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The Ways of the Body

The morning before the annual Hanukkah party, Sarah pressed her face against the door to her daughter's room. The door was never fully closed; there were cracks in the foundation that filled with water and moved at the baseboards. The wood and sheetrock shifted and fought against the right angles of the doorframe. Even if the door could have closed all the way, Dinah would have still wanted a lock on it. Richie and Sarah couldn't give her that. They wanted to sometimes, give her a lock and key and be done with it. More often, though, Sarah wanted to rip the door off entirely. Throw it out in the yard and let the grass wilt and die beneath it.

Sarah pushed through the door and sat next to her daughter's sleeping body. Dinah snored under the faded blanket that Richie wrapped her in on that day some sixteen years ago when she was born. Even in her attempt at adulthood, Dinah still rubbed the worn satin edges against her cheeks while she slept. Sarah reached for an edge that Dinah had curled next to her face and felt the coldness of night that had collected there. She listened to her daughter's breath push out in delicate rasps from her nostrils. Sarah longed to scoop her up and hold her in the old rocking chair like she did when Dinah was young and couldn't sleep.

Dinah woke often in the night throughout her childhood. She would stumble into her parents' room, scared from a nightmare or aches in her body. *Growing pains*, Richie called them. She would drag that blanket with her and crawl into bed with her mother and father. Dinah always picked Sarah's edge; her younger brother, Thomas, would be jammed in the middle. But Sarah knew Dinah couldn't stand the heat of the center, had to have her feet poking out into the air outside the covers. So Dinah would stand in the doorway, a silhouette against the yellow bathroom light that seeped into the hallway. "Mommy?" she would say, and Sarah would

lift up her side of the comforter without even opening her eyes.

Once high school rolled around, Dinah seemed to not sleep at all. She always moved around late. Mumbled into her cell phone over the bubbling and buzzing of the fish tanks that lined her walls. She crumpled paper and tapped along to Beatles' songs that spilled out from her cd player. And then there were the hiccupped cries that crept through the wall of Dinah's bedroom and into Sarah's ears.

No one could remember why she was sad. Sarah sometimes thought she hated Dinah for the sadness. It was that sad anger about her that reminded Sarah of her own mother. It was a heaviness in Dinah's eyes. Ethel's eyes would look the same on those nights when she drank.

Dinah herself felt the sadness was a condition of the body. It squeezed at her skin so tight sometimes that she had to get it out— through her mouth, through her eyes, through her fingers. Sometimes it fell so heavy on her that sleep overtook her joints and she drooled on her desk and teachers ignored her because they knew the sadness well and knew that it wasn't their problem so long as the student kept her grades up. Had she not been so inside of it, Dinah would have thought of the sadness as an infection, a virus, one in which antibiotics could do nothing against and the only thing she could do was gnaw away at painkillers and pray for time to take the sickness away.

Sarah stood up from where she sat on the edge of Dinah's bed. She moved in front of one of her daughter's fish tanks and thought about her own mother. Dinah had never met her grandmother. Ethel had died when Sarah was only twenty-one, long before she had met Richie,

long before she had even the vaguest thought of becoming a mother. Sarah traced a splotch of algae on the glass in front of her. A silver fish zipped past her finger tips and hid behind a plastic plant that floated at the surface of the water. Dinah seemed to have forgotten her fish tanks and whiteness crusted to the top three inches of the glass where water should have been. Sarah's thoughts drifted from her mother for a moment and she was tempted to fill the tanks to their rightful levels. *It wasn't fair*, she thought and shook her head at the fish tank whose pumps sucked greedily at the air. She wondered if her daughter even remembered to feed them anymore. Dinah used to spend every weekend scrubbing at the algae or siphoning dirty fish water into kitchen pots and spilling them across the living room floor. Sarah would yell and make Dinah wash out the pots and wipe up the puddles with towels. Secretly, though, Sarah loved that her teenage daughter spent her free time obsessing over fish. It reminded her of her childhood. It reminded her of Ethel. Her mother always kept pets around even when there was hardly enough money to put food on the table. Ethel never turned down a stray dog or said no to the various animals that Sarah collected.

She sighed and turned away from the gurgling fish tank and back to her sleeping daughter. It was the second week of December, the morning of the Hanukkah party, and Sarah had wandered into Dinah's room with something to say.

The first week of December had brought thick fog every morning. Their little town in Northern California didn't offer much of a winter, but sometimes the whiteness of the fog made it feel like snow. It pulled at Sarah's nerves to watch Dinah drive off in her old beat-up station wagon even before the week of fog. But she couldn't stand to see her daughter rush off to school, barely awake and inevitably late, through the dense clouds that settled near the road. So

Sarah left for work earlier.

She worked with children, mentally handicapped children. And she was good at it. Sarah knew how to relate to the kids, knew what to say and what to do. There seemed to be some sort of logic to it, like a formula. Each kid was different, sure, but what it really came down to was patience and options. *Okay, Tommy instead of pulling Claire's hair we can go outside and play on the swings or we can open up the costume box.* That was all it took to earn their love. Then all week long until their therapy sessions with her, they would ask their teachers and their parents when Sarah was coming back.

Dinah rolled onto her side so that her back was towards Sarah. She could almost count the knobs of her daughter's spine. A fish splashed at the water in the tank next to Dinah's bed stand. It was Saturday and Sarah had no appointments, no children to take care of, no work to escape to.

Dinah used to complain about Sarah working too much. "Mom, you're never home," She'd say, and Dad cooks ravioli twice a week."

Then the two of them would laugh and Sarah would bring home artichokes. Artichokes meant they would sit at the table for an extra ten minutes. Thomas and Richie would disappear off to the computer or outside to watch the first stars light up the sky. Dinah and Sarah would be left alone to slide their teeth against the meaty leaves of the artichokes. They would toss the discarded shells into a bowl between them, and sometimes Dinah would talk about the science test she was studying for or the wave she caught surfing out at Salmon Creek the other day.

The Saturday that Sarah wandered into Dinah's room was the day of the Schneidman's Hanukkah party. It was a tradition, the handful of Jewish families gathered once a year to eat

latkas and drink wine until their lips were stained and repeating the obscure Yiddish curses their parents threw at them as children. Most of the families were really half-Jewish and only remembered Hanukkah because it fell somewhere near Christmas. The Jewish member of the family was usually, like Richie, from New York— a city kid intoxicated by the idea of the West Coast and the country.

Now, watching Dinah's body rise and fall with each breath in harmony with the gasps of the fish tanks, Sarah remembered why she had come into the room in the first place. She went into her daughter's room that morning with something she needed to say about the tequila and vodka bottles in the cabinet that were suddenly empty. Something about Dinah not coming home the day before. The day before, Sarah had brought six artichokes home from the store. "Mid-life crisis, here it comes," Richie said when she dumped all six into the steamer.

Thomas was at a friend's, Dinah never came home on Friday nights. "Why all the artichokes?" Richie asked.

Sarah muttered something about the liquor cabinet and Richie took out the bottles and set them on the counter. He seemed to be studying them and Sarah heard him think aloud in that annoying way he did when he was faced with a predicament. But Sarah had ignored him. She steamed all six artichokes, placed them on a plate, covered them with aluminum foil and then put them into the fridge. Richie cooked frozen ravioli that they ate in silence, and the next day, Sarah wandered into her daughter's room with something important to say.

But now, standing next to her, Dinah was so small in her bed. The fish tanks in her room were too loud. Their water levels were too low. What could she do? Sarah left the room, closed the door that never shut and hurried to the kitchen to pour herself another cup of coffee.

Dinah woke up that morning with a headache. She stretched her arms, twisted her back, and then made for the bathroom to swallow some Advil. The sun had already scattered the morning fog, and her father was outside fiddling with the lawnmower. Half the time it seemed like her father just pretended to work around the house. Dinah thought maybe he just contemplated his tools, ran his hands over them, organized them into metal boxes or leather tool belts. Because even with all the time he spent out there, the fence remained broken, the chicken coop roofless, the lawn unmowed.

Dinah stood in the kitchen and poured herself a bowl of Lucky Charms. She didn't add milk and instead moved into the living room with her bowl. She switched on the television and picked out the sugary marshmallows one by one, letting them melt against her tongue.

Her little brother, Thomas, was still asleep and her mother was at the grocery store buying food for the Schneidman's Hanukkah party. Dinah felt a confusing sort of anticipation weave through her while she flipped through channels of infomercials. Part of her was excited at the thought of the party that night. It distracted her and she accidentally popped one of the crunchy non-marshmallow cereal bits into her mouth. The other part of her longed to crawl back into bed and let her body drift away into soft blankets and confused dreams. But the two parts crashed into each other with their own paralyzing effect; so she sat there with her marshmallows and blurred her gaze at the flashing television screen.

Later into the evening, the four family members shuffled around the house, vibrating with the unspoken expectation of the upcoming event. The slowness of Sebastopol often caused this

phenomenon for families; so much expectation rode on such insignificance. A city boy like Richie would have found it ridiculous had he not still been lodged in his romanticized fantasy of small town life.

Dinah flicked mascara onto her eyelashes while Thomas banged on the bathroom door and demanded to take a shower. “Come on, Dinah. You’ve been in there for an hour already!”

Thomas was only two years younger than Dinah but, it was two years that she took advantage of every chance she got. At the moment, Thomas was well into his whining phase, any minute and he would invite Richie and Sarah into the situation. Dinah grinned at herself in the mirror and unlocked the door right as Thomas left to whine at his parents in the kitchen.

Dinah followed Thomas to where Sarah and Richie hovered over a pot of matzo ball soup at the stove. “It’s all yours, little brother,” Dinah said and ruffled his hair.

Thomas scowled at her before spinning around back into the hallway to make for the bathroom.

“You look pretty,” Richie said to his daughter.

It was awkward to see her grow up so quickly. Overnight, she had gone from a child running around happily through the rows of raspberries in the backyard to this sulky devious woman before him. The word woman made him nauseous, and he had to turn his thoughts to something else. He stirred the soup and wiped his hands on a dishtowel.

Dinah rolled her eyes and went into her room to listen to music and wait.

When they finally started leaving an hour later, it began with an argument about

Thomas's inappropriate Hanukkah attire (dirty jeans and ripped shirts were for working outside, not parties). Leaving was always tense with comic skirmishes. *Who turned the stove off?* Richie would yell from the driveway. *I thought you did?* Sarah would then scuttle into the house and check the stove that was always already turned off by Richie. *We're late*, Richie would remind everyone, revving the engine and glaring at his watch.

Then *Thomas, grab a jacket, you'll be cold* or *Dinah, you can't go out like that, that's hardly a shirt for Christ's sake*. Car doors would slam open, feet would slap angry on pavement, lights would flick on, clothing rummaged through, lights off, doors shut, seat belts clicked. And then maybe, *did someone grab the wine?* Sharp breaths drawn fast against teeth, a groan, another door, more lights— on and off. Back in the car, backed up in the driveway, and finally out on the road in a tense silence cut only by the boiling of the engine and Richie's foot jammed into the gas pedal.

They had fifteen minutes in the car to work themselves into the smiling, happy family that they would be at the Hanukkah party. Thomas screwed up his wet hair and tapped his hand on the side of the door— a tendency that often drove Dinah into a fit. He wanted her to notice, so he tapped harder and started to hum. Richie and Sarah braced themselves. Dinah stared outside, lost in the black oak trees that floated past the window. Thomas stopped humming, defeated and bored. He never wanted to go to the party to begin with. It was all adults and kids Dinah's age which made Thomas self-conscious about the two years that separated them. A lousy thing, his youngness. It gave Dinah reason to push him out from the circles of her friends, to keep secrets that were not for his *young* ears, to call him *little*, despite his obvious physical largeness in comparison to her petiteness. Thomas sighed as their red mini-van pulled into the

Schneidman's driveway.

The family shuffled down the short walkway to the house, wine bottles, Manoras and soup bowls balanced at precarious angles against their dress clothes. Sarah shifted her weight and wrenched the door open. Mrs. Schneidman waddled to greet them. "Oh you're here!"

Another man poked his head out from the kitchen and then did a disco imitation. "Late as usual, but just in time for the party to begin,"

The house was filled with good-humored Jewish self-deprecation. *Umpah!* they shouted and sloshed too much wine into too many glasses. The kitchen sweated with oil and wine; it smeared makeup and glistened beards. Latkas sizzled in fry pans and piled onto plates spooned over with homemade applesauce. The matzo balls splashed into their bowls of broth. A table was covered in chocolate cake and fruit and cheese platters and a tray of sushi that one family made out of irony. Manoras cluttered the windowsills, but Hanukkah candles were forgotten and rosy cheeked couples threw their arms up, filled their glasses and shouted again, *Umpah!*

The *kids*, the teenagers, Dinah's friends, did their best at playing adults. They casually wrapped their fingers around stems of wine glasses that they slipped off the counters and carried to more discrete rooms in the house. They molded their bodies into sophisticated angles while they pretended to enjoy the foul liquid at their lips. There were a handful of them, but Leah was Dinah's closest friend there. The two of them had been friends back in elementary school. They had grown up together, been on each other's soccer teams, been to each other's birthdays, and had been playing adults at their parents' Hanukkah parties for as long as they could remember. And they still didn't like the taste of the wine.

That night, though, Dinah gulped it down with a particular fervor. Her stomach growled at her. She hadn't eaten anything besides the Lucky Charms marshmallows, and that was hours ago. She felt the pleasant heat rush at her face and her eyes shifted lazily about the room.

Thomas sat by the fireplace and watched his sister make wild movements with her body as her friends erupted in laughter and clapped their hands together. Dinah was good at this, drawing others into a world she created. It was almost always excessively sarcastic and filled with silly voices and stories and observations. Thomas couldn't help but smile— it was her charm and he knew it for what it was— but she just looked so happy. At one point, Dinah even swaggered over to Thomas and looped an arm around his shoulder. She slurred out something like *don't tell Mom and Dad* and passed him her glass. Thomas could see the wine stains that gathered in the creases of her lips as she spoke. He took the wine glass and set it on a counter. He would have liked to be drunk, of course, but he didn't like the idea of drinking with all the adults; and besides he had a long night ahead of him. Earlier that year, he had begun to sneak out at night, walk the two miles to the nearest liquor store and shoulder-tap cheap bottles of whiskey or forties. And some nights, Thomas would steal booze from his parents' liquor cabinet. Then, he and the contingency of friends that accompanied him, would stagger through ditches and sway along the winding back country roads. Thomas had made plans with his friends for after the Hanukkah party to drink and then walk around in the dark outside until the sun rose.

Dinah was back in a corner, huddled with her friends. She had found another glass and

was drinking it deftly between nods of her head. There was a party, a *real* party in town, her friends were saying. “Daniel can drive us,” Leah said, “He hasn’t been drinking and he has enough seats for your brother too.”

Dinah shook her head. “Thomas isn’t coming, but Daniel’s car sounds good”

Their plan was solid; they would wait until the bulk of the parents left, and then Leah’s mother, who was already sloshed, would be an easy pushover. The party thinned and the parents began gathering their empty platters and leftovers.

Sarah was drunk when she walked over to the group of teenagers to collect Dinah. “Nah, Mom, I’m staying the night,” Dinah said with a wave of her hand.

Sarah was embarrassed. She was the mother, the adult, and there was this disturbing nonchalance in the way Dinah acted towards her. “Well, alright,” Sarah said. “Did you bring your toothbrush?”

Dinah laughed a laugh that rippled through the group. Sarah actually blushed and then felt a coarse tingle in her palm; she wanted to hit her daughter. She gulped at the air and kissed Dinah roughly on the forehead. “Goodnight then.”

“Night.”

When Sarah pulled herself into the front seat of the car, she was shaking. Richie was smiling and rattling on about the poker night him and “the guys” had planned. He moved the van into drive and they bumbled down the Schneidman’s driveway.

Thomas sat silently in the back seat, itching to get home and finally start *his* night.

Back inside the Schneidman's house, Leah's mother barely looked up when her daughter mentioned the other party they intended to go to. Off they were, folding legs and arms into Daniel's Sudan. Dinah scrambled in the front seat and cranked the sunroof open. She stood up as Daniel drove and let the night and the stars whip at her face and water her eyes. Leah shouted worries from the back, but Dinah let them scatter in the wind that rushed at her ears. She felt the warmth from the alcohol fade into numbness from the cold December air.

When they arrived in front of the house, there was an alarming quietness in the air. "Oh man, did the cops get here first?" Daniel said.

But there hadn't been cops. The house was up a steep set of rock stairs, carved into a hillside and hidden by ivy and redwood trees. Dinah bounded up the stairs, eager for something— more booze, cigarettes, new faces— she didn't really know, and it didn't really matter. She burst into the party, and a sudden wave of self-consciousness hit her.

The house was dark and heavy with pot smoke. The smoke hung on furniture and dragged at everyone's faces. Dinah tried to contain her movements, slow them down, work them into the pace of the room. But she was bouncing from one familiar face to the next. All too stoned to do anything but crack their eyelids and smile at Dinah's rapid words and sharp laugh. She floated from living room to kitchen to the back porch where a few guys sat smoking cigarettes and sipping on a bottle of vodka. She stood next to one of them, Cody. She remembered his name; it was his house, his party. He wore a red and white striped dress shirt and a leather jacket that smelled like it belonged in a museum.

And that was the last thing she remembered that could be separated out into itself. After that, events seemed to shuffle into each other—tiny memories that collapsed and mixed into one

another, then re-stacked themselves only to fall again in a new order. And it all happened surprisingly slow, like she was moving through something thick and sugary— molasses.

There was his shirt in her face, and all the stripes like candy canes which she thought was funny until it made her dizzy. There was the vodka that ripped at Dinah's throat, which she gulped at and then raised into the air like a toast to the slivered moon. And there was Leah who said *got to go home* and Dinah who said *nope, not going anywhere*. And there were the cigarettes. So many, they seemed to smoke themselves— blurring the night in their white coils. They seeped into the redwood and pine trees that towered above them, sprawled out across the porch and twisted under the yellow light from inside. And there were the stripes in her face and the cigarette whose smoke caught on her eyelashes and burned. There was eye rubbing and laughing and more vodka. One guy disappeared. Leah showed up again, desperate, begging, something about her mother and being responsible for Dinah. Dinah waved her away, smiling, *staying here*. Her shoes were gone. Where the hell did she leave her shoes? It was cold and it was just her and Cody and there was a conversation too. Flirting, silly middle school flirting. She giggled and flicked her cigarette even when the end was just orange. And there were the candy canes in her face. She touched them, ran her fingers along the length of them. Then the warmth of his mouth and the confusion as to whether she had been the one to put her lips there. She was in his arms and he was moving through all the smoke and night. A door opened and closed, a new room with a bed and posters that danced on the walls. Stevie Ray Vaughan. The room was so dark that it threatened to drown her; she groped for him and his warm mouth. Better than the vodka, she thought. And everything was tangled, belt buckles and bra straps and shirts that caught on ears and noses. They swam at each other, pulling at clothing, dropping cell

phones and change from their pockets. Until they were all soft against each other and Dinah felt his skin heavy on hers, fighting the cold and dark of the room.

But then knocking, hammering, an angry thing at the door. Leah. *Dinah, Dinah, we got to go.* There was fear in that voice. *Dinah come on. Your dad's here.*

Richie was sitting on the couch napping through a history channel special on the Crusades when the phone rang. It was Leah's mother, Mrs. Schneidman. She was frantic. She explained, long and flowery and guilty. Richie translated it quickly: second party, Dinah drunk, won't leave, *boy's* house. It was one in the morning. Dinah had never been drunk at all to Richie's knowledge and now drunk around strangers, around *boys*? *Uh uh, no way, wasn't happening.* He didn't even bother to wake Sarah up, didn't bother to grab a coat, just out the door into his car.

Dinah laughed at the door and Leah's voice. She laughed and swore and mouthed at the boy's neck. *Dinah, your dad said he would come up here if he had to, you got to go!* Oh shit, more laughter and Dinah wriggled and rolled off the bed. Pants, pants, where were her pants? She hummed and prodded at the floor with her foot. She stuffed her legs into the rough jeans and zipped and buttoned but could not find her shirt. *Dinah? I've got your shoes.* Oh shit, this is ridiculous. Cody was saying something about phone numbers and how pretty she looked. Dinah laughed and poked at the pile of clothes on a chair near the bed. The whole room smelled like old leather jacket, and so did her shirt when she finally found it. She put her hand along his cheek and jawbone, kissed his forehead and left the room.

Outside Leah was all hysterics. She kept spilling over herself in apologies, and tears even seemed to clog up her throat and eyes. Dinah tried to comfort her as they made their way down the stairs. She tried to put an arm around Leah but almost tripped on the uneven stones. The red van glowed ahead of them, lights on and windshield wipers pumping at invisible rain. Leah helped Dinah into the passenger seat and then ran off to Daniel's car parked nearby.

Richie said nothing to his daughter. What could he say? This should have been his profound rite of passage speech that Dinah would never remember anyway. A lesson, a moral, something had to be said. But Richie couldn't bring himself to do it. He just stared at her sideways and watched her try to find the window crank. Dinah's blonde hair fell in tired chunks, and the wind that pulled at the window flipped it across her face. She dangled her upper body out into the night so much so that Richie had to busy his hands on the steering wheel to keep from grabbing her back inside the car. He snapped the locks down with his elbow. Dinah started to roll her head around and mutter out the window. Then she sat up straight, and still turned out the window said, "Well fuck you!" She slurred it across her teeth. "Fuck you!"

It felt so good to say. She was getting away with something and some sober part of her knew it, reveled in it. "You fucking asshole!"

It took Richie a minute to realize that she was talking to him. What could he say now? What divine insight could he share with his daughter to make this a moment they could laugh at in five years. He didn't have a thing, he just stared at her dumbly as her hair and her words flung themselves around the car.

"I was finally having fun, do you realize?" Dinah's voice clawed out against her

tightened jaw. “Fun. And you had to fucking ruin it.” She was almost screaming now. It was a story she was writing for herself that was becoming more real with every word. “When was the last time I had fun? When? You fucking tell me! Tell me!”

Richie couldn’t tell her anything. He wanted to, wanted to be that father that knew what to say, knew how to calm her down. But all he could do was drive.

Dinah choked in the cold air. Stop lights and street signs whirred past her. The stars seemed to touch the trees and the gas stations seemed to fold over themselves. Her vision spun in heaps of air and colors. She closed her eyes and watched little fireworks pop against her eyelids. “Why don’t you ever let me have any fucking fun around here?” That was her voice, she realized. The van sputtered into a turn and Dinah slammed a fist into the car door. She could tell they were nearing their house even with her eyes closed. “Fuck! This is fucked! You’re fucked! Fuck You!”

Back at the house, Thomas and his friends were drinking the tequila and vodka he had snuck from his parents’ liquor cabinet. He hadn’t even considered his parents would notice them missing so soon. He never saw his parents drink except for at parties. Thomas sat with four of his friends in Richie’s shop passing around the two plastic bottles. Thomas loved his father’s shop, he loved all the plastic drawers filled with nails and screws, he loved the smell of wood shavings from the skill saw, and the shapes everything took at night. Hammers and wrenches and tool belts hung from nails and threw their shadows in violent angles across the shop. Thomas always came there to drink, *so we don’t get caught*, he would reason. The shop was separate from the main house, pushed back further from the road so that the driveway ran

alongside the house to dead end in front of the little building that should have been a garage. But really, Thomas knew that drinking in the shop had nothing to do with secrecy. Sometimes, he thought he actually wanted his parents to catch him, to ground him and yell at him about something real instead of the usual— being late to school or not tucking in his shirt for the Hanukkah party. Thomas downed the last of the tequila and slipped the bottle into the metal tool box he had been sitting on. He did a little spin and slid his foot across the concrete, piling sawdust at the inside of his shoe. Then he led his friends out of the shop and into the driveway.

Richie pulled the car in front of his shop. “Hold on a minute, Dinah,” he said.

There, he did it, he finally said something. It wasn’t anything special, but words had come from his mouth and that was important.

Dinah flung the door open and staggered out of the van. She turned towards the house which seemed soft and shifty.

Richie hurried around the car to see Dinah swing her arms, sweeping wildly at invisible tree branches or spider webs. Richie grabbed onto her shoulders and guided her towards the house. “Fuck you! Don’t touch me!” she howled.

They made it up the stairs and onto the deck. Dinah broke free of Richie’s hold, spun around and hacked and gagged and vomited all over the deck and her shoes.

When Thomas opened the door to the shop, he froze mid-step so that one of his friends slammed against his back. He stared at the backs of his sister and father. They were on the deck; Dinah slumped against his father, little and bent in the porch light. Then Dinah moved her

arms like chickens did when they didn't want to be held anymore. Her shoulders arched upwards and her elbows jutted out until she was free. Thomas should have looked away then but he couldn't. He watched Dinah open her mouth and hack up what should have been latkas but was actually just liquid that smacked on the deck and into the pavement of the driveway below. Thomas covered his mouth in disgust and his friends said a few *ah shits* and *oh mans*.

Richie grabbed onto his daughter again and turned to look at his son standing across the driveway. "What?" he cocked his head sideways and bulged out his eyes to make sure he was seeing clearly. "What are you doing?"

Thomas walked forward a few steps and stopped. He had no explanation, no excuse. He and his friends looked like they were about to rob a bank— all bundled up in black clothing and beanies. He was screwed. He tried to dig in his mind for something clever to say, he was a Field after all, and he was supposed to be able to throw out Field Facts left and right— white lies, stories— they were his forte. But not tonight, tonight nothing. Just a weird sort of awe and fear for his sister, who at that moment saved Thomas from whatever would have come from that surprised look on his father's face.

Dinah lurched forward face first into the glass door in front of her. Richie was caught in the middle of his two children, mouth open, trying to find words or punishments or maybe even laughter. In a split second, Dinah had gone from being well within the circle of his protective arms to hurling her body against the door. Richie forgot about his son and dragged Dinah into the house to sit her down on the couch and examine her. She laughed and hiccupped and her eyes rolled underneath her drooping eyelids. She was fine, a bruise, a bump, but no blood—

thank God. He poured her a glass of water and retrieved a bag of frozen peas and from the fridge, wrapped it in a towel and pressed it against her forehead. She sputtered and flung her arms up half-heartedly before settling into the couch.

Thomas snuck back into the house while his friends dispersed back to their own houses. Every creak of the house seemed to be his father, coming to scold him, coming to tell him how disappointed he was. Thomas chewed a handful of Altoids and willed himself into sobriety. He waited tense but his father never came to scold him.

Richie was exhausted by the time he carried Dinah into her bed and explained the whole thing to his wife. Sarah had wandered into the living room after hearing the loud crack of Dinah's head against the glass door. When she saw her daughter, hunched over and half-asleep on the couch, there was no way for Richie to postpone explanation until morning. He scooped Dinah up and then sat down with Sarah to recount the night's events.

Sarah didn't try to sleep after that. She just drank tea and paced from the kitchen to the living room to her daughter's bedside. She went from shocked to angry to terrified to tears and back again. All night a giant lonely charade of emotions that sent her into furious hand gestures or made her bang the tea kettle atop the stove. She uncovered the artichokes in the fridge and began to rip at their leaves with her teeth, leaving a trail of green where she paced. Dinah wasn't a troublemaker. This was something Sarah expected from her son— he was the one always pushing the limit, always testing the malleability of rules. No, Dinah wasn't like that. It wasn't

a game with her. It was Ethel all over again, except Dinah didn't have responsibilities, didn't have to rein herself in enough to put food on the table. So where did that leave her? Sarah began to panic at the thought, and she ground her teeth so hard into an artichoke leaf that she ripped off the entire bottom half. She spit it out on the floor and thought about what to say to her daughter in the morning.

In the morning, the artichoke leaves were cleaned from the floors. Richie drank his coffee and headed outside to play with his tools. Thomas slept. Dinah slept. Sarah sat at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee and a cup of tea. She sipped alternately from each and waited for her daughter to wake up. She told a story over and over again in her head. It was the story she would tell Dinah, just a story and that was it, no punishment, no scolding. Just a story.

It was Sarah's story. The story of the first time she drank. She was fifteen, old enough to know better than to drink an entire bottle of wine. But there was this feeling in her that needed to prove something by it. She was curious and also, she realized later, provoked by her mother's drinking. Ethel drank whiskey the nights when she drank. She poured wine glasses full of it so that her children could pretend to themselves if they wanted to. They ignored the discrepancy of the colors. And by the end of one glass, she would yell, chase them around the house, flip over chairs and throw couch cushions across the room. Her children learned to avoid her, to hide glasses and dishes so that she wouldn't break them. And when they were caught, they knew how to go limp when she slapped at them, they knew how to take the sport out of it. They didn't love her any less for it. It was a game for them. And Sarah wanted to try her hand at the tyrant role. It didn't work. She drank the wine and just giggled and slid on the tile floor with her socks until

she was dizzy. When Ethel came home, she found the wine bottle and smelled it on her daughter's breath. She pulled Sarah close to her and Sarah looped around and laughed, trying to invite her mother into the game. Ethel stared down at her daughter. It wasn't a game anymore: Sarah weakened under her mother's gaze and felt her body go slack like it wanted to melt into the floor. Ethel raised the wine bottle and Sarah braced herself. Hours seemed to slink by and Sarah pretended she could feel the thick glass shatter against her shoulder or her skull maybe. But then there was a crash, a thrashing of glass against glass. Ethel had thrown the bottle through the kitchen window. Dark and light glass rolled around the floor between wine drops like blood on the tile. "Sarah Field," her mother started, her voice deadly like a curse or a sentence, "you listen well because I will only say this once. You are not to make my mistakes, you hear? You are not to make my mistakes." There was something essential in her mother's words that Sarah tried to piece together, but her mind was still reeling from the wine. "Now clean up this mess and go tell your brothers and sisters the entertainment is over for the night."

And that was it. Sarah never drank again until she was out of her mother's house and even after that, even years after Ethel died, she would sip at alcohol and look over her shoulder constantly, searching college parties or bars for her mother. And always she would feel a heavy guilt inside of her churn her stomach against the alcohol she ingested.

Sarah didn't know exactly what she thought she would accomplish with the story. But it seemed necessary. Besides she had never told it before. She needed to tell it, needed Dinah to understand. But when her daughter finally did wake up, Sarah's mugs of tea and coffee were empty. She was refilling them, and Dinah's sudden presence startled her. Sarah had it all planned out. They would sit and drink coffee and maybe eat the last artichoke and Sarah would

tell her story and Dinah would get it— would get the essential piece of the story that Sarah, still after all these years, could not understand. But there was Dinah, tired and hungover looking and wearing those snowflake pajamas Sarah had bought her for Christmas last year. Dinah lowered her head at her mother and filled a glass with water. Then she was gone, back into her room with all those goddamn fish tanks, bubbling away all day and night. It must have been like sleeping underwater for her. Sarah stood at the stove, paralyzed by the two empty mugs in her hands. The sun reached its rays through the kitchen window and scattered dust like memories in front of her.