would watch him read some nights, cupping the book in his arms, I would remember holding him for the first time.

Before the adoption service relinquished us to the guardianship of Jack and Harriet Miller, they had invited us to wait outside as Mr. Miller signed the final documents signifying our transfer. As we had stood there, Harriet, myself, and a nurse who held Caleb (her name was Claire), were almost completely silent but for Claire's intermittent attempts to begin a conversation with the stately Mrs. Miller. Each attempt seemed to send a wind through the parking lot outside the orphanage, stealing any sound from the world but that of the howl of nature's breath.

I remembered stealing glimpses at Harriet Miller. She had been so intriguing to me as a child. Ever so much the debutante, she seemed in a perpetual state of presentation. She had been raised into a good deal of wealth—her father had owned a salt refinery in Upstate New York and numerous other business ventures within New York City itself—and being the lone child amid this monetary comfort meant that at the time of her father's death from mercury poisoning (fishing in the same lake his refinery had dumped its waste into for over thirty years—I had smothered a laugh when Jack told me a few years later) Mrs. Harriet Miller was bequeathed sizable amount of assets. Her husband, a spinal surgeon, took control of the day-to-day operation of the refinery, and discovering that he had almost no knack for running any sort of business other than that

of satisfying Harriet's desire to be married to a handsome doctor, sold the refinery as well as his and Harriet's stake in the variety of businesses her father had put money into in the city. This allowed for the Millers to not only move from the bitter winters of Upstate New York to the center of the world, but also left Mrs. Miller with plenty of time to continue living the life she had always been destined for: one of near absolute self-absorption.

She was this way for the entirety of my life with the Millers, and she was this way when I met her, and when I stood outside the orphanage as well. But she was beautiful and this was enough for me to be completely enamored with her. Although she was flat chested and altogether mannish about her hips (the most prominent reason I'd thought behind the Miller's multiple miscarriages), her skin was as lustrous as carefully blown glass. Her nose was small and glittered by freckles, and her lips were neither thin nor bulbous but possessed a chameleon-like ability to inhabit either form—a change that was inextricably linked to her mood as I later learned. It was her hair that I had envied most. Mrs. Miller had been blessed by some deity concerning herself solely with the locks of white women (which I wouldn't be in the least surprised in discovering was the only god that exists at all). In the lion-spring wind, her curls flicked about the nape of her neck, the claret of her hair the same bright rouge that blushed across her cheeks. It was the otherness of her that had drawn me to Harriet Miller. It was that which soothed me when I was first told that we were to be adopted by the Millers. A woman so different, so much more beautiful than any I had ever glimpsed before, it had been nothing if not exhilarating. I would have sold my life for just a look from her that day.

But Harriet had stood in that last, gasping wind before the onslaught of the fat heat of summer, her gaze set out across the parking lot as if she had always been there, and always would be. Never before or since had I seen a woman with a combination of such effortless poise and such disregard for other human lives. For the ten minutes we were together there she never moved her face beyond a blank stare, blinking only to suck a drag from her cigarette, or to stifle an attempt at connection from the poor nurse.

Jack Miller exited the building. He opened the door to their car, which had been driven to the entrance by one of the aides and helped his wife into the front seat. It was then I held my brother for the first time. Instead of giving Caleb to the less than expecting Harriet Miller or the obviously capable Jack, Claire knelt beside me and pressed my brother into my arms. He was heavier than I'd expected, and uglier. But his eyes were giant, wide open, and blue and I saw our entire lives in them. "Will you stay with me?" they asked.

Claire kissed the top of my head, then my brothers. She put her arms around the both of us and squeezed us soft but close. She whispered in my ear.

"It's just you now. And it always will be. Be sure to remember, Grace."

With that she rose and retreated back into the orphanage and shut the door behind her. The Millers were frozen. Even Harriet appeared momentarily nonplussed at the nurse's gall in handing the young child whom she had just adopted not into her thin, cold arms, but into the hands of a six-year old. The wind once again stole the sound from the parking lot and I held my brother there and looked down at him and thought nothing at all for what seemed like a very long time. Finally, Jack Miller reached down and took Caleb from my arms.

“You don’t have to worry,” he smiled uncomfortably, “we’re family now.”

The memory would end there for me. I remembered little of the drive to their house in Larchmont. Maybe it was that I sub-consciously knew it wasn’t important what happened after, not when I would look upon Caleb cradling his book under the warm lamplight, not when I could see the same hope in his eyes for a story that I knew had been in mind the first time I had held him my arms. He wrapped his arms around the story like it was heavy and it was. Hope always had been for us.

He would expound the same love for the books he would devour upon me at every opportunity. I had spent the entirety of an hour listening to him recite Neruda’s “And The City Now Has Gone” until he could repeat it verbatim, in Spanish and English, while I sat with a Big Mac teetering precariously on my thigh right next to the collection of South American poetry he had discovered the day before. Surprisingly, I rarely raised my voice but to proffer anything beyond a “good” or a “really” which were meant, most of the time, not to placate him, or to reassure him I was listening, but in all sincerity. I could never let myself go long enough to be caught in poetry, or any sort of literature beyond what was necessary, and that had never been because I thought it below me or above me or simply a waste of my attention, but perhaps because I’d thought if one of us loved these worlds we could never reach than that would be enough for the both of us. It made me almost happy to know in those months that dinner would grow cold each night waiting for my brother to exhaust what he’d read that day.

The times he wouldn’t return to the apartment but leave out straight from the library, to wherever he went between the hours of 9PM and 3AM, made the kitchen simultaneously rejuvenating in its silence and alienating in its hollowness. The cartons

of soggy Chinese food sat wanting. The dishes refused to offer themselves to cleaning. I would rarely ever enter the room if Caleb wasn't home. I would take my food to my bed and study whatever algebra or history had been assigned for the class that night and there the burger wrapper would stay until I returned home.

It had been five days straight that Caleb hadn't preached the glory of the book he had been cradling underneath the desk lamp. Five straight dinners I had taken to my room. And five times I had wrapped myself in my blanket and left the light on and waited for Caleb to return so I could see him drop his backpack at the door to our room and kick off sneakers much too small for him now and pull *The History of the City of New York: It's origin, rise, and progress, Volume 1* from his jacket's breast pocket. He would lay his 6'4" frame down upon his bed. The bedsprings would screech as he did this, as he twisted until once again he lay with his arms about anything with a story. It was the fifth night flicked off the light almost immediately upon hitting the mattress with the fullness of his gravity.

"Grace? Hey Grace, you want to go to the Statue of Liberty tomorrow?" He said after a moment listening to the sounding of an ambulance several blocks away.

I lay there quiet. At this point I had resolved myself to attempting to gain four hours of sleep if I could. If I had expected him to speak a word it wasn't to invite me anywhere, much less a tourist trap like Liberty Island.

"You're rubbing your feet," Caleb said, "Which usually means you want to go to sleep but this time I'm thinking it might also mean you're awake."

I turned over and rose to a sit and answered with a sigh.

“I know what you’re going to say, and I know it’s not true. It’s Saturday. No class, no work. For you and me both. I want to spend some time together.”

“This isn’t enough?” I coughed into my hand. The heater was broken again.

“I want to *go somewhere* with you.”

“What’s wrong with McDonald’s?”

He laughed. It was no use being sarcastic with him. Whatever slight I meant to spit at him was washed from my words as soon he opened up his mouth. He knew I was belittling him, he didn’t care. Caleb somehow always found this funny.

“We can get McDonald’s too!” He swung his legs off the mattress, his giant’s feet hitting with a slap, “Though I’m not sure you need another Big Mac this week. What’s the count up to now, three?”

“Fuck you, Caleb.” I grabbed my pillow and clutched it to my chest, turning my back from him. He kept chuckling to himself.

“You know I’m joking, relax, relax. So. When you’re not being you, which I’m hoping that’s tomorrow, and this is up to you, but I was thinking we catch the ten’ o’ clock ferry, give us the whole day there. We don’t have to be like all those tourists. We can go on our own tour...”

“Joy.”

“... and I can be the guide, don’t worry, I’ve been reading up...”

“I’m sure you have.”

He continued on, unaware of my interjections.

“You could use the fresh air, Grace, think of it as something for your health if you want to, I don’t care.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I readjusted the pillow beneath my head.

“The heat’s on, that’s what I mean.” Goddammit.

“Well it’s supposed to be.”

“How many times in the past month have you been outside?” He said.

“Twelve. Shit, Caleb, nobody could answer that.” I coughed again.

“Guess that means you’re coming. I don’t know why you have to make it so hard.”

“Make what so hard?” I asked, “Jesus, just let me go to sleep.”

“Okay Grace.”

I heard him roll back onto the mattress. He shifted about for a moment then came to rest. The ambulance howled, closer now. I had become conditioned to the persistent crying of the police sirens, to the children wailing beneath our heads (and above, our apartment building was somehow home to more young parents than any other in New York City), and I’d even learned to drown out the occasional fire truck or ambulance, their piercing whines inextricably designed to find me as soon as I lay my head upon the pillow. But Caleb snored, and of course he did so now, and if I wasn’t asleep by the time he’d start I’d never get single wink. I tried to engulf my head with my pillow, succeeding only in continuously stabbing myself in the ear with the down goose feathers packed within. I gave up after a half an hour struggle against the noise.

“I’ll go if that makes you happy.” I pitched my elbow into the mattress and perched my head upon my hand and squinted my eyes to where my brother slept. The streetlights and all-night runners burned through the window, casting the shadowed cross of the glazing bar upon Caleb’s back like a faded tattoo.

“Caleb,” He continued to snore, “Caleb, did you hear what I said? I said I’d go, alright?”

The cross rippled across the waves of the sheets as my brother stirred. His snores became deliberate, forced.

“It’s my turn.” I said, the play of grin on my teeth, “You can stop pretending, we’ll call it even. I’m not going to stop talking till you tell me you heard me, so.”

The alarm ceased suddenly. It left a crevasse in the midnight and the quiet wind of our breath filled it in. My eyelids were leaden and the curtain of desperate sleep weighed down on my vision. I nodded off slowly. My chin descended to the small of my throat, touching, waking me for a moment before I began to slip off yet again. Touch. Wake. Touch. Wake. Before my dreams took me I remembered something Caleb had said earlier that night.

“What’d you mean by that? Caleb?” He was still, the backlit muntin sequestering his shoulders, “You said I always have to make things so hard. What’d you mean?”

“You make it hard. Being your brother.” Caleb said, not moving.

I didn’t understand this. It had been me, always me watching out for Caleb. Every hick that called him “nigger” I’d found and hurt or scared bad enough that they didn’t think twice about keeping their mouth shut again. I got expelled from the private Catholic school the Miller’s had enrolled me in to “teach me how to be a proper lady.” I stuffed a bag full of dead birds in Donald Farmer’s lunchbox after I’d heard him call Caleb “the Miller’s shit-baby” to one of his friends; I’d watched him open the latch of his pail and let out a high-pitched squeal.

Caleb had been angry with me when we were a few older than that and he'd asked me what he owed me, what I'd done for him. I'd told him that story, and the one about the Pritchard brothers (who'd ceased chasing Caleb home from school everyday after I'd broken into their room at night, tied them to their bedposts, and stuck toothpicks up their toenails until they promised me they'd stay away from my brother—I can thank Mr. Brownstone, my American History teacher, and Vietnam War vet, for that inspiration), and the numerous others I'd had to protect him from. He'd cried after I finished telling him. "You don't do that, Grace!" He'd said before running to his room. I had to wait less than an hour before he returned, his eyelids lined red and his voice ragged from sobbing. "You didn't have to do that," he said. "I know, but I did, and I'll keep doing it. It's just us, and it'll be us again someday, you know?" He'd shook his head and hugged me and I'd forced him off me but he came back and just kept holding and I thought that was it.

"How've I made it hard?" I said, raising my voice, "I've been the only one looking out for you. You know that."

"I'm not talking about you beating up white boys, Grace."

"Good, we talked about that enough already."

"It should be easy for us. Our bloods like nobody else's and it's ours. Yet every time I try to touch you, you look at my hand like you want to bite it off, like some rabid dog."

"I don't like anyone's hands on me, it's not just you."

"I'm your brother, Grace."

"And I'm your sister," I sighed, "Can we please stop stating the obvious."

“Fine. I’ll ask you a question then. Why is it so hard for you to love me?”

“Don’t be such a shit, Caleb,” I laid on my back, “I think I’ve done a good enough job of proving that.”

“I’m serious,” He turned his head over his should so the ebb of illumination from the window clipped the corner of his eye in a flash of bright blue, “You’ve appointed yourself my guardian without me ever asking you to. Who gave you the right? Who gives anyone the right? I didn’t ask for this. I didn’t ask for someone to save me. All I asked for was for you to see me as more as a duty.”

“If I didn’t look out for you than who would have? Huh? The Millers? You think Harriet Miller cared for you beyond what you made her look like to others? You think that pedophilic fuck Greg Halliday would have run off a gang of skinheads for you? See where I’m going? I didn’t get to have anyone watch over me. I’ve been alone my whole life, Caleb. I don’t need a single thing. But fuck if you need me.”

“Of course I need you. But I don’t need your protection, Grace. I never have. I just need you to want to go see the statue with me.”

“I told you I’d go.” I said.

“I heard you,” he said, “I’m just wondering why I had to ask at all.”

“Now it’s my fault for not asking?”

“I don’t know,” He took his arms up and carried his hands over his face like he was wiping rain from his eyes, “I can’t be sure of anything. If you let me go, let me live my own life, then. Maybe I’d be happy. But you’ve been the only thing I could count on for so long, so long, I can’t tell. When it’s like this, when I can’t get through to you, when you won’t let me love you like I know it should be, I dream that I’d wake up

wishing you'd be gone in the morning. And I'd think you'd gone to work and I'd go to work. The whole day like it always is. The library as soon as I clock out. Two or three hours there and I'd come home, and I wouldn't get anything to eat because I'd think you've got something for me here. I'd get off the subway and the sun would be gone. All flashlight headlights and lamps casting circles upon me.

I'd take the stairs two by two, not hurrying, but you know. I expect you to be there, already digging into whatever you brought back. You never wait. But I slip my key in the lock and find the door open. I walk in and the apartment is clean. I'm not talking about when we pick up the boxes of leftovers or scrubbing the floor of the dead, flattened roaches, no. It's as if we haven't lived here, or at least you haven't. The bedroom is all the same, but your sheets are gone and your mattress sinks to the ghost of your shape.

I'd sit and wait for the few hours I'd have before I go out again and still you wouldn't return. It would be a night I could stay busy so I wouldn't have to think too much about the gutted apartment. But your absence would weigh me down with every step I took back home. A fog would slither into the streets from wherever the atmosphere comes from, wrapping around my ankles, thicker, greyer with every stride. About a block away from the apartment I would realize the fog was not fog at all, but smoke, stealing from the sliver of our open window. It's strange. The fog or smoke, or whatever it is, does not float out and up, but sinks like a great, ashen tongue to the street below. There is no sound at all but the hiss of breath, as if the fog was being exhaled from our living apartment building, you wouldn't believe it, not even the wail of a siren from another borough. And no one is on the street, not a soul, no windows lit up, no

movement at all. I'd reach the front steps and peer in through the glass pane but I couldn't see—the fog is falling like cut fabric down the hallway.

I'd hear something then I've never before in my life. A cry out from the shapeless night. A howl. And I'd be terrified then but only for a moment, only just a second. Because out of that howl comes a second noise, clapping, like slow applause, like horse hooves and there in the middle of the street would be a man riding a horse. A white guy, wearing a grey uniform, a Confederate uniform, and his horse the same color so I couldn't tell where one began and the other ended. You'd think I'd be afraid, a cracker with a pistol wearing a Confederate uniform in the middle of Brooklyn at three in the morning, but I've never felt as calm as when I saw him there. I'll tell you what, Grace; it was like looking into a river. The color and the shape twisted in the rushing water but there underneath that maw, there lies a form I can't help but make out as mine. He stared straight, unblinking, into me and said:

'She's gone now. She ain't never coming back.'

I got to be honest with you, Grace, I was happy when he said that and that got me scared all over again. Nothing happens after that. Nothing ever will and I knew that from as soon as he said it. I wake up. I'm here, or I'm napping at work or on the subway and everything's exactly like it's always been. I'll wait for you to disappear, but you won't but even imagining that, it's the emptiest I could ever be. I don't ever want to feel that way, not even in my dreams. So I thought it'd be right to start things slow. That's why I asked you to the statue. I'd be okay if you weren't there, you know, I'd be fine, I'd live. But it wouldn't matter. I just want it to matter. To both of us."

I laid there for a very long time. The pale ceiling gleamed brighter as the morning crawled into the city. I didn't fall asleep and Caleb didn't. Our breathing matched unnoticed by either of us.

"I'll try, Caleb. I promise."

We encircled the statue and I let Caleb tell me everything he'd ever learned about the Statue of Liberty, how it was brought to America, how many people have written that the sight of this rusted green giantess was enough to make them feel free for the first time in their life. These stories made me imagine a different past for us. Orphans born not into a freedom that was ethereal, ghostly, like vapor, providing too much possibility, but of a concrete body rising from a low, cold mist settled over the Atlantic. If we had been these orphans, knowing full well what lay behind us, then this freedom would have been something we could grip and hold to our chests, something we could have seen in every doorway, in every street sign, in every empty lamp halo. The day was spent in this dream and another. I could not let go of Caleb's dream from the night before and it was if the fog of his streets filled in the open cracks of my memory and fell about thieving my memories from me.

•

I tried to think back and remember if we'd even taken any other pictures that day but I could only recollect this one. Even attempting to think back to photos before that,

or even after was a futile exercise. Every turn, every glimmer of a snapshot of memory responded, “Not here, look elsewhere.” I shook myself. It was no use to dwell on lost memories, much less the absence of even a glimpse of what had adorned my desk for the past few months, no matter how strange this lack of recollection was. But it was stranger still to think of how great the burden of that picture’s memory was for me. Just how long had I been standing here with my mind lost in the shadows of that memory? I needed to stop. Caleb was in the city in George’s care—enough to be dwelling on already—and I have unfinished business to attend to. Dealing with the holes in my memory could wait until these two problems were settled.

I pushed open Perch’s door. The black blinds were pulled closed and the room was cut off from the dawn sun but for a slice cutting through the base of the blinds where one line caught on the window crank. He was at his desk, wrist bent up and fingers crooked around the turn of his phone. Margaret had been right. He didn’t seem to notice my entrance. His hand was wrapped about ostentatious fountain pen that he scratched across a pad of lined yellow paper. Carefully placed upon his otherwise immaculate desk were several stacks of neatly wrapped hundred dollar bills. From my initial glance it must have been somewhere close to \$500,000. Next to these stacks was an empty manila envelope. I had never seen him with anything close to this amount of money. He would occasionally move his pen from its stab in the legal pad and tap the nearest wrap, as if to remind himself that it was still there.

The phone conversation continued. I slowly circled the back of his room keeping my distance from his desk.

It was cold enough that the fire was necessary. Bill Perch was never the one to spend frivolous amounts of money and this extended to the heating bill for the office (I had learned to bring a pair of gloves to the office and begun the habit of wearing my pea coat through the entirety of the day). This didn't appear to be in any relation to his frugality as I would discover soon enough, but because Perch didn't seem to feel the stabbing freeze of an Eastern New York winter. I had watch him arrive on mornings he would ask me to come in early wearing his suit from the moment he left his BMW to the time he would hang his jacket on the stand beside his door, through drench of snow piled across the sidewalk by the four 'o' clock snow plow. He would enter, his face unflushed, his hands the same weak pink they always were, and he would wink or smirk at whoever he had the opportunity to come upon during his journey inside, as if he held some secret to protecting himself from the elements that no one else could ever hope to know.

Perch's office was dedicated to the wealth of small things. The room was sparsely decorated. There were no paintings; in fact, the only object that hung from the bleakly white walls was a frame containing Perch's diploma from law school. Yet there were two chairs in the room other than the one Perch sat in now. Both faced the long desk only slightly removed from the window. Unbeknownst to those who happened to sit in them, each chair cost well above what Perch would make off of their cases. His desk was minimalist to the point of seeming empty. A single lamp candled down on Perch's yellow note pad—it too was worth some incredible sum that Margaret had relayed to me early in my time at the firm. A clear glass coffee table resided in the center of the room. It was constructed in Japan. Only three are made each year. These

were not things that Perch spoke of but that found their way through the channels of the office, this modesty thing I could, in all honesty, say I admired about him. Admired is wrong, perhaps respected would come closer but without the hate I wished to imbue it with.

I didn't know how he come into such a inexhaustible amount of money—I assumed it was much like Harriet Miller's fortune—but I had known what this sort of wealth does to people for as long as I'd known its lying weight in my hands. I knew, beneath his silent modesty, there was hatred in his possessions. I had seen too many potential clients sit in those leather chairs, and seen this hatred spark in Perch's gaze. While he would talk and outline strategy and defense and smile throughout, I would glance up from my note taking and catch what his clients couldn't: that inexplicable killer's stare. It watched, as the client would run his or her fingernails down the length of the down-soft leather arm. It saw every movement, every shift in weight, and calculated what damage the chair's occupant could be inflicting upon his purchase. The stare would disappear as soon as the client left his office, but I remembered, and I would take it back to my desk and think of what would happen if what lay beneath that stare was unleashed. I'm not sure if I ever believed I would be the one to experience it. And yet this is the reason I paced his office this morning.

Perch looked up as I rounded about the coffee table. I felt relieved to see his eyes carried nothing of that stare I had seen only a week earlier. I could not place his acceptance of my presence, however. He was altogether too comfortable with arrival. The surprise I had expected to watch spring upon his face never came. Instead a smirk like the ones he flashed to every female in the office wrapped the corners of his chin.

-Can you excuse me?" he said, speaking into the receiver, I have a visitor.

I stopped walking, not willing to get any closer. I folded my arms across my chest in defiance, or perhaps protection.

-I'll speak to you soon. Yes, always a pleasure. He set down the fountain pen on the note pad. It bled ink slowly across the lined paper. If he noticed it didn't show. He passed the phone from one hand to another and set it in its ivory crutch. The receiver hit loud and the clack reverberated about the room. The fire cackled in response.

Perch tented his elbows on the desk and folded his fists as if he was prayed. He pressed his mouth to them and looked at me. I wondered if that all-knowing smile kept its curve behind his hands. I'd thought once that he could handsome to some people. A full head of hair at his age (50?) could not ever be ill received, nor could a set of naturally straight teeth. He had only the slightest paunch about his middle but made due with it by the means of his broad, oxen shoulders. Not nearly Caleb's height but not average by any means, whatever intimidation lost by this was more than replaced by the fact Perch looked as if he had spent his childhood lugging the carcasses of dead animals across his back, a image I could not help but scoff at, having never seen the man outside the confines of a starched oxford. Although he hid it now, his lower half was razor thin. So much so to the point that it gave one the impression he could topple at any second from even the slightest breath. Leaning on the vast space of his desk, however, I began to feel myself wanting to put as much space between us as I possibly could. Now, I thought, say it now. My mouth opened and closed, lips smacking each other, struggled to tongue out words.

-I'm not coming back, I blurted, I'm quitting.

Perch continued to look at me over the thatching of his fingers. He didn't seem to react at all.

-We don't need to go into particulars of why, I said, but you should know full and well. I honestly don't have the energy or time to deal with it. Between you and me, between you and the police, in court, however it would need to be handled, I don't really give a shit. I've got much more important things to deal with right now.

His eyes moved ever so slightly but enough that I could tell that smirk he'd hidden beneath his hands had turned into a sneer.

-I need you to give me a little bit more than that, I said, I'll take a nod. You want to be sarcastic that'll work too, thumbs-up, whatever. Don't pretend as if there's anymore that needs to be said. There doesn't. I want to be with done with it.

Perch took his fingers and wiped them down his mouth as if he was rubbing breadcrumbs from the corners of his lips. His skin stretched across his face as he did this so that I could see the fiery red of his bloodshot eyeballs. He didn't look away. I shifted weight from foot to foot, more to awaken the muscles of my feet than to fend off any sort of discomfort. I could always run. I've always been able to do that. No organized sports, no teenage training regime, no masochistic desire to keep myself gaunt and spindly, no, I've had it in me like the stereotypes profess that we all do. Watch the little black girl, watch her run. Natural, isn't it. Just born with it they are. And how do you respond? Do you get caught a few times, let the Pritchard's run you down with their pick-up truck, let the officer sweep out your legs four blocks from the convenience store you just hit? Then it'll stop, right? I don't care to know what would have happened, to

know what it felt like not to be that little black girl. I didn't mind being quick then and I didn't mind it now. Perch wouldn't be able to stop me.

-If that's how you feel, Grace. But you won't blame me if I'm a bit hurt.

He gripped the arms of his leather chair and rose. I took a step onto the ball of my right foot and tensed. Perch noticed this and pointed at my legs.

-Something wrong?

-Oh, you mean this? I said, taking another step back, No, nothing at all, I'm just waiting for you to tell me you understand. Then I can leave. And you don't have to think about me again. Ever.

- How long have you worked for me, Grace? He stepped around the cut of the desk, freeing himself to approach me.

-What? Bill, I really don't have time for this.

-Two months? Or so? Long enough to know a few things about me.

Make him understand, I thought. Just do that and leave. He doesn't know you've changed addresses, he doesn't know who Leena is. You never mentioned her to Harriett. And even if he did, what does it matter? You can disappear. You've done it before. Forgetting has never been a problem for you. If Bill Perch knew anything, he should know that. He should know that.

Perch ran the point of his fingers along the edge of his desk. The fire seemed to whisper it's cracks the nearer he got to me. I watched as he found the intercom with his thumb and pressed down the button connecting him to Harriett three floors below. The pinprick of red on the intercom lost its light. The mesh of the speaker threw static about the room.

-Margaret? Perch said.

-Yes, Mr. Perch? The naiveté left the taste of bile in my mouth.

-You can go home for the day. I think, after all that's happened in the city, you deserve as much time to yourself as possible. I'll see you tomorrow. He removed his finger from the button and the red light returned. Perch's office became quiet once again, the crinkling fire-logs incessantly muted. With his eyes cast down to the intercom he looked every bit the film noir archetype. The low-glow of his lamp shined off the dark, glossy wood of his desk, reflecting up and carving out the straight of his jaw-line. He should have looked quite handsome there. Instead, the shadows beneath his eyes deepened into sunken crescents. The creases of face folded in on themselves until they became jagged scars lining his forehead, cheeks, and mouth. Whatever youth had inexplicably remained in his countenance was revealed to be smoke and mirrors, and William Perch looked all the more like the Dorian Gray of Upstate New York. His normally broad shoulders appeared slouched. The fabric of his suit-coat melted to the dearth of light on the back walls of the room as if the room was taking from him any semblance of corporeal shape, leaving only a wisp of silhouette. I could not blink for fear of losing him into those shadows. I could not take my eyes from him.

-I think you should sit down, Grace. He said.

-I know you do.

-I just hate to see you so uncomfortable, he smiled, his teeth faint orange in the reflected light of the lamp, I'm really afraid you're going to hurt yourself if you tense up like that.

-Haven't you been listening? You don't need to worry about me. I'll be fine and you don't need to worry, so.

-You don't think so? He began to walk toward me, There's more than one thing I need to worry about, and several involving just you, Grace.

I didn't back up. I met his gaze and gave him the same stare I'd been intimidating white men with my entire life, yet he was looking down at his hands as neared, rubbing his thumbs up and down over the back of his hands, alternating, one after another, as if he was warming them for use.

-I don't want to lie to you, Bill. You know what I heard and you know what you did to me, and. But, you truly, truly don't have to worry. I've had it much worse and from men bigger and meaner than you've seen, so, you see, there's nothing to worry about.

Perch kept on. Slower now. As if he was attempting to camouflage his footsteps with the low crackle of the fireplace, as if I couldn't see him coming.

-And your word is all I have to go on? Please, Grace.

-I wouldn't normally take that either. But you can be sure about this.

-No, no. You see, I could've thrown it to the back of my mind if you had come to me after you'd hung up the phone. We could've talked it over; I'm really a reasonable man. I wouldn't have minded paying you off, there's money, you know.

-I don't want any money; I want to be left alone.

-I can't leave you alone, Grace. You made me chase you. You made me hurt you. I'm the only one to blame for letting you run. Do you really take me to be stupid enough to let you go twice?

He took another step forward. He was too close. It was at that moment I felt all of my skin grow ice beneath its surface. Every muscle tensed and coiled and prepared to strike out, whether at or away, was suddenly wrapped around my bones like tourniquets. At that moment I was solid stone.

-Do you know what I'm going to do to you, Grace?

-My friends know where I am, I spat out, I told them everything.

-Really? He opened his mouth to a grin. Spit spindled from tooth to tooth.

-I told them, I told them that if I wasn't home in an hour, to call the police, so.

-If you'd told someone, Perch said, You wouldn't have come at all. And if these friends were any friends at all, they wouldn't have let you out of their sights.

-They trust me.

-No. I don't think you told a soul. If you had said to anyone your boss is purchasing large quantities of crystal meth with the intent to distribute, I mean, Grace, that's enough reason to stop you from coming back here wouldn't you think? Especially if you told them that I chased you to the parking lot. Especially if you told them I broke your finger. Especially if they knew I'd tried to kill you. That would usually be reason for some concern. But. How can I judge your friends? There's no way I could have met them. They certainly don't live anywhere near the address you gave me. Then again, neither do you. I should have expected that, come to think of it. I've never thought you stupid. A fake address does make sense. Easier for you to run. Harder for me to track you down. Was it your friend's idea? Just like you coming back here. To tell me you're quitting? I'm sure they have your best interests in mind when they told you that was the right thing to do.

I had been much more afraid in my life but standing there watching William Perch slow towards me I could not remember a single moment that filled me with as much dread. The firelight curled about the back of his head, his shoulders, the front of his fingertips, like he had been hastily cut out from some other world and placed here in this room with the remnants His face grew dark and I lost almost all sight of his features. Every few seconds the fire would catch a virgin branch and take hold, brightening up and flashing in the whites of his eyes. They stared at me incessantly.

-William, I'm not going to-

He hit me then. Not a punch but a claw from his right hand across my lower jaw. His nails, always trimmed unusually long, carved deep into my lip and my head snapped to the side and I heard a sound like a howl coming from somewhere outside the room. I stumbled back. My foot caught on the leg of the glass table and I fell to the floor. The back of my skull hit the wood. I immediately curled into a tuck, throwing my hands up to my mouth and feeling the flood of crimson humor hurry through the cracks of my fingers. I moaned as I touched the jagged slash of my lower lip.

Perch languidly strolled over to where I lay writhing. His hand was still curled back from striking me. His whole body was darkness, his face an absence. I reached out to grab the ledge of the glass table and rise to defend myself. Perch kicked at me. His foot caught the back of my calf and forced my knee up and into the table. The glass spider-webbed. His next kick missed, the toe of his shoe connecting with the crack in the table and the glass shattered on impact.

He loomed over me. He watched as my hands pushed my body away from him, each time carving clear shards into my palms as I attempted to flee from his reach. I

didn't feel the cut of the glass but I felt the wood beneath my fingertips puddle with blood as I pressed down upon the floor.

-Fucking dyke.

He drove his heel down into my left ankle. The thick leather of my boots stopped him from breaking my ankle but it sent a sharp, lightning strike of pain up the back of my thigh stopping at my ass. I kicked at his leg with my free foot, trying to force him off me. He kneeled down, blocking out what little illumination flowed from the fireplace. I punched at the side of his head. My fists flung blood about his face and into the air, where it seemed to linger for a moment like morning haze before dropping to my brow. If he felt my hands pummeling him he didn't show it. He grabbed at my flailing arms, trying to stymie their wild swings. He wasn't quick enough to hold them both.

Perch delivered a punch to my kidney that stung so bad I felt my piss turn bloody the instant he connected. I immediately stopped swinging my arms about and wrapped them both around my side. He took to this with same savage glee as an embalmer in a cancer ward, grabbing my wrists with his hands and using his knee to flip me to my stomach. The broken glass pressed into my side. He sat on top of me and began to wrench my jeans off.

-I'll fucking kill you! I screamed out. My voice was ragged and seemed to tear at the air of the room.

-Scream you cunt. No one's here, he said.

I continued to shout. Telling him I'd murder him, his children, everyone he's ever cared for. I told him I'd chop his cock off and choke him with it. I yelled things I'd do to him, things I'd only seen in horror movies. I kept screaming. He punched me

again. I clenched my teeth tight, biting the tip of my tongue clean off. He clenched his free hand around the back of my neck and dug his nails in until they were crimson. I fought to kick him off me. My kicks were enough to free myself from underneath and I managed to crawl across the floor. He was behind me, unseen. I could only feel his grasp as it grappled about for my flailing legs. He took hold of my ankle and dragged my body back towards him. The glass dug into my side like a scythe, catching like a claw and tearing. My eyes bulged, forcing out tears until they covered the glass beneath my face, causing the shards to fog up with each whimpering breath from my open mouth. I spat out a fat clot onto the glass. He attempted to re-position himself atop me but found himself slipping on the mix of blood and slick clear shards strewn about the floor. I heard the zip of his fly as he continued to struggle to control my legs. I kicked back and felt my heel connect with the soft of his crotch. Perch groaned and took his hand from my ankle. I flipped myself to my back and pitched my feet into the floor. I wriggled and writhed until I freed myself from beneath his kneel and skidded myself away from his reach. He grunted and rose from his crouch to come for me again. The room was darker than the advancing daylight should have allowed, yet I could make out his colossal frame as it stood up for a moment, as it caught a glint from the tender flames slowly fading into the ashes of the fireplace, and then, as it fell, landing amidst the broken glass.

Perch laid there, his fallen shape hulking on the ground like an abandoned car on a midnight interstate—immobile, lit up by the occasional flash of light, a fleeting headlight, a spark of fire. His face was cast down into the floor and his arms were thrown akimbo, his left at an inhuman angle out from his torso and twisted, his right was stock straight and reached towards me with its hand frozen into the form of a grip, as if he held

some invisible object in his clutch, something about the size and shape of a human heart. I had been dragging my bare ass against the broken table spread across the floor and as I sat only feet away from Perch's outstretched claw. Without sequestering my gaze from his still shape I reached to the ground and fumbled, cutting myself several times before I grasped my fingers around a triangle of glass. I thrust out my makeshift defense, pointing the shard at Perch and waited for him to move. I would kill him. If he came another inch toward me I'd kill him. A single bead of what I hoped was sweat strung itself down my cheek.

He stirred. The talon of his hand clenched on air and drew back beneath him. He slowly pushed himself from the floor and fell back abruptly to a kneel. His head rolled back, rolling the skin on the back of his neck before cascading forward, his skin catching with a jolt on his sternum. He brought his arms up and wrapped them around his stomach. His every movement was labored. His knuckles dragged along the ground, his wrists lifted as if they were weighted down by unknown gravity. My eyesight was thinned by a patina of spattered red across my vision but I could see him there, still outlined by the glowing marriage of lamp and firelight, holding his intestines as they threatened to spill from his opened belly. My arm pitched out from my body. The glass shook as my arm fought to remain pointed straight out at William Perch. The same lamp that carved out Perch from the stygian darkness of the room blinked a blurred reflection in the shuddering piece of the table clasped in my fingers. Perch was strangely immobile once again. He merely sat on his ankles and clung to his stomach and breathed deep, choked air into his lungs. It was as if he he'd forgotten about my presence completely, as if the only thing that concerned him at this moment was keeping himself intact.

I dropped the glass. My fingers had been gripping my dagger so tightly I had cut into the folds of my skin. Fresh letting flecked the floor, sounding out so loud in that silence it could have been mistaken for the first drops of a thunderstorm. I reached down and propelled myself along the floor, wincing as my naked thighs caught glass along the way. My back grew warm as I neared the fireplace. Perch still hadn't made a single movement towards me since I'd slunk out from beneath him. He still knelt, his massive shoulders crooked and hunched, his arms still slung about his frame. His face was invisible but for a flicker of orange about the curve of his left ear. Like some exhausted, defeated animal, like some great, dying bear, he shuddered with each intake of breath, his throat sounding out guttural stops and coughs and high-pitched whimpers, his suit coat damp with blood, mine and his, like ursine fur slicked along the length of his body. I watched him for what must have been several minutes. I finally wiped my eyes of blood and tears and cried afresh as pulled my jeans back onto myself. Fighting to stand, my ass and back igniting in pain, I surprisingly found myself able to take regular strides if I didn't manage to think my thighs wetting with a slow trickle of blood from the cuts about me. The rank stench of feces invaded my nostrils. In the course of the barrage of punches to my stomach and sides my bowels had emptied out of their own volition. The revolting scent, once acquired, seemed to permeate every layer of my senses. I was left sucking air, waiting for a reprieve for several minutes, all the while, keeping my eyes on William Perch as he breathed in and out as well. Our breathing matched at some point, I believe, but cannot remember for certain. Much of the next hour is lost to my memory. At some point I was able to handle the reek of blood and shit. As soon as this calm came over me, and I was able to gain a sort of composure, I tongued a tooth from the back of

my mouth and hocked all the snot and clotted blood I could summon, without feeling like I was dislocating my jaw, and spat at Perch's huddled body. The mass of mixed fluid slopped on the wood and the tooth clattered past Perch and into the dark recesses of the office. He still refused to move. I put my hand on the wall and steadied myself as I rounded about the room, keeping myself as far away as I possibly could. I reached the door and watched him. Breath. Exhale. Breath. I walked out to the hall, past my desk to the elevator. As the doors closed before me I slunk to the cold, metallic floor and watched as the fire flickered, flickered and was cut from my life. Margaret was gone and the rest of the office had either yet to arrive or Perch had purposefully made sure that no one came in today. As if he knew I would return not a single day before this date, not single hour after. I hobbled to my car and wondered if he wished he had left someone in the building to take care of him in the case the poor, defenseless lesbian secretary got the better than him. I looked back up to Perch's window. The firelight had dimmed so much that the room would have looked pitch black from the parking lot were not for the last gasps of its embers licking at the shine of the glass. It was then I remembered the money on Perch's desk. I closed the door and walked back into the office.

When I returned to the car once again, I lowered myself slowly into the crutch of my seat, turned the car on, and sat weeping for only five minutes before I put the car into drive and sped south to see my brother.

I parked the car at the New York Downtown Hospital garage as the sun began to move below the skyline. The freezing air that had swept through the city streets had invaded the garage as well and I took my driving gloves with me as I exited the vehicle. The heat had stopped working during the drive and I had wrapped a sweater about my head to keep my ears from numbing in the cold. Much of the bleeding from the slice in my lip had faded and hardened into the cloth, forming dark splotches that shed tiny particles of blood that fell to my lap like dust. As I took it off now, my once straightened hair was matted against my head like a curling black helmet. The left side of my face was swollen and morphing from its normal milk and two sugars coffee stained hue to a mauve blanket of skin. My body had timidly begun to heal. This meant my ass had slipped steadily from unbearably painful to even move, to only excruciating to the touch. The jeans I had worn to Perch's office were mottled with flecks of blood and the back of my pants looked as if I hadn't had time to stop along the drive and had decided to just let my bowels go, which, for all I know, I very well might have. Despite this discomfort, the drive had been oddly rejuvenating. There is a consistency to travel in Upstate New York. There are never any real surprises—the hills you pass are simulacrum of other hills you've seen minutes before, the sky, especially this time of the year, lingers in a steel integrity, touched only intermittently by swathes of clouds made from the fabric of ghost costumes, and the roads retain a constant rhythm of staggered potholes and broken asphalt—all of this melding together to form a great wash of low static that's sole design seemed to force my thoughts away from Leena, away from my brother, away from what had occurred this morning, to a pure absence of worry, of pain, of memory at all.

But, perhaps, there was no true escape from what occurred or what was going to occur. I could only imagine the lengths at which I was being searched for. Whether it was in the form of the local police, fresh from the discovery of Perch's gutted corpse (He had been breathing hadn't he? Could he still be alive? Worse if he was. Worse if he was) sending out a dispatch across the Eastern American seaboard calling for my capture, or in the shape of whatever meth-heads, smurfs, or cranksters Perch was affiliating with, or worse, whomever he employed to protect him from these very same criminals. As macabre as it was, and even more depressing still to think that this is what occupied my mind while I was driving, I couldn't help but admonish myself for not certifying William Perch's demise. I'd left him kneeling there, hunched over himself, stilling oxygen from his deep, wracked breaths, cradling the spill of his intestines on the designer weave of his dress shirt sleeves. All my mind seemed to wish to explore was each and every possibility resulting from this mistake, all the while sending up soft, spaced laughter in the back of my skull, taunting me, counting down the hours until I was caught or murdered myself. No bland tranquility could save me from this. If I had indeed killed him then, would that still have been considered self-defense? Could I have made it seem as if it had been an accident, a necessary incursion to save my own life? Would I be able to stand before a jury and convince them of the righteous nature of his death? The accident of his death? It had been an accident. It had been an accident?

I could not help but imagine the trial, thinking this way. The passionate defense of the lawyer paid for by Leena (that is, if could still care for me after knowing what I'd done, to Perch, and through out my life—God knows the sordid past of Grace and Caleb Miller would be a prime subject if one of us was ever arrested), the character assaulting

prosecution, constantly harking back to that moment I had turned back from the elevator doors, limped into William Perch's office, picked up the exact same shard of glass I'd planted my fingerprints on, the one I had thrust out in front of me in defense, and slit his throat so his arteries shot plumes of dark humor out and upward to the bare ceiling, the patterns of which would be well-documented by the blood-spatter analyst and provided in turn to the unsympathetic jury (mostly white but for a few Vietnamese and one lone elderly black woman, to certify the "jury of your peers" part fulfilled) who would not take any accusations of their condemnation of me being race related: my antecedent crimes and juvenile delinquency enough for them to decide to imprison me for the rest of my mortal life—and then my walk down from beside the judge, the bailiff's large hand cupped solidly behind my elbow, leading me to a door unremarkable but for its symbolism only to me, a look back, and my brother, a few rows removed from where I'd sat for days and hours listening to the deconstruction of my intents and purposes for every decision I had ever made, and in his eyes, memories of nights spent sleeping side by side, waiting for me to realize just how wrong I'd been living for so many years. It was at this moment in this dream that I'd shout out: "No! There is nothing wrong! You caused this, not me! Am I to be punished for your hate?" I could wait for an answer from the silent, watching eyes, but there was only one person whose judgment I cared to hear.

Thinking of the trial only sent me back to Perch's office, back to my face crushed into the scattered glass and his weight releasing off my back and the sight of his seemingly monolithic shadow rising up and crumbling to the jagged teeth strewn across the floor. This served my mind wandering further past my freezing rush down the freeway. The image of William Perch cupping his blood in his palms caused me to

remember all of the awful exploitation flicks Caleb used to beg me to take him to. I never would, of course. No, not for that inescapable separation between us, the same separation that caused me to fight him so vehemently about going to Staten Island, no. I can attribute this rejection to my pseudo-parental instincts telling me that, despite how much I swore at my brother, it probably wouldn't be appropriate to take a 15-year-old to see a double feature of *The Wizard of Gore* and *Color Me Blood Red*. I would go, however. Especially when Caleb was sure to be sequestered in his room, or later, when he was working until the daylight had begun to color the night bluer and bluer. I could never tell if it was the violence that drew me to them or my desire to understand why Caleb wished to see them so desperately. Now more than ever seemed to prove the latter to be my own wishful thinking for normalcy. I couldn't discern a memory in which I might have been truly examining these films for reasons why Caleb would want to suck up their filth, instead, I could only think of the cascade of bright red corn syrup as it rushed toward the dirty projection, flooding the cramped theater crimson. I remembered the shine, the fleck of harsh light off its liquidity, how quickly the blood strained across the victim's skin, and how translucent it became when stretched thin. Perch's letting was nothing like the profusion portrayed in these films. His was stygian, as if the glass had punctured his soul and revealed it to be full of nothing but the dense thickness of evil. Would I fall that same way when they found me? Would my blood look just like his? I had looked into the rear-view mirror then. Was it like his now as it dried across the fattening cleft of my chin? Was it inextricably mixing with his as I drove further and further away? The police arriving and discovering one dark pool haloed about the still-kneeling lawyer, and thinking in that first moment—My God...all this from one man?

He had still been breathing when I had taken the money from his desk and placed into the manila envelope he himself had chosen for its protection. There had been no movement since I had ridden the elevator down and gone to my car—the blood was there, still, as monstrous and real as it had been twenty minutes before, and Perch had not moved from his kneel. It took me quite a while to travel back from the parking lot to his desk, and not without several moments where I had dug my fingernails into the wall in an attempt to stop the pain riddling my body. Yet when I tucked that bulging package beneath my arm and returned once again to the elevator, it seemed as if that standing pool of crimson humor was as thin as a movie screen, like all of it had been some feverish dream, and if I waited long enough, I would feel the world peel back like an eyelid and reveal to me the ceiling of my room, my body wrapped in the sheets, with Leena resting beside me.

I stopped just once along the way to New York. I had forgotten to fill up before I'd left Leena's and had been driving around 85 miles an hour for relatively ludicrous amount of time without getting pulled over. It was rather foolish of me, come to think of it. One brown nosing new recruit to the state police and I could have been waiting for that trial instead of struggling to string my pants down to my ankles and squat an inch above the curled hairs and drying piss on the truck stop porcelain. One trigger-happy state trooper and I could be dead. I'd take the pain and internal humiliation of knowing exactly how I looked in that bathroom. I didn't bother searching for any toilet paper, or looking at myself in the mirror. I could deal with that later. I was already sitting in a dried patch of my own blood—I don't think washing my face would have made things any better for that last hour of the drive.

As I exited the bathroom, I considered grabbing a burger at the adjacent McDonald's. I tested my jaw for mobility. A wave of pain splattered across my cheek. I could do with going hungry for a few days. Leena would be glad for one less fast food trip from me. I hadn't noticed any changes yet but Leena was always keen to bring up my diet every time I complained to her. Whether it was the few times she had been able to wake me in the morning for a run or how lately I would desperately need to sleep for but an hour as soon as the sun was culled below the horizon, she would be quick to remind me that it was the constant influx of Big Macs and Whoppers that were causing me to lose any semblance of energy. I'd always subsisted on nothing but cast off beef of lesser farmers and the dregs of the fryer, so it wasn't well accepted to hear someone, even the woman I love, telling me I need to change that most comforting addiction. But unless there were burgers blended into milkshakes behind that counter yellowed by grease wrapped in yellowed paper, I'd be hungry, and awake, for longer than either myself or those I'd be encountering today, would be happy to endure.

There was a small television caged and hung in the corner of the McDonald's. News from the city hummed low. Low enough that if two or more people began to argue about the quality of their quarter-pounder the sound of the young reporter's voice would be like the far off noises of trucks clicking and starting, cars flying past the station, and wind, picking up after the stillness of the cold sunrise—lost into the sound mix of film devoted to entirely insular pursuits. There happened to be just three people within the room, however. The lone cashier, an older truck driver with mustard spattering out from his masticating mouth, and myself, and none of us had much of anything to say to anyone of us in any shape or form. No one even seemed to notice the black woman wearing dark

jeans stained with darker blood. The swollen pouch of her lower lip. The rank smell of shit that refused to detach itself from her body. If they noticed they didn't show it, or they didn't want to be involved with it. Better not to know. I'd been that way too, once. The hiss from the television sounded out clear.

The attack had been flung far from my thoughts at this point. Walking into that service station three hours into the drive, I had barely noticed the television dissecting the intricacies of the design of the bombing, how the towers still stood, what was being done for the victims. For some reason I had still not connected what had been done in lower Manhattan to why my brother was in the hospital. I did not feel the fear I knew was spreading across the country. Perhaps it was because of Perch that I could choose to keep that fear from enveloping me. I wouldn't have any idea of whether that vulnerability would ever come. When alone sometimes, reading a paper, watching T.V., I suppose I would transpose the emotions I knew were felt by those experiencing tragedy onto myself, but not to the point of succumbing to this experience—only enough to seem a bit more normal. I suppose it was an attempt—a wholly subconscious effort, that is—to escape that vacuum within me. Where in most others there would be that primordial sympathy for those like you, there was none within me. I knew that it was important for me to care for others that way, but I'd honestly only found three people in my life who I'd thought deserved this sort of vulnerability out of me, one of whom had betrayed that trust, proving my system of separation, of detachment of emotion, to be wholly legitimate. Yet still I would attempt to reach an approximate normality. And when I'd watched the news, and thought of only Caleb's safety, I had known that I should be worrying too for the injured, the families of those injured, the dead. I'd waited several

hours for this worry to filter through whatever blockades my hardships had erected to stop any sort of sympathy from flowing out of me. It never came.

The next day, Caleb fell from my thoughts as well. I assume he would have lingered far longer had Georgia not been in the picture—even the worry of anything bad happening to him brought the prospect of my confronting her to the forefront of my mind. Yet, she had called, ruining all chance of my erasing either the attack, or my brother and my former lover from my already scattered thoughts.

I hadn't spoken to Leena since leaving the house. I threw a few quarters into the pay-phone slot near the exit from the service station. Again I found myself imagining some tweakers breaking into that old faded-grey Dutch Colonial, their filth spitting out onto the chair, the tables, first editions her mother had saved for Leena, with no regard for the memory of these things. I imagined them falling over themselves as they rose up the stairs. She would still be sleeping in this nightmare, too overcome by my departure to go to work that day—my very absence loosing her from her rest and throwing her about the bed until the iron sky cast itself through the window and into our room. She wouldn't hear the harsh smack of their shoes against the floorboards.

Each tone that rang into my ear was another step closer to Leena. I knew by the fifth ring they must be standing over her, knives in hand, preparing to kill a woman they knew only by her relation to me. They wouldn't care a thing for her past, for what she could be. They'd be in the midst of 72 hour high and they would murder her with no concern for her life, for the consequences, least of all for my suffering.

-Grace? Her voice buzzed through the earpiece.

-Yes! Yes, it's me. How'd you know?

-Really? It's a collect call.

-Right. Stupid. Sorry.

-It's okay.

Silence.

-Anyone come to the house today? I asked.

-Nope. Mailman, I guess. Or woman. You'd think I'd have seen him as early as I get up but not once, no. You ever seen one?

-Good...what? What're you saying? No, never seen one.

-You've never seen a mailman? Ever?

-Shut up.

-I'm not angry, you know?

Silence.

-I'm glad. You can be.

-If I want you to come back? Not really an option is it? She laughed.

Silence. Longer now. I could hear the awful jazz rifling through the magazine racks of the convenience store.

-Was someone supposed to come by today?

-What? No. Listen; can you do something for me?

-Of course.

-Can you go to your mother's for the we... I stopped myself. I wasn't thinking.

There was a constant smell of iron from the gash in my lip.

-Grace.

-I know. I'm sorry.

-You want me to leave the house?

-Yes.

-What happened? What did you do?

-It's not for anything bad.

- Of course it is. What reason does anyone have to ask that other than because something awful might happen?

-If I tell you what I did something worse might happen. Just trust me enough to know I'm thinking only of your safety.

-‘I'm thinking only of your safety’. You've got to be kidding me, Grace.

-I am.

Silence.

-Alright. A voice not Leena's said from the other end. It was smaller, as if it could have been crushed with the squeeze of my grip on the crutch of the phone.

-Asking you to go to... asking you to go somewhere I would know wasn't the best idea.

-I would say.

-Right. Just. Today. Leave today. You have Caleb's number?

-No.

I gave it to her.

-Just memorize it, I said, and if you wrote it down, burn it as soon you've got the number stuck in your head.

-Yes ma'am.

Silence.

-I wish this hadn't happened.

-Of course you don't. No one does. I love you Grace, but don't try and act like you regret whatever you did. You've never regretted anything in your life. Or maybe you have. But you've done a hell of a job pretending you haven't even if that's true.

-Call me when you're safe.

-Of course.

-Okay.

-Drive safe.

-Okay.

She laughed. It was breathy and fat and hoarse and it seemed to hurt her and I don't know why she let it out at all.

-I'll call when I'm safe. In a few days. Give my best to your brother.

She hung up.

•

The parking garage was near full but for two or three sequestered spots in the stale depths of Manhattan. After removing the sweater from my head I unlocked the trunk and began to sift through the contents of my suitcase. There I found a fresh pair of jeans and some clean underwear. My boots were flecked with spots of blood but the leather was black enough that they could easily be misconstrued as salt stains. The

blouse I'd been wearing was torn down the back. I hadn't noticed until that moment—I suppose the pain must've masked whatever cool touch my jacket had pressed upon my skin. I'm not quite sure how the pea coat had survived through the morning's events yet it was seemingly undisturbed. I stuffed another shirt into my handbag (a t-shirt Caleb had bought for me, one I didn't exactly remember packing for myself), and the jeans too, and the underwear, and I locked the car. Taking large steps was still an far off dream, but I found myself cringing less and less the more I began to shake off the ice of the drive and the wind that seemed to be emanating from the concrete walls.

I found the nearest single bathroom in the garage complex. There was a great hum from deep within the building, down the halls and down from the ground floor. There were only a few people within the parking garage. Exhausted nurses, and surprisingly put-together doctors, clocking out and trading shifts for the night, rushed past me, not even glancing at the fat bulge of my lower lip, or the shadow that had crept onto the hood of my eye-socket.

I hadn't noticed these brands either, until I looked at myself in the mirror. My dull green eyes were bloodshot from lack of sleep, or from stress, or from the force of Perch's hand across my head, and my nose had begun to swell with the onset of a cold. My dark cheeks were flushed, but again, this could just have easily have been bruising. I smelled of stale sweat and iron. My jaw seemed disconnected from the rest of my face, as if I was staring into a cracked mirror, the split slicing down the curve of my cheekbones to the cusp of my chin and carving out my bones. I appeared skeletal. The bruising extended down the lines of my neck to my collarbone. The black pea coat I had been wearing the entire drive was wrapped tight about my body and on it were strewn bits of

dust and white fuzz sticking out like stars on the drape of night. I took off my jacket first and then I removed my blouse. Cut glass fell from the now opened tucks of the cloth. My skin shimmered like snake scales. Small clear pieces of the table had imbedded themselves into my sternum, into the pushed up fat of my tits, and had slithered scratches across the span of my abdomen. Some areas of my skin looked as if a miniature vampire had attempted to climb to my throat using only its teeth. Others appeared as if I had lain down in a bed full of sleeping, feral cats, waking them and not fighting back when they dug their claws in and tore down the length of my stomach. Nothing bled much now but the blouse was ruined even without the split down the back. I threw it out in the trashcan next to the sink. It was overflowing with crushed paper towels and might have been in its third week without being emptied. I pushed the blouse, as deep into the mix of damp paper as I could, until I was sure neither a janitor, nor I, would be likely to see it again.

I took my time removing the jeans. Leaning on the counter for support I slowed the denim down my leg-line, careful not to move too quickly, or to allow the dried blood to shed itself across the linoleum. I bent over to free my feet from the material and gagged as soon as I lowered my head. Nausea swept over me, not so much from the smell or the pain but from the lingering memory of the morning's violation.

I wrapped my forearms around the crane of the water faucet and dipped my head beneath jutted spout and let loose a stream of bile and blood and the remnants of whatever was left in my stomach from the night past. I lingered about the sink for several minutes, emptying myself of memory. The water helped to wash most of my vomit down but there was nothing it could do for much of the more solid parts of my projection. I didn't have to imagine what I looked like standing there: all bruises and brown skin with

only a torn bra and some soiled underwear to protect me from the cold, all the beginnings of one of my exploitation flicks. It was a struggle to think of what I would say if anyone walked in at that moment, if I would need to say anything. If it happened four hours north or in this very bathroom I'm positive they could put the pieces together. If Leena could see me, if she didn't know what had happened, if the blood was colored corn syrup and the scratches were molded gelatin and the bruises were all smoke and mirrors, she would have laughed. She would have pretended to wash my brow, cooing softly as if I was a child holding back a snicker at just how ridiculous I looked. Caleb would have thought the make-up was unbearably cool, and would have emerged from his room several hours later with the same mask of blue blush and purple hued lipstick he'd have stolen from Harriett Miller. I couldn't think as to why I was thinking of Caleb at that age. As if an older Caleb would not have had that same reaction, as if he would have abhorred me even if it was a joke—untrue, but perhaps now it could be, I hadn't seen him for quite some time—or if I would've have let him see me this way at all. I couldn't remember a time I had been this bare to him, if I had ever been at all. I had not a single memory of him walking in on me changing, or preparing for a shower, or even when I was in the shower. I suppose it must have happened.

There were those events in all siblings childhood. That moment when the line is drawn. I assume it was much more evident for men, that instance when the decision is made, if its even a conscious decision at all. But perhaps it was completely sub-conscious. Perhaps there was never that moment, instead, a steady revulsion that builds until puberty and flourishes for those years, long enough to prevent the related from in-breeding, until one day it is gone, leaving in its place an abyss of sexual desire, where any

such thoughts will fall, unrecoverable, until it is ingrained in the mind: this should not be. If it had happened between us, for Caleb, I couldn't remember. Though why should I? It was hubris to think he'd reveal something that personal to me. And how would I have taken it? Who's to say I wouldn't have screamed at him, kicked him out of our room, God knows what? Or if I hadn't reacted, if I'd internalized whatever sense of betrayal I felt, would that have been right for Caleb? If it had happened, he would have told me. It was the only logical reason for my lack of remembrance on the subject.

I don't honestly recall that moment for myself but I'm sure it must have existed. I was never able to decide what exactly I believed regarding my own sexuality, whether it was something genetic or a tendency realized by experience, by upbringing, by being surrounded by men like William Perch or the Pritchard boys for most of my so-called formative years. It had never mattered much to me which one it was, only that I accepted that it was, and that Caleb accepted it as well.

I'd spoken to Georgia about it once. Thinking back to it, it could have been this very conversation that had made me aware of my own amatory leanings. It had not been an experiment for Georgia, nothing related to long, languid hours spent bored in a dorm room or an all-girls boarding school. She had moved to the city when she was 15 to live with a cousin, or an uncle—the situation of her stay those first few months had changed with each telling. Either she couldn't remember exactly or it was a lie, but that had never seemed important for me to distinguish. It really didn't affect where she had lived anyway. Her nights were spent kicking her feet off tables ghosted with coke lines. Her days were equally cheated but when she could find the time for sleep it would usually appear in the form of futon traded for carnalities. Most of the men who happened to

contain George within their Lower West Side apartments were abusive, and high the majority of the time that they were, and usually kept their hands full with running the clubs that Georgia frequented.

I'd laughed when she'd first described these men. Every cliché I could have imagined was inhabited by these descriptions. The existence of these people in reality, beyond the screens of the films I saw each week, had astounded me. I suppose this was how the cliché was birthed but I had still hoped at that time for the world to be a more hopeful, or at least a place more deserving of hope, than one that created these people. But it was not out of rejection of these men that Georgia had found her Sapphic tendencies realized. Rather, it could be said (and had, by myself, by Georgia, perhaps Caleb had as well) that she began to have sex with other women for the sheer pleasure of pleasing the men she had been staying with. In time, it would become simpler to fuck a man's girlfriend in front of him to convince him to let her stay at his flat for a few nights than to force herself to endure fucking the man himself. It was a show for Georgia, and whether or not she enjoyed it was inconsequential to her (though I doubt I would have remained with her if this had been the case for too long). It was easier still to score off of these other women, or their boyfriends, or even the men that their boyfriends work for. She told me that at one point she was actually being requested at parties because of the almost guaranteed fact that she would end up on someone's rug somewhere scissoring some whore with a nose flecked with dried coke and dried blood spotting like peppermint.

I never quite understood why I'd cared to listen to these details. Why I'd never cared about what she'd done before she'd met me. The most I had ever done was made

sure before I even touched her that she prove to me she was clean. Clean for me meant health but she had taken it as drugs and had thrown her entire stash into the toilet before I could stop her. I'd told her then it really didn't matter to me if she used as long as she kept it out of my apartment and away from Caleb. The look of shock on her face is tattooed in my memory. So is the sight of her flinging her arms into the toilet bowl and scooping out her coke, her pills, her weed and crying on the floor when she'd realized how stupid she'd been. I've never regretted smiling. Perhaps that was more for my sake. I must have felt so proud at that moment, taming this wild cat, so that at just a word I could control her every move. And maybe this was so, for a short while, despite what happened. I'd be fine with believing that.

I might have enjoyed the details. It might have made me feel more righteous in my own tendencies. There had been a lack of attraction for so long for me, though I had been with men, forced or not, that when I actually found staring at Georgia for the first time, and I felt that quickness of realization, that 'I must' that overwhelms you, it seemed only right that it should be with another woman. It was something that happened to me, in that single moment, no culmination of events, no psychological evaluation needed—it simply was and perhaps had always been. I'd never spoken about it with Leena. Not ever. I was constantly waiting for that love, that most intense infatuation to stop, as assume most people are waiting for their love to leave them. Not the corporeal love, the very physical manifestation, but that wellspring of devotion that can erupt at any moment. One day that love will not be there, and even though you know it will happen again, there is no way to predict that moment's occurrence.

I stripped my underwear off. Though I hadn't felt it before a freeze draped itself around my waist. I quickly removed the spare cloth from my handbag and threw them up my legs. Despite what Perch had done, the touch of fresh cotton was like absolving water, and although the pain was still very much alive, it had changed, and was as forgetful as I was, seemingly bereft of the memory of the morning—it was as new.

I tossed the soiled jeans and underwear into the waste bin and buried them deep along with the blouse. I pulled the new pants on, perhaps too quickly, but I'd begun to shake myself from my reverie, my self-reflection, and realized where I was, and who exactly was waiting for me within these walls. The jeans I wore now I had borrowed from Leena, perhaps when I'd first met her. They might have fit me at some point. I had only tried them on once before. They had seemed slimming at the time but now they revealed the fat that had accumulated about my thighs. What you get, I thought, you haven't run more than a mile in the past two months. Seemed trivial to think of that now, but I couldn't remember the last time I had looked at myself like this, peering at every appendage, every clothing choice, every stretch of skin. I had never enjoyed the sight of myself. And hell if the punch-drunk prostitute-look was looking to change that. I usually avoided mirrors as if there was a virus to be caught from staring into the glass and I felt the same way now. It was not that I did not believe myself to be an attractive woman, just the opposite in fact. One would only have to look back through my life, at the people that had said they loved me, the ones who had called me beautiful, or even pretty—I would take pretty. What other way was there to gauge that sort of thing? Certainly there were many blatant manifestations of narcissism within the world. More times than not

though, I felt, your love of yourself is found in the stares of others. Georgia's stare, Leena's stare, Perch's stare, Caleb's.

Someone had told me once that in the sun my skin glows like amber, like the light was within. I never thought too much of phrases like that. I would take a word. I would rather have pretty. It was simpler, less special, less resigned. That glow might have appeared at just that angle at just that time of day for just that person alone. Pretty was general. Anybody could say pretty. Anybody could be pretty. It was not that that kept me from the mirror. It was the fear that if I stared hard enough, deep enough, I would discover something I couldn't live with, some mistake, some scar on me that I couldn't place, something I couldn't explain or remember. Some ugliness put upon me just to punish me. I could find all those things now. And yet, it was as if they had always existed, hidden beneath the surface, as if Perch's marks were only revealed, not put there by any violence. Like my skin was born to wear bruises. I wondered if pretty was still there, if that glow was ever there at all. If it had been lies. If all along anyone could see the violence within me, and, in some effort to keep it from emerging, to keep it from existing in their memory of me, they would placate me with beautiful phrases, ones I somehow accepted and listened to despite my abhorrence of such things. I would have taken pretty now. I would have taken the glow, if only to continue to forget.

As I gazed at my swollen face, my bloodshot eyes, my matted hair, I thought for a moment whether I cared to have Georgia see me like this. I had never come to terms with the fact that I thought I looked like a whore when I wore makeup, yet for some reason there remained a small case that Georgia had bought me within my bag. In it was what she would have called a shameful excuse for cosmetics but I took it out now. The

lipstick broke and fell into the sink as I opened the tube, a likely result of the daily abuse I suffered upon the bag. I picked the red stick from the basin of the sink and pressed it to my lips, not thinking of what it could have picked up from touching the porcelain, what was now invading the open slice on my lip. I finished coating my lips crimson and looked at myself in the mirror. It was not I that gazed back but some one older. Older in time or era but not in age. Someone who had lived through wars not attacks. I didn't resemble the whore I always assumed I looked like with makeup, but somehow, with the flush in my cheeks, the bruising about my chin, and the strain on my eyes from staring out at the highway and my short hair wrapping about my ears, I looked as I always assumed and imagined my mother, my completely hypothetical birth mother, would have looked when she met my father, my completely hypothetical birth father—without the injury, comfortable and confident and all-together together. Able to handle the violence of the day, the wars her brothers would have fought in, and the constant fear of loss, all the while waiting for it to end. She must have had brothers, even hypothetical ones. It was enough for me sometimes to simply imagine what she would have been like, what her hypothetical family had been like. Especially what she thought of the mirror.

I was pleased with how I looked now, or at least, how I would look without the bruises, without the swelling, without the glass pocking my skin with its red fingerprints, without rape's rank stench about my body, and thought of Leena, wishing her to see how this blush of color about my lips changed me into someone who appeared, who at least seemed, to deserve her.

I bit my lip and struck pain through my lower lip and smiled and admired the iron-blood stains on my teeth. Like a wolf from the kill. I wiped my mouth of the lipstick but left the marks on my teeth and left the bathroom.

It had taken me almost the entirety of the day to enter the city. The traffic was crushed together as NYPD officers flooded the streets, searching about them for the source of the next attack. It was the same in the hospital.

New York Downtown had taken the full brunt of the casualties of the explosion. Black uniforms and badges mixed together with the pale whites and blues of the physician's frocks. When I entered the lobby through the stairwell I found myself swallowed up in a maw of scrambling patients, doctors, officers, family members, friends all seemingly bent on one singular goal—to maintain the chaos the bombing had brought upon the hospital. The lobby itself was a whirlpool with its center fixed on the nurses attending the main desk. Despite the bitter cold of the streets there was not a semblance of this cool evinced in the room. Bodies seemed to crush into every panged region of my body, as if there was some sort of sonar that called to them from beneath the surface of my skin.

I fought to move amid the throng of people and took off my gloves, thrusting them into my pea coat pockets. I found myself still sweating profusely within the mass. I took off my coat and wrapped its arms tight about my waist, not giving a damn about how stupid I must have looked, or how clearly this showed off the pocks of blood on my

blouse. This made little difference, however. Sweat strung down the length of my back, stinging my open cuts and pooling where I had tightened the arms of my coat. It made little difference to me. I continued to push against the man in front of me, forcing my way into the room.

Officers attempted to control the madness by yelling out names. Whose names they were, no one knew. Names of patients? Of family members? Of the dead? Most of the names were lost amongst the roar of voices screaming out at anything that touched them, but the few that were heard were never responded to; the police continued to read off names that were owned by no one.

The doctors careened about the room like pinballs, bouncing off the occasional patient or nurse and forced back into the whirlpool. Their attempts to force their way through the crowd were met with repulsion. It was not until they would lift their arms above their heads, flashing the silver sheen of the back of their clipboards, that they would be free for a moment, before being assaulted by friends and family asking always where, where, where? If they were ever answered, I couldn't tell, but it didn't defer me from following the flow of bodies about the lobby, searching for my chance to pounce on the nearest doctor or nurse.

Near to the door leading to the street I could make out a man wrapped in black trash bags. He had tight knit cap about his skull and a pair of fingerless green gloves, but other than that all he appeared to be wearing were several trash bags fashioned into a shirt and pair of pants. He stared at the slowly dwindling daylight hung about the front doors, facing away from the main desk. His skin was white as bleach and his eyes were the color of coral. Every few minutes he would open his mouth and scream something that I

couldn't hear, but each time he did, I noticed the police officers near him turn their heads to look. The man seemed to be yelling at the people forcing themselves through the front doors but he didn't move himself to speak to any of them. He remained stuck in place, undeterred by anyone that collided with him. The flow of the chaos in the lobby brought me close enough that I could see the officers begin to move through the crowd, advancing on the man as he continued to bellow at the people entering the hospital. He raised his hands up at the ceiling and began to accentuate each word with a clenched fist punched to the air. I tapped the man in front of me on the shoulder. He didn't turn around, but continued to stare where I stared—at the man in the trash bags screaming to no one.

-Hey! I said, tapping him on the shoulder.

The man turned around. He was Asian and he wore thick glasses and had a large birthmark that extended down the left side of his face. He didn't seem to notice the cut on my lip, or the bruising, but simply stared, waiting for me to speak.

-What do you want? He said finally.

-What's that man saying?

-Which one?

-You know who I'm talking about, the guy in the trash bags, what's he saying? I pointed at the albino still punching at the sky, now curling every finger into his fist but his pointer finger.

-Lady, I can barely hear you, how the hell am I supposed to know what he's saying?

-Ask the woman in front of you! I raised my voice and stared directly into his eyes. He looked away. After a moment he grabbed the shoulder of the woman in front of him and spoke into her ear.

-Excuse me, ma'am, he said, glancing back at me, This lady over here wants to know what that man's yelling about. Can you hear him?

I was impressed by how calm he seemed to become as soon as he said this. I silently chided myself for being such a bitch.

The woman turned to match her eye-line with mine. As she did this, the police finally reached the man in the trash bags. He took one step to try to evade them, his arms still reaching to the sky, and he fell. His body fell out of the air as if the floor had been taken from underneath him, as if he had vaulted himself from the edge of the building. No one said a thing, no one cried out, or turned to look. The only people who saw him fall could have been the police, the few people entering the hospital, the Asian man, and myself. I never saw him get up, nor did I see him escorted out of the hospital by the police. It was as if he had fallen from the world itself. Like he had jumped from the plane in which he and I and everyone else existed together. Like he wasn't supposed to be there at all, and he knew, and he'd chosen to just go.

We continued to move through the crowd and slowly the woman the Asian had grabbed moved her way back so that she was right next me.

She was smaller and darker than I was and she kept looking at me even as we pushed through the crowd. I didn't say a word to her when she reached me, even though I felt her tiny hand as it wrapped around my arm. She didn't grip hard, but seemed to

merely drape her fingers about the bare skin of my elbow, as if she knew she could hurt me if she squeezed just a bit harder.

We walked like this for a while, in silence, letting the noise of the lobby wash over us. Wrapped about her shoulders she wore a quilt that looked as if she had bought it outside the door from any one of the millions of street vendors swarming to the Trade Center. It looked cheap, cheap but homemade and I wondered if she had indeed sewn it together herself. It was tribal-- all blacks and greens and yellows and dark reds like the color of the lipstick in my bag. She wore her short and natural, cropped close to creases on the back of her neck. Wrinkles cut into her face like scars, some so deep they might have been scars after all. Her brow folded over eyes but they still shone brightly as she gazed up at me. I thought back to the mirror. She frightened me, walking there, gripping my arm, looking up at me. She spoke finally.

-You have somebody here, I'm thinking? Her voice was deep and manly, ragged not from smoke but as if she had sung every sentence before this instead of speaking them.

-My brother.

-I'm sure he's fine. You always have to think those things. Will them more than believe them.

-Thank you. I hope he is too, I said, pausing for a moment, Do you have someone here?

I craned my neck to look down at her. She grinned at me. Her teeth were surprisingly all intact, starkly white even, all of them but for her incisors. Both of them

were massive and stained with what looked like crimson lipstick. I rubbed my mouth where I had bitten my lips earlier, careful not to open it to her, and turned away quickly.

-My husband is here. This is the second day I've been in this crowd. I've almost gotten used to it. She laughed and it was throaty and full, like a bullfrogs croak.

-I'm sorry, I said, not knowing what else to say, Was he in the tower?

-No, no honey. Cancer. There's enough in this world already after us. We didn't need anyone else. Sometimes you like to wish it were just that. It'd be nice to be afraid of one thing, to look one way all the time. But that's not how it is, not ever. While you're looking one way it'll come another. It'd be nice if we just had to fear each other, - She stopped for a moment, -Nobody tried to blow up my husband, he just happened to be walking down the same street. He felt fine he said when he called me. I suppose he felt fine before, a bit tired, maybe. But they found it. He told me over the phone. I've been waiting like these, as if he got the cancer from the bomb. Maybe it's just being that close to something violent. Maybe he breathed that evil dust in.

For some reason as she said this I thought of Georgia Hunt. Of how afraid I was to see her, as if she could hurt me physically, kill me; physically, or even pass that evil on to me. And maybe she could, if I let her have that much. Or perhaps it was there already, from Perch. Or deeper back.

-You asked me something before, honey, what was it? She spoke again.

-I wanted to know what that man was saying, the one wearing the trash bags.

She stopped walking. She didn't let go of my arm. I stopped as well and turned to look at her. People began to push into the two of us but somehow we were able to hold our ground against them. Some tried to push through, but most looked on us as if

were insane to stop moving, insane to break from the flow. We stared at each other for a while and I waited for her answer.

-I couldn't quite hear him, actually.

I sighed at this.

-I'm sorry to have bothered you then. I said.

-No, no, I got one thing, just not the whole thing. He was something about 'everything is happening again. This all happens again. It always happens again and worse again.' Something like that. Or not. That could've been what I didn't want to hear. And so I heard. I'm sure you know what I'm talking about- She paused- I hope that helps, honey.

-It does, I said, removing her grasp from my arm, Thank you.

I squeezed her hand and turned back into the crowd.

It was dark when I reached the main desk. The lobby had cleared somewhat from when I had arrived-- the whirlpool was stagnant now and the crush of human bodies had subsided. The absence of people revealed where chairs had been broken and tossed to the side. Those that had been removed to the extremities of the lobby were now occupied by those who either had little hope of seeing their loved ones that night, or, perhaps, had merely given up trying to fight their way through, and waited now for someone to come to them and ask them the same question that had been heard throughout the day, over and over again, where, where, where?

The noise had dwindled to a dull hum, and I could hear the televisions hanging from the ceiling quite clearly. They were all on news stations. Nothing but pictures and video of Lower Manhattan interspersed with pictures of the suspected perpetrators of the bombing. All of the faces were dark, not like mine, not like Caleb's, but dark all the same. The reporter was background noise for the most part, but certain words would stick out to me: "Arab," "Islamic," "jihadist" Words I understood, but only latently. Words I hadn't heard since night school. Words that seemed to as mean as little now as they did then, even as the reporter seemed to insist calling up a graphic every few minutes to lace over the picture, something to make sure everyone knew, this is what these men are. I never followed the news for some reason. It never seemed any different than what was going on around me. Violence and success are companions of every life, including yours— I knew. I never needed the reminder. Much less now. I had mine tattooed about my body. I had my reminder sleeping (hopefully) in a hospital bed somewhere in this building.

The nurse attending the lobby desk was a tall, skinny woman with large breasts. She was attractive in the way one might admire an ostrich or a giraffe, astounded at the smooth line of their neck, or the wide, dumb way their eyes looked out at you, past you, through you, taking in everything and nothing from it. I wondered as I approached her whether her shift had just started or if she had endured the chaos along with the rest of us. She smiled when I rested my forearms on the edge of the desk, which was good, I thought, and perhaps this mean that indeed she had just arrived.

-My name is Grace Miller. My brother's name is Caleb; I was told he was admitted here three days ago.

She blinked as I said this.

-Are you all right ma'am? She asked

-I'm fine, could you tell about my brother please?

-Ma'am you have a fairly severe cut on your lip. Have you been hit? Has your husband been beating you? I'm sorry, it's none of my business but you look as if you need our help, I can alert the emergency room-

-Please.

-Ma'am...

-I'll go if you tell me where my brother is.

Her eyes began to water. Jesus Christ, who is this woman? I stared at her until she broke eye contact with me.

-I'm sorry. Was he in the tower? She asked, reaching for something underneath the desk.

-I don't know, to be honest, She produced a clipboard attached to which were what appeared to be several generic hospital forms, I mean, I was told he was, but I don't know if it's true.

The clipboard hit the counter with a slap. She turned away from me and began flipping through papers stacked behind her, stopping almost halfway through and removing a sheet from the pile.

-Caleb Miller. You're his sister then?

-That's right.

-I'll need you to take a look at these forms and sign them for me before we can allow you up to see him.

She pushed the clipboard toward me, pulled a pen from her navy pants, and tapped it twice on the forms before dropping the pen on the clipboard, returning her arms to her sides. I looked at her for a moment. She squinted at me as if she couldn't focus on exactly where I stood.

-Why do I need to sign these forms? I only want to see my brother, I said, glancing down at the forms and shaking my head in disbelief, You can just as well let me up there, I'm his sister.

-You need to sign the forms, She snorted, wiped her eyes, and turned her head from my direction.

-I can sign the forms up there. What do you want, I.D.? You can keep my wallet, for god's sake; I've been here for three hours. I drove another three just to get down here. I think you've already noticed I've been through enough today. Whatever it is I've got to do to make you let me up there right now I'll do it, I don't care.

-You can start by signing the forms.

I grabbed the clipboard off the counter. The pen flew off its perch on the forms and skidded across the floor, end over end, hitting the tile like drumsticks to a high hat. I walked over, swearing as I slowly bent over to scoop up the pen which had come to halt in front of squat, plug of a man wearing a midnight black suit. His collar was unbuttoned and his gut pushed against the cloth of his shirt like a face against a sheet hanged for the dry. As I grabbed the pen and stood up I noticed the man looking down the front of blouse. He didn't stop, even when I raised to my full height, he kept staring through a pair of what looked like inch-thick glasses. The frames magnified the brown freckles above his cheeks and the collection of moisture on the edge of his eyelids. He

was balding but still had an island of thin hairs struck out from the front of his forehead like a horn. I looked at him through those glasses and could see myself reflected in his eyes. His gaze stayed on my chest, but I turned away at the sight of myself and began to walk towards a row of seats that had opened up.

-You here for someone? The man said.

I lifted the clipboard in the air and shook it, still walking.

-You look like it, I heard him rising off his chair behind me. Reaching a chair, I sat down next to a young white girl playing with the buttons of her coat. Where the fuck was her mother?

I kept my eyes down on the form and began to write my name on the top line. In the high of my vision I caught the clap of the man's jet-black oxfords against the tile and stayed with them as they slid, stopped, and axised on their heels, coming to a rest a seat to my left. I attempted to keep my concentration on the words laid out over the form, on seeing my brother, but I finally relented and looked up at him.

He no longer had his gaze focused on my breast, but sat, rubbing his eyes, taking small breaks to adjust his glasses and cast confused glances at the television. Tears strung like dew across his eyelashes and the white fleck of spit foamed about the corners of his lips. He removed a large collection of pages from his jacket and began to read.

I could have left. I could've called for somebody. I did look up to the nurse's station. I could've thought then -maybe one of them would come over and kick this freak out of the hospital. - I could've stuck my head into the forms and finished them and gone to see my brother and George. But I didn't. I listened to every word he said.



Martin Haversham lived in Stamford, Connecticut (or rather Stanwich) and has not stopped living there since the day he was born. He was the third of three brothers, each one progressively less impressive than the last. The first, Gerald, who was never called Gerald, but Gerry, was a local hero in Stamford by the time he was fourteen. Gerry had jumped into Upper Mianus Pond upon seeing the Falstrom sisters plunge through a thin patina of ice covering the water. Those who had been near the pond at this moment, Martin included, recounted how Gerry had ripped his jeans while running to save the two young girls. Martin had stood and watched, only eight at the time, the same age as the Falstrom sisters, and the thought never appeared in his mind to do what Gerry had done instinctively. The older Haversham boy disappeared beneath the dark surface of the pond and swam towards the fierce splashes and the tiny, flailing arms wrapped in pink winter coat sleeves. The water pulled about him as he swam. Suddenly the splashing ceased and the boy and the pink winter coats removed from the air. At this, the adults had begun to run themselves towards the pond. Martin remained stuck where he stood. While some of the men began to struggle to take off their boots and others fumbled for the buttons and zippers running down the front of their pea coats and bomber jackets purchased in the city, Gerry emerged from the bruise blue water with the Falstrom sisters tucked underneath his arms. He kicked, fighting to keep the girl's heads above the freezing bite of the pond. The men, who had moved so quickly to remove their boots and jackets before jumping in, stopped what they were doing and silently looked on as the boy found steady footing on the bank and rose from the pond, the water gripping to

him for a moment before falling from its clutch like a rock climber from a mountain sill. Gerry didn't move once he reached his full height, as if the cold had finally caught him—for Martin, nothing moved at all. The pond and those around it were frozen like this until Karen Falstrom (the girls' mother) rushed from where she had been locked in warm conversation with Ronald Dunn (a recent graduate of Williams College who had since returned to Stanwich to, along with romance the recently widowed Karen Falstrom, work as a substitute teacher of English) towards the water and screamed without sounding out a word. It was then the sculpture broke for Martin and movement returned to him. He lost sight of Gerry in the flood of bodies that reached out to offer aid in helping both the boy and the two girls rolled underneath his arms. Even now, Martin could not remember the next time he saw his brother. Had it been that very day? Had it been mere minutes after the people turned their focus to removing the Falstrom girls from the freezing air? Had it been weeks later as Gerry had lain in Stamford Hospital, spitting coughs rank with phlegm and dark splotches of blood? Had it been at the funeral mass when he was pushed past the open casket by his uncle, pushed also by the hundreds of Stanwich townspeople who had come to honor a boy they knew only through rumors and newspaper clippings? It might have been. Martin could never remember, but then, he could sometimes barely remember what his older brother had looked like. He could remember Jonathan perfectly however, and it's really Jonathon why Martin sits here now, and it's really Jonathon that you need to hear about. The second eldest Haversham brother enrolled at Yale when he was only sixteen. Though mentioned in nearly every American commencement speech, the chances of someone actually becoming the President of the United States hover around something close to one in forty million,

however, most people in Stanwich believed the odds of Jonathan Haversham holding the highest office in the land was closer to one in fifty. No one ever threw out odds on whether he would be admitted into mental institution at the age of eighteen, or what the chances were he would impale himself through the throat with the sharpened end of a broomstick by the time he was twenty-two. Martin had begun a practice over the first two years of Jonathan's enrollment at Yale of waiting at the bus stop with a book in hand. This book was never something he was reading or planned to read but a novel taken from his father's study carried mainly for the reason of impressing Jonathan. Martin attempting to live up to his success. His brother would usually step off the bus with his trunk tucked underneath his arm as if it weighed nothing at all and linger a few seconds on the edge of the sidewalk. He would look as if he were searching for someone, when he knew full well the only one ever waiting upon his arrival would be his younger brother. Yet they would both play the game—Jonathan looking about the bus stop, letting his gaze widen further back to the houses and forestry behind the four plastic seats and the glass overhang, and Martin, raising up his book and waving it at his brother, struggling to steal his attention, and Jonathan, smiling at something beyond Martin, beyond Stanwich, but not letting his attention fall to what was closest to him, and Martin, now leaping into the air and yelling out Jonathan's name, and Jonathan, relenting, looking upon his brother, his grin falling from his face for a moment, and Martin, always remembering this change—and so it would go on most days Jonathan was able to steal away from the university to come home. Martin wouldn't speak much on their walk back to their house. Neither would Jonathan. The most interaction that went on between the two would be a nod (Jonathan abhorred physical contact) and an exchange of greetings.

Jonathan would then hand Martin his trunk and they would slowly move, slightly staggered along the sidewalk. He would consistently be excited to see his brother but Martin remembered there be no real reason for this feeling. His brother rarely spoke to him and never once mentioned the novels Martin would carry along with him—not even when he brought *The Brothers Karamazov*. It was this day, the day Martin brought Dostoevsky to the bus stop, that Jonathan began to act in the manner that would lead him to be admitted to the Norwich State Hospital for the Insane one month later. Built at the turn of the century and opened in 1904, the hospital resided along the Thames River, a decidedly scenic plot to house the mentally unstable. Beginning with just one building to care for a total of ninety-five patients, the hospital expanded by the 1930s to twenty-one buildings caring for a total of 2,200 patients. The mental asylum's layout, like most hospitals caring for the insane, was split down the center of the administration building. Flanking this structure were the Awl and Salmon buildings, the latter keeping the more violent patients and those guilty of committing crimes by insanity until the mid-1970s. It was in Salmon that Jonathan Haversham lived until his twenty-second birthday. Martin remembered the tour his family went on two months after Jonathan was admitted. It was his first visit to Norwich, and his parents first since their son had begun to decorate his room with the pages of a novel he had taken it upon himself to write in his own blood. A Doctor Lundqvist greeted them upon their arrival. Despite his gossamer thin blond hair, the doctor looked little like how Martin had expected most Swedes to be. Dr. Lundqvist was globe-shaped and had allowed what facial hair he could obtain (solely on the rolls of his neck fat) to grow to what appeared to Martin a fake beard—the type seen worn by Lincoln impersonators, hung from above the ears and slunk so it rested directly

on their Adam's apple like some Amish neck warmer. His cheeks reminded Martin of dough. It was almost comical to watch the man speak. With each opening and closing of his mouth, his cheeks would shake and quiver and flap as if they were being slapped by air. So steady was this shake that even after Dr. Lundqvist had finished a sentence and would turn to flash a grin at Mrs. Haversham, the skin of his face would continue to undulate. Martin had imagined putting his ear up against Dr. Lundqvist's face upon meeting him and hearing the smack and pop of the man's jowls like frogs plopping into a thick morass. Now that Martin was remembering that day, he could not tell as to whether Dr. Lundqvist had indeed been smiling at his mother or if that smile had remained upon his face throughout the entire tour of the Norwich State Hospital for the Insane as if the poor doctor had been afflicted with a stroke depriving him of any sort of facial expression other than that of unabashed glee. Welcome to the Norwich Insane Asylum, young man, Dr. Lundqvist had said to Martin as he pawed the boy's in an attempt at a handshake, you'll see we are taking wonderful care of your brother here. Martin was always careful to note and could still remember how Dr. Lundqvist never referred to Norwich State Hospital for the Insane by its official name, rather, shortening it to "The Asylum" or "The Norwich Insane Asylum." It had seemed a mistake at the time, but for a man to work his entire life as the director of this hospital it seemed more like an attempt at ownership rather than an error. As if simply by renaming the hospital, or even nicknaming the place, could provide Dr. Lundqvist with something that no one could take from him. This sense of ownership, which might even be wrong to say, as to Martin it had always seemed in his memory that Dr. Lundqvist referred to both his institution as well as his patients the way a husband might refer to his wife and children. The "we"

never extended to the nurses or other doctors attending to the patients. It solely referred to the Scandinavian doctor. As if the reach of his control, of his treatment, went beyond what a single man could possibly handle. The only logical answer would be to describe his work as director as a collective enterprise, thus the proclamation that “we” are taking wonderful care of your brother. Martin was silent for a majority of the tour. His father, never rising to the same loquacity he had been known for throughout the state before Gerry’s death, was quiet and reserved as well. This left Martin’s mother Linda to deal with the doctor. Linda Haversham was the type of woman that most young men despise having for their mother come the time of puberty—a study of late-blooming beauty completely ambivalent to any sort of appreciation for her husband yet simultaneously absolutely enthralled with her son’s friend’s obsession (and their father’s) with not only her realization of her ability to attract other men, and thus her choice in attire following this discovery, but also with tracking her every move, her every expression, her every word with the explicit desire to anticipate what would make her more comfortable, what would make that laugh roll out from within her, what would make her continue to speak to them for only another moments time. And so on. Dr. Lundqvist was not immune to this attraction. It would only take Martin the sight of seeing the doctor grasp his mother’s left hand with his own left to acknowledge this. Upon seeing her reach through her purse minutes prior with this same hand, the doctor had deduced that the woman was accustomed to shaking with her less dominant hand and also deduced that she would enjoy someone realizing this and giving her the pleasure of using her dominant hand to greet him with, something the doctor had thought about exclusively since he had first seen Mrs. Haversham exit the bull-black Chevrolet parked outside the hospital gates.

Dr. Lundqvist was to delighted to see the corners of her mouth curl up at this greeting, bending the near-invisible hairs on her upper lip so they shone for but a second before blending to flesh once more. In response he took his other hand and sandwiched her thin venous fingers between his fat paws and smiled even wider. Martin watched all of this along with his father. He felt the slightest pressure of his penis pulling on the fabric of his briefs. Remembering that moment now, he could draw this movement back to the burgeoning thoughts he had had at the time that his mother was fucking someone, or looking to fuck someone, other than his father. He had wondered then if sometime during the tour his father and himself would be left alone wandering the grounds of Norwich State Hospital for the Insane while the doctor took his mother to an empty cell and laid his bloated mass atop Martin's mother while he rubbed her clit. These thoughts would arrive steadily for three or four years after this moment, ending suddenly and inexplicably in his early twenties. He never knew if his mother had indeed fucked another man during this time, or before. He never knew if she ever had for that matter. His parent's divorce came when his father was well into his sixties and his mother had ceased wearing the sort of dresses that made men wonder just how far those freckles on her thighs extended. It was unfathomable at times to believe that his parents had endured, or had deserved to be subject to any sort of marital strife beyond the loss of their first two sons, yet still he was left wondering at wholly inexplicable times of the chance of infidelity within his family. For example, he was shaving just a week past and cut himself with the two-blade disposable, the same blade his father had used, and Jonathan as well for a few years, before Norwich, and had watched as that dark humor dropped from his now-not-quite-bare chin into the sink-basin, effusing through the spumy froth of

his shaving cream until it stuck on the perforated stopper choked by the small hairs of his cheeks and neck and mustache and chin, and at this moment, as the blood stuck to the stopper, Martin thought of the last time he had seen his mother bend down to playfully smack her lipstick smothered lips on her husband's pale cheek. Had it been before Gerry dove into the pond? Or was it far later, perhaps after Jonathan was admitted? For the life of him, Martin could never remember the exact moment it had happened at all. And yet it was there as if it always had been. Martin saw no reason to doubt himself, but if it had indeed happened, he thought that perhaps this last time it occurred could give some answer to why he could not shake the thought that his parents had been unfaithful to each other, and if it had happened, it had happened here at Norwich. It was insanity, he knew, to think such a thing. His mother was never out of his sight throughout the doctor's tour nor had she ever returned to the hospital after that day, as well as his knowledge served him. She had been there as Doctor Lundqvist had presented the bowling alley, the bakery, the laboratory, and so had he and his father. The halls had seemed as if they had been designed to consume light. What little that was allowed to siphon through appeared as slivers of brightness against the walls like lines of white frost in the sun. As the four moved through the hospital—Dr. Lundqvist in front, gesticulating, Linda Haversham just barely staggered behind him, nodding incessantly, Mr. Haversham and Martin at his side, behind them maybe ten feet and dragging their shoes along the wood-paneled floor—Martin would watch as the dark between cracked doorways would swallow the doctor and his mother almost completely each time they passed an office or open cell in the Awl building before splashing them back into his vision for a fraction of a second. Each time they did this, despite his being able to make out the slope of their shoulders

and catch the slap of their shoes, he would imagine them vanishing forever. In that instant, when they were lost from not only the Norwich State Hospital for the Insane, but also his entire world, he would not know, even now, after having twenty years to think over that day, whether he would have stopped or continued on. But on where? And would his father have noticed their disappearance as well? He had thought about this for sometime and he was no closer to an answer. Awl had not been very interesting to Martin. It seemed to him the entire hospital was more of a university dormitory than the prison he had hoped for, or at least imagined. He had inquired of his father whether Jonathon would be in a cell like he had seen in *Cool Hand Luke*. His father had taken him, and Jonathon as well, just a few years past, when Jonathon was still being lauded for his mind's seemingly endless potential. His brother had hated the film and spoken openly of it. He thought the constant Christ allusions to be heavy-handed and patronizing to those watching the film at once, but there was something much stronger in his abhorrence of the film, something embroiled in the portrayal of Luke as someone worthy of Jonathon's respect. On the ride back to their home after stopping for scoops of caramel ice cream (Martin's favorite), his father driving the family's Ford Consul, his brother alternating between explaining to Martin why exactly he should be wary of films like the one they had just watched, and shouting down his father each time Mr. Haversham spoke about the merits of Newman's performance, which Jonathon could only describe as "masturbatory"—though never to his father's face and especially not at this moment. In that car, however, Martin remembered his brother turning on his father with the same expression he would see years later in a dimly lit cell at Norwich State Hospital. This expression came after his father, watching the road, fists wrapped about

the wheel, turned to his brother- Jonathon, you can't believe that, can you? Truly? Have I done so much wrong that you can't see? At this, a great silence settled in the car and it was as if all the emotion Jonathon hoped or wished he could convey toward his father was culled through an extreme display of will. A crimson rash spread from the base of Jonathon's neck until it reached his cheeks. His lips arched into a sneer and his eyes remained completely placid. Martin had thought for a moment that Jonathon might leap from his seat at that instant. Change into something more horrible than Martin could imagine. Rip the entrails right out of his father. The car would veer from the night spotted road. His brother feeding on Mr. Haversham's remains and the car linking with the others parked along the side of the road. Sparks like white fireworks shooting up the window. Martin frozen in the back seat watching, the sound of screaming sounding from the metal car sides, and his father as he is eaten alive. All of this from the absence in Jonathon's gaze and he could never forget that. He would never understand why those words caused his brother to look at Mr. Haversham that way, or why even his own mind went to that dream. Martin would never think of it again, until now of course, and one other time. It's quite easy to discern what time that would be by now, wouldn't you say? Everything is about this really. Two black orderlies welcomed them to Salmon Hall. They seemed friendly to Martin. The younger of the two (his name was Benjamin) was rather handsome and Linda made attempts at flirtation with him, as Martin had expected, however these were met with little success. Benjamin would smile occasionally at her when they happened to make eye contact but seemed to be looking at the ceiling, or the wall, or rather, anywhere but Linda Haversham when she would do much more than cast her stare on him. At one point she took a hand to her

forehead, wiping her brow of sweat (which was quite understandable, it being just barely past the 4th of July when they visited Norwich for the first time) yet it was when she ran her hand down her side, outlining the curve of her hips, but not softly, or with any sort of grace, but hard enough to wrinkle the fabric of her blouse, pulling at the cloth about her breast that it was clear Benjamin held no more interest in her than her own husband did, for he watched this act without not a trace of movement from his face—a blank stare and a blank smile as if the presence of a woman such as this, in a place seemingly designed to pain those who were unlucky enough to look upon it, was nothing more than a paltry amusement, a minute blip on the radar, to which attention was paid, but only in the smallest of measurements. Benjamin and Donald (which was the other orderly's name) explained to the Havershams of the cautions they should undertake upon entering Salmon Hall, as well as the rules and regulations in place to certify their safety. We don't usually allow many visitors on Salmon, Benjamin said, but Dr. Lundqvist thinks Jon's got no intentions of harming anyone no more. Now, we won't be able to let you in there with him, much as we'd like to say he's gotten better. But you'll be able to see and talk to him. However, for your safety we're gonna have to ask you to stay least five feet from the cells at all times, and that means all of them, not just Jon's. It's best if you don't try to make any sort of eye contact with any other patients. As Dr. Lundqvist has told you, Salmon's where we treat our most violent patients. Not saying that Jon's in any danger here. Nor are you. See these doors here? Benjamin gestured long row of steel blue doors lining the hallway. These are here to keep our reputation intact, aren't they Dr. Lundqvist? The doctor looked up from peering at Linda Haversham's freckled calves and carried his leering smile up to face Benjamin. Yes, that's quite right, he said.

We haven't had a single escaped patient since Norwich was first erected in 1904. It's a testament to both the diligence of orderlies such as Donald and Benjamin here, but also to the hall's ingenious design. You see, Dr. Lundqvist strode over to the closest door and opened and closed it, these doors are airtight. And as you'll notice when we take you in to see Jonathon, we have a strict system. No two doors are to be opened at the same time. If one is opened in order to enter a wing of Salmon Hall, this same door must be promptly and securely locked before we can open the next successive door. In this way, even if a patient were to escape, he wouldn't be able to get very far, you see? How many attempts have there been? Dr. Lundqvist turned to face Mr. Haversham, and his lips straightened for the first time since the family had arrived at Norwich State Hospital for the Insane. Linda Haversham even turned her gaze away from Benjamin long enough to look upon her husband as if she had noticed for the first time that he was and had been with them for the entirety of the past two hours. Dr. Lundqvist adjusted his glasses on his nose and his jowls jiggled slightly as he opened his mouth as if to speak, yet no sound came out. It was as if the doctor was hoping to inhale just the right kind of air in order to respond to that question, as if none of the air inhaled previously was enough to formulate an answer to that inquiry without betraying a secret known only about the halls of the asylum. As I said previously, we have never had a single escaped patient recorded here at Norwich, Dr. Lundqvist said after a moment, his voice rising and breaking as he spat out the words faster and faster. That's not what I asked, said Mr. Haversham. I'm sorry, but what do you mean then? As I've explained this is a totally secure facility, the doctor said. What I'm asking, Mr. Lundqvist, is how many patients have tried to escape Norwich. I heard you fine the first time, I'm not deaf. It's a question of desire,

Lundqvist. How many prisoners want out? Dr. Lundqvist coughed and glanced first at Benjamin who stared at Mr. Haversham with a look of an intense interest on his face, and then to Donald who bowed his head and seemed pre-occupied with the embroidery spelling out his name on the front of his robin's egg blue orderly's smock. Martin had noticed in that moment an inexplicable whining coming from within one of the several doors lining the room, noticeable only by the grace of the silence that his father had invited into their midst. He had thought of that sound for some time—at first he had believed it to be one of the prisoners, or perhaps one of the fans used to cool and vent the hallways, but he thought of how difficult it would have been to hear much of anything through those solid steel doors. In later years, he had come to the conclusion that this whine was simply a symptom of the hospital itself. The way all things take on the fear people put into them. It was a decision then that this soft pain was nothing more than an abstracted imagining of what should be present in an insane asylum. Of course his senses would be heightened to any sort of terror. He was, obviously, an already extremely impressionable young man when he visited Norwich, and he chalked up these moments in which he could not explain the sounds, or voices, or thoughts that invaded his head, to the same mental abnormality that had taken his brother—an inherited madness. When Dr. Lundqvist entered the hall on which Jonathon's cell resided, urgency suddenly appeared in his steps. His strides took him far beyond Linda and especially Martin and his father. This urgency was not out of fear as far as Martin could discern, rather, it seemed to him the desire that one could find in a police detective looking over photographs of a crime scene he had seen personally. The blood now a black stain painted against the ground, the raped and dismembered body stark white and

splayed out, now more like an animal found on the side of a highway than the once painfully innocent body of someone's fifteen-year-old girl, and all of this doing nothing more than reminding the detective of what he had seen first hand- the blood not black but close, the body still holding a pinkish hue, remembering that once-life to him. It seemed to Martin those photographs lay in every cell for Dr. Lundqvist. The supposedly violent patients were surprisingly docile when Martin and his family passed their rooms, yet the doctor looked through their grated windows-- a quick glance or barely the move of his head— as if he could remember every murderous act they had committed as if they were not his simply his patients but manifestations of his most fearsome desires. Reminders always about him. However, when he caught up to the doctor near a turn in the first floor hallway, Martin saw that that smile had not left Dr. Lundqvist's face. It was strained now, but Martin had admired the man in that moment for his attempts at composure. Jonathon's cell is just this way, first on our left, the doctor said. The corridor in this section of Salmon Hall was divided between cells, which resided on the left side of the hallway, and washrooms, which resided on the right. Benjamin bent down to Martin's ear as he paused at one of the bathrooms. For our safety, Benjamin said pointing at the massive metal mesh door leading into the washroom across from them. We have to be there, you see, to watch them when they gotta go. If they try anything, which they have, we have to close this door, SMACK. Benjamin clapped his hand together. And they're trapped. And they can't hurt us. Or you or your dad or your mom. We've got a good system here, don't you worry. Have you had to shut my brother in there? Martin said. Benjamin smiled. His teeth were massive and strikingly white. Your brother's much too smart to make us do something like that. Benjamin!

Dr. Lundqvist shouted from further up the hallway, these good people would like to see their son, not our washrooms. Benjamin continued grinning at Martin as he rose up to his full height and continued his way down the hall. Martin followed him, and felt somehow relieved to hear such respect come from Benjamin concerning his brother. He'd thought at the time this respect would affect Jonathon's stay at Norwich, that perhaps it would allow him to come home to Stanwich much sooner than what his mother had said he would. Somehow it would worm its way through the walls of Norwich State Hospital and find itself crawling beneath Dr. Lundqvist's office floorboards. And in all due time it would poke its head about and appear as the most natural of things will do. Jonathon would ride home on the same bus that returned him from Yale and he would pretend not to see Martin as he stood by the bench of the bus stop, clutching another Russian writer, perhaps Gogol this time, or Gorky, whatever he knew his brother to have just read, and discarded, left usually on the base of their house's stairs, as if he was waiting for Martin to pick it up for him, or, and now it seemed more likely this was true, that Jonathon left the books as an explanation, a storied reason for why he rose up the stairs that specific day, why he bled himself near dry, why he wrote what he had done in the pages of his leather-bound notebook with a quill he had bought at Yale's bookstore, dipped in the ink of his own letting. The last book had been *Notes from the Underground*. Most of the pages were dog eared, but the novel was tee-peed where the maple railing line met the short, curled carpet, and when Martin opened it to the page indicated it was blank, and un-bent by his brother. He had kept his thumb dug into the crevice and flipped through the book. All of the pages were marked by black ink—notes, underlined phrases, and some passages completely crossed out—but on

remembering his thumb slunk into the spine he returned to the page to find it blank but for one phrase encircled with staining red-black liquid. What could only be the blood of his brother wrapped itself around the words, “They — they won’t let me — I — I can’t be good!” It was then he was pushed aside, his father and mother running up the stairs. Jonathon had left a note for his parents in the glove compartment of his father’s Consul. Martin had had the chance to read the note just once. His father had pressed it into his hand some days after the event, and told him to keep it for himself. The note only remained in his possession for a matter of minutes before he was approached by an officer almost a head shorter than Martin, who promptly appropriated the note, telling him, “Your father didn’t have any sense giving this to you.” Martin was able to read the first line of the note prior to this, which had been so anti-climactic that he hadn’t even thought of it until just now, a simple, “You will find me at the top of the stairs...” It was so perfunctory that Martin couldn’t help but hating his brother then, and still, for not being more profound, or elegant, or even audacious in what he could only assume was his suicide note. Perhaps Martin was secretly seething to himself that he had not deserved a note in his brother’s eyes. Especially now, after all he has done. An entire life devoted to the saving of another. But could he really deserve such a thing? He had been waiting at the bus stop. He had seen his brother exit to the curb. He had played the game, hadn’t he? Martin had waved his hands above his head, wagging Dostoevsky’s last novel like it was a rallying flag. His brother had played, too. He’d looked on. Past the bus stop. Past the rows of houses. Past the malls. Past the town itself as he had always done and might have done again. But this time he had turned and walked to the Havershams’ house without greeting his brother. There was always the recognition but

there was none in this moment—Jonathon strode, his head down, a book in one hand, the book, the other thrust deep into the refuge of his pocket. Martin should have followed him, but he waited for almost an hour before trudging back to his house. The twilight seeped into the skyline as he'd entered. It was only minutes before his parents returned home, pushing their youngest son into the maple railing running up the stair-side causing him to drop the novel he has become sure was left for him, and him alone. His mother had tripped on it as she'd climbed the steps, the heel of her shoe sharp enough (his parents had just returned from their anniversary dinner, or one of their birthdays—they hadn't told Martin and he couldn't remember) to impale Dostoevsky through. He remembered the howl of noise, his mother's cries, his father's frantic attempts to wrench the knife from Jonathon's hands, and Martin, sitting on the lower step staring at the torn pages, all the sounds hitting his hearing like soft velvet, nothing but a touch of the senses, wordless, meaningless, existing to prove they exist, but nothing more. Martin reached down and lifted the ruined novel from the floor. He turned to the page his brother had propped open upon the stairs just moments ago. His mother's heel had pierced through much of the page, but Martin could still read some of the words that Jonathon had circled with his own blood. What had once been an almost calligraphic twist about the letters was faded and smudged and halved from the onslaught of his mother's heel. It now read, "I—I can't be good!" The group moved through the corridor of Salmon Hall with caution. The walls were green as he could remember, or had used to be, fading now to the color of bile. It gave the hallways the sense that a putrid smell of defecation should be smothering its inhabitants, and although none existed, nearly every person that would enter Salmon Hall would cringe, curling up their face in disgust, putting hands to their

mouths, with a fear in their eyes that was sourced never from what could be known but always from what could be imagined. Martin did, too. Mr. Haversham seemed the only one immune to the faux-rank spread about the walls—he walked through Salmon strangely unaffected. It could have been Martin’s imagination but his father’s strides appeared to lengthen as they neared Jonathon’s cell. As if with his gait he was saying, “Go on, get on with it, let me see my son.” Mr. Haversham outstripped both Benjamin and Donald and even Dr. Lundqvist, coming to Jonathon’s cell with a halt. Martin stopped several feet short of the cell, just enough to catch the edge of the room gleaming with the sunlight patched through his brother’s window. The grated glass looking in upon the cell was smaller than the others, as if it had been designed specifically for the patient therein, like denying him just the slightest inch of view of the corridor was a part of his healing process. A mistake, surely, but Martin could not help noticing, even as he was about to approach his brother for the first time in months. Mrs. Haversham touched her son’s shoulder and smiled down at him, which Martin assumed was meant to be comforting but what little feeling of safety this contact emoted was extinguished by the glint of fear Martin saw in his mother’s eyes. He looked back at her with the same absence of recognition he had had when he’d been told his brother would not be coming home, not for quite some time. It took some time, then again it could have been seconds, before Martin realized his mother was not simply resting her hand on the nape of his neck with the design of feigned safety but was pushing him forward. He was being forced ahead. Like a first line of infantry. Perhaps Martin will protect me, she must have thought, perhaps my youngest son will save me from what I know I am culpable in creating. Martin didn’t mind. It gave him chance to separate himself from his mother’s

touch. He maneuvered between the orderlies and came to rest beside his father. The window into Jonathon's cell was much too high for Martin to see in properly so he looked to Mr. Haversham for a sense of how he should feel in this moment. He could not remember if he had been surprised to find his father's face twisted into a grimace but it was an expression Martin had never seen, nor would see, for the rest of his natural life. Would you like to speak to your son, Mr. Haversham? Dr. Lundqvist slowed to the cell-door. He reached out his hand to Donald who planted a large loop of keys into his open palm. It's the reason we're here isn't it? His father, as he said this, broke the freeze of his face to look down at his son by his side. Martin stared back into his father's gaze and attempted to display the same stoicism he had seen within that gaze again and again. Dr. Lundqvist placed the key, a long, steel grey skeleton, into Jonathon's cell-door. Wait, his father said. Mr. Haversham bent and with a struggle brought himself to a kneel beside Martin. He brought his face uncomfortably close to his son's, enough so Martin could see the lightning strikes of bloodshot streaking across his father's eyes. Mr. Haversham's skin was near translucent at times but in the dark corridor it appeared ghostly, and if Martin reached out he'd find at his touch paper as thin as gossamer. His father's graying ginger hair, which at the start of the day had been pressed and molded to his scalp with copious amounts of pomade, was now releasing in the heat. A red curl had fallen and draped across his forehead, and was now hooked and catching just below the terrace of his eyebrow. His father was not tired as much as he appeared as one would look fighting to his death. Not a death carried long, or one that was sudden, internal, silent, but a death that was eminently tangible. A death that had beaten and torn at the man until he lay now on splayed branches and scattered nettles in a forest somewhere

mountainous and lonely. Martin imagined his father as he stared at his son now, looking up at the beast that loomed above him, preparing to steal his breath from him with one clawed stroke. It was a tired death. An accepted death. His father kissed him on the forehead then. He brushed back Martin's hair and cupped his massive hands about the sides of his head, covering his ears so what Mr. Haversham said next came to Martin like the love song sung ten miles beneath the surface of the sea. This wouldn't have happened if Gerry were still here, would it? Martin stared at his father. Do you think that was it? Mr. Haversham's fingers dug into his son's head. His fingernails were long and cut into Martin's skin, sending tears flooding to his eyes. His father saw this and let go. He seemed to be waiting for an answer, but Martin could not find any within himself to give. He had to pry his gaze away from his father's trembling hands, the wet of his own blood glinting with every shudder undulating through Mr. Haversham's body. He looked from his mother, to Benjamin, to Donald, to Dr. Lundqvist. They all seemed not to have noticed what had just occurred—Dr. Lundqvist's eyes on Mrs. Haversham, Mrs. Haversham's on the orderlies, Donald's and Benjamin's scattering glances about the hall, to the cell, to the walls, to the cells down the hall, and back to the door to the corridor past locked airtight, closing them all in with each other. Martin wondered much later if Jonathon heard their voices as they approached, if he heard the key slide into the lock with a metallic click, and stay, waiting on a word from his father. But at that moment he could only look from one adult to another pleading for some sort of answer. Not for why this happening, but an answer for the proud quiet man who now shook as he stared into his son's open gaze. Mr. Haversham? Dr. Lundqvist waited by Jonathon's cell door, his fingers still clasped about the ring of keys. I hate to say this,

but it is getting rather late. I would hate to have your time with your son shortened by any means; however, we do adhere to a strict interpretation of our visiting hours. Yes, said Mr. Haversham as he stood, I'm sure you do. Fine, open the door. Dr. Lundqvist obliged. Jonathon, your family is here to see you. A sudden rush of sunlight flooded Martin's vision. He raised an arm, cutting the glare enough to look upon his brother's cell. It was unremarkable. The walls were an eggshell white and undecorated. A single window sourced the flow of light into the hospital. The window itself was over five-feet long and checked by iron bars behind which was a single sheet of meshed metal screen. A bed lay in the left-hand corner of the room. On it was one pillow and one thin, wool blanket. The bed was impeccably made, either from being untouched or from a sort of preparation for our arrival, Jonathon's or the orderlies. Benjamin, Donald, could you restrain Jonathon, Dr. Lundqvist said, Just a precaution Mr. and Mrs. Haversham, I assure you. Benjamin and Donald moved into the cell like ghosts, appearing beside a small, mahogany desk as if they had existed in the room before Dr. Lundqvist had even opened the door. They huddled over the desk, blocking out most of it from view. They worked quickly, silently but for the clink of metal buckles and the groan of straining cloth. Beneath the hulking blue smocks Martin could see a pair of bare feet belonging to his brother. Jonathon tapped his foot to a song none could hear but him as Benjamin and Donald worked to wrap the clean arms of the straight jacket about Martin's brother, buckling and pulling at the straps, tightening his embrace about himself. The orderlies stepped away, looking now upon the Doctor. They moved a few feet away from the young man sitting in the chair beside the table, and stood, like personal attendants for the boy they as just imprisoned inside his clothes. It seemed to

Martin as if they were concerned not for the protection of the Doctor nor the family, but for the young man who sat with his head slunk below his shoulders, handless arms wrapped about his frame like a tipped cross. Jonathon raised his face to them. There was a sharp intake of breath behind Martin—his mother gasping. Martin's brother looked much the same as he always had, his bone structure resembling the same young man who had been the pride of Stanwich, Connecticut, his hair like rippled rain down the pale window pane of his forehead, his lips still pencil-thin about a mouth too wide for him to be truly handsome but enough that the girls he had taken to the movies when still in high school gravitated their kisses to him without the slightest hesitation. It was what his brother had done to his skin that stopped Martin dead. He had watched, still clutching *Notes from the Underground* to his stomach like it was an injured robin, as the paramedics had tripped over themselves bringing Jonathon down the stairs. He remembered glimpsing his brother's head through a break in the medic's movement. Bandages and crimsoning gauze had engulfed Jonathon's face, about his eyes, his ears, his mouth. The only manner in which Martin could discern that this was in fact his brother being carried to the ambulance was the plume of hair like burnt straw that struck out from the wrap of the white bandages. Martin had thought at the time how much his head had resembled a speckled egg. It was as if the chick inside it was poking the shell from within, and with each attack of its beak it cracked ruby lines across its cage. And this was within a blink and his brother was rushed through and out the front door, down three steps, skating across the newly planted cobblestone walkway to the spinning lights of the ambulance. His mother had followed her son out the door. His father had remained upstairs and had not descended until the police had forced him from Jonathon's

room. Martin could not remember what he had done, but he supposed he had wondered what had lain beneath those bandages. And he knew now. From the police report of the incident, of which Martin became aware of only a few years ago, an omission so egregious to him at the time he physically became sick thinking of his lack of wherewithal to examine it prior to that date, it was believed that Jonathon had taken the quill, burned the sharpened end and dipped it in ink he had purchased, along with the quill, in the Yale bookstore some months before he returned home, and pressed the tip into his cheek and dragged the quill down the side of his face to the base of his jaw-line and from this spout of blood he had written

To Averett,

I have written this in the manner and time as you have instructed me. If you are reading this then I have surely failed. The changes that were necessary were far beyond my capabilities. I can do nothing now but apologize to you

(there lay a blood splotch that drew itself like gauze over the words written)

If it is possible, and I'm sure that is for you (you have come back after all), you must look to Martin to finish what I've begun. The line runs thr—

•

-Ms. Miller?

The man stopped reading and looked up. He appeared stunned, as if the sound of my name had awoken him from a yearlong slumber. Standing several feet away was a nurse, one I had yet to see before, holding a clipboard with a single page flipped back and hanging from the edge of its solid back. This attendant was much older than the one that had given me so much trouble at the front desk. She appeared almost matronly in her scrub uniform, though she couldn't be past her forties. The azure softness of her pants did little to hide the fact she had put on a few pounds, and had been described in this way, for quite some time. Despite the frantic manner in which she was glancing up and down—down to the page, to me, to the man, to the page, to the young girl (still alone, still playing with the buttons of her coat), to me, to the page, to the page, to something beyond all of us, and back— she gave the impression of being amiable (perhaps this very impression was the entire basis for her being in this profession) but she made no move to approach, as if she had made a mistake and was deathly afraid that her misstep would be accounted by everyone in the large atrium of the reception room, and held against her for all eternity; I felt sympathy, I had felt this way too many times before.

-Ms. Miller. She said again, this time less as a question. More of a statement.

I struggled to remove my mind from a cellblock in the Norwich State Hospital and slowly nodded.

-Caleb Miller's...sister? Is that right? She didn't wait for a nod this time. Have you finished your paperwork?

She still refused to walk much closer. Her glances frequented the man sitting next to me more often.

I looked down at the printed form in my hands. It was devoid of any marks beyond my first and last name scrawled with atrocious penmanship above the first inked line.

-No. No, I haven't. I said.

-That's quite all right. I can help you with them on your way. She flipped the hung page up to rest on her clipboard and tucked it to her side.

-You mean I can see my brother now? I asked, not without a hint of incredulity.

-Yes, ma'am. We can finish your papers while I take you to his room.

I rose out of my seat. The man grabbed my arm. His fat fingers were cold and strangely wet upon the skin of my wrist.

-What are you doing? I wrenched my arm out of his grasp.

-Please, he said, please, you have to hear the rest of it.

His eyes, which had been wide and dark and shimmering like onyx had now loosed their gathered moisture and rained it upon his grubby cheeks. His face appeared as I imagined my own had looked just hours prior, without, of course, the proliferation of bruising and the lip that was spliced open and still bit with pain with every movement. What held me there, both before and now, I could not discern. It was as if I was looking down upon myself from the height of an older age, down into the reaches of my memory, and knew that I had stayed, I had listened, I had been here and known exactly what was to happen next—there was nothing I could have done to change this moment.

-Ms. Miller? I can take you now, the nurse said, but we will be closing your brother's wing from visitors within the hour.

I looked at the pleading man in front of me. His desperation was painful to endure. I had never felt so hurtful as when I stood there, watching, silent.

He grabbed the manuscript he had been reading from, all of the pages, and thrust them into my hand. The paper was cool like the press of linoleum against bare toes.

-I'm at the Plaza. I need you to find me. I have time. I have time.

The man backed away from me and held his hand up, towards the nurse, as if he was warding her off, as if she would attempt to rush him at any moment, slapping him across the face, screaming 'What are you doing? Can't you see you've frightened this young woman?' and those tears would be spread across his face, the wet drops wrapping around the outline of her palm print, like some cherry ghost. He turned the corner down the hall leading to the parking garage. I listened to the sound of his retreating footsteps. We listened, the nurse, the young girl, whoever else was surrounding us, whoever else was silent in those stretched out minutes.

A siren some streets down broke through and I nodded at the nurse and followed her to the elevator.

•

Caleb was asleep. Georgia wasn't there.

The nurse made an exception. Because of the egregious wait, my long drive, and lack of lodgings she said I could stay the night in Caleb's room. She was kind enough to bring me a small pillow and a thin cotton blanket that smelled weakly of drain cleaner.

When I had entered his room I had expected him to be one of two things: near death or bursting from his bed with overflowing joy at my sudden (unexpected?) arrival. Georgia had been in my imagination—through no effort could I eliminate my desire to watch her react to either of these scenarios—looking on as my brother enveloped me in his arms, as she faded into the washed out eggshell of the walls, the robin's egg blue of the bed sheets, until she was forgotten to both of us, or, as my brother wracked breaths filled with dust out of his chest how he would call to me alone to whisper to, to deliver that final word to the only one who could truly know him.

That final situation had frightened me. It had teleported into my thoughts with no warning and by the time I had found myself thinking it was too late to stop, to hold off, to explain logically that this could not be how I felt, I could not actually be imagining my brother's death as some approximate desire. And yet I had, and I was. Was it jealousy that floated in the air about these dreams? For who? For Georgia? For Caleb? For some past Grace that was lost in that well where the amnesiac goes to drink? I fought desperately to find this scenario's impetus—I could not be that petty, I could not be that self-righteous—but found myself trapped in other memories.

The snap of scissors over Caleb's tightly wound curls.

The corner of the upstairs hall in the Miller's home, dappled with sunlight.

Crooked fingers reaching down to my chest, fumbling with the top button of a young girl's blouse.

A city gutter filled with black water and my boot cracking its still surface.

Fog sweeping across concrete, the sound of a horse hooves.

A wolf pawing the side of Laura's bed stand, felling a picture frame.

Running, ratcheting up the side of a fence in dark, into the Pritchard's yard.

An eye, brilliantly blue, insanity blue, blinking, directly in front of me.

A shadow (Caleb's arrival? Georgia's departure?) flashing across the bottom of a closed doorframe.

A song lushly hummed, by a white woman in a white dress drawing sheets about my young-thin arms.

A child, a boy, staring with tears matted to his eyes, at two black orderlies standing up a man whose face bore the scars of talons.

But this was not mine and I caught it. I stumbled a bit in the breaking of my reverie, the way drunkards do, as if they had found something invisible to all else but them and been stunned by its appearance. The nurse looked at me strangely before gesturing to my brother's door. Neither of those scenarios I had spent so long unconsciously molding occurred in any approximate fashion as I walked through the open fringe of the doorframe.

Caleb was beautiful. He had not changed at all from when I had last seen him at the airport. Copper eyelids strung like valances across those the azul of his pupils. His hair was a bit longer than I had ever kept it, but it was acceptable—the curls that once wound so black and so tight about his head had released somewhat, allowing the strands

to reach higher or handcuff themselves to gravity if the situation presented itself—he appeared as he had several years, as a sort of looking glass Caleb, hazed by what normally would be the soft focus of dreaming’s lens, but was in fact the coasting float of dust particles captured in the room’s lights, freshly ignited by the nurse standing in the doorway.

His complexion was neither at any loss for color, nor was he disturbed by a rush of light into his room. The blanket was pulled up and collared about his neck. Beneath it I could not tell if he had lost weight or put on the accompanying pounds of consistent companionship—George sure as hell couldn’t cook but she knew better than to alternate between Chinese and Big Macs every night (I wondered if Caleb missed my unhealthy consistency). His feet were pushed against the plastic frame sticking up at the end of the hospital bed much too small for him. He looked very much like the man-child I had always treated him as, strong legs bent to fit the bed built for far more normal-heighted people, and his head sticking out like that, disembodied, the shine of his cheeks like one of the painted cherubs he had once shown me in one of his lent tomes (a collection of the work of Raphael, I remembered that name at the very least). He had left that book on the stand next to our beds for two weeks straight, pages always open to that same painting. He used to stare at it and run his fingers through his hair, about his face, rubbing the scattered stubble that manifested itself in the oddest places, as if he could see himself reflected back from off the curve of the page, off the glint of those light, photocopied brushstrokes.

The room was rather empty despite his obvious presence—his shoes lay next to a closet, the same immense Nike’s I had bought for him almost five years ago. I couldn’t

trust Georgia on much of anything but I couldn't find a logical reason she would lie to me about the date of his hospital admittance. All the more reason I found it so surprising the room was this clean, what with Georgia's (supposed) consistent visits. The girl could walk five steps on the sidewalk and leave more of trace than the thousand before her. And yet there was no strewn trash, no faint smell of her perfume. It was as if she had never existed here. As if she couldn't. Then again, I had never found hospital wards particularly inviting. Perhaps she was as uncomfortable as anyone else could be in this overbearing sterility, as I certainly was. There was a design to these rooms that seemed to abhor human presence, like every inanimate object glared out at all that entered their lifeless solitude. I walked slowly around the bed, circling it, as if at any second Caleb would awake and throw himself from the bed and enwrap me in the embrace I knew so well to be his and his alone. He would tuck one arm about my back, curling his fingers into the ridges of my ribs and take his other hand and curve it to the back of my head, taking my face to his chest and burying it there. Perhaps I put this distance between us to protect myself, understanding full well that any sort of crushing entwine from my brother would be sure to kill me in my weakened state. The thought of his hand touching the back of my head caused a dull ache to form at the base of my skull. I rubbed my neck, gripping the side of my brother's bed to steady myself. I glanced up at the television hung in its corner gallows, dead but for the reflection of the three intruders into its room.

-He just got to sleep, the nurse said, I'd appreciate it if you didn't wake him, but, you are, you know, his sister, so.

-Thank you. I walked back to the door and I handed her my completed papers.

She took them calmly and cast nary a glance upon the pages before tucking them underneath her arm.

-I'm so terribly sorry about the wait. She said.

-It's really no trouble. She wasn't leaving.

-I know things have been rough for you, she said pausing for what seemed eternal, Its pure insanity out there. And you'd be amazed at how many people were here today that didn't have single relation to the bombing. None at all. I can't tell you why they were here. Like that man you were sitting with. My shift ended early this morning and as I was leaving, there he was, waiting for the door of the emergency room to open. But he didn't go in. Kept grabbing those pages and holding them to himself, like they were warming him or something. You know when people talk about other people seeing through them? Not like that, no, not seeing through, nothing like that. Seeing past, that's it. That was him. Looking right past me but not at anything at all at the same time. Like he was lost, remembering something. And here he was again, talking to you. I'll ask around but I can't imagine anybody that looked like that, or was staring like that, would have talked to single other soul. But he talked to you. I'm sorry if I'm bothering you. I'm usually the one to try to be more reserved, more professional, but you can understand. Its these times. It's when you can't even imagine the worst that could happen to you. No movie, no book can hope to prepare for you for it because it's always so removed. It happened to them, the characters right, but it couldn't happen outside of someone's mind. And yet, you see? I was three floors below and I could hear it go off. You'd think concrete could muffle something like that, but I could hear it like it had already happened, like I knew it was going to happen and I was right there beneath the tower looking at it. I'm sorry, I'm

sorry. It's just I saw him staring like that, and you listening to him here, and I can't help it if I feel like there's something you and I have to share. Maybe him as well.

She might have said this. I blinked at it was in my mind. It was remembered and yet seemed false. She waited for a response, but how could I respond to something I didn't believe had occurred? She waited.

-I'd like to be alone with my brother if that's all right. I said.

The nurse tilted her head, as if she didn't understand, but clearly she had heard what I'd said. Her silence made me think then 'Yes, of course what she said was real but she left then, remarking on her way out the open door that I could stay the night, something about a vending machine down the hall to the left, sodas and waters but good enough, and then she was gone. I cursed myself for forgetting to ask to speak to a doctor. I turned to look at Caleb. He was still fast asleep. I assumed he would survive the night. The nurse hadn't mentioned anything, but from the manner of her departure it was a safe bet he would still be very much alive in the morning. Footnoting his strong, solid breathes was the pinging of the heart-rate monitor. The streets didn't seem able to reach up as far as this wing of the hospital but the passing flicker of headlights revealed that there was, in truth, some place beyond this room, people beyond the two of us. The reality of other human beings crawled over me, leaving in its wake a coat of deep sadness that covered me entire. Is this how it should have been? Was it my fault, was I the wedge between us? No it was Georgia, other Grace said, but who had invited her in? It had been true Grace, no one else. Could you really blame him? And you had said you were finished with her. He had sat at the table and listened to talk, as you had him. This wasn't something lended to you, though, this was your hurt and your hurt alone. He had

been surprised, he'd said so—he had never heard you speak this much, or this passionately. It wasn't you, it was some other Grace. Had he asked you or was it of your own volition? I'm finished with her, you had said, laughing, as if one Grace, that past Grace, scoffed at the chance of ever encountering Georgia again, and one in the future, maybe true Grace, laughed instead at herself, for believing that anything ever ended.

A pain started in the back of my jaw where Perch had struck me first and crawled its way through my membranes until it reached the base of my skull, exactly where that numbing ache had begun several minutes before. It stabbed there, causing my head to spin with nausea. I labored over to the chair squatted directly below the television, rotating my body carefully but clumsily, and dropping my weight into the crutch of the seat. The cushions were comfortable, or they would have been, but this fall sent a lightning stroke through the line of my spinal cord and my thighs cried out from each still open slice in their skin.

The image of the room, of Caleb, flickered by my vision until that Kuleshov effect disintegrated. I saw the world in single frames, a filmstrip down the projector's flash. It stopped on one frame before I lost consciousness, something wrong, something that didn't belong, something spliced into those slowing images—a prison cell, occupied only by the cut out lean of two shadows, a woman looking in, and a man unnoticed behind her.

I awoke to find Georgia Hunt sitting in a brown folding chair pulled up to the corner of Caleb's bed and her right hand softly petting my brother's forearm. I opened my eyes as liars do, taking care to keep the hemisphere of my eyelid veiled low enough to feign the consistency of sleep, but open enough that I could make out the two of them. Caleb remained asleep. I assumed whatever had afflicted me was no gone. There was no pain left in my body but that that should have been there—the pinpoint stripes of cuts, the solid indent of bruises, the sharp jagged possibility of broken bones. Banished was that hateful fugue that had overtaken me. It had done its worst and I had survived.

Georgia was whispering something to Caleb, something I couldn't discern. A tray of uneaten food lay beside Caleb's bed, a mix of mashed potatoes, green beans, and turkey from the look of it. This would be the closest he would have come to a Thanksgiving meal since when we lived with the Rabinowitz's. On the other hand, I had no idea the sort of life Georgia and Caleb lived together. It could have been, in that first November of the inception of their romance they had indeed sat across from each other (in her apartment? In our old apartment? How dare she) and shared that feast. Had Laura and I even celebrated that day? I thought back to that fall and shivered, remembering only cold.

That small shudder of movement shook me enough in that chair to cause a groan of leather on denim, alerting Georgia to my presence. Her head darted to direct itself at me. She smiled, her front tooth still slightly snagged, curling over her thin bottom lip, a grin that was more sneer than smile, but only in appearance. No matter how much fault I attempted to place upon her I could never doubt the sincerity of that single expression.

Despite the way her violet tinged eyes slit. Despite the way her tongue sometimes crept through the gaps of her teeth, as if she could taste the air you exhaled. Despite her nose, already too small, much too Seuss-like to be real (and yet it somehow was, what genes, what grace, I'll never understand), and the rolls of skin on the bridge of that nose that spun up to kiss each other when someone had been particularly amusing to her, which was almost too often to be considered real either.

And it was, and it was now as well. Although Caleb hadn't seemed to age at all, Georgia Hunt had become something different entire in the small thread of time between the airport and this moment. Were it not for that smile I would have struggled to recognize her. Her hair had lost most of its down-soft luster, as well as most of itself. The shapeless length that strung strawberry-blonde down the arch of her shoulders, the locks that had draped across my thighs like autumn valances, all that bountiful, clutchable substance was chopped high and tight but for the front which cut down and split her right eye like a retriever's snout. For all the time we had spent together it had always been I who had embodied the butch dyke and yet it seemed as if she had modeled herself after the most glaring stereotype she could find, even as she traded her Sapphic philandering for the heterosexual monogamy she had always evoked while intertwining her fingers with mine as we walked down Houston—look at me, look at us, look what I'm doing.

Her black pea coat, a near-identical twin to my own, draped across the spine of her chair. She wore a grey tank top that her near non-existent breasts still fought through with her seemingly constantly excited nipples; this, paired with her weathered, abyss-black jeans gave all the air of nonchalance, of rebellion she had designed her outfit to

project. Ever desiring to say more with her appearance than was possible for her to think of within.

I blinked several times. I squeezed them tight, and opened them wide again, still pretending that I had indeed just awoken mere seconds before. Her eyes flew across me with their usual insouciance, that grin still plastered above her chin. I settled my hands on the arms of the recliner I had fallen into the night before and attempted to catch her gaze. If it found my eye line it escaped in an instant, preferring to scour over every corner of my body before returning to my face.

-Where were you last night? I asked after a moment.

She patted Caleb's arm and turned to square herself off with me. She leaned forward and spread her legs, letting her arms hang cool between her knees. She let her head fall for moment, that wild nose of hair arrowing to the floor before flipping her neck back, the nose flying up, smelling the air of the room before returning to the exact place it had lain before.

-I went back to the apartment. Our apartment. Christ, Grace. You look awful. Christ. She kept smiling.

I unintentionally brought my fingers to my lip and felt the slice running through it, felt its pain, before realizing what I was doing. I put my hand back down on the chair. Skin smacked leather, sounding out louder than I'd planned, as if I'd done it for emphasis.

-You too. What's the full-on butch about? I asked, You showing your true colors?

-I needed a change, She laughed, Obviously. You don't like it?

I stared back at her blankly.

-Well, Caleb does. She finally closed her lips across her teeth and any trace of that smile vanished from her face.

We watched one another. Her gaze stopped scattering about the room and rested on my own.

-The doctor should be in soon, I expect. I said.

She shrugged.

I checked my watch. It was rather late in the morning, the hands arced close to north on the dial, revealing just how deeply, and at what length I had slept the night before. If it was sleep at all. Minute strands of memory/dreams, silk-thin, slunk back into my mind—pasts and people I recognized as my own. And yet I knew, in the remove from that subconscious state, that I had been watching these dreams as both participant and alienated observer. This fugue, that searing pain, had carried me to a plane of remembrance uniquely disturbing.

At the same point I was in the midst of my own action, events I had been intimately involved in, I was also cowered in the back of a blackened theater, lit only by the flicker of my past before me and the soft runner lights of the soda-soaked aisles. No matter how deeply I longed to join in the story unfolding on-screen, I could never touch those figures I knew I had once been able to feel so intimately.

The first image was of a young Grace, a version of myself that even without this state I could not remember clearly how exactly she had felt. Something had always blocked me from recalling this little girl's existence, perhaps a defense of my mind to protect me from past horrors, yet I thought this too apt, too comfortable to believe; I

thought rather that this is a constant yet rarely acknowledged situation for those that watched their memory fade further and further into the soft-focus of their age, that these beings, these past selves were much more like forgotten friends than versions of those looking back. They are unrelated to us, but come back as eerie doppelgangers, strangely reminiscent of lost thoughts but altogether alien to our current place and time. It went as far, for myself at least, that to even acknowledge the existence of this past Graceful was painful. For what else were these memories but attacks upon my present self? Accusations—you thought this, you felt this, you did this, this is still inside you, this could all happen again.

This Grace wore bright pink snow-boots that she had asked her stepfather to paint specifically. The boots were much too small for her and her toes were blistered but she wore them anyway, they were one of the few good things to come to her. Her snowsuit was less important to her and was in turn also less garish, simple blue with a plaid scarf that Jack Miller had given her as well. She waited out in the snow for her stepfather to bring her brother from the house to go sledding. This had been an interesting promise for this Grace—her stepfather was usually out of the house much of their time there, at least during the daylight hours, and what little of they saw of him was resigned to sitting cross-legged a body-length in front of him, catching a glimpse of his shape in the reflection from their dinner of late-night television programming. The prospect of Jack Miller anything athletic even was deemed suspicious by young Grace, but in this instance she willingly forced any flash of doubt from sparking in her mind—this could have been the beginning of something good. That is, if it had not followed young Grace's expulsion from her third school in little over a year.

The first two exits from the private schools the Miller's had enrolled her in, the names of which are lost to me now, were quite different in their inception. The initial departure was rather tame when compared with the latter. Young Grace, very young at that moment, happened to bite one of her teachers, and although her teeth were not quite mean or sharp enough to draw blood, the look in her eyes as she had wrapped her tiny fists around the matronly instructor's fat, bloated forearm, a look the woman had described in her report as "rabid" and "hinting at delinquent tendencies, tendencies bordering on the psychotic," a look that had caused enough of a stir within this teacher's tightly pulled back sylvan bun that she had recommended an early introduction to psychotherapy would not be entirely misguided—it was perhaps most apt to assume that among these descriptions, and the great amassed respect for this woman, lay the true reasons why Grace was expelled from that first institution.

The second expulsion was the now infamous Donald Farmer incident. I had been thinking of it days prior, but as I watched young Grace now I could only just glimpse a shadow of exactly what had caused that girl to place a bag of dead birds collected from the park (how there had been so many robin, specifically robin, carcasses in the park that day, or that spring, is still spoken about with eerie, careful recollection—some believed it to be a sudden onset of disease that located these Larchmont robins by a flaw in their in their genetic architecture, some more, mostly older Jewish women now living alone, believed it to be sheer stupidity by the birds themselves, and the monumental intelligence of their many free-ranging house cats, though, still more, the intellengista of New Rochelle, thought it even more likely that the robins were feeding on worms covered with toxic chemicals, chemicals they themselves (with much acknowledged hubris) had

believed to be safe enough to rid the neighboring towns of the mosquitoes that so ravaged their children with bumps swollen pink with uncontrolled scratching, and, finally, a select few, all of which were drowned out by the shouts of the realist majority (yet not before voicing their opinions loud enough for a small black girl, one that spent most of her time running a stick along the metal benches scattered about the park, just to hear the different tones each one would make based on the day, or the hour, happened to overhear their explanation), believed that these birds had perished for the simple reason that they could not stand to live a single second longer in a world doomed to constantly shepherd itself towards its own destruction—but Grace, at that age, did not take much to any of these theories, but thought it only right, and honorable, that she put the dead robins to better use than decomposition). What Donald Farmer had done, exactly, was now in the shade of the past. I suppose it had had something to do with either my color, or with Caleb, but either way, it was not his actions that called for any disciplinary movement from the school upon young Grace but her own twisted, yet inspired revenge upon the boy.

After much debate between the Millers it was decided that they would attempt one more private school before considering therapy for their adopted daughter. Harriett was without mercy when it came to pronouncing her desire to be rid of the girl. Grace had brought her none of the respect, or talk, among her high-minded and deep-pocketed circles that she had desired from the adoption, nor had she opened up a hidden cell inside her, where someone, surely not herself, had decided to lock away her natural (?) maternal love. It took no effort to provoke Harriett into discussing at length the methods of psychoanalysts used on children like this Grace. Nor did it take long to reach a point in this discussion, whether culled forth by mounting glasses of wine or growing rage

concerning Grace's indiscretions, where Harriett Miller would reveal her desire to commit her adopted daughter to a mental institution, no matter the consequences this decision would have on the child that would be left at the house, who until recently had only been trusting enough of one person in Larchmont, at least to speak to. A young Grace's separation would have caused immeasurable grief to all members of the Miller household, or so Jack Miller had believed, and it was at his urging, and his slight, but steady ability to find nuanced ways to influence his wife's decisions, that Grace should be given one more chance to redeem herself before the family considered anything as drastic as committing an eleven-year-old girl. I had always assumed it was this man's subtle poise that had saved Caleb and I from the terror that undoubtedly lay beneath Harriett Miller's cold façade. I had not honestly cared much if it was for Caleb's benefit, or my own, or it was simply children that he seemed to wish to bestow his kindness upon.

There was no one else, especially then, and especially after the Donald Farmer incident, that would have defended me. This other Grace had not been a stellar student, nor had she excelled at any sort of sporting events (although she had run the mile in a time that was, unbeknownst to her school's ironically portly physical education teacher, egregiously close to breaking records set by men much more famous, and much more athletic than she—a fact I would only learn years later), and nor had she shown herself to be especially competent in the realm of *ars poetica* (although this too was open to debate as well—the stanzas this young Grace had written were never handed in to her teacher but when I compared them to some of the work in Caleb's books I found my own, even at that age, to be surprisingly poignant, precocious even) but she had been quite proud of herself for her complete and utter respect for her step-father's wishes, whether they were

for a semblance of silence within the house after he had returned home from his practice, or for Grace to help him with the filing of papers she would never discover the importance of; this single, redeeming quality was perhaps just enough to save the two children from a life sequestered from each other, but also, perhaps, enough to sentence the two of them to every hardship they had endured together—a possibility that had weighed down upon my mind for longer than most memories had lingered.

The third and final expulsion occurred two years past the Farmer incursion. The cause had been strange, but nothing so much so in that realm to really set it past placing a bag of dead birds into a young boy's lunch box. Grace had been accosted (well, that is wrong too, isn't it?), perhaps, approached by another boy in her class—white, blonde, unremarkable enough that these were the only two aspects that I could remember him by, and as this memory dealt with the events of the day which she left the Millers forever, the sledding day, there was no chance to call back and retrieve the face of that boy—at the end of the final class of that day, and was asked to the middle school dance that was occurring in the ensuing week. Grace hadn't reacted particularly normal when faced with this proposal. She had stared for several minutes, as if waiting for a soft song to float in from the school intercom, lyrics describing just exactly how a girl such as she should speak in this moment. It was, after all, the first time any boy had had the countenance to even say a word to her, much less stand this close to her. Other children had laughed at what happened next, laughed not so much for the actual events, but more for this boy's obvious insanity, guts as well, but mostly insanity, for approaching the girl whom most knew, from the gaping mouths of their parents, had been expelled from two schools already and was rumored (by the children only) to have stabbed another student at some

point in her scholastic career, a crime which the police were too terrified to enforce any punishment upon—young Grace had actually enjoyed that final rumor.

The boy asked her and almost a minute later this other Grace had bit his lips together with her own and wrapped herself around him, taking both of them to the floor of the classroom. Most of the other students had left at this point, but a few remained, along with the professor, a post of a woman as far as I can recall, electric cord thin with a temper that was the beneficiary of far more rumors than even this other Grace had heard about herself.

Grace proceeded to fight with the knit belt the boy had strung about his hips, a fight she won rather quickly despite having no experience with such things. She had her hand down his pants before a single student realized what was happening in the corner of the classroom. Grace had never kissed a boy before, and what little this other younger being had known at the time came from stealing away from class for an alleged trip to the bathroom (almost always an excuse to traverse the exterior of the school until she reached her brothers classroom so she could watch through the slits between the hand-drawn artwork hung on the window and make sure that Caleb wasn't being bothered by anyone), and finding Molly Kiernan, another devotee of the 5th period lavatory sojourn, behind a mammoth green trash container with her mouth wide open and her head cocked to the side and her fingers tucked beneath some sophomore's cotton boxers and her face pressed as if glued to that poor boy's face. So it was with this image that young Grace made her decision, and although it might have been a logical explanation for her actions, and one worthy of the headmaster's time, it never seemed a legitimate course for Grace to take. She had never, and would never, be any more than an acquaintance of Molly

Kiernan. Despite this, she felt some sort of affinity for the girl she so consistently found behind those trash containers, beyond even this commonality. I had never come to terms with why this feeling existed in me, nor could I recall just exactly when this other Grace had disappeared and I had taken her place, who looked upon Molly Kiernan with the decidedly judgmental (and simultaneously hypocritical) eyes of a disapproving adult. No matter how many times I came back to that memory of myself sitting in the headmaster's broad leather chair waiting for Harriett Miller to pick me up, I would never believe that the reason I had withheld the image of Molly Kiernan, with her arm thrust like a pike down the pleat of that young boy's trousers, from the only person capable of commuting my sentence was because I had felt a certain kinship with a girl such as that.

Other Grace might have been on the boy for little over a minute but that was enough for her lack of expertise, as well as the lack of information she had received up until this point on the sensitivity of male genitalia, to leave her suitor with a psycho-sexual complex that unconsciously prohibited him from allowing anyone, including his doctors, from even attempting to touch his balls for the next six years of his life (or so the rumors had gone, the exact condition may have changed somewhat from first telling to when it reached my ears, but I knew exactly the extent of what that other Grace had done). He wasn't left with any discernable scars—she hadn't even begun to use her nails before she was torn off of him—but the bruising of both ego and scrotum was substantial. The damage she did to his lips was superficial and the swelling could have actually made him more attractive. He'd rolled on the ground, clutching himself, as her professor, along with some of the boy's larger and more daring friends, threw their arms under the crook of Grace's shoulders and pulled the young girl from her four-limbed grip. Surprised by

her lithe, almost weightless body, they lifted her toward the sky, her legs left clutching at the air like crab pincers. As she rose, she'd cried out "What are you doing? What is wrong with you? What are you doing?" repeating these phrases over and over, a record spinning smoothly until disturbed by the pounding of footsteps, as if there nothing at all strange or out of place with her actions, but it was them, it was these three monsters who deserved to be punished, who deserved to be pulled off *her*.

Jack Miller had been away at a conference during these events. San Francisco I believe—I only remembered the places I thought I would be least likely to visit in my lifetime (as of now I have a perfect track record, but who can tell with my memory, San Francisco could be fall into the ocean and I might not recall it at all). It was near three days before he was informed of Grace's expulsion from her third preparatory school.

I watched as Grace footed deep into the snow that had only just begun to truly build on top of Larchmont's ground. She stood with a blue sled bought long before her brother and she arrived at the Miller's home. It was a sled perhaps bought for the Millers, or purchased by them in the hope that there would be a child soon perched atop its stiff metal. Obviously at the time it was believed this child would be a natural procreation of Jack and Harriett. The sled was hung first on the side of the garage, close to the rake and the shovel and Jack's underused tool bench. In a few years, during the initial spring-cleaning of the household, the sled was taken off this hook and moved to a second nail in the deeper recesses of the garage, replaced by a wrapped noose of extension cord. By the time of Grace and Caleb's adoption by the Millers the sled had found itself lodged between the lawnmower and the snow tires stacked in the back, where it was near indiscernible from the front seat of a parking car. But Grace had found it. In

her stepmother imposed quarantine within the house following that final expulsion she had found herself scouring the reaches of the expansive home for interesting places to hide from the cold fingertips of Harriett Miller.

The woman had taken to encircling her abnormally long hand about Grace's neck, and squeezing, not unlike a lioness' bite around the rolls of its cub's neck, but harder, meaner. She'd do this whenever she'd chance find her outside of the two rooms she had designated as permissible for her step-daughter to enter after the quarantine was set down: that of Grace's bedroom, which was no real punishment to the young girl—her brother lived there as well and delighted in hearing Grace tell stories (always imagined, always portraying Grace as the recipient of some calling beyond the constrictions of scholastic pursuits) about why she was able to stay home all day away from school—and the kitchen, where she was allowed fifteen minutes to eat a meal prepared with noticeable reluctance by her step-mother.

It was during one of these short respites from Harriett's glacial stare and chilling clutch that other Grace found the sled. She'd been able to drag it out from its tuck by the lawn mower, chipping some of the blue paint from the metal in the process and letting these remains fall to the garage floor, as if someone had shaved slivers from a clear, summer sky. The screech of the heavy sled along the concrete alerted Harriett Miller immediately and it wasn't a matter of seconds before Grace was being dragged up the stairs and thrown with such force into her room that she sprained her wrist trying to stop her inertia from carrying her forehead into the sharp corner of her bed frame. Her brother watched this while sitting on his bed playing with the G.I. Joe dolls bought for him the Christmas past. He'd grinned, knowing that her sister was trapped in their room until at

least her next meal, which was plenty enough time for another story of her daring escapades about the house. The sled lay forgotten by both Grace and Harriett in the empty spot in the garage where Jack Miller would attempt to pull his car into a day later. He would stop, however, just short of the object glinting in the cone of his headlights and discover a toy he hadn't thought about for over six years.

It was with this toy that Grace stood waiting for her stepfather to collect Caleb and take them to the hill only a few streets from their house. It was standing here for several minutes, growing colder in her stillness that caused her to begin to think that something was wrong. Jack's eagerness to speak to her was one oddity in itself but his proposal of this day spent not only outside, but alone with him (well, with her brother as well, obviously) was the first indication that something was not quite right with Mr. Miller.

Caleb came to the entrance of their home, the white door swung open and the winter sun crawling inside as it rose into the sky. He was in a state of half-dress—his snow pants were on safely, as were his boots, but the suspenders buckled to the belt of his pants swung like swing-sets at his side and he wore a spaghetti-sauced stained undershirt, his favorite, yet no coat. He shot rapid glances indoors and would slowly turn his head to look upon his sister waiting in the down blanket of their front yard. I do remember thinking he appeared like an automatic sprinkler but I could not recall if I'd thought it was amusing; I still watched these events from this far off fugue state, unable to touch or feel or control any memory that forced itself upon my vision. Words spoken by this Grace's stepparents floated from the interior as if blown out from a wind entering through an unknown hole in the home.

“Bit him, she bit him, Jack.” Harriett, livid.

“What’d he do?” Jack, calm.

“What do you think he did? You know just how she gets, you think he could have stopped her?”

“No, I mean what did he do to her. You know, to make her attack him?”

“She wouldn’t talk to me. She’ll never talk to me. Neither of them will!”

“Did she say anything to the headmaster, what’s her name?”

“—(not for something for me to remember, the fugue-state decided for me) No, she didn’t say a word to her either. Like she chewed off her tongue in the process of assaulting the poor boy. I’ve called his mother twenty times already. The woman won’t take my calls. She’s goddamn senator’s wife. Or ex-wife. What does it matter? She’s someone I *need* to answer my calls.”

“He must have done something.”

“Did the Farmer boy do anything? Did —(again, not for my ears) do anything?”

“—had it coming. No one who looks that evil could get away without someone doing to her what Grace did to her.”

“You honestly believe I think that’s funny?” Harriett, enraged.

“You might have, once.” Jack, subdued.

Caleb looked from me to the voices back to me. Sprinkler. Tsk tsk tsk tssssssssk. Silence from the house.

“I let you convince me once, Jack,” Harriett, “You’re lucky I waited until you got home. I was going to take her to Dr. Engles the day it happened.”

“I’m glad you didn’t.” Jack, indiscernible.

“What is it about her? What makes you defend her so? She’s a monster and she proves it again and again and its like you keep forgetting. Like all of her silence and every single one of her glares is catnip to you. No, it’s giving you too much credit even likening you to a cat. You’re a dog, and she’s the heel and the hand and you keep coming back.”

“I really don’t think my forgiving her makes me like a dog, Harriett.”

“You don’t? What animal do you want to be, sweetie?”

“I’d take walrus on most days. For the tusks mostly.”

“You can’t take this seriously, can you?”

“I don’t know, none of this seems too egregious to me. Yes, she could probably use some counseling but she doesn’t need to go to a shrink. She needs us to finally act like we wanted her in the first place. She needs us to stop acting like we settled for her. I’m going to start with sledding and maybe I’ll cut back on the trips. Less television, more activities, for both of them. You should do the same.”

There was a crack then like the sound of whiplash. Caleb stopped his routine and stared directly at the source of the sound. He absent-mindedly began to run his thumb and forefinger along his suspender straps. The air was light and still so I could hear clearly, as if it was beside me the zipper whine of Caleb’s insecurity manifesting itself between his fingertips.

“I shouldn’t have had to do that. But don’t you ever think for a second that we live here, that we live this life off of your practice. As hefty that wage is that you pay yourself, it’s my daddy’s money that keeps us here, that pays for the car you drive. That gives me some say in this house. Not some, *the* say.” Harriett, quieter.

“That may be true.” Jack, muffled.

“It is. And I say we take the girl to Dr. Engles. Today.”

“I really don’t trust it, Harriett, I wish you’d listen to me.”

“It’s science, same as anything you do.”

“I highly doubt that.”

“You’re right. I’m sorry. Where you take your little tools and cut into people’s skin they’re able to fix people with their words. Who would you say is the master healer, huh?”

“This isn’t about Grace anymore, is it?”

“Dr. Engles suggests—.”

“You’ve spoken to him about it?”

“Is that really so surprising?”

“After I told you to hold off, to give her a chance?” Jack, incredulous.

“I think I’ve explicitly spelled out how much regard I have for your opinions when it comes to this.” Harriett, hissing.

“When?”

“When what?”

“When did you go to see him?”

“That’s none of your business.”

“I should say it goddamn is my business! It’s my daughter!” Jack, shouting.

“Let go of me, Miller.” Harriett, dangerous.

Caleb took a step inside. His body was tensed, coiled, yet confused, as if he did not know, if provoked, which way he would run.

“I’ve had about enough of this, Harriett, your lording over me your father’s money. Like you said, I pay myself rather substantially. I’m not in medical school anymore. You don’t have a hold on me!”

“I’d say I do. Look how easy it was to raise the hair on the back of your neck, little doggy.”

“—”

“Oh, was that too much?”

“—”

Caleb retreated even further inside. The sun reflected off his boots. He was bodiless. The rest of his still tiny frame was lost in the shadow of the house.

“Are you going to let go of me now?” Harriett, insidious.

“—” Jack, smoldering.

“Jack?”

Grace’s fingers had begun to lose their color. I could remember the freeze.

“Harriett. I’m going to say this slowly. Calmly. Because that’s what I am. Calm. We are not taking Grace to see a shrink. Whether it’s Dr. Engles. Or anyone else. We’re going to deal with this the way we should have when we first adopted them. All right?”

“You need to let go of me.”

“Not until you tell me we’re not taking her any where.”

“Mark doesn’t even think he needs to see her.”

“Who the hell is Mark?”

“Dr. Engles—apologies.”

“Why are you calling him Mark?”

“I haven’t just been seeing him to talk about Grace—no, stop, you’re really too simple, really too simple, it’s nothing like that.”

“Then what?”

“It’s nothing like that. Though—”

“Harriett!”

Laughter juttred out from the dark of the interior. I hadn’t remembered her laugh until this moment but somehow other Grace allowed me to recall the short, staccato bleats of Harriett Miller’s amusement. It was almost cough-like in its abruptness, entirely false in its delivery, as if she had rehearsed this reaction in an effort to mask the fact that she didn’t understand, and would never, understand why a person would laugh at anything at all.

“I’m not allowed to joke now? I thought we were being funny. We’re being funny aren’t we?”

“This is our marriage.”

“(laughing) No, no, this right here, this is our marriage.”

“What did you do with him? Did you sleep with him?”

“God no. I might respect his work more than I do yours, but I have enough intelligence to know what an affair like that would do for me. He’d be a step down, now wouldn’t he?”

“That’s why you didn’t sleep with him?”

“Well, that, and it would’ve meant he was a whore.”

“—”

“How did you make it through medical school? Do I have to explain everything? I’ve been seeing Dr. Engle’s for therapy! Therapy, Jack, not sex. Even I don’t mistake those two.” Harriett, proud.

“When? How’ve you been keeping this from me?” Jack, frantic.

“Christ, what do you think I do all day?”

“I assumed you stayed here. Read. Took care of the kids.”

“Have you ever seen me read? Let go of me.”

“No. How many times?”

“Twice a week. Tuesdays and Thursdays. One hour...if things go quickly. (Laughter) Since September. Now, let go of me.”

Caleb came back into view. Grace assumed Jack had finally relinquished his grip on his wife. The young boy was wide-eyed, the lightning strike blue of his pupils clear even from this distance—he looked as if he had seen something indescribably horrible, yet even now I couldn’t imagine, from what I remembered of their conversation, that anything could have occurred that would cause him to stare out like that. As if he had caught just a scent of the cold outside and this alone had been enough to freeze him on the wooden boards of the front steps. Grace held the wet rope connected to the sled, and even though she tightened her fingers about the curve of the tight twine she could barely feel the rope in her hands.

“And he said we didn’t need to bring Grace to see him? During one of these appointments?”

“Yes.”

Jack sighed. They must have been standing closer to the door as a faint wisp of breath lifted out from the shadows and curled up the awning of the porch. This could not have been but this is how other Grace remembered this moment. As if Jack Miller was made of steam, and with each puncturing word from his wife he lost more and more of the countenance of his soul.

“What did he suggest we do?”

“Now you care what he has to say?”

“No. I know you. Far better than you think I do.”

“Do you now?”

“I know you’re hiding something. An ace in the hole. I can feel it. I can feel you waiting. You’re a snake. I can see you coiled, when are you going to bite? Go ahead, Harriett, go ahead.”

“Could you be more dramatic?”

“I’m waiting.”

“Mark thinks its best if, well, he thinks that he could help her more if she was committed.”

“Jesus...” Jack, whispering.

Harriett’s sheep bleat clapped from the foyer.

“This is the only way, Jack. I did, I really did, you know. *Want* to believe in your faith, not her certainly, but your faith in her. It was nice. Probably the nicest thing I’ve thought about you for quite some time. But if you think it would have ended up any other way then really Jack, what am I supposed to do with you? You knew it was going to happen again. I’m really starting to think that it’s you who needs Dr. Engle to talk to.

You're a, what did he call you? A sadist. Sado-masochistic, that's it. It doesn't matter, you can go to him if you want. But tomorrow I'm taking Grace to Dr. Engle. And he'll take her to —(the film skipped, the audio dropped, other Grace keeping me from memories that should have been mine, where was she taking me? I thought to the manuscript that lay in my lap. What was the name of that hospital? Was it one and the same?).”

Flat slaps, Jack's shoes on the floorboards, sounded out from within.

“Where are you going?” Harriett, annoyed.

Jack appeared from the house. He was still wearing the suit he had been clad in when he'd arrived the night before. The same suit he had been wearing that morning when he'd knelt down, smiling, eyes sunk back from lack of sleep, and asked Grace if she would like to go sledding. He'd forgotten to take off the rubbers wrapped around his black oxfords.

Grace had watched him come in through the garage the night before, and watched still through a slit in her bedroom door—even as her brother warned her that Harriett would be coming upstairs soon, and if she saw her still awake—as her stepfather sat himself down in the noisy leather of the sofa. Harriett and Jack had exchanged words, nothing more than acknowledgements of each others presence in the home, but Jack spent this entire conversation with his hand pinched to his temples, fingertips rubbing out some accumulated pain, from travel or from the few seconds he had had to speak to his wife since arriving in Larchmont, and his palm shading his gaze. Grace could see he was not closing his eyes but gazed at the dark form of the wrinkles on his fat palm as if searching for his next action in the folds of his age. He must have slept the entire night on that couch.

Harriett had rose up to find her rest only a few minutes after greeting her husband (the young girl who looked so much like me, but could never have been me, hid beneath her covers until she was sure the woman was asleep before creaking open her door to catch a glimpse of Jack Miller collapsed into the clutch of the sofa). Grace had not been able to find much repose in her hours confined to her room, and so she had waited for her stepfather to pound the soles of his feet onto the stairs and retreat to the master bedroom, and yet this moment never came. After almost a half an hour of struggling to keep her eyelids from falling, she gave up, and returned to her bed, where she remained awake for perhaps another fifteen minutes longer, curling her bed sheets up and over her head and yet wishing (I can remember) so desperately to hear her stepfather opening the children's door and whispering a good night.

Jack Miller was taller than he'd ever been the moment he exited the house. Ever present was his protruding spare tire, the white of his shirt now a light beige from sweat and apparently consistent use throughout the entirety of his trip, and yet, he appeared as Grace had never seen him before. For the first time in her life, her stepfather seemed determined, resolute, and altogether composed.

He reached the edge of the doorway and the blanket of sunlight fell over him. Caleb stared up at Jack, and smiled—I assumed he thought the man was still set on taking the two of them sledding—but Grace caught the glimmer of sadness in the man's eyes that seemed to spark up with the crush of daylight.

Jack reached out his hand and Caleb took it. The two of them walked down the steps, not turning to glance at Grace, heading straight for the Miller's BMW. Jack carefully opened the door, holding Caleb's hand directing him away from the swinging

metal and then back around, and as if the boy was marionette on a string, he swung him into the back seat of the sedan.

“Where are we going, Daddy?” Caleb asked. These were the first words Grace had ever heard him speak to his stepfather, and Jack seemed as surprised as she was in this instant. It took him a moment to reply but he hiked up his grey-flannel suit pants and revealed his bare ankles and lowered himself into a catcher’s crouch. Grace could see her brother’s face, or rather, half of it lit by the rays fighting through the rear window. He was grinning, his adult teeth still not yet fully come in, the bottom row of his mouth like a randomly assaulted bowling lane, which, coupled with his inability to close his together his teeth (a preventive measure, he would later tell me, for smiling too quickly, and cutting off some of his tongue), made him look altogether clownish. Yet as Jack continued to speak to him, the muscles in Caleb’s face relaxed and his cheeks lost their child-like buoyancy, until they disintegrated into the last image of him I could remember from that day.

“Caleb, I want you to know that you’ve done nothing wrong. Neither has Grace. I love both of you. Too much. But isn’t it wonderful that people can do that? I didn’t know it was possible either, maybe not even until right now, but something tells me this is the best thing for all of us. And that’s why we have to go away,”

Caleb swallowed hard, as if his esophagus held a whole apple within it.

“There won’t be any sledding today. You shouldn’t blame Mommy either. This is my decision. You might hate me for it now, and perhaps until I’m long gone, but I think at some point you’ll come to realize this was right. You might even come to thank me,”

Caleb began to blink his eyes rapidly, a precursor for tears, always,

“Hey, come on, you’ll always be my little man. I’m glad you spoke to me. I’m glad you called me Daddy, so. It’s... you need to be there for your sister, all right? Okay?”

Caleb nodded,

“Good man. Sit tight, I’ll be back in just a second.”

Jack rose up, blocking my view of my brother.

“Is Grace coming with us?” A voice lilted from behind the expanse of my stepfather’s suit coat.

“Of course, Caleb. I wouldn’t forget about her.”

I watched from afar, trapped in the back of the blackened theater. Jack approached my younger self as if slowed by some great wind. His shoes crunched into the powder lush on the ground. Grace was footed where she stood. Her tiny, gloved fingers squeezed the rope tied to the sled. She was puny, despite her age. She had begun to shiver what must have been minutes before but what cold she felt I could not recall—I could only imagine that freeze gnawing on her frail frame. Jack moved ever closer, each step cracking brittle in the fragile air.

Harriett Miller had come to the vestibule. She wore a swan-white robe that enveloped the waif it hid beneath its flocculent plush. Her hair lay in fiery curls along her collar, each strand multiplying in volume in the stark daylight. If the cold affected her at all it was not remembered to me. The breaths she took, strangely sonorous and deep, effloresced none of the pluming vapor normal for a human in this type of weather. Mrs. Miller was gorgeous, I could never forget that, but in this memory she was a

goddess. It was somehow possible to put aside all that I had heard her pronounce about this young Grace in recompense for being allowed to view her like this for just another instant. The murderous fire that raged in her gaze as she turned her head to follow her husband's path across the snow was horrifyingly arousing. Her lips were full with anger and puffed out. Were it not for the stare that emitted above it, one would have thought she was attempting to be demure, or even cute, feigning a pout to cajole some oblivious suitor into giving her everything she wants—it could have been these same plump lips that snared Jack Miller into believing there was the possibility of kindness behind the steel perfection of her stare. A cigarette stuck out from the pale skin of her fingers. Its flame had gone out long before she'd approached the entrance to the house but she still toggled her thumb on the butt, flicking the imagined accumulation of ash to her bare, beautiful feet (how wonderfully soft her ankles must have felt!) placed daintily on the floorboards. She didn't say a word.

Jack Miller stood before other Grace. He did not kneel, nor bend to Grace's height, as he had when speaking to Caleb but stood as tall as he possibly could. His shadow lay over her cutting off what little warmth she had been absorbing from the noon sun.

“Hey Grace.” He said.

“I heard what you told Caleb.” Grace spat out.

The snow crackled like firewood as Jack shifted his weight. He didn't, or wouldn't look directly at her, but at a twig that lay encased in the flinty layer of ice armoring the powder below.

“I get it. If he doesn't.” She said.

“You do?” He asked.

“We’re going back aren’t we? You’re taking us back?”

“I’m going to try.”

“Okay,” She dropped the rope, yet she could not feel it leave her hands, “I can explain what you’re doing to Caleb.”

“Good, good.”

“—” She waited.

“You should know I don’t want to do this. It’s not really a choice.”

“I heard what you said inside too. Most all of it.” The young girl threw this at him like an accusation.

“You did?” He caught her stare with his own then let it fly back to the twig.

“Caleb left the door open.” Grace blinked at him.

“I was wondering why it was so cold.”

“Yeah.”

“—”

“—”

A car drove by. The sound of the tires on the plowed street seemed a country away to them.

“I know it was wrong.” The girl said.

“What was?” He picked his nose, absentmindedly. Between the BMW’s door and the middle of the yard that determination, that composure, had vanished into winter air. Here was Jack Miller as Grace had always known him. A man who struggled daily to prove that he was worthy of being considered a man at all.

“Kissing –. And jumping on him. And touching him. All of it.” She said, as if reciting a list of personal goals.

“Jesus. Of course,” he wiped his forehead of imaginary sweat, “and no, it’s not wrong. I mean, it is. It’s a mistake though. And we’ve never talked to you about that, and I don’t know if they ever have—have they?—to you? The professors? Well, if they had, then.”

“—”

“You don’t have to apologize.” He said.

“I wanted to. To you.”

Jack sniffed. I, nor Grace, could see his face.

“Is this okay?”

“I don’t know. I’m thirteen.”

Jack laughed. It was warm and his breath blew over her, that same profusion of steam she had seen floating from the house minutes before.

“It shouldn’t be.” He said.

“Yeah.”

“But you understand don’t you? I’m not doing this for my marriage,” He continued to half-chuckle, “Never for her. And not for me either. You must understand why...”

His voice cracked. He peeled his eyes to I/ Grace. A cut of sun blinded me/her but we couldn’t forget he was crying.

“Why? No, no. Not really.” She shook her head.

“I need you to,” Jack rubbed his hands together, searching for warmth, “It’s important, before we go. I just want to know you forgive me for not being good enough.”

“You’re good. I’ve always thought that.” We said.

“That makes this easier, thank you.”

Other Grace glanced at Harriett statuesque in the vestibule.

“She might be right about me,” We said, “I don’t know why I keep doing these things. You say they’re mistakes. I don’t know—”

“They are mistakes—” Jack interjected.

“—what – is but maybe that’s where I should be. Caleb too.”

“Caleb?”

“What’s in me’s got to be in him, right?” She asked.

“I...you know...”

“We’re brother and sister. That means we’re the same. Means we’re the closest you can get, right? All that I’m going to do, he’s going to do too.” She bit her lip—we wanted an answer so desperately.

Jack refused, however. Walking closer, he placed his hand on the back of the wool cap keeping my, Grace’s ears from falling off from frostbite. He pulled us awkwardly to him, until our face was flush with the fabric of his suit and I could hear the groan of his gut as it turned—how long had it been since he’d ate something? His stomach ebbed in and out. These were not smooth undulations. Each rise was wracked with sobs he was choking off with his sleeve. Each fall inspired him to bring me closer, as if he thought just by breathing, he could be taken away from me, although his feet remained steadfastly stuck in the inches of snow.

We turned my head to the side, away from the house and out to the street. It was a wondrous day and I can't remember if the sunlight really had streamed through the stripped branches like golden banners or if this beauty was just my mind trying to redeem what little happiness was inherent in those hours.

It was not nearly spring yet. Despite this, packages of snow toppled from their perch in the trees, pure-white gifts that caromed through the tree-limbs until they met road and exploded in an instant. One such box caught Grace's eye and as it fell she noticed a man watching the Miller's house from the sidewalk.

He was dressed what appeared to be pajamas. The fabric shimmered underneath the light and its luster, along with the indigo sheen of the material, stuck him out from the surrounding world. Against the ivory background of fence and snow-draped awnings and the twinkling graupel the wind summoned into the air, he seemed as if he had been cut out from some other picture, and pasted onto Grace's vision.

A chalky scarf was wrapped tight about his neck, which accentuated the pristine olive hue of his skin. This would have led Grace to believe he was Mediterranean were it not for the chimera of attributes his face stole from other races. His nose was pointed. It hooked low until its dagger tip reached the same level of his upper lip, which along with its twin below, was dark and belied some African ancestry. His cheek bones were high and protruded out, sinking the sides of his mouth into themselves, and were it not for the tightness of his pajamas (?) revealing a certain heft to his frame, one would think he was starving. Coifed about his large head was a bountiful layering of straw-blonde hair, long and flowing and full, and it would have made him quite handsome were it not for the

hodge-podge of cultural stereotypes he had seemingly cut onto himself, so odd was their mixing. His eyes were Caleb's.

A hot-white flash of pain stung the back of Grace's head.

Did it?

I could not remember any longer. The man stared not so much at this other Grace but at this Grace, at the real Grace in the theater of the dream. He saw me. He saw me looking back on this memory and he knew everything about me and I could not escape him—there was no exit at all. Had he truly been there? When young Grace turned and looked away from her house, had she indeed caught sight of him? I/ Grace fought to turn our head. Yet it hadn't happened. I had kept staring and him right back at me. His eyes were my brother's and his skin was near mine and he did not belong. He called back to another memory, something stranger, something that if shown to me would reveal something about myself much too true.

“Grace?” Jack had noticed my stare. He looked to the man as well (he did exist!) and moved to shield me with his body. Jack Miller and this observer locked eyes. Grace was finally able to pull her gaze away and found that Harriett had disappeared inside, as if the man's appearance had banished any concerns she had had for her husband's actions and forced her to retreat indoors, under the cover of privacy.

Finally the man began to walk past the house. He never ceased staring at the young girl and her stepfather until at last he had to turn his head, and yet he had made it such a point that it had seemed for a moment that he would have broken his neck just to keep his gaze upon them for a few minutes longer.

“Odd,” Jack said, “Have you ever seen him before?”

Grace shook her head. She clutched at his suit pants, soiling them with the collected dirt she had sponged from the sled rope.

“Are you ready?” He asked, “Don’t worry, I can bring your things later.”

“Okay.” She said.

“Its... if I go back in I’m afraid she’ll take you.” A window shade shuddered and Grace glimpsed Harriett’s sinewy fingers wrapped around the cold black of the phone receiver and her dead stare watching them from within the house. Her mouth moved but Grace, who’d never been adept at reading lips, could not make out what she was saying.

“I suppose.”

“Will you call?” He placed both hands on her shoulders. They were surprisingly weightless.

“Will you?” She retorted, rather savagely.

His hands squeezed slightly when she said this and she immediately regretted her words.

“I could try. I could. And maybe later...”

“I’m sorry—”

“No don’t be. I shouldn’t have asked you to do that. But if you know, you want to,” He looked at his wife in the window, the drapes blinked and Grace never saw Harriett Miller again, “Well, I could do whatever I needed to.”

“I’d like that.”

“So.” He said.

The film began to fade, slowly, so I could make out their exit. I heard every crack their boots made in the ice, the doors of the BMW snapping as they shut, the engine

growling and lurching as Jack Miller shifted out of the driveway, to the streets now collecting winter on their faces, and I heard Caleb fidget in the back seat as he waited for Grace to say something to him, to explain what was happening. But I didn't say a word on that car ride. I stayed within this moment for quite some time, not calling back, nor moving forward to the uneventful year we spent with the Rabinowitzs (whose proper names are lost to me now) or the ten days we were considered the wards of Greg Halliday (of which hour was spent without sleep, without rest, waiting for the man to make another attempt at touching Caleb until I could think of a way to escape his house unnoticed—blowing up his kitchen ended up being the decision, a match left burning while the gas seeped from the stove was enough to distract Halliday long enough for me to grab Caleb and run a mile flat with him on my back, before my legs gave out and my hands turned blue). No, I remained in the pureness of that drive. In that moment, as the windshield grew hoary with frost and Jack activated the wipers, I had allowed the repeating flap of rubber to erase every thought in my mind. I remembered that and I was there in that fading memory. The animal smell of the leather seats filled my nostrils. The slick swath of the wipers squeaking was loud in the canals of my ears. The snow was a gossamer veil across my vision. I had forgotten the hospital entire, and although I sat and stared through the slitted windowpane out to that ferrous slattern of a city, every sense that had been stolen from me in age, each little minutia that had been denied me in that fugue state came to me in the guise of a great wave. These intimate details were only those intrinsic to the last minutes of that memory, before all faded to the Cimmerian darkness of natural amnesia, yet they were more potent than any I could cull from a recollection of years closer to this day. Even the overwhelming blood stench of iron had

now left me with the clothes it had come in on. I wanted to praise Georgia for being so silent, so unconcerned with my presence, for allowing me this chance to remember again. I did not move, but lay in repose for what must have been an hour, and waited until everything faded and all that could be recalled was young, faceless girl knee deep in snow clutching a rope attached to nothing.

-Grace?

Caleb.

Caleb's voice is a tenor and he has the unique, unconscious ability to make every word he says seem more drawn out than they should be. It is not a drawl, nor is it slow, but it gives the impression that Caleb is singing to you—something that, if acknowledged by you, he will grin, and not speak for some time, as if he is refusing to let you in on a secret yet so desperately wanting to tease you that he might allow a shade of the truth to come to light. That is Caleb's voice.

This was not.

From my name alone, I knew. Gone was the stretch of the 'a' across the length of the word, gone was the growl that began it, gone was the cymbal crash that resounded at its completion. As semblance of that Tony-the-Tiger rumble remained, but as he had sought to maintain that bridge of Upstate New York accent, his throat strangled itself, stopping my name halfway through, turning it into two syllables, and ending on a spark of quiet static.

I turned to look at my brother. He rocked his huge head from side to side—his neck cracking like a gunshot—and pushed himself up to a sitting position, one where we could lock eyes with each other and not struggle to maintain that bond. He smiled. His

eyes seemed perpetually widening, a blink with no movement of his eyelids. I reminded myself—a futile effort—to ask the doctor what drugs they had prescribed for him.

-You're alive, huh? I said, a little too nonchalantly, still trying to disguise my happiness in the fact of my statement.

-Do you want some water? Georgia leaned in and gripped his wrist. She had gotten a tattoo since I'd last saw her, a new one. A black star, empty inside, on the back of her hand, in that meaty expanse between her pointer finger and her thumb. How appropriate, I thought.

Caleb didn't react to this. I smirked, noticeably. He kept looking at me and lifted his arms as if to say 'here I am.' Georgia's hand fell when he did this. She took it back and proceeded to place that hand at her side. It hung lifeless, as it had been snake-bit and was thoroughly paralyzed.

-I told George to call you as soon as I woke up (the truth comes out). I had to see you. And now you're here and I'm going to be fine.

-You're damn right you will. I shifted in my seat. Some of the cuts along my legs had stung with the beginning of infection. I kept my face as immobile as possible—I didn't need Caleb worrying about me.

-We should have just gotten ourselves hurt, Grace, the food here is a hell of a lot better than anything we ever ate at the apartment. He laughed. Georgia joined in as well but it was false and if I noticed so did Caleb.

-Caleb, when's the last time you spoke to a doctor? I sat up taller and winced.

-I don't know really. What's today? Not this morning, I would have noticed you sitting there and I wouldn't have had much to talk about with Doctor... Georgia?

-Hudson. She fed him, eager to be acknowledged. She leaned forward at the off chance he required more of her. Her nipples pressed through the fabric of her tank top and I thought for a moment of how I had run my fingers about their shape and then I stopped and watched and knew what she was doing.

-Right, Dr. Hudson.

-So yesterday? I asked.

-Yeah, I guess.

-And?

-And I'm a six foot six, two hundred and forty pound (lie), just absolute specimen of a man! He rose up his arms and flexed his biceps. Neither I, nor Georgia laughed this time and he lowered them as fast as he had brought them up.

I stayed silent, waiting for him to tell me what this Dr. Hudson had said, allowing him to figure out he couldn't feign ignorance or hope that I would somehow be incapacitated before meeting said Doctor and that if he wanted it on his terms, now was the time. A few clouds had snuck themselves atop the sun and the New York outside of the hospital returned to its grey wash of winter.

-Nothing. They just want to keep me for some tests.

-Bullshit. I said.

-I swear!

I tapped my fingers along the arm of the chair.

-All right, he said I'm at higher risk for asthma and respiratory diseases, cancer, whatever, but honestly, it just feels like I smoked three packs of cigarettes in a room without any windows. I can leave tomorrow. Ask Georgia, she was here.

I glanced at my brother's girlfriend. Her arm was still pitched limp to the floor. She'd taken to rubbing her other hand along her shoulder as if she was trying to rub the feeling back into it. She avoided my gaze.

-She doesn't seem too eager to agree with you. I said.

He kept smiling and swung his head to look at either of us.

-Come on, tell her! You were right there, what was it, yesterday? Two day's ago? Asthma, that's it.

-It was about that, yeah. She said quietly.

I snorted.

-Fine, Caleb. I drove down because your girlfriend here told me it was, how'd you put it, trauma to your head that put you in here? And yeah, I don't see any bandages on your head, not a single scratch on that ugly face of yours. I can believe you even if you're keeping anything about that from me, no way for me not to, evidence is all here, so. She mentioned the lungs, but I'll just wait on Doctor Hudson to tell me exactly what's wrong there. My question is this. Why lie? I'd have come anyway. He's my blood. But why lie?

My brother sniffed and appeared unsure what to do. He crossed his arms but not in accusation, at me, or Georgia, but in pondering, as he was want to do whenever there was something broached that he wasn't informed upon. He was smart in that sense, and I'd always admired his reserve. If there were any argument that I found myself unprepared for, or at least unformed for, I would merely begin to shout down my opponent, and defend my position with passion, not cold fact. Caleb would retreat to the fold of his forearms, burying his chin into his chest, and he would scour every last piece

of literature he had ever read, every history book, every memory until he had found a suitable response. So it went for all things and I could see the churn of his brain from ten feet away, attempting to discern how best to answer me. I chortled quietly to myself. I had missed all of his tics, from this to how, ever since he had awoken up, he had been making circles in the air with his big toes—twenty big circles clockwise, twenty big circles counter-clockwise, ten tiny taps in the air to a rhythm only he could hear.

Georgia, however, was fiddling with the tongue of her belt.

-That was directed at you, honey. I said, careful to coat that final word with all the venom I could summon.

She did not react how I had wished. Her lips curled up into that sneer and she began to scatter her glances about the room as she had when I'd first woken up.

-Got you here, didn't it? That dead arm came to life and rose slowly. Its wrist was decorated with a watch that glowed dull in the unforgiving lights of the hospital room, a solid, purple bangle, and a collection of brass rings that were, as far as I could tell, individual guitar strings she had fashioned into some fifteen odd bracelets. The arm reached its apex and pointed directly at me. She quickly flicked her hand out and gestured across the room, swinging the freshly emboldened limb with aplomb.

Caleb sensed the tension between us and attempted to assuage it by farting out a harsh cough that I could only assume he meant to be a laugh.

A nurse, not the one who had led me to Caleb's room the night prior (she had the night shift as I recalled—yet, she wasn't Caleb's nurse at all—a shame, as I wanted to speak to her about what she had said to me, concerning that affinity she believed we shared), entered into the room and pulled a chart from its clip on the wall behind

Georgia's head. Her arrival startled all of us—Georgia almost speared the poor woman with the swath of her arm and had to adjust rather drastically to avoid slamming her nails into the nurse's neck, a movement that caused her to almost topple off her chair—but did what Caleb could not: prevent me from flinging myself from my sit and strangling Georgia Hunt.

-Hey... She read the name off the chart, Caleb Miller. My name is Sandra. How are we feeling today?

Sandra was short, black, and pregnant. Her nails were cropped close but they were each encrusted with octagonal jewels, most likely colored plastic, and her perfume (or was it her hairspray) smelled like shaved coconut. I considered all of these wins for myself. Anything to make Georgia more uncomfortable, and nothing made her squirm like pregnancy. I had never asked her about it. She adored children, or at least pretended to, yet when we found ourselves crushed close on the subway she would use me as a barrier between any woman, young or old, who seemed to be with child. I had joked, when I still made light with her, that it was responsibility she was afraid of—not the thought of carrying another life, but what she would have to do for it when it popped out, what she would have to give, and give up. I watched Sandra encircle the bed and pull the blinds, filling the room with the grey light that had been fighting all morning to enter the room. I heard the steel wheels of Georgia's seat screech and roll across the linoleum floor, distancing her from the nurse on the other side of Caleb's bed frame. Her glances stopped flitting about and focused squarely on the obvious bump pressing against Sandra's uniform.

-We are ready to leave, Sandra. Feeling fantastic. Caleb's voice strained somewhat to force this out and if someone did not know him as well as I did, they would view this outburst as a blatant lie.

-I'm sure you are, baby, she laughed, And Doctor Hudson agrees with you, surprisingly. That don't mean he don't want to keep you another night. Don't look at me like that, I'm on your side! Trust me, you don't want to go out there anyway. Everybody's gone crazy. Looking for bombs in every trashcan and every car parked longer than fifteen minutes. And while we're all doing that, they is thinking up another way to get us.

-They find anybody yet? Caleb asked.

-You ain't using this thing, are you? Sandra gestured toward the television with the clipboard, "Don't matter, just fear and sex on anyway. I saw this morning they found it was a van that did it. Someone drove a van into the garage. The bomb was in it. But they found the license plate or the ID number or something and they know where the van's from. A rental to one of those Middle Easterners. I can't remember his name right now but I'll keep my ears peeled and see if they mention it again, if you want me to.

-I'd appreciate that. Caleb said.

-You get your lunch?"

Georgia sat next to the bedside table containing the still full and now cold tray of food. Sandra saw this and grimaced.

-I'll see if I can't get you another, if your hungry. She said.

-Great. Caleb smiled at her.

Sandra flipped the clipboard underneath her arm and hung it back up on its hook, pausing to pick up the tray as she passed by Georgia. I caught a glimpse of her glaring at Georgia's back as she wrapped her fingers around the plastic. She left.

-See? Caleb said, What'd I say?

I smiled at him and lifted myself from the curve of my leather chair. My body ached and made sure to not allow me any respite from this knowledge. I dropped the sheaf of papers I had almost forgotten into the molded indentation of my weight slowly dissolving in the leather and I limped out of the room after Sandra.

The floor was blinding when I first exited the room. It had not dawned upon me that most of the running lights for the hallway had been off when I had arrived the night before. Where my footsteps had screamed out the night before, my very presence was an afterthought—a footnote to the grand plan of the respiratory ward. The hall was loud, so loud that I wondered how I had slept as deeply as I had for so long, or how I had carried on a conversation within the room without it being diluted by the constant whirl of voices, motion, and electricity that was sourced no where and every where at the same instant.

Patients were laid on rolling gurneys stranded with their legs cut out from beneath them outside of rooms already occupied. Most were connected to some breathing apparatus or another. Doctors (seemingly all middle aged, all male, all Caucasian, all handsome... it was truly ridiculous in its homogeneity) sporadically jumped from near-statuesque poses next to their patients—examining charts or pressing the cool halo of their stethoscope against a bared back, their minds oblivious to the world outside, their lone thoughts on the shuddering whoosh of air into their patient's lungs—to the half-

sprint of their path to the next abandoned bed flattened to a wall, to the next breath, the next heartbeat.

Unlike these men, the nurses (warming of the heart—men and women, black and whites and browns and yellows—a veritable United Nations of attendants) hummed about the hallway with a harmony of dynamism. Whether they stood still for a moment within the rooms they marched in and out of, I would never know, as all I could view was the constant blur of their robin's egg blue nurse's uniform as the ping-ponged from door to door.

I must have been invisible to them, so slow was my pace down the hall. I assumed I must have appeared absolutely bewildered by swirl of commotion, but I found its chaos rather calming. My right foot dragged slightly as I walked, drawing thin, black lines on the beige linoleum. It was not so much from any blunt injury Perch had suffered upon that leg but from a queer exhaustion that seemed to affect me in parts—the foot for one, but my shoulders as well, one tight to my neck, the other looser than it had ever been in recent memory. Of course there were the pointed stabs of deepened flesh, dug out by that shattered glass, and the long, shallower cuts that strung down my torso and thighs, it was not as if I was strong enough to put these from my mind, but the two most debilitating results of yesterday morning past was at present, the absolute enervation from these immutable pains, and in the future, what retribution I would have to defend myself from. For now I kept my thoughts far removed unmarked cars and police officers and men dressed in atramentous suits watching me as I walked down the sidewalk, far from knives and handguns concealed in trench coats, or poison slipped into coffee, or whatever else I could summon from the copious amounts of noir and exploitation films I had

viewed in my early twenties. I thought only of finding my brothers nurse and discovering if he was truly fit to leave. It was simple, yet it was perhaps all I could manage at that hour.

As I walked, I struggled to maintain a consistent gate, and I'm sure the swelling of my jaw had begun its certain ascent towards the immobilization of my entire face, I was the last thing on the mind of any of the doctors or nurses speeding about the floor. What little time their glances lingered upon my purpling bruises obviously failed to serve their curiosity with anything appetizing. Their minds and eyes were set on specifying their every movement to an economy of aid. It was simultaneously disheartening and soothing to be this obviously injured and this blatantly ignored.

I moved through the crowded hallway with relative ease, the mechanized workers of the hospital avoiding me with deftness, and, despite my awkward gimp's walk, I managed to catch up to Sandra at the administrative island for Caleb's floor. She leaned over the swinging saloon door and spoke to another nurse, an older woman with dyed crimson hair and a pair of glasses whose frames were hue-perfect with her loosely curled locks. Her hand was set into her side. I could tell she had been lithe and tiny once, before the child, and retained a peculiar thinness in legs and arms, as if her body had quite yet realized the transformation it needed to endure in order to care for the other being growing within.

As I closed the distance between us I noticed two anomalies on the respiratory hall. Tacked next to the elevator, both leaned like rested pitchforks against the wall, were two police officers. Standing to either side of the double doors, they carried on a conversation through the crowd of assorted hospital workers and myriad gurneyed

patients waiting for the elevator's arrival. They were of relatively normal height—Caleb would have towered over them—but each of them were blessed with the dedication to body-build during their off-hours, breaks from what I could only assume were posts such as this. They were identical, not just in uniform but in genetic make-up. Both were bulldogs: noses flattened and wide about their ugly faces, skin the same velvet-black, shoulders pinched to their chest and rotated inward from too many hours spent on a bench-press. Both drank from the same generic Styrofoam coffee cup they had culled from behind the nurse's station. I would not have been surprised if their consumption was synchronized in turn. Twin Berettas were tightly clasped to their hips. I recognized the handguns from a photograph Caleb had shown me in one of the books he'd been lent from the NYPL only a few years ago. I knew their caliber, their stopping power—I knew exactly what those bullets would do to the back of my head if I made any attempt at running.

I moved closer and closer to the nurse's station, my palms beginning to sweat. Uncontrollably, my limp became more pronounced. It was as if my very soul sought the release of capture, from not having to endure another panged minute fretting over who it would be that would grab the back of arm, sticking in my ear "Ms. Miller, please come with us,' before they clacked steel bracelets around my thin wrists. It was inevitable, my mind told me. Rather than Perch. Perhaps, my body believed, the sound of the locking doors of a police sedan would heal every pain that coursed through me now. I am not sure who it was within me, which Grace, that fought these urges, for it appeared each and every part of me cried to me to give myself up. But give myself up for what?—my champion inquired. It was an accident. Forensics could, and surely would, prove my

innocence. But what of the money?— a new Grace juttled in. Let us not forget, you're not wanted for murder alone. There's an envelope burning a hole through your trunk as you waste time tracking down a nurse. And to ask her what? Whether your brother was lying to you? There are more important things to concern your self with. But here lies your salvation, in that false concern for your brother—as if you truly care whether he lives or dies. He gave you up long ago, why are you still here? To show emotion you can't possibility know to be yours, is that it? You allowed a man to die just twenty-four hours ago. You left him clutching his intestines to himself on the floor of his office. What are you doing here? Are you still keeping up the pretense that you did not wish him dead? Let's not forget what you yourself have done.

Who are you? I screamed at these voices. You starving beasts, you pack of wolves. Is there not other flesh, other pain, other fears you can devour? When did I welcome you in? Is it you who hunts my memories? Or do you live in their absence, the ghosts of my sins?

The twins had yet to notice me. I began to look for exits. It was a futile endeavor—I could barely walk, how was I supposed to escape two NYPD officers in peak physical condition?—but nevertheless I continued to pray for the proximity of those four burning letters outlined by ivory. Perhaps, in the twisting quiet of an emergency stairwell I could find refuge from the confusion that ran rampant through my mind. Nearing Sandra, with the sound of whirring machines and shouted conversations increasing in volume with every minute I strayed outside of my brother's room, I allowed the vicious swirl of noise that engulfed the hallway to take me with it, hoping to silence the warring voices within. Slowly, my mind began to calm. I kept my gaze on

the officers but was resolved to eliminate any remaining insecurity from my mind. I had invited this chaos in for much too long. Leena's eyes and arching cheekbones floated into my thoughts. I wanted so desperately to call her yet reminded myself of my request of her, one that, hopefully, she had obliged. Despite my assurance, or perhaps it was ego, in my belief that, indeed, she had quietly left the house and driven far enough that no one, not Perch, not the police, not even I could find her, I still sought to have a simulacrum of certainty that she had followed my wishes. I reminded myself to call the house as soon as Caleb was discharged from the hospital. That would give her another day. There was the off chance that something at work would hold her up, or she would require some investigation about where best she could travel both comfortably and below the radar. I was willing to give her this time. My only hope was that when I phoned the only sound I would hear would be the repeating tone followed by the answering machine. I could not bring myself, for fear of igniting those voices into return, to even consider my response to the call picking up: the greeting not the saccharine drip of my Leena's words, but gruff and unknown and murderous—the sound of ends.

I reached the nurse's station. A quick grimace rippled across Sandra's face as she saw me approach. I couldn't tell if it was maternally motivated or devised in spite.

-Hi. Excuse me. Sandra? I said.

-Yes ma'am. Can I help you?

-I need to ask you a question.

-Who are you again?

-I'm sorry, rude of me. I'm Grace Miller. Caleb Miller's sister. You just left our room—

-Yeah, no, I remember you. Didn't know your connection. You're not on the contact list. She said, pushing up from her lean, slowly and with great effort. Red with the glasses blinked at me.

-I'm not surprised.

-Oh? She raised an eyebrow.

-It's not important.

-And it's none of my business. What'd you need? She asked.

-My brother. He told me Doctor Hudson said that asthma would be the most of his worries right now. And that he'd be at higher risk of respiratory cancers.

-Right? Her eyebrow hadn't lowered.

-Is that true? Is that it?

She looked at Red, who turned away and began to make notes on some paper that were either quite important and worthy of her time, or diversions to save her from having to join the conversation.

-After doing a few tests, yes, that's all we could find wrong with him. He's lucky really. Could've been much worse. A woman in... I won't bother you with that. I didn't lie to your brother, and definitely not to you. He'll be free to leave tomorrow. We just want to keep him here for the night. Doctor Hudson does at least.

-What does that mean? I demanded.

The police officers turned their heads at the raising of my voice. They took sips of their coffee in unison. I could not read their faces enough to tell if they were merely intrigued by the new addition to the cacophony or they recognized my face, reminisced from the wanted wall of their station. Perhaps it was the bruises or the injured gait I had

foolishly displayed so blatantly. The twin closer to me glanced at his brother and gestured with his head, a single, quick, devastating motion, for him to look at me. The second twin peered over the lip of his Styrofoam cup as he took a long draw of hot liquid down his throat. Then, through the grace of a god I had not come to know yet, he lowered the coffee cup and revealed a wide, leering grin. His eyes drifted down the length of my torso to the base of my feet, letting his gaze stop at every mound of breast, every curve of ass, every plump line of thigh. A silent relief enveloped me.

I returned to Sandra. She appeared to be immutably confused. It was if my question had emitted as an exhalation of sighs instead of words, or if what I had said was in a language that she could not place, not simply one that she could not understand, but one she had never even heard before. I raised my eyebrows at her, hoping to incite an answer. The grimace had returned to her face.

-Excuse me. This little guy. What did you say? She placed both hands on her hips and breathed deeply, her mind some place with absolute no connection to my problems. I didn't blame her.

-What does that mean, I said, what does it mean Doctor Hudson *does at least?*

She rubbed her hand across the bow of her belly. Back up and back down. I fought quite hard to keep from getting too impatient.

-You think something different? I pried.

-Well no one saw it but Doctor Hudson.

-The sooner you tell me the sooner I'll let you get back to work. I'm his sister.
Please.

Another deep breath, her lips shined with gloss stuck out and puckered. I let her calm down. Red shot judging glares through her glass frames. Sandra took her hands off her stomach and pressed them both to the middle of her sternum and took one more inhalation of the stale hospital air.

-I'm sorry, second trimester. They'd like me to take off, especially now, but I don't have anything to do at home. Can't stay away. So. I only heard this from Doctor Hudson, and him alone. That's it. The tests we ran were mostly related to his cardiovascular, respiratory, pulmonary systems, as we are doing for everyone that was near the bombing. We did those for your brother, course. But Doctor Hudson wanted a CT scan done. When I asked him the reason—I don't you thinking this is normal, Doctor Hudson and I went to high school together in the Bronx—he told me he'd been with your brother in his room when all of sudden he'd started reciting some story. First part of it, the doctor told me, had to do with the bombing, what he was doing during it. Nothing out of the ordinary, although the doctor hadn't asked him about the bombing since the morning, but, as your brother got going, Doctor Hudson realized he wasn't talking about the bombing no more. He was telling a story. A story about a little boy and his brothers and an insane asylum. And it was vivid, Doctor Hudson told me. This wasn't some random thing he was making up out of his own. Now, I ain't saying your brother isn't capable of that, he at once just wasn't in any state to be talking that much, what with all that dust and smoke still in his lungs and at another he was throwing in details that nobody could make up that quick. And then he stopped, just like that, middle of the story. The doctor asked him about it and Caleb couldn't remember saying it. Nothings come back yet from the scan, and what few examinations we could do have come up empty

handed. He hasn't done it again. I told Doctor Hudson he was probably exhausted and just started spouting off the last thing that was in his head before the bombing. I've heard of it before. People getting trapped in that moment of peace before some terrible event. It's the only memory they believe in anymore—everything after is false to them. Maybe it was that and maybe he was just tired. I'm not in the right place to make that call. I wasn't there. Shit, Doctor Hudson hasn't been home for almost four days now, maybe even he isn't in the right place. You shouldn't worry. We'll have the scans back either today or tomorrow, another day past tomorrow, if that, and we can call him back in. He's in no danger. You should just take him home and give him some rest and yeah if he starts talking like that to you then we'll be here for you to contact. I didn't know you were his sister. I would've told you, not have you come follow after me. Then again, there isn't anything to worry over. Maybe its better to just forget about it and we'll give you a ring if we find anything. That's it.

The manuscript lay on a leather chair across from my brother. Was it purely coincidence? A little boy, an insane asylum? The man had found him as well, or chanced upon Caleb just days before. My mind shouted at me: *it could not have been chance!* And yet there was no logical design behind it. What good would it do to read the same story to two siblings, three days apart, and not finish it each time? Was he interrupted by the blast? Was that shockwave of bombarding sound and smoke what stopped him short, like my nurse had so quietly disturbed his tale just last night? Along with my memory seemed to be slipping my sanity. If there were to be any answers they would lie in those pages. If not there, they would be in a hotel room at the Plaza. First, however, Caleb would need to be questioned. He would try to keep it from me but I would force it from

him. I would need him alone, too. I could only hope Georgia would depart as she had the night before. I'm sure I could have her removed. Careful though. I needed to be wary not to offend my brother too drastically or he wouldn't tell me a thing and I would never know. What was he up to? What was his game? If nothing less, the enigma of this man would keep me from obsessing over just where I would be attacked, just when Perch, or the police, would come looking for me, and what would come from either.

-Mrs. Miller? Sandra peered at me.

-Sorry, I was just thinking. I shook my head, sending blasts of pain through my jaw, and it's Miss Miller. Or Grace. Grace is fine.

-You see I didn't want to worry you.

-No, its okay. I'm glad you told me. I said.

-What would you like me to do? She asked, Can I get you anything?

-Thank you, but I think it'll make sense a little farther from now, you know? And no, I'm fine. I think you're right.

-Which part is right?

I smiled reassuringly at her.

-Forgetting.

I turned and walked back to Caleb's room. The police officers were gone.

What was with the nurses in this hospital?

•

-Where'd you go? Georgia was standing now and placing a tray of hot food (now Caleb's second lunch) onto my brother's lap. She didn't face me but threw the query over her shoulder as if she did not care much for my answer but a merely voiced it to appease some god of courtesy, or perhaps simply to show to her boyfriend that there was no bad blood that ran between the two women.

-Where do you think? I just couldn't be kind to her, could I?

-She told you the same thing didn't she? Caleb asked as Georgia placed napkins about his neck.

I trudged over to my chair. I stopped and took in the seat. The manuscript sat where I had left it. Was Caleb watching me? Did he know what halted me? Had he seen these papers before? I carefully picked them up and used my free arm to lower my weight back into the clutch of leather. My body cried out for but a moment before sighing in gratitude.

-Yeah, Caleb. You're leaving tomorrow.

He inhaled a bite of mashed potatoes and grinned at me, showing me the half-masticated vegetable oozing through his teeth. I smiled at him.

-Jesus, Cal. Georgia said as a chunkier piece of potato crawled out from Caleb's mouth and plopped back onto the plastic tray, You're a child sometimes, you know that?

-Hey Grace, you can see our new place tomorrow. I've been doing pretty well, still on nights, even more so now, but George's been working at a record label as a secretary. You see her behind a desk? He continued to stuff food in his mouth as he spoke, mixing his diction with grunts and guttural swallows.

-Never. I said, catching Georgia's eye line. She knew what my gaze was asking: where do you go during the day?

-Things are different now, Grace. Georgia said, wiping Caleb's mouth.

-I'm aware. You sold the old apartment then?

Caleb nodded his head at the same time he was attempting to force down a spoonful of corn. He choked and spit out the yellow grain. He was a child. She was dead on about that. But he was mine.

-I'm okay! He laughed, Yeah, it was weird. Moving out. You should have been there.

-I should have, shouldn't I? *Why won't you tell me about the man in the suit? You met him too.*

-Yeah, Grace, you should have. Georgia snorted at me.

-I didn't—he seemed hurt—you know, mean it like that. I just meant it was weird. I'm sorry for selling it.

-It's just an apartment, Caleb. I'm much happier you're okay right now. I couldn't give a shit about that place.

I began to thumb through the manuscript. It had seemingly been written in one sitting, and the lack of paragraphs made for extreme difficulty in finding the point at which he had stopped reading. Collateral damage was done by the pages being mixed together in no particular order after about the fifteenth page, done either by my hand or by the man himself. I needed to ask Caleb if he had heard more than I had, and where, exactly, the story had been interrupted.

-You leaving again tonight, George? I used her nickname (I'd never thought much of it but she enjoyed the sexual ambiguity) in an attempt to assuage her into feeling comfortable leaving my brother alone with me, where yes, I could disparage her to my heart's desire, and most likely would have were it not for more pressing matters.

-I thought we would both go back to the apartment. She said.

-Really? Do you think Caleb will be fine without one of us here?

-Grace... He started

-He's a hell of a lot better at taking care of himself than you were of him, so yeah, I do.

I bristled at this and unconsciously bared my teeth. I hoped that my lipstick was still smeared across my incisors.

-I think I'll stay here for the night. I said, It only makes sense. My car's already racked up the twenty-four plus fee, and you know, I've actually started to enjoy my little seat here.

With that I closed my eyes, as if to cement my decision. Neither attempted to continue the conversation. They were silent for some time, or at least spoke in hushed whispers too low for me to discern. With time, I stopped listening for that moment when Georgia would depart and discovered myself falling asleep once again.

It was dusk by the time I awoke. Georgia had disappeared. I did a quick reconnaissance of the room yet couldn't find her coat, nor any other item that would belie her presence. The lights of the room had been dimmed. What little of sunset still imbrued the sky slipped through the slivers between the drapes, patterning prison bars along the floor. A spotlight coned over Caleb, whose wide feet poked out from beneath

the cotton blanket despite the fact that he was sitting straight up. Dwarfed in his hands was a thick sheaf of papers.

-What are you doing with those? I said.

I hurried to rise from my seat. My legs were not prepared for this drastic a movement and collapsed beneath me. My wrist jammed and a bullet shot up the nerves of my arm. I let out a moan. Covering my mouth, I curled into a fetal position before making an attempt at trying to stand up,

-Grace! Caleb threw the blanket off him and swung his legs off of the bed. The coverlet rippled in the air for a moment, blocking out the sunlight before crumpling in a heap beside me. He dropped the pages along the linoleum where they separated and slid about. Sheets floated beneath the bed, under the gap between the floor and the closet door, under the radiator. I watched them, marking where each and every one of them fell and rested and hid, to be sure that nothing in the story was lost. Agile, Caleb ran to my side, crashing to a kneel and taking me up in his arms. It was the first time I had felt his touch in almost three years. I had forgotten the tightness of the muscles in his shoulders, how jagged his biceps were, how cavernous his chest was, how unfathomably warm he always was, and how despite how sharp every corner of him seemed to be, how perfectly comfortable I felt, how I had always felt, whenever I'd let down my guard and allowed him to hold me. He swallowed my frame into himself. All pain died in an instant and I was left immutably joyful. And in a second the pain returned, leaving no trace of that happiness, as if it had never been.

-I'm sorry, I said, Tripped. I'm okay.

-Oh yeah, I believe you Grace. It's been a while but I still know when you're lying to me.

-Damn it. Worth a try. I flinched as I pressed my hands to the floor, removing myself from his clutch. His eyes sunk as if I had hit him. I saw him begin to chew on his lower lip. He folded from his kneel and sat leaning against the plastic frame of his bed. He wrapped his forearms around his knees and pulled them to his chest. I wanted to laugh but was not sure how my body would take it—all he needed to do was stick his thumb in his mouth and he would have been four-years-old again. I put my weight on my hands, ignoring the screams of my wrist and I let my legs relax and slunk them beneath my brother's tented knees.

-So where's Georgia? I asked, as nonchalantly as I could.

-She's home, He looked at my face, running his eyes over my bruises, You want to tell me?

-I really don't.

-I figured.

-It's not that. I sighed, I want to. It's...

I trailed off, watching the rows of sunlight retract closer and closer to the window. I needed to protect him for just another day or two longer. Until I left the city. Then I could tell him. I had not made the cleanest escape, which was certain. But I expected that I had about three days on any pursuit. No one at Perch's office knew anything about Caleb nor did anyone but Perch (I could only assume this really) know anything about where I actually lived, or whom I lived with. I'm sure the police would make the quickest headway into finding me, but if they did I could hope that Leena had

disappeared before they arrived to question her on my whereabouts, and that Caleb, or even Georgia, would persuade any officers that subsequently found their apartment that I had not contacted them, nor had I come to visit Caleb at the hospital, and that they had not had contact with Grace Miller for quite some time and they would request that any police investigation remain clear of their personal affairs—they had, after all, endured both an obviously traumatic event and a very near tragedy. I could hope at least, that this would be the case.

My wandering stare fell to the pages. They appeared so strange to me. I had been putting such regard, such respect on their contents, such reverence for the story printed out on their possibility that it had been inconceivable to think of them as so easily disposable. It would not take me more than five minutes to collect all of the sheets from the floor and place them in the trash and not think another single thought about their strange occurrence in my life. How simple it would be, my concerns being lessened with the crackle of the pages hitting the bottom of the plastic bag filling the bin next to Caleb's bed. It would have been, and as I looked them, I truly believed that I could have done it had I not awoken to Caleb reading the manuscript. He had complicated so much already. The entirety of the past 48 hours were nothing if not caused solely by his being in the most unlucky place in the United States at the most luckless time. Yet, a quiet voice reminded me that if he was not there on that day, at that hour, it would have been ten years from now, and it would have happened again. It was inescapable, as if it had always happened, and always would happen. The same violence, in no unique or surprising manner, to me or to seven or to thousands—if not now, then when? These pages were only a result of that inescapability. I could forget them, but they would

return. I looked at my brother. His gaze had been lingering on the scattered manuscript as well and he sensed my head's movement and followed it up, until our eyes met.

-I wouldn't have been there, He said quietly, if it hadn't been for him.

-Martin? I said, admitting a fact unconsciously known since the moment the story began for me.

-I'm sure of it. I noticed him following me about a week ago. It wasn't much—a few coincidences at first, he was behind me at a Metro card machine once, he walked by a coffee shop I was at on Broadway, he got into a cab across the street from me—but you forget those things pretty easily. I've had those people before, and I'm sure you did too. But they're always around because of some fate of direction. You just end up going the same places as others.

-That's very sad. I said.

-It is. There's nothing new and anything that is someone's already done it before—you're just repeating. And you might argue, well yeah, but it's never been you doing it before, but I disagree.

-You do?

-Of course. You being any different doesn't change a thing if the action is the same.

-You were never this morbid.

-It's a recent development.

-Well, not according to you.

-I guess not. He laughed. The sound ruffled the blinds, shimmering the strips of sunset.

-You've been keeping up with your library membership I can tell.

-Not as much as I'd like.

“__”

“__”

-You were talking about where you saw him. I spoke up.

-Sorry. So. There were those small moments but I began to notice more and more, as the week progressed, that there wasn't any pattern. There wasn't any direction. We weren't fated, like I said. It wasn't just Manhattan. Georgia took me to a concert in Brooklyn, beginning of last week. Afterwards we took the subway back to the island and I'd been having a craving for something sweet all night and I've done fairly well recently and since the shows were just getting out I told her we'd be tourists and grab something at Sardi's and make fun of all the fat cats in suits and I'd pay for everything. As we sit down I see him. I couldn't tell if he'd followed us in or been there waiting for hours for us to arrive just by looking at him, but Grace, I swear to God, I knew it had to be the latter. He'd already had two small bowls of what looked like ice cream with caramel sauce poured over it and when I looked at him he looked right back. After a moment he called a waiter and ordered another. I ignored him for most of the night, Georgia and I had been having a good time and I didn't want to ruin it or make her worry, but ever so often I'd glance up and he'd be watching, scooping hills of caramel drenched ice cream into his fat mouth. He was about twenty feet away but through his glasses he looked like he was about to cry. The night went on, Georgia had some drinks and I kept waiting for him to leave. But he didn't. He kept ordering bowl after bowl of that ice cream. By the time I paid the check he must have gone through fifteen or so. He watched us leave and I

put Georgia in a cab—she was, well, you know—but I let her lay out in the back seat and even though it was freezing I stood outside the cab and told the driver not to worry about the meter running and waited for what must have been ten minutes for him to come out, so, I could confront him, ask him politely why I kept seeing him. But I thought, as I waited, there was a better question after all. I couldn't blame him for having the same direction, he can't fight fate as much I can't so I couldn't legitimately be angry at him for being in the same place. It was his concern for me. All of those moments that I had forgotten, all those times I'd seen him recently, they all returned and they all brought one constant with them—never, in any instant, did his attention, or even his stare, stray from where I was. If I could just find out why he was so interested in me, I could go about my business. But I waited and he didn't come out and I got scared. So I left.

-You got scared? I asked. Caleb had been afraid of few things in his life. None of these fears, that I could remember, had extended beyond his childhood.

-Worried. I got worried. I don't deal with most agreeable individuals all the time, but I'm sure that's the same for the next person. I got worried some one was having me followed.

-Why would care about that? What are you doing? I asked. *Aren't you quick to judge Ms. Miller?* Another voice.

-You're never worried about being followed? (*touché, brother*) That's why I left. Georgia had passed out already so I didn't have to bother thinking about whether not she was spooked by how I was acting. He didn't appear until the morning of the day. I had a meeting in Battery Park but I would have been back uptown by the bombing if it wasn't for him. He was sitting in the Southbound 2 when I entered the Metro. I saw him.

Through the window. The train had arrived maybe a second before I walked down the stairs. I could still hear the air rushing, like a ghost of its movement, even though it was stopped but another train, the same one, but on another plane, in another world had kept going. Weird I know but I think it was that same train. The same train, but one without me on it. He would have passed and I never would have seen him. I can still hear it, even now. Ever since the bombing, it hasn't been quiet. I haven't told Doctor Hudson, or any of the nurses.

-Georgia? I asked. He shook his head.

-The trains still going, constant reminder.

-Of what?

He shrugged.

-So he was there.

-Yeah. Same black suit he'd been wearing every other time I saw him. Same glasses. Except for the pages everything was exactly the same.

-These? I nodded at the manuscript.

-I'm sure of it. I didn't waste a second. I made sure I got on and I sat directly across from him. The train wasn't too crowded so it wasn't like either of us could miss the other. He kept his head down—he kept flipping through the pages—but I knew that he knew that I was there. He probably knew anyway. That's was why he was there wasn't it? That's why he came to you too. It's why you have the pages now, isn't it?

He waited for an answer. I stared at him for some time. It was peculiar. Although we had been speaking for some time now it had only just occurred to me that perhaps for all of my thoughts earlier concerning the pages I had never assumed that

believed anything less of their importance—it was a certainty that something, something intrinsic to my very being, lay in discovering just who this Martin Haversham was, and why he had approached my brother and I. Yet, listening to my brother speak now, I considered the situation in a far more cynical mode. Caleb had recently received some sort of brain trauma, or could have—I would have to wait for the results of the CT scan. This Martin Haversham could just as easily have spent time in the same insane asylum he wrote about. In fact, who's to say that Martin Haversham existed at all? Couldn't this Martin be the concoction of one Jonathon Haversham? It was very possible that the same story that was being told to us was actually the invention of the subject himself. It would certainly explain the egregious amount of time spent building up to the meeting with his fictional self, as well as the hero worship evident in the possibly equally fictional brother.

I began to wonder if Caleb had met this man far prior to this tale he told me now. Was this all Georgia's idea? A way for them to extract more money from me? It seemed impossible for Caleb to concoct a venture such as this, but it was not altogether uncommon for Georgia to come up with elaborate schemes, especially if they involved a monetary return on her end. She would also have the connections to actors. But would she have access to as good an actor as this? To pull off Martin Haversham? I've never prided myself on being a critic of much of anything aesthetic, much less performance, but I had been convinced. I obviously still couldn't fully trust my brother yet four hours ago I had been fully prepared to forget that I was being hunted for murder and theft and God knows what else they would try and pin on me, all in order to discover just what the importance of these pages was for me. I decided Caleb would never go along with anything of that nature. This also, I supposed, meant that I believed that Georgia would

never conceive of the like either but I also decided to reserve judgment on that until a later time.

Caleb's belief had always been staggering. In me, in other people, in good in general. I had been envious of him for so long. Yet now, when I could finally have the chance to share in that feeling, why did I falter? A pain began to arise, a pain I remembered only in glimmers and thin shadows. I stopped the onslaught of debate in my brain in an instant and thought of nothing but keeping my eyes locked on my brother, and allowing his words to flow through me like water.

I nodded at Caleb. He smiled, but only with one side of his mouth.

-So I say to him: My name is Caleb Miller, sir. I've noticed you've been following me around recently. Is it alright if I ask you why exactly you're so interested in me?—

-You gave him your name? Are you fucking stupid? And you asked him why he was 'interested in you?' Are you five? An ache in my jaw began to spread. I gritted my teeth and fought to quiet my thoughts.

-Thanks Grace. No. I thought it would be smart to placate him a bit for I interrogated him. Doesn't hurt to be polite once and awhile. You should try it.

I groaned. Not at his answer— the pain was spreading to my neck. I knew it had happened before, this hurt, but it pained more to try to remember.

-One day. Anyway. He sits there. Doesn't even look at me. I get a bit more direct, if that makes you proud. I say: Not too interested anymore, what happened? Good right? Doesn't work. He just keeps on flipping through the pages. I'm starting to

get angry, and you know I don't get angry, but I am—I was cordial to him, it's only natural I should get a polite response in turn.

-And? I asked. My neck pinched as the muscles spasmed. I wished he would finish the story.

-No answer. Of course. I get up and grab the pages from him. That's how I recognized them sitting on the chair. I mean, yeah, its not often I see you with anything beyond a paper but even then I thought you just bought the Times to make me read it.

-My secret's out. What'd he do?

-Got his attention. Raised those eyes and it was the same as at Sardi's. They were filled to the brim. I felt awful and it didn't take me long but I handed the pages back to him. He thanked me. First words he said. 'Thank you, Caleb.' I would've been freaked if I hadn't remembered I'd told my name already. But it still didn't sit right. It was too natural, the way he said it, like he'd said it before.

Caleb turned his body to face me, throwing his legs over mine and pushing them past where I sat. His face was just a matter of feet from my own.

-And that's it. He said.

-That's it? I asked, incredulous.

-That's all he said. He gets out at the next stop. Of course I follow him. And he's out there on the street and he's heading to the Trade Center, so. I run to catch up with him and this time I grab his suit coat and I hold on and I shake him up. 'Why are you following me? What's wrong with you?' I yell at him. He starts crying and he's making a scene. I realize it's not the ideal situation for me to be in. I could see what everyone that had been walking, and was now stopping, was seeing when they looked at

us. Six-five black guy in jeans, a shitty coat, and a baseball cap shaking a five-seven fat crying white guy in a suit in the Financial District. I mean, *I* would have tried to arrest me! So I grab him and stand him up and dust him off. He's still weeping but I'm smiling so the other white guys remember their jobs and move along. I drag him over to the nearest bench I could find—just so happened to be the nearest bench to the blast—and I sit him down on it. I wait until he stops with the waterworks and then I say, quietly: 'Please, I need you to tell me why you've been following me. If you haven't been, and this is all a coincidence, then tell me.' And Grace, I thought about telling him all about my fate theories, directions, inevitability hypotheses, repetition philosophies—all of it. I saw the way he looked and I knew he wouldn't hear a word I said. But I knew at the same time if I didn't threaten him, I'd never find out a thing. I told him that if it was a coincidence, if he hadn't been following me, I'd let him go, off the hook, no more questions asked. But if I ever saw him again, even just saw him in a crowd, he wouldn't enjoy the consequences. I told him that he wasn't interested in me, and he wasn't following me, and if he saw me out, or in the subway, or at dinner, before I saw him he'd do best to run.

-You sound like me. I said. He scowled.

-Not a compliment when it comes to that. But I had to. And it worked. In the only way it could have, I suppose.

-What do you mean?

-Well he just started reading the pages. Didn't give a word of introduction. Just started to reading. Got pretty far, too. About to where these pages end.

-What? The pain started to rise, scaling the nape of my neck like a spider.

- The pages you brought with you. I don't know whether he gave them to you, or you stole them but it's odd—the last of your pages is exactly the last thing I remember him saying before the blast hit, give or take one or two sentences, which I was clearing up before you tripped here.

- Caleb, where did the story end? Where did he stop talking? When did bomb go off?

- Jonathon's letter. He was just starting to read about Jonathon's letter.

I felt nauseous. I remembered that I hadn't eaten all day but that didn't halt the putrid bile that forced its way up my esophagus.

-Grace? He asked. He began to reach for me but I evaded his touch, crawling to the closest trashcan and spilling the contents of my stomach into its welcoming basin. Caleb followed me over and held my clothes out of the way and pulled some of my hair back that wasn't already saturated with puke. The pain left me with each expulsion, as if it was solid and tangible and it could be seen clear in the blood intermingled with sand-hued throw-up that swam at the bottom of the trashcan. When it had left me, I sat down next to Caleb's bed and rested my face against the side of his mattress, keeping one hand on the bin just to be safe. Caleb stood over me. The sun had finally disappeared below the horizon and the empty glow of the hospital lights filled the room. Despite this harsh illumination, I could barely make him out, my eyes straining even to squint at him.

-Jesus Christ, Grace. Is that blood?

-Is it red?

-Yeah its... Damn it, Grace!

-Little joke.

-There's nothing funny about that. What happened?

-Caleb?

-What? He was quieter. I heard fear in my brother's voice for the first time in my entire life.

-That last page.

-What about it?

-Same for me. That's where he stopped for me too. A nurse came up and interrupted him. It wasn't even his choice. Same time. Same part of the story.

He was silent now. I closed my eyes. My throat was acidic and every part of me ached but I smiled and I knew he could see that.

-What should we do? He asked finally.

-We get you out of here to start. And then we go to the Plaza. Together. When you're feeling better.

-I feel great, it's...

-When we're both better then.

-Why the Plaza?

-It's where he told me to find him.

-Okay. He paused, long enough for me to forget that I was still awake, but Grace?

-Yeah.

-You need to tell me what happened to you.

I didn't respond and he did not press the subject. In that all-dark beneath the drape of my eyelids I found sleep instantly. At one point in the night, I thought I awoke to my brother lifting me like a small child and placing me in the leather chair, but by the

time the dawn began to pattern the floor once again—and my dreams had all become shadows and fog— I had forgotten it entirely.

•

Caleb and Georgia's apartment was considerably larger than the one I had rented in Brooklyn. They had moved to Chelsea and somehow been able to fund two bedrooms, two bathrooms, and separate room that Georgia was utilizing as a makeshift storage space but was itself more spacious than any other area of the house. Her things, some that I recognized—a ceramic penguin, a Tibetan tapestry, her collection of erotic photography, there were numerous others—were spread wantonly throughout this space. There was no motivation to their position and there seemed to be no plan for their movement to another room at any point in the near future. There was a long green sofa that was in surprisingly good shape for its age—Caleb said he had bought it from an elderly man down the street who had lost his wife to cancer, and was now selling his apartment to find a smaller place that easier to handle. On the sofa were three pillows designed for king size beds but were being used as decorations. I didn't feel the need to correct either of the tenants on their faux pas. There was a television opposite the couch. It was rather small considering the rent that I could only imagine Caleb had to pay for himself, from a wage that I could only

assume was far more substantial than when we had lived together. A VCR was attached but I had a difficult time locating a single cassette in the apartment. I gave up after a largely half-hearted search and left the machine's presence up to an explanation involving copious amounts of rentals.

The corner nearest the window overlooking a bodega, two coffee shops, and a Pakistani run electronic store across the street was nearly blocked completely by several stacked cardboard boxes all labeled 'Hunt,' and a gargantuan A/C unit. There were no curtains for the windows, not entirely unfortunate as the room itself devoured whatever luminance dared to sneak in, whether it was from the city outside or the tungsten bulbs hanging in the adjacent kitchen. So much so that even standing in the room at noon with every light on in the house would still leave its inhabitant's pupils widening as far they could dilate in order to gain some sort of semblance of vision. The other corner was reserved for a collapsed tower of books that were all lent out to 'Cal Miller,' a change that had somehow let go unnoticed for the full length of our time living together in Brooklyn. A majority of these books were the excessively elaborate tomes that I had always seen him involved in, but he had interspersed an impressive number of practical application manuals—mostly concerning business ventures deemed sound by the authors and brightly bound paperbacks concerning investment banking with middle-aged white men in designer suits with at least a palm full of pomade sleeked through their thinning hair, gracing the cover, some with merely a smile, others courageous enough to proffer a thumbs up, all of whom looked as if they spent their weeks playing house in penthouses on the upper-east side and their weekends attending parties upward of 85th where girls like Georgia Hunt performed whatever sexual act these men could think up, or afford.

Caleb had never shown any interest in being taught how to succeed in any sort of profession, which made me believe that perhaps these books were lent out to ‘Cal’ Miller after much cajoling by his significant other. There was an unremarkable orange blanket laying on the couch when I arrived that I could only assume was placed there by Georgia under the pretenses of my residing in their storage room, one that Caleb was quick to snatch up and bring into their guest room.

The rest of the apartment was undecorated and oddly devoid of ownership by either my brother or Georgia. The hallway walls were adorned only with the cascade of dull illumination from the single bulb lighting the passage. There were no paintings, or even photographs beyond those that hid face to face in Georgia’s hardcover collections. They had inhabited the space for little over a year yet I could have been convinced they purchased the apartment a week before I arrived. The guest room as understandably bare then. I was pleased with this. It was far less disconcerting that the thought of having to sleep beside several framed pictures of my brother and my ex-girlfriend in various states of embrace at all of destinations I had refused to visit with them. My bedroom was Spartan—a mattress atop a brass bed frame, no sheets, no duvet, no pillows (Caleb would end up bringing in the garish decorations from the storage area), there were no windows either, and no clothes or hangers inhabiting the skinny closet space. A wooden bed table with a single accountant’s lamp adorning it was placed between the frame and the wall. I was perfectly content.

Upon entering, I placed my bag on the edge of the bed and unpacked a change of clothes and laid it out neatly upon the bed and replaced its space within the bag with the outfit I had been wearing since arriving at the hospital. The apartment was poorly heated

so I did not last long in that undress. There was a bathroom connected to the room with a lock that did not appear interested in being useful so I left the door open. There was nothing in the medicine cabinet and there were toothpaste stains along the basin of the sink, years older than Caleb and Georgia's arrival. The floor, like the sink, had not been cleaned for some time. I tip toed across the few feet leading to the bath, carefully spirals of long hair—I could only assume that this was the room used for Georgia's follicle transformation—and stepped gingerly into the rust tinged porcelain.

I took a shower lasting almost an hour. I was still drowsy from the night prior and although I felt much better than I had in days, there was still the lingering throb of exhaustion wed with acute savagery invested in my countenance. Laying down into the curve of the tub, the fall of water enveloped me. I was convinced that if I stayed in this repose for the right amount of time then the water could do more than cleanse me of the physical remains of the past few days' events; that stream of heat could burn out every memory until I was left utterly clean. By the time the hot water ran out and my body began to shiver, I was still waiting.

I dried myself off and wasted no time in getting dressed. Caleb had packed the pages of the manuscript into my bag. I removed them and found that he had taken the time to put them all in order. Below the manuscript was a thick manila envelope. I took it out and observed its shape and weight. Caleb had undoubtedly become aware of its presence when he placed the manuscript in my bag. Yet he had made no mention of it this morning, or when I'd parked the car down the block, or as he'd given me a tour of the house. He couldn't have been as daft as to not recognize the bulky rectangular stack that dragged the envelope earthward. It was unlike my brother to not bring it up.

Perhaps after our conversation the previous night he had begun to finally trust in my judgment, to allow me my secrets, all in the name of protecting him. Perhaps I had begun to tear him away from Georgia, toward the only other human he could truly trust. Perhaps we had become what I had always hoped we would be, what the nurse who had handed me that strange, wondrous, impossible being had told me we were all along. Perhaps it was just the two of us now. I slid the envelope into the breast pocket of my jacket and left the guest room.

The apartment was quiet. I made my way into the kitchen and searched for some sort of string to tie the manuscript into a roll. The drawers were as empty as I had expected them to be but I succeeded in finding a rubber band hiding in the back of one of the cabinets closer to the dishwasher, most likely forgotten by the previous tenants. I tightened the pages into a roll and ran the band about the twirled papers. I exited the kitchen, heading towards Caleb and Georgia's room.

He was asleep when I walked in. I thought it amusing that even in his own home he couldn't figure out how to purchase a bed large enough for him to fit in. His legs splayed out from beneath the covers. One hand lay across his forehead as if he was an actress fainting in sight of some horrific monster. The other struck out from his body and draped his hand over the edge of the bed. His mouth was open and he was snoring.

I was relieved to find the master bedroom as oddly hollow as the guest room. There was a desk along the wall with sparse adornment of necessary lamps and scattered books. There was a mammoth antique dresser that overtook much of the room beyond the bed. I sat in the desk chair and rapped my knuckles along the grain of the wood. Caleb stirred.

-I'm supposed to be resting, you know? He groaned.

-Where's George? She wasn't here when we got in and she's not here now.

-Working. I told you she was a secretary.

-At a record label, got it. When's she get home? I pressed.

-Around six or so. Why?

-I want to go to the Plaza today.

Caleb rolled over and faced me, propping himself up on his elbow.

-You think you're up for it? He said.

-You think you're up for it? I responded.

-Fine, let me get dressed and write a note for Grace telling her where we went and we can go.

-No note.

-She'll freak if we're gone and I don't tell her where we went.

-Make something up.

-I'm going to have to tell her sometime, He frowned, what's wrong with telling her?

-Because it's family business. I spat out.

-I think we need a few more people in our family for you to make that a reason, so. I'm going to tell her.

I crossed my legs in impatience. There was the slim chance that Georgia would call the police if she found out there had been someone stalking Caleb. If this happened and suddenly either Caleb or I had to answer to an officer concerning Martin Haversham,

whoever it was would surely require my information. This information would undoubtedly lead to my arrest.

-Grace? Is that all right? He moved his legs out from underneath the sheets and stood up. He was not Caleb. He wore only a pair of pale blue boxers. His body gaunt, his features skeletal, he walked stiffly and stood behind me and despite him leaving my vision I could not erase the image of my brother who was not my brother looking as if he had been drained of every ounce of life that once coursed within him. Was I so consumed with my own injuries that I had not noticed how my brother had changed in the three years I had seen him? I thought back to the hospital, only the day before, and yes, there it was, as if my amnesia was non-existent, and I could clearly view my brother as he had always been as long as I had known—the powerful man-child, not this wasted specter.

I could hear him pick up a pen. He began to scribble what I could only assume was a letter to Grace explaining where we were venturing. When he finished he left the letter inked and branded on the table and walked slowly over to the dresser where I heard him rummaging through layers of clothes. He returned to my view fully dressed and he crouched down and he stared into my eyes with the pure blue of his own, blue that if just a single shade lighter would make anyone believe he was insane. His cheeks were sunken and if I had not been beaten a few days previously I would have admitted he looked worse than even I. He was old. He was no longer a child. I had never known this Caleb. I had kept other Caleb, young Caleb for so long that I hadn't imagined he could ever have become the man he was now. I began to cry.

-I'm ready to go. He said, not reaching out to comfort me.

I wiped my eyes and nodded at him.

He walked out of the room. I could hear him take his coat off of the hook next to the door. I leaned forward and squeezed my eyes shut. When I opened them, full, hanging droplets released, relinquishing the memory of their shape and suffusing into the dust blanketing the floorboards. I watched them die and I rose from the chair and I took Caleb's letter and folded it and placed in my jacket beside the envelope.

I joined Caleb at the door. We walked silently down the three flights of claustrophobic stairs and out into the bitter city. I stopped at the entrance to put my gloves on. Caleb continued on towards the nearest subway stop. Glancing up from my hands I noticed an idling car parked across the street. The windows were tinted and fogged from the heat running but I could make out two figures within. Their faceless heads turned as I stared at the car and I'm sure they met my gaze. I tore my eye line away and noticed my brother with his hands in his pockets and his head down already a block away from the apartment building. I followed, sending a glance back at the car and waiting for my memory to remind me, just why exactly a great bath of familiarity consumed me each time I looked in it's direction. And why that *déjà vu* filled me not with curiosity, but with an abject, and total fear.

•

The Plaza was as beautiful as I had remembered it. I had been foolish when I'd first arrived in the city. I'd thought I could rent a room in the hotel in the same sort of lease one would find in any complex on the island. My cheeks had stung with shame as I'd walked out of the door that day but I'd never recollected the place in any other hue than that of the golden amber that seemed to be intrinsic to the air within the lobby. Perhaps I adored it so because it was the complete opposite of all my experiences, and all of my dreams as well. There was a pureness to the place. A simplicity. There was nothing sinister, or cynical, or even quaint about the hotel. It was everything I knew my or Caleb's lives, or that of anyone we would ever come into contact with. I wondered if Martin had known this as well.

We stood at the reception desk, or rather, I spoke to the concierge, an aristocratic looking man in his fifties who revealed no signs of any snobbery inseparable from his appearance, and Caleb scoured the hotel bar for the manuscript's owner—his hunch, not mine.

-I'm sorry, ma'am. There's no one staying with us listed under that name. He smiled sincerely, as if it was as disappointing for him as it was for me to hear that news.

-How about Jonathon? Jonathon Haversham. I asked

-No one under that name either, ma'am. He continued to smile.

-Thank you, I mean it. Where are your pay phones?

He gestured some thirty feet away. Four machines stuck to the wall near the lobby bathrooms. I raised my hand in a reminder of my gratitude and made my way over.

I called Leena at the house. As I did this I kept my gaze scanning about the lobby praying it fell on a portly man in suit in a perpetual state of sadness. The tone kept on for almost two minutes before I realized that the answering machine wasn't picking up. I hung up the phone into the crutch and swore to myself. I dialed the number again. I waited for another five minutes. No answering machine. I called again. I hung up after two bleated tones.

She had disconnected the phone before she left. An intruder had cut the line. She had turned the answering machine off. Someone had wrenched the phone from the socket. *You've murdered her too.*

As my mind began to turn on itself, Martin Haversham walked down the central staircase.

•

Caleb reached him before I did. I didn't even see him approach yet before I knew it Caleb had his massive fingers constricting Martin's upper arm. He caught me walking over out of the corner of his eye and nodded his head to direct me towards the exit. I followed at a distance, not wanting to draw attention to myself, or my brother. The concierge looked up as I passed the front desk. I smiled pleasantly at him. He began to return the expression but another guest blocked me from his view. All the better. Caleb was leaning in and speaking into Martin's ear. His arm slid from the bend of Martin's

elbow to the man's opposite shoulder, in a half-embrace, a feigned friendship, while his other hand reassured his staunch power over where Martin Haversham was heading.

Outside my brother took a right and continued to the nearest crosswalk. I continued to hang back, searching the faces on the crowded sidewalk for any whose gaze lingered a bit too long, or showed a bit too much interest in the towering black man and the stumbling designer suit. I followed them to the cross where they were waiting but stood a good twenty feet behind them. The lights turned and we marched across the snow-laden street, entering the park.

Caleb found a bench and sat Martin down in it, much as I assume he had only a week before. He backed away. He rotated his head at my approach. His expression was inscrutable.

Martin was shockingly presentable when I got a good look at him. He had shaved at some point and had chosen to wear a tie and button his shirt to his Adam's apple at least for the afternoon. His suit was in the same state of disarray as it had been when I'd encountered him previously. He held his hands steepled together and pressed out in front of his knees but he kept an uncommonly constant eye line that somehow contained the both of us. His fingernails were bloody about the cuticles, as if he had been scratching at a wall for hours, or had attempted to rip his nails clean off. We stared at each other for some time. The wind had picked up while we had been inside the Plaza and was cutting into every exposed patch of skin I displayed to it. Unable to withstand it any longer, I reached my hand into my coat and took out the manuscript and handed it out for him to take it from me.

-What am I supposed to do with that? He said.

I kept the manuscript steady.

-Take it. Caleb said, We don't need it.

-Good, neither do I. Martin said.

I tucked the pages back into my coat.

-I'm glad you came, Grace. Martin said.

-Are you? Martin is it? He nodded, but I was not sure what question he was affirming, You're just too interesting to let slip away.

-That's so very nice of you to say. Do you think so too Caleb?

Caleb snorted. Martin frowned, looking dejected.

-You going to tell us what this is about? I asked.

-Of course, He said, leaning back, but we really don't have time to talk to about it here.

Brother and sister exchanged looks of confusion.

-Why don't we have time Martin? I asked.

-Because he told me everything. Everything that happens. Everything that needs to happen. But if we don't leave soon then none of it does and none of us can be saved.

I laughed. It shot punches through my jaw and up my neck and into my head and all through me but I didn't care.

-Caleb. He's insane. Let's go. We'll bring him to the police on the way back and drop him off. You can tell them he's been stalking you and that'll be that.

My brother didn't say a word to me. He furrowed his brow and stared at Martin Haversham.

-You ended it at the exact same place. How?

-I knew. Martin replied.

-You knew you'd be interrupted at that exact spot. For both of us. Caleb said, incredulously.

-No. I'm not psychic. He told me when the bomb was going to go off. Martin looked at me. And when that nurse was going to walk up to you. And where I could find you both. But he also told me that I couldn't tell you more of the story than I did, because I couldn't, because I never did.

-You could have stopped it. You could have stopped the bomb, you're telling me? You knew and you didn't do a thing? Caleb asked, his voice growing, expanding, shaking the snow from the maples.

-What could I have done? I'm not that person. I'm not someone like that.

-You didn't do a thing.

-I couldn't.

-Why?

-Because the bomb always went off. It always will. It has nothing to do with the change that needs to happen.

-God fucking damn it Caleb, let's go! I was yelling now. Leena's face kept appearing in my vision, a dial tone in my ear.

-Yes, Caleb, we don't have to talk here, Grace is right. Martin began to stand.

-Stop! Caleb pushed him down, Tell me. Tell me how it ends.

Martin looked to me, pleading. There was no one even close to us. I could kill him here, I thought. Martin turned and sighed in disappointment.

-How it end? I told you. I can't tell you. I only tell you that much. You'll find out later soon enough, but he'll be the one to tell you.

-Who the fuck is He? I shouted.

-Averett.

Caleb picked him up by the collar. Martin's shirt tore as if it was made of paper.

-Fuck you! Just leave my sister and me alone!

-I will, I promise, as soon as I'm done. Martin was calm and his eyes had lost their eternal moisture.

-You're done now. I said.

-No. He said. We need to go to your apartment in Chelsea.

-Why should we take you there? Caleb brought Martin close to his face, close to his teeth, so that the man was completely sequestered from the ground.

-I'll tell you, but you need to promise me something first.

-Caleb... I said.

-What? Caleb asked, his incisors bared like a wolf about to tear out the jugular of some defenseless animal.

-You have to promise me, Martin looked at me, The both of you, that you'll take me to Norwich State Hospital for the Insane. In Connecticut. Tonight.

Caleb glanced at me for an answer. I couldn't move. He glared at me and turned back to Martin.

-Deal. We can take Grace's car. Now tell me.

Martin swallowed hard. The expression on his face was one of terror. Like what he was about to say would seal his fate.

-He told me not to. But he also told me how important it was to get you to Norwich State Hospital tonight. He'll have to forgive me.

Caleb threw Martin to the icy ground as if he was a small child. He screamed into his face.

-Tell me!

Martin whispered something inaudible. Caleb sprung from his crouch in an instant, and without even stopping to look at me, sprinted towards 5th avenue.

-What the fuck did you tell him? I said, advancing closer to Martin's quivering form.

-In ten minutes, Georgia Hunt returns to the apartment. Five minutes after her arrival, two men who are looking for you break into the apartment. Exactly six seconds after the discover that she is not you, but that you're staying at the apartment, these two men will slit Georgia Hunt's throat—

I stood still. There was no sound at all but that of the biting wind and footsteps approaching behind me.

- Precisely twenty minutes after that, your brother will arrive. Two minutes after this, your brother will have murdered both of these men. Forty-five minutes past this point your brother will die of a stab wound to the right ventricle of his heart—

I turned to face the footsteps. Standing ten feet from me was a man with long blond hair, a large hooknose, and eyes that were a blue I knew far too well. He wore what appeared to be pajamas and he refused to look away from me. He saw it all within me. All of my past, all of my future. All Graces at once. For a moment I could too. Then it was forgotten.

