

Recovery

Meanwhile I walked home from school alone, my dress torn, my underwear tucked inside my bookbag. I wanted to take the car, go to the store, maybe do some shopping, but this was 1979—a recession clearly in the works, another cycle of economic speculation leading to inexplicable despair. The car needed a new set of tires and a brake job. My father would let me drive it only on Sundays, to take us all to church, or to go shopping for food and drink, but not for clothes. I hadn't bought clothes in nearly two years, not since May left to become rich and famous in New York City. Usually, I stole, and walking home I thought I'd like to get myself a pair of purple shoes, to go with a sweater I used to have. In the fall, at the first sign of brisk weather, I'd put on my sweater and admire the way it caught the light; I liked the way the wool felt against my skin, reminding me that it was my skin, and that it was capable of feeling something simple as a pretty sweater on a brisk, sunny day: I went through the gate leading into the backyard, and the swimming pool, thinking about a sweater I used to have. Jimmy was sitting on the diving board over the swimming pool, throwing rocks, and inside the house Daddy sat naked in the living room. He was looking at the picture of May in a catalogue, the part for women's underwear.

“It's good to see you,” he said.

“Sorry I'm late.”

“Come here.”

“Jimmy,” I said. “He’s outside. He’s filling up the swimming pool.”

“What did you do to your dress? Come over here. Come over here now and let me have a look at you.”

“No,” I said.

Instead I sat on his lap, which pleased him momentarily. He was too drunk to find a way inside. When he began to weep, I got up to fix us dinner. Noodles and Tab. I called Jimmy into the house and asked him to find us light bulbs; I promised to take him out for ice cream if he helped me clean the kitchen. Jimmy wouldn’t eat. At the table, my father explained to us the value of hard work and discipline. Then he sent me to the store for a bottle of blended Scotch. He said there were a couple of fives in the car, beneath the floor mat; he praised my cooking and, when Jimmy began to fidget, slapped him silly.

“Come on, Jimmy,” I said, taking his hand. “Come with.”

The clock sits on an ottoman beside a plant where we both can see it clearly. My lover once said I am a cynic, and what I could not tell him is what I know to be true: to explain the roots of my experience would be to challenge his expectations for a safe and happy life. I have since learned that cynicism and despair are mutually exclusive. One can only expect the worst if one knows what might in fact or deed be better. Cynicism assumes that things will always fail to measure up, but still we have a device with which to measure their ascent; the cynic always has the potential to hope for a better way of life—the possibility for change, which for the desperate remains always far removed. I tell myself cynicism at its best is a form of false modesty. I say to everything there is a season; even in the 1930s, people still hoped for change: standing in line, longing for a piece of bread, a raw lump of rancid beef. My father was born into the great depression, like a number of other well-intentioned boys, and somehow, somehow along the way he decided to serve

his country and to try and hold a job and to marry my mother, and when she finally left, with a blackened eye and several cracked ribs, we stayed behind, waiting—for Jimmy to try and learn to speak; or for May to send us plane tickets. And when nothing happened, nothing happened. My father continued to sit unemployed inside the living room. Jimmy turned silent as the flesh. And I . . . I rearranged my dress and told boys at school how much I really wanted to change the world.

“Okay,” Evangalene says, smiling. “Okay. When did things start to get out of hand?”

You see the truly desperate are the eternally damned. I took Jimmy’s hand and led him outside. My father was mistaken: beneath the floor mat, beside the car keys, there was almost fifty dollars, and seeing that much money, the most money I had ever seen in one place that actually belonged to my daddy, I thought of the swimming pool. Daddy could buy some chlorine and fill the pool. Or he could order himself a mail-order suit, maybe a newspaper subscription. He could ask me to drive him downtown in order to renew his driver’s license, which had been expired for years, and then he could find a job, a job he could in fact hold onto: I’d help him get up in the mornings, fix him breakfast, maybe make his bed. Thus, I held the money in my hand while Jimmy rolled down the window, and then I started up the car. Gas was going up in price back then. The car started unexpectedly and I backed out of the drive, slowly, the way I always did, and when I reached the end of our street, I told Jimmy to fasten his seatbelt.

I didn’t have instructions to Mom’s house. I didn’t even know where she lived. May lived in New York City, which was all the way across the country, and I was nervous about driving in too much traffic. I stopped at the high school and found a screwdriver beneath the seat and exchanged license plates with a dusty pickup. Across the parking lot was the

girl's restroom, and the lockers; I went to my locker and removed my books, my windbreaker, three packs of chewing gum and a box of Trojans. I cleaned it out and wanted to leave a note, but I couldn't think of what to say, and so instead I left a sheet of notebook paper. The paper was purple and had thin lines, the way I liked them, and on the floor, in the dark corner, you could see the condoms my boyfriend and his dealer, Tully Crenshaw, had used just a few hours ago. My boyfriend had bet Tully Crenshaw he couldn't last seven minutes.

"Seven," my boyfriend said. "I bet you can't go seven minutes."

Tully was shy in front of my boyfriend. He was used to privacy and upholstered car seats. Normally, you could fog up the windows easily.

"Wait," I said, sliding out of my underwear.

"If you do it," my boyfriend said, "you can't tell anybody."

"What if she gets pregnant?"

"She won't tell anybody, either," said my boyfriend. And then, turning to me, winking, he said, "Will you, June?"

I was raised to believe in secrets. I didn't use condoms to avoid pregnancy; I used condoms to prevent my father's knowing. Once, when I had an affair, I returned to condoms for the same purpose: to keep my lover, the man who calls me a cynic, from incidentally discovering my infidelity. I slept with another man because I wanted to leave my lover but was afraid to. I love the man who calls me a cynic, but I know too that eventually we must destroy each other, which is why he has since left me for his ex-wife. To marry would be to make holy the ties which bind us, most of which are knotted up into my past. I learned at a very young age I cannot endure the weight of man.

Jimmy was always silent. The night Mom left, she said she was going to the liquor store; she asked if we'd like a

candy bar, maybe some soda pop? Her eye was swollen shut and when she coughed she held her side. The ribs are sensitive, the way they curve—a cage God made to keep the vital organs safe: the heart, the liver and lungs. Jimmy and I sat outside on the porch, waiting, and even then we knew she wasn't going to return. There had been too much damage done. Mornings, she had begun to cough up blood.

And I've heard stories. I know some women forget for years what's been done to their bodies—a random uncle, sneaking in to visit; a sentimental step-daddy, occasionally drunk and caught off-guard. These women wait for years before, some early morning, with birds outside, chirping, they wake up and realize they've been violated. Meanwhile they have to learn to survive all over again, though if they only asked themselves, they'd know that's what they already know how to do better than anybody could have ever taught them. And let me tell you, I always knew. I always knew, and I promised not to tell, because I always knew it was my fault: my daddy did not have to fuck me, and had I never been born, it never would have been. To survive, one must first learn the rules, and such reasoning keeps us dangerously alive. We learn not to be afraid of blood. We learn it is easier to die than it is to live.

Meanwhile, I am taking Tofrinal now, 150 mgs a day, and still I know it is no good. I know that I am dying. I know that grief will smother even a mother's heartbeat, and I know if it were not for grief, I could have saved myself from this need for medication, and sleep, and always, always the center of the night.

"June," my daddy used to say, before Mom left for liquor and treats. "June is busting out all over."

Sometimes, he'd ask me to sing, and I never forgot. I have never let it go.

Today I learned that the United States destroys weekly billions of gallons of milk. Hunger, it would seem, is merely the

result of inadequate distribution, and now, having moved into another city, looking back on my life from yet another region, I still have a picture of Hillary and Bill on my refrigerator. They are standing on a platform in Daley Square, surrounded by a crowd of Democrats. Somewhere, I know, I am standing there among them, and it is a hopeful scene, one describing a candid moment by way of a telephoto lens: even up close, Hillary and Bill are beautiful. Clearly, they are in love with each other and what they just might yet accomplish—victory, and the still unblemished possibility for hope. Hillary is wearing a plum-colored dress, the campaign has hit its second wind, and as for the grieving process, it is variable and indiscriminate, like crime on our city streets. What goes on inside our households often is a shame, and shame, I now know, is what binds us to our past. It's what makes us each complicitous and capable of more: I did not have to do the things that I have done. I did not have to send my lover to New York City and his ex-wife. I did not have to buy a leather sofa. I did not have to celebrate the good times and, in so doing, forget just where I really came from. Yuma, Arizona, which is nothing more than a corporately owned grocery store in the middle of the desert.

But you see as I am explaining this, I am strong again, and Hillary Rodham and Bill are here upon my refrigerator, gently waving in a sea of public affirmation. A vision of the future, possibly: first weeks, then months, then my life begins to pass, and for the most part, you can say that things, like the popular vote, will always turn out in the end, regardless of our common histories. Jimmy went to New York City and, unlike May, caught a disease; he died stepping into a cab off Fifty-seventh Street, carrying the virus and spilling it out onto the pavement. I was in grad school in California when it happened. A man called me up from a pay phone and asked me who I was. May was in Europe at the time with an architect from Brazil. Jimmy had been living with her, floating in and out of NYU and dangerous love

affairs, bartending at a place called Tooth & Nail. It took years of counseling before he ever began to speak, in Louisville, because once the police caught up with us, they weren't about to let us live in Hollywood. We were driving stolen property, said the cop. He asked us when was the last time we ate anything.

I said, "We're not very hungry, Mister."

And foster care isn't as bad as most people make it out to be. It's easier to live with strangers than it is with someone you've been raised to love—family values have a tendency to depreciate over time and too much familiarity. Our foster parents gave us pocket money and sent Jimmy to special doctors; they paid for my abortion and encouraged me to take calculus, and fine art, and when it came time for me to go off to college, they told me this was going to be my fresh start; they said I should be certain to do whatever it was I wanted. I could become a concert pianist, or a librarian, or a nurse. I slept with my lover the first time in grad school, before he was married; we met at a famous school and moved in together the way most people who are afraid of following too closely in the steps of their fathers, and mothers, usually do. We lived like normal people who share living quarters briefly and a bed: we ate pasta on weekends; later, he married someone else, then divorced; eventually we bought together expensive cars. We moved to the Windy City and lived nearby the lake. Sunday morning, driving past me, you'd never know my brother had died alone on a street in New York City. To be sure, you'd never know just where I came from.

Once, I went to a career counselor, and he told me the most important thing in life was to learn to sell yourself. Evangalene says the medication will help and tells me not to feel ashamed. She says, spreading out her fingers, there will be a window-pane effect. The dizziness will go away. After a while, maybe we will have a breakthrough?

Recovery, I think. But from what to what? I admire Barbara Jordan deeply, but if you cut the national debt, we'd certainly have a lot more cash to circulate. After all the zeros, the interest begins to add up. If you sleep with strangers, you will bring home precisely what they give you; if you do not pay your bills, you cannot invest into the future. Fortunately, Evangalene is not too big on the dance with anger, and this is the kind of thing Evangalene likes to tell me, though of course she knows I already understand the principles of sound investment. Sometimes, she even asks for pointers. Still, she wants to use a metaphor I might appreciate, and the medication, which makes me dizzy and weak. I no longer drive or get dressed up, and if I drink coffee, I feel as if I'm going to cry. For days, I mean. Once it starts, I'm not likely to stop for days, and I'm discovering other odd and interesting things about myself: things most people wouldn't want to know about anybody, especially those with whom they might engage in cautious conversation—at the grocery store, say, or Marshall Field's. I'm thinking that I've spent years figuring out what was wrong with me only to learn that it wasn't me. It wasn't my fault. *It's not your fault*, Evangalene says, though maybe she just wants to seduce me. *You got kicked around as a kid, it's only normal . . .* and I think even if she did, it wouldn't be all that difficult. One day I walk into a highly recommended psychiatrist's office, and the next I'm pumped full of antidepressants and, in effect, exonerated. It's time for me to learn to do things I have never done before. Evangalene says the past does not own you. *You have to free yourself from what has happened.*

But what happens next? I mean, you cut away your past, and what does a body have left to stand on? What I mean, Evangalene, is just who is left to tell me who I am?

Right, she says, smiling. There's the rub.

Sometimes I imagine Jimmy, sitting alone in a bar, Tooth

& Nail, picking at his scars. Once he hit fifteen, the acne was contagious; it spread all over his body, despite the medication funded by kind and caring foster parents. By the time he was twenty, I was in grad school, and the sores were finally beginning to look as if they might someday heal, and sometimes I see him, sitting alone, drinking at a bar. Maybe a tall stranger wanders up to him, rests a friendly hand on Jimmy's thigh? Maybe they step into a room to talk, to have sex, to spread the risk of intimacy. You don't need AIDS to illustrate the volatile nature of love, but it does help to inform the general public. Health care is a booming industry, and sometimes I imagine Jimmy, on his knees, taking some strange man or woman by the mouth. Then I think of him all alone, afterwards, and the sweet bitter taste of regret. *It is not the body*, he will write to me. *It is the stranger within. It is always, always the unknown.*

Evangalene doesn't know the half of it, and still she knows it's bad. My lover, who leads a social life, has encouraged me often to invite Evangalene out to dinner. "A conversational threesome, June. I mean, what do you guys talk about?"

"Girl talk," I say.

Then my lover says if things do not change pretty quick, as in October, he is going to move to New York City. He can make twice the money there, he says. He's given our relationship too many years already.

"Time to cut your losses, yeah?"

"June," he says. "Look at you? You can't even leave the house anymore."

He's right, of course. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, I take the El into the city, then a cab to cross the river; since the Michigan Avenue Bridge fell in, the traffic has become complex. Then I take an elevator seventeen flights up to Evangalene's office. Evangalene has suggested perhaps a facility? Just for a couple weeks, to see how it feels.

Precisely, I feel as if I'm dying. Simply I am dying, and I am a thirty-one-year-old woman with a decent man and a lot of money in the bank: I have a stuffed cat, and a leather sofa, and a garage to park my foreign car in. I have a man who loves me more than his ex-wife.

"Go," I say to him. "Cut your losses. Cut cut cut!"

I am holding up the smallest kitchen knife we own, but still it's sharp. I take the knife and draw a line into the back of my wrist. I draw the line up to the elbow, slowly, because things done deliberately often take time. When I am finished, I clean the blade with my tongue. "If you leave me," I say to him, "I won't go any more crazy than I already am."

"You're going to kill yourself," he says. "And I'm not going to watch." He is reaching for a dishtowel for my arm, and now he is wrapping my arm, holding it above my head, as in *first aid*, and I know that I am dying.

"I hate you," I say.

"Shhh," he says.

"Oh God," I say. "Go to hell."

I think of Ben Franklin and James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, who invented the National Debt; I think of Aaron Burr; and Teddy Roosevelt, cruising around in the Great White Fleet; and Henry Adams, discovering for us all that governing principle of energy by which a republic must drive its ships and tanks into the future. And then I think of George Herbert Walker Bush invading Panama, and then Kuwait, each in the spirit of Liberation, as if such a thing were possible for anyone. Quite frankly, we are a nation indebted to more than just our fellow debtors: there is such a thing as history and the resources we have at hand to shape it. When we say it's time for change, all we really mean is that maybe we will have a little loose to give the homeless.

I no longer had much riding on the future of the German mark, either. The yen was plummeting, because now it was time for real change across the corners of the globe. Substantive. Dollars and legislative bills. It was time we looked things in the eye and put our people first. Actually, I wrote Hillary an anonymous letter. *Your husband may be right*, I wrote. *But you should tell him not to smile so much.*

We all know Clinton was raised in a place called Hope. In six weeks I have lost another fifteen pounds, though Evangalene claims I have a heavy heart. October has long since passed, my lover is long and gone, and often now I find myself explaining things to him. Maybe I am simply hoping he will not come back to me again.

“I was mad,” I say, looking at my wrist.

Evangalene tilts her face, quizzically, and even I know this is not enough. “Not *mad* mad. I was angry at him for being fine. Every time I look at him, I know that he is fine and it makes me feel as if I’m going to die.”

“So you lost your temper?” Evangalene says.

“No,” I say. “I lost my head, and now I can’t find it, and then I lost my man.”

I am weeping now, alone in my chair beside myself without a tree in sight—just a small, potted plant. Evangalene no longer bothers to take any notes; she knows me that well, she thinks. She knows that I am weeping, and ridiculous, and she knows precisely what is wrong with me, though of course she only knows the half of it.

“It’s going to take some time,” she says, looking at the clock, which always sits between us.

Go ahead, I’m thinking. Fire away, but be careful of the questions you want to ask. Just what do you really need to know? I mean, does my lover really want to know the things I have written about him in my journal? And does he really want to know why I hate his ex-wife? That smug good little woman

with the turned-up mouth? And does that little woman really want to know the things that he has said to me?

When he comes, he often calls me bitch, I write. According to Evangalene, it is important I record my thoughts and dreams. By dreams she does not mean ideas I have for tomorrow, like Martin Luther King, or Gandhi. Still, it has been a while; the streets are icy and full of holiday cheer; now when my lover comes, he must always come without me. *I will no longer sleep with a man I am in love with*, I write. It is something new I have also learned about myself.

And later, inside our office, I have decided to bring Evangalene another plant. It is small and slightly decorous, and I am feeling increasingly belligerent.

“So tell me, Evangalene,” I say. “Shall I tell his wife? His intended? Whatever the hell she is? I mean, shall I call her up and say, Dear Ex-wife, please know your man no longer has the opportunity to call me bitch?”

“Stop,” Evangalene says.

“Stop,” I say.

“Unless you’re going to follow through. It’s fine to beat up on yourself if you take yourself to the hospital, after.”

“You mean check myself in?”

She is a smart woman who smiles at me. “No. I mean, if you’re going to be mean, you also have to be nice. You’re going to have to have it both ways, June.”

I lift my arm and smile. “It didn’t need any stitches, you know. I’m not crazy. Merely dramatic.”

She smiles, accordingly.

“I know you know that,” I say. “Now you know that I know that, too.”

Because I am almost feeling better, I no longer write the check inside her office: the silence while we wait to fill in all the blanks is too unbearable, and I am discovering that I no longer wish to feel this way. Instead, I bring the check along beforehand, already filled out, complete, and slip it beneath

the blotter on the desk on my way out. Stepping outside the building, onto the Miracle Mile with half a million other people, I realize that soon it's going to snow. Nothing, I have always believed, ever makes us special.

Because it's all been done before. We've had Democrats in office more than once. A long time ago, a few fat men gathered together and decided to corner the silver market, and instead they threw the country into an unexpectedly deep depression. You see I'm not the only girl to get shafted by her daddy. To drink too much when she is lonely. To miss my brother because he's dead.

I missed my brother when he was living, like most of us. After all, he didn't like to speak; he sat in school and drew things on the desktop. Our foster parents bought us gifts at Christmas. They taught us how to drive their cars, each with a manual transmission, legally. They encouraged us to bring home friends from school, and I began to date a boy who was a Christian. One Easter, May flew all the way from New York City.

Evangelene doesn't know the half of it, and I am just beginning to recall even more, each day a little bit more clearly. I recall the way my father wanted me to dance with him beneath the carport. The way my mother slept alone at night, in the hallway, curled up beside a fan. The way Jimmy, before he was old enough to know what was happening to his body, let alone his sister's, had been taken in unto the fold.

It was dark, and I was asleep in our room. The swamp cooler was spinning, because it was hot, and you could feel the sky filtering through the drapes. At night, with everyone asleep, the house could have belonged to anybody.

Where were you?

In bed. I was in bed asleep; I was asleep in bed listening to the heat. In Arizona, August is the time for change—the season of monsoons. Daddy was coming down the hallway, and

you could tell his step. It was heavy and damp, and Mom was asleep. Passed out, somewhere. I heard Jimmy's door open and knew I hadn't warned him.

Yes.

So I went into the hallway. I went out into the hallway and said, *Daddy. Daddy?* and he said, *Go to bed*, and I whispered, *No, Daddy, can we? You know, can we tonight?* and then he hit me, and then he hit me again, always on the body, places not supposed to show, and then he went in to bed.

But not to Jimmy's. In a way, he didn't do it that night to anybody. Not that night, but he did one night when I was afraid of paying any more attention. He slipped inside Jimmy's room and made us listen to the sound of it.

When May flew out to visit, on Easter, she brought us all presents from New York City. Her hair was yellow now and she'd had surgery on her face to make her cheeks look hollow. She said, after a while, nicely, that Jimmy and I couldn't come and live with her until we came of age.

The history of nations is determined by our natural resources—those raw materials by which one discovers energy, commerce, and universal greed. Irony, for example, makes for a poor return, and sarcasm is always cheap. What's of value, I now know, is that I grew up believing it was my fault. *Jimmy?* Yes, because I never did tell him. I mean I drove all the way across the California desert with Jimmy in a stolen car, and I never did tell him what Daddy did to me. I never did tell him that he wasn't sitting in that car all by himself.

Months pass, and Evangalene becomes more and more interested in the voice. The voice that is telling her this story.

No, I say.

"No, tell me about the voice. What does the voice look like?"

The voice belongs to a girl, of course. She is an eight-year-old girl wearing shorts beneath her skirt to keep the boys from seeing her underpants during gym and recess. The skirt is purple, like her sweater, the same sweater she will grow into and wear to cheer her up when she becomes cold in Yuma, Arizona. Suddenly, I am desperately afraid this may be the wrong answer.

“Purple,” Evangalene says, smiling. Always she is smiling.

“Purple,” I say.

“Where is she,” she says.

What?

“Close your eyes. Close your eyes and take a minute. Tell me,” she says, smiling, “precisely where she is.”

And it is true, I think. I know precisely where she is. But to comfort an inner child, you must first believe in comfort. In sympathy, and none of us is ever special. We live each day longing to be more, don't we? *Don't we?* Sympathy is what tries to make us special, and if we believe in it, we believe we may be deserving of something other than our lot. Surviving, nothing more or less, which is to say, weeks pass into months, and later seasons. Winter has been cold and brutal, and meanwhile the future is unfolding in the center of my lap, here in my den, where I sit holding a glass full of vodka and ice, looking out the window. People are rehabbing the three-flat across the street; a couple years ago, it was a tremendously successful crack house. Now the prostitutes on the corner have turned out their summer clothes, and I am living here alone with my leather sofa. At night, looking out the window, I hold my glass in the center of my lap and tell myself I will not cry, and at work I have taken another leave of absence. My lover, who has since left me for New York City, and a few more figures to his salary, is spending an awful lot of time dining out with friends and his ex-wife.

Things, he says to me on the phone, over Christmas, are pretty swell. We're getting along real well together.

And then he says, "June? June, are you okay?"

This half, then the other; the good and also all the bad. Some things I don't want to find out, no matter just how long it has been, and still I know I'm going to. The truth is, I don't know what to believe in anymore. The Future or the Past. The here and now, as my lover used to say, requires Valium and Faith, but Daddy believed in months of the year, and in naming them: May, June.

June, honey. Fetch the paper. Kiss me quick, June. Bring me another can of beer, June.

Sometimes I wish he'd called me April, which always is the cruelest. I am sitting now on my leather sofa, looking out into the street, which is warm enough for spring, and knowing that I could have been someone other than I am. When Evangalene asks all over again what started this—what, she means, has brought my life to surface now, I know precisely what she's getting at, though of course she doesn't know the half of it. Yin, Yang; two peas in a pod. A woman and a man. So on.

Also, the answer always changes, especially in fairer weather. Most recently I have decided it is because Daddy's still alive, though slowly he is also dying. My daddy lies in a hospital bed in Phoenix, Arizona, *Good Samaritan*, with tubes stuck deep inside his throat. By now he must be yellow as a spoiled fish. His teeth sit neatly in a bedside drawer, along by the vomit pan and surgical gauze. And to tell the truth, instead of merely keeping it inside, it would not bother me to know that he was dying if he were still at least halfway lucid.

"He's out of his mind," I say to Evangalene.

Who smiles, meaning, Wasn't he always? I mean, that of course is the impression I have, June. Though clearly you know more than you are telling.

“No,” I say. “He’s out completely. He doesn’t know who anybody is and he will not die. He will not die, Evangalene. He will not die!”

“Of course. We have to make room for him.”

“No.”

Of course, smiling. And suddenly I know that Evangalene *does* know the half of it, and the other, because in this life imagination can be more powerful than even incest.

It makes me feel foolish and weak for taking so long to discover this.

When the chips are down, who are you going to trust? Probably, you can imagine it makes me want to kill him.

Who?

Everybody, though mostly first myself, and sometimes when I call my lover I still ask him to forgive me. Now, sitting in Evangalene’s office, that tidy well-lit space with the cozy plants . . . now and for the first time in years I do not consider suicide daily. Never, never have I admitted this to anybody.

“June,” my daddy said, often. “June, you must always do just what we say.”

More and more frequently May calls and asks me if I’d like to contribute. She means to the doctor bills; cancer grows increasingly expensive, though payment plans are currently still available. She means, Health care is a booming industry, and it is we, the sins of our father, who are going to have to foot the bill. Sometimes she asks me about psychotherapy; she has recently read somewhere that Winnie the Pooh is a case study in addiction.

“You know, all that honey?” She says, keeping me company, “You know AARP is the largest voting bloc in the country? It’s one thing to screw the country up, but quite another to hang around on life support! With Alzheimer’s!”

She has a point: modern medicine has made it difficult to

die; sometimes I worry we are all going to be here for a very long time. Even so, I'm thinking, how can anybody hate her family?

What I want to do is explain it all to May. I want to discover the source of my despair, and I want to explain it to her thus: just because our forefathers decided to have children with our mothers doesn't mean they should have. What seemed proper then horrifies me now. Like our daddy, tying on a bender, his semen sodden and full of booze; or our mom, decorating her house with brass and wicker. I learned to dance in the second grade, beneath the carport with my daddy's best friend, Neil. Neil had long shiny black hair and liked to call me *darling*. Later, after Daddy became upset, he slapped Neil upside the head and then, accidentally, knocked him out cold with his can of beer. I remember Daddy explaining that he was sorry, but even so only he was allowed to love me like that. We were all eating hamburgers in Yuma, Arizona, and he still had a mouthful. Neil was sitting by the pool, which wasn't yet quite empty. My daddy's best friend was sitting by the pool eating his hamburger and paying us no mind.

"No," I say to May, even more assertively, though we will always be separated by long distance. "I do not wish to contribute. I just want him to die and leave us all alone."

"It's a grieving process," May says, exclaiming. "Be glad it's going to be over soon! You can get on with your life!"

And then she says, hesitantly, because she's accustomed to awkward types of living, "How's Tim?"

She means the man who's dining out with his ex-wife in New York City, going to parties and making new friends and getting along just fine. She means, Aren't you seeing anybody new yet?

A woman and her therapist. If I fall in love with Evangalene, which I already have, will she someday be compelled to for-

give me too? Her hands are soft and tender. Like me, she is not used to doing yard work. She wears thick furry sweaters and reminds me of a bear.

May no longer has her looks, though she's still tall and beautiful. She dates wealthy foreign men and never talks about her family. Occasionally, and once I came of age, we would take trips together to Mexico, and Spain, sometimes Madagascar. We would take trips alone and talk on the beach and she would tell me that Daddy wasn't such a bad man. He just couldn't hold a job. He didn't love his wife. He should have lived in Paris.

Once she told me she even missed him.

"Yes," I told her. "You certainly did."

"In a way," she said, almost wistfully. "You know, in a way I'm kind of sorry that it never happened to me."

"Yes," I said. "So am I."

As for Daddy, he doesn't know what he is missing, either; he still believes he is going to dance with me at my wedding. If his mind were still alive then possibly I could tell him? Daddy threw May out of the house for not coming home early enough Christmas Eve. She was sixteen and learning to sew and he was still employed. I was seven, maybe. Then she came home late, and he took away the presents she had brought. He took her by the wrist and began to scream, and eventually she took her presents back and broke away for New York City. Unlike most girls from Yuma, Arizona, who leave home for New York City, May didn't become a prostitute in Cleveland. Not even Syracuse. Instead she went to New York City and became a model and learned to put a pretty face upon her past.

My boyfriend, the one I had in Yuma, before I met the Christian, his name was Daniel. He said normally he liked pretty girls, better, but he was willing to hang around with me. Actually, he didn't know who or even what he liked. I didn't know it then, but I do know now some of his other half. That is, I know the things his parents did to him, too.

His father was in the Air Force and often flew aging fighter aircraft overhead.

“Okay,” says Evangalene. “Why don’t you tell me about the voice.”

“You mean who I am?”

“I mean who is speaking. What I mean, June, is who is speaking to me now?”

You see I knew already I was pregnant. That night, that night we left Yuma with our daddy sitting at the table, waiting on us to bring him back his bottle, we drove fast. We drove fast with stolen license plates, and May was in New York City, posing in lacy underwear, beginning to make a name for herself. We drove toward Buckeye first because we didn’t have a map, and then I found a sign that pointed us in the general direction of Los Angeles. My boyfriend had been to California once, Hollywood, where people made movies and millions and millions of dollars. I didn’t think I’d make much money, but I knew it was also warm in California, that you didn’t have to live inside the house in January, and I knew there was an ocean there. I’d seen pictures of it, mostly on the TV, which tried to make it seem convincing. On the way, we stopped at a rest stop. One guy wanted to give me a twenty-dollar bill; we were somewhere near the middle of the California desert, and Jimmy began to cry. He was sitting in the car, crying, because he hadn’t eaten anything for days, which was the only time he ever made any noise, crying, and then the man said, “Come on, girl.”

The man didn’t have any tattoos along his arms. He smelled bad and needed a shave, but he was wearing a suit, too. “My daddy’s a cop,” I said. “Fuck off.”

He laughed, as if he almost believed it. Jimmy honked the horn, and then I did some minor calculations. So far, we had only been gone half a day, and this was something I was fairly confident I could leave behind me at the border. I looked at Jimmy, sitting in the front seat, staring at the steer-

ing wheel. It didn't seem improbable, or even all that unusual, and then I said, "Mister, it would take a lot more than twenty."

The Christian boyfriend who liked my foster parents, he once told me he'd been saved since he was thirteen, and I said, "You're pretty lucky."

Evangelene says children of dysfunctional homes lack ritual, so now at the first of each month I always bring her a new plant in addition to my check: I'm thinking that after the first few times, it began to make sense. Sometimes I wore my purple sweater to school and sat on the lawns watching the sky. Each day, I have since realized, it is possible to see things differently. And then one day I couldn't find my sweater.

"Okay," says Evangelene, impatiently. "The voice."

I'd sit on the lawns and wait for Daniel to show up. Sometimes he'd ask me to do it in his car so he could say he liked it. Once, he cried in my arms, and I held him, tightly, because I knew that someday I was going to miss him. He'd look at the marks on my back, and legs, and ask me if it hurt; he did a lot of angel dust which made him unpredictable. You never knew exactly just what kind of pharmaceuticals you were buying back then. Drugs were still relatively expensive.

"Pharmaceuticals," I tell Evangelene, looking for the bright side. "And Gene Therapy. It's not too late for somebody still to make a killing."

As for the Christian boyfriend, he liked me to do things to him, too, and this was in a different state. Soon, only one thing left was sinful, and eventually I escaped and took a leave of absence and sent my lover back to his ex-wife. Then I spent twelve months watching CNN and learned, essentially, that it was time for change. I watched women march in Washington, DC, with signs that read *Get Bush Out Of Our Bush!* I watched downtown Chicago become evacuated three days before April fifteenth because of crumbling infrastructure; my accountant was instructed by the federal gov-

ernment to stamp *Chicago Flood* at the top of my return in order to escape penalties for being late. When a woman is late, it often means she's going to have a child. Do you really want to know the other half? After Pat Buchanan threatened to take our cities back, *M-16s at the ready*, even Bernie Shaw grew inarticulate and vague, and sometimes the phone would ring with news from people I still knew at work. Sometimes, I read badly written well-intentioned books about adult children of adult children, and when Ross Perot withdrew from the race, I knew even then he was going to come back in; sometimes, it feels good to make yourself feel bad, especially when you can still afford to. Nonetheless, I told myself, again and again, sometimes reading, sometimes weeping on my leather sofa, *it's time for change*, and Clinton went on MTV; the economy continued to flounder, obviously; the Olympics finally came along and provided some relief. In a few months a former POW running for vice president will forget to adjust the volume on his hearing aid.

Evangelene, I want to say, prepared now to make a joke. Where have I come to?

She is smiling, nodding, pretending to know precisely what I mean, though I can tell she's growing restless. Eventually she smiles and shakes her head, sadly, meaning I'm no longer doing the hard work I am supposed to. Like the American public, she wants to get back to the real issues.

And so I take a breath. I take in the city view from this high office and say, finally, "Except for being repeatedly violated as a child, I have never failed at anything."

Until now. Now we're finally getting somewhere. When the Chicago Bulls won the NBA, the people of the city rioted, just like Los Angeles, and it was possible to see most of the events in color from my living room. And maybe it *is* time we make a scene. Perhaps I know that I am getting better? After all, my daddy is going to die soon. I will never know what happened to my mother. Jimmy, though he is dead, no

longer has to wonder why. Sometimes May sends me postcards from Morocco and New Orleans. She has recently discovered a book, *Self-Pleasuring for Life*, and recommends it to me highly.

The voice, Evangalene is saying. *Tell me about the voice.* But I don't know if I can believe in this.

Speak up, Evangalene says, gently. *Tell me what you mean.*

She means she knows I'm scared. I am scared because the voice belongs to that same little girl. She is a small girl, maybe eight, and wearing purple shoes. She is playing with her little brother, Jimmy, who doesn't like to speak. When I ask Jimmy why he never talks to me, Jimmy shrugs his shoulders and smiles.

"Are you mad at me?"

"No," he says, shrugging. "I'm Jimmy."

"I'm June," I say, holding out my hand. "Pleased to meet you."

We play some more in the yard, like a dream and very happily, before Daddy calls us in for supper. He is smiling, clean-shaven and content, and when we come running to the door he lifts us up into the air.

What does she want?

She wants to be lifted up into the air. She wants to feel better and she wants to tell Jimmy she is sorry. She is sorry, only Jimmy is far away, and she can't tell him she is sorry.

But where is she? Where is she right now?

She is lost. She is lost and she is found.

But June, why don't you just ask her to step outside? Here, among the living?

Finders keepers; the real issue has always been the way we live and die and teach ourselves to cross the street. Later, after I have moved away and begun to wean myself off the medication, I will listen to Al Gore give a speech. I will listen to him explain to the beholden that Bill Clinton won this

election because he was also willing to lose. Then, time moving on, then they will both lose: after Monica Lewinsky, one gate too many. And Al Gore, after calling for a recount, will spend a photographic op with his family in black turtle-necks playing football.

Touch, they say. *Let's play touch.*

It seems so very simple, really. The woods are dark and deep, and I will always be close enough to step inside: this is what I did, and where I am, and this is what I know. One day I made up my mind while walking home from school to make my life a better place; I was seventeen, and pregnant, and so I looked for an opportunity and ran with it. I ran with my silent younger brother and our daddy's station wagon. Then I ran with it elsewhere, to graduate school, to sound investments and comfortable furniture, and in so doing I became successful and made a lot of money. Which is to say, I spent my childhood thinking I'd feel better once I came into my twenties; and in my twenties, I said let's just wait until our thirties; and in my thirties, I realized that things were never going to change, and it was nearly enough to kill me.

"I mean, we are not going to change the world," I say to June.

"I know," she says, smiling. "It's okay."

She is holding my hand, wearing her purple shoes and yellow dress; her hair is done up in a pony tail, the way I used to like it, and we are walking down Michigan Avenue. You can feel the wind kicking up off the lake and June is looking up at all the tall magnificent buildings. Now she squeezes my hand, stopping to catch her breath, and says, "But it's so beautiful!"

We have made it into summer, our namesake. Evangalene, a woman I am in love with, distantly, tells me I've been merely winded. She says I will learn to forgive myself, and maybe she is right, though for the moment I am not quite certain. Mostly I want to show my little girl the sights; I want to bring her up safely and I want to teach her not to be afraid.

Today, after ice cream, which I have not had in years, we will go shopping at Field's, and now we are crossing the Michigan Avenue Bridge which has long since been repaired. We are crossing over to Dearborn, wandering through the traffic, smiling at the cab drivers. June squeezes my hand and says, "You know, I'm really hungry."

The campaign is still under way, nothing is ever certain, especially the disasters which will happen next, and across the avenue a crowd is gathering. For some reason we are the chosen and elect. There are television cameras and photographers and bleachers; officers are riding around on horses, and June reaches out to pet one. The officer smiles at me—a disheveled woman in her thirties, her jeans slightly faded, fresh from her analyst's office and staring blankly at a horse. Now the officer checks his watch and moves along while the crowd gathers up its momentum, because now it's finally time: lunch hour, on a fine city day in the tallest city in the world. Everywhere, people are happy, taking in the sun, shirtsleeves and bright loose dresses and comfortable shoes. I pick June up, lighter than air, and set her on my shoulders; and there, not too far away, stands a platform, and now when I make out a plum-colored dress, I am hoping that it just may be Hillary—the first lady of the future. She is speaking into a microphone, saving her husband's voice, her own booming off the buildings, larger than life. We can't understand a word she's saying, though most of us would like to believe in something. Meanwhile, June folds her hands on top of my head, and I step up on my toes, hopefully, in order to reach a better view. You see, I have begun to open up my eyes. And all around me I am looking for a reason, and maybe a new lover, and other ideas I'd like to get to know. I think it's time to make some introductions. Because all around me is this gathering crowd, and no matter how you have been raised, when we all finally do decide to cheer, for a moment it may be just enough to lift your heart.