We Don't Need No Education:

Belief, and The Expurgation of US Public School Literature Texts in Response to Activist Beliefs

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Abstract

The critical component of this thesis examines the expurgation of literature textbooks produced for use in government-funded American schools in the 1970s and 80s with regards to the manner in which this affected the texts' complexity and potential as both works of fiction and educational materials, and the present-day implications of this expurgation. It also addresses the differences and similarities in the goals and methods of the two major advocacy groups who called for the books to be altered and the manner in which methods changed as the political and cultural climate of the United States became more conservative, and challenges the arguments of earlier writers on the subject in light of new research.

The creative component of the thesis is the first third of a completed novel titled *Belief,* which follows an American nuclear family over forty years, from when the parents come of age during the Women's Movement to when their nearly-adult children attempt to come to terms with their restrictive religious upbringing at the turn of the century. The novel focuses on the parents' turn to Evangelical Christianity as a way of surviving personal tragedy; their decision to educate their three children at home in reaction to the Satanic Panic and public school textbook lawsuits of the 1980s; and the ways that their children's experiences of faith, their repressive environment, and the dissonance between their parents' and church's expectations and who they naturally are causes conflict both within their family and in their wider community.

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The Expurgation of US Public School Literature Texts in Response to Activist Beliefs

1. Introduction

On July 8, 1996, the board of the Lindale Texas Independent School District voted unanimously to ban thirty-two books; all of these were on the reading list for Advanced Placement English, a course organized by the College Board which offers university-level curricula to high school students usually aged 16-18. The banned books included *To Kill a Mockingbird, Huckleberry Finn, The Scarlet Letter,* and *Moby Dick*.[1] The removal was 'an attempt to make students adhere to Christian beliefs' according to the president of the school board; he claimed this was not motivated by a personal agenda, but rather part of 'upholding the values of the community.' This action garnered negative response from the media and from parents in the district, and there was protest of both the removal of the books and the board basing its decision on 'what Jesus would or wouldn't read.'[2]

While the removal of books from public schools[3] and libraries in the manner of the Lindale ban is the popular image of modern-day American censorship with respect to children's and young adults' reading material, it is not the only way in which minors are prevented from being exposed to fiction that certain people deem harmful. Though there is an ongoing discussion regarding what fiction minors should be allowed or required to read in public schools, the selection of material used occurs outside the influence of most of those who have an interest in that discussion, is invisible to the public eye, and is heavily influenced by the actions of special interest groups, the self-interest of educational publishers, and the consequences of the textbook controversies that took place in the latter half of the twentieth century.

The definition of 'censorship' given by Oxford Dictionaries is 'the suppression or prohibition of any parts of books, films, news, etc. that are considered obscene, politically unacceptable, or a threat to security.'[4] Though conceptually similar, the usage of the word in regards to literature in public schools requires a slightly more narrow and specific definition. Ellen Last, in her dissertation presented

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[1] Herbert N Forestel, *Banned in the USA: A Reference Guide to Book Censorship in Schools*

[2] Associated Press, "Lindale School District Bans 32 Books, Including May Classics," *The Abilene Reporter-News,* July 9, 1996.

[3] American public schools are government-run, tax-funded, and tuition-free, equivalent to UK state schools.

[4] "Censorship," *Oxford Dictionaries,* Oxford University Press Online, accessed October 31, 2016, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/censorship.

in 1984 for a Doctorate of Philosophy in Education which is the first study to comprehensively analyse contemporary conservative protestors' views, defines textbook-related censorship as 'the act of a person or a group, whether official or unofficial, as it seeks to eliminate certain classroom practices and materials for all children on the basis of an expressed or implied standard of appropriateness.'[5] Since the word is most often used with reference to the second definition in writing in this field, that is the function it will be assigned in this work unless stated otherwise.

The censorship method that is of primary interest to this essay is expurgation, the removal or alteration of segments of a text ranging from single words to entire paragraphs in order to bring the text into conformity with a specific viewpoint, belief, or set of guidelines, often without the informed consent of the original author, usually conducted in such a way as to be invisible to the common reader. In the case of books for public school use, these alterations are generally undertaken by book publishers, either at the behest of external parties or of their own initiative in order to prevent the finished books from being banned or rejected for purchase by school boards. Textbook expurgation has been referred to as 'pre-publication censorship' or 'proactive censorship' by writers in education,[6] 'silent editing' in a dissertation examining the practice in Tennessee high school literary anthologies published in 1975,[7] and 'Bowdlerization'[8] by a former member of the U.S. Department of Education.[9]

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[5] Ellen Louise Last, *Textbook Selection or Censorship: An Analysis of the Complaints Filed in Relation to Three Major Literature Series Proposed for Adoption in Texas in 1978* (Doctoral Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1984), 27.

[6] John S. Simmons, "Proactive Censorship: The New Wave," *The English Journal* 70, no. 8 (1981): 18-20.

[7] Dorothy Tompson Weathersby, *Censorship of Literature Textbooks in Tennessee: A Study of the Commission, Publishers, Teachers, and Textbooks* (Doctoral Thesis, University of Tennessee, 1975).

[8] So named after Dr. Thomas Bowdler, who is remembered for having expurgated Shakespeare's plays into innocence. There are many more colourful verbs for the practice: in 1831 one critic referred to Bowdler as having 'emasculated' Shakespeare; he viewed this as a positive thing and expressed the wish that the same could be done for other writers. See: Noel Perrin, *Dr. Bowdler's Legacy: A History of Expurgated Books in England and America.* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1969). Perrin also notes that "'castrate,' 'geld,' and 'mutilate' were the customary English verbs for expurgation until around 1800," and that 'Bowdlerize' came into usage in approximately 1836.

[9] Diane Ravitch, *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 114.

When dealing with textbooks the line between censorship and 'selection' is often blurred, and activists pushing for the former have historically insisted that their actions fell under the definition of the latter. While censorship involves approaching literature with the intent of weeding out what is objectionable, selection involves approaching literature with the intent of finding that which is most excellent. Censorship seeks to exclude where selection seeks to include; selection prioritizes the right of the reader to read, while censorship prioritizes the protection of the reader from the presumed effects of reading.[10] 'The censor wants to protect the goodness of the student through ignorance of evil; the [selector] knows that goodness through ignorance is no protection against evil.'[11]

While there has always been strife in the U.S. in connection with public education it is only in the past few decades that the pressure exerted on those who produce texts has passed out of the public eye. The visible pressure exerted by the Women's and Civil Rights movements in the 1960s and 70s on textbook publishing effected a change in the status quo resulting in the reduction of sexist language and the inclusion of writing by and about women and minorities; though they did advocate for the censorship of content, specifically racist and sexist language, their general aims were to broaden the scope of offered literature. Conservative protestors, aligned for the most part with the Religious Right, insisted that the changes in schoolbook content brought about by these movements constituted a censoring of traditional, Christian values; their response to the successes of the Women's and Civil Rights movements was to exert pressure focused on narrowing the field of acceptable content to be consistent with what was presented prior to the Civil Rights movement. Conservative protests through the 1970s and 1980s were intentionally visible, taking place in adoption hearings, newspapers, and in the courtroom. Rather than dying down after its initial success, as pressure related to socially liberal movements generally did, conservative protestors continued to push for the further alteration of school texts to more closely fit their worldview, shifting from public and visible modes of pressure to more subtle but no less effective means.

By examining the move to eliminate racist and sexist language and to include work by and about more diverse subjects in public school literature textbooks, the

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[10] Lester Asheim, "Not Censorship But Selection," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 28 (1953): 63-67.

[11] Kenneth L. Donelson, "Challenging the Censor: Some Responsibilities of the English Department," *The English Journal* 58, no. 6 (September 1969): 870.

effects of the right-wing backlash that followed, the methods of continued conservative efforts to maintain control of book content and the ways in which those methods have changed, I will demonstrate the manner in which textbook censorship evolved as power over content shifted over the course of the 1970s and 1980s and methods of control changed from overt to surreptitious, legal to extralegal. This will illuminate the extent to which pressure from both sets of activists influenced not only the books that were being produced at the time, but also books produced decades after the major textbook lawsuits of the 1980s.

In so doing it is perhaps useful to begin by addressing the word 'child' itself, which is the term consistently used for public school students in discussions on this topic. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child define 'child' as 'anyone under the age of 18' unless the laws of a country have a lower age of majority;[12] in this context the term covers anyone enrolled in a public school, which often includes 18 and 19 year olds due to the manner in which the age of first enrollment is determined. This usage fails to draw distinctions between adolescents and toddlers, conveys an inaccurate and emotion-laden image of the young people concerned, infantilizes its subjects, maintains the sentimental paternalism with which organizations who would restrict young peoples' rights and access to information 'for their own good' approach their work, and by grouping all young people together implies that guidelines must be applied uniformly across grades rather than selection made on an age-appropriate basis. Students who are old enough to vote, be drafted into the armed forces, own a car, get married, be sent to adult prisons and serve life terms, serve on juries, or be sentenced to capital punishment have information or material withheld from them not because more thorough information or more meritorious material is available (selection), but out of an impulse to shield them from exposure to language and ideas that are deemed inappropriate for them (censorship).

[12] Nigel Cantwell, "Are Children's Rights Still Human?," in *The Human Rights of Children: From Visions to Implementation*, eds. Jane Williams and Antoinella Invernizzi (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), 43. Though the U.S. has not ratified the CRC, it is a signatory of the treaty and participated in its drafting, and the treaty definition of 'child' is generally consistent with U.S. law.

Considerations of whether this restriction of material violates human rights[13] aside, the limitations placed on what is allowed into the classroom makes effective teaching difficult. The National Council of Teachers of English's 1972 manifesto entitled *The Students' Right to Read* describes the purpose of the English class to be equipping students to develop into thinking, judging, enquiring adults able to synthesize logical arguments and critically assess the information presented to them by the world, and to allow them to vicariously experience unfamiliar facets of human existence so that in this judging and thinking they might also feel and empathize.[14] This conceptualization of the English teacher's purpose echoes throughout writing by educators, much of which insists that these skills cannot be developed through the use of 'beige selections'; the material used must be complex, containing shades of meaning and multiple possibilities for interpretation, if instruction is to move beyond mere literacy.[15] Students cannot learn to make critical judgments when they are taught with literature that is uniform, presenting a single worldview and lacking in complexity, and educators argue that students who are not taught to think critically are unable to become fully functional and self-actualized adult citizens. [16]

In their appeals for the inclusion of more complex and multifaceted material, educators frequently draw on philosophical arguments, principle among these being the work of John Milton and John Stuart Mill. In an article on the responsibilities of an English department Kenneth Donalson, the editor of *The Students' Right to Read*, asserts that in addition to keeping on hand an array of contemporary material on combatting censorship, all teachers of literature should be familiar with the

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[13] See Judith F Krug, "Growing Pains: Intellectual Freedom and the Child," *The English Journal* 61, no. 6 (1972): 805-813; Haig Bosmajian, "First Amendment Protection for the High School Punster and William Shakespeare," *The English Journal* 75, no. 3 (1986): 67-71; and Lotem Perry-Hazan, "Freedom of Speech in Schools and the Right to Participation: When the First Amendment Encounters the Convention on the Rights of the Child," *Brigham Young University Education and Law Journal* 2015, no. 2 (2015): 421-452 for discussions of censorship and suppression in public schools in relation to the First Amendment, Bill of Rights, and similar legislation.

[14] Kenneth L. Donelson, *The Students' Right to Read* (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1972), 6-12.

[15] Simmons, *The English Journal*, 19.

[16] James F. Symula, "Censorship and Teacher Responsibility," *The English Journal* 60, no. 1 (January 1971): 128-131.

foundations on which modern arguments are built, specifically *Areopagitica* and *On Liberty.*[17]

The New Testament quotation, 'test everything, hold fast what is good'[18] forms the basis for one of Milton's main arguments against the restriction of written material in education, that to recognize what is good and useful one must first be able to compare it with what is base. After explicating the beneficial uses of questionable books he goes on to remind the reader that, even if their benefits did not outweigh their risks, the suppression of problematic writings would be insufficient to produce virtuous students, and that children develop vices independent of their reading:

> Evil manners are as perfectly learnt without books a thousand other ways which cannot be stopped, and evil doctrine not with books can propagate, except a teacher guide… Banish all objects of lust, shut up all youth into the severest discipline that can be exercised in any hermitage, ye cannot make them chaste that came not thither so.[19]

The best weapon against vice, natural or learned, Milton argues, is education. Prohibitions simply make material more appealing and therefore more dangerous; the exegesis of questionable writing under the guidance of a skilled educator robs it of its power to harm and arms students with the tools to deal with such material on their own, a skill that is necessary if they are to become self-actualized adults.[20]

The section of Mill's essay, *On Liberty,* which deals with 'Liberty of Thought' presses four points: an opinion silenced may well be true and to deny this is to assume infallibility; that an erroneous opinion may contain a portion of truth which may only be discovered by debate; that even if received truth is whole and factual it cannot be fully comprehend by those to whom it is taught until they learn to question it and therefore defend it; and that meaning and vitality is lost when truth becomes dogma.[21] In defending these, Mill speaks against the extralegal, social tyranny enacted by majorities against minorities, arguing that "the only purpose for

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[17] Kenneth L. Donelson, "Challenging the Censor: Some Responsibilities of the English Department," *The English Journal* 58, no. 6 (September 1969): 869-876.

[18] 1 Thessalonians 5:21, ESV

[19] John Milton, *Areopagitica and Of Education,* ed. K. M. Lea (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1973), 17, 21.

[20] *Ibid.,* 21-22.

[21] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 59.

which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant."[22] Though Mill acknowledges that this statement does not include children or 'those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage,'[23] he goes to pains to highlight that times change and mores are proved wrong, and that the limitation of liberty to white adult males may one day seem rightfully absurd and be expanded, just as the culture of his day dispensed with comparable outdated ideas.[24] Rather than leaving Mill's argument open to criticism, this acknowledgement of changing values preserves its relevance, as the reader is invited to extrapolate the argument to fit the values of the times to include those marginalized groups which Mill neglected through his own self-admitted bias.

With regards to the damage that the suppression of information does to society Mill's arguments are similar to Milton's. Rather than free enquiry being only of benefit to the great thinker, he posits that permitting all minds to be developed to the limit of their capabilities is necessary for the cultural climate that has brought about every great era of human advancement.[25] Bringing about an environment in which the general populace is allowed intellectual development by its nature requires resistance to be made to those who would suppress the teaching of that which contradicts their own opinion; when that opinion is held by a cultural majority or a powerful minority, resistance becomes more vital. And even in the teaching of orthodox material questioning is useful:

> He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may be able to refute them. But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side; if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no grounds for preferring either opinion.[26]

Even if a public education were to consist entirely of what protestors considered acceptable it would be inferior to an education which is open; unquestioned material, learned by rote, is difficult to defend, and a student who has not made received

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[22] *Ibid.,* 14.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] *Ibid.,* 23.

[25] *Ibid.,* 39-40.

[26] *Ibid.,* 42.

knowledge their own, questioned it and learned to think critically about the supports it stands on, is in hardly a better place than an individual who has not been educated at all.

In later portions of the essay Mill touches more on power and individuality, arguing that denying a person the right to choose his own course in life, no matter how right and benevolent the course upon which he is compelled, robs him of his humanity.[27] I would push this argument a step further, and propose that to limit the information provided to a person so that they are compelled by the data given to act in the manner preferred by he who has withheld information is no different than the dehumanizing compulsion that Mill speaks against. And yet it is this that certain protestors have done, suppressing information, most notably sex education, with the intent of compelling the behaviour that they desire from students who would be better served by being taught to formulate and defend their own viewpoints based on data which is complete as possible.

Objections to the proposition that arguments regarding free will and speech be applied to those under the age of eighteen are frequently coloured by the cultural tradition of children as property. Discussions of education policy tend to focus either on the rights of parents or of the state, with the child an object, rather than an actor, to be fought over by these two institutions.[28] The removal of material from the public school curriculum in response to parental, or adult, requests assumes that those parents or adults have both responsibility for and control over the minds of students, regardless of whether said students are their children, or whether those children have gained their majority. Any adult can exercise control over what every child in the public system may be taught, by virtue of the child's status as student and the adult's as non-student. This effectively robs children of constitutionally guaranteed rights, including that of intellectual freedom, rendering them effectively 'subcitizens.'[29] Children are considered potential adults, rather than human beings in their own right, dependent upon those who care for them; though that care may be benevolent,

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[27] *Ibid.,* 65-66.

[28] Martha L. A. Fineman, "Taking Children's Interests Seriously," in *Nomos XLIV: Child, Family, and State*, eds. Iris Marion Young and Stephen Macedo (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 234-242.

[29] Krug, *The English Journal*, 807.

benevolence is no substitute for rights.[30] An education which relies on insulating a child from external views, with the aim of raising adults who will not question or reject what they have been taught because they have not been made aware that there are alternatives to the way of life in which they have been raised, produces adults who are incapable of fully exercising their rights, essentially imprisoned by the education, or lack thereof, that they have been provided.[31]

2. Historical Background

There is a long history of pressure groups influencing the content of textbooks in the United States; religious, and specifically Christian, pressure and influence has the longest standing. An incident that typifies early conflicts occurred in Philadelphia in 1844, one of many such incidents that took place in the United States at the time, and which is best summarized as a lengthy dispute between the Protestant majority and Catholic minority of the city over Bible reading in the public school. It will probably surprise a modern reader that the issue was not that the Bible was being read, but that the version in use was a Protestant translation, and both parents and bishops objected to Catholic students being forced to participate. Their initial request, that Catholic students who refused to read the Bible aloud in class not be beaten for their refusal, was generally ignored, and further requests for their children to be excused from the readings were met with violent anti-Catholic demonstration by Protestants who believed that the failure to fully 'Protestantise' Catholic children would lead to a Catholic takeover of the United States; the demonstration culminated in a riot which destroyed buildings and required military intervention to quell.[32] Other religious minority students, such as those of the Jewish and Quaker faiths, faced similar challenges, and it appears that the school boards generally considered having the teachers flog students who made protest on religious

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[30] Michael Freeman, "The Value and Values of Children's Rights," in *The Human Rights of Children: From Visions to Implementation*, eds. Antonella Invernizzi and Jane Williams (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited , 2011), 22.

[31] William A. Galston, "Parents, Government, and Children: Authority over Education in the Liberal Democratic State," in *Nomos XLIV: Child, Family, And State*, eds. Iris Marion Young and Stephen Macedo (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 228.

[32] Joan DelFattore, *The Fourth R: Conflicts Over Religion in America's Public Schools* (London: Yale University Press, 2004), 32-46.

grounds, rather than expelling them outright, to be a more than sufficiently merciful accommodation of their beliefs.

The first 'textbook war' in America began immediately following the Civil War, when publishers were unable to sell the same books in both the North and South due to differences of opinion as to what constituted an accurate representation of the war and its accompanying issues; the solution at which the publishers arrived was to produce separate books for northern and southern markets, with the former documenting 'the triumph of the Union and the end of slavery' and the latter describing the event as 'The War of Northern Aggression' and treating slavery as a minor issue.[33] It would be reasonable to assume that the presentation of the Civil War in history textbooks ceased to be an issue by the advent of the twentieth century, which is why it is worthwhile to note that in July 2015 the same debate arose again, with individuals protesting the batch of history textbooks that Texas intended to adopt because they portrayed the Civil War as having been about state's rights, with slavery a peripheral issue, and omitted mention of Jim Crow laws and both the activities and existence of the Ku Klux Klan. The content standards under which these books were introduced were voted in by a Republican majority State Board of Education in 2010, in an effort to 'rectify liberal bias in the way Texas taught history.' [34]

The fifteen decades that separate these two instances of controversy regarding the teaching of the American Civil War were marked by a range of protests and disputes regarding content; though each decade of the 20th century seemingly had its own preoccupations, a common argument was that the threat *du jour* put the souls and morals of good Christian boys and girls in danger. The early decades of the century were marked with protests over the teaching of evolution in the classroom, culminating in the trial of John Scopes in 1925. Following World War I the Daughters of the American Revolution protested what they perceived to be the 'pro-British' bias of textbooks, with insufficient emphasis placed on American military history; they were joined by the Ku Klux Klan with complaints regarding pro-Jewish

[33] Herbert N. Foerstel, *Studied Ignorance: How Curricular Censorship and Textbook Selection Are Dumbing Down American Education* (Oxford: Praeger, 2013), 2.

[34] Benjamin Wermund, "National Debate Revives Criticism of Texas Textbook Standards on Civil War: Omissions Fuel New Criticism," *The San Antonio Express-News*, July 10, 2015, Accessed 28 October 2015. http://www.expressnews.com/news/education/article/Texas-textbook-standards-on-Civil-War-concern-6377518.php

and pro-Catholic sentiments.[35] In the 1940s the great fear was of creeping socialism;[36] in the 1950s this was joined with protest against work by suspected Communists and a perceived shortage of appropriately patriotic reading,[37] both of which lasted into later decades; protestors against socialism and communism frequently framed their arguments in terms of a perceived threat to Christian morals.

Race and women's rights came to the forefront in the 1960s. These two movements differed from those which came before in that they were for the purpose of furthering the lot of heretofore-marginalized groups and called for inclusion, while prior protests generally came from culturally dominant forces and called for prohibitions. Women's movement protest was made in response to the fact that 'history books [dealt] almost exclusively with men' and should be required to include some women;[38] contrast this with protests over the inclusion of writing by suspected Communists, the argument of which generally ran 'history books haven't mentioned Communists and they should continue to not mention Communists.' The pressure for inclusion of women and minorities arose from a politically liberal, progressive, humanist agenda, which was greatly at odds with the largely Christian, conservative, and traditionalist movements that had come before. The groups who pushed for this inclusion tend to be referred to collectively as 'humanists' by textbook protestors who held opposing views, and perceived as a bloc with a single agenda; since this term is used consistently in conservative writing on the subject and no other collective term exists for these groups, I will employ this term when referring to those protestors who pushed for an inclusive curriculum that was in harmony with humanist ideals, and whose work was opposed by conservatives.

While the effects of these humanist efforts were slow, they ultimately succeeded in changing the status quo: the gendered words and phrases and stereotypical presentations which they requested be removed have passed out of popular usage. While the treatment of race and minorities has yet to reach the level hoped for, work by and about minorities is now included in texts as a matter of

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[35] Foerstel, *Studied Ignorance*, 2-3.

[36] Jack Nelson and Gene Roberts, *The Censors and the Schools* (Oxford: Praeger, 1977), 84.

[37] Ravitch, *The Language Police,* 70.

[38] Joan DelFattore, *What Johnny Shouldn't Read: Textbook Censorship in America* (London: Yale University Press, 1992), 159.

course, and the heavy-handed stereotyping that was common before the protests is no longer considered socially acceptable.[39]

There was a nearly immediate grassroots conservative response to humanist efforts, with the first conservative textbook lawsuit taking place in 1974. By the nature of their methods, conservative protests were far more visible than humanist protesters during the 1970s and 1980s. Their visibility led to the offer of support from groups associated with the religious right that were, even in the case of the Ku Klux Klan, generally accepted by protestors; their effect on textbook content is proportional to the support they received. While the concerns of the earlier decades of the 20th century, such as the Red Scare, have fallen more or less by the wayside, the textbook industry is seemingly still caught between the two major protest movements of the latter decades, with conflicting views on the presentation of gender roles, the teaching of critical thinking, and the purpose of education at the forefront. Though humanist groups ceased to have a proactive effect on book content, the guidelines that publishers adopted as a result of their efforts remain, in part due to a general cultural change in what is considered acceptable and in part to liberal regions, such as California, which still exert passive pressure. Rather than negating the effect of humanist activists, conservative protests were and are considered alongside them by school boards and publishers, necessitating complex lists of content guidelines to assist book editors in their attempt to toe the narrow line that lies between what the two groups individually deem unacceptable.

3. The Textbook Adoption System

In a competitive marketplace, controversy has been known to generate both interest and sales, but the textbook market differs from the market for general literature greatly, having more in common with government procurement: the ultimate consumers – the teachers and students – have no say as to which books are adopted for use, the review and selection of books is conducted by elected officials who need to satisfy their constituents in order to retain their positions, and publishers must go to great expense to develop new series of texts without any guarantee that

[39] Foerstel, *Studied Ignorance,* 62.

they will be approved for use.[40] Since it is a fact generally recognized that it is active constituents who protest the use of controversial material in the classroom, and it is active constituents who elect school board members, it is clearly in the board members' interest to consider and adopt only those textbooks that will not offend their constituencies. It is therefore in publishers' interest to produce material that will be considered non-controversial by the widest range of readers, and therefore be widely purchased, more so than it is to provide accurate scholarship.[41]

There is a degree of variety in how textbooks go from a concept under review at a publishing house to weight in a high school student's backpack. Twenty-seven states allow local school districts to purchase textbooks at their discretion. In the remaining twenty-three, the 'adoption' states, the school board of each state develops a list of approved books from which local districts must make their selections. To be specific, the adoption states are: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and West Virginia. These states are some of the largest in the country, and tend to be home to citizens that ascribe to the more extreme ends of the political spectrum. Of these states California and Texas are currently, and were at the time of the 1980s lawsuits, the most lucrative for textbook publishers, and it is with the aim of pleasing their school boards and their unique sets of activists that publishers approach the development of curricula.[42] One would imagine that the liberal leanings of the former locality would balance out the demonstrated conservatism of the latter, but this fails to be the case. California's adoption system focuses only on books for the lower grades, allowing schools to select for the upper grades at will; the state also requires the books to have a 'Californiacentric' overarching narrative that causes them to be unsuitable to schools in other states. In contrast to this, Texas' adoption system covers all of the grades of public school (students approximately aged 5-18) and, though they may not necessarily reflect the

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[40] Ravitch, *The Language Police,* 97.

[41] David D. Perlmutter, "Manufacturing Visions of Society and History in Textbooks," *Journal of Communication* 47, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 77. "Guidelines reflect the fact that, in most cases, dealing with certain issues in any way will offend some groups. With historical issues in which controversy cannot be avoided (e.g. the Vietnam war) images and words are made as vague or bland as possible. Again, risk must be reduced. Controversy is anathema."

[42] DelFattore, *What Johnny Shouldn't Read,* 121.

values of other localities, the books that Texas adopts tend to not be so specific to that state that they cannot be used in other states.

The process by which a textbook is adopted by the Texas Board of Education begins with calls for new instructional material, which are scheduled so that the core subjects of English Language Arts and Reading, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies will each be reviewed once every eight years, with other subjects coming up for review with slightly less frequency. Publishers who intend to participate in the review and adoption cycle submit a Statement of Intent to Bid, after which they have one year to produce materials for consideration that conform with the guidelines provided in the call for material. The drafts produced are then given to members of the state review panel, which is comprised of individuals appointed by the commissioner of education and who are nominated by a range of parties from educational organizations to parents; the panel then reviews the material to ensure that it conforms to state guidelines and content standards. The commissioner then recommends which materials be placed on the adoption list based on what percentage of the standards they meet, and presents the publishers whose material has made the adoption list with a Report of Required Corrections of Factual Errors. Texas residents are permitted to both submit written comment regarding the materials presented for adoption and to participate in a public hearing conducted by the state board of education for the purpose of allowing citizens to provide oral testimony regarding the materials.[43] The states then produce a list of requested changes, in response both to the judgment of the members of the board of education and the comments provided by members of the public, at which point the publishers may withdraw the textbook from consideration or make a revision of the text that conforms to those suggestions; this review process continues back and forth until the board of education makes a final decision to either adopt the books in question or reject them.[44]

The development of new textbooks is expensive, with the typical cost of a single series estimated to be in the millions of dollars, and to withdraw a product from consideration or to have it fail to be adopted results in a loss large enough to cripple smaller publishers and to be a considerable factor in the way even the largest

[43] Texas specific information provided by the Texas Education Agency website: http://tea.texas.gov/

[44] DelFattore, *What Johnny Shouldn't Read,* 124-129.

textbook publishers treat requests for changes; in the interest of making sales, publishers tend to accept changes suggested by the reviewers, which results in textbooks where facts are often distorted, if not outright falsified.[45] The outlay and risk associated with the development of new textbooks has contributed to the current monopoly market. While there were over one hundred publishers providing humanities textbooks in 1960, by 1995 nearly 90% of textbook production was undertaken by seven major media companies.[46] Given the lapse of years between editions of a textbook and between the development of new series, it was not uncommon for developers to move between companies, or to return to work for companies for which they had previously developed; such intermixing between teams and companies tends to foster community, but also encourages homogeneity between different publishers' content standards.[47]

For a publisher, the production of a textbook that makes the approval list in the states with the greatest purchasing power is a guarantee of good sales, so publishers produce textbooks that will be acceptable in those states.[48] Smaller states, regardless of their content standards, can only select from those books that are published. Since it is not fiscally rewarding for publishers to cater to the small markets, the standards of the most influential adoption states and the actions of activists within those larger states, i.e. Texas, dictate a great deal of the content of educational texts across the entire country.

Publishers respond to the Board of Education's content guidelines and the consistency of protests in three ways. Firstly, they anthologize only that content which they are confident will meet the requirements of both parties. In addition to this, they write content guidelines for internal use based on objections from previous years, and use them in editing extracts from preexisting writing as well as in commissioning new writing specifically for the textbooks they intend to publish. Finally, they use this commentary as a guide for expurgation, removing or altering segments of texts ranging from single words to entire paragraphs in order to bring

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[45] Simmons, "Proactive Censorship," 18-20.

[46] Perlmutter, *Journal of Communication,* p. 69. 'These companies are, in order of market share: Glencoe, owned by McGraw-Hill; Prentice-Hall, owned by Paramount; Houghton Mifflin; Holt Rinehart Winston, owned by Harcourt; Scott Foresman, owned by the News Corp; D. C. Heath, owned by Ratheon Co.; and Addison Wesley, owned by Pearson.'

[47] *Ibid.,* 73.

[48] Ravitch, *Language Police,* 98.

texts into conformity with protestors' views; there is extensive evidence that this is frequently done without the informed consent of the original author. This is done not only in anthologies and textbooks, but also in school editions of full-length works, two notable examples being *Fahrenheit 451*[49] and *Gulliver's Travels.*[50] The most notable instance in an anthology is probably the deletion of approximately three hundred lines, or ten percent, of Romeo and Juliet from the 1980 edition of the high school reader *Adventures in Reading* published by Harcourt Brace, with similar omissions noted in contemporaneous books, including a single-volume paperback edition for school use. No indication is given in the student or teacher's edition of the text that the work is abridged. The cuts all but omit the love story, and eliminate key images that develop major themes.[51]

4. Research Background and Literature Review

Why Literature Textbooks?

Textbook expurgation is not well explored, perhaps because it is extremely difficult in most cases to determine what has been removed from history and social studies texts during the approval stage. Since the publishers have control of the annotated proofs, which are the only record of the changes requested by school officials, it may indeed be impossible to analyse efforts to censor most types of textbooks. Access to the published copies only allows for comparison between official editions, which differ greatly; it would be necessary to obtain the proofs and editorial notes to determine the effect of the alterations requested by the school board.[52]

Literature textbooks are another matter. Though teachers often augment the class offerings with their own selections, most American school districts use approved literature anthologies as the core textbook of middle and high school (ages eleven through eighteen) English classes.[53] Literature anthologies differ from other

[49] Perrin, *Dr. Bowdler's Legacy,* 270.

[50] *Ibid.,* 225-26.

[51] DelFattore, *What Johnny Shouldn't Read,* 2.

[52] *Ibid.,* 19.

[53] Foerstel, *Banned in the USA*.

textbooks in that they are made up of a combination of extracts from previously existing works such as novels, plays, and short story collections, and pieces specifically written to fit the needs of the textbook, such as short stories that utilize specific vocabulary words, so the originals of much of the anthologized material are easily accessible in their unedited forms. Though textbooks relating to other areas of study, such as history and the hard and social sciences, are also expurgated, literature textbooks are unique in that the extracts of which they are formed have source texts that can be consulted to determine to what extent expurgation has taken place. A comparison of the originals to the anthologized versions allows a researcher to trace what ideas are being systematically suppressed and promoted through public education in the majority of the United States, as well as how the ideas considered to necessitate suppression have changed.

Previous attempts to determine the causes, extent, and results of textbook censorship have made use of questionnaires and interviews with teachers, publishers, and textbook salesmen; official documents including textbook adoption lists; the guideline pamphlets produced by specific publishers; and the word-by-word comparison of the contents of literature textbooks to reputable versions of the source material – hereafter referred to as 'content analysis' – among other methods. Though most of these methods were found to be helpful or illuminating, it was determined by the authors of previous studies that content analysis was the most rewarding source, in that it provided concrete and comprehensive evidence of both the presence of censorship in a text and examples of exactly what content had been determined to be objectionable.

Content analysis is especially useful in the examination of literature texts because it reveals the internal logic of the censoring bodies more clearly than does an examination of straightforward book banning. While the removal of an entire book from the curriculum or classroom sends a clear message as to the intolerability of the views it expresses, it is not clear what aspects of the book are most intolerable; a line-by-line comparison of an expurgated text with its source text illuminates exactly which words in which contexts and combinations are found objectionable. Additionally, content analysis allows one to determine what has been allowed to remain – the examination of a short story from which instances of moral relativism have been removed but racist comments have been retained tells a reader more about

the censors' mindset and values than the examination of a book addressing similar topics that has been removed entirely from the curriculum.

This essay makes use primarily of written objections to texts made by protestors as part of the adoption process, handbooks and guides produced by conservative protestors for the information of potential allies, and whole or partial records of publisher's internal content guidelines to inform interpretation of content analysis performed by the author on a selection of the textbooks in question.[54] Use is also made of scholarly and popular articles and writings on textbook expurgation and adjacent issues, such as children's rights, the legal issues surrounding public education, and the cultural impacts of curricular censorship.

Previous Research Efforts

While much research has been done on the educational and legal ramifications of book censorship in educational settings, literature academics have concentrated on the outright removal of books from school libraries. Educators naturally focus on the practical outcomes of protests and content guidelines with discussions of how working around these impacts teaching and learning, while scholars of law have been concerned with the legality of book bans and the impact textbook lawsuits will have on future litigation, with the issue serving as more of an arena for first amendment concerns rather than a subject of inquiry in itself. Approaching the matter from the perspective of literature broadens the discourse by considering the altered texts as texts, rather than as an accessory to the process of education or legislation. Regardless of its other effects, expurgation alters texts, which in turn alters the texts' scope for interpretation and subverts the author's intentions. An analysis of these alterations reveals what it is those who have called for them to be altered wished to have suppressed, providing insight into their desire to suppress and how successful they were in pursuing that desire which is absent

[54] Greater use has not been made of publisher's content guidelines because they are difficult to obtain, due in part to their nature as documents intended for internal use rather than general dissemination, and perhaps also in part to the unwillingness of publishers to acknowledge their existence.

when considering either protests and guidelines or the texts themselves from other viewpoints.

For the purpose of this study, content analysis was undertaken on multiple series of literature textbooks, specifically all editions of the final four volumes of Holt, Rinehart, and Winston's *Holt Basic Reading* series (ages 10-13), all editions of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich's *Adventures in Reading* Series (ages 14-15), Prentice Hall's *The American Experience* (ages 15-16) and D.C. Heath's *The Humanities: Volume I* (ages 16-17). While most of these texts have been specifically targeted by protestors, and all were found to have undergone some degree of expurgation, *Holt Basic Reading* was ultimately selected as the focus of this study, due to the volume of detailed written protest available regarding its content, the thoroughness of its bibliographic material, which eased the process of identifying and obtaining the exact editions of the books and stories used as source material for the texts, and because objection was made to its content by protestors at both ends of the spectrum.

The amount of time required to compare every word of a textbook to a source text – as well as the difficulty of locating the appropriate edition of the source text – may be indicative of why textbook expurgation is not an especially popular area of enquiry even within those disciplines that have dealt with it. Articles on the matter tend to be both broad in scope and somewhat outdated, with many of the most informative having been published prior to or concurrent with the 1980s lawsuits; recent articles tend to concentrate on the removal of books from public schools, which, by its more overt nature, is easier to address. Major enquiries into the matter seem to be limited to four volumes: two books, and two theses submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education. These four are referenced frequently in other writing on the subject, but no other work involving original content analysis appears to be available.

The earliest of these four sources is *The Censors and the Schools,* written by Jack Nelson and Gene Roberts, Jr. while participating in the Nieman Fellowship program for journalists at Harvard and published in 1963; both men were Pulitzer winners. The emphasis in this volume is on the effect of interest group criticism on the content of textbooks, especially social studies and history texts, in the first half of the twentieth century, and on the historical background of interest group involvement in the textbook writing process. The authors were in possession of a large body of material produced by the censoring organizations that clearly described the material

and sentiments to which they objected, and through an analysis of the school texts in conjunction with these materials it is made clear that the publishers of the time bowed to the critics extensively.

Also published in 1963, *High School English Textbooks: A Critical Examination*, by James J. Lynch and Bertrand Evans, surveys literature anthologies and grammar and composition books, and is essentially an audit of the books on the market with attention paid to content, organization, coverage, and editorial apparatus, among other areas. The identification of silent editing was a byproduct of the examination, rather than one of the original intents: Lynch and Evans found that passages were removed and works were cut to fit available space, and recommended strongly that the practice be stopped.[55] This recommendation does not appear to have been taken into account to any great extent. At the time of publication Lynch and Evans were professors of English at the University of California, Berkeley.

In 1975, Dorothy Thompson Weathersby presented to the University of Tennessee a dissertation for the Doctorate of Education entitled *Censorship of Literature Textbooks in Tennessee: A Study of the Commission, Publishers, Teachers, and Textbooks* that remains the most thorough study of textbook expurgation to date, and which has been cited in most academic writing on the subject since. Weathersby made use of questionnaires presented to teachers, textbook salesmen, and publishers; minutes of the Tennessee Textbook Commission; and content analysis of the textbooks themselves in researching the thesis. Due to the nature of the project her focus was somewhat narrow, concentrating on the literature textbooks used in Tennessee schools for grades 10-12, adopted in 1971 and 1966, which consisted of 22 textbooks. Her conclusions were 'that publishers were very willing to omit or alter any language or content that parents, educators, or organizations might find offensive'[56] with the majority of this editing occurring to accommodate religious sensibilities, and with no indication given in the resulting text that any material had been removed or altered.

Close behind Weathersby's thesis in terms of impact is a doctoral thesis presented by Ellen Louise Last at the University of Texas at Austin in 1984, entitled *Textbook Selection or Censorship: An Analysis of the Complaints Filed in Relation*

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[55] James J. Lynch and Bertrand Evans, *High School English Textbooks: A Critical Examination* (New York: Little, Brown, 1963), 124.

[56] Weathersby, "Censorship of Literature Textbooks," 202.

to Three Major Literature Series Proposed for Adoption in Texas in 1978. While Weathersby focused on textbook expurgation itself, Last concentrated on the protest groups who agitated to have the expurgation enacted, with the aim of determining what the petitioners typically protested and what logic informed their protests, including their definition of literature and expectations of public education. She naturally limited the scope of her enquiry to protests brought before the Texas textbook adoption board. As well as identifying the major grounds for protest, Last identified the major protesters to be Mel and Norma Gabler, founders of the Educational Research Analysts, with the cooperation of others. The Gablers, the Educational Research Analysts, and the organizations that encouraged parents to protest the adoption of textbooks at the time that Last was writing and into the present decade presented themselves as 'concerned Christians' who demanded to have the textbooks rewritten to correct the effects of 'the humanist agenda,' with an emphasis on preserving gender roles as presented in the Bible, presenting Christianity as the only religion of good people, preserving a Christian reading of American history, and reinforcing conservative values.[57]

There are several further sources that make reference to those aforementioned, but these make only minor additions to the information presented, with the greatest balance of that concerning the adoption committees, the publishers, and the textbook content guidelines; no other source undertakes the content analysis that forms the basis of Weathersby's thesis. Of these, some important sources include Lee Burress' *Battle of the Books*, which addresses book burning and literary censorship in the public schools from 1950 to 1985; Joan DelFattore's *What Johnny Shouldn't Read,* which examines the major textbook lawsuits of the 1980s and 90s from a predominantly legal perspective; and Diane Ravitch's *The Language Police,* which makes heavy use of the textbook content guidelines that she obtained while working in the U.S. Department of Education and tends to object equally to pressure from both sides of the cultural spectrum. A more recent book on the subject, published in 2013, is Herbert Foerstel's *Studied Ignorance: How Curricular Censorship and Textbook Selection are Dumbing Down American Education*, which both examines the historical occurrences of textbook censorship and describes how these have affected the present-day situation with an eye to general trends; though

[57] Last, "Textbook Selection", 140.

Foerstel acknowledges the existence of textbook expurgation, his focus is systemic, and he makes no analysis of the expurgated books themselves. It is interesting to note that both Ravitch and Foerstel make no distinction between the efforts and effects of humanist and conservative protestors, treating both as irksome distractions from the true purpose of education. More generally speaking, writing that is critical of expurgation does not investigate humanist pressures, and that which does generally follows Ravitch and Foerstel's approach in failing to consider the ways in which its methods, aims, and outcomes contrast with conservative efforts, tarring all pressure with the same brush.

Studies and books of this kind were generally undertaken by members of what one might consider the intellectual elite, all of whom were trained in research and writing to some degree, operating within a defined intellectual framework, and who found the practice of textbook censorship objectionable. Conservatives advocating for the expurgation of textbooks generally had a self-described anti-intellectual bent,[58] which would explain why the backgrounds of those writing from the conservative viewpoint on the matter are markedly different; those conservative writers with an academic background tend more to be Doctors of Theology rather than Philosophy.

Most notable on the conservative side of the equation are Mel and Norma Gabler, who produced several books, pamphlets, and articles on the perceived damage inflicted by public school textbooks on Christian students, including *What are They Teaching Our Children: What You Can Do About Humanism and Textbooks in Today's Public Schools!* (1987), which describes exactly why they believe parents should be all but breaking down the doors of their children's schools. Prior to devoting themselves to protesting school book content at the Texas textbook adoption hearings, Norma was a housewife with a high school diploma, while Mel worked for a local oil company and had completed one year of college.

Other writers in this category tend to be professional conservative activists or personalities, with their context a biblical rather than humanist education; several of the more vocal contributors, such as Tim LaHaye and Jerry Falwell, are evangelical ministers.

[58] DelFattore, *What Johnny Shouldn't Read,* 46.

Phyllis Schlafly's *Child Abuse in the Classroom* presents transcripts from the textbook lawsuits and focuses on fundamentalist parents' objections, while Tim LaHaye's *Battle for the Mind* purports to explain the insidious effect of secular humanism in leading America 'in the footsteps of Sodom and Gomorrah.'[59] Barbara Morris' *Change Agents in the Schools* attributes the ills of contemporary society to secular humanism and the influence of the public schools, citing schools as 'change agents for the destruction of Christian Western civilization [purposed] to establish instead, a Humanist/Socialist 'new world order.'[60] Jerry Falwell's arguments in *Listen, America!* cover similar territory, with Christian schools suggested as a solution to the influence of public schools. Falwell also praises the work of the Gablers in fighting 'the self-appointed system of secular humanism' in the schools.[61] These works are aimed at a more general audience than those that are critical of censorship, with the intent of informing the average citizen of a looming moral threat against which they must act and calling for a push against the intellectual elite that seeks to seduce the minds of their children.

As far as work in favour of the efforts of humanist activists there would appear to be no single campaigner or urtext, but journals for educators published in the 70s and 80s demonstrate that it was very much in the minds of teachers, especially teachers of English. *The English Journal* especially demonstrated preoccupation with sexist language by publishing seemingly endless articles on how to fight sexism and racism in the classroom, and whether, how, and why to teach using neutral language. A succession of issues showcased the debate as contributors on both sides of the matter published articles explicating their stance. Some of the most typical of these are two responses, arguing opposing views, to the title, 'Forum: Do the NCTE Guidelines on Non-Sexist Use of Language Serve a Positive Purpose?' made by Lance Alter and Millicent Rutherford. Rutherford argues for the use of neutral language, citing clarity of meaning, the historical baggage of the generic 'he', and the inherence of artificial restrictions on language to the teaching of English; Alter states that the guidelines are 'mischievous and unnecessary,' arguing that 'making a

[59] Tim LaHaye, *The Battle for the Mind* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1980), cover material.

[60] Barbara Morris, *Change Agents in the Schools* (Elliot City, Maryland: The Barbara M. Morris Report, 1979), 18.

[61] Rev. Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1980), 183.

big deal out of trivia is likely to intensify it. For example, if members of a particular ethnic group laugh and don't get upset by jokes about their group, they will appear much more able and self-confident than they will if they get all uptight and insecure about it.'[62] Similar articles are 'Majority Report: Until Now' by Norma Wilson, which positively reviews the NCTE guidelines on sexist language in its publications;[63] 'Non-Nonsexist Guidelines: A Happy Neutrality' by Frank S. Zepezaur,[64] and a set of four brief arguments under the title 'Facets: Sex and Language Features' by Harold Allen, Carol Schanche, Albert Joseph, and Paula Treichler.[65]

5. Humanist Protestors

Humanist pressure on publishers and school boards is considered to have its roots in the liberal social movements of the latter half of the twentieth century, most notably the Civil Rights and Women's movements; its initial cause with regards to school texts was the eradication of racist and sexist language, and the inclusion of material by and about racial minorities and women in the curriculum. Its efforts were most clearly seen from the early 1960s through the mid 1970s.[66] Most writers on textbook expurgation, especially those in the conservative camp, focus on its restrictive aspects, such as the request for gendered terms to be changed to gender neutral terms, and for blatantly sexist or racist segments to be removed from textbooks. Though prohibition was an element of humanist protest, requests for restriction mostly focused on a word rather than a concept level, and generally speaking the movement called for inclusion, rather than exclusion, with the intent of broadening the scope of material presented to students. To quote Director of the

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[62] Lance Alter and Millicent Rutherford, "Forum: Do the NCTE Guidelines on Non-Sexist Use of Language Serve a Positive Purpose?," *The English Journal* 65, no. 9 (December 1976):10-13.

[63] Norma Wilson, "Majority Report: Until Now," *The English Journal* 65, no. 5 (May 1976): 8-10.

[64] *The English Journal* 72, no. 4 (April 1983): 23-25.

[65] *The English Journal* 72, no. 8 (December 1983): 12-15.

[66] Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr., *Religious Fundamentalism and American Education: The Battle for the Public Schools* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 31.

Council on Interracial Books for Children's Racism and Sexism Resource Centre for Educators Robert Moore:

> Feminists seek changes in traditionally sexist texts in order to insure constitutionally guaranteed rights for all students, including the right to an equal educational opportunity…. Such pressure is fundamentally different from that which seeks on the basis of tradition to maintain the status quo of discrimination against half the population.[67]

This attitude is reflected both in the content guidelines produced by publishers in response to humanist protest, and in the alterations made to textbooks themselves that came under protest. In 1975, the School Department of Holt, Rinehart and Winston released a 13-page pamphlet on overcoming sexism in education entitled *The Treatment of Sex Roles.* The guidelines open with a section on role models; the itemized list of aims is prefaced with the statement,

> The traditional roles of women in society as homemakers and in the areas of child-rearing, education, nursing, and the arts are both valuable and vital to the life of the society. No effort should be made to downgrade or disparage these roles. Rather, an effort must be made to expand the roles of both sexes, to include men in nurturing and homemaking activities and to include women in areas such as business and science. An unbalanced assignment of such roles does a disservice to both sexes.[68]

The guidelines themselves focus on the achievement of balance and the avoidance of gender-based stereotyping. Contrary to conservative claims that the publisher pushed complete gender reversal, the guidelines state that characters should only be sometimes shown engaging in activities and behaviours stereotypically associated with the opposite gender, with the implication that variety, rather than role reversal, was the goal of the committee who compiled the guidelines. A more nuanced understanding of protestors' desires and the guideline's aims can be obtained by examining what changes were made in the editions of Holt's readers that were revised after the adoption of the guidelines, which will be undertaken later in this section.

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[67] Charles Suhor and Diane Allen, "What Qualities Distinguish Guidelines from Censorship?" In NCTE to You, *The English Journal* 70, no. 3 (March 1981): 93.

[68] Holt, Rinehart and Winston School Department, "Guidelines for the Development of Elementary and Secondary Instructional Materials" (1975), 2.

The 1981 pamphlet *Guidelines for the Treatment of People and Related Issues,* by the Holt, Rinehart and Winston School Department, approaches race and culture in a similar fashion as the previous pamphlet addressed sex, and is reproduced in part in the appendix of *The Language Police.* The pamphlet is primarily concerned with the presentation of minorities, listing stereotypical behaviour and presentations that should be avoided. For example, under the heading 'Jewish People: Images to avoid,' is listed 'Jews with hooked noses; dark, kinky hair; hunched-over postures; heavy makeup and fancy hairstyles.'[69] Other sections cover the presentation of the elderly, Hispanics, Asian Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans.

The Holt Basic Reading Series, editions of which were edited under the guidelines in these two pamphlets, clearly demonstrates both the slow increase in influence exerted by humanist activists and the results of the subsequent conservative backlash. When the series was produced in 1973 Holt, Rinehart and Winston was one of the 'Big Four,' the major publishers whose books were most likely to be found in classrooms across the country.[70] Aimed at students from first through eighth grades (ages 5-14), the readers were conceived to be revolutionary with regards to the method of instruction: while previous reading texts had focused on phonics, accompanied by short passages to exercise phonetic skills, the Holt series took a 'whole word recognition' approach, using excerpts from respected children's literature rather than material written expressly for teaching; these excerpts were accompanied by open-ended discussion questions to test comprehension and encourage critical thinking, as well as writing prompts that asked students to present their personal thoughts, opinions, and experiences, so that the student might concentrate on the act of writing rather than struggling to be inventive with subject or content. The first edition was six years in development, and upon release in 1973 was met with enthusiasm from teachers and educators due to the innovative approach.[71]

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[69] Holt, Rinehart and Winston School Department, "Guidelines for the Treatment of People and Related Issues" (1981), 192.

[70] Bruce Appleby, Greg Johnson, and Robert M. Taylor, "Instructional Materials: Another Hefty Literature Series," *The English Journal* 79, no. 4 (April 1990): 92-96. The other three publishers so designated, according to Appleby, Johnson, and Taylor, are Prentice Hall, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, and Scott, Foresman.

[71] Stephen Bates, *Battleground: One Mother's Cruisade, the Religious Right, and the Struggle for Control of Our Classrooms* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1993), 248.

The series dominated the market throughout the 70s, and generated over $50 million in sales in the first 8 years.[72]

Note that the first edition of the Holt series was released in 1973, while *The Treatment of Sex Roles* was adopted by Holt in 1975: the first edition of the series was developed before the prominent emergence of the Women's movement, and the editor willingly admitted that it had gender issues. To take a brief example: the first edition of the sixth grade reader *Riders on the Earth* is over 500 pages long, and out of the twenty pieces of fiction included only four have female characters that could be considered protagonists: a whale, a dragon, a little girl, and a princess; in each case they are accompanied by a male co-protagonist who in some of the stories could be argued to be the true hero of the narrative. In contrast, some of the stories contain no female characters whatsoever, and several more contain one or two female characters who play a limited supporting role. While the selections are, for the most part, excellent pieces of literature, one could hardly call them representative of the average classroom gender profile.

The second edition of the series was revised under the 1975 content guidelines, released in 1977, and generally deals with the issue of gender balance on an extract level. Three pieces of short fiction with male authors were cut and four pieces by female writers were added, changing the gender ratio for writers from 12:5 to 1:1, and shifting the percentage of named male characters from 77% to 68%. In the third and forth editions, released in 1980 and 1983, changes were made primarily on a line rather than an extract level; with the gender parity of authors retained as far as short fiction was concerned, the gender ratio of characters shifted to 2:1 male to female, and the presentation of non-white characters to 20%, compared to 12% in the first edition. The 1980 edition was the first to come under fire from conservative protestors, and the 1983 edition was revised to bring the series into line with demands made by that group more so than to conform to the demands of humanist protestors. The final edition of the series was published in 1986, with its revision made in response to lawsuits brought by conservative protestors, which will be thoroughly discussed in a later chapter. Tables detailing the changes made in extract selection throughout all five editions of the textbook, including the proportion of

[72] *Ibid.,* 218.

male to female authors and characters, and white to minority authors and characters, may be found in the Appendix.

The frequency of revision, especially in light of the fact that the series consists of 17 volumes averaging approximately five hundred pages each, reflects both the popularity of the new series, in that the publisher was willing to commit to the revisions and complete them so quickly, and the extent to which the content and execution was deemed unsuitable by both interest groups and the publishers themselves. While conservative protestors were active from the books' initial publication, it was not until they made itemized objection to the 1980 edition that editors shifted their focus primarily towards appeasing conservative concerns, so the second and third editions were revised in an attempt to make them conform primarily to liberal demands, and showcase the evolution of editors' thinking on the subject.

Due to the scope of the series it is necessary to artificially limit my field of inquiry. After conducting analysis of the final four volumes of the series (for fifth through eighth grades) it is most logical to focus on the sixth grade reader *Riders on the Earth,* because it was revised with equal attention given to humanist and conservative objections, because it has the greatest body of written protests recorded against it, and because it was central to the 1983 conservative textbook lawsuits.

A General View of the Text

Each edition of the book is broken into six sections, with each section unified by a central theme, and containing a mélange of complete and extracted pieces. Many of these pieces are drawn from pre-existing sources including poetry, short and long fiction, essays, newspaper articles, songs, and nonfiction; sections focusing specifically on the structure and mechanics of language, and brief nonfiction accompaniments explaining people, trades, and careers mentioned in the extracted material were written specifically for the textbooks. Most of the pieces are followed by a set of questions meant to prompt discussion, thought, or comprehension exercises; there are occasions when these questions vary between editions while the pieces that they accompany remain unchanged.

Compared to other textbook series, the citations for the textbooks' content are very thorough. In the instances where certain selections are not cited, the notice prefaces the acknowledgements: 'The authors and publishers have made every effort

to trace the ownership of all selections. Some of the selections are in public domain.'[73] In contrast with contemporary series, the citations provide the original title of stories and extracts as well as the title used in the textbook, making the location of the source material somewhat easier. There are also very thorough credits for the photographs and artwork, of which there is generous inclusion throughout the series.

Also in contrast to many other textbooks, the series has few editors. Only two people, Bernard J. Weiss and Lyman C. Hunt, edited the first edition, with Eloise Eskridge, Janet Sprout, and Millie Moore listed as 'educational consultants.' Weiss and Hunt stayed on throughout the life of the series, with their titles given in the third through fifth editions as 'Senior Author, Reading and Linguistics' and 'General Editor' respectively. For the second edition the consultants were Janet Sprout and Jack Henderson; for the third Janet Sprout, with Loreli Steuer listed as 'Reading and Linguistics'; for the final two editions Loreli Steuer for Reading and Linguistics and Susan Cruikshank for Reading and Language Arts. In contrast, the Adventures in Reading series by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, another Big Four publisher, lists over a dozen editors and contributors without defining what hand they had in the making of the book, with each edition handled by a different team of people. The consistency of the editorial team provides *Adventures in Reading* with a coherence that is lacking in contemporary Big Four series: the pedagogical material that binds the extracts together has a consistent tone, as do the prompts and exercises, and greater care has been taken with the attribution of extracted texts than is seen in the work of the other three major publishers.

Content Analysis: Three Short Stories

The short story 'The Baseball Computer,' which appears in all five editions of *Riders on the Earth,* was adapted from the novel *Ollie's Team and the Baseball Computer*, written by Clem Philbrook and published in 1967, six years before the first edition of the Holt readers. The acknowledgements give complete bibliographic information for the novel and note that the story that appears in the textbook is condensed. This is perhaps an understatement, as the original novel was 122 pages

[73] Bernard J. Weiss and Lyman C. Hunt, eds.,*Great Waves Breaking* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983), iii.

long and replete with subplots; the textbook version dispenses with these along with 108 pages, presenting a story that is a tidy fifth the length of its source material.

The story is about an elementary school baseball team that consistently loses because the players each think that they would be better suited to a different position. The team is 'data processed' via computer by the father of the protagonist, the results of which indicate that the players are all playing their ideal positions. This leads to the team winning games; in the end it is revealed that it wasn't the data processing that made the team great, but that the players had the potential for greatness within themselves all along.

The original text and illustrations present all the characters with Caucasian features; the textbook version eliminates physical descriptions and the illustrations, which are consistent throughout all four editions, show characters of a mix of different cultural backgrounds, with the coach, the protagonist, and the protagonist's father being illustrated as African-American. Due to the cutting of the subplots several overtly sexist interludes are eliminated from the version of the story that appears in the first two editions of the textbook; unfortunately this causes those that remain to be more obvious. Though the coach of the team is a woman the baseball team contained no female players, and the story is scattered with phrases like 'the right man for the job,' the players are frequently referred to as 'men,' and male pronouns are used consistently to refer to mixed gender groups. The 1980 edition addresses the gender imbalance by changing two of the characters on the team, Mike and Art, to Patty and Sue, while otherwise leaving their actions in the story unchanged, save for regendering the relevant pronouns; the illustrations are similarly altered, with long hair added to three of the eleven players pictured. 'Men' is changed to 'players,' and sentences that require singular pronouns are restructured to be correct while using plural, nongendered pronouns.

These changes go a long way towards bringing the story more into accord with the guidelines, but they don't completely outweigh the negative treatment of female characters that is carried over from the source text. In the first two editions there are three female characters: the coach, who is described by the main protagonist as the team's 'only claim to fame' and the source of 'a lot of ribbing' from other teams, and two young girls who are identified as the players' female classmates. The three places in which the girls appear in the first two editions, and the manner in which those mentions were edited in the 1980 edition, are as follows:

1973, 1977	1980
‘We’ll be right here to help you,’ said Deedee Miller and Elmira Bisbee, two of Ollie’s classmates who had been watching the team practice.	‘We’ll be right here to help you,’ said David Miller and Elmira Bisbee, two of Ollie’s younger neighbours who had been watching the team practice.
‘We have some new baseball cheers, haven’t we, Elmira?’ asked Deedee.	‘We have some new baseball jokes, haven’t we, Elmira?’ asked David.
‘What do girls know about baseball?’ interrupted Ollie.	‘What do you know about baseball?’ interrupted Ollie.
‘Oh, we know a lot. We’ve read many baseball books,’ answered both girls.	‘Oh, we know a lot. We’ve read many baseball books, and we play, too,’ answered Elmira and David.
Then Elmira said, ‘Tell me, Deedee, why does it take longer to go from second base to third than from first base to second?’	Then Elmira said, ‘Tell me, David, why does it take longer to go from second base to third than from first base to second?’
Deedee’s brown eyes sparkled. ‘Because there’s a *short stop* in between.’	David’s brown eyes sparkled. ‘Because there’s a *short stop* in between.’
The girls burst into giggles. Ollie cringed. Dusty held his nose.	The two children burst into giggles. Ollie cringed. Dusty held his nose.
Then Deedee winked at Elmira. ‘Tell the boys what baseball stockings are, Elmira.’	Then David winked at Elmira. ‘Tell the team what baseball stockings are, Elmira.’
‘Why certainly, Deedee. Baseball stockings are stockings with runs in them!’	‘Why certainly, David. Baseball stockings are stockings with runs in them!’
Ollie glanced at Dusty with disgust as the girls burst into giggles.[74]	Ollie glanced at Dusty with disgust as Elmira and David burst into giggles.[75]

[74] *Riders on the Earth* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), 75-76.

[75] *Riders on the Earth* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), 75-76.

Deedee and Elmira were dressed in their snappy white pleated skirts and red sweaters.[76]	David and Elmira were telling jokes and giggling. They wore red sweaters and caps.[77]
The Red Sox fans were screaming now. Deedee and Elmira led them in a rousing cheer.[78]	The Red Socks fans were screaming now. David and Elmira were jumping up and down.[79]

In revising the longer section in order to make it more consistent with the content guidelines, the editor eliminated the mention of the characters leading cheers, so that while the girls in the earlier edition attended the baseball game for the support and encouragement of the all-male team, the children in the later editions apparently are in attendance more for their own amusement and fondness for the game. It is interesting that the cheering is the only aspect of the characters' behaviour that is changed, and that instead of changing the dynamic between the characters the editor chose to age down the pair and turned one of them into a boy, so that the players' disdain is for two younger children, rather than the only female peers shown in the story. In the previous two editions, the same editor saw no issue with that behaviour being enacted by girls who are the same age as the baseball players, despite the fact that the players are referred to throughout the story collectively as 'men,' and that the players' response to the girls' enthusiasm and support is nothing but open disgust.

That this piece was retained while several extracts from critically acclaimed works were removed because they did not contain female characters is slightly baffling from a literary viewpoint, but gives a clear impression of the publishers' and editors' attitudes. The idea of gender equality in textbooks does not appear to have fully penetrated the editorial staff until the production of the 1980 edition, as the portrayal of girls as existing for no other reason than to cheer for the boys and who receive nothing but disdain from the boys for whom they are cheering was

[76] *Riders on the Earth* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), 78.
[77] *Riders on the Earth* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), 78.
[78] *Riders on the Earth* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), 80.
[79] *Riders on the Earth* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), 80.

apparently seen as a perfectly acceptable presentation of female characters over the course of two editions.

Many of the stories that are cut from the 1977 edition for the purpose of increasing female representation are replaced by an assortment of writing, both fiction and nonfiction, that matches up perfectly in terms of page count but which is rarely similar to the piece that it replaces. One instance which resists this trend is the story 'Young Ladies Don't Slay Dragons,' which replaces 'Family Life;' both are parodies of the knightly genre. In 'Family Life,' a mother dragon tells her children the story of an encounter she and their father had with a knight when they were newly married, while in 'Young Ladies Don't Slay Dragons' a dragon is plaguing the land, the princess volunteers to deal with it, the entire palace insists that young ladies don't slay dragons, and the princess deals with it. It is interesting to note that in doing so, she rescues a young prince who insists on marrying her, just in case readers perceived the story to be too radical. Though the story is written by a woman and focuses on a female character, it does not present an entirely non-stereotypical view of femininity:

> And once she even killed a mouse. She had come into the bedchamber to find her mother standing on a chair and screaming – as queens often do in the presence of mice. 'Don't worry mother, I'll get him,' Penelope said.
>
> 'Young ladies don't kill mice,' the queen said. 'For heaven's sake, stand on a chair and scream along with me.'
>
> But Penelope didn't stand on a chair and scream. She caught the mouse and disposed of it tidily.
>
> Well, she would dispose of the dragon, too. And she would get some ideas about how to go about it. [80]

Though the princess Penelope is confident in her abilities to slay the dragon, she is the only female character in the story that breaks from traditional gender roles, and even so she is portrayed in the illustrations throughout all editions of the book as pretty, slender, blonde, and dressed in a pink gown. Despite her demonstrated competency in all other areas, including armor repair and birdhouse building, the other characters continually dismiss her as a possible candidate for dragon extermination.

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[80] *Riders on the Earth* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), 382.

A brief example of some rudimentary line-level alterations for the 1977 edition can be seen in the extract titled 'Pelops and Poseidon,' an adaptation of the classical myth written by Frances Carpenter. Since one of the goals of the second edition, as dictated by the content guidelines, was to have as perfect gender parity among the authors anthologized as possible, and since it was easier to reproduce material from previous textbooks than to identify, obtain permission for use, illustrate, edit, and incorporate new material, it is logical to assume that the editors wished to retain as many female-authored pieces as possible from the first edition, regardless of the quality of the writing.

The myth itself is the story of how Pelops uses trickery and the help of Poseidon to win the princess Hippodameia as his wife; the princess is the only named female character[81] in the story, and she is completely passive throughout. This is merely a reflection of the gender biases of the original myth, but Carpenter chose to begin the story with a few pages of atmospheric scene-setting, in which a young Greek boy called Milo accompanies his father Arion to watch the Race of Pelops during the Isthmian Games, a precursor to the Olympic Games, supposedly founded by Pelops in thanks to Poseidon for his assistance. The opening adds a wider context to the myth, and contains some of the more interesting language in the piece, as it is more concerned here with setting up atmosphere than conveying the events of the story. The version in the first edition begins:

> The sky overhead was as blue as the sea that washed the shores of ancient Greece. The sun's rays fell brightly on the white pillars of the nearby temple of Poseidon, the great God of the Sea. Its bright light almost hurt the eyes of the boy Milo, who sat beside his father, Arion, on a stone seat in the hippodrome.
>
> Hundreds of men and boys were crowded together on the rising circles of seats in this open-air theater outside the Greek city of Corinth. From near and far they had come to watch the great games being held there to honor Poseidon.
>
> The time was long, long ago. The Greeks then still believed in the magic of their powerful gods upon lofty Mount Olympus. They said the mightiest of all these gods, Zeus, ruled the earth. Poseidon,

[81] I must note that the (non sentient) horses that appear in the story are explicitly identified as females and are given female names; when it came time to tally up the ratio of male to female characters at the end of the revision process the mares would have been counted as 'named female characters,' and would have been considered to contribute towards gender parity in the text as much as the voiceless Hippodameia and the more vocal Princess Penelope.

brother of Zeus, was the God of the Sea.[82]

The introductory pages go on to illustrate the importance of the sea to the Ancient Greeks, the role that Poseidon played in the pantheon and his powers over the natural world, and the cultural significance of the myth of Pelops and Poseidon and the Isthmian Games; throughout this Milo is used as a self-insert for the reader, presenting him or her with a character with whom they should theoretically be easily able to identify as a means of making the myth more accessible to the intended audience.

The fact that only a young male perspective is offered is as much a product of the culture in which the adaptation was written as it is a product of the culture about which the adaptation was written. Given the editorial approach to other pieces it is logical (if cynical) to conclude that the cut was made to eliminate two named male characters, Milo and his father, from the story, thus improving the 'gender balance' of the piece. In the second edition, the story begins, 'the story of a prince named Pelops and Poseidon, the great God of the Sea, was well known in ancient Greece. As it was told to boys and girls of those long-ago times, I will tell it to you.'[83] In this version, the contemporary cultural context of the story is not reintroduced elsewhere.

It is inarguably an issue that the book in its first iteration was biased as to the race and gender balance of both writers and characters presented. For the most part, the content of the stories independent of each other was not an issue, but the text presented as a whole lacked balance, and so it is logical that the editors' first reaction to the need for alterations was to replace entire pieces, rather than to attempt to correct the bias on a line level. Though the changes brought about in the second edition, from an equality-minded viewpoint, are an improvement, from a literary view they are a detriment to the overall strength of the book. This could have been otherwise, had the cuts been made more judiciously. As it stands, it appears that the stories that were selected to be replaced were done so with an eye to expediency, rather than to the quality of the literature presented: several of the pieces that were cut in the revision for the second edition were from critically acclaimed works which have remained in print and on library shelves, such as *The Black Cauldron* and *The*

[82] *Riders on the Earth* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 262.

[83] *Riders on the Earth* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), 265.

Phantom Tollbooth, while the pieces that replaced them tended to have experienced relatively short-lived popularity.

Though the effects of humanist activism have included the removal of material that was determined to be harmful and without merit, some responses to humanist pressures have had negative outcomes. In public education it is now a given that no material be presented that can be considered offensive, and equal representation must be given to all viewpoints. While these policies restrict language that is truly offensive and ensures that textbooks present multiple opinions on topics that benefit from them, such as historic events, they have also been used to justify the sanitization of complex material. For instance, Texas' Board of Education insists that Christianity not be presented in a negative light, which necessitates the Crusades, the Inquisition, European relations with indigenous Americans, and the history of slavery and race relations to all be presented in ways which gloss the negative impacts of these events, if they are not ignored entirely. This tolerance for alternate viewpoints is also the basis by which several states justify the teaching of Creationism in high school science classrooms.[84]

The definition of 'offensive' material has become far more diverse since the concept was first introduced, with the addition of ableism, ageism, and the promotion of environmentalism and healthy living to the list. The method among publishers for bringing about the eradication of offensive material has come to consist primarily of producing long lists of specific images and concepts that must be avoided, such as the mention of 'junk food' or 'conflict with authority,' including parents, teachers, and the law,[85] which give equal weight to racial stereotyping as to name-calling, drastically limit the possible content of books, and stands completely at odds with the original intent of humanist activists to broaden the scope of material presented to students.[86] Though practically any concept, argument, or historical fact is guaranteed to be offensive to someone, educational publishers have done their best to produce textbooks that can be found to be offensive to neither conservative nor liberal activists. Sadly, the consensus seems to be that the content of these textbooks is

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[84] DelFattore, *What Johnny Shouldn't Read,* 13-17.

[85] Ravitch, *The Language Police,* 195-197.

[86] One publisher is known to have said, as though it was a well-known truth, that any literature written before 1970 was automatically out, because anything prior to that date was unacceptable due to either racism or sexism.

frequently neither factually accurate, in the case of fact-based disciplines such as history and the sciences, nor of artistic merit, such as in literature and the fine arts.

The sacredness of the work of giants of literature aside, the question must be asked: is it possible for a student to learn how to analyse, interpret, and deal critically with a difficult piece of writing when that writing has been stripped of that which makes it difficult and provides material for in-depth analysis? Is it possible to teach critical thinking using literature that has been rewritten to no longer require critical thinking?

6. Conservative Protestors

Though religious groups protested and burned schoolbooks throughout American history, current conservative textbook protests took form in the early 1970s, when organizations and individuals identified with Christian fundamentalism and the political right began exerting focused pressure on publishers and encouraging parents, educators, and Christians in general to join them in their crusade.

The conservative censorship movement was in large part a reaction to the success of humanist pressure, and much of the textbook material which came under fire, such as the inclusion of female and minority characters in readers, was a direct reaction to the activities of humanist protestors. The movement was also a product of the general cultural backlash that resulted in the Conservative Ascendancy, and as such was supported by many of the major organizations that contributed to the New Right's rise to political power in the final decades of the 20th century. While humanist protest was a byproduct of the activities of activists working for change in the social and political arena and generally lacked focus and cohesion, conservative protestors were organized and purposeful, with censoring school curriculum their primary *raison d'être.* While humanist activists called for greater inclusion and wider representation in textbooks, the conservative movement called for exclusion, presenting publishers and school boards with lists of unacceptable content and demanding its removal. Perhaps it is due to their high level of organization and cohesion that conservative protestors, and even the selfsame groups, organizations, and individuals who were most active in the 70s and 80s, continue in their endeavour to make public school curricula conform to their worldview, while humanist pressure

remains primarily in the form of public resistance to the efforts of contemporary conservative censors, on the occasions that these come into the public eye.

Conservative activists initially focused on influencing curricula pre-publication through attendance at textbook adoption hearings and by submitting written objections to school boards and publishers, offering support in lawsuits when requested. When they started seeing results from this work in the 1970s they began focusing more on publicly visible protests, producing checklists for parents to use in reading textbooks for objectionable content, form objection letters for parents to send to school boards and publishers, and guides to organizing petitions, protests, and lawsuits, until in the 1990s they all but abandoned pre-publication efforts to focus on publicly visible methods, especially lawsuits and protests.

Many organizations involved themselves in conservative textbook protests; the most visible and influential of these was the Educational Research Analysts, which was founded by Mel and Norma Gabler in 1973, expressly to review public school textbooks for objectionable content pre-publication and agitate to have content and guidelines changed to reflect a conservative Christian worldview. Some of the most vocal organizations, which actively encouraged protests and lawsuits among their adherents, were as follows.

The Moral Majority was a political organization established in 1979 by televangelist Jerry Falwell, associated with the Christian Right and the Republican Party, claiming to represent social conservatives and evangelical Christians united in the cause of the 'pro-family movement' in a culture that 'had turned away from God;' it was vocally anti-divorce, anti-abortion, anti-women's rights, and anti-gay rights, and was disbanded in 1989, for the reason that its founder believed that its purpose had been fulfilled.[87] Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum (est. 1975) is a conservative, Christian, traditionalist interest group which markets itself as 'pro-family' and which is most notable for its vocal opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment with the argument that it is a conspiracy to 'abolish the right to 'stay at home, to rear your children, to be supported by your husband.'[88] The American Family Association (est. 1977) focuses on the perceived immorality, profanity, and violence in television and media, compiling data on material deemed objectionable

[87] Bruce J. Shulman and Julian E. Zelizer, *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008),13.

[88] *Ibid.*, 22.

and calling for boycotts by conservative Christian families.[89] Focus on the Family (est. 1977) and the Family Research Council (est. 1981) were both formed by the radio preacher James Dobson, the former to provide Christian guidance to troubled families, the latter to provide more overtly political advocacy for the 'traditional Christian family.' These organizations advocate for corporal punishment, Christian heterosexual nuclear families with stay-at-home mothers as the solution for all social ills, and abstinence-only sex education; attribute homosexuality to permissive parenting and support 'gay conversion therapy'; and advocate against legalized abortion, divorce, feminism, and gay rights.[90] Beverly LaHaye's Concerned Women for America (est. 1979), according to the mission statement on the organization's website, aims to 'protect and promote Biblical values among all citizens — first through prayer, then education, and finally by influencing our society — thereby reversing the decline in moral values in our nation'; the website lists seven core issues which are the organizations' current focus, which include the outlawing of abortion, the legal definition of marriage as 'one man, one woman,' opposition to US involvement in the UN on the grounds of national sovereignty, and the return to American public policy being based in a Judeo-Christian worldview.[91] The Daughters and Sons of the American Revolution are non-profit service organizations which aim to promote 'historic preservation, education, and patriotism,' membership is open only to those who can prove lineal descent from 'a patriot of the American Revolution.'[92] All of these organizations protested personally, produced material to aid in protesting, or encouraged and supported others in protesting against the mention or inclusion of material including secular humanism, situation ethics, gender equality, evolution, and critical thinking in textbooks, and in demanding that the

[89] Glen H. Utter and John W. Storey, *The Religious Right: A Reference Handbook.* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2001), 160.

[90] Shulman and Zelizer, *Rightward Bound,* 13; Utter and Storey, *The Religious Right*, 172-173.

[91] "Issues," *Concerned Women for America*, accessed Septermber 5, 2016, http://concernedwomen.org/issues/.

[92] "Who We Are," *Daughters of the American Revolution,* accessed September 5, 2016, http://www.dar.org/national-society/about-dar/who-we-are/who-we-are.

books reflect a Christian worldview, inculcate students with conservative values, and present a thoroughly patriotic history of the country.[93]

The earliest of the textbook lawsuits in which they were involved is agreed to be that which took place in West Virginia's Kanawha County in 1973, and began when one board member, Alice Moore, raised objections to the language arts texts that were being considered for adoption, though she had not read them, claiming that they were 'anti-American' promoted 'ghetto' language, and were pro-communism.[94] Though textbooks were under consideration for all grades, those to which Moore objected were predominantly for the grades 7-12 range, and were produced by well-respected publishers including Scott, Foresman and Houghton Mifflin. When the books were adopted in spite of her objections 'thousands of protestors mobilized;' local businesses and schools were boycotted and a quarter of the county's 45,000 students did not attend the first day of the school year, 3,500 coal miners staged a walk-off, the city bus system of the state capital was shut down, and the school board members who had supported the adoption of the books received death threats and demands for resignation.[95] The situation escalated despite board members having the books removed from schools, with arson and bombs closing four elementary schools, many others vandalized with KKK and Nazi insignia, the board of education office building being damaged by fifteen sticks of dynamite, and a local branch of the Klan staged a cross-burning in support of the protests.[96] The Gablers provided Moore with material to aid in her formulation of objections, becoming more involved in the

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[93] In presenting the position of these organizations it is useful to quote from a handbook published by Robert Simonds (all emphasis from the original):

There are only *two* general world views. Thought there are many ideas on life's worth and purpose they all boil down to two basic views. One is *God's view* – the other is *man's view.*

These two views produce two different people The humanist or worldly person is basically EGO, or *self-oriented.* The Christ-ian person or follower of God is "*other person"* oriented.

Humanism says there is *no* God. Christianity says there *is* a living Creator God. Each of these two views, philosophies, or belief patterns comprise their own world-view. All belief systems fit into one of these two diametrically opposite camps, even though there is every shade and colour in each of these fundamentally opposite philosophies. (*Communicating a Christian World View in the Classroom: A Manual* [Costa Mesa, Calif.: NACE, 1983], 1.)

[94] Carol Mason, *Reading Appalachia from Left to Right: Conservatives and the 1974 Kanawha County Textbook Controversy.* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2009), 3.

[95] *Ibid.,* 5.

[96] *Ibid., 56.*

protest as it developed until they ultimately flew to Charleston to show their support.[97]

The lawsuit that gained the most publicity and appears to have defined the genre, as it were, occurred in Hawkins County, Tennessee, over the Holt, Rinehart and Winston readers discussed in the previous section. In the first weeks of the autumn term of 1983, a sixth grade student in Hawkins County, Tennessee asked her mother for help with her reading homework, which consisted of the story 'A Visit to Mars' in the 1983 edition of *Riders on the Earth* from the Holt Basic Reading Series. The story described telepathic communication with Martians; the mother in question, Vicki Frost, who self-identified as a fundamentalist Christian, objected to the telepathy described in the story on the grounds that 'anything beyond present human capacity… is a form of magic forbidden by the Bible'; she believed all forms of imaginative thinking to be dangerous influences that could lead Christians away from the truth of the Bible.[98] After reading the remainder of her daughter's textbook, and the textbooks of her children who were in the first, second, and seventh grades, she found more objectionable material, including 'minorities, foreigners, environmentalism, women in nontraditional roles, and open-ended value judgments without clear right and wrong answers.'[99]

She first demanded that the principal of the school have the books removed on the grounds that they 'promoted witchcraft, rebellion, pacifism, and Hinduism; reading them might even invite demonic possession.'[100] When the principal refused to have the books removed and threatened to have Frost arrested for her attempts to disrupt classes – she repeatedly removed her children from the school in the middle of the school day or took them out of class during English study and attempted to teach them herself in the cafeteria with books she had brought from home – she then went to the school board. When the school board refused to acquiesce a group of fundamentalist parents and their religious friends, with funding provided by Concerned Women for America and assisted in the formulation of their testimony by the Gablers themselves, initiated the lawsuit designated *Mozert vs. Hawkins County*

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[97] *Ibid.,* 172.

[98] DelFattore, *What Johnny Shouldn't Read,* 13-14.

[99] *Ibid.,* 14. A detailed legal history of the *Mozert* and similar trials is given in this source.

[100] Bates, *Battleground,* 11.

Public School; many of the people involved in the protest did not have school-aged children, or had children being educated in other school districts.

The demands made by the conservative families who brought the lawsuits against their school boards included the removal of the books from the school on the grounds that the textbooks were teaching the 'religion of Secular Humanism' and were therefore unconstitutional, that the content that they objected to be replaced with content that reflected their values, and that they should be permitted to teach their own children from literature curricula of their selection on school property and during the scheduled time for literature instruction. Though named for Bob Mozert, who volunteered to lead the protest group because, according to Frost, 'a woman is not supposed to be seen or heard in public,' Frost continued to be a focal point of the lawsuit and provided a great deal, if not the majority, of testimony against the books when the case went to court.[101] The trial was technically decided in favour of the plaintiffs in 1986: since testimony made it clear that no standard textbook series could be found that would accommodate all of the parents' views, they were given the permission to remove their children from reading classes only under the condition that they sufficiently taught their children reading at home, and the Holt series would remain in classrooms.[102] At this point the children for whom the protestors had been so concerned had moved up the grades, with many of them having graduated or come into their majority, which did nothing to dampen the ardor with which the protestors approached the trial. Though it was neither a resounding victory nor very effective in terms of protecting the children on whose behalf the trial was nominally undertaken, the trial did succeed in one regard: presumably unable to recover from the bad publicity and the mad scramble to revise the series to satisfy the protestors, Holt was sold to another publishing company, bringing the world of textbook publishing one step closer to a monopoly market.

With a few exceptions including *Island Trees v. Pico,* in which five high school students sued their school board for removing nine books from the school library at the behest of conservative parents,[103] the lawsuits pitted conservative parents, who almost always identified as fundamentalist Christians and who were

[101] Ibid., 66.

[102] Ibid., 275-277.

[103] Provenzo, *Religious Fundamentalism and American Education,* 26.

backed by or instructed by one or more of the aforementioned major groups, against school boards in an effort to have textbooks and series removed from use. In the instances in which the parents were ruled against the publishers nevertheless faced dramatic losses as a direct result of the bad press, and many textbook series were pulled or discontinued, or their publishers or imprints shut down.

Though the influence of conservative Christian activists can be seen on textbooks from earlier in the century, it was not until the 1980s that it became clear how much influence these individuals had over what was published and what was taught, influence that other interest groups lacked due to their inability to compare in terms of size, organization, unity of vision, and resources. Though both the Texas Board of Education and the textbook publishers had taken protesters' stated views and guidelines well into account in producing the books that came under fire during *Mozert,* the trial made it apparent that the most influential would be satisfied only if they were permitted to personally asses and censor the entirety of the curriculum, whether they had children who would be reading it or not. To quote Stephen Arons, '…to be concerned with the education of one's own children is human but to be concerned with the education of everyone else's children is divine.'[104]

Protestor Objections

There are three sources from which a reader can gain an impression of exactly what it is the conservative protesters object to: material generated by the protestors themselves in the form of written testimony presented to the Board of Education as well as books and pamphlets produced to be distributed among potential activists to inform them as to what they should object to; content guidelines produced by publishers for in-house use; and the contested texts themselves. If these sources are considered in conjunction, it is possible to form a clear picture of conservative protestor views and how they contrast to the goals of humanist protestors.

The 1980 edition of the Holt, Rinehart and Winston series is the first for which the Gablers produced a Bill of Particulars, which they presented to the Texas Board of Education during the 1978 textbook adoption hearing; Holt would have

[104] Stephen Arons, *Compelling Belief: The Culture of American Schooling.* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1983): 16.

been operating under internal guidelines influenced by the Gabler's previous Bills and testimony as they had been regular participants at adoption meetings since 1962. The portion of the bill dealing with the first eight grades runs to 75 pages, with the high school grades, for which Holt produced an unconnected series of readers, being treated separately.

The most frequently repeated complaint in the bill regards the method of reading instruction used. The fact that the series used whole word recognition, rather than phonics, was one of the reasons that teachers raved about the series. The Gablers do not elaborate as to why they object to the non-phonics based approach, but rather point out instances in which the books fail to teach phonetic reading as if the School Board were considering the books due to ignorance of the method used. The first twenty pages of the bill are primarily devoted to recording instances that demonstrate 'Defective Method in Teaching of Reading,' as the Gablers describe it.

From the wording of their response to exercise prompts in the teacher's edition it is clear that they believe that teachers are intended to and do teach the textbook verbatim, working systematically through the entire book reading out exactly what the publisher has written, rather than choosing the exercises they prefer, supplementing with exercises of their own, and adjusting the tone and content of the lesson to the experience level and personal interests of their classroom. They state clearly that they believe that teaching should consist of the students being continuously fed concrete information, with discussion, writing prompts, and any activities that do not consist of an obvious transferal of data to be a waste of classroom time. To quote directly an objection to discussion prompts following a short story, 'Classrooms are in existence *only* to teach academic skills; not [to focus on] student feelings.'[105] In addition to this, they believe that the information transferred should forward their worldview, and that the presentation of behaviours and attitudes in writing is equivalent to giving them official sanction, so that if a story in a reader contains a character who takes something that isn't theirs, the Gablers interpret this as the reader actively encouraging stealing.

Any instance that would require a student to speak about personal experiences or circumstances, or to offer opinions on a fictional scenario, is seen to be an invasion of privacy or a pointless waste of time; in the second instance the students'

[105] Mel Gabler and Norma Gabler, "Bill of Particulars on the Holt Reading Series, Presented to the Texas Board of Education as Part of the Textbook Adoption Process," 1980. P. 38.

lack of experience will prevent them from providing workable solutions, and in the first the protestors state that it is inappropriate for students to talk about their home life since liberal teachers are not familiar with conservative mores and won't have the context to interpret a student's experiences, such as corporal punishment, correctly. Following a story in one of the first grade readers, the teacher is to ask the students if they would make the same decisions as the main character, and whether they think it would be the best thing to do, with emphasis on students being able to substantiate their answers logically. 'The text not only asks questions that invade the students' privacy but also to discuss and defend their personal values' [106] is the objection that the Gablers give to the exercise. When discussion prompts ask children to talk about how to solve world problems, such as pollution, the Gabler's response is 'Most adults could not solve the pollution problem – why hinder young seven year old children with so many problems?'[107] Whether the Gablers were being facetious in responding to the discussion prompt, as if the children are being burdened with actually solving world problems rather than being taught to express and support their views in a critical and well-reasoned manner, is unclear from the text, though the frequency with which they employ this argument would indicate that they are in earnest. This objection was persistently used as basis for the removal of critical thinking skill building tasks from the texts; they also required that fiction portraying situations where characters had to make difficult choices or the rightness of a given choice was ambiguous be removed on the same grounds.

The presentation of traditional gender roles are similarly high on their list of priorities, with the stated intent of countering the effects of the Women's Movement and restoring traditional gender roles. The teacher's edition of the Level 8 text for Grade 1 prompts a class discussion over whether or not specific careers are open to both men and women, with the aim of the discussion being that students 'come to realize that nearly all careers can be pursued by both men and women.'[108] The Gabler's response to this is: 'Why censor the most rewarding and important profession possible – girls and ladies as mothers and homemakers?[109] In response to a discussion of personal titles that includes Ms. as an option: 'Students should be

[106] *Ibid*., 23.

[107] *Ibid*., 28.

[108] *Ibid*., 20.

[109] *Ibid*., 20.

taught correct standard English instead of current fads and slang such as 'Ms.' Many people, both male and female, do not consider Ms [sic] a title of respect. The title of respect for girls is Miss and for married ladies is Mrs. This text should be corrected.'[110] There is no indication what title they find appropriate for unmarried adult women, though an objection is recorded for every occurrence of 'Ms.' in the textbook. In a similar vein, they respond to the mention of female athletes by citing the gender balance clause in the Board of Education's call for textbook submissions, stating that there should be fewer female athletes included, since male athletes outnumber female athletes and it is unrealistic to present an equal number of both in the text; this argument is also used in objecting to a section on queens who have had great influence on their citizens, and whenever women are mentioned as being employed in traditionally male trades. To the short story 'Young Ladies Don't Slay Dragons' the Gablers say, 'This selection is obviously feminist propaganda. Students are being subjected to the biased beliefs of the author in a current fad.[111] Regarding the series as a whole, their response is 'These texts do not realistically portray traditional families, nor do they realistically depict the roles of men/women, boys/girls.[112]

In keeping with their opinion that to portray in writing is to indicate support, the Bill contains objections to all instances in which parent-child relationships are characterized in a way that is not in keeping with how the Gablers think parents and children should interact in real life. Their response to a parent in a story who explains to her son why he needs to do his chores rather than punishing him for refusing: 'This portrays the mother as a weak authority figure who practices no discipline.'[113] Objections are registered to negative feelings expressed towards parents and to the portrayal of problematic parent-child relationships, which are accompanied by claims that indicate that parental authority should be unquestioned by characters and supported by the narrative, and that the children portrayed in texts should always be shown to love and respect their parents. Furthermore, neither the teacher nor the students should question or evaluate the behaviour of adult characters in the readers.

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[110] *Ibid*., 39.

[111] *Ibid*., 70.

[112] *Ibid*., 76.

[113] *Ibid.,* 67.

Besides the major topics that garnered repeated objections, there are several more minor points that received objections no less adamant. The claim that illiteracy is on the rise in the US and that all time available should be spent in instruction is used often when the teacher's edition contains prompts for discussions of gender roles. There are general objections to roleplaying which reference its 'known dangers' but which fail to elaborate on those dangers or the grounds for the Gabler's objection. In response to the writing prompt, 'If you had the choice of being any animal other than a human being, which animal would you choose? Write reasons for your choice,' the Gablers write, 'It is degrading to equate humans with animals.'[114] An essay on dialects in America is responded to with 'This essay would open the door for the use of non-standard language in classrooms'; any treatment or mention of variants on academic English – that is, white English – is similarly objected to.[115] The story 'Look out over the sea' by Pearl Buck is flagged for removal because, 'This story is very depressing.'[116] An objection to a poem written in spoonerisms runs, 'Why should twelve year olds spend time learning how to speak incorrectly?'[117]

Ellen Last's dissertation provides the most comprehensive compilation of the written and oral protest that conservatives presented to the Texas adoption board during the 1978 hearing on new literature textbooks, which was responsible for adopting the majority of the books that were targeted in the 1980s textbook lawsuits. Her work draws on both the written arguments and oral testimony, which were voluminous, requiring computer processing to be made sensible. Last divided the protests into categories labeled 1) Personal, 2) Descriptive, 3) Interpretative, 4) Evaluative, and 5) Educational,[118] with the further subcategories of A) concern for author, B) concerns related to the reader, C) concerns related to content, D) concern for literary and language-related matters, and E) cultural concerns.[119] Overall, personal responses and educational concern were the most numerous, with the subcategory related to content or subject matter making up nearly half of the

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[114] *Ibid.,* 60.

[115] *Ibid.,* 65.

[116] *Ibid.,* 68.

[117] *Ibid*., 75.

[118] Last, "Textbook Selection or Censorship," 77.

[119] *Ibid.,* 78.

objections, and the subcategory concerning literature's effect on the reader comprising a third.[120]

22%, the largest single percentage, of protest fell into category 1C: personal reaction to content or theme;[121] the second most frequent categorization was 5B with 20% of objections, and involves educational concerns regarding the reader.[122] In contrast, Last posits 'that if the rating process were applied to comments on literature by teachers or textbook publishers, two frequently occurring ratings would be 3D, interpretation of language and literary features, and 4D, evaluation of language and literary features, two of the cells for which the protesters had >2% of objections'[123]; this highlights the protesters' focus on having the textbooks conform to their personal beliefs and worldview, rather than stand as good examples of teaching texts.

Some of the statements the protesters made that Last sorted into category 1C include 'This story…is an attack on the family, the home, American society and Christianity'; 'Note role reversals of parents (father shops), and the inappropriate Women's Liberation term 'Ms.' instead of 'Mrs.'.'[124] Protests in the 5B category include 'This could easily breed disruption or rebellion and could cause an incendiary situation where women libbers are powerful';[125] 'why stress improper behaviour of nation's leaders? Errodes [sic] confidence, leads to negative opinion';[126] 'Asks for value judgments teenagers not capable of, should not waste their minds on. Story stresses problems with no real solutions'.[127] The category 5C, educational concerns over content, contains 10% of the protests, which include 'Why not stories that teach individualism and self reliance, pride of country, love of God and family?';[128] 'A four line poem – not worthy of classroom time of discussion';[129] 'Why do we need education on gangs? …Why discuss such a negative subject when

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[120] *Ibid.,* 91.

[121] *Ibid.*, 79.

[122] *Ibid*., 82.

[123] *Ibid*., 89.

[124] *Ibid*., 79.

[125] *Ibid*., 82.

[126] *Ibid*., 83.

[127] *Ibid*., 83-84.

[128] *Ibid*., 85.

[129] *Ibid*., 85.

there is no solution to the problems, no encouraging content? What academic value has it?'; 'This kind of reading would serve to indoctrinate with women's lib philosophy.' [130]

Nearly a decade after the protests covered in Last's study the Educational Research Analysts produced the volume *What are they Teaching Our Children?: What You Can Do About Humanism and Textbooks in Today's Public Schools!* This volume elaborates in narrative style on 'the most common problem areas of curriculum and textbook reviewing,' presenting stories about horrified and unwitting parents attempting to determine why their compliant children have become rebellious teenagers and encountering witchcraft, murder, Satanism, rape, and brainwashing in their children's school and textbooks.[131] The book recommends that parents obtain copies of the Gabler's handbooks in order to aid them in weeding out objectionable content in their children's' curricula and putting a stop to it. The handbook titled *HB-1: Humanism* contains the assertion that textbooks indoctrinate students, who they refer to as children despite the fact that many of the challenged books were meant for high school students (ages 14-18), with the principles of secular humanism, which they claim is a religion. The humanist beliefs that they object to, as they state them, are the 'assumption of man's independence' and human self-sufficiency, sections of textbooks that tell teenage readers that not all conflict is unhealthy and that 'it is not always wrong to challenge rules,' and the presentation of what the Gablers and similar protesters referred to as 'situation ethics,' that is, the concept that moral laws may have exceptions; what is right in one circumstance is not necessarily right in another.[132]

The Educational Research Analysts produced an array of material to inform Christians, parents, and the population at large of the ways in which the educational materials of the public school 'is seriously endangering the moral and spiritual health of millions of children',[133] which they began making available to the wider public in the late 1970s. *Handbook No. 20, Textbook Review Criteria and Examples*[134] was developed as a guide for the at-home textbook reviewer, with the purpose of

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[130] *Ibid*., 88.

[131] Gabler, *What Are They Teaching Our Children*, 189.

[132] Gabler, *Humanism*, 2-3.

[133] Gabler, *What Are They Teaching Our Children?*, back material.

[134] 1982

providing them a classification system for objections. The contents were divided into twelve broad categories, between which some overlap occurred, and were referenced in both written arguments and oral testimony by protestors during the textbook adoption hearings concerning the English textbooks which were brought into use in Texas schools in 1983, the editions which the protestors involved in *Mozert* objected to.

Two pieces which were objected to under the category 'Attack on Values' were a nonfiction piece on censorship and book burning, because it 'cast the book burners in a negative light' and only presented one side of the issue, and 'The Lottery' because, among many reasons, 'the student who has only a minimal amount of Bible knowledge may consider the account of stoning in the Bible as senseless and meaningless as the stoning in 'The Lottery.' Both pieces were removed from the final version of the book.[135] Objections were made to the use of short stories set in cities, which portrayed African-American or minority characters, or which were written by African-American or minority writers, because they were biased towards minorities and the lower classes and were not considered positive enough, with reference made to the category 'Prejudice and Distortion.' The category 'Omissions,' and especially the subcategories 'lack of attention to national heroes and other deserving individuals; lack of attention to positive achievements of our country,' were the basis for persistent demands that books cover the founding fathers and George Washington more thoroughly, as well as a long list of conservative, white, male writers that they believe should be given more space, calling specifically for women and minority writers to be eliminated to make space.

From category eleven, 'Humanism, Occult, and Other Religions Encouraged,' the humanist beliefs to which they objected, as they state them, are the 'assumption of man's independence' and human self-sufficiency, sections of textbook that tell teenage readers that not all conflict is unhealthy and that 'it is not always wrong to challenge rules,' and, the concept that moral laws may have exceptions; what is right in one circumstance is not necessarily right in another. Objections are made to all sex education, across grade levels, as well as to the favourable representation of any and all religions other than Christianity and, to an extent, Judaism.

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[135] Last, "Textbook Selection or Censorship," 98. The information provided in this handbook can be found in outline form in Appendix B.

In 1984 Holt released a pamphlet entitled *Guidelines for Literature Selection*; it is logical to surmise that the decision to do so was in part influenced by the lawsuit in Hawkins County and the series' increased visibility to professional protesters. According to the material gathered by Diane Ravitch in *The Language Police*, the Holt, Rinehart, and Winston School Department's pamphlet *Guidelines for Literature Selection,* 1984, which was produced in the wake of the Christian protests that led to the Mozert trial, includes the following list of 'topics to avoid in textbooks': behaviour that will lead to dangerous situations, e.g., children should not go with strangers; bodily functions; conflicts with authority including parents, teachers, and the law; creation myths that present alternatives to Biblical creation; crime; dialect, especially black dialect; divorce; drinking; drugs; euthanasia; evolution presented as fact; fighting; guns and shooting; illegitimacy; irreverent references to the Deity; liquor; lying or duplicity of any kind; name-calling; nudity; obscene or profane language; physical violence; poor nutrition, poor eating habits, or junk food; questions that ask students to describe their feelings, as that is invasive of a student's home life; references to Christmas, Easter, and Hanukkah; references to humanism that might be interpreted as giving it the status of a religion; religion; sex or sexuality; 'situation ethics'; smoking; stealing; suicide; and unpunished transgression.[136] The range of topics on this list demonstrates that rather than superseding the concessions made to humanist protestors, conservative objections were added to the list of controversial material curated by publishers, narrowing the range of acceptable material more drastically than would have been necessary had conservative objections overridden prior humanist objections.

Content Analysis: The Forgotten Door

This short novel was one of the many pieces that was expressly protested by the litigants of *Mozert* and, in conjunction with 'The Men of Mars,' was the section of the book that sparked the attention of Vicki Frost. The text was revised prior to its inclusion in the first edition (1973) in ways that are consistent with conservative concerns regarding the representation of free enterprise and government, and was revised again for inclusion in the third edition (1980) in response to the written and

[136] Ravitch*, The Language Police,* 195.

verbal objections brought before the Texas adoption board by the Educational Research Analysts.

The piece was originally published as a children's novel by Alexander Key in 1965, and comprises one hundred pages of the roughly five hundred page textbook. The story is about Little Jon, a boy from a distant planet who accidentally falls through a forgotten portal and lands in the Smokey Mountains, striking his head on a rock and conveniently losing his memory in the process. He is found and taken home by the Bean family; their neighbours find out about Little Jon and become suspicious of his origins, to the point that it is no longer safe for the Beans or Jon to remain in the area. When Jon's parents repair the portal and find him, they bring the Beans back through the portal to their planet before sealing it off forever.

Both the Hawkins County protesters and the Gabler's Bill of Particulars took issue with several aspects of the piece. Little Jon can read minds and communicate telepathically with animals, and comes from a society that has advanced past war, the use of currency, and the consumption of meat. The antagonists are churchgoers, but steal, influence their children to break the law, and wave guns around liberally; the sheriff is biased and the welfare workers rule-bound. Mr. Bean, who is generally portrayed as a positive character, expresses complex feelings about his service in the Korean War.

In preparing the textbook for its initial publication in 1973, quite a bit of work was done on *The Forgotten Door.* There is an average of one change made per 150 words to a word or phrase, and approximately one change per 300 words to typographical features such as formatting, punctuation, and the use of italics or capitals. In addition to this, an extensive subplot was cut entirely. Following the community's realization of Jon's existence, he is accused of having committed a break-in, and is taken to juvenile court; the only way he can prove his innocence is by demonstrating his clairvoyance. The local judge who oversees juvenile cases is happy to leave him with the Beans, but a Colonel Quinn, who it is implied works with a CIA-type government department, begins to exert pressure on the Beans to give Jon up so that he can be used to develop a weapon for the defence of the United States. The portrayal of Colonel Quinn, while somewhat realistic, reflects poorly on the U.S. government and the Department of Defence, and the Beans' refusal to give up Little Jon could be considered both a conflict with authority and a demonstration of situation ethics. The excision of Colonel Quinn removes the primary reason for

the Beans to leave with Jon's family – in the original novel it was not only clear that Colonel Quinn was willing to have the entire family killed to allow him access to Jon, but the people tasked with the killing were actively advancing on the farmhouse through the night. Without Colonel Quinn, the only people the Beans have to fear are their neighbours, who are generally bigoted and afraid of Jon. While animosity with the neighbourhood is certainly not to be brushed off lightly, it is perhaps too slim a reason to abandon home and relatives to relocate to a distant planet with no possibility of ever returning. Colonel Quinn had committed to hunting Jon and the Beans to the ends of the earth; the neighbours had merely planned to let their cattle loose.

In preparing the textbook for the 1980 release, extensive line changes were made to the short novel – approximately seventy-two alterations, most over a sentence long. Out of these, only one related directly to pressure concerning sexism: in the original novel and early iterations of the textbook, the juvenile court judge is consistently referred to as 'Miss Josie,' while in the 1980 edition she is properly referred to as 'Judge Cunningham.'

Otherwise, the 1980 revision eliminates language such as 'Devil take you',[137] 'I'd like to wring Gilby's neck',[138] and instances in dialogue where characters refer to someone as a fool, all of which directly contravene directives made by the Gablers as described by Last during the oral testimony portion of the adoption hearings over the 1980 textbooks. Near the beginning of the novel, the revision alters the description of a woman so that 'waddled' becomes 'came,' 'fleshy' becomes 'full,' and 'ugly' becomes 'harsh,' decisions which are logical in light of guidelines indicating that neither size nor appearance should be related to morality. Less logical is the decision to remove the moment in which the woman so described slaps Jon without sufficiently altering the surrounding narrative, so that Jon's head snaps back with no reason given.

Other changes made include the softening of Mr. Bean's opinions on his service in the Korean War, Mrs. Bean's explanation of lying and why it may be necessary in some circumstances, the Beans' response to Jon's assertion that his

[137] *Riders on the Earth.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), 112.

[138] *Ibid.,* 156.

people do not kill animals, and the general wrongness Jon feels about the culture in which he finds himself:

1973-1977	1980-1986
Response to Jon's insistence that lying is wrong:	
'Oh dear, there we go again,' she sighed and sat down, frowning. 'Jon, in this day and age, with the way things are, truth – the exact truth – is often a hard thing to manage. There are times when it could cause needless trouble and suffering.'[139]	'You're right, of course,' Mary said, sighing 'And we do try to be honest. But Jon, in this day and age, with the way things are, truth – the exact truth – is sometimes a hard thing to manage. There are times when it could cause needless trouble and suffering.'[140]
Killing animals:	
'That's the way people live, young fellow,' Thomas said, frowning as he wrote something on a piece of paper. 'Well, that's another odd fact about you. I'm going to stop being surprised and just jot down the facts.'[141]	'At first to keep warm, young fellow,' Thomas said. 'But now, Jon, some people are beginning to think the way you do about that.' As he spoke, Thomas started jotting down all that they had so far discovered about Jon.[142]
Jon's confusion:	
Little Jon looked at them helplessly. Again the dreadful feeling of lostness poured over him. He was sure of the answer now. Mary Bean had guessed it. Suddenly he turned, peering out of the	Again the dreadful feeling of lostness poured over Jon. He was sure of the answer now. Mary Bean had guessed it. He was a long way from home. Suddenly he turned, peering out of the

[139] *Riders on the Earth.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 132.
[140] *Riders on the Earth.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), 132.
[141] *Riders on the Earth.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 136.
[142] *Riders on the Earth.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), 136.

back window as he heard Rascal barking. Rascal was lost, too, though in a different way, chained in a world where everything seemed wrong.[143]	back window as he heard Rascal barking. Rascal was lost, too, though in a different way, chained in a world where everything seemed, if not wrong, at least very different.[144]

Humanity's failings:

'I apologize for the stupidity and meanness of my race. But honestly, we're not all like the ones you've met here. Actually, there are some pretty nice people in this world – only there aren't enough of them. It's the troublemaking kind that keeps all the rest of us on the jump.'[145]	'I apologize for the stupidity and meanness of some of the people you've met here. Actually, there are some pretty nice people in this world – only there aren't enough of them. It's just too bad that the troublemaking kind keeps all the rest of us on the jump and makes things the way they are.'[146]

In addition, this revision removes mentions of characters consuming alcohol, and inserts a section where Mr. Bean speaks positively about the 'free enterprise system,' two of the issues that specifically interested the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Ten pages of the Gabler's Bill of Particulars for the 1980 editions are devoted to objections to *Riders*, nearly twice the number devoted to any other volume with the exception of the third grade reader *Special Happenings*, on which the Gablers wrote eleven pages of objection that are predominantly concerned with the lack of phonics instruction and the presentation of authority figures as fallible human beings. In response to *The Forgotten Door* as a whole they write:

> No wonder child suicide rates are up if this selection is representative of what children are forced to read in school. After reading this story, students will feel that the world they live in is full of despair with no hope for tomorrow. Students will feel

[143] *Riders on the Earth.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 143.

[144] *Riders on the Earth.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), 143.

[145] *Riders on the Earth.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 171.

[146] *Riders on the Earth.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), 171.

> despair since, this side of death, there is no utopia for them to escape to as the story character did. Such an attitude doesn't lead students to seek that utopia, it could lead them to escape the world, as pictured in this selection, through drugs.
>
> What a depressing picture of the world is presented by this story. The advantages of our society over an 'utopia' where everything is well-ordered without any chance for challenge or individuality. Such a selection conditions students to accept a society where everything is regulated and in perfect order without telling the what they would be losing: personal freedom, creativity, the need to hope, the job of accomplishing a difficult task, etc. Students should not be subjected to a selection that will depress them and fill them with despair as this selection will.[147]

While some of the revisions made to *The Forgotten Door* are arguably an improvement, such as the use of the proper mode of address when referring to the judge and altering the description of an antagonistic character to remove the association between physical unattractiveness and personal unpleasantness, many of the alterations reduce the complexity of the story, and therefore the potential for critical interpretation. In softening the language used to describe the differences between Jon and the humans and between his world and culture and theirs the contrast between the two is reduced, and internal and interpersonal conflict over these differences is simplified. In mitigating the impact of the characters' opinions and statements inconsistencies in characterization are caused, so that Mr. Bean is simultaneously for and against war, and Jon finds falsehood and the killing of animals both completely incomprehensible and abhorrent and yet, some how, an unfamiliar but equally valid approach to life.

Besides causing the primary characters to be inconsistent, the alterations reduce the negative portrayal of antagonistic characters and suppress the protagonists' reactions to their behaviour, which reduces the conflict that is central to the plot. The result is a story with little at stake that lacks the triggers for classroom conversation that were inherent to the original. In the 1977 edition the story, though it had been edited, imagined how someone who had not been desensitized to contemporary culture would react to concepts such as violence and falsehood, and how people would respond to his view of these behaviours, which we generally admit to be bad despite their frequent occurrence. In the 1980 edition the same alien

[147] Gabler, "Bill of Particulars," 75-76.

observes the same behaviours and comes to the conclusion that they are not bad, but merely different.

The textbook guidelines circa 1980 push for the removal of 'values clarification' or situations where the morality of a protagonist's actions is not easily defined. There are no values to clarify after reading the revised edition because the characters have already done so for the reader, and the characters are of the opinion that the way things are done is just fine.

The extent of the revision for the 1980 release, and its close alignment with the views of the Gablers and similar activists, indicates that the publishers were aware of the power wielded by fundamentalist Christian protestors. Though the speed with which they produced the 1986 edition of the text, which was written in response to the Hawkins County protests and ensuing lawsuit, may have somewhat curtailed the extent of the changes made, the fact that they did not alter *The Forgotten Door* in that edition would suggest that the editor of the text could not see a way to bring the text more in line with the protestors' views without essentially beginning from scratch with completely different extracts. The editor of *Riders on the Earth* voluntarily revised the volume to be as inoffensive to the Christian Right as possible, to the point that, when the lawsuit came, no further manageable revisions were apparent.

7. Conclusions

Though humanist pressure on textbook publishers brought about changes in public school education that were deeply necessary and contributed to broadened opportunities for cultural minorities and women, conservative reaction to those changes has been in some ways so severe as to have pushed us back to a stage comparable to the decades before protests were made to racial and gendered stereotypes in schoolbooks. Despite the seemingly constant demand for reform in education, with the nation's slipping test scores cited as evidence for the 'dumbing down of America,' the connection between activist pressure, publisher guidelines, the simplification of classroom material, and slipping test scores escapes many.

The traditional means of censorship are simple to respond to: black lines and burning pages are easy to see, to understand, require either reaction – the destruction of information is wrong – or acquiescence – those doing the destroying have a right

to do so. While public school textbooks undergo a process that yields result similar to the action of the censor and his black marker, it is neither so visible nor so easy to challenge.

The 1980s and 90s were characterized by a cultural phenomenon where otherwise reasonable people held the fear that everything from tabletop role playing games and rock music to children's television shows and picture books were thinly veiled means of introducing Satanism, demonic possession, and the occult into their and their children's lives. Groundless accusations of sexual and physical abuse for the purpose of Satanic rituals were made against parents, relatives, and preschool teachers. While the social repercussions of the hysteria, named in retrospect 'The Satanic Panic', are still felt, experts and laypeople alike now generally recognize that the panic was groundless, born of the convergence of phenomena that included the Conservative Ascendancy.

While the 1980s textbook lawsuits also rose from this cultural shift, and the content to which conservative parents objected was often informed by The Satanic Panic, textbook protests have failed to either die away in the same manner or to resolve in hindsight as the bugbear of a different decade. The organizations that fueled so much of the textbook censorship of the 20th century still exist, recruit members, and influence what is presented in public school classrooms. Though the Gablers both passed away nearly a decade ago, the Educational Research Analysts continue to review textbooks and encourage parents to protest the contents of their children's textbooks; the criteria they list on their website for acceptable material is not substantially different than that which Ellen Last collected for her dissertation in 1984. They have become less overt in their practices in the past few decades in the most part because they have not needed to be militant to further their agenda. In the words of one of their founders, Norma Gabler: 'Lowering our voice and working under opponents' radar gets better results'. It would almost seem as though they've worked themselves out of a job. In recent years those individuals who in previous decades would most likely have been protesters have actually been voted onto the Boards of Education, or else are called in by board members as 'expert' readers of proposed textbooks. An article from the June 2012 issue of the *New York Review of Books* states '[in] 2009, the nation watched in awe as the state board worked on approving a new science curriculum under the leadership of a chair who believed that '"evolution is hooey."' Book burning has evolved into campaigning, and those

who would have once been carrying torches and gasoline now angle to be elected to the Board of Education and the Textbook Adoption Committee.

When one considers the specific content of protests in conjunction with other writings of the conservative pressure groups involved a clear agenda emerges. In their own words, the purpose of the public school is to impart the practical skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic to children, to instill them with love of God and country, to support traditional gender roles and a patriarchal worldview, and to suppress critical thinking and the questioning of authority figures. They claim that this is how schools operated before the interference of agents of evil ranging from Communists to suffragettes. In addition to this, they believe that to present something in writing, such as criminality and violence, is to promote it, and that children who read such literature will naturally fall prey to whatever is promoted. Children should be exposed to literature that reflects a happy, idealized, and sanitized world, rather than literature that reflects the reality of modern life for children and youths, which often involves unpleasant elements. An education patterned after their desires is at odds with the demands of a humanities education, which has at its core the development of independent critical thinking and an understanding that a search for truth requires questioning, and that truth, once found, is not monolithic.

That they believe that they are in the right as well as in the majority is clear in the rhetoric they use both in their pamphlets and in their petitions, which often make use of emotional language and assume that the reader will naturally agree with the writer's position if they are made aware of it. The fact that they believe so strongly in the rightness of their position and have dedicated so much time and energy to furthering it, the fact that no one holding an opposing viewpoint is similarly vocal, and the manner in which textbook adoption in Texas and the United States functions has resulted in this vocal minority exerting a sweeping and disproportionate influence on what students are taught in the public schools.

Christian Fundamentalists have often made clear that their goal is for the United States to become a Christian nation, in which their views and morals are supported by law; this is most clearly seen in their lobbying for legislation that they view as being in line with Biblical law, such as the banning of homosexual unions. In order to bring about a fundamentalist Christian America, they would have to win over the minds of either a majority of the voting public or a majority of the people in power. In a time where viewpoints are polarized and ideologies often extreme, it

should be clear that changing the minds of adults is in many cases an impossible undertaking. This is why the religious right has put so much energy into influencing what goes on in the classroom: there is no need to change the minds of the adults when the next generation's minds have already been won.

Belief

Prelude

September 1997

The sound of her cell phone made Pauline jump, the biology textbook in her lap tumbling to the floor in a crease of pages and sticky notes – one of her kids had reset the ring to an air raid siren and she had yet to figure out how to change it back. She dug the phone anxiously out of her purse and thumbed the green button.

"Hello?"

"Pauline? It's Reverend Cole here, I need you to come up to the auxiliary hall a moment."

"Is something wrong?" She wasn't sure how the children's pastor, who had arranged for the co-op to use the church, had gotten the number to her phone, couldn't remember giving it to him; she'd only gotten the silly thing so the kids could call her if there was an emergency when she left them home to run errands.

"You might prefer to have this discussion in person." He hesitated for a moment. "Two of your students were caught… well, the best word for it would be 'necking,' probably. In the storage closet."

"Be right up, Reverend."

She threw the cell back into the gaping purse, then picked up the biology book and unfolded the crumpled pages as her heart rate returned to normal. Her first assumption when she heard the phone had been that Maranatha, her middle child, was calling to say that she'd set the kitchen on fire. At thirteen, this was her first year staying home alone; Pauline was trying to be ok with it, pretending to be ok with it, but she was just waiting for the emergency to come. Her boys, seventeen-year-old Noah and nine-year-old Uri, were both more compliant, less prone to calamity, the kind of kids she wouldn't have worried about leaving home alone. But they were the social ones and, when given the choice, had opted to continue at the homeschool co-op, while Mara had begged off, insisted that she worked faster and better at home, alone.

The co-op met in a local non-denominational church every Monday and Wednesday of the school year, and all of the mothers who taught got in an hour early to set up. They were a chatty bunch, and even when Pauline was obviously reviewing for the day someone would come up to talk to her, so that she'd taken to hiding in the church library to go over her lessons. She taught high school sciences, biology and

chemistry in the morning, physics and freshman intro in the afternoon and though she adored the subjects she'd quickly found out that a love of the material didn't automatically translate to good teaching skills. The time to get herself into the right mindset was precious.

As she slid her shoes back on and left the library she wondered which of her students had been caught in the closet, felt an ache of sympathy deep in her stomach: whoever they were, their lives were about to get painful. Though the co-op was made up of families from different denominations, with different beliefs, their handbook was clear on what behaviour would not be tolerated. A smooch in passing was right out; hiding in a closet for several smooches and possibly more was grounds for expulsion, for the kids and their families. Even if they were allowed to stay, possibly because their mothers taught and couldn't be replaced easily, and even if their mothers were the kind that didn't believe a person's first kiss should be given at the altar when they were married, the rest of the group would whisper. The rest of the group would avoid them, warn their own children away from them. The rest of the group would no longer trust them. Their reputations would be destroyed; their social lives in the co-op and, depending on what church they went to, the wider Christian community, would essentially be over.

When it came down to it, though, it was really more the mothers' fault than the kids'.

Pauline and her family had moved to Wentworth County, Virginia a few months after Uri was born, when the homeschooling community was small enough to meet in the living room of one of the more well-off families. Even though nine years had passed and the rural county had become decidedly less rural, the fields full of alfalfa and grazing cows slowly taken up with planned neighbourhoods, ugly schools and uglier strip malls, sprawling multilevel cinderblock churches like the one where the co-op met, the community was still small; the kids that she hadn't known since they were toddlers she knew by sight and reputation, even if she couldn't remember their names off the top of her head – half the time she couldn't remember her own children's names off the top of her head. Some of them were trying out a teenage rebellious phase. There was giggling, and handholding, and a little too much one-on-one attention between certain pairs in her classes. Evidence of a worldly infatuation with each other's bodies rather than the friendship in Christ they were supposed to be cultivating. Hugging in the hallways. Touching noses. Unbecoming,

hormone-saturated grins across half-dissected frogs. Behaviour that wasn't, technically, against the rules, but that rode the fine line.

She felt that some of the moms should try a little harder to make their kids behave, should stop being amused by their romances and be more concerned for their purity, or if they didn't care about purity then be concerned for the example they were setting for the younger kids. It wasn't a big step from kissing to activities that got people pregnant. That was one of the things she regretted about moving away from DC. Their Pentecostal church in McClain had a homeschool group all of its own, where all of the mothers agreed that romance between teenagers Was Not Allowed, that kissing was for married couples, where everyone kept a close eye on everyone else's kids, reported all suspicious behaviour so that it could be quashed as quickly as possible, where they all agreed that it was their responsibility as parents to get their sons and daughters to adulthood with the virginity between their ears as intact as the virginity between their legs. Where they truly believed that they were responsible for the state of their children's souls.

But this far into the wilds homeschoolers were few, their beliefs more varied, and any organized activity required them to club together, Protestants and Catholics and Mormons and even some pagans and agnostics in their patchwork skirts and Birkenstocks who homeschooled for hippy reasons, raised their own goats and hand-milled the wheat to make their own bread. Still, it was better than sending her kids to public school, or even to private Christian school, better than ceding control of what they were taught and how they were taught to a stranger. But there was lost the unity of creed that had been a given when they were members of a single-denomination group. And even of the women that agreed that teen romance was a no-go, no one was willing to breach the barrier of politeness, no one was willing to tell the women who thought the little crushes were so cute, "Your kid's acting like a slut. Fix it!"

Misstatement: Pauline was willing. Pauline was always willing to tell the hard truth, but had bitten her tongue from the first class she'd taught at the co-op because everyone knew that she was willing, because she didn't want them to peg her as just another crazy evangelical, a raving fundamentalist, didn't want them to class her with the families who didn't teach their daughters beyond seventh grade because a woman's destiny was motherhood, who didn't let women wear trousers or cut their hair short. She already felt a little out of place, as one of the more conservative and more educated women in the group, and she knew a confrontation,

even a well-intentioned one, would make that worse, would seem as if she were criticizing the other women's beliefs. So she had waited, knowing that eventually a boundary would be crossed and they would all be forced to re-evaluate what would and would not be allowed, what the consequences for crossing those boundaries might be. It was amazingly satisfying – it wasn't loving and it wasn't Christ-like, but it was satisfying – knowing that some woman who had turned a blind eye all this time was about to get her due, was about to be called to account for her child's promiscuity.

She climbed the stairs to the auxiliary fellowship hall, a recent addition to the sprawling church where her classroom was located. How a pair of teenagers had gotten into the storage closet, she had no idea. Only the rooms that would be in use were unlocked; they'd probably gone for the first dark place with a door that they'd found. It was a blessing that someone had caught them before something really disastrous had happened – and then she realized that, while the Reverend had said they'd been caught 'necking,' the descriptor didn't necessarily preclude below-the-neck behavior. The poor man. His request that she come speak to him in person rather than elaborating over the phone all but confirmed it; a minister was a minister, but teen sex was the sort of thing a mother needed to handle. And if it had gone that far… there had been, not just in her church but in several of the churches in the area, a rash of hasty weddings among the recent high-school graduates, and of early babies that were too big for their supposed age. The other option was single motherhood and shame. Either way, doors closed, futures became limited. It was a horrible thing to happen to a family.

Through the window in the stairwell door she caught a glimpse of Reverend Cole standing outside the fellowship hall, one hand on her son Noah's shoulder, the other hanging on to Leah Chapman, one of the Catholic girls in her chemistry class.

Noah was supposed to be setting up her classroom. What was he doing in the hallway? He looked like he was going to be sick; Leah's face had the puffy moistness of recent crying.

As Pauline came out of the stairwell, thunder and fury and cold, heavy fear building up somewhere in her lizard brain even while her conscious mind was straining to find any other possible meaning for the gathering outside her classroom, her idiot son gave her his guilty-as-all-hell grin.

"Hi, Mom," he squeaked.

Part 1: Creation
1964-1988

Chapter 1

Contrary to her children's subconsciously held belief, Pauline did not spring into life greying and fortyish, her body wrecked by more pregnancies than she had living children and more than a decade without a full night's sleep. She was in the habit, when she ran across relics of her pre-motherhood life – yellowing photographs, school notebooks with publicity pictures of Frankie Valli and Paul Newman and Ringo Starr pasted over the carefully written assignments, columns clipped from magazines and newspapers, suede confirmation gloves and chipped rosary beads and truly horrifying hats – of turning them over in her fingers and asking herself, "How the hell did I get here?" She'd excised that usage of "hell" from her spoken vocabulary, but that question usually deserved the full weight of profanity, the emphasis that unaccustomed filth brought.

Very well then. How did she get here?

As is so often the case, the evidence cannot fully explain the reality. How *does* one get from point A to the rings of Saturn?

*

Pauline began life as a New Jersey girl, the granddaughter of German and Polish and Irish immigrants, more interested in the here-and-now than eternity. Even so, she spent the Wednesday nights of sixth grade in confirmation class, cramming her head with doctrine, theology, church history, but also with handclap and double-dutch chants, how to tell fortunes and dress her own hair, the mystical knowledge of eleven-year-old girls. When Easter and confirmation finally drew near she was reluctant to lose the excuse to eat her supper quickly once a week, to leave the dishes to her mother and run down the block and around the corner to their church with the evening air cold in her throat, to sit packed tight together with the other sixth grade girls of Immaculate Conception Parish, whispering back and forth because the nun and the priest that taught the class were too deaf to hear them. She'd picked the confirmation name 'Cecelia', patron saint of music; when she is sixteen the Simon and Garfunkel tune will hit the top 100 and boys who know her from church will sing at her and dance suggestively, and she will not be sure if she regrets the choice.

At the evening vigil on the day before Easter she and the other chanting, rope-skipping, fortune telling girls in her class would be confirmed, profess their faith and be accepted into the congregation as adults, full members, responsible finally for their own souls. The prospect filled them with hope, even though they had discussed the grim probability that this symbolic step into adulthood would make little practical difference; their mothers and grandmothers would continue to watch them closely, warn them away from boys and from boyfriends and try to wheedle the details of their confessions from the priest. The girls were at an age of ambivalence towards mothers, who in their experience were to some extent interchangeable – the same print housecoats and pale nail polish and hair set once a week at the same salon, who yelled at and smacked and doled out sandwiches to each other's children impartially. Their mothers, for their part, appeared to be ambivalent towards them as well, so to the girls it seemed as though they flickered back and forth between adulthood and childhood. Some days they were taken across the river to New York City, where their mothers coaxed them into tight-bodiced Y-line dresses like the ones that they themselves wore at neighborhood cocktail parties, let the woman at the makeup counter at Bloomingdales brush powder onto skin that didn't yet need it, whispered girl talk over tuna sandwiches and malts at the Woolworths lunch counter afterwards. Other days they were lumped in with their younger siblings with smacks to the back of the legs with a cooking spoon and time faced into the corner of an avocado- or mustard-colored kitchen wall to think about what they'd done, which they usually spent wondering if they would ever fully transcend the tightly braided hair and juvenile cut of their school uniforms.

Early on that Saturday afternoon Pauline and four of her friends from the class made their final confessions before the ceremony, one right after the other. They walked over to the church together, purposefully, planning to get the duty out of the way as close to the evening service as possible so as to minimize the window for sinning. All five mothers, of course, assumed that these confessions would focus mostly on boys; only the priest knew that all five confessions focused mostly on Mother, and the only boys that managed a look-in were brothers of the more aggravating variety. Of these, Pauline had more than her fair share. She was bookended by brothers, two older, two younger: Luke who was right about everything, Sam who was kind about everything, Michael who was into everything, and Peter who got away with everything.

Each of the girls knelt in turn in the comforting dimness of the confessional, leaned head against cool wood made waxy by the touch of confessant upon confessant, whispered their transgressions to the man unseen on the other side of the carved screening. The ones done first waited in the front pew for the rest to finish saying their short penance, fingered the red velvet of the pew cushion and stared unseeing at the painting of the annunciation that decorated the apse and half-wondered what secret sins the others were atoning for. The walk home afterwards was more subdued than the journey to the church: they felt oddly lighter, but not significantly different, they decided together. When they parted they called over their shoulders, 'See you tonight!'

Pauline went in her front door interrogating the peace at the core of herself, decided that she would interrogate the contents of the icebox next, possibly make a molded salad to pass the time until she could put on her new white dress, the gloves and veil that went with it. Between filling the kettle and lighting the stove her mother appeared; before the water boiled she was ranting, her voice surely able to be heard outside the house.

"I don't ask much of you, Pauline, but what I do ask I expect you to do."

"I didn't mean – " she began.

"'You didn't mean,' did you? And what exactly does that get me?"

Pauline assumed the question was rhetorical, stayed with her back pressed against the edge of the kitchen counter.

"Well?"

"It gets you nothing, Ma'am."

"From your brothers a certain amount of shirking is unavoidable, but I expect better of you." She began pulling potatoes out of a cupboard, slamming them down onto the counter; Pauline rummaged for the peeler, hoping that a show of willingness would end the conversation. "You're the only daughter; you need to accept that it comes with responsibilities."

As she peeled potatoes and carrots, diced onions, laid the table, she heard under the hard-edged drone of her mother's voice the mudroom door open four times, light footsteps hesitate, then quickly patter up the stairs before the door of one of her brothers' bedrooms squeaked open and then shut. At some point her father put his head in, hat in hand, and muttered something about going down the street to buy light bulbs.

Her father found her in disgrace in her bedroom when he came home with the bulbs an hour later, gently suggested that being the first to extend the olive branch did not necessarily mean that she was in the wrong, but rather that she had a healthy sense of self-preservation. She didn't responded to his gentle urgings beyond sulky sniffs, but over dinner she made up with her mother while her four brothers stared at their plates and shoveled in burned food and pretended that they had heard no shouting whatsoever. And so the walk to the church for the 8 o'clock Easter Vigil was peaceful.

They held candles in the darkened sanctuary, listened to the droning chant of the choir, and she knew that she was unworthy to take the wafer – in her heart she was still angry with her mother. At confession she had told the priest that sometimes she couldn't help but hate her mother. He had reminded her that it was not just the word of God but a commandment to honor her parents, appended notice that Christ had told them that to hate was to commit murder in one's heart. Then it had seemed so simple to be good, to follow the rules, to keep her thoughts pure; she couldn't understand how all of that peace had shattered the moment she'd gotten home. She should not partake of Communion in such a state, felt that she shouldn't even be allowed in the church, not after breaking at least one – depending on how harshly you interpreted it, possibly two – of the Ten Commandments, but still she stood in her pew, holding her candle, her crinoline and her stockings and the polyester voile of her dress making her skin prickle as she waited to be called to the front.

She should get up, walk right out the door, but she didn't have that kind of courage – what would everyone say? At the very least she should stay in the pew, not allow the priest to confirm her, not add to her sins. But to refuse to go up when they were called was its own breed of horrible. Everyone present would know that somewhere between confession and Vigil she had sinned, and they would all wonder what it was that she had done. No one – not even her brothers, who had been present, if out of sight – would be able to guess what secret transgression stuck her fast.

Then the celebrant called for those who would be confirmed to come forward and her father stood and stepped out of their pew, waited for her to go before him up to the altar so that he could stand behind her as her sponsor, swear to the priest to support her in her walk with God. He saw her hesitate and held out his hand to help her up, gave her the comforting smile that he saved for doctor's appointments and scraped knees, and she was on her feet and walking to the altar before she realized

that she had changed her mind. She stood with the other girls, answered the priest with a firm voice, tilted her head back so that he could anoint and bless her, and opened her mouth so that he could place the Holy Eucharist on her dry tongue.

Her father squeezed her hand as they returned to the family pew, gave her a smile. The consecrated body of Christ felt like it was crawling back up her throat. But then she sat down and fumbled through the hymnbook and the service continued, and gradually her guilt lost its sting. She didn't really hate her mother, exactly. And this was a new beginning, a turning point. She would be better, do better, from here on out.

*

The nuns who had her for seventh grade that autumn would have been surprised by this resolution: the only difference they could see between her and the girl they had all known from grades first through sixth was a dramatic increase in both height and attitude. The third time she was sent to Mother Superior for mouthing off in class – the third time in two weeks, for shame – the woman made a suggestion: Sister Charisma, who taught physical education, also organized after-school sports clubs, hockey and basketball. The exercise and the competition might give her an appropriate outlet for her aggression; the teamwork might make her less inclined to make targets of the other girls. If Pauline didn't like the idea of getting sweaty every afternoon, scrubbing classroom floors had been known to have a similar therapeutic effect. Of course, one of those pastimes would be far easier to explain to her parents.

Her mother was baffled by her sudden interest in hockey, somewhat reluctant to give permission for her to be an hour later home from school, but if Mother Superior thought that she should play, then play she would. That's what they did, the priests and nuns: told you what you should be doing so you didn't have to worry that what you were doing was wrong, could concentrate instead on doing it as well as you could.

That first afternoon, changing back into a gym uniform that was still slightly clammy from phys ed earlier that day, she almost decided that the floor scrubbing would have been better. She didn't really know most of the other girls who chatted to each other as they changed clothes around her, had no idea how hockey worked

besides the obvious of stick and ball and running, wasn't sure that she'd even be able to do that much without falling flat on her face. When Sister Charisma made them warm up with sprints only the prospect of embarrassment kept her from flopping down on the field and refusing to continue.

Then came the part that she'd expected: she was handed a stick, and told to hit the ball.

It was the way that the stick felt like an extension of herself, the way she could pulse all of her tar-thick anger and frustration through it to send the ball wherever she wanted it to go, the fact that putting her head down and chasing a single purpose didn't get her in trouble, that hooked her. What Sister Charisma expected of her, speed and precision and strength, was so different from what everyone else had always demanded: silence and stillness, all that she felt kept hidden.

The reputation she quickly earned for being a thug was well deserved. She didn't slash, but she was all elbows, knees, shoulders, and she thrilled with every bruise. At her age her older brothers had started fights at school, gotten notes home, detentions, ineffectual thrashings and disappointed lectures from their father. Pauline knew better than to up and swing at anyone – as the girl, she would be dealt with by her mother – but that didn't kill the urge to batter faces in. Mother Superior had intended for the discipline and teamwork to straighten her out, but the violence was what gave her release, let her stay sweet and well behaved off the field, and at night when strange feelings twisted at her center, when her almost-breasts grew suddenly sensitive and a throbbing began where her legs met her body, she ground her fingertips into her bruises and banished the throb with sweet pain, fell into the thick deathlike sleep of physical exhaustion.

In health class the spring that she was confirmed Sister Ascensionata told them that they would be growing, changing, that some of them might begin to feel uncomfortable with their bodies, and Pauline rolled her eyes. Her body was her home, solid and strong, she couldn't imagine not being in love with it, with what it could do. Then she went through a sleepless week of growing pain in her hips, her knees, her shoulders, and the next Monday the Sister pulled her aside at the end of class, adjusted her skirt so that it hung low on her hips, whispered that it would be a good idea to let out the hem until she got a new one. That didn't make her uncomfortable either, though she'd heard the other girls wail over their sudden, sore,

jelly breasts, the irregular cramps and tiredness and how the curves they'd never had before made it impossible to button their favorite blouses, hiked their skirt hems up to show knees and thighs, made the newly fashionable sheath dresses look like sausage casings on them.

They had, too, a new interest in her two older brothers, who went to the all-boy's school next door to their all-girls school and could be seen during recess through the chain-link fence that divided the playgrounds of the two institutions. The girls from hockey wanted to know what they were like at home, whether they had girlfriends, whether they walked around with their shirts off, whether there were any girls they talked about. Whenever this line of questioning was broached she made retching noises, refused to answer seriously. Brothers were gross. She'd never get moony over boys the way her friends did; they were too familiar a beast to be alluring.

Sister Ascensionata's lectures addressed the changes that were suddenly visible in the girls around her, but the tightening between her legs that she felt at night was never mentioned; she associated it with the tightening she felt in her head, the groundless irritation that made her snap at people and get sent to the office, yet another unpleasant part of growing up. She ignored it through seventh grade, hockey kept her too exhausted to do anything else, but summer came and she was thirteen and there was no more hockey. 1965 and the boys around her didn't appeal, but men were beginning to, or the idea of men that she'd half-consciously gleaned from movies and novels and television shows, of strong hands and broad shoulders and warm, soft kisses, of being held tight, and–

She wasn't entirely sure what came after that.

With the heat and the release from classes and uniforms came idleness, boredom, the ennui of adolescence. If they stayed in the house for too long their mother found work for them to do, so Pauline and her brothers went free-range. Long days were spent at the community swimming pool, racing the girls from hockey and pointedly not looking at the older boys practicing their jackknifes. When they didn't swim they wandered the neighborhood, occupied other kids' backyards, stayed out of sight so as to be, if not completely out of mind, at least out of hearing when the inevitable summons to household chores was issued.

It was the girls who she'd stood with to be confirmed, still her preferred group of friends, who added the most fuel to her fire. In the first week of summer

vacation one of them pulled her aside after Mass while her mother chatted with Father Donato, pulled a battered copy of *Doctor in Malaya* out of her handbag and passed it on to her only after many promises that she wouldn't get caught with it. Pauline read the book under her covers with a flashlight borrowed from Michael and Peter's room; the first smoldering scene between the willful Andrea and the attractive Doctor Ferguson was all that was needed to induce her to join the girls' private circulating library. The romances were sold in drugstores and supermarkets, bought on the sly with hoarded change, and read in secret – even though nothing more unchaste than a kiss was ever shown, at least two volumes had ended as ashes in a fireplace and a sore behind upon maternal discovery. But still they bought them, read them, and passed them around with the best bits marked with paper clips, and daydreamed about young doctors, handsome landowners, willful bachelors, brooding guardians, terse cowboys: the kinds of men they didn't know personally but were certain existed somewhere, were certain to walk into their lives one day in desperate need of a love that only they could give.

When the novels grew tedious, the girls turned to film. They didn't dare try to sneak into a real movie house, but there was a drive-in a mile or so outside their neighborhood, and when they thought they could get away with it they climbed the hill behind all of the parked cars and necking teens, settled on the grass with a knapsack of pop and bars of chocolate, claimed to have been over at each others' houses when their mothers asked where they had been so late. Some nights it was more fun trying to spot the couples among the sea of cars, to search for discarded clothing, the flash of skin in the back seat, a suspicious bouncing. Other evenings the flickering screen was all-engrossing – they managed to see *Doctor Zhivago* (A LOVE CAUGHT IN THE FIRE OF REVOLUTION) seven times before the end of summer, and the Beach Party films so many times that they all blended into one vague memory of shirtless boys, bikini girls, sand and picnic blankets and sexual tension.

The tightening at the juncture of her thighs made it impossible to sleep that summer, like the buzz of coffee in the wrong part of her body, and she'd watch the digits on her alarm clock flip over, unable to concentrate, to center, to erase the feeling. Some nights she had strange dreams where bodies melted into each other, parts of bodies moved and shifted on their own, threatening people touched her in ways that excited, and the tension at her center wound tighter and tighter and sometimes she woke up then, and was cross and distracted the entire day, but often

she stayed under, in the frightening exciting body-filled dream world, and woke feeling relaxed but unable to understand why.

But as July melted into August and the days got hotter, the nights longer, the feeling grew more intense, more persistent, began to encroach in daylight moments. She couldn't think for her over-consciousness of her body, for the tension, the need to do something about it. She thought she would come apart.

Eventually, she did.

It was two in the morning when her wandering fingers found the place. She knew it was two in the morning because she was curled on her side with her hands sandwiched between her thighs, watching the moonlight glint off the white-on-black numbers of her avocado green flip clock, willing herself to fall asleep. As she shifted one hand pressed the place for a moment and the elusive throbbing snapped tight, but in a pleasant way. She didn't know what she'd touched, why that spot was different from the rest of the folded nothingness between her legs that she touched so many times in the course of a day, while getting dressed and showering and while she slept. Only the internal organs had been labeled in the diagrams in class; the external anatomy seemed to her as featureless as the plane of her stomach, no difference between one inch and another, just skin. She lost the spot, took ten minutes searching for it, found it and kept her finger tight to the one place as her hip cramped. The topography was unfamiliar, she didn't know if she would be able to find it again if she moved her hand, moved her body. She poked, twisted, trying to repeat whatever it was that she had done to make her belly tingle, eyes still on the clock glazed over with internal vision. She found the movement, felt herself tightening and tightening around that axis, and then her hand ached, cramped, and suddenly the spot was too sensitive, too sore to touch, and she pulled her fingers away as if she'd burnt herself.

She gave up, rolled over.

At three a.m. she rolled back, glared at the clock, then went looking for the spot again. It was hard to find, slipped away even as she found it, but she pinned it under her finger, and lost herself in the feeling, so that she was surprised by the unexpected shudder, the way her brain came apart, like being pushed into deep water and she couldn't decide if it hurt or if it was the best thing she'd ever felt, a yawn and a sneeze and the fizz of seltzer filling up a body that wasn't hers. But even better: as she came back to herself she found that she was tired, her eyes were heavy, and she

rolled over into a sleep as deep as any she'd had when she was sore and bruised and triumphant.

The insomnia was less of a problem after that. Some nights she couldn't find the spot, and gave up. Others her hand cramped and went numb or else the place went suddenly sensitive, so that she would have to stop, and her dreams would be fitful and she'd be snappish in the morning. She wasn't ashamed because she didn't know that it was a thing to be ashamed of. It was like scratching an itch, like how her friends played with each other's hair to make their scalps tingle, no different from the way she pressed her bruises, the way her mother took her sleeping pill, the way her father drank his single glass of bourbon before going to bed.

School and hockey began again, but she continued with the habit; it wasn't only in the dark before she slept that she felt the throbbing, but often during the day as well, in class or while she was studying, when she recalled scenes from the films she had seen or novels she had read – not just the drugstore romances, but also school books, weighty things by weighty Victorians where so much was implied – that involved men that were handsome and threatening in a way she could not parse, and when she had the time or the privacy she unwound herself. When she couldn't her concentration was broken by the wanting of it, and she continued to tingle and think Men thoughts until she had the chance to be alone.

That was the state she was in on the Friday afternoon when her mother came into her bedroom without knocking, clean and ironed uniform shirts draped over her arm, and stopped in horror.

Pauline had been prickly and distracted all that day, had gone to her room when she got home from school and stretched out on the bed with her history text, propped herself up on one elbow and snaked her free hand down the front of her skirt so that she could do something about the prickling at the same time as she did something about the reading she hadn't gotten around to, the paper that was already technically overdue but that she was pretty sure she could slip into Sister Celestine's desk early enough on Monday that the woman wouldn't notice. At first she thought that her mother's gasp was a reaction to the state of her room; she was disabused of this notion as she was jerked off the bed by the arm she had down her skirt and smacked across the face.

"Filth! Filth! Where did you learn that filth?"

"Nowhere, Ma—"

"Don't lie to me, who taught you that disgusting behavior?"

"No one – "

"And I suppose you let 'no one' kiss you, and I suppose 'no one' puts his hands up your blouse as well. Who is this 'no one' that taught you to do such a foul thing? Answer me! Where did you meet him, what have you let him do to you?"

"Nothing, Ma, there isn't anyone!"

"Don't lie to me, someone must have shown you; someone must have corrupted you. What else have you been doing? Have you been kissing him?" She dragged Pauline down the hall by one arm. A pale face poked out of Michael and Peter's room and was withdrawn, and as they passed the door was quietly and firmly shut.

"I haven't kissed anyone!"

"Did you let him touch you? Did you take your clothes off for him? What have you been doing, you slut?"

"Nothing, I swear to God!"

Her mother smacked her again. They descended to the kitchen, where the cross-examination continued for upward of an hour, of which the first half had passed before Pauline made the connection between what her mother was saying and what she had been doing, that somehow her harmless habit was S.E.X. Her mother remained convinced that someone had shown her how, someone had told her to do it, someone had kissed her and touched her, above and below the waist. It was with great effort and many tears that Pauline convinced her mother that she was still a virgin, though her mother remained certain that she had committed some other sin with some man. No pure young girl would think to do anything so filthy.

The afternoon waned but her mother's anger didn't, and only the prospect of her father coming home ended the discussion. He would not be told, it would be too much for him, he would never be able to look at her or speak to her again if he knew. But if she were going to behave like an animal then she would be treated like an animal: her mother dragged her out the back door, locked her in the garden shed with the rakes and the push mower and the aluminum Christmas tree.

For the first few moments sitting on the packed dirt floor in the dark, watching dust motes dance in the fine threads of light that pushed through the cracks in the walls and listening to the muffled sounds of the neighborhood – screaming children, the dinging bell of the Good Humor man, the odd bark of a dog – was

comforting, filled her head in place of her mother's shouting. But slowly her own thoughts crept in, made patterns in the stillness between her ears. All those nights when she couldn't sleep, had she been doing sex without knowing it? Her mother had shouted before, at length, but never like this.

Could she be pregnant?

Didn't you need a boy for that?

Maybe you didn't need a boy; some of the older girls had said that you could get pregnant from a toilet seat. That was why their school was all-girl, and why you should never use the public toilets. But kissing was definitely part of it, and that required a boy. Also, she hadn't been doing any kissing.

She prodded her tummy, tried to decide if it had gotten any bigger since she'd started touching herself, tried to remember if pregnancy had any other symptoms. There had been older girls, at church and at school, who had started getting thick around the middle, who had been sent away, come back months later thin again but different, sadder or angrier or just not there. The ones who didn't go away got married quickly, had a baby soon after, and depending on who they'd married also got sadder or angrier or more absent afterwards. People looked at them differently, treated them differently. Some of the girls never came back.

Would they send her away? She could stay inside until she had the baby, so no one would see her get fat. They could pretend someone had left it on their doorstep. Maybe she wasn't pregnant, maybe what she'd been doing wasn't sex. Only married people could have sex, and she wasn't married. But if that was true, what made the girls get big and be sent away?

As the snatches of information she'd gained in the locker room and the classroom and from the romances and movies and her girlfriends' talk congealed, she was overcome by a slow horror, made worse by the fact that, until that moment, she'd given none of these things a second thought. She couldn't tell whether the feeling in her gut meant that she was pregnant, or that she was panicking. She began to pray, not any of the prayers that she'd been taught but a babble of need: *pleasenotpregnant, pleasenotpregnant, pleasenotpregnant.*

Michael, her younger but not youngest brother, brought her out an inexpertly made sandwich and a Mason jar of water some time after dinner, at which point she had progressed from babbling to bargaining: she would be the perfect daughter, the perfect girl, work hard and not talk back and not even think about boys and never

touch herself again if only this would all work out all right, if her father never found out and they didn't send her away and it all didn't get worse when her mother eventually let her out of the shed.

The sandwich slid neatly under the gap beneath the door but the jar had no hope of fitting, so Michael threaded the end of the garden hose under to her and turned it on as low as possible so that she could drink. He told her that Ma hadn't said what Pauline had done, and had been in one of her horrible moods – Paul was lucky, really, to be missing it, dinner was burnt and there had been no dessert. Ma hadn't only been silent when they asked why Pauline was in the shed, she hadn't said a word while they all choked the burned dinner down, and no one had been brave enough to ask why their sister was in disgrace.

Slowly the light faded and the air cooled, and she realized that her mother intended to leave her in the shed overnight. It was a few days shy of October still, not the worst time of year to sleep outside, and after all of the tears and misery her eyes were heavy. There was a folded pile of thick painter's cloths in a corner, from when her father had redecorated the living room, and she spread these out in her clear spot to pillow her bones and keep the cold of the earth from seeping into them. Sleep erased the fear, the shame, the agonizing uncertainty, even though she woke periodically through the night to wonder for a moment where she was, why she wasn't in her bed.

The next morning she was dragged out, still in her rumpled, dirt-stained skirt and blouse from the day before, and marched to the church, where her tight-mouthed mother told her that she was going to go into a confessional and tell the priest about every time she had polluted herself; she was too frightened to ask what would happen if she refused. When it turned out that they had come so early that the church hadn't yet been unlocked her mother stalked round to the clergy house and rang the bell until the housekeeper answered. All Pauline could hear – she didn't dare move from where her mother had left her in the entryway – was the frantic rise and fall of her voice, but it succeeded in drawing out one of the priests, Father Seratelli, who brought with him the cup of coffee he'd been drinking, the pages of the homily he'd been working on folded in the other hand, his pen tucked behind his ear.

That was worse than the night in the shed, leaning her forehead against the screen that separated them, knowing that the white haired man who had given her her first communion, watched her grow up, who was like her grandfather, was listening

on the other side as she slowly found the words to explain why they were there. His response came just as slowly, but was softer than she'd expected, clarified what her mother's shouting had not: no, what she had done was not sex, could not get her pregnant, though it was akin to that act. The longing she felt was for a husband, and when she was fully grown and married then she could give in to it fully, should give in to it fully, as God had intended when he created sex. But until then she must guard herself against sin – for unless it took place within the confines of marriage sexual activity was a sin – and pray for the strength to resist temptation. He did not need to tell her that giving in to that specific breed of temptation could ruin her entire life, her entire future, faster and more thoroughly than any other sin, that all it took was a moment of weakness to condemn herself forever to the same fate as the girls who had been sent away.

Her mother did not think that the penance he gave her was sufficient; they remained at the church until nearly four o'clock, Pauline on her knees in front of the altar in one of the small side chapels quietly reciting prayers over and over, stomach knotting and head swimming with hunger, mouth dry, while her mother sat stonily in a pew, staring straight ahead and running her rosary through her fingers. A few times Pauline caught sight of someone she knew out of the corner of her eye as they walked by and felt the burn of shame, wondered if they'd noticed her disheveled school uniform, if they knew she was in trouble, hoped that they knew her mother well enough to assume that what she had done wasn't as bad as her presence there made it seem. It wasn't as if the whole neighborhood, in passing by her house, hadn't heard her hollering at Pauline many times before.

On their walk home, her mother quoted, "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched."

"Yes, ma'am."

"You will never do that again, do you hear me? Whoever taught you how to do that, you will not associate with them again. You will leave your bedroom door open at all times, and if I ever see you engaging in that filthy practice, or any other of its kind, I will light the kitchen stove and I will hold the hand that you used against it until it blisters, do you hear me young lady?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Your father and brothers do not know what you have done. Unless you give me cause to, we will not speak of this again."

Her brothers gave her odd looks for the next few days, caught her out of earshot of their mother, asked, "Did she catch you with cigarettes? I bet it was cigarettes. Did you steal something? Sneak out at night? Come on Paul, why won't you tell me what you did?" Her mother didn't speak to her more than absolutely necessary for some months, but the absence of speech, which contrasted so sharply with her habitual haranguing, conveyed her displeasure, her belief that Pauline was all but beyond redemption, far more effectively than words could. She put her face in at Pauline's bedroom door while she was studying, propped it open a little wider, sometimes came into her room and pulled Pauline's hands out where they could be easily seen, stared at her with the look that made Pauline feel that she was seeing everything that she'd ever done wrong and was writing her off, condemning her to hell, giving up on her.

She remembered the promises she'd made while locked in the garden shed, to be better and do better, remembered what Father Seratelli had told her about sin, how easily she could ruin her life. Her teachers were shocked at the change in her that year, a lackluster student with a tendency for bullying who they had all assumed wouldn't complete high school, might marry young or get herself in trouble but who definitely wasn't going anywhere, seemingly grown overnight into a young woman determined to use the brain God had given her, suddenly studying, handing in work on time, earning good and even fantastic marks. The effort extended to home, where she was neater, better, kinder, in the hope that her mother would stop looking through her, would look at the chores she'd completed and tell her that she wasn't a disappointment.

The very idea of touching herself, of boys and romance and all that went with them, made her feel horrible deep in her stomach and behind her eyes, a syrupy thick fear-tinged guilt that wasn't quite able to cancel out the bodily longing she felt for all of those things. She restrained herself, shaken by the experience of being caught, until once again she lay staring at her clock at two a.m. Desperate for sleep, she padded down to the kitchen for a drink, the brush of her flannel nightdress almost painfully enjoyable against her skin, her bare feet making quiet scrunch-scrunch-scrunch noises on the burnt orange hallway carpet then stick-stick-stick noises on the kitchen linoleum. She sat for a moment with her glass on the step down to the sunken

living room, listened to the silence of the house, then walked slowly back through the kitchen and up the stairs with the full glass in her hand, trying not to spill. Her room was at the very end of the hall and she paused as she walked back to it at each of the bedroom doors, first at her parents', then at Luke and Sam's, then at Michael and Peter's, listening for the sound of night breathing.

They were all asleep.

Back in her room she slid under the covers, held her breath and listened tensely for movement as her fingers sought out the special place. It didn't take her long, and relief and guilt washed over her in equal measure: she was an animal, she was disgusting, she was going to hell.

She turned fifteen, sixteen, and girls she knew started seeing boys, started having boyfriends, started going on dates and kissing surreptitiously. Rumor had it that they did other things as well, the things that her mother had accused her of when she wasn't quite old enough to understand their appeal. Her mother's mouth pinched tight when she mentioned that her girlfriends were finding boyfriends, and she knew it was out of the question for her. What her mother had caught her doing was proof enough that she couldn't be trusted, that she couldn't trust herself, and she pretended that she didn't want a boyfriend, didn't feel that way about boys, to make it easier to be convincing when her mother asked her about the boys at school, at church, and she said that she didn't notice, didn't like them, didn't want to go on dates with any of them.

The girls who were sent away were now girls that she herself knew, who she had been confirmed with, played hockey with, watched drive-in moves from the top of a hill with and tried to spot trysting couples when none of them knew exactly what a couple could do to make a car rock. Other girls were thrown out of their parents' homes or threatened with convents for going out with boys, or were caught necking and petting and came to class with bruises and downturned eyes the day after. She couldn't risk angering her mother again, couldn't risk her future, but could barely tolerate the way her very bones seemed to ache for things she could not have. She did not so much long for a husband as for the day that she would be given to one, cross over into the phase of her life where the sin would become a sacrament. The only thing she could do until then, she reasoned, was keep herself under control, work as hard and be as good as she could, get married as soon as possible and pray that she didn't slip before then.

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Pauline turned seventeen a few weeks before Christmas, 1969, her first schoolyear as the oldest child still at home. She was thankful when her older brothers came back for the holiday, Luke from his third and Sam from his first year at a university they described as 'just this old place in Massachusetts,' so that people would assume Harvard, MIT, instead of Boston College, where they were actually going. Besides drawing their mother's attention away from her and her shortcomings, she had missed them.

On the evening of their return they held court in the living room, glasses of spirits on ice cupped in their hands. The Parents, as they were now referred to by their elder two offspring, were elsewhere. The younger two played Parcheesi; Pauline had dissociated herself from their bastardized version of the game in favor of her older brothers' company, even though she liked Parcheesi and was only pretending to like the contents of the glass that Sam had poured her: four parts soda water to one part spirit and thoroughly unpleasant. She wet her lip and followed along as they talked about people she didn't know and things she hadn't thought about: Vietnam and the draft, their fraternity brothers, the raid on the Black Panthers, the girls they were dating or were considering dating, the Mets winning the World Series. Then came a topic about which she did have an opinion. The sound of their mother's voice brought it up – raised, not in a shout but with body, meant to carry, and her brothers shook their heads.

"He's awfully henpecked, but it's at least half his fault," Luke began.

Her gorge rose instantaneously, warred with the hideous mouthful of scotch-tainted soda; she couldn't say anything.

"He's passive and ineffectual, but he's still our father," Sam said.

"Well yes, but that does not excuse him."

In their parent's living room, drinks in hand, the two proceeded to psychoanalyze their progenitor, the younger brothers oblivious to the conversation, the elder brothers oblivious themselves to the mounting apoplectic rage of their middle sister at their first ever betrayal of the unspoken childhood pact to in all things take the side of their father. It wasn't so much his natural passivity that was the problem, they decided, but his abdication of any authoritative role. Their mother

only pushed at him because he did not push back, refused to take responsibility or be the heavy with the children, or the tradesmen, or anyone. He had essentially saddled her with a sixth, eternal child, and because of this she had every right to treat him as such.

By this point Pauline had found her voice. She choked out, "How can you *say* that? Don't you see how she treats him? How she treats everyone?"

"We're not saying it's his fault that he's that way, Paul," Luke answered patiently. "With Grandpa dying when he was a kid, Dad never had a model of masculinity to live up to; that's what happens when a fellow's raised by women. It's no surprise that he practically is one."

"How could you? She never allows for the possibility that she could be wrong, she never takes on anyone's opinion, she acts like getting her point across is more important than hurting someone's feelings. If he pushed back she would have just pushed harder; the only way to deal with Ma is to agree with her and give her what she wants, or else not play at all. You can't win."

"We're not saying that we don't love him – "

"You're not going to be able to talk sense to her, Sam," Luke, the eldest, interrupted. "All first children have a natural affinity for the opposite sex parent, she won't be able to see past that. She'll marry someone exactly like him, and then she'll understand what we're on about."

"What about you, then?" she asked. "You're the first boy, you can't see past your sucking up to Ma."

"I have reached an age of reason, Paul. You're still a teenybopper."

"Think they still have sex?" This came from Sam.

"I'd guess once a week, out of duty. She wouldn't let him any other time."

Unable to get her point across and furious at being dismissed, Pauline expressed herself the only way she could, which unfortunately confirmed her brother's estimation as to her reasonableness: she dashed her drink to the floor and stormed out. The floor had other ideas. The heavy-bottomed glass bounced quietly on the thick shag carpet, the scotch-and-water wetting it a little. The storming was ruined by Sam calling after, "You'd better come back and clean that up before Ma sees." Luke echoed, in a rhetorical tone, but loud enough to make sure she heard, "The tempests of adolescence. Always throwing a fit about nothing at all."

She took her revenge by taking a bit of wire and locking the roll tops of the two desks in their shared bedroom, imprisoning both the work that they had brought with them to do over the break and the assorted half-finished models, collections, and bits of junk that habitually strewed the surfaces. When she calmed enough to begin to worry about the chance of fraternal retribution, she found that she had made a grievous error: it was simple to lock the old desks with her wire, but when she tried to unlock them in the same way the tumblers refused to move, no matter how she prodded them. Both she and her revenge were discovered simultaneously, the wire still in her hands. The value of the desks were weighed against the value of the textbooks that they contained, and the paternal cavalry was called in.

While the roll tops were being chiseled open she was asked, "What ever possessed you?" in her mother's most strident tones. She refused to answer. Her brothers, confident in their wisdom in private but perhaps a bit ashamed of their conclusions in public, likewise declined to offer a hypothesis as to what they might have done to provoke their sister.

*

Her last year of high school was defined by the uphill battle of What Comes Next. Her mother thought she should take her perfect marks in typing and neat girl-next-door looks and get certified as a secretary, work in the city. Not New York, despite her protests that Midtown was half an hour away, practically their back yard. Her mother thought she'd be more comfortable starting out somewhere smaller, safer, in New Jersey – Hackensack for instance – until a nice boy from church decided to marry her. Pauline didn't tell her that 'nice' and 'boy from church' didn't go together; her girlfriends agreed that they had the foulest mouths and the friskiest hands of any of the boys they knew. Besides that, the idea of spending one more year living at home made her stomach twist and her heart pound; she'd rather go into a convent, Lord knew she'd be watched less closely there. And even though her hard work at school hadn't killed her fleshly longings, had distracted her from, rather than replaced, physical satisfaction, she found herself reluctant to give up now, when she had only just proved to herself and everyone that she was a good student and, in finding that she was a good student, finding also that she enjoyed the work for its

own sake, and enjoyed being good at something that other people valued and approved of.

It had been a given that her brothers would go to college, had to go on to college, would get nowhere in life if they passed up the opportunities that hadn't been available to their father, but when Pauline suggested that she, too, might benefit from more schooling, her parents were baffled. When they couldn't change her mind her mother pushed for Hood, Felician, somewhere nearby, single-sex, and Roman Catholic affiliated. Everyone was dying to live as close to New York as they did, she should be grateful that it was her birthright, should stay as near as possible to where God and her parents had decided she belonged.

Her parents would never have guessed that it was the nuns – symbols of propriety, of obedience, of conventionality – who told her that she should try for higher education, who pushed her to look for schools farther afield, worked her down to a short list and helped her write out the applications. They were the ones who suggested Georgetown, the oldest Catholic university in the country, though it had only begun accepting women in 1969. She quickly became wedded to the idea of going south, of living in the capitol, of being just far enough away that her parents could not drop in unannounced without a bit of effort. Even with the provenance of the school, and the scholarship that she was given to study, her parents resisted the idea, until Mother Superior spoke to them. Pauline had despaired of ever convincing her parents to let her go, but the moment that her mother told her that they were due to meet with the nun to discuss Pauline's future she began thinking over what she would pack, what she would need to buy new, whether she could make over her school uniforms to look fashionable enough to be worn in public.

The first time any of the three of them saw the school, or the District of Columbia for that matter, was on the day that they arrived to move her into the women's dorm. Her younger brothers packed her things into the back of her parents' Chrysler station wagon the night before they left, woke up before sunrise to groggily hug her goodbye. She fell asleep in the back seat almost immediately, head pillowed on the mound of linens that her mother insisted she would need, slept through most of the four hour drive, came awake as they went over the 11th street bridge.

"Whaddaya think, Ma?" she asked.

"It's not exactly Manhattan, is it?"

"Isn't that a good thing? It looks a lot safer than New York, doesn't it?"

Her mother didn't answer, remained silent as they passed the Washington Monument, and while they ate a quick breakfast in a diner in Foggy Bottom. The quality of that silence changed as they drove up to the gates of the school. The leaflets she'd been given didn't quite convey the gothic grandeur of Healey Hall, the way the place had the peaceful feel of a seminary. The city itself seemed smaller, quieter, than New York, and the school itself was even quieter than the surrounding city. Her mother took in the Hall, the stone walls and high gates that surrounded the school and conceded that the place wasn't as much of a dump as she had expected. They wandered the nearly empty campus, down long, winding paths between tall brick buildings; the school was built on hills that made it seem as though it folded in on itself, cupped the buildings and paths away in the palm of the earth and hid them from the sounds and sights of the city.

Her mother seemed comforted by knowing where Pauline would be eating dinner, where her lectures would be held, what she would see every morning through the large window of her dormitory room and, after taking in the view of the Potomac, lighting a candle in the Chapel of the Sacred Heart, and declaring the District to be inferior to all of the boroughs of New York, she seemed content to allow Pauline to stay. Her father, for the most part, had been quiet on the drive down, was looking soft about the mouth, and apart from the occasional quip about setting up barbed wire to keep the boys out was uncharacteristically silent as they carried her boxes and bags up the Escher-esque staircases of her building.

As a freshman and a scholarship student she was required to turn up with the others of her type a week ahead of the general horde, so the dormitory into which they decanted her things from the back of the car was eerily still, summer-hot and empty. Her mother insisted on doing the unpacking, so that she could go home knowing that the room was organized, even if it wouldn't be staying that way for long. They stacked the empty boxes on the bare mattress of the roommate who had not yet appeared, ate a second, awkward meal before leaving. As they hugged each other goodbye Pauline pretended that she didn't see her father trying not to cry, trying not to look back at her so she wouldn't see him trying not to cry as he turned the key in the ignition and handed her mother the road atlas before pulling out.

As she watched their brake lights recede down 37th Street Pauline felt the tension go out of her shoulders, and she realized that, all of her life, her mother had made her anxious. And now, alone for the first time and secure in the knowledge that

her mother would not be unexpectedly walking around the corner, she found that she was no longer anxious, that she had never really understood what it was to not be anxious. She went up to her room, closed her door, spread out as much as she could on the narrow, lumpy mattress, and luxuriated in the peace. Abruptly she sat up, cleared her throat, and said, "Cocksucker." Then again, more emphatically, "Cocksucker!" Satisfied, she flopped back down.

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That initial moment of defiance aside, in the first weeks she couldn't shake the feeling that her mother was just about to appear around every corner, that the woman had to know whenever Pauline cursed, or stayed up late, or spoke to a boy, that at any moment she would come to drag Pauline back home. And so she eased into the new freedom slowly. She tried to preserve the persona she'd adopted after her night in the garden shed: dressing modestly, being careful what she said, going to sleep early after evenings spent in the library reviewing her neatly written notes from the day's lectures so that she could rise early, saying the rosary while she dressed in the dark so that she didn't wake her roommate, being polite to everyone but avoiding speaking to boys, standing too near to boys, even looking at boys for too long. Compared to her life at home it was an environment seemingly devoid of rules, and she carried with her as a caution a mental image of herself in a year's time, returning home having failed all of her classes, pregnant and disgraced.

On the first afternoon that she found herself unoccupied she walked to the National Mall – both out of curiosity about the city and the nebulous worry that if she allowed herself to socialize she would inevitably meet the wrong people and be hooked on reefer by dinnertime – looked at the memorials and the White House, poked her nose into the Smithsonian and tried not to feel lonely; she'd never gone out like this on her own before. People had been moving out of D.C. in droves since King's assassination three years prior, and between that and the openness of that part of the city, the utter lack of skyscrapers, it felt positively pokey compared to Manhattan. She wondered why her parents had worried about her.

Her roommate, Louise Renton, was a decent girl, a deb from Georgia who studied philosophy and planned on marrying the boy she'd been dating since her first year of high school, which made her, Pauline judged, a safe choice for friendship.

Her boy was studying only three miles away at American, would probably go into politics the way his father had, and though Louise had been raised to be a congressman's wife in twinset and pearls, for the present she was a liberated woman. This Pauline didn't realize until after she decided that she quite liked Louise, and after a moment's pricking of the conscience decided that she liked Louise enough that it shouldn't matter, there were so few women at the school that they really ought to stick together, and being liberated probably wouldn't rub off. Said liberatedness led to Pauline having their room to herself a few nights a week, but even when Louise was there it seemed like more privacy than she'd ever had before in her life. No one went through her drawers, no one read her journal, no one touched her things or cross-examined her about where she'd been and who with.

Louise introduced Pauline to her friends, made her come eat with them when their paths converged in the dining hall, and so over trays of institutional food – which still tasted better than the dinners her mother burned when she had her mad on – Pauline found herself slowly becoming Politically Aware. She'd known about Vietnam and the IRA – everybody knew about them, she was sure – but events closer to home had slipped her notice: Black Power and Women's Liberation and Gay Rights; the threat of overpopulation, oil spills, toxic dumps; protests and bombings and airplanes hijacked to Cuba; pot and the Pill and punk rock. Everything was an issue, and everyone was angry.

She wanted good grades, but she didn't want to become a social pariah, so on the evenings when Louise put on her black sweater and lavender eye shadow Pauline often went along, walking half a step ahead so that she wouldn't catch the smoke of the other girl's cigarette. She listened to the dining hall crowd talk late at night, over sour coffee and cigarettes they'd clubbed together to afford, smushed into one booth at a diner where the waitress seemed to know them, seemed to know that they couldn't afford more than coffee and left them alone as they drank it. She went to parties where people lounged around listening to music she'd never heard before, drank beer, talked about how to fix things, whether it were worth trying to fix things, and she went to parties where the music was louder and there was no talking and boys tried to dance with her, to give her drinks when she already had a full one in her hand. She read the books that Louise left lying around, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* and *The Feminine Mystique* and the drugstore romance novels she kept under her bed and didn't know that Pauline knew about, which Pauline waited until Louise was visiting

her boyfriend to plunder, read as quickly as possible, and then felt guilty over until she got the chance to confess the feelings the more physical passages gave her, did her penance and walked back out into the world knowing she was once again in a state of grace.

Even with the privacy she hadn't returned to her filthy habit – or not habitually, in any case. When it happened she confessed this too, and wasn't certain if it was easier or more difficult, knowing that the priest who heard her was essentially a stranger. Still, she burned for want of the sort of touch she read about in the romances, which the more serious books in Louise's collection were beginning to help her understand even as they made her wonder about their implications apart from their effect on her immortal soul. There had been a considerable gap in her education, and she picked at what she'd read in the back of her mind continually, so that in the dining hall or in lectures or just as she was falling asleep she would start as a connection was made. The most jarring of these came in the library one afternoon: as she transcribed her Gen Chem notes to her log she remembered that it was her parents' anniversary the next week, resolved to send them a card because she wouldn't remember to phone, tried to remember how long they'd been married, counted up from 1950 and arrived at twenty-one years, and then remembered that Luke's birthday was only four months away. His twenty-first birthday.

She recounted, then used tally marks on her scratch paper because she had to be wrong, but no matter how she figured it came out the same way: her mother had been pregnant when she'd gotten married. She wasn't certain if what she felt was shock or anger, that her mother had committed a far greater sin than the one for which she had condemned her daughter so severely, had thought the worst of her not because of who Pauline was but of who she herself was. Later, she would consider that her mother's actions had been out of fear, born of knowing where that path led and worrying that her daughter would continue down it given the slightest chance. But for the moment, and for many days afterwards, she burned with anger at the knowledge, and when her parents telephoned for their regular Sunday evening chat she asked Louise to tell them that she had sore throat, had lost her voice, and would call the following week.

All of this should have been more than enough to distract her from work, but even though she enjoyed herself more often and more freely she was terrified to the bone that, even if she managed to avoid the temptations of the flesh, the work would

prove to be too difficult for her and she'd be sent back to New Jersey to become a typist and marry a boy from church, have babies and cook roasts. Though marriage would satisfy her craving for sex, the more she read the more disgusted she was by the idea of doing any of the things she read about with any of the pustule-ridden, foul-minded boys from her childhood, even as the idea of doing them with one of the vague-edged men of her private fantasies became more appealing. And too, the work itself gripped her; either it was simply more interesting, more challenging than high school had been, or else acting the part of a person who loved schoolwork for the past four years had actually turned her into one in a kind of cognitive Stockholm syndrome. All of it got her blood running, from dissecting newspaper articles to calibrating lab equipment. She went to all of the classes, read everything she was handed, skipped ahead in the textbooks, and brought her work to the tutors to be checked even when she knew it was right.

And that was how she met Martin.

He tutored General Chemistry, looked a bit like a young, underfed Cary Grant with longer legs. When she first brought him her work he was kind and polite if a bit aloof, and she decided immediately to make a habit of it, both for the sake of her grades and because the sound of his voice raised goose bumps on the back of her neck and fluttering low in her abdomen. For all his good looks, he was seemingly sexless and thoroughly preoccupied with work, probably a postgrad, so she felt safe indulging her little crush.

"You know everyone says he's a fruit, don't you?" Louise asked her one evening as Pauline gathered up her work to go see him.

"Who is?"

"Martin Freeman. Even if he isn't, it makes no difference – he doesn't go around with girls."

"What does it matter? He's too old for me anyhow," she answered, but she kept her face turned away from Louise as she did it.

"'Too old for you?' Where do you cruise for dates, nurseries?"

"Come again?"

"He and I are the same year. If he's too old for you then no wonder you've never had a boyfriend; the ones that are just right aren't in long pants yet."

"Oh," she said. "I thought he was a postgrad."

"No, just a fogey."

"He's a good tutor."

"Still, don't get your hopes up."

Pauline turned this conversation over in her mind as she went down to meet him, studied his face for signs of queerness as he looked over her work. It seemed to her, the longer she looked at him, the longer she listened to him, that everyone had gotten it wrong. He wasn't attracted to men, she was sure. He was like her, saving himself for the right person, didn't want to have anything to do with the tarty chicks that flung themselves at anything with an Adam's apple. This only made him more attractive to her.

Even as her views on politics and women's lib began to soften – after so many conversations with so many smart, friendly, earnest people she couldn't help but think that maybe there was something to what they were saying – her feelings about sexual immorality hardened. Even with the Pill, boys were trouble, could get her sent home faster than bad grades. And too, there was just something wrong about the idea of going to bed with a random boy, making an evening's entertainment out of a sacrament that had been held up as holy her entire life. And if it turned out that they were all wrong, that sleeping around broke your heart and your soul and left you unfit for love or marriage, it wasn't as if she could take it back after she'd done it.

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On her first Sunday at Georgetown she'd done her hair, put on a good dress, and walked a block down O Street to Holy Trinity Church, sat in a pew near the back and tried not to be noticed. It was the first time she'd gone to Mass by herself, and though it felt strange she knew, even more than when she'd been confirmed, the time had come when she would have to make her parents' religion her own. After a week of new people, new responsibilities, new tasks, the familiarity of the liturgy comforted her, and as she walked back to school, stomach empty save for Holy Communion, she thought that it might not be so difficult, becoming this adult person she was pretending to be.

Had Pauline's practice been more personal, less performative, perhaps it wouldn't have been difficult. But for her, religion was not so much a question of belief as behavior. It was external to her, and as work piled on and Saturday evening parties grew more frequent she found herself stretched between obligations, needs,

wants, trying to find a compromise. For several weeks she dragged herself out of bed, neglected her makeup and barely did her hair though she still wore a good dress, dozed through the sermon and crept right back into her bed the moment she returned. The first Sunday that she was so late that she slipped in just in time to join the queue of people going forward for Communion she burned with shame, slipped out immediately afterwards to avoid having to shake the priest's hand as she left and have him look her in her bleary eyes and ask why she'd been so late, whether she was ill, and have to tell him that no, she'd simply been out until three in the morning, drinking beer and debating Communism with girls who didn't wear bras.

The shame remained even as her tardiness became habit. She told herself that once she'd gotten more settled in, once she was on top of things, once she was a sophomore, she'd clean up her act, that this was only temporary and once she'd learned to deal with the pressure, balance the work and the socialization she'd find a way to balance religion as well. And really, what else could she do? She was there to get an education, to be exposed to new ideas and challenging people, and none of those things were happening on Sunday morning dozing in the back pew.

Even though she loved the actual work, it felt as though she was always one bad evening away from getting behind. Gen Chem and Latin both called for hours of rote memorization, and she didn't know until the end of the first week that the freshman intro to journalism came with the requirement to volunteer for the student paper, so she found herself spending Sunday afternoons proofreading articles on sex or protests, occasionally entrusted with filling a few stray inches with something fluffy because she was a freshman and hadn't proven herself yet. Hockey was still her outlet though she battered less than she had when she was thirteen, even though she was no less angry. But whether it was balancing equations or memorizing conjugations or writing an essay on the Pentagon Papers it all gave her a little thrill, the solid satisfaction of work well done.

So when she went home for Christmas and one of her uncles responded to her description of work for the student paper – where she had recently been allowed to co-write a piece on a Women's Lib demonstration – with a smack on the behind and the directive to get a move on finding a husband before she got so much education that no man would have her, she'd been positively speechless. Even though the rest of her family couched their opinions in more diplomatic language, there seemed to

be a consensus: they were all waiting for her to settle down, saw her time at .Georgetown as just a blip, a holding pattern on her path to married life.

After the freedom of the previous fifteen-odd weeks it was positively painful to be home again, to try to fit herself into a mold that she felt as though she had outgrown completely. And though it wasn't impossible for her to bite her tongue when her mother harangued, to pick up the chores that had been hers before she left and keep her new opinions to herself, it rankled. This she had expected, though she hadn't expected it to be so bad, and she hadn't expected it to extend outside her parents' home, to the other parts of her life.

By that point in the school year she had given in, went to confession on Saturday afternoon and slipped in to the church on Sunday morning just in time to join the line for Communion, slipped back out again immediately after, and promised herself and the Blessed Virgin that she'd do better as soon as she was able. So on that first Sunday home for Christmas break she attended Mass proper for the first time since October, sat where she always had next to her father and sang the hymns with gusto, eyes closed, greeted everyone she could reach during the rite of peace, then settled in happily to listen to the homily.

Her parents had gone to the same church since before she was born, and she had grown up with sermons from the same three priests, week after week: Father Seratelli, who had christened her, Father Donato, who had confirmed her, and Father Frances, who had performed her parents' wedding. Listening to the homilies was like listening to her grandfathers talk, more comforting for the familiarity of the sound and the presence of people she loved than for anything actually said, so that it was possible that, though she'd been there every Sunday of her life save when she'd had chicken pox, it was quite possible that she'd never heard what was said before.

It was the third Sunday of Advent, and the text on which the homily was based came from the first chapter of Luke, the passage where the pregnant Mary visited Elizabeth, and Elizabeth knew when she heard Mary's voice that she was the mother of the Lord, called her 'blessed among women.' It was delivered by a new priest, a young priest, who had been sent to replace Father Frances, who had retired the year before.

He read out the passage, then paused dramatically before saying, "Think on that with me, for a moment: 'blessed among women.' Blessed, because of the life that she was carrying." He paused again. "I don't know how many of you take a

paper, but even if you do I hope it is a shock when I tell you that there are people out there, in our very own United States, who are even now agitating for laws to be passed that will allow for the murder of children before they are even born. If the Blessed Virgin walked the earth today, these people would insist that it was right and best that she end the life that she carried, the life that would cleanse the sins of the world."

Pauline felt her jaw dropping but contained herself as the homily continued, as he condemned the Pill as well as abortion, claimed that it was two means to the same murderous end. She couldn't say that she exactly disagreed with him – abortion was murder, sex was for marriage – but everything he said seemed to appall her. He painted a picture of a world were young girls were tricked into, forced into, depriving of much-wanted children, a world were marriages fell apart because of contraceptives, where women who didn't know any better destroyed their own lives because Women's Libbers told them it was the only way they could be happy. She couldn't say all of that wouldn't happen, but what about the mothers she'd known with more children than they could feed, caught in marriages they would have left in a moment if only they had the money? What about the girls who fell pregnant through no action of their own, by relatives or strangers that they'd tried and failed to fight off? What about all of the girls that had been sent away?

While sitting in the diner sipping coffee late at night the week before going home the other girls had been buoyant: not one, but two cases were about to go before the Supreme Court, cases which could lead to prohibitions being overturned, women having control over their bodies and their futures, and as she'd listened to their discussion, made them explain what it all meant, what it could mean if the decision went the way they wanted, she hadn't even considered once that what they hoped for might be contrary to the teachings of the Church. Even as a virgin she knew the fear that her life could be derailed completely by one bad decision, knew that she didn't even have to be the one to make that decision but that any man could take a fancy to her, corner her, and if the time was right all the plans that she'd had, everything she'd worked for, would have to be put aside.

Her father had to nudge her to her feet when it came time for them to go forward for communion after the homily ended, and she was still so flustered that instead of accepting the bread and the cup she folded her hands and bowed her head for a blessing, explained when her mother hissed at her in irritation afterwards that

she hadn't received because her soul hadn't been prepared; that she'd come back for the evening service and do it then.

She did return that evening, and even though she received the Host she didn't feel entirely at peace about it. Over the next few weeks she found herself paying close attention to what the priests said, and the more she chewed it over the less she could deny that it wasn't just the interpretation, but the core principles themselves that gave her pause. This was a troubling thought, but rather than coming to grips with it she tried to put it out of her mind. It wasn't her task, after all, to puzzle out the word of God and how to live, but her task to obey, and if listening to the Father's message caused her to question her faith, maybe it was better that she wasn't around to hear it for a little while.

She had wanted to tell her mother about Martin just as much as she'd wanted to not tell her mother about Martin, but not quite as much as she'd desperately wished that she had the sort of mother that she could tell about things like Martin. The guilt of words left unsaid sat like a stone in her belly, and even though she was irritated that her family so underestimated her, in a way she was glad that she was a girl, that her aunts and uncles over Christmas dinner asked her about boys and dances, rather than the kind of questions they'd asked her brothers when they'd gone off to school, questions about their thoughts and opinions. Being honest about what she'd seen, how she felt, how her views had morphed, was practically suicidal: they'd bring her home and sling her in a convent before she got through telling them.

In the end she couldn't quite keep it all to herself. The more she got to know him the more she liked Martin, the more she wanted to tell someone who mattered about him, and she figured that if she eased her mother into the news that she knew a boy socially, the idea of 'boyfriend' would be much easier to introduce further down the line.

She began, "I've started making some friends," while her mother washed and she dried the dinner dishes on the Saturday evening before she returned to school.

"Have you, now?" her mother answered absently.

"Louise and I and a few other girls get coffee together every few days. And Martin's offered to escort me to the next formal."

Her mother's back stiffened slightly, but Pauline went on as though she hadn't noticed. "I've mentioned Martin before, haven't I? He double-checks my work for me. I'm beginning to feel as though I fit in there."

"We're sending you to that school to get a degree, not to find boyfriends." Her mother's response was much calmer than she expected. "If that's what you want to do, come home. There are plenty of nice boys here, and you won't be wasting our money."

"It's not like that, he's not a boyfriend. We just see a lot of each other." She paused for a moment. "I thought you'd like to know I'm making friends. I thought you'd be happy for me."

"You don't need friends that are boys." Her tone had hardened. "Boys are only thinking about one thing, and believe me, Pauline, they'll find a way to get that one thing. You'll be sorry if you spend time alone with one of them."

"The girls only think about one thing, too; at least Martin talks about something else."

"You don't have to worry about the girls."

Pauline chewed the inside of her mouth and debated telling her mother about the existence of lesbians, about the girls who had hit on her in the short time she'd been away, how the offers they'd made had been far more explicit than anything a guy had ever said to her. It would shock her mother and end the conversation, but there would probably be repercussions, so she repeated: "Martin isn't a boyfriend. We're taking classes in the same department and he's nice to talk to. But I wouldn't mind if he wanted to be my boyfriend. Later."

If she hadn't been entirely truthful with her mother on this account then it was because she was not being truthful herself. In describing Martin as just a friend she easily glossed the times they had gone out together on what could be called dates, the evenings they had spent together not working on Chemistry, the fact that when she'd shut herself in her bedroom with the telephone over Christmas the call had had not been to Louise, as her mother had assumed.

It was a relief to return to school in January, to drape her overcoat across the back of her desk chair and sink down onto her bed, close her eyes, and know that no one would walk in without knocking. A relief to be back to evenings in the diner and afternoons in the newspaper office, to back-to-back lectures and paper deadlines, to concrete tasks that she could actually complete, questions she could answer. And she had missed the southernness of D.C.: the drawling way of talking, the politeness that seemed almost excessive compared to her family's brusque manners, the way that

life seemed slower here, calmer. She'd missed collared greens, the way warmth was struck low in her stomach when the lunch lady called her 'honey.'

The first two months back were such a whirlwind that it was easy to avoid thinking about the Church, about what she believed. There was too much protesting to do, too much writing, too much editing, too many opportunities that she shouldn't pass up. And if her conscience pricked when she slipped in the back of the church just in time to go forward to receive the Eucharist, she was too worn out from all of her hustling to feel it. And even if she couldn't bear the homilies, couldn't drag herself out of her bed any earlier, she comforted herself with the fact that she still went to confession. There was comfort in speaking her failings to the darkness and having someone tell her what she must do to be clean again, walking out into the February drizzle with a clear conscience. And, too, the memory that she would have to eventually confess her shortcomings often helped her avoid committing them in the first place, especially when it came to Martin.

Over the fall they had periodically spent time together for purposes other than work, always somewhere public and always on her initiative. She liked that he wasn't pursuing her, liked that he let their relationship go at her pace. Some time in November she'd taken him to a private corner of the campus, stood close to him while she talked, gave him ample opportunity to try to kiss her, touch her, suggest that they get up to something a little less vertical; she was both triumphant and a tiny bit disappointed that he continued their discussion seemingly oblivious to her designs, that he respected her too much to try anything.

She'd expected them to continue in this way after Christmas, so it was a bit of a surprise when Martin came to find her at dinner the day she returned from break, asked her if she would like to go for dessert with him. He gave her his high school letterman jacket to wear as they strolled along the bluff above the Potomac to Foggy Bottom, took her arm as they walked and let her natter about New Year with her brothers and how strange it had been with Simon and Luke having both brought girlfriends to visit over the break. At first she thought they were headed to the diner where they usually went, but Martin continued past to a bakery in the bottom of Watergate East. He told her to pick something from the pastry case. When she couldn't make up her mind he asked for one of each, tucked the white card box into his knapsack and took her hand as they walked up out of the complex and led her,

hesitating, towards the Kennedy Center, a looming edifice of white marble reminiscent of both a Grecian temple and a sugar cube.

"Are we allowed to be here?" she whispered as they walked through the front doors and down a flag-hung hallway broad enough to have an echo, high enough to lose a balloon several times over. She could hear opera, bleeding faintly through the walls.

"Doesn't feel like we should be, does it?" he whispered back, and called an elevator to take them to the top floor.

When he led her out onto the rooftop terrace the sun had nearly set, but the sky was still shot with color, and there was light enough to see the city laid out around them. He found them a spot out of the wind, cut the string on the bakery box with his penknife, and while she ate Napoleons he did imitations of his mother and father and older brother Wally over Christmas dinner that made her laugh even as she felt sorry for him; his family didn't sound like the most enjoyable bunch to spend a holiday with.

He put his hands over hers when she went to take his jacket off as they were saying goodnight on the steps of her dormitory, settled it more snugly on her shoulders, said "You'd better keep this for now. It suits you," then gave her a careful kiss on the forehead that made her stomach flutter.

Perhaps it was the kiss, or the conferring of the jacket, that caused their relationship to shift. Their dates became regular, and on the days they didn't go out they sat together in the library, working; most days now he joined her and Louise in the dining hall for at least one meal, and though Louise's penciled eyebrows had rocketed towards her hairline the first time he pulled up a chair next to Pauline and said hello she hadn't made anything of it. Kisses goodnight, on the forehead and cheekbones and neck, also became a habit. She'd told him that she wanted to be able to tell her mother that they'd never kissed, that they'd need to be able to prove that their relationship was chaste, that he loved her for her mind, that he really wasn't thinking of only one thing.

Whether she was thinking of only one thing was a different matter entirely.

So he kissed her everywhere that showed, everywhere that wasn't her mouth, and put his hands on her waist or shoulders or hair but carefully, respectfully, and nowhere else.

When she brought him home for Easter break her parents were acquiescent, pleasant, polite. Luke was visiting his girlfriend's parents for the holiday so Martin was conveniently given the empty bed. Pauline had expected that the admonition she delivered to the three remaining brothers would only incite them to worse behavior, but they all seemed uncharacteristically inclined to be good, especially Sam, who Martin was sharing a room with. Even more surprising, perhaps, was how much her parents appeared to like him. He was neat-edged, clean cut and well mannered when the trend in their age group was decidedly otherwise, and at first they seemed surprised that she hadn't brought home the unwashed hippie that they expected, then pleased at how similar he was to the nice Catholic boy they had imagined she would marry from the day she was born. It seemed like the visit would be a raving success. Until they went to Easter Vigil.

The priest welcomed the congregation to come forward and receive the Eucharist; Pauline's mother gestured for Martin to go first, and he bashfully shook his head, remained in the pew with his hands carefully folded and head bowed. Her mother wouldn't make a scene during Mass, but the sharp look she gave as Pauline walked past her to get to her space on the pew made her stomach clench anxiously.

On the walk home Pauline's mother asked if he had refused communion because he hadn't confessed that morning, if he would be ready to partake at the morning service the next day, and when he answered, quietly, "I'm not a Catholic, Ma'am," her mouth set in familiar, grim line. Pauline had primed him beforehand, told him that it would be offensive if he went up, even though he was a Christian; when she saw her mother's expression she wished that she'd told him to fake it.

Her mother cornered her in the kitchen while they were putting the finishing touches on dinner the next afternoon.

"What does he mean, he isn't Catholic? What is he then?"

"He's a social Methodist, but really it isn't all that different. They believe –"

"What is this 'social? Is he a Methodist or isn't he?"

Pauline had hoped that 'social' as a modifier for 'Methodist' would be preferable to 'Methodist' alone, as it indicated that his heart was in the right place but that he was open to suggestion on the particulars of his religious practice; clearly she had been wrong. "He goes to church to be part of the community. He grew up Methodist, it feels like home to him."

"So he's wishy-washy. He doesn't agree with them but he doesn't have the guts to leave. Is this what you mean? This boy is practically a heathen and you've brought him into my house?"

"He's the nicest boy I've ever met and he respects me and he's smart," she took a breath, "and I think he's the person that God wants me to marry."

Her mother went very still.

"No, he isn't."

"Why not?"

"Because if he were the person that God wants you to marry, God would have told me. And he would be Catholic. You can't marry a Protestant."

"But all the Catholic boys we know are horrible. Martin's not like the other guys, he's not always trying to get into my pants."

"You know who else wouldn't be trying to get into your pants? A queer homosexual. That's the only reason he's not trying to get into your pants, Pauline. A nice Catholic boy wouldn't be trying to get into your pants. You go looking for a husband at a school full of heathens, of course the only good one will be queer."

"He's not queer."

"How do you know?" Her mother paused. "Have you been doing things?"

"No." It was the truth, but somehow it did not sound as convincing as it should have.

"Oh my God, what have you been doing?"

"Nothing! We haven't even kissed properly yet."

"You don't have to kiss to be doing other things. You're not having *sex* are you?" The word came out in a *sotto voce* hiss.

"No! Nothing like that, we don't even spend time alone together!"

"Then how do you know he's not a homosexual?"

"Why does everyone think that he's a homosexual?"

"So you're the only person that doesn't think he likes men. What does that tell you, Pauline?"

"Mommy, I want to get married and I think Martin is the one, why can't you just be happy for me instead of browbeating me about it?"

"And if you were doing drugs you'd want me to 'just be happy' for you? I'm your mother, and if you're shooting up marijuana then I'm supposed to take the needle away from you."

"You don't shoot up marijuana, Mom."

"Don't tell me you're doing drugs, too."

"No, but I'm not stupid."

Her mother smacked her across the face.

For the rest of their stay her mother aggressively behaved as if Pauline and Martin were just friends. She made sure to keep them as far apart as physically possible, and asked Martin several times if he was going steady with any of the girls at school, or if he had a sweetheart in his hometown.

"My parents are appalling," was the first thing she said to him when her father dropped them back at school; they were still waving at his taillights. "I'm so sorry about the visit."

"I quite liked your father," he said mildly, and squeezed her hand.

"My mother is appalling then."

"She's not so bad; she'll get used to us."

"You can think so if you want to, I don't have much hope for it."

*

October 1972 – They had known each other for one year, five weeks, and three days when Martin asked Pauline to marry him. She didn't hear a word of the carefully prepared speech he delivered, on one knee, about all of the ways that she made him complete and how he couldn't contemplate life without her, how he didn't want to delay life with her a second longer than absolutely necessary; she was too shocked, deafened by the sound of her own blood rushing in her ears. Then she realized that he'd paused, that a stricken look was slowly overtaking his face, wrapped her arms around his neck and babbled an acceptance before he could change his mind.

For the rest of the day she cradled the secret happily, wore the little ring with the stone turned towards her palm so that no one would notice it was a diamond, smiled at nothing and probably took in nothing. He wanted her. He needed her. And once she was his wife, she'd no longer have to worry about boys and their hands and their lips and the trouble they could get her in, no longer have to suppress her desire, step away from him when she wanted to move closer, drop his hand when she wanted to be slipping her own under his clothing.

That year she was sharing a rowhouse two blocks away from the school with Louise and a handful of her girlfriends. Louise spotted the ring the moment she walked in that afternoon, grabbed her hand and flipped it over to see the stone and immediately began crowing, sloshed bourbon into coffee mugs as Pauline begged her to keep it quiet. They toasted, and as Pauline took her sip Louise asked, "So what did your mother say when you told her?"

She paused, gulped down the rest of the bourbon, then held out the mug. "Hit me."

"You mean you haven't told her?"

"I was so happy that I forgot to."

"…how does that work?" Louise asked as she poured a generous double.

"You've met my mother, you figure it out."

Pauline considered the issue as she changed for the evening, wondered if her parents would react better to being told in person, played out the scenario in her imagination and decided that the telephone would be the safer option.

As she dialed she tried to decide whether the feeling in her middle was excitement or terror, listened to the ringing while half-hoping that no one would pick up. She thought it would be best to ease into the news, chat a little first, but when she recognized her mother's voice and the canned sounding, formal salutation she always used, the words rattled out before she could stop them.

"Martin asked me to marry him and I said yes."

Her mother was silent for some seconds, then said hoarsely, "Why are you doing this to me, Pauline? Why are you doing this? Where did I go wrong with you? Tell me, where did I go wrong?" There was the rattle of the phone hitting the cradle on the other end of the line, and the dial tone sounded. She tried to call again to tell her father, but the phone rang out several times, and she gave up.

Her brother Luke called later that day.

"What did you do to Mom? Are you trying to prove something, Paul? Because this is a horrible way to do it."

"Why can't anyone be happy for me?" she wailed at him.

"So this is serious? You're actually going to marry the twerp?"

"If it wasn't serious I wouldn't have phoned up and said I was going to. Why is everyone being so horrible?"

"Take a look at yourself, Paul. Take a good, hard look, and then you tell me why everyone is being 'so horrible' as you put it." For the second time that day the phone on the other end rattled into its cradle, and she was left with a dial tone and the pressure of tears building behind her eyes.

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The Sunday after the proposal Martin borrowed a friend's car and drove them up to Maryland so that Pauline could meet his parents. Pauline had been worried when he suggested a Sunday visit that they would have to go to church, that her fumbling through a protestant service would embarrass him, and he assured her that they would only be staying for lunch, would travel up too late for the morning service and leave early enough to miss the evening service. The drive was an hour and change, and as they turned into the sleepy neighborhood where Martin had grown up Pauline wondered aloud why he so rarely went home despite it being so nearby.

They were greeted at the door by an impeccably dressed couple a decade or so older than her own parents. Mrs. Freeman took Pauline's hand in both of hers and said how nice it was that they were engaged, with a practiced smile that was confined to her neatly lipsticked mouth, as if anything more would disarrange the rest of her powdered face. Mr. Freeman echoed the sentiment as he took her hand to guide her to the living room, where they sat for exactly twenty minutes on a sofa set which bore no sign of wear, sipping vegetable juice or club soda, talking about the upcoming election with the calculated neutrality of diplomats.

The carpet in the dining room, and the dining room set itself, likewise showed no sign of wear. There was extra silverware, and at first she thought that this was a slight on Mrs. Freeman's part, that she expected at least one piece to be dropped. Disappointingly small plates were brought out – Martin had told her that his mother was proud of her cooking, and so Pauline hadn't eaten breakfast – on which halves of avocados, pale pink shrimp salad mounded gently in their hollows, had been nested cut-side up in drifts of shredded lettuce. She supposed that they could stop at a diner on the drive back and resigned herself to hunger, augmented by the club soda she'd drunk, since she'd been too nervous of the pale carpet to ask for vegetable juice.

As Mrs. Freeman lifted her fork she said, “I’m sure your parents were overjoyed by the news, Pauline. Will they be holding the wedding at their church in – New Jersey, was it?”

She swallowed a shrimp whole, glanced at Martin, then answered, “We haven’t gotten to the specifics as of yet, but I’d thought it would be nice to hold the ceremony at Holy Trinity. It’s quite close to the school, which would make pre-Cana easier.”

“Pre-Cana.” She said the words slowly, as if they were in a foreign language. “I’m not familiar with the term…”

“Before marriage a couple must be counseled by a priest, to ensure that they are entering into the contract with a full understanding of its significance,” Pauline answered. She hoped that it would show that she wasn’t a flighty girl, excited to be married because of the ring and the dress and the party, but rather the kind of serious, wise woman they would want their son to take as a wife.

“You go to a Catholic church, then?”

“Yes, I am Catholic.”

“Oh.”

Pauline gave up trying to coax the slick flesh of the avocado onto the tines of her fork, began nibbling at the shredded lettuce around its base, handling her knife and fork with same careful precision with which she’d used her scalpel in dissection labs, terrified of spilling or clattering or scratching the finish on the wood.

“Martin had mentioned that your family was Catholic,” Mr. Freeman began when the silence became uncomfortable, “but he made it sound as though you weren’t particularly… devout.”

“It can be difficult to keep the Sabbath holy when you have a paper due on Monday,” she answered.

“There are plenty of lovely places in D.C. for a wedding,” Mrs. Freeman said as she rose. “I’m sure you’ll find one that suits – you have plenty of time, after all.” She began collecting plates as Pauline struggled with a chunk of avocado. The soft flesh slipped back to the plate, and she resigned herself, said, “Thank you,” as it was taken away.

Her disappointment was short-lived: larger plates were brought out on which roast chicken, mashed potatoes, and a medley of vegetables were arranged and steaming, garnished with radish roses and sprigs of parsley. She hadn’t realized that

there were families who ate like this, as if their dinner table were in a restaurant: at home her mother had always put the pots and pans directly on the table, let them all pick out what they liked, the crispy corner portion or the softer middle portion or the slightly underdone sprouts at the top of the vegetable dish. Even when there were guests, the only concession made was that everyone waited until their plate had been filled to begin vying for their favorite bits.

As they ate the main course the polite questions continued, and Pauline told them about her four brothers. Mr. Freeman said he guessed that all four of them had had their work cut out for them, keeping the boys away from her in high school and she said they hadn't needed to, that she'd gone to the all-girls school while they went to the all-boys school, so there hadn't been any boys at school to fight off.

"So your education was religious?" Mrs. Freeman asked, and Pauline regretted having brought it up. Everything she said made it seem as though she'd grown up in a closed community, was more devout than she was.

"It was a Catholic school, but the education was held to the same standards as that of the public school," she answered. "Having so many brothers, it was a relief sometimes to spend the day with other girls, not have to worry about what the boys were getting up to while your back was turned."

"Your poor mother, with all of those sons, she must have been run ragged. When Walter and Martin were small there were times that wished I could snap my fingers and have them instantly grow up." She demonstrated the gesture, the light glinting off the face of her watch casting rainbows on the wall behind her. "Don't mistake, I love my boys. A daughter might have been nice, but I have to say that two children is the ideal number. After Martin I couldn't imagine having another." She paused to sip from her glass of club soda. "But then, being Catholic, you most likely intend to take after your mother." She took a longer drink but kept her gaze on Pauline over the rim of her cup.

Dessert was death by inches. She didn't know what she had said, what she had done, to make Martin's mother take such a dislike to her, suspected that it was simply who she was, the way that she had been raised, that the woman objected to, that there was nothing she could do that would win her approval.

On the drive back to school Martin tried to assure her that it had all gone well; she asked him what it not going well would have looked like, then. He supposed that if his parents had taken an active dislike to her then they wouldn't

have kept asking questions, kept speaking to her, would have turned the conversation towards him as much as possible. They were the kind of people who avoided things that they disapproved of, who made it clear that they were displeased and allowed you to adjust accordingly rather than shouting about what you'd done wrong. The fact that his mother had kept asking her about her family, about her religion, meant that she approved enough of their relationship to try and fix it, to try and fix Pauline.

Pauline's own mother took the opposite approach. Her litany developed over six months of phone calls, administered every few days: Pauline couldn't marry him, she wasn't old enough, she didn't know what she was getting into, he was a heathen, he'd wind up going with other women and abandon her, he'd wind up going with men and abandon her, he'd start drinking and beating her and then abandon her, he would get her pregnant and then abandon her with a baby, he would see other women but not abandon her so that she would be stuck with him and his children and he would give her diseases that he'd caught from the prostitutes that he was seeing, and she would die slowly and painfully with her nose rotted away while her husband flaunted his infidelities, and while she did she would ask herself why she hadn't listened to her mother. He could maintain the charade of being a good man for a year, maybe two, but once they were married he wouldn't have to pretend any more, he would have her trapped and then she would see. He might be nice but he had nothing to tell him what was right and what was wrong: he didn't know God, he had no moral compass. Why was Pauline punishing them by doing this? Where had her mother gone wrong?

Pauline never responded – there wasn't any space between all of the words for a response. After hanging up the phone she sobbed for a few minutes, then got back to desperately attacking life: lectures and papers, marriage license and wedding planning, newspaper and protests. Christmas break was perhaps the hardest part. On pretense of workload she managed to put off going home until the twenty-first of December, refused offered rides in favor of a return train ticket. Over the holiday her mother barely spoke to her, instead gave her long, sorrowful looks that ended with deep sighs; her father avoided the house, avoided conversations, and though it could have been her mother's moods that kept him in the garden shed or puttering with the ice-crusted hedges Pauline felt that to a degree he was also reluctant to talk to her, to have his say, and she couldn't tell if that was because he disagreed with her mother or if he felt that she had spoken for both of them.

There was too much assorted family around for there to be much shouting, and even though Pauline saw the pain on her mother's face every time an aunt or a cousin spotted her ring she didn't take it off, didn't deny that she was engaged, though she kept her answers to their questions about the boy, about the wedding plans, brief and changed the topic as soon as possible. She worried that she wasn't as safe from the convent as she had thought, that her parents would keep her from going back to school, send her somewhere that no one could find her until she changed her mind, promised to be a good girl again, but New Year passed and the day came for her to return to D.C. without event, except that when she went to say good bye her mother would not look at her.

She had too much time to think on the nearly empty train south, to wallow in the realization that, though her parents loved her, it didn't seem as though they could bring themselves to accept who she was. That for all her striving she was a disappointment to them, because she couldn't fit herself into the pattern they had dreamed for her from the moment the doctor had said, "It's a girl." That every hard-won success they would count a failure, because each interfered with her performance of the role of perfect daughter.

The phone calls began again: her mother had hoped that coming home, hearing the message of the priests who had watched her grow, seeing the life that she was passing up by marrying that heathen, would have changed her mind, but it was clear that Pauline had hardened her heart to righteousness. They never should have let her go off to that school. The calls increased in frequency, the litany in volubility, until the first week of April, a little less than a month before the wedding, when Pauline said that no, she would not be coming home for Easter, and no, she would not be changing her mind about marrying Martin. The calls stopped then. After a week or so of silence Pauline tried phoning home, wondering if everything was all right. Her mother hung up on her. When she rang again the phone had been taken off the hook.

Louise had asked when Pauline came home from Christmas if she and her mother had done any planning over the holiday, and Pauline had hedged, said that her mother hadn't entirely warmed to the idea of her getting married yet. The older girl hadn't pressed, waited a few weeks, then asked casually if Pauline thought that she and her mother might go to New York to buy her dress. The conversation came close on the heels of one of her mother's tirades, and Pauline burst into tears,

managed to get out between sobs a brief account of her family's response to the engagement, her mother's regular calls trying to convince her to break it. Louise had wrapped an arm around her shoulders, her lips pressed into a thin line, and let her cry it out, gave her a cigarette and a glass of water when she was finished, then found their pocketbooks and took Pauline out dress shopping.

Pauline had already sorted out the technical parts of getting married, had arranged to have the church on the day they'd chosen, spoken to a clerk about the marriage license, scheduled the counseling that they would have to go through before they could marry, discussed the difficulties presented by Martin's religious circumstances with the priest who would be doing the marrying. The tasks that would make it a celebration, rather than a merger, were beyond her, tasks that she had always thought her mother would take care of and which she wouldn't have to concern herself with until she had a daughter of her own. But just as she had been brought up knowing when to stand and sit and kneel during the Mass, Louise had been brought up knowing how to host a dinner party and choose coordinating outfits; arranging the frillier parts of a wedding was second nature to her.

Funds were limited, but they weren't about to let that get in their way. While Pauline worried away at her schoolwork Louise telephoned florists and bakers, made notes in the back of her day planner, argued politely in her soft Carolina drawl until decimal points shifted miraculously to the left. The weekends were devoted to esoteric errands.

The dress was found at a consignment shop with the promise that no one but they would know it had already been worn, carefully washed by hand in the house bathroom and ironed over and over until it looked fresh, if a little out of fashion. The complex garments to go under it Louise insisted on getting new, spent an entire day going from one store to the next picking out skimpier and skimpier specimens and holding them up to assess their suitability while Pauline grew redder and more embarrassed, periodically calling over a salesgirl to ask if she had any recommendations and asking, "Won't she just be a beautiful bride?" When a set had finally been judged sufficient Pauline saw the price tags and nearly fainted, whispered that the brassier and girdle she saved for best would be good enough.

"Oh Lord, honey! You want him to keel over when he sees you take that dress off."

"But, the price…"

"Let's call this a little early wedding present from my parents," Louise said more quietly. "If Mama found out I let you get married wearing anything less, she'd just skin me."

The visit to the doctor that Louise knew came next, and was more subdued. When a nurse in white came to call her into the back the older girl took her trembling hand and squeezed, gave her a comforting smile, and for a moment Pauline wondered if this was what it might have been like if she'd had an older sister. The doctor was taciturn, old, and she felt a pang of guilt as she accepted the prescription that he wrote out. Contraceptives were a sin, but they would barely have the money to support themselves when they first started out. If a baby came before she finished her studies then they would be sunk. At least the pills were legal now; if she had to break a law of God she didn't want to compound things by breaking the laws of man into the bargain.

In between addressing invitations and writing term papers Pauline read the store of books of which she had feigned ignorance since the girls' first meeting. She sat with her feet up in the kitchen, a mug of coffee at her elbow, and studied the diagrams, shouted across the house for the other girls to come explain things when they didn't make sense, and so learned everything that she hadn't been taught when she was fourteen and Sister Ascensionata explained about her changing body, the things that a person could do with another person, the things that marriage sanctified and made sacrament. Some of these were met with skepticism, most with quiet embarrassment, but she couldn't deny the crackle of excitement whenever she picked up the books, whenever she thought about what she would finally allow herself to do once the ceremony was over.

On the night before they got married Pauline walked barefoot through cold spring grass to the chapel, to pray to the Virgin and Saint Cecelia. It was an impulse that she couldn't dismiss, even though she felt uncomfortable about the way she was drawn down the central aisle, the fact that she was there at all. Kneeling before the pure white statue of the Virgin with the night pressing against the stained windows she felt a deep peace that, even though she knew on some level it was simply the effect of being all alone in a big, quiet room, she took to mean that she was doing the right thing. And no matter what she believed, how confused she was about what she believed, no one could fault her for cleaving to the traditions of her childhood when it came to what she had been taught would be the most important event of her life as

a woman. When the feeling all but overwhelmed her she stood and kissed the plaster toe of the statue, dipped her middle finger in the font of holy water and crossed herself as she left.

On the day, the girls she lived with dragged her from her bed before dawn and sat her in the kitchen with coffee and bagels, dressed her hair and did her makeup by committee. Her feelings showed on her face: fear that she wasn't ready, anxiety that Martin wasn't ready and wouldn't be there when the time came, the bone deep pain caused by her mother's refusal, in the end, to be present, and her father's refusal to defy her. Her friends spoke over and around each other, made her laugh when they could and kept her from thinking when they couldn't, told her to breathe, that it would all be over soon, and that the whole institution of marriage was a meaningless patriarchal relic and it didn't matter anyway if the whole damn day went to hell because she and Martin were soul mates, didn't need any ceremony to prove they were meant to be together, and if he didn't show then she didn't need no man anyway.

It wasn't the wedding she had imagined, that she imagined that her mother had imagined for her, but in the end she didn't care. Luke refused to come, out of respect for their parents' decision and because he did not condone marrying outside the faith and would not pretend that he did even for his only sister, so when her bevy of female friends in their best Sunday suits wrapped her in a bed sheet to prevent stains and walked her to the church an hour before the ceremony Sam was waiting with the priest, asked if he could be the one to give her away. She had cried when she realized that her father wouldn't be there to walk her down the aisle, cried again when Luke refused her request to take his place, and she teared up when Sam asked if he could, was barely saved from ruining her makeup by Louise with a packet of tissues and comforting words.

Her younger brothers were there in badly-fitting suits, told her that her father was so sorry that he could not be, passed her an envelope from him that contained three fifty dollar bills and a note scribbled on a corner torn from a larger piece of paper that said: *'With love from your Daddy on your big day.'*

She and Sam and her one attendant – another journalism student called Margot with whom she was fairly good friends – sat quietly in a tiny antechamber near the front door of the church, listening to the scrape and chatter of people filing in, finding their seats, trying to remember which was the bride's side and which the

groom's and trying to decide which of those two they belonged on. In a few minutes Louise would come with her checklist under her arm and tell them that it was time, straighten the veil, hand over the bouquets, and send them down the aisle.

"You know, Paul –" Sam began. "Well, I'm here because I want to see you get married, and I didn't come to get in the way of that. But I feel like I wouldn't be doing my due diligence if I didn't ask. If you're not sure about this, say the word; I'll bring my car around, we can go visit Dad's cousins in Maine for a month or two, by the time we get back everyone will have forgotten all about it."

She looked at him for a moment, then burst out laughing.

"Okay, I guess that's a good sign," he grinned at her.

"I've never been more certain of anything in my life," she told him.

Chapter 2

The first time that Martin saw Pauline was in the Chemistry lab, on the first Tuesday of the school year, September 1971. He remembered the date because of what she was wearing. Loose hair and loose clothing were against the rules for lab work, everything was supposed to be neat and pulled back and close fitting, but on the first day no one knew that they weren't supposed to be dressed as they normally did, and the professor went over the syllabus and course expectations and gave them all a free pass before imposing order and docking points for forgotten lab coats.

Martin felt disgusting. He'd gone for a run before breakfast, then cycled in from the crumbling apartment tucked under a railway bridge that he shared with five other guys. His shirt was stuck to his chest, and he could smell his shoes while standing up. It was a freshman level class that he'd taken the year before and he didn't care about impressing anyone – the professor was his advisor, had volunteered him as a TA. Looking like a hobo might help him stick in the minds of some of the students when he went to the front to introduce himself. He'd come in ten minutes late with an apologetic nod to Dr. Hauser, and already their faces were slack, their minds elsewhere as everything that was said to them whistled over their heads.

He walked purposefully to the back of the room and perched on the cold radiator, scanned the classroom trying to identify who would need the most help, who would never turn up, who would try and weasel him into writing their lab reports.

And then he noticed Pauline.

For a moment he felt a *frisson* of recognition run icily across the inside of his skin, the lightning strike of neurons firing, even though he knew that this could not possibly be the girl his body thought she was, the girl he used to know.

Pauline was sitting near the front of the room, twisting slightly on the high swivel stool that tucked under the worktop. The similarities: a fluff of reddish-brown hair, long socks clinging to perfect calves, one penny loafer dangling from her toes and being gently bounced, a knee-length kilt in dark tartan. Her blouse was so white that he thought he could make out the lines of a peach bra underneath. His heart was racing, and he breathed slowly to calm it. Just a girl with auburn hair that had made over her school uniform into something she could wear now that she was an adult.

The twisting of the stool, the bouncing of the foot, were gestures familiar to him, but many women fidgeted.

As he watched she slipped the kilt pin out, closed it one-handed, put the looped end in her mouth, turned it between her fingers and tapped it against her lips as she listened: an unfamiliar but incredibly alluring gesture. The kilt hung, the overlapping edges held together by the nap of the fabric, and as he watched it he found himself willing it to fall open, to give him a view of the freckle-dusted thighs underneath, summer tanned and smooth to the touch.

Dr. Hauser called his name twice before he heard.

Martin went to the front, scanned the room before speaking. Her face was her own, the chin and cheekbones rounder, the nose and eyes different, and he didn't know if he was relieved or bitterly disappointed. He rattled off a list of his duties, the hours he would be at the back corner table in the canteen free to answer any questions they had, help with homework and studying for tests, or just have a chat about the material. Instead of taking off after this introduction, as he had planned, he resumed his post on the radiator, continued to watch the bobbing loafer, the turning pin, the overlap of tartan fabric that refused to drop open. The mouth, the hands, the concentration. When they were dismissed for the day she slid the pin back into place, closed it, and hopped down from her seat, and he had to resist the impulse to follow her – Ted Bundy had yet to become a household name, but the Zodiac Killer, the Co-Ed Killer, the Boston Strangler, all were recent news, and he'd spent enough time with women to know how aware they were of the possibility of winding up jointed like fryer chickens in the trunk of a car, how nervous strange men, overly attentive men, made them. Only a selfish bastard, he figured, would pounce on a girl on the first day of a class where he would be marking her work, where he was the person she would have to go to if she needed help.

Not that she would come to him needing help. She'd been paying attention on that first day, seemed on the ball, didn't strike him as the type of student who would need it. And he didn't want her to need him, didn't want her to be a dumb bunny even though he knew there was no sense in him wanting her to be anything, because she wasn't who he wanted her to be, who he had thought she was when he'd first seen her.

Even so, she was the first student to show up to his second session, not wearing a kilt this time but in slacks so that he thought of Katherine Hepburn, so that

even though something in him hitched when he saw the movement of her hair as she scanned the canteen for him, it was easy to sit next to her, to act normal. She wasn't stymied by the material already, she just wanted someone to double-check her homework. It was correct, neat, the lab report meticulously formatted, and he almost wished that there was something that he could do for her. When she walked away from the table he didn't lean over to watch her legs scissor inside the loose cotton.

October came and the air cooled, so he wasn't so sticky when she asked him out. There was a concert coming up, folksy blues, and she wanted to go but didn't want to go alone – guys at that sort of thing got grabby if they thought you weren't with someone and it really ruined the groove and she had two tickets anyway so… would he go with her?

It wasn't until they were drinking beer and chatting, waiting for the music to start, that he realized that they were on a date.

*

For a while Martin let Pauline believe that she was the only girlfriend he had ever had. It wasn't a lie, exactly, just an omission. Then she asked, and he told her that, yes, he had gone steady with someone before, just one someone, in high school. Then Pauline had said that she was glad that she was the only woman he'd ever been serious about, and he'd put his arm around her and squeezed her tightly and not answered. It was easier to let Pauline think that she was the only one, easier to let that be the truth rather than to excavate the past and deal with its painful complexity.

*

He had been too young, the wrong color, the wrong social class, to personally experience the 1960s race riots; he didn't think about the issue until desegregation came to him. In the summer of '66 the school districts of Prince Edward County, Maryland were rezoned to blend black and white, urban and rural, in a way that was intended to be more harmonious than bussing children back and forth. On his first day of high school that September, mixed in with kids from other neighborhoods instead of the dull familiars – the paste-eaters and the eggheads and the one kid that flipped his eyelids inside out and chased the girls around the lunchroom – who had

dogged him from kindergarten, Martin was informed by a boy from the projects old enough to grow a full beard and register for the draft that he should bring sufficient cash the next day to purchase a quantity of illegal herbal recreational product, or he would be leaving the school on a stretcher. Martin went home and appealed to his father's logic: they could toss the drugs afterwards, maintain the status quo, give the 10th grade Colossus enough money to eat for a while and let Kismet deal with it – call it charity, it was practically a tax write-off – and Martin could graduate with his bones and ligaments intact, if possibly touched with indelible psychological scarring.

Two days later, he and his older brother were dropped off at a boarding school in northern Maryland, a collection of ivy-covered Federalist buildings enfolded by clever landscaping and old shade trees, far enough from the nearest town that their chance of escaping the place was essentially nil. It was single-sex, supposedly founded by a Scottish lord in exile, and, due to desegregation, suddenly popular among the upper-middle-class parents that were upper- enough to afford it. Martin's older brother peaced out the moment they arrived. Wally didn't blame Martin for landing them in *Nicholas Nickelby*, figuring it would have happened as soon as their parents had fully internalized the fact that national educational integration didn't mean everywhere else to the exclusion of P. E. County, and that it would involve the introduction of poor white drug pushers as well as respectable non-white students into their sons' classrooms. But, as the older brother, to hang out together in exile would be social suicide. Wally only had two years to go; he wouldn't be around long enough to salvage bad first impressions.

At that age Martin was short, stocky, and odd, a perfect candidate for extracurricular pummeling. He tried to transcend this fate by being as weird as possible. The first snow of the winter he walked the perimeter of the quad in nothing but shirt and swimming trunks – twice, because some people didn't believe he'd done it, even with the bare footprints to provide testament. Other students took bets on whether he could drink two gallons of milk at dinner, whether he could streak the Dell – a snowdrop-clotted meadow where the outdoor ceremonies were held – without getting caught, whether he could walk the ridgepole of the library a la *Anne of Green Gables*. It got him social cachet, but not of the type he really wanted, not the type that Wally seemed to accrue by being his hip, disinterested self.

He first saw the girl that year, while he was sitting on his bedroom window ledge three floors up – not for a bet, but to enjoy the fresh air and privacy. He saw

her, and she did not see him, and so he observed her covertly as she walked towards the library down one of the many boxwood-edged brick paths.

Though it was an all-boy's school, there were girls in scant numbers. The teachers were, for the most part, family men, and were given apartments in the dormitories, ostensibly as a perk, but in fact to make surveillance of the boys all the easier; their children were taught for free regardless of their gender. The girls all wore ties and kilts in the school tartan, and the same buttoned shirts as the boys, tailored by their mothers to fit their shape: an elusive parade of schoolgirl fantasies, rarely seen outside of class, immune to the rules and routines that dictated the boys' lives. The teachers' daughters ran wild, and were never spoken to in class for fear of the quite likely eventuality that the teacher was her father, and the kind of father that had lettered in shooting in his not-so-distant heyday and had firsthand experience of the loaded subtext of an adolescent male 'hiya'.

There were many popular hobbies among the male studentry, but the only true and nearly universal obsession was girl watching. They were not unlike amateur ornithologists in their pursuit: every sighting was recorded, the subject identified by the notes in carefully curated secret guides; habits and propensities were discussed quietly by small groups of enthusiasts; changing plumage and slow advance into maturity noted with scholarly delight.

It was a Sunday, and he was on the window ledge with algebra and she was on the way to the library. What he saw: a froth of reddish hair, her legs in green velvet bellbottoms, her gauzy white shirt made blinding by afternoon sunlight, and as she passed under him the tight span of her shoulders, the prow of her breastbone and bow of her clavicles, a spray of cinnamon freckles, and – he was directly overhead, and her shirt was loose, he could see right down it to the bricks passing under her feet, he couldn't help what he saw and couldn't have known that he'd see it – the small, dense half-handfuls of her almost-breasts, the wink of pink nipples.

He nearly fell off the ledge.

*

When he returned in the fall for his second year of high school he would find himself in Chemistry with her, and thus find out that her name was Denise. He would also find out that she was named after her father, Dennis Coleman, who was the

Chemistry teacher, and who was called ‘Major’ behind his back because of his limp and his cane and his bristling mustache, though no one could really articulate the logic of this nickname.

Mr. Coleman opened the first class with the question, “Can anyone name the elements that you were assigned to memorize over the summer?”

Martin responded, after a considerable silence, “Earth, air, fire, and water, Sir.”

Denise excused herself from the room to laugh to the point of choking while her father went apoplectically red. Martin saw her go, remembered sitting on the windowsill that spring and the glimpse down her shirt and abruptly and desperately needed some time to compose himself as well.

*

After the windowsill but before Chemistry there was summer. He arrived home at the end of May with images of small breasts below freckled collarbones engraved across his vision, and was informed that now that he was fifteen he was old enough to work, and furthermore he’d been volunteered as a carpenter’s helper to someone a colleague of his father knew, six days a week, all summer long. He said that he had no idea what a carpenter did, he’d be no use at all; his father said that was why he would be working as a carpenter’s *helper* and earning what amounted to pocket money; the point was the discipline and the structured activity.

That first morning he wandered down to the corner of his road at twenty minutes past four, waited until a white Chevy van rolled out of the fog and stopped in front of him. He hopped into the passenger’s seat, loose-jointed with sleep, clutching a paper sack of sandwiches. The carpenter waved his thermos in greeting, and put the van into gear.

“Gotcher coffee in there, Mr. Slattery?”

“Call me Gus, kid. Got my coffee, sugar, cream, and cornflakes, it all slides down nice and smooth, no mess. Can have a taste, if you want.”

“No thanks, Mr. Slattery.”

“It’s Gus.”

“Yes, sir.”

The man sighed.

The highway was empty and quiet, and the darkness made Martin feel peaceful at his edges even as his core churned with nerves – he still wasn't entirely certain what was expected of him. After twenty minutes they pulled off onto a newly-paved road, its pure blackness marred by lumps of dirt crushed beneath truck wheels, drove a little way into a housing development not unlike the one in which Martin lived, except for its rawness. Slashes of bare earth crossed the lots like wounds, houses in various stages of completion – empty foundation, frame, walls, siding, finished – huddled in the pre-dawn gloom. It was in front of one of the latter that they stopped, a brick rambler with stickers on all of its windows. Gus pulled up in front, killed the engine, then popped open his thermos and dumped the dregs on the ground, opened the cooler that was wedged in the space between the two front seats and took out a beer, pulled the tab and sloshed some into his thermos.

"Sour milk's the devil's own," he explained, and tossed the filmy liquid out the window. "And so is needless waste," he added as he emptied the beer into the thermos and screwed it closed.

As Martin skittered around, fetching and lifting at Gus' direction, the rest of the site slowly came to life: other men arrived and stood about talking, began pouring foundations, wandered around with beams on their shoulders or massive paper sacks full of powder. He could hear their shouting, muffled by the window somewhat, and he realized that their conversation was peppered with phrases that he'd never heard adults say, phrases that were sniggered in the lunchroom or scribed onto the bathroom walls.

They worked until the sun crested the high point of the sky, stopped to eat lunch sitting on the brick steps of the house they'd spent the morning fitting with baseboards. When Gus opened the cooler to take out his food (three hard boiled eggs and a dill pickle) he had to move the empty beer cans before he could get to it, and Martin realized that he had continued to sip from the thermos the entire morning.

As he peeled his eggs Gus told Martin about his boyhood: long, rambling stories about fishing, barefoot dustbowl wandering, the sort of life that, decades on and viewed through the right lens, would make later generations sick with nostalgia. He washed the dusty greenish yolks down with beer while Martin slowly chewed his sandwiches, punctuated his stories with hollered responses to the other workers' greetings.

After lunch Gus played a less active role, standing back, thermos in hand, while Martin measured and marked, cut and nailed per his directions. If anyone knew what was in the thermos they didn't say, but it made Martin nervous. His parents were teetotal; he held the supposition that one beer was enough to send someone into paroxysms of violent behavior, and that everyone was as opposed to alcohol consumption as his parents and therefore would call the police to arrest Gus for consumption and himself as an accessory the moment they realized what he was sipping. When the end of the working day came without any sign of either he was very much relieved. He was less relieved when, while he loaded up the tools, Gus decanted yet another can.

"Mr. Slattery, we are going home now, aren't we?"

"Sure thing, kid. And it's Gus."

"Yes, Sir. You…you're allowed to drive while you drink?"

"Don't matter, I ain't driving. You are."

"Sir?"

Gus walked around, slid into the passenger's seat, and tipped back another swallow. "Break, gas, gear shift. Just point it and go."

"Sir?"

"Anytime you're ready; I ain't in no hurry to get home."

Driving a van home through the lowering darkness was unthinkable, but so was refusing to do what an adult had told him to do.

"Lights, kid. Don't forget your lights. Whenever you're ready."

He'd paid attention while their father taught Wally to drive, but he had never tried it himself before. He took a few jerky turns around the construction site before making slowly for the open road.

"Stick to the highway; straight'll be easier to deal with."

"Yes, Sir."

"It's Gus."

It was slow and nerve wracking, so nerve wracking that Gus fell asleep halfway through, but only after he'd finished the beer. Martin nudged him awake after turning off the highway.

"Mr. Slattery, I need to know how to get to your house."

"Just go back to yours, kid. I'll get myself home from there."

He didn't try to argue with this. At the end of his street he hopped out of the driver's seat and got well away from the road as Gus wandered around and got in, and he stayed there until the brake lights receded and turned a corner. When his parents requested the thumbnail account of his day he neglected to mention the beer or the manner in which he had returned.

After a few weeks he got the hang of driving, though he judiciously continued to not mention it when his parents asked how the job was progressing. The effect that the work was having on his body he didn't notice until the day that he buckled his belt on the tightest hole and his trousers slipped down anyway. Summer transformed him: when school started in the fall people assumed that he was a new student, asked where he'd transferred from, offered to show him around the place. And when he made Denise laugh so hard she had to leave the classroom he wasn't the weird fat kid being a smartass any more, but the charming, attractive stranger being witty. Granted, Mr. Coleman didn't see much of a difference, but his classmates did, and his classmates were the ones that mattered.

For the first few weeks of that term he made Denise his closest subject of study, trading on his newfound popularity for information, noting down all that he observed or was told about her in the back of his English notebook. He still dreamed of freckles and collarbones and… other bits, even though he hadn't seen hers again – in class she wore her shirt buttoned all the way up, her tie knotted with the tidy full Windsor that her dad had taught her. Beside the tie, her dad had also taught her to fly-cast in the school pond, and to throw a ball so hard and straight that it nearly broke your hand if you could catch it. She didn't like chocolate, but she loved banana candy. She liked to read poetry and Chaucer in Middle English out loud in the library basement where nobody went because it was haunted, and she'd felt some of the ghosts before but they left her alone because they liked the sound of the words. She frequently went braless in mufti, though no one could confirm whether she wore one under uniform. She didn't like shoes. She didn't like her freckles. She liked music but couldn't sing. Her two best friends were Lovey Coe and Maryanne Trumickey, who were also teachers' kids.

And she liked him.

This last piece of information was gathered when Lovey came up to him in the library during study hour, Wednesday afternoon the third week of fall term,

banged her hands flat on his desk to get his attention, and said, “You’re taking Denise to the variety show next Friday.”

“I’m sorry, I’m what?” He was simultaneously startled and terrified. Lovey had that effect on people.

She repeated herself.

“Does… Denise won’t want to go with me.”

“Yes she does. She likes you, and you’re too dumb to notice. She doesn’t know I’m telling you; you’d better make her think it’s your idea.”

“Yes… yes, Ma’am.”

“Good.”

He waited outside the Chemistry classroom the next day, to ask her without her friends watching. He thought he would have to stop her, but she paused when she saw him at the door.

“Good class, wasn’t it?” he asked.

“Yeah. Ralph talks too much though.”

“…I like your blouse.” It was the standard-issue uniform shirt, just like his.

“Thanks?”

He opened his mouth to try again, but all that came out were scared breathy sounds.

“Are you going to the variety show?” she asked.

They were going to be late for the next block of classes.

“Uh-huh.”

“Are you going, you know, with anyone?” she asked.

“If anyone wants to,” he said.

“Do you want to go with us? Me and Love and Mary I mean.”

“I was going to ask if you wanted to, actually. You can say no, no hard feelings, really.”

They were late for the next block of classes.

“We’re not exactly supposed to have dates, but if its six of us, who’s to say we’re not going as friends?” she said.

“So you want to?”

“I was hoping you would ask.”

“So that means yes?”

“Yes it means yes.”

"Are you sure?"

"Yes I'm sure."

There was no telling how long the painful exchange would have continued if Denise's father hadn't poked his head out of his classroom door, eyebrows rampant. They scurried off in opposite directions.

Martin had thought that the terrifying part would be arranging the date, but when he'd sheepishly slipped into English and pulled out his notebook he found that the butterflies in his stomach had multiplied. Had it been a real date he may well have died of terror beforehand.

The variety show was put on every year at the end of September, to let the student body voluntarily entertain each other with their talents and the faculty mandatorily make fools of themselves. In a normal high school it would have been considered too square for words, but in their isolated state any form of social diversion was welcome.

They met up outside the auditorium. Maryanne and her date were sharing a covert cigarette behind the box hedge, while the other three were sitting on the grass chatting when Martin arrived, early for the show but late for the socializing because he'd been through all of his clothes twice before realizing that the uniform requirement during school hours really was a gift to the awkward and borrowing a sweater from his roommate that was too warm for the season. Denise had her arms wrapped around her knees, hunched just enough so that her collarbones stood out, a slice of cinnamon-flecked chest and shoulders showing above the loose neckline of her blouse.

He remembered nothing of the show. He was only conscious of the blistering heat of her arm not quite touching his, the way her sandal bobbed off the toes of her left foot when she crossed her legs. He realized that she wasn't paying attention either, that she had been waiting for him to make a move when, breath held and eyes locked dead on the stage, she put her hand in his. The touch felt like electric shock. Her hand was warm and dry and just a little rough from frequent washing, and when the strangeness of it had passed he touched it with his other hand, tried a little squeeze, then traced his fingertips from the knuckles up her wrist and back.

In his sleep that night he felt her hand in his, ran his fingers up her entire arm and down her back, over and over, and woke up in the middle of the night trying to stub out his erection against the mattress like a trick candle.

It was a slow, shy, decorous romance. There weren't many private places around the school, they weren't supposed to be looking for places to be private anyway, and at first they were terrified of being alone together. The terror wore off after a few weeks, and Martin got used to winking at her across a room, to studying together and having Sunday dinners with her and her brother and her parents in the family apartment. He suspected that her parents tolerated him because he was compulsively respectable, too terrified to kiss her. He held her hand when he could, and they danced close when they got the chance, and he kept his dreams, ashamedly, to himself. Later he told her about those dreams, and found out to his surprise that she had similar dreams, that she liked watching him as much as he liked watching her, that she gave him insistent victory hugs after cross-country runs because the sharp smell of his sweat gave her strange feelings somewhere below her stomach, and he was both gladdened and relieved.

The close of spring semester threw opportunity into their laps: Martin was staying on for six weeks after the end of classes to help repaint the academic buildings; Denise's parents were going on their customary end-of-school vacation, leaving her and her brother to keep an eye on each other for two weeks. As soon as their parents vanished out the front gates the older brother zipped off to see his own girlfriend, with a directive to Denise to not get knocked up while he was gone.

Martin knew only that her parents would be gone, so on the evening of their exodus he was a bit surprised to knock on the door of the family apartment and find Denise there alone.

"Do you want to have a picnic?" he asked.

"It's raining."

"It's an indoor picnic."

She looked somewhat bemused, but followed him back down the hall and up the stairs to his dorm room.

His roommate was gone for the summer, and he'd pushed the beds together to make space on the floor for a tablecloth, laid out food nicked from the dining hall. He'd scrounged candles: tea lights, tapers, brightly-colored votives, and one massive rose-scented pillar that someone's mom had sent after coming for a visit and experiencing the smell of an adolescent's room full of six-week-old laundry. A gentle summer rain was falling outside, taking the edge off the unseasonable heat.

The candle flames fluttered in the breeze from the open window, and the tap of rain like fingertips on glass muffled outside sounds, closed them off from the world. They weren't allowed record players in their rooms, but Martin had smuggled a book of poetry out of the library. He settled with her on the floor, opened the book, and started:

"Dark is the day, when Phoebus' face is shrouded," feeling like the cheesiest idiot ever. But he had picked well and he read well – he read to his mother while she cooked, when he was home – and within the first few pages Denise had stretched out on the floor with her head in his lap, eyes half closed and fingertips toying with his shirt buttons.

He wasn't thinking about getting up to anything. Not yet, at least. It was just nice to be together, to not be listening for footsteps, or worrying what other people thought of her head in his lap, of the fact that he'd made a picnic in his bedroom and was reading her poetry. Of the way that they looked at each other. No feeling guilty, no worrying about getting caught not doing anything.

When she kissed his fingertips he stopped mid-sentence.

"I'm sorry, should I not do that?" she asked.

"No, I just wasn't expecting it."

"Then should I do it again?" Her smile was teasing.

They stayed on the floor – beds weren't safe, had no plausible deniability. She kissed his hands, and his neck, and ears, and all around his eyes, slowly, carefully, nervously, and her fingertips ran up and down over the safe parts of him. There was less of her that he could touch, more places that were dangerous, but she seemed to like his hands on her back, tracing circles over the cloth.

"Is this ok?" she asked now and then, as she touched somewhere new. And it was.

They paused for a moment, minutes or hours in, pressed tight together with their arms around each other, not in the way they had expected to be when they had thought about being alone together, but the way that they hugged people they hadn't seen in a long time, might never see again. He was surprised how good it felt. The pressure of her hands was overwhelming, her kisses exciting and satisfying at once. And maybe he was scared, a bit, of doing any more. He'd never asked her how far she'd gone before – it wasn't a question you could ask in mixed company. But they were alone now, and he had wondered.

“Have you ever kissed anyone before?” he asked her.

“I’ve just been kissing you,” she grinned.

“I mean real kiss. On the mouth kiss.”

“Yup.”

“Oh,” he said.

Maybe this wasn’t a good idea. The last thing he wanted was to let her see how much of a spaz he was, give her a reason to stand up and walk away.

“Don’t you want to know who with?” she asked.

He couldn’t tell if she was teasing now.

“Do I?”

“Sure you do.” They were nested on one of the comforters on the floor, and she was rocking, like she was dancing to some internal music.

“Ok. Who with?”

“Love and Mary.”

“Say what?” He wasn’t sure how he was supposed to react to this.

“It was Lovey’s idea. Her older cousin said that her first kiss was the most horrible awkward thing ever, so Love thought it would be a good idea for us three to practice first. Couldn’t with the boys, they can’t keep their mouths shut.”

“Oh.” A pause. “I’m jealous of Lovey now.”

“I can teach you, if you want.” Her tone was nonchalant.

“Should we stand up first?”

“Naw, down here’s ok. Tilt your head some for me. And close your eyes.”

Her mouth was soft, tasted slightly sweet, made him shudder like the dreams where they were naked. She pulled away and smiled at him. His face felt hot.

“You’re a natural, but you could use some practice. What did you think?”

“Nice,” he croaked weakly.

“Would you like to try some more?”

“Can we?”

“If you really want to.”

*

Martin woke up to thin early sunlight through the half open window. They were still nested on the comforter on the floor, still dressed. The candles had

extinguished themselves in soft pools of wax. His arm was asleep under her head, and his neck was moist from her breath. His requisite morning erection was pressed against her thigh through the material of his jeans, but it didn't appear that he'd done anything in his sleep that he'd have to be embarrassed about. They had kissed, slowly and carefully as the candles went out around them, not daring the bed, their hands on each other's necks and shoulders, and sometime before the last lights had burnt out they had fallen asleep coiled together on the floor.

He shifted, and she shifted with him, pressed tighter against him and clutched at the back of his shirt, still asleep and refusing to wake up. He settled back in, ignoring his dead left arm, and enjoyed the feeling of her weight, her warmth against the length of him. He should have been frustrated, should have been wanting, but it was the greatest contentment he had ever felt, as if a hole somewhere deep inside of him that he hadn't known was there had been plugged while they slept beside each other.

They slept together every night until her parents returned – in the technical sense, and not premeditatedly. There was something forbidden about the bed, about laying together on it, so they dragged blankets and pillows onto the floor and fell asleep there, kissing and talking intermittently. On the third day Martin dared to run a hand over her bottom, then to give it a gentle squeeze, and she seemed to like it. The next day they peeled off each other's shirts, after several minutes of "You're sure? We don't have to if you don't want to" back and forth. He was surprised at how eager he wasn't to plunge ahead, that after months of vague-edged longing he was satisfied with the tiniest bit extra.

At first he was careful of the turgid mass in his trousers, tried to keep her from bumping it, realizing it was there. Then she woke up to him grinding against her thigh and whimpering in his sleep. She pushed back against him, and he ground harder. She kissed him, deeply and at length, and he woke in a flood of excitement and panic, accompanied by a more corporeal flood that he hoped she wouldn't be able to tell was there. He was ashamed enough about the erection, went red to the ears and hid his face, and when she asked he pretended that that was the only thing that he had to be ashamed about.

"Don't be embarrassed. It'd be weird if you didn't."

"It doesn't mean I think we should… Well, it would be nice, but… Yeah."

"Nervous?" she'd asked, and he'd nodded. "Me too."

"I want to, though."

"You made it pretty obvious a second ago that that was the case."

He hid his face again.

"I'm sorry, I couldn't help it," she said, and moved her fingers through his hair in a comforting way. "I want it, too, if that makes you feel better. I'm just better at hiding it."

"Do you?"

"I think about what it would be like when lectures get boring."

This conversation came seven days in, on the Sunday, and he dwelled on it for the rest of the day.

They usually took their time getting to the physical part in the evenings, settling in slowly, chatting and reading first, but when Denise came to his room that night she kissed him immediately.

"Hello there," he said.

"I found something under Donnie's mattress," she answered.

His first thought was smutty magazines, but instead she pulled a paper sandwich bag out of her pocket.

"What is it?"

"Rubbers." She blushed a little when she said it, but pulled one out to show him.

A few were wasted immediately, blowing them up and letting them shoot around the room as they deflated, and the childishness of that took the edge off a bit.

"Do you know what to do?" she asked after they'd moved on to kissing and gotten shirtless.

"Sure I do, the same way I know how to build an internal combustion engine. We've been over it in class, I've just never had the chance to try it in person."

She snorted.

"Do *you* know what to do?"

"Not really," she answered.

"Didn't test it out with Love and Mary?"

She socked his arm.

*

It was less erotic, more technical than the kissing and the groping, and the few minutes' intense embarrassment of being naked in front of her almost killed his inclination entirely. But then she also got naked, and his embarrassment was overcome by curiosity, half sexual and half simian, and slightly frightening in itself.

The first time was over almost before it had begun, but Denise said that she'd heard that that was normal. The second time was easier, and the third made use of the obnoxious morning erection, which he hadn't expected so soon after the previous time but which had come anyway, jabbing Denise in the belly until she woke up, and then woke him up and asked if they could do it one more time before he left for work.

It was like a dam had broken. They were all over each other, all the time, no longer nervous or embarrassed. In the final frantic week before her parents came home they went through all of the condoms under Donnie's mattress – he wasn't supposed to have them, so he couldn't do anything but thump her if he figured out that she had taken them, and as they thumped each other a good deal in the normal run of things the prospect didn't give her much worry.

He was surprised at first that her parents didn't seem to notice a difference in them the moment they got back, and then he was relieved. Later that week, Denise told him that Donnie had cornered her when he came home, showed him the two packages of rubbers her brother had stuffed in her skirt pockets.

"He said he was too young to be an uncle."

"He wasn't mad, then?" Martin asked.

"He was a bit hacked off that I went in his room, but he did tell me when he left that I wasn't allowed to get pregnant. And he said to tell you that if you screw up or make me cry he'll kill you."

"I kinda knew that already."

"It bears repeating," she grinned at him. "He doesn't know if Mom and Dad know, but if they do they won't say anything unless they have to; they never say anything about him going off with his girlfriend."

*

They wrote each other long, lazy letters while they were apart over the summer, about what they were doing and what they wanted to be doing and what

they might do one day. Martin was back working with Gus, still driving him home in the evening but legally now that he was old enough for a license, making a slightly higher wage because he knew more or less what to do now. The older man was quite receptive to hearing about the travails of teenagers in love. The ring was his idea, he even took Martin to pick it out at an antique shop in Old Town: three little sapphires in yellow gold, because he knew that she liked them. He'd ask her at the end of the last week of school the upcoming year, they'd be engaged through their senior year, he'd take a job and they'd get married just after graduation and all would be good. Maybe it was an idealistic plan, but they lived in an idealistic world still. He hid the ring in his dresser and took it out every now and again, held it up to the light and tested the idea the way he had probed a loosening tooth as a child.

When he went back to school in the autumn Martin was anxious, put off finding Denise until he'd done all of his unpacking. He hadn't seen her all summer, it had just been letters since he'd gone home, and part of him worried that she had changed, that she had found someone else and hadn't wanted to break it to him through the post. In that moment the existence of the ring felt foolish. They were only sixteen years old; he had no business making plans like an adult.

Then she came knocking on his bedroom door. His roommate opened it, and she plowed past to jump on him with a whoop of joy.

Nothing had changed.

*

The year rumbled along, parties and exams and Sunday dinners with the Colemans, stolen moments in secluded spaces to get as naked as possible and go as far as they could. He'd gotten a job working in the kitchen, now that he was a junior and considered mature enough for such a thing, and he was squirreling the money away for the daydream-edged future. He belonged, in a way that he hadn't when he was a goofball freshman, or even when he was an alluring sophomore. People knew his name now, knew who he was, teachers and students alike. Life was exciting, and whenever it stopped being exciting all he had to do was pull the ring out, turn it over in his fingers and think about the future, and his belly would ignite with anticipation.

He was in the kitchen after dinner, scraping baked-on macaroni out of metal trays when one of the pimply freshmen came to find him, asked him to come to the

Dean's office, please. As he walked slowly down the empty halls he wondered if their trysting in the library basement had been found out, wondered if they expelled guys for heavy petting with teacher's daughters, wished that he didn't have to go before the Dean smelling like cafeteria food.

When he arrived at the administrative offices the Dean's secretary had a peculiar look on her face, nodded for him to go straight through into the office rather than sitting in one of the row of stiff-backed chairs where young offenders usually waited for sentencing. Rumor had it that not a man among them had ever spent less than ten minutes sweating in one of those chairs before being called in to account for a transgression. His stomach knotted, the fear of being in trouble quickly transubstantiated to the fear that someone else was in trouble: his parents weren't so young, Wally not always so careful, and when he wasn't around he had no idea how Gus managed to get home at the end of the day.

The Dean himself looked drawn, sat behind the desk kneading his hands together slowly.

"Please sit down, Martin. I'm afraid I have some unfortunate news."

"My parents?" he asked as he slid into one of the chairs that faced the desk, conscious of the many tiny breaches of protocol, afraid of what they might mean.

"No, no. Your family is quite well, as far as I am aware."

He stopped to breathe deeply, and Martin wanted to scream.

"I am so sorry to have to tell you this, Martin, but Denise Coleman is in the hospital. She's been in an auto accident; her parents phoned just after she was taken into surgery."

For a moment he thought that he would vomit, right there on the carpet. The air in the room expanded, pressed in on him. It felt like his heart had stopped.

"But she's alive?"

"Yes, she is," he said slowly. "Though— Well, it was not a minor accident. The doctors are hopeful, but nothing can be certain until she comes out of surgery."

There seemed to be things that Martin was missing, things that were going unsaid that he should be picking up on, understanding.

"Your teachers have been told not to expect you in classes tomorrow." The Dean stood and walked out from behind the desk, laid a heavy hand on Martin's shoulder that he assumed was meant to be comforting. "Donald is at home; it might

be wise for you to keep each other company while you're waiting to hear from the hospital."

The hallways seemed to stretch as he wandered down them, so that with every step the Coleman's apartment grew father and father away. It was so strange to him that everything could change so quickly.

They gathered on the oval rag rug in the Coleman's living room, shell-shocked and rocking themselves for comfort: Donnie, Lovey, Maryanne, and Martin. The room was unnaturally still, except for the record on the turntable, repeating a Beach Boys album over and over, just on the edge of hearing.

They were silent. Their work was spread before them but no one even pretended to study. Donnie stared and rocked, Lovey occasionally spoke an opening into the leaden air, but no one took it up and it bounced on the carpet. Martin lost himself in the texture of things: the over-and-under braiding of the rag rug, the brushstrokes on the painted baseboard, the coarse weave of the sofa fabric, the warmth of Maryanne's hand as she touched his arm, now and again, not asking if he was all right, because he wasn't, but making sure that he was still there. Maryanne was the one who managed to keep busy: she had a ball of waxed black thread and a teacup full of glass seed beads, and as the minutes ticked over she strung them, doubled them, tied them into necklaces, a chain of tiny, parti-colored daisies.

They stayed there all night, as if by hanging on to the last thing they had been told would keep it that way, hanging on to the moments when Denise was alive would keep her from dying, as if she could only die if they closed their eyes, as if their staying awake, hoping, was keeping her alive.

She'd had her license for a month, had been running into town for some sundry, possibly just for the joy of exercising her newfound freedom. The drive up to the school was straight and steep, and it was well known that the students liked to shoot down it, on sleds in winter or on bicycles and in cars in more clement weather, and that is what they assumed she had been doing when the car rolled into the ditch at the bottom of the road. And she'd been laying there waiting for someone to find her, to cut her out, while he was clowning at the dinner table, taking it for granted that he'd see her again.

Her parents came back just after five the morning after the accident. Her father went immediately to the bedroom, leaving her mother to deliver the news: Denise had come through the surgery, but she hadn't woken up from the anesthesia.

That night was the entrance to a long grey tunnel. He remembered the vigil, the hope that she might wake up, the odd certainty that she had to survive. Teenagers didn't die. But he couldn't say, afterwards, when it was that 'she hasn't woken up,' became, 'she's gone.'

They dressed her in white for the wake, and he and Donnie exchanged a look; they weren't going to challenge the assertion that she had died a virgin, but it felt wrong, weird, that an entire part of who she was had been dismissed, that the priest rattled on about her purity and innocence as if she were a six-year-old girl instead of a young woman. They had parted her hair the wrong way and covered the side of her head that the surgeons had shaved with an enormous bow, the cuts and abrasions that hadn't had time to scab with long sleeves, gloves and stockings, made up her face delicately to cover the bruising, and the freckles, so that she looked like the good Denise, the non-evil twin that they'd never met, that didn't smoke cigarettes or steal her brother's rubbers and hadn't been planning to meet Martin in the basement of the library on the day that she'd rolled her father's car.

Maryanne slipped one of the beaded daisy chains around Denise's neck when she went up. She'd made one for each of the five of them that night; Martin hadn't taken his off since she'd dropped it over his head, wore it tucked under his good shirt so that it made a subtle pattern of bumps, like a scapular, beneath the thick white cloth. When he had his moment alone to say goodbye he reached in and took her hand – the left one, on the far side, the damaged side – ran a finger up her wrist a few inches the way she liked, then slid the ring onto her wedding finger. It was a little large, and went over her stiff knuckles and the satin glove smoothly. When he put her hand back down he tucked the pinky edge under the camellia border inside the coffin, and if anyone saw the ring no one mentioned it to him.

*

He was careful who he told over the summer, what he told, but was nevertheless given a lot of advice on the fleetingness of young love, how it only hurt because it was his first taste, that he didn't really know what love and heartbreak felt like and that he would love again. No one met their soul mate in high school, it was 1969, not the Dark Ages. His parents said that yes, it was tragic what had happened, but a little high school romance wasn't worth getting all bent out of shape over; those

things never lasted and if she hadn't died they would have broken up sooner or later. He hadn't thought it would be forever, had he? It would be better for him to date around, find a society girl, someone more their equal, the way Wally had done.

Gus, to his eternal gratitude, said very little, treated him with an extra measure of gentleness that summer, let him talk when he wanted to and clam up when he didn't and pretended that the redness of his eyes on the bad days was due to all the dust. The smell of the nearly-finished houses was comforting now – raw wood and raw earth, plaster, paint, solvents, adhesives – and when he was working he could go entire hours without thinking about it, pretending that it was the summer before and she was still alive, that a letter from her might be waiting for him when he got home.

For a while he considered quitting school altogether, becoming Gus' apprentice on a permanent basis, spending the rest of his working life enveloped in the clean scent of sawdust and living like a hermit with the exception of the periodic post-work beer that the older man had gotten in the habit of sharing with him when they first started talking about finding a ring for Denise.

When school began again he did none of his work, went to class only periodically; what exactly he was doing with the time in which he wasn't working or going to class he had no clue, though his roommate often had to shoulder barge him awake in the morning, came back in the afternoon to find him again in his shorts and undershirt folded into the bed, not quite asleep but not quite awake, or came in after dinner to find him sitting at his desk in the dark staring at the wall, food forgotten.

This went on for about a month, long enough that people had begun placing bets on how long it would be before he was kicked out. Then the Dean pulled Martin into his office. He only caught every other word, but eventually got the gist: the war in Vietnam was still going strong, he was too smart, too good to be wasted on the draft, to get blown apart or get sent home with no legs and shell shock. Life was hard, but he needed to pull up and apply himself, do well enough to get into university, if not for the sake of getting ahead then to keep from being shipped out to die. They would give him top marks and recommendations and all the help that he needed, but he would have to start going to class and at least try to do the work, would have to write the college applications himself.

The schools were picked systematically: American, Georgetown, University of Maryland, where the Dean had gone, where his father had gone, and where Mr.

Coleman had gone. All would offer a change of scene, but keep him close to familiar ground. He wrote his essay at the meeting table in the Dean's office, a precisely worded meditation on the value of hard work, and how he had learned that value over a long summer at the service of a labor-wizened carpenter so archetypal that Gus would not have recognized himself. The forms asked about his academic interests, he ticked 'medicine,' figuring it was a good idea, since he'd always had a natural affinity for the sciences.

The response letters sat unopened on his bureau for two weeks, until his roommate noticed, opened them for him, and howled, "They want to *pay* for you to go pre-med and live in D.C., and you can't even be fucked to open the letter? Man, what is *wrong* with you?"

He wasn't old enough to buy alcohol, wouldn't have been allowed to have it on campus even if he had been, but Donnie bought it for him, and he bribed himself with it to put on clothes, go to class, do his work, used it to fall asleep at night and stay asleep until morning. He finished out the year in a haze, was given passes though he was sure that he hadn't earned them.

The day that they – he and Denise – were supposed to graduate he sat in the basement of the library, staring at the ceiling until the last wheeze of the ceremonial bagpipes had faded, then loaded the contents of his room into three postal cartons and a suitcase and phoned Wally – who worked a desk job with the FBI in Baltimore – to ask for a ride home. His parents' surprise at his unannounced arrival was evident only in that they asked him why he hadn't told them it was graduation; his reply was that he hadn't gone.

*

By the time he unpacked at Georgetown that fall – the same suitcase and three cartons that he'd packed that spring – Martin had learned better to hide his pain. He had gotten through the summer on sips of the sherry that went in the Christmas cake, gulps of port and cognac from the bottles his father's colleagues gave them for holidays and which they never drank, cheap wine that he was finally old enough to buy for himself, the beer that Gus still shared with him.

It helped being somewhere that no one knew about it, where it was more awkward to tell people than to pretend that it hadn't happened. In retrospect his own

apathy frightened him, how close he had come to being jungle meat, and he resolved to buck up and take a bit of interest in life. He joined the track team, went to parties, buried himself in work on the days that he simply couldn't lift his head up and look anyone in the eye and pantomimed normal the rest of the time, smoothing the raw edges of his heart with over-proof liquor with no regard for time of day, day of week.

Drugs were an appealing solution only until he tried them. The first joint he was passed, at a party in the house of people he didn't know, he drew on deeply, wandered back to his room hours later in a sticky miasma and wallowed in memories, her records on his turntable and Chaucer open on his pillow. He didn't try it a second time, didn't consider anything harder. Drinking was better: it loosened him up, made talking to people easier, made pretending that he was ok easier. He couldn't have managed his reputation better if he tried. Professors liked him for his earnest work, his bland politeness, the other students for his calm disinterest, the way he held himself casually apart: without intending to he had become that incarnation of his older brother that he had so envied in his first year of high school. When people started asking if he had a girlfriend, the version that he allowed to propagate was that Denise had left the country, gone somewhere far away and wasn't coming back to America again, and that seemed to only make him more attractive to a certain type of girl. The advice given by the other runners was that he needed a few good lays to perk him up, get him out of his eternal low-grade funk.

Halfway through that year a girl kissed him during a party, not once but continuously, and he went with it. She pulled him into a bedroom, skinned off her shirt, but he didn't go for her chest, tried not to look at the fleshy eruption above the satiny cups of her bra. She unbuttoned his shirt, said, "That's a funky necklace. Some hippy chick make it for you?" and he stood up, shrugged his jacket on, and left without a word. She put it around that he was probably a fag and definitely a jackass, and girls stopped going for him. He might have regretted it if he'd had an interest in finding another girlfriend, in touching another girl the way he'd touched Denise.

His parents had made it clear, in their restrained way, that even though they would welcome his visits, have a bed open for him at Christmastime, they considered him grown up and out of the house the moment he'd left for Georgetown. For the few weeks before the start of summer, when he found himself panicking in the limbo of needing to figure out a way to earn money and a place to live until school began again he considered begging them to let him spend one last summer living at home,

offering to pay them rent, but the more he thought about it the less he truly wanted to go back to his parents' home. A part of him had hoped that they would be impressed with his acceptance letters, with all of the funding offers, especially since Wally the Perfect had bypassed higher education and gone straight into work. He hadn't been able to decide whether his mother's response of, "Well that's nice dear, but are you sure you're cut out for college?" hurt more or less than his father's "Oh, is that so?" but it was certain that both cases stung far less than the cold comfort they'd given him after Denise.

He volunteered for medical tests, sold blood and painted office buildings and slept in the library until he could afford a place to live. And maybe it was the effect of being no one in a strange city, or simply because time had passed, that he started to slowly come back to life. There were moments of contentment, minutes where the accident passed out of his mind. He knew that he would never lose the phantom-limb pain of missing her, knew that he would never be okay again, but he thought that he might be able to pretend to be.

Then had come the moment, standing in the back of the classroom in the first week of his second year of college, when it felt as though every neuron he had was firing in recognition, followed so quickly by the pain of absence. His ambivalence towards Pauline kept him from realizing, at first, why the little freshman with the kilt and the right answers persisted in showing up for tutoring sessions, asked him if he'd go to a Fleetwood Mac concert with her. It wasn't until they'd been seeing each other regularly for a few months that he realized that they were going steady, and realized that the bottle of wine he kept under his bed remained full not because he'd bought another one and hadn't remembered, but because he hadn't drunk it.

It didn't feel so wrong for him to be going out with Pauline, for him to be attracted to her, for her own sake as well as for those little glimpses of Denise that he saw in her, which after three years may well not have been glimpses of Denise because old memories fade and new memories take their place, so that it wasn't Pauline who reminded him of Denise but the other way around. And she was safe in a way that other girls weren't: she didn't go for his buttons and zippers, didn't pull him into dark corners and ask him to do things that he still couldn't think about without remembering Denise. It was clear that she wanted something from him, from their relationship, that wasn't significantly different from the dream of wife and work and family that he had fostered in high school, when he'd bought the sapphire ring.

So he was content to follow where she led. The track team had been half right – he hadn't needed a good lay as much as a good woman, good company, someone to pretend to be OK for.

He probed at the idea of marrying her and found that he quite liked it. They appreciated each other. Pauline liked how he respected her, enjoyed his company, and the fact that she thought he was cute didn't hurt; he liked how normal he was with her, how unbroken, how she had the feel of coming home the way that returning to his parents' house never had. He considered, briefly, life without her, decided that he couldn't go back to gin for breakfast, wine under the bed, the not-life he wasn't sure he could avoid if he didn't have her around to distract him. He met her parents, he bought a ring, he enquired after the special housing arrangements for married students. She wouldn't sleep with him until they were married, and he saw nothing wrong with that. Yes, he had urges, desires, but he wasn't ready to act on them, didn't know what sorts of feelings that acting on them might stir up. They hadn't talked about sex –Pauline didn't bring it up except to say it was a topic for married couples alone to explore, and Martin didn't dare bring it up at all.

He asked her to marry him while kneeling on the bank of the tidal basin, under the cherry trees that wouldn't bloom for another seven months. She seemed so stunned that for a moment he thought that he had misjudged the situation, misjudged everything they had done and said since he'd first met her. Instead of taking the ring or saying yes or doing any of the things that he'd been expecting she'd wrapped her arms around his shoulders and began crying on his neck. For a moment he'd scrabbled, tried to comfort her and apologize at once.

"Yes, you dummy, of course it's yes," she'd said, and let him slip the ring onto her finger. "They're happy tears."

The day before their wedding he went to a junk shop, bought a small wooden chest with a latch that he could bolt, and went back to his last night in the falling-down house he shared with a half-dozen guys from the track team. He folded up the letters – hers and his, Donnie had gone into his sister's room while his parents were still vague with grief, found the letters that Martin had written, and given them to him, said that no one but him should get to know what was in them – and gathered together the books that had been hers, the records and the photographs, all the little things, and put them together in the box. Then he took off the daisy chain for the first

time since Maryanne put it around his neck, slid it into a silk jewelry pouch, and tossed it on top.

Then he stood there and stared at it for a while.

He should bury it, or burn it, he knew, something final and symbolic, on the day before he got married, committed his life to one woman. If he and Denise had broken up he probably would have.

He'd told Pauline he'd had a girlfriend in high school, that she'd died in a car accident, that he'd wanted to marry her and missed her still, and she'd held him closer, tighter than she usually did, until the dry sobs that came whenever he talked about it had passed. But he hadn't told her that they'd slept together. At first it had seemed too personal to mention, but over the course of pre-marital counseling, sitting in the priest's office for an hour a week discussing the details of life, it became clear to him just how vital sexual purity was to the Church, and to Pauline. He hadn't realized what stock she put in it, worried just a little that she might refuse to marry him if she found out that he wasn't a virgin.

He couldn't tell her all the details, for his own good and hers. But he couldn't deny to himself that it had happened, that Denise had happened. He cast around and found his school tie, a notebook, some photographs, his high school varsity letter, topped off the box with odd mementos, locked it, marked it with a gummed label scribbled with *School Memorabilia – to save*.

*

What he remembered afterwards of the actual ceremony consisted mostly of Pauline: the sight of her walking calmly up the aisle, standing with his hands in hers and her eyes to anchor him as the priest droned about sacrifice and obedience while his knees locked and his feet sweated inside his good shoes, the little squeeze she gave his fingers when it was his turn to repeat the vows. Her dress was impossibly white, shiny lace, with a high collar and long sleeves and a skirt that brushed the ground, and it made him think words like *chastity* and *purity* and *virtue.* It was a symbol of what was to come, he supposed, the same respectable, antiseptic conventionality that ruled his parents' marriage. He'd had more than his due of passion in his life, felt that trading it for stability was the only wise choice.

Then the priest pronounced them husband and wife.

She had been firm from the outset that she wouldn't let him kiss her on the mouth until they were married, because of what it might tempt them to do. He had understood that she really meant, what it might tempt him to do, what would happen if she touched off his manly passion, and he had assured her that he was a gentleman, that a kiss wouldn't make him lose control of himself, but if she felt it to be safer then he would respect her and hold off on the mouth kissing. Then the priest had given them permission, and in front of everyone she'd risen up on her toes, taken hold of his shoulders for balance, and planted one on.

It wasn't gentle or teasing, but a hard, hungry kiss, and he understood in that moment that she hadn't been worried about what *he* would do, were they to begin kissing, but rather what *she* might do. And suddenly he was nervous.

When they finally parted lips one of his friends in the back caterwauled, "Daaayum!," a comment that stood applicable to the rest of the afternoon.

She had always kept some space between them, distance, thinking room; as they walked out of the church she twined his arm around her waist, leaned in close so that the stiff breast of her gown could brush against him. They were broke, but one of her girlfriends had arranged for cake and punch in one of the university social halls, and whenever something – a table, a plant, a door – blocked others' lines of sight her hand strayed low, fingers played across the small of his back. When they stood together just inside the doorway to greet everyone she found the opportunity to step in front of him, lean back for a moment so that the curve of her buttocks impressed itself against his thighs. She shifted to stand beside him, but he took hold of her arms, bent to whisper in her ear:

"Stay right there for just a few minutes, or else a whole lot of people are going to see something they don't want to."

She grinned up at him, then settled his arm around her waist. He shook hands with each of their guests with her close against him, a buttress of her skirt hiding the bulge in his unfortunately closely-cut borrowed trousers. This was not how he had imagined events unfolding, but he couldn't say that he preferred his mistaken prognostications to her unanticipated and sudden desire to touch him.

They didn't have the money to go anywhere on honeymoon; he'd suggested that they stay the weekend at a nice hotel in the city, for the feel of getting away, but Pauline had abjured the idea – she didn't want to be dining with strangers, have housekeeping coming in to change the sheets and such. They had managed to get a

week to themselves, though, no work and no classes, and the key to their little apartment in the block where the other married students lived; she thought that that would be more than enough.

Martin now had misgivings about the place as a love nest – the walls seemed thin. Nevertheless, it was where they went after their guests had waved goodbye, driven by Wally to save them the indignity of walking. Wally left them with a wink, and a honk of the horn, which Martin was certain had drawn the attention of the other residents of the drab block. He could feel their eyes, their attention on him as he hefted Pauline and lifted her gingerly over the uneven threshold.

As he put her down and breathed deep he thought first of removing his ridiculous bow tie, but she rose up and kissed him, with a touch more finesse than at the alter, but with no less insistence.

"Oh, is that how things are?" he asked jokingly.

"Why do you think I planned for the party to end at four in the afternoon?" she asked, then closed the front door and began unbuttoning his waistcoat.

Martin had kept under lock and key the memory of his physical relationship with Denise, like pressed flowers or antique silks that might crumble if exposed to sunlight. Just after her death he'd thought of her and found himself getting hard, and was both horrified and disgusted. His sexuality went on hiatus for nearly a year after that, until he could get off without thinking about her, think about her without crying. Still, it was his only point of reference, and he'd thought about it again as his wedding night had drawn near, trying to imagine what the aftermath would be like. He had worried that Pauline would be unsettled by the sight of his naked body, disgusted a bit by its smells, its coarseness, worried even more that something would tip her off that he wasn't exactly new to it all, and there would be tears, and anger, and she would walk out on him. So even though her eagerness was something of a relief he was disconcerted to find the roles reversed, to find that she was all for pushing merrily onwards while he was the nervous one.

"Hang on, beautiful, shouldn't – don't you want to go to the bedroom first?"

She obliged at speed, then began again to kiss him, and he began to panic. She had shucked him of jacked, waistcoat, and tie, had his belt undone and his shirt unbuttoned, she was going to start with his mouth and eat him whole, everyone who had told him that he would have to be slow with her because nice girls were shy and not really interested in it was a raving liar.

"Hold up, hold up." He took her hands in his to get them away from his trousers and all that hid beneath. "Don't you think you're going a little fast?"

"Not particularly. I've been waiting two damn years for this. Hell, I've been waiting my whole life for this, why would I want to take it slow?"

"Aren't you nervous?"

"Only in a good way. More excited, really. Why, are you nervous?"

"I didn't – you've always been so shy before. I didn't quite expect to get jumped on my wedding night."

"You're lucky I waited this long to jump you, I almost pulled you into the ladies' during the cake," she grinned, then kissed him gently and buttoned him back up. "All right then. How would *you* like to begin?"

"May I take your hair out for you?"

"You may, kind sir."

He took off the veil, then pulled the pins out slowly, thinking. It had been too long since he'd done this. He had no idea what to do, how to begin. Her hair fell down her back, and he carefully finger combed it before twisting it over her shoulder, kissing the back of her neck, whispering in her ear, "Please be gentle with me."

She laughed; he wasn't joking. But she did progress more slowly, stripping off his clothes piece by piece in a delicate way and stopping to kiss him in between. Then she led his hands to the back of her dress, told him to undo the buttons.

"Are you sure you're ready to?" he asked.

She had left his underwear on, but nothing else, and his erection felt obscene, like something she shouldn't be seeing even under a layer of cloth, but as he leaned forward to unbutton her dress she pressed against it, bit at his neck.

Her underthings were satin, complicated, the sort he would have expected to see at an upmarket burlesque show. She kissed him again, put his hands on her, slipped her own hands into his shorts.

"Careful, you don't want this to be over before it starts," he whispered. At least that much he remembered how to do, the holding back, managing his own excitement, which was considerable in the face of her rigging, of the lace and satin that barely hid her breasts, highlighted her curves. She pulled him down onto the bed, and he helped her peel off his shorts. The earthy smell of his arousal filled the room, and he waited while she looked at it, trying to gauge her reaction to her first –

or so he assumed – sight of the male apparatus. To his surprise she wiggled down, wrapped her hand around it, and took the end gently into her mouth.

"Where did you learn to do that?" he groaned.

She did something exciting with the tip of her tongue, then paused long enough to say, "I'm a student of journalism; where do you think I learned it?"

"That… that sentence can be interpreted in several ways."

"Research."

She glanced up at his stricken face and burst into laughter.

"Louise has every manual known to man, and even some that aren't. The girls made me read all of them and then ask questions when I didn't understand things. You wouldn't take a test without studying, would you?"

"Shame I didn't know I'd be taking a test…"

"You have a week; make-ups will be offered on a daily basis until you obtain a passing grade."

"What if I never –" He cut himself short with an involuntary moan as she took him in deeply and the head of his cock hit the back of her throat. His capacity for speech returned as she kissed her way up his body some minutes later. "Shouldn't we use protection?" he whispered.

"We can if you think we should. I'm on the Pill though, found a doctor that would give it to me a few weeks ago, so we should be safe without," she answered. He moved to slide her under him, but she held him down on his back, straddled his stomach. "Stay there. I want to try it this way." She kissed him, then began to ease his cock inside of her, and he obliged by holding still, holding on to her hips, watching her face as concentration softened the focus of her eyes. He was worried still that she was going too fast, that she wasn't ready yet, that she would hurt herself.

"No rush," he said to her as she rocked it further and further in, then, "Is it hurting? Stop if it's hurting," as he felt her close over the last fraction of an inch.

"It doesn't really hurt, but it does feel odd. Good odd."

He tightened the muscles in his abdomen, made his cock pulse inside her, and she started and squealed in surprise.

"And now would you like to lie back and let me do the work?"

"No, I think I like the view too much for now; perhaps you should ask again after dinner."

He opened his mouth to argue, but she began to move.

*

They didn't leave the house once that week. Pauline had stocked the Frigidaire with prepared dinners, snacks that didn't crumb and could be taken back to the bedroom, the cupboards with bottles of wine. They woke with their bodies pressed tight together, limbs braided, Pauline's thighs still slick from the night before. They had sex over and over, then held each other and talked, languidly, about all the things that it hadn't been quite appropriate to discuss before, the things that required the intimacy of a post-coital hormone high to be comfortably divulged. She brought out one of the manuals that Louise had given her and they read it together with her head resting on his shoulder, tried to follow the diagrams of the more complicated positions and wound up giggling as one of them overbalanced or fell over, and returned again to the simple iterations that already felt comfortingly familiar.

Pauline was insatiable. She reached for him in the morning, while he was still asleep, while they were fixing meals or wandering to the kitchenette for a drink, and heaven help him if he let her in the shower with him. His body was more than up to the task, but he had to admit that his favorite part was after, when she curled into his chest or settled his head on her breasts and they had their legs slung over each other's hips. The ease of it, the quiet intimacy of her there, skin on skin and breath mingling, the simple joy of her against him.

It was only at the end of their honeymoon, when they'd finally gotten dressed, kissed each other thoroughly goodbye and parted to go to their respective places of work that he realized that he had not thought once of Denise that week, nor dreamed of death.

Chapter 3

Pauline's parents didn't speak to her in the first few months of her marriage, but she didn't mind. Being married gave her other things to think about, and her father wrote her chatty letters on the sly, which slightly discredited the unified front that her mother, as reported by her brothers, thought would make her see reason and get an annulment.

School let out. Pauline got work waitressing and delivering newspapers before dawn to make ends meet, snagged an internship with the Women's pages of the Alexandria Times two days a week with the hope that it would lead to a position at one of the D.C. papers down the road; Martin took summer work dogsbodying in the lab of one of the research fellows which made it possible for them to stay in university housing over the summer, in the apartment where they had honeymooned after the wedding.

It was the seventeenth of July 1973, the summer before her junior and his final year when a call came from Pauline's mother. If she hadn't been at work when her mother called, if she'd had the time to think, rather than taking the receiver from the counter girl when it was shoved at her without explanation, she would have probably hung up the moment she heard her mother's voice:

"Come to the hospital. Holy Name on Teaneck Road, not the city one… Do you never listen to me? It's your father."

She didn't question how her mother had gotten the diner's number, or known she would be there. She left a message for Martin with whomever it was who answered the lab phone, walked out of the diner in the middle of serving lunch. For the first block of speed-walking she considered going home, packing a bag, phoning back and getting more details, but the train was closer than home, and she had a change of clothes, a packet of work, and her wallet with her. If she didn't get to the hospital in time because she decided to stop by home first she'd never forgive herself.

It was an anxious three hours from Union Station to Penn Newark, pressed tightly between the window and a man in a suit hiding behind the business pages, unable to concentrate on her reading or on the landscape flashing by on the other side of the cold glass, which reflected enough that when she sat back she could see the red mark on her forehead from where she had leaned against it. They passed through

Baltimore and Philadelphia and she realized that she hadn't eaten lunch. Her waitress' uniform itched, bit under her armpits.

The sight of the marshes of New Jersey made her feel comforted somewhere deep in her empty belly and anxious at the same time. So much could have happened while she was on the train, and she didn't know if she wanted to stay in the space of not-knowing, where there was still a chance that everything was all right, that her mother was overreacting, or wanted to know for sure the extent of the emergency.

Sam was waiting for her with their parent's station wagon and a meatball hero.

"Hey Paul, how was the ride?" He hugged her with one arm, held the sandwich away so the greasy paper wouldn't stain her uniform.

"I got here. How's Dad? Ma didn't tell me anything."

"Of course she didn't. Did you get lunch before you came up or did you book it?"

"I booked it. Now tell me how Dad is." She pulled at the handle of the passenger door; not only was it locked, but her brother was leaning very firmly on it. He brandished the sandwich.

"Dad is fine. Eat."

"That isn't an answer. If he were fine Ma wouldn't have called and told me to come to the hospital. Lemme in the car."

"And if it were really bad I wouldn't be making you eat something before we went, would I?" He shoved the sandwich at her again, and she took it from him only to avoid being hit by it.

"But I want to know what's going on! For the love of God, tell me."

"Eat first. It's not worth you fainting over."

She unwrapped an end of the sandwich and crammed it into her mouth, made a show of biting off as much as she could and swallowing it nearly unchewed, and he sighed and unlocked the passenger door for her.

As they drove towards Hackensack he filled in what their mother had left out, what they hadn't known for certain when she called her daughter and told her to come home. Their parents had been finishing off breakfast, her father stood to get one last drop of coffee, had let his cup fall and smash on the kitchen floor. Peter had been there, said it was like watching him melt, like a marionette with the strings cut or a chocolate figure in a hot kitchen. Their mother had panicked immediately,

dragged him to the car with Pete's help as their father protested, but protested with only half of his mouth, one leg trailing. She'd driven him to the hospital before she realized that an ambulance would be faster. He was admitted and she was left to fidget and pray in the waiting room, which she did for an hour or so before it occurred to her to phone her other children. Pauline hadn't been on this list until Luke arrived, and it had taken him a while to convince her to call her daughter, and even longer to convince her to try the diner after there was no answer on her home phone. Peter had been reading her letters to their father, charged as he was with getting his hands on them before his mother did, and had remembered what she had said about finding work. And that explanation, when they were nearly to the hospital and the hero mostly gone, brought Sam around to what she actually wanted to know: what was wrong with their father?

Stroke. Muscular damage on the right side, but his mental faculties still present and accounted for, as far as they could assess. It was too early to tell how extensive the damage was, how much he had lost. It was a relatively minor stroke, if anything so life changing could be characterized as 'minor;' there could be a more major event on the horizon, if he didn't take care.

When they arrived at the hospital Pauline bolted into the waiting room, was brought up short at the sight of her mother, rosary gliding through her fingers. She eyed her daughter, said, "You look healthy; married life appears to suit you."

And that was all that was said on the matter.

That night Pauline slept again in her old bedroom at the far end of the hall, surrounded by the childhood odds and ends that she was surprised her mother hadn't thrown out in a fit of rage upon realizing that her daughter would be married with or without her approval. The next few days were spent trading off with her mother and brothers in visiting the hospital. She sat next to her father's bed for hours on end, reading to him from magazines and showing him pictures, running him through the exercises for his limp side that the nurses had shown her, walking him up and down the hallway in the hope that his dragging right foot would wake up and cooperate. They brought him food from home because her mother didn't trust the hospital fare, double-checked his medication in case a tired nurse made a mistake, chased away the more annoying relatives when they had overstayed their welcome.

Martin had to stay in Washington, hacking away at work and writing her little notes because they couldn't afford the long-distance charges on the telephone, and

she didn't know if she hated being away from him or hated the sudden fear she felt, the realization that her father was mortal, more. Martin seemed to understand why she had left Washington with nothing but what she had with her, why she had to stay in New Jersey for as long as it took for her father to get better, why she had quit all of her jobs and gone back to living under her mother's roof, and for that she was grateful beyond words.

Her father was discharged from the hospital on the 20th, a Friday; Martin came up from Washington on the late afternoon train to lend his strong shoulders and gentle manner first to the assembly of a steel-frame bed in the living room so that his father-in-law would not have to hazard the stairs until his walking improved, and then to the finicky business of getting the man from hospital bed to car to living room without injuring his body or his pride. His mother-in-law made mouths at the steps up to the front door, the step down into the sunken living room, the slickness of the kitchen linoleum and the length of the shag carpet, muttered about all of the places that he could trip, all of the accidents just waiting to happen. To everyone's surprise, his father-in-law grouched back.

"For the love of the Virgin, woman! One unholy step is not going to kill me. I'll sleep downstairs, but you're not going to treat me like a complete cripple!" He settled into the depths of the oxblood Chesterfield chair that the family had clubbed together to get him for his fortieth birthday, gave the room a proprietary once-over – the cabinet with the hi-fi and turntable had been moved to squish against the drinks cabinet behind the sofa, to make space for the bed – before looking back to Martin. "There should be a Parcheesi board in the drawer under the decanters. Fetch it out; we can fit a game or two in before bedtime."

Bedtime was a topic that Pauline wanted to avoid. Being back in her old house hadn't been so strange, but with Martin there as well she couldn't pretend that it wasn't their first time staying with her parents as a married couple, no matter how pressing other events happened to be. As the evening wore on she grew more on edge, waiting for the inevitable conflict. But it didn't come. And when bedtime finally did, and Martin asked which of the absent boys' beds he would be taking for the weekend, her mother utterly shocked her by saying that they would be staying together in Pauline's bedroom.

"You're married now, what can I do about it?" she asked as her daughter made faces at her that were reminiscent of a carp out of water.

It was a strange summer. Pauline tried more– and more successfully – than she ever had before to keep from irritating her mother, and her mother for her part seemed mellowed by the emergency. She still enjoyed finding fault with people, holding forth on everyone's flaws, but softened somewhat towards her daughter and more dramatically towards Martin, who came up every weekend that he could to do chores around the house and run errands. She gave Pauline an earful at first about delivering newspapers and working in a diner:

"You could have become a secretary; you could be married to a banker by now!"

But when Martin explained, gently, that Pauline had taken work because she had to, because otherwise they couldn't make rent and electricity and all of the other costs of life, she closed her mouth and loosened her purse strings, first paying for their train tickets, then buying Pauline new clothes, then slipping tidy little envelopes into Martin's jacket pocket when she dropped him at the train station to go back to Washington for the week.

"For sundries," she said, even though it was always enough to make a significant dent in the bills. "It's hard to keep a home running with the lady of the house away."

*

When they both returned to Washington just before the start of school their little apartment felt unfamiliar to Pauline, looked shabbier than she remembered it being when she was getting dressed and eating breakfast on the morning six weeks before that her mother phoned to tell her to come to the hospital, the last time that she had been there. But it had a double bed and only a little bit of a mold problem, and the kitchen was all hers. And she liked being back in classes, having her mind feel busy, having the long walk to the technology block and the Reiss building to stretch her legs every day and the privacy of their own home in which to do other things at night.

By October the apartment had begun to smell like them, and life had begun to feel somewhat normal again, even though they had not yet been married a year, didn't strictly have a 'normal' to return to. But Pauline no longer jumped when the phone rang, hesitated before answering it in the panicked conviction that it was bad

news, that her father was in the hospital again, that he was dead. Martin told her not to worry, that no matter what the old wives' tales said, trouble didn't come in threes; there was nothing for her to worry about.

*

Martin was cycling home on the Friday before midterms, the panniers of his bicycle heavy with textbooks for a weekend of cramming but his soul light with the beauty of the evening and the joy of speed, his toes strapped to the pedals so that the upstroke as well as the down of his long legs added power, shot him forward at a pace with the cars in front and behind him. He hunched lower over the backcurved handlebars, shooting down a long hill so that the momentum would shoot him up the far side with minimal effort, his attention on the road in front of him, on the unfamiliar momentum lent by the weight of all of his books behind him.

So when a driver, a young international on a fellowship, at the intersection at the bottom of the first hill failed to see him, tried to turn his VW Rabbit into what he read as a break in the traffic but what was in fact a scarlet Motobecane Grand Sprint with Martin perched like a whippet in midstride on top of it, it took a moment for either of them to react. Not unlike the whippet might, Martin tried to jump sideways, to bend himself around the moving curve of the car's back bumper. If the bike had been lighter, if he'd left all the books behind, he would have made it. Instead he struck the last inch of white painted steel.

The bike stopped immediately. He didn't.

Afterwards there was a gap in his memory just a little longer than his flight over the car. He hadn't even grazed it, had been launched forty feet to land, face first, in the middle of the intersection. And when he realized that that was where he was, that the wetness he felt was his own blood, his only thought was, *I have to get up. I have to get my books before someone steals them.*

By the time the ambulance arrived he had staggered to his feet, and he resisted their attempts to get him into the back of the vehicle with the declaration that he had to check on his bike – it was debatable whether it or the books were the most expensive thing that he and Pauline owned, but it was certain that they could afford to replace neither. He had to get home, he had to study. They told him that he had to

go to the ER. He repeated that he had to get home, he had to study, he didn't have the time to go with them, not even if they'd wanted to take him to visit God.

In the end they coaxed him into the back of the ambulance with the promise that they were going right by his house, could drop him off on their way, and maybe someone should look at his head, but only after they'd let him chain the bike to a tree – they wouldn't let him drag it into the ambulance with him – and let one of the young EMTs unclip the panniers for him so that the books could be brought along.

Once he was decanted into the Emergency Room the shock began to catch up with him. He wanted to lie down, he wanted to sleep, he wanted at least to close his eyes because the artificial light felt like an ice pick being driven through his pupils and his head was killing him, but instead of giving him a bed they'd propped him up in a wheelchair with his books on the floor beside him and left him in the hallway by the nurses' station, and whenever he closed his eyes someone jostled his knee, asked how he was feeling, offered him a glass of water. Perhaps once an hour they asked him if there was anyone they could call, but when he had them phone Pauline all they got was a busy signal; when they asked if there was anyone else they could phone he told them she was it. And every now and again they rolled him away, let him lay down only long enough for his head to be x-rayed, then brought him back again to the patch of hallway where he'd first been parked, under orders to not stand up, not that he was especially inclined to.

After the fourth x-ray he asked if something was wrong with the machine.

"Oh no, it's fine," the doctor breezed. "We just couldn't quite believe you hadn't broken anything."

"Should I have broken something?" he asked.

"Given how fast you were going, we figure you should have broken everything."

"How fast was I going?"

"Imagine taking a basketball," she said. "And throwing it down on the road hard enough to make it shatter. That's how fast we figure you were going."

The doctor who saw him explained that he had landed on his left orbit, the thickest part of his skull. It should have been the temple, the spot where the artery surfaces to thud just beneath the skin. It should have shattered his skull, bathed his brain in blood, killed him instantly, the story living on in local lore as a mother's caution to cycling children, to the student population in jokes about international

drivers. The skin of his forehead was split in a starburst, blood clotted his clothes together, one shoe was missing, and he was concussed to hell and back, but as far as they could determine he was fine.

When they finally allowed him to leave it was past dark. He tried to call Pauline again, to get her to come fetch him, but the line was busy; later he found out that she'd taken the phone off the hook while she was studying, had fallen asleep with her face in her book and when she'd woken up with her stomach growling and her mind fuzzed she hadn't remembered about the phone. The student who had hit him was sitting in the waiting room with his missing shoe clutched in his hands, surrendered it amid exclamations of relief that he hadn't been killed, apologized over and over as he put the shoe on and laced it up by feel. Martin was wary of accepting the ride home that was offered, given the reason he was in the hospital, but he did accept an arm and guidance to the correct bus stop: the panniers full of books were too heavy for him to carry home on his own. Accepted, also, the handful of change when it turned out that he didn't have any for the bus; the driver only let him on, looking the way he did, because there were no other passengers to be disturbed at the sight of him.

His eyes seemed to be working as normal except not: the headache was crushing, and the act of seeing seemed more painful than it was worth, so that he found his way from the bus stop to their front door mostly by walking along the edge of the blacktop, rubbing the side of his left shoe against the raised curb, so that he wouldn't have to focus his eyes. He could hear the nag in Pauline's voice as she took the front door off the chain, undid the bolt, let it swing open. She screamed when she saw the wreckage of his face, made more ghastly by the black wires holding the flesh together, his clothes crusted with dark blood.

They took that to be bad luck number two. It wasn't.

It had been assumed that, since nothing was broken, he had walked away from the accident relatively unscathed. So even though the headaches continued, and his eyes refused to focus, it wasn't until he fell down the stairs of Reiss a few weeks later that he had to admit that something must have gone wrong after all.

The doctor who examined him said that it looked like right superior oblique palsy: the optic nerves are vulnerable where they cross, and the force with which he'd hit the ground had been more than enough to do damage where it could not be seen. The left eye was fine, still focused straight ahead, but the image in the right

now focused twenty-four degrees north, six degrees east, was rotated an eighth of a turn. Hence his inability to walk down stairs, to cycle, to read: the images no longer lined up, and trying to force them was what gave him the headaches. If it didn't clear up on its own in a few months they'd try for surgery.

In the months of waiting for it to 'clear up on its own' Martin gradually became a hermit. The headaches made him short-tempered, his inability to make sense of what he saw looking anywhere but skywards made him a hazard wherever he went. He could only read if the page was held at the very top of his visual field, so he studied lying on his back on their bed with his head off the edge, the book held upside down so that he had to roll his eyes all the way up to see it, flipped himself over every few minutes to make notes by feel which then had to be read in the same way. By the time that it became clear that he had failed the fall semester, and most likely would fail the spring semester if things continued as they were, Pauline was begging him to demand surgery and to hell with the cost.

She skipped a class to take him to the hospital on the day of the surgery, held his hand while they slipped in the IV and sat with him as he waited to be wheeled in, but the moment they put him under she had to dash to make a lecture, so when he came around from the anesthesia he was alone. He had expected there to be a nurse to hand – it was standard procedure; bad things could happen if you left someone alone while they were still out – and so he waited for anguished minutes for someone to come and tell him if the whole thing had been a success, wondered just a little if he had died on the table and this was the afterlife. He assumed that the pain in his lungs was from the endotracheal tube that had been in place during the surgery to ensure that he got enough oxygen.

Two months later he felt like hell, his chest hurt like hell, he looked like hell. He could barely make it to work or to class and when he got there it was all he could do to stay awake; he couldn't eat, and the weight was falling off him like heavy rain. They didn't have the money – they had no idea how they were going to cover the ER bill from the accident, were paying off the surgery in installments – but he went in again in May, let them take a picture of his chest; it showed shadows on his lungs.

The only definitive way to rule out cancer was a biopsy. If he woke up with seven stitches across his heart he'd know that he was in the clear. If he woke up with a Templar's cross, down his sternum and bisecting his breast, if all that held him together was catgut like a quilt at the county fair, he'd know that they found what

they were expecting to find, cut out as much as they could, and all that was left to do was hope and pray.

This time Pauline was able to be in the recovery room. He came around to the sound of her not-screaming in the same way her mother did, her voice loud and fast and full-bodied, pitched to carry: "Aspirational pneumonia? He has aspirational pneumonia? You mean you left him *alone*? After *general anesthesia*? And then you diagnose it as goddamned lung cancer? A first-year med student wouldn't make that mistake. And then you have the gall to stand here and tell me to be grateful –"

"Young lady," the surgeon boomed, "Medicine is not a science, it is an art. It would do you good to remember that. Good day."

The surgeon's rubber soled shoes creaked towards the door; his wife took breath, about to get started in earnest.

"Pauline," he croaked for her, and the breath rushed out. The room spun. He felt sick.

"I'm here."

His fingers on her fingers, then his fingers on his chest, oddly slick and hairless from the just-in-case prep, shaved from collarbone to pubis and ready for possible evisceration, but whole. And the hand-sized gauze, the drainage tube taped over his heart.

*

He was one of the ill-fated souls who did not react well to general anesthesia. When he had been left alone after the surgery to repair his vision he must have vomited while still under, aspirated the water and acid that had been the only thing in his stomach. He hadn't been able to cough it back up, and so the fluid had stayed in his lungs, the bacteria that came with it multiplying, until he was so ill that lung cancer seemed like the most logical reason.

Looking back, Martin realized that he should have tapped out then, either when the accident scrambled his face or when they thought he had cancer. The institution would have let him take a year off for medical reasons if he'd asked, come back when he was once again a functional human being. If he had known that he was allowed to ask, if someone had known to tell him that he was allowed to take a leave of absence, it all would have ended differently.

He tried not to let it show, how much both events had affected him. He didn't dare lose any more time trying to recover, and he was terrified that one professor or another, teacher or boss, would realize that the Martin that they had was not quite the Martin that they had admitted, had hired, but was rather a slower, slightly more confused imitation whom they really had no use for and should no longer employ or allow to remain enrolled. His speech was sometimes halting now, and he found himself confused, lost in familiar places, unexpectedly worn out, not quite himself at a time in his life when his only assets were who he was and what he knew. He fell asleep in classes, fell asleep in the lab with his face resting against the cover of the autoclave, found himself wandering in buildings he'd navigated in his first year dead drunk and hazed with post-Denise misery, was unable to find rooms in which he'd spent hours, if not days. The professor who had hooked him in for tutoring and hooked him up with the lab work that covered their student apartment gave him subtle concessions, not enough help for anyone to call favorites, and he struggled through the year, managed to keep his job and even do halfway decent work from time to time but failed nearly every class he took. In the week that he had thought he would graduate he instead went to meet with the Dean, the relevant department heads, and his advisor, cited extenuating circumstances and begged to be allowed to re-take the year.

And that was the second calamity: not his accident, or the cancer scare, but what happened when he forced himself to carry on in spite of them.

Martin had begun at Georgetown with no deeper hope than to get through, get by, and get out of going to Vietnam. Then Pauline had lifted him out of his darkness, reflected a better, more noble version of himself until he unexpectedly found that he was living up to it, found that he had become the person that she thought he was, who was going to change the world, or at least find the cure for cancer. But no graduate school would accept a student who failed nearly an entire year of his degree, who paused in the middle of his interview to stare into space and then picked up where he had left off nearly a minute later, who couldn't stay focused long enough to complete the entrance exams in the allotted time. No one would accept him, and even if they did, no one would give him funding. The economy had stagnated seemingly on the day that they were married, and while their family misfortunes had kept them busy there had been calamities in the wider world: first the oil embargo, then a stock market crash, and with the president under

investigation and calls for impeachment growing it looked as though things could only go down. Even the best and brightest were no longer certain of their futures.

Their second year of marriage and final year of undergraduate was calmer than the first, despite the workload. Pauline kept him organized, helped him study, all but frog marched him through his classes, so that when their second anniversary came around they were able to celebrate as well the certainty that they would both be graduating. And when they did graduate, wore the robes and walked and held hands through the address, he had to admit that doing it together made it more significant, that sharing the milestone made it greater.

Pauline had gotten into the Masters of Journalism at American University, but the only offers of work that he could find were variations on the theme of 'lab tech,' calibrating machines, babysitting the petri dishes, dissecting and pipetting and staining. He considered calling in the favors he had accrued in his first three years, considered that he'd probably blown them all in that disastrous fourth year, and took a job in public health, assaying blood, urine, and semen samples, making slides and smears and counting wriggling spermatozoa in a lab in Arlington, Virginia. It paid, though, Pauline reminded him, and it was only a thirty-minute cycle from McLean, where they were looking for apartments – she was hesitant to let him cycle, after the accident, but given the gas shortages it was the most reliable way for him to get around, and he insisted that he wasn't afraid, that one of them would be stuck cycling and it was better if it were him. They would be moving out of student housing, across the river where they could find friends who weren't tied to the university, start behaving like real adults. She would be getting teaching work, with any luck, to make their life more comfortable. Before he knew it she would be finished with school and earning real money, and with a work history no one would care about his failed classes. She would support them while he went back to school, the economy would turn around, they'd start a family, and all would be well.

Martin started at his first adult job on Monday, May 19, 1975; Tricky Dick was in disgrace and Gerald Ford was in the white house, the Vietnam war had just ended and the most recent economic recession was about to as well. The last weekend of May was devoted to moving house. He enjoyed packing up their college life more than he'd imagined he would, wrapping each glass spice bottle and flowered stoneware dinner plate in newspaper and fitting it into place in one of the second-hand wine boxes that they'd salvaged from behind their favorite shop,

packing the full boxes into the back of the second-hand car – a liver-colored Cutlass that stalled out at intersections – that they hadn't owned long enough for it to feel like theirs yet, carrying the boxes up the front steps and then the inside steps and in their front door and setting them down on the goldenrod-yellow living room carpet of the apartment in McLean that he had found advertised in the newspaper as being perfect for recent graduates and which, though hardly a dozen square feet bigger than their apartment at Georgetown, was so much nicer by virtue of being dry and mold-free and smelling of new paint and floor cleaner.

"What's this?" Pauline asked late that afternoon as they were sorting the bedroom into cartons and laundry bags.

"What's what?" Martin asked as he came out of the bathroom, and stopped with a start as he realized what it was she was dragging out from under his side of the bed.

The chest was caked with dust. He hadn't moved or touched it in over two years, and Pauline still virtuously left his things – his books, the boxes under his side of the bed and in the top of his side of the closet – untouched, remembering all of the times her own mother had tidied away something vital to her the day before it was needed. She scrubbed at the label with a corner of her sleeve, technically his sleeve, since she was wearing one of his old shirts over her own clothes to keep the dust off, and the words *School Memorabilia – to save* showed through, the ink already beginning to fade and the label to yellow.

"Oh," he said, pitching his surprise to sound like the emphasis of sudden revelation. "That's a bunch of random crap from high school. You know, the kind of stuff that you hang on to because you can't bring yourself to pitch it. There's probably nothing important in there; I don't know why I still have it."

"Should we bother taking it with us, then?" she asked, then in response to his hesitation, said, "I'm kidding. My bedroom back home is practically a shrine; we've got more than enough space for one box of your childhood."

That evening they ate Chinese from the takeout cartons and drank beer from the bottles while sitting on the living room floor surrounded by liquor boxes filled with their things; the apartment was unfurnished, and so far all they owned was a wardrobe that Pauline had reclaimed from the roadside while tooling around in the Cutlass to get used to the steering, and a perfectly new mattress that Martin's parents had insisted on giving them as a housewarming present. After the Chinese and the

brief consideration and quick dismissal of the idea that they had any energy left for unpacking, they stripped naked and made love in all four rooms of the apartment; it was less from desire for each other than to make the place their own, to erase the memory of the previous tenants from the vinyl floor and loop pile carpet, Formica countertops and newly-painted walls, but that didn't make it any less enjoyable. As they fell asleep on the mattress on the floor with their limbs braided together Pauline wondered if this was what it was to be an adult, if she would ever feel more like she had arrived than she did at that moment, in her own home with her husband's leg thrown over her hip, with no one to answer to save herself.

*

The neighborhood was quieter than the student village, the walls thicker and the green spaces better landscaped, though the tall, pressed-together buildings with two apartments on each of their three floors were not so different from the rowhouse they had just left. Over that summer they worked like dogs, Martin at the public health clinic in the hope that he could move up the pay ladder if not the position ladder, Pauline waiting tables again to give them a bit of a buffer in the bank for when she started school in the fall, but nevertheless they gathered tidbits of information about the neighbors who they didn't have time to get to know.

Before they became used to the idea of other people so close, in the first months after they married, they made love in frantic whispers and blushed if they saw the neighbors too soon after; for the first few weeks after moving they rediscovered that early shyness, tried not to disturb the quiet and paused to listen whenever sound came from the far side of the wall, the floor, the ceiling.

Here most of their neighbors also had some connection to a university: Georgetown, American, Washington, Mason, there was a glut of schools in the area, and the postgraduates and the married students took advantage of their ability to live elsewhere, to have a little distance from the institutions that took up so much of their time. They were all – they only realized when, suddenly, they were no longer – very young, recently married, generally healthy and too broke for real entertainment of an evening.

The couple in the apartment to their left were both students, but one of them was usually in, writing at their kitchen table or sitting up in bed, because they were in

the humanities and didn't have a lab, or even the corner of an office, to roost in. On the right was the young wife of a newly-minted public accountant, still round and tender from her first pregnancy, her eyes deep craters that begged 'no more,' even though Pauline and Martin both knew that she jumped her husband the moment he got home, caught him at the door with a kiss and said, "Thank God. If I spend another minute alone in this breadbox I'll go nuts."

"You've got the baby for company."

"Don't be an idiot."

And the sound of a belt buckle striking the floor, the creak as they moved to the bedroom, bedsprings and moans until the baby cried, or – rarely – until contented silence.

The first time Pauline and Martin were at home during this exchange they looked at each other bug-eyed, unable to believe what they were hearing. Then they laughed, and before long the sound became part of the daily rhythm.

The upstairs and downstairs neighbors were students as well, but only the husbands. Upstairs had a two-year-old whose feet thud thud thudded across their ceiling early in the morning and all day on weekends, and Mrs. Downstairs worked double shifts and had a pot of either cabbage or collard greens simmering perpetually on the back burner.

By the time Pauline's Masters began that fall Martin had more or less settled into work, found what excitement there was in dealing with human excrescence day in and day out, begun to enjoy his coworkers' company, even though he had his eyes open and kept in touch with his old professors in the hope of a better job turning up. And when Pauline's course finally began and he came home to find her reading, the light kindled behind her eyes, the excitement in her voice when she told him what she'd been up to while he was gone, he wondered why he'd wanted any other life. Her tuition was covered despite the instability at home and abroad, but they had to take care of living expenses themselves, and he was glad that he hadn't gotten into graduate school, glad that he could keep them afloat and provide while she finished up her education. His turn would come later.

It was early November, nine weeks into the semester, when they received the phone call that they had been half-expecting: Pauline's father had had another stroke. This time they thought they understood what this meant, didn't panic. She finished off her assigned reading, packed a bag, and drove up to New Jersey late that evening.

While she was on the road he had a second stroke.

All of her brothers were assembled in the waiting room; her mother, who had been calm on the telephone earlier that day, was sobbing, and with creeping dread Pauline slowly realized that she had misjudged, that just because he had gone through a stroke once before and survived, been mostly unchanged, didn't mean that it would happen again. You only got so lucky once.

Her mother shouted at her father even as she caressed the drooping, lifeless side of his face: he hadn't been careful with his anticoagulants, hadn't taken them religiously, thought he was in the clear if he fudged a little, didn't really listen to the doctor because what do doctors know? No one is ever in the clear, Pauline realized then. Anyone can die.

After a month of driving up to Bergen County and back to McLean every few days, first to sit with her father in the hospital and then in the rehab ward, Pauline surrendered. Her work was suffering, she caught herself nodding off on the road, she couldn't keep her mind on what she was doing, all of the grocery money was going for gas. Her advisor signed off on a leave of absence, promised her that her place would be held for her, and once again she moved back into her childhood bedroom. This time there were some differences: more exercises for his body and his mind both, a wheelchair and a special bed and a contraption to get him in and out of the bathtub now that he could no longer shower, directives about what he should and should not be fed, how he should be kept to a routine and what that might consist of, the sudden minutiae of caring for a person that had, what seemed only moments before, been perfectly healthy and able.

He came home in time for Christmas, and he seemed cheered up by the presence of the family, especially Luke's two tiny children, by the tree and the food and the decorations. But when January and February came and brought with them the grim relentlessness of routine, the exercises that he hated and the long days to fill, that was when it all grew difficult.

They had been told to expect personality change: anger, confusion, fear. Possibly no speech, ever again. When he came home from the hospital he could get out 'yes,' 'no,' his wife's name and his daughter's name and a slurred sound that seemed to stand for the boys, both collectively and as individuals. He could also bring out the Nicene Creed and the Lord's Prayer, those parts of the liturgy that he had heard repeated, Sunday after Sunday, for his entire life. Pauline's mother took

that as proof that he was being stubborn, that he could speak if he wanted to, and she badgered him, tried to make him say the name for things before she would hand them over.

As winter turned to spring Pauline and Martin talked, gingerly. He understood that she had to stay, had to do all that she could, that she didn't want to leave her father alone. He missed her, yes, but he didn't mind coming up to New Jersey every weekend, liked spending the time with her parents, taking care of things for her mother. But her leave of absence would eventually run out, and she had to agree with Martin: when it did, no matter what, she would have to go back to school. The old man was improving, if only by degrees, and he had expressed several times, if mostly by gesture, that he thought that she should be out and about, not mewed up with him. It was perfectly safe for him to be left alone, and he seemed irritated at times that they refused to leave him alone for fear that he would be lonely, want something and have no one to reach it for him.

He seemed to have lost his voice, but he had not lost the words. It was early summer: Pauline gave him a pencil and some paper, told him that the doctor had said that drawing would be good for him. Instead he began to produce all of the words that had been shut inside him since the stroke had closed his mouth.

At first it was observations, questions, as if he were testing out his pen's capacity to replace the fluency of his frozen tongue, but as his speed grew he began having full-on conversations with his daughter. For weeks he tried to keep it a secret between the two of them, but it wasn't long before it got out to the rest of the family.

"He'll only write Ma little notes, like 'need blanket' or 'pass salt.' He acts like it's too much for him to do anything more complicated than that, but he writes me damn letters when he feels like talking," Pauline told Martin the next weekend he came up, while they were snugged together in her room. Her mother had handed over the double mattress on which she and Pauline's father had slept for so many years, had made Martin move Pauline's twin mattress into the master bedroom. This bothered Pauline a bit, both because she didn't feel right about taking her parent's bed and because she didn't want to consider what had undoubtedly occurred on its worn surface, but she'd reconsidered when she lay down next to Martin on it and found, to her delight, that she had space to roll over. It left only a narrow margin of floor on three sides, but she didn't care.

"I told you he'd get better." Martin played with her hair absently. "Before you know it he'll be running the house. Bet you anything he turns into a right old terror, gives your mother a run for her money."

"What are you on? I've been eating the vegetables out of his beef stew for twenty-odd years because he never had the heart to tell her that boiled carrots and onions make him gag. He's not going to stand up and make demands now."

"He might; your old man has more iron in him than he lets on."

*

Pauline couldn't remember exactly when the darker notes snuck in, when she should have noticed all was not well. They had been told to expect him to be different, to allow him to be short-tempered or miserable as he needed to, and she assumed that he was letting off steam on the day that he slipped her the scrap of paper that said *I'm killing you. And your mother*.

"Don't say that, Dad." She crumpled the scrap, put it in her pocket, but he took up another from the stack she kept for him, continued.

I've ruined her life, and now I'm keeping you from following your dreams.

"Shhhhhh. Daddy, I'm right where I want to be."

I'm a burden. A dead weight.

"Don't say that, Daddy. Don't talk like that. You're upsetting yourself. We all love you."

He had gone to write some more, but she had put her hands over his, held them tightly and told him she loved him until he nodded a reluctant assent and stopped reaching for the paper.

Afterwards she said that she should have expected it, should have anticipated, should have taken him at his word, but she was so used to his quiet martyrdom, so easily understood why he might be miserable, thought that she understood it to be just a passing feeling, that she said nothing, not even to Martin, about what he'd written. Not until afterwards.

By July she thought they had all settled into their new normal, had gotten used to the routines and the notes and the wheelchair and the bed in the living room, and she finally felt good about going back to school in the fall, taking up where she had left off. When she mentioned it to her father it seemed to cheer him up, and he

made her read aloud to him from the articles her supervisor had given her to get her back into thinking shape. Luke and his wife had promised to lend more of a hand when she was gone, and Martin had promised that they would visit as much as they could manage.

She was with him on the day: the sort of clear, blue Saturday that people dream of, everyone else out of the house. He was half asleep in his wheelchair in the kitchen while she cooked and talked to him – she had always talked to him, but they all talked to him now, an incessant string of babble because the doctors had told them how much difference regular interaction could make to recovery, and once they'd made the habit it was surprisingly difficult to break. Even her brothers chattered to him uncharacteristically now, like TV teenagers.

She was making dinner, and she dropped the egg carton. All of them but one spread in a sticky, shelly puddle on the linoleum. Can't bread schnitzel, or make spaetzel, in an eggless house. It was just the two of them for another few hours, even the neighbors were out. She woke him up enough to tell him where she was going. He nodded, and then nodded back off. She found her pocketbook and ran.

A dozen eggs. Twenty minutes, maybe twenty-five. It was perfectly safe for him to be alone, there was nothing to worry about except that he might get lonely.

When she came back there was an odd stillness about the house, a weight that she did not like. The wheelchair wasn't in the kitchen – it was difficult, but he could get himself around in it. Downstairs bathroom – not there. Strange smell, sharp smell, calling out to him as she checked the rooms. Knowing that she shouldn't have left him no matter what the doctors had said, not even for a moment, not even for a dozen eggs.

The office door was ajar, blocked open by the wheelchair. The empty wheelchair. It wasn't really an office: desk, filing cabinets, bookshelves, all the papers in the house, important and unimportant, in one small room. And her father on the floor in front of the filing cabinet, the bottom drawer that used to lock but didn't any more because Luke and Sam 'fixed' it when they were little, the drawer that locked in the office that locked because it held two of the sure things in life: taxes, and death in the form of her father's service pistol, the sidearm that he wouldn't get rid of no matter what her mother or grandmother said. He must have pulled himself out of the chair, dragged himself with his good arm across the floor, commando crawled, loaded it one-handed. His blood was on her, clothes and hands.

But she didn't scream, because there was still a pulse, a faint one. As she groped for the desk phone, punched in the three numbers, her brain clicked over quietly: no exit wound. The bullet lodged. He's still alive.

Siren in one ear, dispatcher's voice in the other, calming, directing, and her fingers on that pulse when it stopped. A stutter, then nothing. Paramedics, throwing the wheelchair out of the way, picking her up, they would make him breathe again – and they couldn't. She screamed, 'It's my fault, it's my fault,' but wouldn't, couldn't say anything else.

Only Martin ever knew what her father said to her, how she should have known what he was thinking, what he might do. How she left him alone anyway, for eggs, for a dozen goddamned eggs to make them all dinner. And deeper, what she didn't tell Martin: had he done it because she was leaving?

She didn't see her mother cry. Perhaps her mother did, but Pauline did not see it.

Her mother was heartless.

"You're only crying for yourself, not for him. He was in pain and now he isn't, why cry for him? He took the easy way out, the way he always did."

*

The rest of the summer was taken up with the aftermath: the funeral and the will and the arranging of her father's affairs. There were so many things to chase after, so many people to notify. Would her mother stay in the house she had lived in since the day she got married? Could her mother stay? Would her mother be allowed to stay? Who would they have to talk to in order to make sure her mother could stay? If her mother didn't stay, where would they move her to? What about the car? What about insurance? Social Security? Did he have military retirement benefits? All of the papers and contracts that were in his name, all of the little affairs of life that he had taken care of when he was alive, that her mother had known nothing about because she hadn't needed to know anything about them. It was a comfort, in a way, concentrating all of her mind and might on what had to be done, on the problems presented by black ink on white paper. It kept her from thinking of other things.

That September Pauline went back to American, like she had told her father she would, started again in the classes that she had been taking when he had gone down with the second stroke.

She lasted nearly a week.

In her third class, the professor ended the session by passing out mimeographed reading assignments, an array of old articles for them to read through and discuss later in the week. She glanced at the packet, turned over the first page and saw one of the accompanying images: South Vietnam's chief of police holding a gun to the head of a Viet Cong member. And she knew, could feel as if she were there, what the moments after that photo was taken had been like: the tang of propellant and blood in the air, the weight of the body hitting the ground, the utter finality of death. She couldn't move, couldn't breathe, didn't realize she was screaming until someone shook her, couldn't stop screaming once she realized it, couldn't stop crying once she finally stopped screaming.

Martin went to the Dean the next morning, explained the situation as best he could in the hope that no one would make her talk about it, no one would press her for the details, and above all else no one would show her that photo or any photo like it again. When she went to see her supervisor the next week he already had the leave of absence paperwork drawn up, promised that they would hold her place and her funding for one more semester, given the extenuating circumstances, but if she did not return in January and finish out the spring semester then both place and funding would be given to someone else. She said that she understood, signed the papers, walked out, drove home, and went back to bed for the rest of the day.

*

Nothing was safe. At any moment she could lose everything. She cried when Martin left for work in the morning, waited for him to call her at lunchtime to tell her that he hadn't died, not yet. If he was slow getting home the fear rose, stopped her tongue, left her rocking on the kitchen floor and feeling as though she would fly into pieces like a blown dandelion. She couldn't leave the house. There were too many things that could kill her, too many ways for her to die, and if something happened to Martin while she was gone then no one would know where to find her to tell her. He could be hit by another car, have a heart attack at work, be struck by lightning –

anything. It was all consuming, the fear of what might happen, the creeping certainty that it – car, lightning, heart attack – had already happened and she was only waiting for the news to reach her. In the night she woke frequently to check his breathing.

She thought about being voluntarily committed, worried that she would do something that could lead to her being involuntarily committed, decided to try seeing a therapist. It took the front end of the day for her to gear herself up for the visit, and the back end for her to recover from it. He was a firm man whose manner of speaking – loftily authoritarian, like the surgeon who dismissed her in the recovery room when she asked how the hell you mistook pneumonia for lung cancer – rubbed her entirely the wrong way. It was like talking to her mother, who, despite the fact that she was grown and married and living on her own, that she had been the one to sort her father's affairs when her brothers were too busy and her mother baffled by it all, still told her what she should do, how she should think, just like the shrink. But once she started seeing him she couldn't stop going, every other Tuesday at 3 pm, because he kept her prescriptions current for the tranquilizers to keep her calm and the antidepressants to get her moving when the tranquilizers worked too well, and because she was considered at risk for suicide, given the way her father went. The pills barely took the edge off, sometimes made her feel worse, and there were moments when she threw away the bottles only to fish them back out of the kitchen garbage minutes later, rinse the coffee grounds and raw egg mess off under the tap: at their first consultation he warned her of the dangers of a patient going off her medication abruptly, his duty to make sure the world was safe from her and she was safe from the world. If she didn't take them he might have her committed; if they didn't work then maybe she was the problem.

Martin worried about her, worried that she wouldn't be there, one way or another, when he got home in the evening, that if he left her alone she would break. At night they were almost fine; with her wedged in close to him, her hand on his chest so that she could feel him breathe, he could pretend that all was well. But then morning would come, and as it drew him nearer and nearer to leaving the house she shook, sometimes cried slow silent tears that made her eyes red. She clung to him on the doorstep, but she eventually had to let go.

He phoned her the moment he got into the lab so that she would know he'd gotten there safely, and then he fretted his way through the morning to the lunch phone call. She was on the edge, he knew it, and he wondered every day when he left

the house if she would still be there when he came home, if she would decide that the fear was too much to live with. He worried almost as much that she would have a comparatively good day, that she'd try to go out, would break down in public and be committed to the psych ward, or if her doctor would do it when she went to see him, or if she'd do it to herself. The calls were just as much for him as they were for her, and his stomach knotted itself with nerves as the hours ticked by and he weighed the probability that she wouldn't be all right. She was his axis, his fixed point, his center and anchor and she had come loose. He didn't know what to do for her, and he didn't know what to do for himself without her.

There were few resources to draw on: the girls from her childhood, from confirmation class, now lived too far away to come stay with her, possibly draw her out of the dark places that her mind seemed so determined to occupy. Louise had married and moved back home to Georgia, her other college friends had scattered themselves across the nation, and even so she was hesitant to open herself up to the people she knew, to let them see the wreck she'd become when she'd always been so strong, so bold, so certain in herself. Her brothers and their wives were well meaning but ill equipped, her mother disastrously so. After one Sunday visit in which she told Pauline to stop being a child, stop being sorry for herself, and buck her ideas up, with the additional aside that what she needed wasn't a psychiatrist but a spanking, Martin quietly arranged for them to be 'out' on Sundays and busy whenever his mother-in-law wanted to visit with them without a generous buffer of brothers and sisters-in-law and grandchildren.

This was not an easy task: since Pauline and Martin had proved so competent, so compassionate when it came to dealing with their father in the wake of his strokes and with his affairs in the wake of his passing, her brothers had decided that it would be best for their mother to live closer to them, to not be deprived of the company of her only daughter. A few months after the funeral Luke had pulled her aside to tell her, with an air of expansive generosity, that he had arranged for their mother to move into a cozy apartment in Bethesda so that she could be within dropping-in distance of Pauline and Martin; their childhood home was simply too big for her to handle, but since he and his wife were expecting a third child Sam and Michael and Peter all agreed that it made sense for them to buy it from her, keep it in the family. Pauline had been too miserable to respond, Martin too dumbstruck.

It was due to the lack of options that he settled on the idea of asking the neighbor women for help – there was no one else to ask, and he had to know, should she do something unwise while he was at work, that there would be someone, anyone else handy, that she wouldn't be alone for nine or more hours of the day with no one to call the police if she decided to take all the pills in the house. She wanted no one to know that she was – as she phrased it when she was feeling particularly out of control – capital-C-Crazy; she was ashamed, worried that the label would follow her forever after should she let it attach itself to her person.

They had generally been friendly with the neighbors – bridge nights, cocktails, and casual-conversation-level of friendly – which he was grateful for when he went to have a private word with the women above and below, to either side and across the street. There were words he couldn't, daren't say, problems that people didn't confess to, so he couched it in terms he hoped they would understand: Pauline wasn't handling her father's death so well, was taking some time out to get herself back to normal, but he worried about her getting lonely, on her own inside all day. Might they, could they, would they mind dropping in on her from time to time, just to put a young husband's mind to rest?

They may have heard through the academic grapevine about her breakdown in lecture, interpreted this intelligence in light of their own experiences and all reached conclusions that were wildly different in spite of being generally correct. Knowing that while he was gone they would come over, drink coffee, dangle their babies, added somewhat to his peace of mind, but every morning that he closed the front door and left her behind, alone, was the absolute last morning that he could bear to do it. He knew he was going to crack. And yet every evening he came home, relieved, to her, and knew he would do it again when the sun rose.

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The woman who lived in the apartment on their right came first with her baby, sat down for coffee and asked if the crying could be heard through the wall, if it woke them up, and they both knew that she was really wondering what other noises they could hear. Pauline said no, not once, ran her hand over the kid's head and made faces at it, but wouldn't pick it up. It would hate her, it would start screaming and squirming, she would drop it, and it would die. Everything died.

The other women came after, and even though they did not discuss the fact that they were all paying visits to the one apartment they managed to stagger themselves, so that Pauline had time to gather her reserves, find her public face. It wasn't unpleasant having them visit. As far as company went there wasn't much difference between them, but having someone to pretend for, someone for whom she must pantomime being all right for an hour or so, was comforting. It reminded her that she still could.

Then, in August, a new family moved in across the street.

Donna was in her thirties and worked as a nurse, half time since having her two children, who were both under the age of ten. Her husband was just starting at Wesley Theological Seminary, across the river. Two weeks after moving in she appeared on the doorstep to introduce herself, came in for the requisite cup of coffee.

"I heard you've been having problems lately, honey," she said after they'd gotten the usual getting-to-know-you topics out of the way, and Pauline couldn't tell if that meant that the neighbors had been gossiping or if Martin had found out she was a nurse and had said something especially. Or if it was so damn obvious at that point, not just to a nurse but to anyone with eyes, that she was plummeting to rock bottom.

"It's been a rough few years," Pauline conceded, gave a brief account of Martins accident, her father's strokes and death – leaving out the suicide – and summed up her breakdown and leave of absence from the university with, "I haven't really found my feet again, after it all. But everything will work out eventually."

Donna shook her head. "Honey, it sounds like you need Jesus."

"Well, I grew up Catholic, but in the last few years the Church hasn't really been the comfort to me that so many people seem to find it."

"No baby, not religion. Jesus."

She was an older woman, a motherly woman in the ways that Pauline's mother never had been, a slow talker and an easy listener that put her hand on Pauline's shoulder in the way that made her stomach feel warm, made her feel accepted and acceptable. That was why Pauline listened, maybe, because she was out of ideas, out of steam, and wanted a mother to come and put everything right, and there was something about Donna's slow, soft drawl that made her want to nod and agree.

The woman brought her a Bible with an oxblood leather binding, and when Martin left for work the next morning she opened it on the kitchen table. The feel of the tissue-thin pages, the smell of the ink, gave her a *frisson* that wasn't unpleasant, the physical memory of sitting in the pew next to her father as a small child and flipping quietly through a copy while one of the priests spoke soothingly in the background. She'd never really read the Bible before, she realized. She began at Matthew, the start of the New Testament, because Donna had said, when she'd brought it over, that Pauline probably wasn't in the best shape for pages of 'begats.' And whether it was the mesmerizing quality of the language or the comfort of having one task: sit still, read book, do nothing else, she found that it calmed her, built a barrier of words between herself and her fear.

There wasn't anything else, really, for her to do, alone in that apartment all day long, so she read entire sections at a stretch, went back and read them again, immediately, from the beginning, until she found that she was inadvertently memorizing verses. When it felt as though the anxiety would drown her she recited passages aloud, over and over until meaning distorted and changed and the sound of the words filled her ears, overwhelming one repetitive, intrusive, all-consuming thing with another. Martin came home often to find her scrubbing and reciting: *Iliftupmyeyestothehills, fromwheredoesmyhelpcome, myhelpcomesfromthelord, themakerofheavenandearth.*

In November Donna persuaded Pauline out to an evening church service, fetched her in her husband's car and drove them the short distance to a squat building with a peaked roof and a square-limbed cross rising timidly from the ridgepole, smaller wings sprouting off the main building like tumors. She timed their arrival carefully, so that the scant attendees were already in their pews but just before the service began, so that they could slip into the very back of the sanctuary unseen, would be able to slip out just as easily if Pauline couldn't handle it after all.

She hadn't been inside a church since her wedding, expected that it would be different from what she'd grown up with, that it would be strange. But then an organ wheezed to life to play the introductory notes of a hymn that she recognized, and she was overwhelmed with familiarity, with the feeling that she'd come home. When the minister rose to speak she felt a tightening in her chest, an apprehensiveness that he'd ruin it all, but the message he gave could have been written specifically for her: the father's love heals all wounds. At the end of the service Donna led her to meet

the other congregants, and it baffled her how happy they all were to see her, someone they had never met before in their lives, someone they didn't know and couldn't know because she kept so much of who she was tight at her core, and still they welcomed her like a sister.

It wasn't long before Donna was taking her regularly to Wednesday night prayer meetings. Pauline started going on Sunday mornings as well, to the early service so that she could leave Martin asleep in their bed and come home just as he was ready to start the day. It wasn't much, two outings a week, but it was an improvement and it bled into the rest of her life, and they began to wonder if she might start weaning herself off the pills, might stop seeing the shrink. The anxiety hadn't gone away, exactly, but she had a way of coping, now, when she hadn't before.

If the ritual of reading and praying and singing fed her sanity, then the content fed her mind. So much of church growing up had been repetition, formality, the unquestioning acceptance of what she was told that she hadn't realized that there might be another way of being, a form of Christianity that demanded thought and reason, that had a space for study. It was impossible to go to church with Donna and not think about what she believed, why she believed it, and she realized that when she stopped going to Mass in her second year of college it had not been because she had lost her faith, but that she had never really had a faith to lose. She'd believed in God, and heaven, and hell, yes, but that had been no different from the belief she'd had in the tooth fairy when she was a child. In the quiet moments she realized that she had never stopped believing in God, and heaven, and hell, that what she had stopped believing in before her entire life went to pieces was the Mother Church.

Since the introduction of the Bible she had begun to be, if not her old self again, then at least a functional human being, and Martin began to hope. He'd had aunts, known older ladies, whose whole social lives had revolved around their churches – bake sales and crocheting altar cloths and teaching Sunday school, choir and Bible study and chairing every committee they could ever have need of. He imagined Pauline growing into one of them, and the thought was a pleasant one. It was a woman thing, religion. They needed the community it gave them, the support and the structure. And he wasn't about to mess with the thing that had gotten her to stop spending the day curled in the fetal position on the kitchen floor, gotten them back in bed and all over each other, the way they were before the disasters began. He

was too grateful that he no longer had to wonder, as he put the key in the lock in the evening, if she'd killed herself while he was out for the day.

In July she sat down at the kitchen table, wrote the application for the graduate program yet again, began looking at the classifieds, started picking up work at the school, volunteering herself as guinea pig for psych students' final year projects, life modeling for art classes, typing up doctoral theses. The shrink told her that religion was no replacement for medication, so she downplayed the role that it was playing in her desire to quit the pills, didn't mention that she'd already begun skipping doses, that her obsessive thoughts of death hadn't gone away as she implied, but that she overwhelmed them with words, presented him with a careful imitation of what he wanted to see until he finally conceded that she no longer needed to see him.

Martin prodded test tubes and she read the Bible, and they listened to their neighbors making love and their neighbors' babies crying. They had talked about kids, in the abstract, on and off, always as a maybe, later thing. Maybe one day, maybe when we can afford them. Until the night, a few days after she sent off the application to re-enroll, when Pauline heard in her head, clear as day, "If you don't do it now you never will." It could have been God or her own subconscious, but either way it was probably right. They had wine after dinner, went up to bed early, and when Martin began shuffling through the bedside table for a condom – the shrink had insisted she give up the Pill – and discovered they were out she said, "Let's not bother."

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Would it really be that bad if we got pregnant now?"

"Well..."

"And do you really want to go out and buy more?"

So he didn't and they did, and a few weeks later they were. They found out in September, when everything was starting fresh, and she began to think about how she'd balance baby and school. It was the first good news they'd had in a long time, and they kept it to themselves, though Pauline began going to rummage sales to look for tiny clothes, borrowed pregnancy books from the library.

Martin's almost hope solidified as she began collecting things – rompers and socks and swaddling cloths. He knew perhaps more than she did that having a kid before she was finished would put the kibosh on her continuing school, on her

getting work she enjoyed, on him trying to get more qualifications to possibly improve his lot and prospects, and he didn't care. She was acting more and more like the woman she'd been before her father's death with every day that passed. And it was wonderful, having the secret, the special thing between the two of them.

Until the baby wasn't.

It was a ten-week miscarriage, an easy one and typical enough with a first pregnancy, a young couple. Or at least that's what the nurse in the emergency room told her.

They'd only known that she was pregnant for seven weeks, but that time had been stuffed full of hope and possibility. The nurse tried to explain to her that it hadn't quite been a baby, that it must not have developed properly, that sometimes the body makes mistakes, but Martin pulled the woman out of the hospital room before she got full into it.

He asked the nurse if they could be given the body to bury, and was told that there simply wasn't a body to give them: what would have been their baby in seven more months had weighed less than a quarter of an ounce, was smaller than a kumquat when it slipped out of Pauline's body like an exhale in sleep, without her noticing. He couldn't tell Pauline that. The next day he made a hand-sized coffin out of balsa wood, thought for a while about what he could put in it, then snuck out while she was napping and cycled to Chinatown, argued with fruit vendors until one allowed him to purchase a single kumquat – he could have bought a reasonable quantity, but that would have required him to either eat or throw away the rest, and he didn't think he could bring himself to do that. He took it home and wrapped it in one of the knit baby caps Pauline had horded, nestled it gently in the tiny coffin and tacked the lid on with panel pins before Pauline could see what was inside.

The next day they drove to Roosevelt Island Park in silence, crossed the bridge and wandered through the memorial to a quiet place just off one of the paths, where he carefully dug a hole for the box. Pauline cried quietly, and he comforted himself with the idea that the fruit that she thought was the baby would sprout and grow into a tree, that there would be something on earth to mark the little life that hadn't been.

He worried that the miscarriage would push her over the edge again. She stopped going outside, spent that Christmas wrapped in the blanket from their bed and crying quietly over their lack of baby, over the fact that they weren't giving the

news of another grandchild to her mother as a Christmas present, the way they'd decided they would in September when they were still pregnant. She seemed to think it was her fault, despite all that the nurses had said, that she had eaten the wrong thing or done the wrong thing, or that maybe having been on the Pill before was what had done it. That perhaps she had made her own body into inhospitable ground, where nothing would ever grow to flowering.

He knew that they were hurtling once again to the dark place she had occupied after her father's death on the day in February that she burned the baby clothes that she'd collected in the kitchen sink, set off the smoke alarm and evacuated the block of buildings with their apartment at the middle. He thought for a moment of taking her to a shrink, to a hospital, to get just a little more help than they were getting. But in the final analysis he didn't trust the doctors to handle it right, didn't trust himself to make the right call, and certainly knew that if he screwed up, if they committed her, Pauline would never forgive him. So instead, with the scent of smoke still thick on the neighborhood, he went to talk to Donna. She had worked some miracle before, could she do it again? He explained in full this time – he was desperate enough not to care if she knew, what she thought of them – about the miscarriage and his own accident and how Pauline had been the one to find her father when he died, though he left out the details of how Paul's father had died, because some things weren't spoken of. And Donna promised to try.

She'd been one of the women left milling in the road when the smoke alarm went off, and though everyone else believed Pauline when she said that she'd forgotten a frying pan of oil on the stove and it had smoked, Donna knew better. She began again to invite herself over in the daytime, made coffee and sat at the kitchen table with Pauline, did not push her to talk and listened quietly when she did, and slowly the story came out.

In March the women at the church held a memorial service for her baby, just women, on a Saturday evening, in the children's chapel because it was a more intimate space than the main sanctuary. There were mounds of flowers, and someone brought an embroidered christening dress to represent the lost child, which made Pauline cry the moment she saw it. It didn't matter; most of the women were crying also. She felt like she didn't deserve this kind of fuss, there were people out there with real problems. The woman conducting the service asked her what the baby's name was to have been, so they could commit her to God's protection. They hadn't

gotten that far, they hadn't even known the sex of the baby, but when she opened her mouth to explain, the name 'Rebecca' came out instead.

In September 1978 she began the journalism program for the final time, and part of her felt that maybe it was best that they hadn't had a baby after all. She had school to finish, work to get after, so much to do before she could afford to put her life on hold. By May she was waking up nauseous every morning and late getting out the door because she couldn't stop vomiting. In August she turned in a dissertation that it seemed as if she'd spent less time writing than she had applications and deferral requests for the program, and discovered quite quickly that, degree or no, simply no one would hire a pregnant woman who was already the size of a house. She spent the rest of the pregnancy at home, typing other people's dissertations and doing everything she could to prepare. On January 11th, 1980, the obstetrician dropped Noah on her belly, undersized and blue, and she realized that there was nothing on earth that she could have done to prepare for this.

Pauline didn't remember Noah's birth as such, but rather remembered the edges of it. The discomfort of the final three months, which she never managed to get used to and only got through by telling herself that it was almost over. The desire to strangle the nurses, the doctor, and especially her hyper and excited husband with her bare hands. The unshakable worry that something would go wrong even as she prayed with each contraction that it wouldn't. For a while afterwards she had panic dreams that took her back to the delivery room, her body not remembering so much as experiencing afresh.

They put Noah – hairy and skinny and squinting out of blue eyes in a mashed face, looking more like a half-drowned hairless rat than the Gerber baby, moving in an erratic, jerky way that reminded her of a grub – on her stomach before she realized he was out, took him away and brought him back over and over, as if through the haze of pain and exhaustion and really good drugs she could care about anything that wasn't sleep. Martin held the grub through the flurry of visitors, visitors that wouldn't stop touching her, on her hands and her shoulders and her head but finally not on the baby lump. They wouldn't stop talking at her and waiting for answers that her clouded brain wouldn't provide, that once provided wouldn't roll off her thick tongue, until her mother declared to the room in general, "For the love of Mary, give the girl some space! It's obvious she's dead beat, you can all come

back when she's got some clothes on," then shoved everyone out and – miracle of miracles! – closed the door as she left, leaving Pauline, Martin, and grub, alone.

When Pauline had been allowed to sleep a little, become somewhat more human, her mother slipped back in the recovery room, alone. She held Noah confidently, juggling him and smelling his head like he was a cantaloupe, and Pauline felt warmth towards her mother, towards this soft-edged baby-holding woman who she couldn't recall ever having seen before.

"How did you do it five times?" she asked.

"I didn't. I did it once and I told your dad that that was it, I wasn't going to do it again, no way, no how. Until, whoops! So I did it twice, and that was going to be it. And then I thought, I'd really like a girl, so you weren't so much 'whoops' as 'God works in mysterious ways, honey.' So I had my three, and I was never going to be pregnant again. Gave everything away, the diapers and the bottles and the little bathing tub. A few years went by, and then it wasn't 'woops' so much as 'you have got to be kidding me.' The last time, with Peter, I thought I would kill your father, it was so unexpected that I didn't realize until it was four months along. So you don't do it all at once, it's one at a time. Unless it's twins, but that's not very likely in our family."

This was a woman that she'd never met before, this quiet woman that wasn't constantly proffering advice though for once she actually knew what she was talking about, and Pauline wondered how long it would last, or if the baby, in making her a mother and her own mother a grandmother once again had somehow magically turned the woman into a fundamentally different person through the mystic properties of baby head smell.

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Once Noah was born Martin could admit to himself that the pregnancy that had come before him, the one that had ended with a miscarriage, had been a straight-up emergency. He hadn't been earning enough to feed another mouth, let alone buy diapers, and Pauline hadn't yet been well enough to take care of anyone beside herself, and even in doing that she sometimes struggled. But the miscarriage hadn't felt like the minor miracle that he knew it to be. Something in him had ached to name the child, to hold it and care for it and watch it grow, and though he held it together

for Pauline in private moments he had cried, just a little, for the first child who he would never get to hold, get to know. It had sparked something in him: the longing for children, despite all the reasons not to have them, the longing to be a father, not the way his father was, but the way Paul's father had been. He made funny faces at babies he met in public, and gushed sometimes to their mothers about how cute they were, and when one smiled at him, toothless and absent-eyed, it felt like his heart was breaking.

When Pauline got pregnant with Noah he had increased his watchfulness, redoubled his attention, only this time it was a pleasant thing, fretting constantly over her, reminding her to eat and to rest and to read the baby books. He tried to take her to church more often, encouraged her to spend long afternoons chatting with Donna, anything that he could trust to keep the darkness at bay, because he didn't dare think about how it might play out should she sink back again now, or worse, just after the baby was born. That this baby might not be born he did not even consider. It was a thought that could not be entertained, as though to think it would be to make it so, the possibility that this pregnancy might end in the same way as the previous one had, in blood and sorrow.

And when Noah was born the nurses had to all but bribe Martin to give him up – the firm warm weight, the squashed face, the wide-open vague blue eyes. He fitted perfectly into Martin's arms, and Martin wanted to hold him forever, had the unexpected, frankly frightening urge to bite the nurse that took him away to be weighed and measured. The hospital discharged them after Noah plumped up a bit, and they took him home, uncertain of the wisdom of such action. His mother-in-law had been to their house while Pauline was stuck in the hospital bed, along with two of Pauline's sisters-in-law and a cousin, so the apartment was disturbingly clean when they walked in, the fridge and cupboards stocked with pre-made dinners and the kind of treats you only found in New York. They placed the bundled infant in the middle of the couch and sat down at either end. They looked at him. He looked through them in the unsettling way that new babies do.

"We appear to be in possession of a small human," Martin observed.

"What do we do with it?"

Noah answered the question for them by scrunching his face, giving a quiet, preliminary fuss that struck heretofore unknown terror in their hearts, opening his

toothless mouth and letting out a wail that could only have been justified had something large and carnivorous sunk its teeth into his haunch moments previous.

That was the last quiet moment they had for a while. If she had gotten enough sleep to have feelings, Pauline would have resented Noah, for his constant screaming and nursing and needing her. Instead she resented Martin, the fact that, even though he did everything he possibly could there were still things that he couldn't do, that he got to leave the house and go somewhere clean and quiet and full of adults while she was stuck at home. And she hated herself for hating him because he was doing the absolute best that he could, because he was so patient and kind no matter how little sleep he got, which made her hate him even more. Her womb ached and her stitches stung and the whole of her felt as if it had been pressed flat with a steam roller then blown back into shape, only not quite the right shape. The way Noah stared, eyes still blue and unfocused, unnerved her, and though he was warm and soft and nice to hold like a kitten, she didn't have the same overwhelming urge to hold him that she got when someone handed her a kitten.

They had made a mistake. She for having a baby, the hospital for letting her take him home, Martin for leaving him with her every day as if she knew what the hell she was doing. She wasn't mother material, she never could be mother material, she never should have been allowed to take the baby past the door of her hospital room. Even so, she managed to keep him clean and warm and fed, held him and entertained him when he wasn't asleep, and hated herself because she resented him, this demanding little monster that had hijacked her life.

All of Pauline's discomfort with the wiggling wad of baby was counterbalanced by Martin's unexpected ease: he'd never held a baby before, never really seen a newborn up close, and for him instinct kicked in, in spades, while his wife was left feeling anxious and somewhat cheated. Martin, it was clear, was meant to have children. He had the energy for late nights, the stamina when Noah wanted to be walked hour after hour, rushed home at the end of the workday to see what new thing their little blob of recombined genetic material had done while he was gone. His vague desire for peaceful house, happy wife, secure job, had morphed since first he dreamed it. Now it was a desire for family, for people to take care of.

Noah fattened up quickly, started looking like the kind of baby pictured on formula cans, his eyes focused and darkened a bit, the black hair fell out and was replaced with finer, lighter hair. Then came a day when he was on his back on the

grass in the park down the road from their apartment, batting at a mobile, naked except for his diaper. Pauline reached out, flicked at a spinning mirror over his face, but instead of looking at the mirror he looked at her, and his face broke into a smile, legs and arms flailing jerkily like a turtle on its back. And her heart melted.

Chapter 4

His first memories were of his mother, when she was all his own: piggybacked everywhere, bounced and read to and played with and walked. His world was full of her face, her laugh, her hands reaching for his, the bulk and warmth of her when he climbed out of his cot in the corner of his parents' bedroom and dive-bombed their bed while they slept. She was young, springy as willow, the kind of mother that took him shopping late at night when Dad was working overtime and ran down the empty aisles of the grocery store while he sat in the basket of the cart like a lion in a zoo, looking out through the bars as they gained speed and she let go to make him laugh.

His image of her was of her legs, from the knees down: he clicked together Duplo under the kitchen table while she cooked, sat next to her chair at Bible studies and in church, and when they were at home he kept whatever he was playing with on one of his dad's handkerchiefs, so he could bundle it up and follow her from room to room; occasionally she stepped on him.

She was the one that brought him music; in the car there were tapes, and at home on rainy days they put records on the turntable and danced in the living room until his side pinched and he fell down, at church meetings she stood him on her chair so they could sing loudly together. His father's music was different, when he was home, when he played it, quiet and sad with lots of guitar; his mother's was bright and ringing and usually about Jesus. He learned Bible verses that way, sung them with her until they burned themselves into his memory, became part of the background of his thoughts as he fell asleep at night.

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Martin had comforted her with the idea that she could find a job once Noah got old enough for daycare, preschool, first grade, but even before their moment in the park, when he looked at her and saw her for the first time, she knew that that dream was over, at least for the foreseeable future. And the closer he got to being old enough for school of any kind, the less inclined she was to put him in school, to take part in the great American rite of passage that was a public education.

Timing was paramount. A different decade, earlier or later, and she would have bunged him into public school with barely a second thought. But the year that Noah was born was the same year that *Michelle Remembers,* the first-hand account of a victim of satanic ritual abuse recalled under hypnosis, hit the shelves, and even though Pauline didn't read it – she'd sworn off upsetting books, tried to avoid anything that might push her back in the direction of her previous downward trajectory – her neighbors, who still visited for coffee and communal baby bouncing, ensured that she didn't remain ignorant of its essential premise.

One somewhat sensational account she could have ignored, but in 1983, when Noah was still more than a year too young for school, the teachers of the McMartin Preschool in Los Angeles were accused of subjecting their students to satanic ritual abuse. That was when she began to take notice. Pauline propped her newspapers and magazines up against the coffee pot so that she could read while she fed Noah, borrowed and sent away for even more papers and newsletters to read when she finished with those that she had, followed the stories and sought out commentary on them. And she wasn't the only mother to do so. It would come to be referred to as a panic, the Satanic Panic, which was honestly a better name for a metal band than for the niggling worry she and every mother she knew had about what might happen to their children. It seemed that she was suddenly surrounded by stories about what people did to children, what people that everyone had thought were safe did to children, until the very idea of sending Noah to kindergarten made the anxiety rise like bile in her throat.

So when the lawsuits between Christian families and the public schools began over what students would be taught, whether school as it tended to be run pushed children to reject their parents' beliefs, whether it should be allowed to do so, Pauline was already all but convinced that there was no way on earth that she was going to send her son into that environment. Toddler on hip and determination aroused, she searched the newspapers, newsletters, magazines, spoke to people and was directed on to other people, trying to discover what she had to do to keep her son at home, to be allowed to teach him herself, to keep him away from those who would do him harm.

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It happened like her mother had said it would. One night the condom split – she never had gotten back on the Pill, was superstitious about it after the miscarriage – and a month later she couldn't keep food down and everything smelled too powerful, reeking of humanity and decay. Even the smell of Martin, the salt of his skin and the bitter-sour note of his sweat, which had always aroused her, turned her stomach. And she found out quickly that Noah had been the easy pregnancy. The morning sickness didn't go away until six months in, and it wasn't just morning sickness but all the time sickness that left her wrung out and dehydrated, and when it finally stopped her blood pressure began to spike. Her obstetrician put her on bed rest the same weekend they moved from their apartment to a one-story brick house on Quintana Street in Arlington, the kind of single-family home with a back yard and front porch in a quiet, tree-lined neighborhood that Martin had imagined living in when he bought the ring for Denise. Pauline was reluctant to give up their apartment, the friends she had made and the ability to walk most of the places that she needed to get to, but if they'd renewed their lease both of the kids would have had to sleep in the walk-in closet that just fit Noah's toddler bed, which he was nearly too tall for. Besides, the rent was cheaper, and the house was within walking distance of a park, and a fifteen-minute cycle from the Ballston metro station, which let him catch the Orange Line to the public health lab rather than fighting traffic crossing the Roosevelt Bridge every morning, which he did despite still having flashbacks to his accident whenever a car bumper came too close.

Pauline's family descended: under the direction of her mother, the sisters-in-law shuffled the contents of the apartment into boxes so that her brothers could move them. Pauline herself came last, with Donna and a blood pressure cuff accompanying her merrily every step; the doctor had made it quite clear that under no circumstances should she lift, move, stress, or do anything that might risk hers or the baby's health. She lay in state on the sofa while her mother oversaw the unpacking: hers and Martin's things into the master bedroom which ran along the front of the house and had its own bathroom; Noah's toys into the one of the two other bedrooms that his uncle Peter had painted a creamsicle orange at his request; the rest into the open-plan living room and kitchen, over which her mother gushed as she sorted mixing bowls by size and alphabetized the spices.

"You can watch the babies while you're cooking, it's just perfect for you!"

Donna left her the blood pressure cuff, and in the final few months before the baby came she played a weird little game with it. Noah would call, and she'd get up slowly, get him food, or a drink, or whatever he needed, then lay back down with the cuff and a watch, so she calculated exactly how much she could do without putting them at risk. Donna came to sit with her sometimes, and her mother appeared to take care of housekeeping and bathe Noah – those visits made her blood pressure rise highest of all, she'd checked – but otherwise she was alone, except for Noah and the books that Martin piled on her nightstand.

That was the pleasant part of her uncomfortable second pregnancy, all of the reading that she did, because there was literally nothing else that she could do. Noah would curl up next to her with his board books and make up stories to go along with the pictures while she returned to the books she'd been hanging onto since the first pregnancy, waiting for a chance to read them. She devoured the history of the Salem witch trials and a volume on herbal healing at once, moved on to read about mental asylums, eugenics, pollution, public education. And she followed current events, when Martin remembered to bring her the paper, when the newsletters she'd signed up for came in through the mail slot and Noah could be convinced to brave the monsters hiding in the shadows to go and retrieve them: news on the progression of the McMartin trial and the accusation of teachers, parents, and trusted people of similar unspeakable deeds; what countries Christians were being killed in now and under what pretenses; how Christians closer to home, Protestants and Catholics and sects which aligned with neither, were having their children taken away from them, how the End Times had indeed arrived. She felt like she'd been starving for months, ever since she'd finished school and her life had been taken over by the task of keeping Noah alive, and was finally being allowed to gorge.

As she went she took notes on her reading as if she were going to write her own articles, dissected the magazines and newsletters in the way she had been taught. She marked the leaps in logic and the fuzzy language, highlighted the main points, noted down the fallacies and unsubstantiated claims, then wrote herself neat summaries and stapled them to the finished pieces. When she looked over the results of all of this thinking she felt bad, just a little. For the most part, these weren't academics or investigative journalists, but regular people who felt strongly about something, who were driven by love for God and general conviction to get the word out about the persecution and injustice that the mainstream media was too biased to

get involved in uncovering. She didn't feel right, skewering their work as harshly as she was doing. She shouldn't criticize people who were, after all, on her own side.

*

In the months after his mother got big but before his sister showed up, women at church said to Noah in bright, fake voices that a new baby would mean that he would have to go to Sunday School like a big boy, but he knew that they were wrong; his mother had already told him that they would both be able to stay in the sanctuary, that she wasn't letting them out of her sight. It seemed that adults were often confused, often wrong about how the world worked. His mother had told him to just smile and nod when that happened: when the cashier at the grocery store asked if he was excited to be starting school, when the librarian asked if he was going trick-or-treating for Halloween, whenever anyone mentioned cartoons.

He wasn't allowed to watch cartoons; they read books instead. Though there were times when his mother would open a book and begin to read to him, then stop with a funny look on her face, put it down and choose something else to read, and later the first book would be missing from the shelf beside his bed. They'd been reading King Arthur for weeks when Morgan le Fey was introduced. His mother's mouth had pressed thin, and the next day he couldn't find Arthur anywhere, so he never got to find out who or what Morgan le Fay was. His mother had explained at the beginning that the book called Merlin a wizard because that was the only word that the writer had for it, but that Merlin was really sent by God to help Arthur gain his throne as the rightful king; they didn't read books with wizards in them because wizards were evil, they did magic and called up demons. So he supposed that there had been too much wizard in it after all.

When she was able to leave the house again, after his sister was born, it started happening in the car, as well: his mother would turn on the radio, say, "This song came out when I was in high school!" nod her head along for a little bit only to start, abruptly switch it off. Eventually she stopped switching the radio on in the first place, and instead played praise music through the battered tape deck. Noah didn't mind; she played the songs that were sung at church, so he could sing along with her as they ran errands.

By the time he was old enough for the Bible verse challenge at Sunday School – he still stayed in the sanctuary during the service, but Dad took him to recite to the teacher of his age group so that he could get the candy and have his name put up on the bulletin board – he knew over fifty verses, even if he had to sing them to remember all of the words, but he couldn't say where Puff, the magic dragon lived, or what happened after 'ashes, ashes.'

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As Pauline read her pamphlets and newsletters Noah gave her hi-lighter tattoos or snuggled up to her with his board books, and baby number two floated beatifically in her midsection. She was enjoying it too much to admit that she was incredibly, viscerally uncomfortable. She had denied herself so much since Noah's birth that she'd all but stopped listening to her body, the pull of sleep and the warning bells of pain. It was to be commanded, not to command, and so when it began to let her know that something was wrong she ignored it.

Martin noticed how high her blood pressure had gotten one Saturday morning, while he was idly playing with the cuff as they cuddled, Noah sandwiched between them, no one quite awake enough or hungry enough to initiate the search for breakfast.

"Have you been reading bodice rippers, by any chance?" he asked.

"Not since we got married," she answered without opening her eyes. "Why do you ask?" She felt like shit, assumed it was because she needed food, because she hadn't slept well, because of all of the ways that having a baby inside you disrupted the everyday processes of the body.

"According to this you're either being ravished by three disinherited noble sons and a muscle-bound highlander, or you've been on the phone to your mother. Which is it?"

She grabbed the cuff from him, pumped it up, watched the dial. Her eyesight was fuzzed to vagueness, but even so she could make out the jumping needle well enough to know that he was right.

"Could I have broken it, maybe?" he asked.

"No. I don't think so. Maybe we should call the doctor?"

"Will he be in on a weekend?"

"Call Donna, she'll know if it's worth worrying about."

She had assumed that the headaches were from all the reading that she'd been doing, the nausea and swelling of her hands and feet normal. That what she felt was due to the pregnancy, no exercise, no coffee, bad sleep and acid reflux. They went to the walk-in clinic but wound up at the hospital, waiting for an OB to show up because the duty nurses couldn't arrive at a consensus. There was protein in her urine, and spots skating across her field of vision, and when they asked she realized that, yes, the baby had been less active recently, but she had assumed that that was because she herself had been less active, because there was less space for the baby to tumble around in. They kept taking her blood pressure, kept asking for urine samples. Then a nurse brought her a cup of juice on a tray, and she reached for the cup and missed, and they realized that she couldn't see any more.

She heard the obstetrician, a giant of a man from southern India, tell her that they were going to induce. Then there were IVs, she felt the needles sliding into her skin, and someone with cold hands moved her onto her side for the epidural, someone who sounded like Martin – but couldn't be Martin because Martin never got that panicked note in his voice not even when they'd told him that he had lung cancer – touched her forehead and told her that he was right there.

Afterwards he told her that it was a long labor for a second child. Her body hadn't wanted to give up the baby, and they'd had to keep giving her Pitocin to keep the contractions going. There had been talk about an emergency C-section, but the baby had been stable and her blood pressure, though worryingly high, had leveled out at not quite high enough to send her into convulsions, and while they were weighing the pros and cons of cutting her open the baby had decided to come. Even then it had been slow, and they'd gotten out forceps, then a vacuum pump when Pauline's blood pressure began to climb once again, dragged the runt into the sunlight and hustled her into an incubator, put her on oxygen. Maranatha was tiny and purplish, but aside from a little worry about her lungs, she seemed all right.

If it weren't for the ache in her breasts, the pain in all the places that Martin had made her love so much, she could have imagined that she was in the hospital for some other reason. A woman's health advocate came and helped her pump her breasts empty, and even though she hurt the way she had when Noah had been born this time the pain was duller, more far away.

They brought her the baby on the third day, let her hold it – skinny and red, and hairless, her skull misshapen from the extraction, skin peeling, cry more like a mewl. And Pauline adored her from the first moment: unlike with Noah, this baby had no association with the birth, with the blindness and the pain and all the stitches holding her together, with the transfusions they'd been giving her when she'd first woken up. This baby was a door prize for being in the hospital, and this baby was perfect.

They stayed in the hospital a week, both of them under observation. Pauline would have been allowed out earlier but she'd managed to burst her stitches, needed to be sewn up again. Noah had stayed with her mother through the debacle, and women from church brought them food for months after, so it wasn't until Maranatha had begun to hold her head up and reach for things that Pauline realized the horror of having a newborn and a four-year-old around the house at the same time.

She began teaching Noah to read with the baby strapped to her chest, decided that the important part was getting through it all in one piece and moved lessons to her and Martin's bed. The wreck that the house had become while she was on bed rest solidified, and when she paused in her daily doings she could feel the weight of clutter, of dust, like the presence of someone standing behind her.

Noah had been a mostly quiet, mostly healthy baby, as babies normally went. Maranatha was not. She always had cold, or colic, or fever; she screamed if she wasn't being held. It was a rough transition from the low-key time of being pregnant, from the long days curled up in bed next to Noah. No one was helping any more. The books that she hadn't finished sat on her nightstand, growing overdue fines, and then were brought back to the library unread. Her newsletters piled up on the table in the entryway where the mail was put when it came in, then migrated to a basket in the bedroom for when she had time for them. The ones that she had read and marked up to look into later were eventually thrown away; she didn't have time to investigate what the writers had said, she would have to take what they said on faith, that they were honest Christians writing as well and as truthfully as they could.

When the baby got big enough to be taken outside – a few weeks after all of the baby books said that her immune system had developed to the point that she wouldn't catch plague from anyone that sneezed within fifteen feet of her, a few weeks before all of the older women they ran into stopped giving them dirty looks for taking a baby so tiny into the outside world where just breathing the air would

doubtless give her plague – they began looking for a church. As much as she loved the church that Donna had introduced her to, Pauline couldn't handle a thirty minute drive every Sunday morning, not with a baby that screamed whenever she was put into her car seat and a toddler that sympathy cried because, as he put it, 'She's so upset! Something's gotta be wrong!' She'd savored the time on bed rest, but now that it was over she was desperate for anything that would get her out of the house, let her spend time with other women again, that would feed her soul.

Martin understood, brought the classified page, the phone book, and a local map back to bed with him when he got up to make them coffee on the Saturday morning before her proposed first foray back into the world. As they sipped he read out the advertisements in the paper and the names in the phonebook and she marked them on the map, categorized them by sect and made a list of service times, starred the ones that sounded especially interesting, particularly welcoming.

The idea of having to find a church again made her nervous, so Martin began to joke. A Catholic church was obviously off the menu; she'd stopped going after they were married and didn't intend to ever set foot in one again. Episcopal was just Diet Catholic, the same boring rituals with less Mary worship, though they might give it a chance. Methodists were all old people, and as ritualistic as the Episcopalians; Presbyterians were nearly as bad, and they all reminded Martin of his parents. Baptists didn't drink. Calvinists believed in predestination, as did the Jehovah's Witnesses, but the Jehovah's Witnesses were already off the list because they were a cult, and double ditto for the Mormons. Mennonites wore coffee filters on their heads, and they treated women like the 70s hadn't happened. That left either Pentecostal, which also had coffee filters depending on the flavor, and could skew ultra conservative or more egalitarian, the way Donna's church did, or a non-denominational church, which could turn out to be relaxed or cult-like, but either way you had to stay on your toes.

She laughed, pointed out that for all of her education she wasn't exactly living the life of a liberated woman herself. Perhaps each branch of the church had its problems, but she wasn't in a position to point fingers or throw stones. She needed a community if she was going to keep her sanity, and she'd been told that the more conservative churches were where she was most likely to meet other mothers who taught their children at home.

Part of her missed the solemnity, the veneration and adoration that threaded through the Catholic liturgy, the ritual and respect, so she opted for 'Diet Catholic' that first Sunday, put on makeup for the first time in months while Martin wrestled the kids into clean clothes. Her heart thudded anxiously in her chest as they walked into the dim building, and she led them into the very last pew – to make leaving easy if Maranatha began screaming, she told herself, but really because she was scared, because she hadn't left her house in God knew how long and she couldn't take the newness, the people, the feeling of scrutiny as she shifted in her seat, shifted the baby's weight and checked that her bib was securely fastened.

They all stood as the rector entered and the service began, and she was comforted by the familiarity. It was just one service, just to knock the newness off of leaving the house, it wasn't as if she was going to join an Episcopal church – and then the young rector stood up to deliver the homily and instead of the ten minutes of pointlessness she had expected, gave a message that she wouldn't have been surprised to hear at the church that she missed, the church where they had let her cry for her first lost baby.

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It was coming, or Noah was drawing nearer to it, breath held. The weekly moment of private ecstasy, anticipation sharpened and focused by the slowness with which they marched towards it.

May the Lord be with you.

He inhabited that moment, that taut silence in which hundreds drew breath.

And also with you.

Every part of him tingled with the perfect unison that rose, unprompted, from below and beside and all around him. It felt as though he were being obliterated by it, become clear, perfect sound.

The breath.

Lift up your hearts.

The sound was in his bones, his lungs, changing the beat of his plum-sized heart. No accompaniment, just the clean, pure voices, pressing against the smooth whiteness of the vaulted ceiling, the candy-colored windows, controlled and measured so that the silences held more weight than the words.

We lift them up to the Lord.

The fullness of the response drowned him, blinded him for a moment, so that all he saw was overwhelming light.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

He wanted that voice, that sound, to last forever, the strong tenor to vibrate through his backbone for the rest of his life.

It is right to give him thanks and praise.

And the moment was gone; the rector continued chanting the Eucharistic prayer at too quick a pace for him to follow the words, the responses over. As the organ hummed into life for the Communion hymn he fidgeted against his father's legs, conscious again of the tightness of his shirt collar, cuffs, belt, the stiffness of his black Sunday shoes, the fold of sock caught under his toes. A large hand rested lightly on his head, and he held still for a moment, two moments. Below, people had begun filing up, kneeling, taking the wafer and the wine. Sometimes he rode down on his father's shoulders, was allowed to kneel beside him, dip a wafer like a white feather in the golden cup a robed woman held down low; the woman smelled like face powder. Mom wasn't too happy about him taking Communion when he wasn't old enough to understand what it meant, but he did understand, and the Rector had said it was ok. Communion had a dark purple taste, even though the wine was a clear golden, thick and musky in his mouth and tingling the edges of his tongue. He tried to make it last as long as he could.

He could see the bronze cloud of his mother's hair as she stood up, walked up the center aisle below him. Today they weren't going down for Communion. His sister was fussy. Dad had taken both of them to the choir loft where they wouldn't bother anyone, and she'd fallen asleep belly-down, slung along his corded brown forearm like a football, her legs, like chicken drumsticks in her pink sleeper, twitching every now and again.

"Hang on, little buddy. It's almost over." He felt more than heard Dad whisper to him. Dad's voice was as clear as the Rector's, and perhaps stronger, though that impression might have been because he always stood so close. He leaned back into his father's legs, and the free arm snaked around him, hefting him up, bouncing him in midair to change grip, then setting him to rest gently on the sill of the recessed window above their seat at the end of the pew. There was no choir for early service, so they had the entire loft to themselves: father, son, and sleeping baby.

Noah resettled himself on the deep sill, leaned his forehead against the thick, watery glass of the round window, watched pigeons chasing each other across the blue slate of the roof. If he closed his eyes, he could bring that moment back, half-strength like watered down hot chocolate. The ecstasy of the voices. Better than hymns, better than instruments. He had no words for the sound, the way it reverberated inside him, the way it made him feel as though in the same moment he had both ceased to exist and only then come into being. He curled up in the window, folded the sound of the final hymn around himself like his winter quilt, and promised that he would never forget this.

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Martin felt guilty – that he had made her move while she was pregnant, that the child he'd put inside her had almost killed her, that she was trapped in the house day in and day out with two small kids and no friends or family nearby. So every Sunday morning he rolled Noah into a pair of trousers and the baby into something frilly enough to make her girlness apparent, bundled them into car seats with a bag crammed full of diapers and snacks and changes of clothes between them while Pauline threw food for lunch into the slow cooker. They went first to the early morning sung Eucharist service at the Episcopal church, because they both felt at home with the simple beauty of the traditional liturgy, because the Rector preached about peace and love and acceptance and banned political talk during the coffee hour. Then they went to the ten-thirty family service at the Assembly of God, because it was more modern, the music more upbeat, the preaching often tied into current events. Then back home for a quiet lunch, playing with the kids, walks and naps and the peaceful sorts of Sunday activities that his grandparents had engaged in when he was young, before they went back out again to one church or the other depending on who was speaking that evening and what they had to say.

When Noah was a baby Martin had stayed home with him on Sunday mornings so that Pauline could go to church alone, but after the move and the advent of a second child he started going with her, and found to his surprise that it helped him as well. He'd grown up going to the local Methodist church with his grandmother, his hair wet down and combed back, collar buttoned all the way and with a real tie, expected to pay strict attention during the sermon and tasked with

serving coffee to the old ladies in the fellowship hall afterwards, so the familiarity was a comfort to him in a way that he hadn't expected, the music and the preaching and all the Bible verses that he'd once known by heart.

It was his fault, he knew, that her professional life had been cut short, his fault that she was stuck at home with two kids under ten and a washing machine that sometimes stopped mid-cycle and bled soapy water across the floor, that she wasn't using her degree to do something that made her eyes light up when she talked about it – as much as lab tech wasn't what he had imagined that he'd be doing, he liked it far better, he knew, than he would have liked reading the same favorite board book over and over while trying to keep the house running. She needed more friends, needed more time with people who were over two feet tall, but making her take that time was difficult. She had always been competitive, from the time that she had battered opposition and teammates alike on the hockey field; she had been friendly but hadn't retained many friends, and those few that could possibly be ranked so were far away, were only letters that arrived, inky and bulging in the mailbox every few weeks, to be replied to in bursts when naptimes coincided.

He was glad when she started going to the women's groups run by both the churches they went to, when she joined the Wednesday afternoon Bible Study at a local Baptist church – though the latter of which was less for the content than for the fact that it was peopled with other women reluctant to be parted from their children, who didn't sniff and make comments when Maranatha fussed or Noah clung to her knees. At night she told him about the Bible study, how a lot of the women baked their own bread, made their own clothes and had six, seven, some times a dozen children, like the old Catholic families. The leader of the study wouldn't let them talk about miracles, because God didn't perform miracles any more, and if the children of a woman from another denomination were ill behaved, if the woman and her husband didn't get along, she'd sniff a little and mutter, "Drink!" as if a glass of wine with dinner was the root cause of all discord. If they happened to be having wine with dinner Pauline made sure to lift a glass to the woman, usually with Maranatha on her lap, sucking and looking out at the room, so that the alcohol would cycle through by the next feeding.

"Pauline, you have problems with authority," Martin told her.

"I grew up Catholic, went to parochial school, and had my mother looming over me waiting for me to screw things up my entire life. Of course I have problems with authority."

Even after he began going regularly, Martin's role at church was predominantly supportive. When Maranatha started fussing during the service he smuggled her out of the sanctuary so Pauline could stay and listen, chatted to the mothers who also bounced fussing toddlers and infants in the entryway. Soon he knew them by name, and enjoyed running into them during the service, passing their kids back and forth and talking about habits and schedules and developmental stages and wished, some times, that he was the one at home all day with Noah and Maranatha, the latter of whom was moving quickly from the inert, cuddly stage to the inquisitive, entertaining stage.

Even so, he didn't find much friendship at the church, *per se*. The men were much like the men he knew elsewhere, and he lacked the interests that would have allowed them to bond. The women were welcoming, but difficult to get to know outside of their mutual baby comforting sessions, since so many of the church events were either gender segregated, or too goal-oriented to really offer the chance to get to know people. That gave him pause, the division along gender lines. And it wasn't the only thing. It seemed to be understood by the group as a whole that men and women couldn't have friendships, that inevitably things would turn sexual, and so people of the opposite sex must be careful, should not allow themselves to get too close lest they be tempted to sin. He ignored this, mostly because it couldn't strictly be said to apply to him – he didn't quite have friends of either gender, was so far out of practice with the concept that he wasn't sure how 'having friends' worked, aside from outdated playground etiquette only half-remembered. But Pauline seemed to make friends, and he encouraged her to see them, to go out with them, to build the net of people who would be there to catch her if she fell, who could watch for the warning signs with him.

There were other little things that got to him – headship of husbands and the submission of wives, the repeated insistence that women attend to their modesty lest they tempt the men around them to sin, the reasons that were given for why women weren't allowed to preach. The boundaries of gender were scribed across every aspect of life, boxing each of them in to what they could and could not do. He couldn't say that it wasn't in the Bible – but then, so were the directives for taking

concubines and wives from the women who had been captured in war, instructions on when and how someone should be stoned to death, and it seemed pretty safe to say that everyone ignored those with no negative consequences.

Still, a lot of it struck him as good, or at least well-intentioned, and he tried to take the preaching to heart, to match that which was prescribed for a Godly husband, and Godly father. There were couples in the congregation – he knew because Pauline told him, and Pauline knew because they talked about it in the women's group – that practiced true headship, where the husband made all the decisions and guided and directed the family, and reportedly this led to peace, tranquility, and perfectly clean kitchens. He didn't want to say what his honest thoughts were on this idea. Pauline was just as, probably even more, competent than he; he would never dream of treating her like a six-year-old who needed to be told to do her chores every day of the week. And her fear, the darkness – which they had begun referring to as her illness, so they wouldn't have to explain her distress, the days when she wouldn't leave the house, to people who could not understand – meant that he had found himself in charge of life by default more often than he wanted to, expected that he would find himself there again before long. Being the only functioning adult in a situation was exhausting; when it happened he longed for the day when she would rise up again and they would make choices, plan plans together. So he feared more than a little that the next time she fell she wouldn't rise, that she was being taught that her standing up, taking charge, thinking, was rebellion against the model that God had put in place.

Their church association made making friends outside its own circle more difficult as well, though that didn't come entirely without perks. One of the other techs invited him to a Super Bowl party around the time that Maranatha had begun pulling herself up on furniture to wobble on her feet, and Martin declined – thankfully – with the excuse that they would be at Church for most of the day.

"Missing one day won't get you sent to the bad place."

"Probably not, but it really gives Paul a boost. Sometimes I think it's the only thing that gets her through a week."

"So send her to church and come yourself."

"Can't, I take care of the baby."

"Man, has she got your nuts in a jar or something?"

Martin grinned, went back to numbering slides.

"Hey man, you gotta clear something up for me. You work in a lab right? A lab where we literally watch evolution in action, that's the only reason you and I have a job. So, do you really believe this whole 'everything created in seven days' shit?"

"I don't really think about it, to be honest."

"Come on, you have to have. You're watching bacteria make adaptations and evolve practically before your eyes, and then you go listen to some headcase talk about this imaginary friend of his that lives in the sky and zaps people with lightning bolts for thinking naughty thoughts. What do you believe?"

"I believe in doing whatever I have to do to feed my kids and keep my wife happy. Now if you'd excuse me, I keep miscounting, and it looks like your sample has just about evolved far enough to escape the dish."

He was, afterwards, proud of having stood up for himself. The fellow in question was a blowhard and a bully that Martin avoided more so than his other coworkers: there were fewer sadists in a microbiology lab than in a cancer lab, or at least they were harder to spot, given the relative difficulty of beheading a bacterium as opposed to a mouse. The conversation gained him the reputation of a religious nut, and earned him a quiet chat with his manager about how he wasn't a saboteur working for either PETA or the fundies. It wasn't until Martin mentioned religious discrimination that the subject was dropped, but after that the other techs seemed less friendly. Not that this bothered him too much. He had other things to think about, and one of those things simply wasn't how to reconcile his work with his church attendance. He was on one hand easier with not knowing, not over-interrogating things. In the lab he operated under one set of rules and assumptions, at home another, just like he was different when being a father as to when he was being a husband, or trying to be one of the guys.

It was harder, oddly enough, to explain their sudden interest in church to his family than to his work colleagues. His parents simply couldn't understand it, while Wally's wife – a bottle blonde Junior League member who had refused to invite any of the Freeman side to the wedding – thought it smacked of working class. In much the way Pauline had when explaining him to her mother, he focused on the similarities and tried to be polite when his mother sent him clippings of articles about churches being fronts for pyramid schemes, about ministers running off with their parishioner's wives, all the collection money, or both. When it could no longer be

kept secret that Pauline had decided to school the kids at home these were followed by clippings on the dangers of homeschooling and well-meaning lectures on how it was best to leave education to the professionals. Pauline countered by sending articles back about public school child prostitution rings and daycares being used as fronts for Satanists to get children to use in their rituals, and Martin stepped in and intercepted all correspondence so that both women could think that they had won. Pauline's family was somewhat easier to deal with, if only because they were more used to dealing with them. Her mother was simply happy that she was going to church again, while two of her brothers said that she might as well be a Satanist if she wasn't going back to the arms of the Mother Church, and the other two continued to generally not care, though they were the least receptive to their sister's lectures on topics religious, especially when they touched on the demonic realm. Her fascination with the unseen world had been sparked off while she was pregnant with Mara, from all the reading she'd done about angels and demons and modern-day miracles, and Pauline didn't always recognize the baiting in her brother's questions, in their invitations for her to tell them about demon possession and the manifestation of evil spirits. For his part, Martin wasn't so certain where he stood – he knew that these were the topics of discussion, more often than not, at the Bible studies and women's meetings Pauline went to while he was at work, and he had heard people pray in tongues, watched them be knocked to the ground by the power of the Holy Spirit, seen people who had come into the church limping stand up and run, people with lost hearing say they could hear. But questioning it all wasn't a priority. He worked and cared for the kids and slept little and had even less time to think, so when there was a spare moment he went with what Pauline needed, because he was just too tired to interrogate, to question, and too worried about what could happen if she were upset, if her support was found to be built on shaky ground.

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They were staying late at church one Sunday, at one of the new churches they'd started going to once his sister had been born, the one where people raised their hands in the air and prayed in languages no one but God understood. His parents were talking to friends, standing around in the dim and empty sanctuary and Noah was hungry. He was wandering up and down the pews, looking for food that

someone might have left and glancing up now and again to make sure that his parents hadn't gone home without him. There was an older girl up on the stage, the daughter of the people his parents were talking to; at that point he was still young enough that he didn't realize that she was closer to him in age than she was to his parents, in his mind they were all just grownups. She was at the piano, playing slowly and softly with all of her fingers at once the chorus that had gone with Communion earlier that morning. He stood beside her and watched her hands, the certainty of their movement on the keys, then rose up on his toes to watch the hammers dance up and down on the throbbing strings.

"Come here," she said, and he thought about running away but she babysat him sometimes, so he knew she was ok, and might have gummy worms. She took his right thumb and placed it on a white key that was exactly like every other white key.

"That's middle C. Do you know 'Joyful, Joyful?'"

He nodded.

"Mom and me sing it in the car," he said.

"It starts here."

She pushed down his middle finger and the piano sounded a clear, firm E. She led his fingers back and forth, told him to hum along with it and picked out the lowermost note herself because he couldn't get it unless he took his thumb off of the all-important middle C. They went over and over it, slowly, doing each phrase on its own, until he could plink out the whole thing with his right hand anchored by the thumb on the C.

Each tone reverberated deep in his bones. Noah the boy didn't exist, he was the music. The world was gone and all he could feel was the light pressure of the keys against his fingertips, the gentle sliding as he pressed them, the throb of the clean, clear, deep red notes. He stopped, and realized that his parents weren't talking any more, that they were standing at the edge of the stage, watching him and the babysitter.

"Jessie, do you teach at all?"

"Sometimes," she said. "Mostly older than Noah, but Noah's very well behaved."

They started the next week, again with middle C, and no songs at first – just up and down, all ten fingers, and exercises that wove in and out, to teach him to control his hands, to make them do what he wanted. He had to practice at Gramma's

house – the lace tablecloth and potted plants were taken off the upright and it was tuned, and he was allowed to touch it for the first time. It didn't matter that Jessie hadn't taught him any real songs yet, he got lost in the scales, in the even tone of note after note after note, feeling each one in his blood, a burst of rich, pure light.

He was practicing on the day that his mom and Gramma had a fight. They argued a lot, in thin, hoarse voices that were different from how they usually talked, and the tension in the air made him sick-nervous when they did, so at first he tried to sink back into the music – he was on Three Blind Mice and Hot Crossed Buns by then – but he heard his name, set his hands to running scales, up down up down in out, by themselves, quietly, so that he could listen.

"You're not hearing me mother! He's shy, he's quiet, he doesn't want to be apart from me. If I put him in school they'll decide that something's wrong with him. He won't speak up, he'll barely speak to anyone in the first place, and he'll be picked out to spend the next twelve years in special ed with the mouth breathers and the paste eaters and the future delinquents of America before he's been given a chance!"

Gramma huffed. "He needs to be around kids his own age, Pauline. Socialization will be good for him. They'll break him out of that shell."

"And how is one frazzled woman with forty other kids to watch going to make sure the quiet little one way at the back is actually learning anything? I have a Masters degree, Ma, I can teach him to read as well as anyone."

"I know you think that, but –"

"Don't but me, I'm not some naïve housewife that's read *Little House on the Prairie* one too many times and wants to go back to the simple life. A lot of people are teaching their kids at home now, it's not that weird."

"A lot of people deprive their infants of the healthfulness of formula so they can breastfeed them like cows, but that doesn't mean that it isn't a seriously questionable practice," she said.

"I don't agree with what they're teaching now, or how they're teaching it, or the environment he'd be going into; I think that Noah will learn better if I keep him at home and teach him myself."

"And how will he meet other children?"

"We go to church, we go to playgroups, and school isn't for 'meeting other children,' its for learning. Or should be for learning."

"I want my grandson to have a normal childhood – "

"Like I did, Ma? Nuns and uniforms and guilt and praying, is that the normal childhood that you want for him?"

"You did normal girl things. You skipped rope and learned handclap songs from the other girls."

"Noah knows songs too, I play with him."

"But does he know any songs that aren't Bible verses?"

"I want him to learn early, I want him to have it in his heart, where no one can take it away from him. And the schools will try and take it away from him. I don't want them to brainwash my son."

"I hope you know what you're doing, Pauline. And how much extra work it will be, having him underfoot all day. And literally underfoot, the child would sit on them if he were small enough.

"Is it even legal to keep him home?"

"Yes, it is, Mother. Socialist education is a modern phenomenon, children have been taught at home, or by tutors, for far longer than they've been going to school."

"People have been shitting in holes in the ground for longer than they've been using toilets, but I don't see you digging a hole in your back yard."

"Mother!"

"He can't hear me, he's playing. And he'll have to hear about curse words eventually, Pauline. You can't keep him in your pocket his whole life."

A chair creaked as one of them got up, and Noah switched back to playing 'Hot Crossed Buns.'

*

When Pauline lost her first pregnancy Martin began dreaming again about Denise, but it hadn't bothered him so much. After Noah was born, after he'd grown enough that Martin had sufficient sleep to dream, the dreams were worse; by the time Maranatha was born the dreams were full-out nightmares. Night after night he saw her in her coffin, her bones showing through and flesh desiccated, and he was crushed with guilt because he hadn't saved her, couldn't save her.

Pauline had encouraged him to join a men's group at the Assemblies of God church, worried that he didn't spend enough time with people, and by the time the

dreams became nightmares he was in the regular habit of going. They met at a cheap restaurant before work on Wednesday mornings to drink coffee and do a short Bible study written around men's issues, which seemed to him to consist of nothing but temptation towards sexual sin and impatience with their wives. Other guys had confessed their struggle to stay away from porn, to not think about old girlfriends when their wives were being frigid, or even when they weren't. So one day he took the plunge and told them he'd been having dreams about his old girlfriend. That got everyone's attention; Martin was friendly but spoke very little, and not one of them didn't wonder about what dark secret he must be hiding.

He began with the moment he first saw her: "I was in high school – saw a redhead walking down the path outside my bedroom window. Her shirt was loose, and I saw things that made me burn."

He was trying to be delicate, paused there to ascertain whether they were following him, and the pastor in attendance chipped in: "So often it begins like that, with a young girl's immodest behavior leading a good young man astray – temptation sent from the devil. And this shame follows you even now?"

"Not exactly…" Martin hedged. He'd never felt ashamed of that moment, never really considered that he should. It was an accident on both their parts; if anything he should have been ashamed for continuing to look at her afterwards because of that unintended sight. "She didn't know anyone could see – I was four floors up, and those loose shirts were really popular back in the day." He thought there would be an aside about modesty and women's clothing then – there had been several discussions already about wives who dressed too sexy or wives who didn't dress sexy enough or teenage girls at the shops or babysitting their kids who wore the popular clothing, put their shape on display – no respect, treating themselves like pieces of meat – and how hard it was to banish the image afterwards, to not think about oversexed fifteen-year-olds' legs and necks and pert chests and how much harder it had to be for the young men in the congregation who didn't have the practice that they had at controlling themselves.

But they were listening to him now, raptly even, waiting to hear what he might confess to them.

"We started dating the next fall, got really serious about each other – it was like I'd finally met the person I had always been looking for. I was going to ask her to marry me, when we finished school. I bought a ring, had it all planned out.

Then…she had a car accident. And she died, and I couldn't really tell anyone how much she meant to me."

They were surprisingly quiet after that, looking down into their cups of coffee or out the window, and he realized that he'd never told this story before. He'd tried to keep it clean, pared down for speed, left out the sexual aspect – he barely admitted that part even to himself now, and he knew what sort of direction their opinion of that behavior would go in.

"I'm having dreams about her again – about her accident, about losing her. They stopped right around when we got married, started up again around when our first kid didn't get born." He wouldn't say 'miscarriage,' but they knew what he meant; most of them had a child or two that hadn't been born either.

"Could it be that you feel some condemnation over the relationship? Guilt over something less than righteous that's decided to surface now that you have the innocence of children to prick your conscience?" one of the older men offered.

"Perhaps…"

"Does Pauline know about it?"

"I told her I had a girlfriend, and that she died, but I didn't tell her…everything. I wanted to move on. I wanted her not to pity me, or think badly of me. I was scared of losing everything again."

Another of the men, a grandfather several times over, leaned back in his chair in an expansive manner, sucked his teeth, spoke slowly, "We hear a lot, especially from the pulpit, about being held to a higher standard. But what we don't discuss so much is the mess that stands in the way of hitting that standard. We, as men, are victim to a host of temptations that women will never know, will never understand. They can't comprehend what their beauty does to us, how those images stick in our minds, how much we long for the comfort of their flesh, how key it is to our very wellbeing. It doesn't matter though, that they can't understand, because God does. And God forgives."

"Pauline needs to know." This was added by Tim, a reedy guy with six kids. "Trust me. Confess, weather the storm, and everything will be better afterwards."

"Worst that can happen, you sleep on the couch for a few weeks," someone added, and there were a few chuckles at that. Martin's wasn't one of them – he was wondering if finding out that he hadn't been a virgin when they married, that he had

known the touch of another woman, would be enough to send Pauline down again, to throw the delicate balance of her mental health into chaos.

He chose his time carefully: made dinner, did the dishes afterwards, poured Pauline a glass of wine and made her put her feet up while he wrestled the kids into their pajamas, then carefully gave them a dose of the travel medication they kept around for the long car rides to visit Sam and his family. He remembered Paul's stories about lying awake listening to her mother shout at her father, and though he was pretty sure they were too young to remember if it did come to shouting tonight, it wasn't a risk he was willing to run. Noah's eyes grew heavy during the first picture book, and Mara was giving out puffing baby snores in his face. He rolled them off him and into their beds with only a little guilt – Pauline would probably have a fit if she knew that he'd drugged them, but he figured it was extenuating circumstances.

Pauline looked comfortable in their bed – more lying than sitting up, glass of wine almost empty and book open – but there was a tension in her shoulders that he recognized. He slid in next to her, took up his position as she shifted to accommodate him with his head on her shoulder, legs entwined, and she dropped her book to snuggle him back.

"What's up?" she asked.

"I need to tell you about something."

"Did you lose your job? Please, Jesus, tell me you didn't lose your job."

"No, not that. It's something old. Quite old, that I should have told you about before."

And he told her, as honestly and non-graphically as he could: that he'd been going to marry Denise, how he had met her and fallen for her, about picking the ring and waiting for the moment, the horror of her accident and the mess he had been after, and finally, when there was no more context that he could provide that would make what he had done make any more sense to her, that they had been sleeping together.

She didn't shout, or even react very much, but he felt her stiffen when he told her that he had had sex before he met her, felt revulsion pouring off her like smoke from a block of dry ice. He finished, waited for the shouting to start, but instead she disentangled herself from him without a word, picked up the spare blanket and the rest of the wine, and closed the bedroom door after herself as she left.

The silence continued for nearly a week, and he wanted to think it was because they saw so little of each other: he spent the whole day chasing responsibilities at work, and when the kids finally went down for the night the two of them were too tired to talk in any serious way. He knew that it was against everything she believed in, but he still worried that she would leave him, that she would never love him again. That she would never get over his revelation or the fact that he had concealed the truth in the first place.

They moved carefully around each other, Pauline sleeping on the living room couch and determinedly silent, until on Saturday morning, after what felt like an eternity of sleeping alone, Martin brought Pauline her coffee. And the words began coming out. It was a slow process that took several days, lots of time. She felt hurt that he hadn't told her, thought somewhat less of the him she had first gotten to know, was shamed and disgusted by the idea that he had compared her to Denise in his head, cheated that he might hold her up to the example of a dead woman, worried that he still loved Denise and that she would never quite manage to measure up.

When Pauline began sleeping in their bed again she kept to the far edge of her own side, and for once he didn't try to pull her to him. He watched her, though, wary and careful, for signs that she was on the way back down, that he had pulled the rug out from under her sanity, was overwhelmed with relief on the night that she snuggled up to him and he could hope that he had been forgiven.

In the end the confession took a weight off his soul – as did her silence making him pay for it – and he kept going to the men's group. Even if he didn't agree with everything that was said there, a lot of the discussions were comforting, especially those about God's promise to provide, coming as they did at that point in his life. Even though he hadn't been out of work once since finishing school, which was a piece of sheer luck given the rate of unemployment, meeting all of the bills had never been easy; there was always some emergency, something that needed replacing, until he finally had to accept that next month wouldn't be the month that their outgoing would be less than their income, that that month might never arrive. The endless recessions of the 70s were hopefully over, but even so they were scraping along with little in the way of margin. It didn't matter how hard he worked, there was no guarantee that he'd be able to provide for his family.

He figured that it was all well and good for them to say 'God provides,' it wasn't any money out of their pockets. So when the topic was broached, *what do you*

fear, he confessed his worry about rent and groceries, how they were still making payments on the hospital bills for his daughter's birth, how some weeks came when the fridge and the bank account were both empty. And they nodded, shared their own stories of layoffs and unbalanced budgets, and he figured that would be the end of it. Until, later that week, one of the pastor's wives gave Pauline a copy of the key to the church food pantry, told her to take what she needed to stay afloat. Pauline told Martin, asked if they should really use it – they weren't desperate, and other people probably needed the food more. For a moment his pride rankled: were they saying that he couldn't even feed his own kids? But then he saw the offer of the key as what it had been meant to be – a gift, out of love, from people who cared. And though Pauline's brothers had lent them money, her mother had watched Noah so that Pauline could pad his paycheck with temporary work, no one had ever provided for them in this way, with no strings attached.

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Maranatha started walking, then started running, and Pauline began to consider working again, or going back to school half time, something that would make her feel less like a brood mare. But she didn't know how to balance that with kids – Noah had just learned to read, and the baby was just a slightly more mobile, more difficult infant. And a paying job would only increase her workload, add more without subtracting, and she was already exhausted. As a stopgap she put up fliers at the universities and was proofreading and retyping student papers, but usually while Mara ate and Noah played under her feet; she couldn't imagine anyone allowing that setup in a lecture hall, or in an office. Then she got pregnant again, and all of her ideas about going back to work went out the window.

They had been told that their sex life would calm down after kids; Pauline had just found that the hormones of pregnancy made her even randier than normal, and even right afterwards, when she was sore and healing and up every two hours to nurse, being held and caressed and reminded that her body had other functions beside incubator or milk machine made her feel better, made her abused organs protest less. It was her favorite panacea for the boredom and the loneliness, and since the doctor had said that she wouldn't ovulate as long as she was breastfeeding, they hadn't been as careful as they should have – the feel of skin was so much better, and not having

to fiddle around beforehand and pull out quick just after, or remember to buy anything, was far too convenient.

The women of the Bible study beamed approval – they had assumed the four and a half year gap between the first two had been due to difficulty, and that she had been desperately trying all the while. She was told in consoling tones that after the first three or four it got so easy, and she grimaced and decided that talking to her doctor about getting on the Pill again might be a good idea, even though it was expensive, made her cranky and made her cramps worse. Her three would grow up and then she'd have her life back, but five or six… she would be washing diapers until she qualified for Social Security, her tits hanging to her knees and her uterus probably dangling from out between her legs in utter defeat. Some of the women at Bible study already looked as though they qualified for Social Security, their faces too thin for bodies that had expanded and contracted so many times that they were as shapeless as Martin's favorite running shoes. Their limbs were permanently swollen, their veins varicose, their hair frizzing like microwaved Brillo pads, their bones and teeth light from being sucked dry of calcium by forming fetuses. They barely moved if they could help it, and some of them had had their inner organs slip out of place, had their abdominal muscles separate along the center line, were incontinent.

Even as she agreed in part that children were a miracle, that women were designed to giving birth, that the first commandment to humanity had been to be fruitful and multiply, the part of her younger self that remained wondered what set the mothers apart from the incubator, the tubes and drips that had sustained her daughter in her first week outside the womb. If they were so wrecked from the process that they couldn't mother, couldn't enjoy mothering, what was the point of it all? They were sentient tenements, becoming pregnant nearly the moment that the previous tenant had vacated the premises, their lives nothing but birth and feeding, managing and providing. The only thing they did for themselves was go to church – where they were told to submit to their husbands and glory in their children, who were quite literally consuming them – and go to Bible study, where they examined verses that told them how to be better wives and mothers. She was driven mad by their dictum, but where else could she go? No one batted an eye when she kept Mara with her, unbuttoned her shirt – invariably one of Martin's, as they were the only ones that either fit or were reliably clean any more – to let her feed while they discussed the reading. Most of them had toddlers at their feet as well, toddlers at

their breasts. There were so few places she could go and feel comfortable, not feel judged for taking care of her colicky, cranky, clingy daughter.

So she kept going, thanked them for their advice, for the teas and compresses they recommended. And she was thankful; if those woman knew anything it was how to make a pregnancy more comfortable, how to recover quickly afterwards. And it was an easy one, at the beginning, more like Noah than like Mara. She didn't get as sick, she could even eat regularly, chase after her kids. Her doctor was worried that blood pressure would be an issue again, but while it became elevated it didn't spike, was more steady than it had been with Mara, so they told her that she might get away with only going on bed rest in the last month. She didn't know after if it had indeed been a quiet pregnancy, or if she'd been too busy with the kids she already had to take much note of this one's movements. She could say with certainty that he was less athletic than her other children, didn't drum against the top of her abdomen the way that they had, kick at her belly so that she could see the ridge of disturbance as the fetal foot traveled across. He was quiet, lazy, and she should have thought of Mara in the last weeks, when they were both in trouble and hadn't known it, instead of thinking that she was getting a quiet kid, a snuggly kid, a low-maintenance kid that wouldn't get lost in the grocery store and shut himself in with the milk the way that Mara had done the moment that she learned to walk.

It was twenty-eight weeks in when she started to feel the rumbling inside her. The doctor said it was probably gas.

"I've had two kids, I know a contraction from a gas bubble," she told him.

Braxton-Hicks then, nothing to be worried about. She went home and worried anyway. They had told her with Mara that everything was fine, and they had both nearly died. This was a new doctor; after Mara she had transferred to a clinic within walking distance of the house, as they had the one car and she didn't want Martin cycling to work in bad weather. She went home, ran laundry and fed her kids, and still the pains continued, tentative, irregular, worrying. Every so often she felt the baby drop low in her uterus, felt him flail around more than usual, before drifting back up to his place under her ribs. The cramps woke her up in the night, as did the baby's frantic kicking as he periodically dropped low. She went back to the clinic again, saw a duty nurse, and was sent home with the directive to stop being hysterical, she was only twenty-eight weeks pregnant; she couldn't be going into labor.

Her water broke while the kids were in the tub the next morning; at first she thought that they had splashed her. Then a contraction, sudden and hard, doubled her over, and she let out an involuntary cry.

"Mamma, are you all right?" Noah asked her.

"I'm fine baby. Bath time's over now. You two get dressed, and we'll have lunch in a bit. Noah, help your sister with her buttons, please." She lifted him out first, then Mara, toweled them off and sent them down the hall to the room they shared, tried to stand and went back to her knees, dizzy. There were spots in front of her eyes. She crawled out to the kitchen, thankful that their house was so small, trailing blood and amniotic fluid that the part of her that wasn't panicking was worrying about cleaning up before it stained the wood. She pulled herself up by the cabinet, knocked the receiver of the wall phone onto the floor, keyed in the number of the clinic.

"My baby's coming," she told the receptionist. There was a ruffle of papers, then the voice of the duty nurse from the day before.

"Mrs. Freeman, I've already told you, preliminary contractions are perfectly normal. If you can't handle them I suggest lying down with a heating pad."

"You're not hearing me. My baby is coming. My water has broken, my contractions are real, and if you don't start believing me he's going to be born on this goddamned kitchen floor with no one but my eight and four year old kids in attendance."

There was quiet on the line.

"I see. I will notify Dr. Swords in that case, and the hospital. Please hang up and dial emergency and request an ambulance, as if this is indeed happening as quickly as you insist it is, you may not reach the hospital before giving birth."

Pauline didn't respond or say good-bye, but hit the reset button until she heard the dial tone.

"Mom?" Noah was in the doorway, Mara peering around him. She realized that she was sitting in a pool of rosy fluid, filigreed with darker tendrils that shifted shape as she moved. The contractions were blurring together.

"Everything's fine, baby," she said, the dial tone in her ear. "I need you to do something for me." He listened to her instructions solemnly, repeated them back to her, then took his sister's hand and led her out the door. Pauline listened for the sound of the front door closing, the neighbor's door opening, before she dialed.

"911, what is your emergency?"

"Yes, I need an ambulance. I'm seven months pregnant and I've gone into labor."

"Can you give me the address?"

The voice was young, female, but detached, dispassionate. She gave her address and longed for Martin, for Donna, for her mother, for someone to be there with her.

"Ok, Mrs. Freeman, we can get an ambulance to you in about forty minutes. I'm going to stay on the line until it arrives at your location or you disconnect the call, ok?"

"Yes."

"Can you tell me how far apart your contractions are?"

"They aren't."

"Pardon?"

She didn't reply, stifled a moan, then answered, "About thirty, forty seconds. I think he's going to be born right here if someone doesn't show up soon."

"Is this your first pregnancy, Mrs. Freeman?"

"My first two are with the neighbor."

The voice stayed with her, as she rocked and shifted and watched the clock. It was happening too fast, it was happening too intensely. She was high on endorphins, high on fear, feeling as though she were floating above her body but present enough to respond, to track the changes as her baby moved through her, to give her blood type, her age, the number to find Martin at work, everything the girl on the other end of the line asked her for. The dispatcher was speaking calmly in her ear, "Just ten more minutes, Mrs. Freeman, just hang on a little longer and the ambulance will be there," when feet and legs and body slipped out of her, and in terror she held him upside down, watched the tiny chest convulse, then heard the mewl of an almost cry.

"Mrs. Freeman, are you still there?"

She couldn't answer. He moved jerkily, wouldn't open his eyes, gasped but didn't seem to take in any air, tried to cry but barely made any noise. She held him, moved the umbilical cord out of the way – she didn't know what to do. The phone hung by its cord, the calm voice calling for her. His chest heaved, eyelids fluttered but couldn't open, were still sealed shut. He was so small, a lost nothing. She was faintly aware of her uterus contracting, even more vaguely aware that she was

bleeding. He was so small, but he had come so fast, exited her body at such speed, that she was torn. She held him, watched as the rise and fall of his chest slowed, felt the shuddering of the irregular heartbeat. He didn't try to cry now, just labored to breathe, and she wanted to breathe for him, wanted to be his heartbeat. It got so slow at the end, his breath, that at first she didn't realize that it had stopped.

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When Martin got to the hospital Pauline was awake but staring at the wall, her arm held stiff next to her, riddled with marks from where they'd tried and failed to place IVs. He wasn't sure if she saw him: her eyes remained fixed on the wall, not blinking. He sat down in the hard metal-framed plastic chair next to her bed, reached over the bed railing to stroke her hair out of her face, then began rubbing her hand, the one without the IV hookup, between his. It was cold against his skin – her hands and feet went numb if she held still for too long.

"Honey, can you hear me?"

She blinked.

"What can I do?"

She mumbled something he couldn't hear.

"Come again?"

"Get the baby. The ambulance people took him; I want to bury him."

"They didn't tell me—"

"They weren't there."

He wanted to sit with her for a while. The fixed stare, her lack of movement, the tube of someone else's blood flowing into her, made him go cold and sick in his gut. But after a moment he stood up and kissed her.

"I'll see what I can do."

It was only on his way back out of her room that he noticed the man in police uniform, his bald head glowing and sunglasses reflecting the overhead lights, sitting in a cheap plastic-backed chair like the one he had just vacated with its back against the wall in the hallway immediately opposite Pauline's door. The mirrored glasses made it impossible to tell if the man's eyes were open or closed, and as he stepped quickly past Martin wondered why the hell a cop was sitting outside his wife's hospital room.

At the nurses' station he paused, moved to stand in front of the youngest of the three whose pink and yellow scrubs and braided hair made her look the most friendly, waited for her to acknowledge him before saying,

"Excuse me, ma'am, I'm the husband of the patient in room 223." He fumbled his driver's license out of his pocket so that she could see that they shared a name, an address, that he wasn't some random creep. "They told me my wife had a stillbirth. She wants to arrange for us to take the baby home, so we can bury him."

The woman's face creased with what he read as sympathy even as he knew that she was going to refuse the request. It wasn't like a miscarriage: there would have to be a death certificate, an autopsy. The body would be sent through an undertaker, handled like an adult, he wouldn't be allowed to just walk out of the place with it under his arm like a loaf of bread.

He told her that he understood, thanked her, then asked, "Do you know why there's a cop sitting outside my wife's door?"

"Well, when she phoned emergency, the dispatcher sent the police along with the ambulance. In that situation, if they have reason to think that a crime has been committed, they often go along to the hospital."

"What on earth kind of crime do they think was committed?"

"Sir, you'd have to ask the detective that." She waited a moment, then added. "They've requested that we run tests for narcotics and street drugs, that's all I know."

This time as Martin turned to go into Pauline's room the police detective rose, put a hand on his arm to stop him.

"Sir? If you have a moment I'd like to ask you a few questions," he said in a tone that made it clear that it wasn't exactly a request.

They stood in the stairwell, which was more private than the hallway, where 'a few questions' from the detective lasted nearly an hour. Pauline had both a personal and a family history of mental health issues; how had she coped with the fact that she was pregnant? Had they really wanted a third child? Were they able to afford a third child? Had they considered an abortion when they discovered she was pregnant again? Might Pauline have sought an abortion without telling him, might she have tried to do it herself to keep him from finding out? Had she ever done drugs? Were their children wanted? Be honest, didn't he hate being tied down, hate having children? Wasn't he glad that there wouldn't be yet another screaming brat to take care of?

For all of his questions, the detective seemed reluctant to answer any of Martin's. It was unclear whether or not Pauline was actually under arrest, which was a moot point as long as she couldn't physically leave the hospital. A report had been filed, though, and a policeman would remain nearby until the public prosecutor decided whether to charge her. The prosecutor had a seventy-two hour window to make up his mind, so if they heard nothing within three days it was safe to say that she wouldn't be arrested. Otherwise…

They were simply doing their due diligence. Some women's babies were stillborn because of drug use, and no one could argue that those women weren't criminals, that they shouldn't be charged. Other women induced themselves, tried to murder their children before they were born, did it immediately after they were born, for any number of reasons. Procedures were in place to protect those who could not protect themselves, and for this reason his wife was being considered guilty until proven innocent.

At the end of it Martin walked back to Pauline's bedside seething. For a woman to go through this, and then to be accused of killing her own baby? To arrest her while she was still in the hospital on the off chance that a personal tragedy was a crime? What kind of sick world did they live in?

He sat down next to her again, recounted his conversation with the nurse in brief, trying to make it sound positive: death certificate, undertaker, funeral. Their baby was being considered a real person, that was a morbid positive. They just had to perform the autopsy first, determine why the baby had died, whether it had died before it was born or—

"He was alive."

"What's that Paul?"

"He was born alive. I held him, and he cried, and he breathed, and he died. But they won't listen to me. Like they didn't listen to me when I said I had contractions. And now he's dead, and a policeman asked me questions about why I didn't go to the hospital when I felt the contractions and whether I wanted him to die because it's my fault. He asked me if I really wanted another baby after Maranatha, if it hadn't just been easier to let him die. He tried to make me say that I was happy about it. And I tell them that he was born alive, and the nurse tells me that stillbirths happen, that I'll be relieved when I don't have baby vomit to clean up. No one will listen to me."

"I'll listen to you, Paul," he said.

"I wish you weren't the only one."

She was still, holding his hand, staring at the wall, then said, "The kids are with the neighbor. You'd better call my mom to come watch them. I have no idea when they're going to let me out of here."

*

He went home that evening to get Pauline some clothes, her Bible, her wash bag; his mother-in-law had collected the kids earlier that afternoon, so he was surprised to find the lights on as he came up to the house. A woman in a headscarf opened the door to him.

"Mr. Freeman? Your neighbor let us in. Word went round the telephone tree; we hope it's not an intrusion, but we didn't want Pauline to come home to – well, Emergency Services takes the person and leaves everything else."

The house smelled like bleach; there were women running the laundry, women vacuuming the carpets, women cleaning the cupboards and refilling the refrigerator with covered dishes full of ready-cooked dinners. And in the kitchen, below the sink, three of them wearing yellow rubber gloves were carefully scrubbing at the edges of a wide dark stain, at the prints of EMT boots that had tracked it out the door, at the fingerprints on the phone and the cupboards and the doorframes. There were flowers on the table, flowers on the windowsill. Women who he knew his wife didn't know that well had dropped what they were doing, their many children, their goats, their bread, and had come to clean his wife's blood off the kitchen floor, so that Pauline wouldn't have to come home and see it.

Novel Summary

Part 1: Creation (1964-1988)

Extract included

(Approximately 65,000 words)

Part 2: Fruit of the Tree (1988-1997)

Mara recounts her mother's depression after the baby that wasn't, the birth of her younger brother Uriah, and a growing suspicion that God doesn't exist. Due to gender divides, she makes friends with a girl at Bible study who is from a more conservative sect than her own, which displeases Pauline.

Uriah begins learning to read and discovers troubling passages in the Bible and comfort in fantasy novels. He slowly gets in the habit of stealing books to circumvent his mother's limits on what they are allowed to read.

Noah is allowed to take a part-time job at a fast food joint, where he learns about rock music. The family starts going to co-op, where he immediately falls for Leah Chapman

Maranatha is pushed into a friendship with the daughter of one of her mother's friends, which highlights the ways in which she doesn't conform to the expectations her family and community have for her as an adolescent girl.

Noah continues to slowly get close to Leah while his siblings suspect him of keeping secrets from them. They maintain a secret relationship over the summer after their first year at co-op, but are caught in the closet the first day back the subsequent autumn.

(Approximately 65,000 words)

Part 3: The Fall (1997-2001)

His parents react to Noah's transgression by purging the house of all 'worldly' materials and enacting stricter control over what their kids see and do. Noah tearfully accepts it; Uriah retreats into an internal world; Mara realizes that education is her only chance of leaving, and begins borrowing Noah's SAT prep book.

Martin identifies perhaps too well with Noah's lovesickness and engineers a courtship between him and Leah, while Pauline realizes that her children are strangers to her. Martin finally finds his place in the church community when he starts volunteering in the nursery and preschool classes.

Noah begins taking classes at the local community college; Mara is allowed to go as well after much arguing. Noah finds himself struggling with the work while Mara struggles with the people. Mara uses her grades as reason that she be allowed to apply to university several years early, while Noah's complete failure brings to light

that he's been copying his mother's answer keys for the previous three years, and has no hope of earning a higher education.

Mara and Martin bond over the college search, and he tells her about his first girlfriend in an effort to make clear to her how important it is for her to remain sexually pure. Noah gets into a ministry school, and they leave home within a week of each other, which leaves Uri alone. His sibling's abandonment, and the increase in his mother's supervision of his behavior, makes him retreat farther into fantasy worlds of his own making, compulsive eating, and self-harm.

Noah has a fight with Leah in his first weeks away, and responds by driving two hours to apologise in person, which becomes a habitual solution. He quickly learns that his peers at the school also have secrets, and falls into an emotional entanglement with a girl his age that eventually becomes physical, which he justifies to himself and tells no one about.

While at university, Mara is forced to come to terms with the fact that much of what her parents have taught her is not based in objective fact, but finds it easier to come to terms with her attraction to women and masochistic desires.

Noah graduates from ministry school and they all gather together for Noah and Leah's wedding, where the younger two, on a mission to find a place to smoke the weed that Mara's girlfriend gave her to get her through the event, find Noah in a kitchen pantry with the girl from ministry school, who is comforting him in the wake of his misapprehension that Leah is not a virgin. The three confess to each other some of their secrets while keeping others back, consider the good things that have come out of their upbringing, and promise to stick together better in future, though Uri expresses doubt that anything will actually change.

(Approximately 65,000 words)

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Appendix I - Tables

Table One: Changes in Short Story Extracts In *Riders on the Earth,* 1973 Edition					
Title	Author	Male characters	Female characters	Minority Characters	Included in all editions
Section 1					
The Forgotten Door	Alexander Key	10	6	None	Yes
Section 2					
The Men of Mars,	John Kier Cross	5, one alien	1	None	Yes
Confusion in the Marketplace,	Norton Juster	5, 3 non-human	0	None	No
Adventures in Naples,	Richard Parker	7	4	None	Yes
The Baseball Computer,	Clem Philbrook	16, one dog	3	5 (African American)	Yes
Section 3					
Look Out Over the Sea,	Pearl Buck	5	3	8 (Japanese)	Yes
The Big Spring,	Jean Craighead George	3, 2 whales	1, a whale	None	Yes
Pelops and Poseidon	Frances Carpenter	7	4, 2 horses	None	Yes
Section 4					
Music by the Minors	Richard Parker	6	3	None	Yes
Section 5					
Theseus and the Minotaur	Charles Kingsley	5	1	None	Yes
Family Life	Tudor Jenks	3, two dragons	2, both dragons	None	No
The Challenge of the Sword	Mabel Louise Robinson	5	1	None	Yes
Trouble in Camelot	Edward Eager	7	5	None	Yes
Taran and the Black Cauldron	Lloyd Alexander	4, 1 non-human	4	None	No
Section 6					
The Dog of Pompeii	Louis Untermeyer	6, 1 dog	0	None	Yes
How Ologbon-Ori Sought Wisdom	Harold Courlander	2	0	2 (African)	Yes
Adventure in the Outer World	Suzanne Martel	6, 1 dog	1	None	Yes
Ratio of male to female writers	12:5	Ratio of male to female characters	102:31 77% male 23% female	Ratio of white to minority characters	111:15 (12% non-white characters)

Table Two: Changes in Short Story Extracts In *Riders on the Earth,* 1977 Edition					
Title	Author	Male characters	Female characters	Minority Characters	Included in all editions
Section 1					
A Visit to Mars	John Kier Cross	5, one alien	1	None	Yes
Adventure in Naples	Richard Parker	7	4	None	Yes
The Baseball Computer	Clem Philbrook	16, one dog	3	5 (African American)	Yes
Extra! Extra	Ellen Conford	4	4	3 (2 African American, 1 Asian)	No
Section 2					
The Forgotten Door	Alexander Key	10	6	None	Yes
Section 3					
Look Out over the Sea	Pearl Buck	5	3	8 (Japanese)	Yes
The Big Spring	Jean Craighead George	3, 2 whales	1, a whale	None	Yes
Pelops and Poseidon	Frances Carpenter	5	4, 2 horses	None	Yes
Section 4					
Music by the Minors	Richard Parker	6	3	None	Yes
Maria's House	Jean Merrill	1	6	3 (Hispanic, remainder indeterminate)	No
Section 5					
Theseus and the Minotaur	Charles Kingsley	5	1	None	Yes
Young Ladies Don't Slay Dragons	Joyce Hovelsrud	4	2	None	No
The Challenge of the Sword	Mabel Robinson	5	1	None	Yes
Trouble in Camelot	Edward Eager	7	5	None	Yes
Zeely	Virginia Hamilton	3	3	5 (African American)	No
Section 6					
The Dog of Pompeii	Louis Untermeyer	6, 1 dog	0	None	Yes
How Ologbon-Ori Sought Wisdom	Harold Courlander	2	0	2 (African)	Yes
Adventure in the Outer World	Suzanne Martel	6, 1 dog	1	None	Yes
Ratio of male to female writers	1:1 138	Ratio of male to female characters	25:12 68% male 32% female	Ratio of white to minority characters	112:26 (19% non-white characters)

Table Three: Changes in Short Story Extracts In *Riders on the Earth,* 1980, 1983, and 1986 Editions					
Title	Author	Male characters	Female characters	Minority Characters	Included in all editions
Section 1					
A Visit to Mars	John Kier Cross	5, one alien	1	None	Yes
Adventure in Naples	Richard Parker	7	4	None,	Yes
The Baseball Computer	Clem Philbrook	14, 1 dog	4	5 (African American)	Yes
Extra! Extra!	Ellen Conford	4	4	3 (2 African American, 1 Asian)	No
Section 2					
The Forgotten Door	Alexander Key	10	6	None	Yes
Section 3					
Look Out Over the Sea	Pearl S. Buck	5	3	8 (Japanese)	Yes
The Big Spring	Jean Craighead George	3, 2whales	1, a whale	None	Yes
Pelops and Poseidon	Frances Carpenter	5	4, 2 horses	None,	Yes
Section 4					
Music by the Minors	Richard Parker	6	3	None	Yes
Maria's House	Jean Merrill	1	6	3 (Hispanic, remainder indeterminate)	No
Section 5					
Theseus and the Minotaur	Charles Kingsley	5	1	None	Yes
Young Ladies Don't Slay Dragons	Joyce Hovelsrud	4	2	None	No
The Challenge of the Sword	Mabel Louise Robinson	5	1	None	Yes
Trouble in Camelot	Edward Eager	7	5	None	Yes
Zeely	Virginia Hamilton	3	3	5 (African American)	No
Section 6					
The Dog of Pompeii	Francis Cornford	6, 1 dog	0	None	Yes
How Ologbon-Ori Sought Wisdom	Harold Courlander	2	0	2 (African)	Yes
Adventure in the Outer World	Suzanne Martel	6, 1 dog	1	None	Yes
Ratio of male to female writers	1:1	Ratio of male to female characters	98:49 66.6% male 33.3% female	Ratio of white to minority characters	111:26 (20% non-white characters

Table Four: Revisions made to *The Forgotten Door*		
Page	1973/77 Edition	1983/86 Edition
112	"Devil take you!"	deleted
113	Waddled	Came
113	fleshy	full
114	"Got black hair like one, near long as a girl's."	"Got long, black hair like most of 'em."
114	"Cat got your tongue?" she snapped. "Well, I reckon I can loosen it." Abruptly she slapped him hard. He knew the slap was coming, and he managed in time to go limp and roll his head. As he did so, the man unclenched his hand to get a better grip on him. Immediately Little Jon twisted free and ran.	"You better answer me! Cat got your tongue?" she snapped. As the woman spoke, Jon drew back abruptly to avoid her unwelcome inspection and curious questioning. As he did so, the man unclenched his hands to get a better grip on him. Immediately Jon twisted free and ran.
116	ugly	harsh
118	"They- they're so impersonal."	deleted
119	"Is – is he an Indian?"	"Where do you think he's from?"
119	"I doubt it, and it wouldn't make any difference if he were a horned Andalusian with scales."	"I can't guess, but it doesn't make any difference. He needs help and that's all that matters."
120	"Good for everything from hornet stings to housemaid's knee."	"Good for all types of ailments from hornet stings to hair loss."
127	Does not occur.	"I'll stay home with Jon"
128	"…refuses to live in cities"	"…prefers country life."
131	"Jon, I'm going to cut your hair, and I'm going to give you some different clothes to wear. I hope you don't mind, but I want you to look as much like other boys as possible."	"Jon, since Mr. Gilby will be looking for someone with long hair, I'm going to cut yours. I'll also give you some different clothes, so that you'll look as much like other boys as possible."
132	"Oh dear, there we go again," she sighed and sat down, frowning. "Jon, in this day and age, with the way things are, truth – the exact truth – is often a hard thing to manage. There are times when it could cause needless trouble and suffering."	"You're right, of course," Mary said, sighing "And we do try to be honest. But Jon, in this day and age, with the way things are, truth – the exact truth – is sometimes a hard thing to manage. There are times when it could cause needless trouble and suffering."
132	"That's the way the world is."	"That's the way the world seems to be."
133	"Oh Jon! I don't understand you! She shook her head."	Mary bean shook her head. "Her feelings are important."
134	"Jimmy O'Connor is a good choice. Be hard for anyone to check up on it."	"A good choice. People around here wouldn't be about to check up on it."
136	"That's the way people live, young fellow," Thomas said, frowning as he wrote something on a piece of paper. "Well, that's another odd fact about you. I'm going to stop being surprised and just jot down the facts."	"At first to keep warm, young fellow," Thomas said. "But now, Jon, some people are beginning to think the way you do about that." As he spoke, Thomas started jotting down all that they had so far discovered about Jon.
142	"Gilby was probably drinking. I'm sure he saw a stray Indian kid."	"Gilby was probably imagining things. Perhaps he saw a stray Cherokee boy."
143	"I'll try to explain, Jon," Thomas said very patiently.	"It's part of our free enterprise system, Jon," Thomas answered.
143	Little Jon looked at them helplessly. Again the	Again the dreadful feeling of lostness poured

	dreadful feeling of lostness poured over him. He was sure of the answer now. Mary Bean had guessed it. Suddenly he turned, peering out of the back window as he heard Rascal barking. Rascal was lost, too, though in a different way, chained in a world where everything seemed wrong.	over Jon. He was sure of the answer now. Mary bean had guessed it. He was a long way from home. Suddenly he turned, peering out of the back window as he heard Rascal barking. Rascal was lost, too, though in a different way, chained in a world where everything seemed, if not wrong, at least very different.
145	you know how people are	deleted
145	some idiot	someone
145	addition	by the side of the road
145	Man	human being
146	Thomas Bean shook his head. "At the rate we're going, we'll need another million years."	Thomas Bean shook his head. "I hope I'm wrong, but at the rate we're going, we'll need another million years."
147	"But maybe I'm a million years behind."	"But maybe I *am* a million years behind."
151	"Bush doesn't like kids, and he never makes any exceptions. He sure had me going with those questions. If only he doesn't get too curious about Jon and start asking more…"	"He sure had me going with those questions. If only he doesn't get too curious and start asking more. Wish I didn't get this uneasy feeling whenever I have to talk to outsiders about Jon"
152	"It'll take time to narrow things down and find out who's lying. And they'll lie. Oh, confound that fool Gilby for bringing up that tale."	"It'll take time to narrow things down and find out who's lying. Oh, confound Gilby Pitts for bringing up that tale."
155	That was why Thomas Bean limped. It had happened in a place called Korea, Brooks had said. Many men had died in Korea- and still no one agreed.	That was why Thomas Bean limped. He had been wounded in a place called Korea, Brooks had said. Many men had died there, and still no one agreed on the right or wrong of the war.
156	"I'd like to wring Gilby's neck."	"That Gilby Pitts!"
164	"Now, Jon," Anderson Bush was saying with a friendliness that Little Jon knew was completely false, "I'm glad you decided to come out and clear this thing up. We don't like to see young fellows like you being sent to reform school. So, if you'll tell me where you put those things you took the other day…"	"Now, Jon," Anderson Bush was saying with pretend friendliness. "I'm glad you decided to come out and clear this thing up. We don't like to see young fellows like you in danger of being sent to reform school. So, if you'll tell me where you put those things you took the other day from Dr. Holliday's summer house…"
171	"People!" Mary blazed. "Why do they want to make so much trouble? But we'll talk about it after you eat. You two get washed. You're filthy."	"Why do some people want to make so much trouble?" Mary asked. "But we'll talk about it after you eat. You two get washed and come to the table."
171	"I apologize for the stupidity and meanness of my race. But honestly, we're not all like the ones you've met here. Actually, there are some pretty nice people in this world – only there aren't enough of them. It's the troublemaking kind that keeps all the rest of us on the jump."	"I apologize for the stupidity and meanness of some of the people you've met here. Actually, there are some pretty nice people in this world – only there aren't enough of them. It's just too bad that the troublemaking kind keeps all the rest of us on the jump and makes things the way they are."
175	"Bush has found out that the O'Connors didn't have any children. He's sure worked fast! I'll bet he got on the phone first thing and called the Marine personnel office in Washington."	"Bush has found out that the O'Connors didn't have any children. I'll bet he got on the phone first thing and called the Marine personnel office in Washington. Jon was right. We

	He shook his head. “All we can do is keep Jon out of sight – and pray that his memory comes back.”	should never have made up that story. All we can do is keep Jon out of sight – and pray that his memory comes back.”
179-206	Miss Josie	Judge Cunningham (24 instances)
188	“He may be a mind reader, but I’m not at all convinced he isn’t a delinquency case himself. He sounds entirely too clever to be up to any good.”	“He may be a mind reader, but I’m not at all convinced he’s telling the truth. He sounds entirely too clever for someone his age. I just wonder.”
190	Anderson Bush crossed and recrossed his legs, and Mr. McFee began tapping his fingers impatiently on the table beside him.	Anderson Bush crossed and recrossed his legs; Mr. McFee began tapping his fingers impatiently on the table beside him.
190	Miss Josie interrupted quietly, “I quite understand your feelings about the matter.”	Judge Cunningham interrupted quietly, “I understand your feelings about the matter.”
192	“I’ll be hanged if I’ll let any weaselly bunch of idiots drive you away from here!”	“I’ll be hanged if I’ll let any bunch of cowardly characters drive you away from here!”
193	“If they threaten us again, I’ll have to show them that Jon and I can be more dangerous.”	“If they threaten us again, I’ll have to show them that Jon and I can be more dangerous than they can.”
195	A nightclub offered a staggering amount of money for two weeks of personal appearances and mind reading.	A theatrical agent offered a staggering amount of money for two weeks of personal appearances and mind reading.
195	By the time Miss Josie’s little car spun into the lane, Thomas was fit to be tied.	By the time Judge Cunningham’s car spun into the lane, Thomas was fit to be tied.
199	“Mrs. Groome is making trouble, and if the government steps in…”	“Mrs. Groome is making trouble, and if the government steps in and claims Jon…”
200	They would kill Thomas to get Jon O’Connor. It shocked him to realize that men would place such terrible value on Jon O’Connor’s ability	The pursuers would kill Thomas to get Jon O’Connor. It shocked Jon to realize that such a terrible value was placed on his mind-reading ability.
201	Little Jon knew he hated weapons; Thomas had used too many in the past…	Jon knew Thomas hated weapons, that he had thought, after the war, he would never use one again.
206	This was the strange world, Thomas Bean’s world. Only, there were too few in it like Thomas Bean, and the door to it had long been closed…	This was the strange world that he had stumbled into – Thomas Bean’s world. Once, his people had visited here, but the door to it had long been closed...
206	Miss Josie went there only once.	Judge Cunningham went there once.