

By the time she was driving a fifteen-passenger van to the Outer Cape, Rose could no longer look at Declan, who slouched in the seat beside her, polishing his gold-plated harmonica. A fellow chaperone on the Barrett Hall senior trip, he'd contributed almost nothing except lazy charm and conspicuous flash. While Rose squinted at the road through a light May rain, Declan howled along with his playlist of bluegrass and folk. His dark hair—long enough, to Rose's dismay, for a ponytail—gleamed so brightly she wondered if he'd dipped his comb in po-made.

The girls were only distantly aware of Declan's noise, since most of them wore buds tucked into their ears.

"Maybe we could listen to NPR," Rose said.

"The news? Nah," Declan said. "That shit's depressing."

"Okay, then." Rose cleared her throat. "Some silence, maybe." She pointed to her right temple. "I've got the start of a headache here."

"Drink more water," Declan said, offering his metal canteen.

"I have Advil," one of the girls shouted from several rows back.

"She has Xanax," said another.

"She has appetite suppressants that don't seem to be working," said a third. A flurry of fake hitting followed. Rose stuck two fingers in her mouth and emitted a short, sharp whistle. The hitting subsided.

Frankie, Rose's favorite, stirred from her nap against

the window, pink hair matted to the side of her head.

"What does one do," she said, "if one has to piss like a racehorse?"

"A timely question," Declan said.

"I'll get off at the next exit," Rose said.

"Look out," someone shouted. "Rose is about to get off."

She pulled into the lot of a diner in Sagamore, knowing that by doing so she was tacitly agreeing to spend roughly ninety minutes there, though it should have been only fifteen. Some of the girls would hide on the other side of the diner to smoke. Some would flirt with the waiters, some would try to order beers. Some would sit down for fried eggs and hash browns, then forget to leave a tip.

"Fifteen minutes, tops," Rose said as they filed out of the van. Declan trailed after them. In their wake, they left gum wrappers and perfumed inserts from magazines, iPads with movies still playing on their screens. Brynn, one of the more studious girls, was reading *The Magic Mountain*, a piece of red licorice dangling from her mouth.

"How you doing back there, Brynn?"

"I don't really have to pee."

"Why don't you get some air anyway," Rose said.

Brynn sighed, dropped the book, climbed out, and shut the door behind her, leaving Rose in brief but much-needed silence. She closed her eyes, then opened them

at the sound of explosive laughter: Beth K., who was always in need of an audience, lay on her back in one of the parking spots, legs high in the air. Rose tapped the horn. Beth K. stood up and saluted her.

In her front pocket, Rose's phone glowed and trembled with a text from Declan, who was in the diner: *want anything to eat?*

*No, thank you*, she replied, though in fact she was hungry, and thirsty from the granola bar she'd eaten earlier. It was best, she thought, not to make things harder with Declan by letting him buy her the black-and-white milkshake she wanted. She and Declan had slept together twice. Both times, his hair damp and slightly sticky on her cheek, she had thought of it as a simple inevitability. Rose and Declan were the youngest faculty members on campus, and Declan was one of only eight men. He was new—he taught history and music, stressing the importance of the latter—and it was clear to everyone that he wouldn't last long at Barrett Hall. It was not a place that managed to captivate young faculty: it was too remote, the winters so snowy that they created a de facto five-month quarantine. It was difficult to meet people, nearly impossible to date. Little of this had mattered to Rose in the six years she'd been at Barrett, but, on the cusp of thirty, she was starting to wonder how long she could stay.

Her phone trembled again: *got you a donut, just in case*. She closed her messages and checked Instagram to see what the girls had posted so far. There was a photograph of Frankie, asleep with her mouth wide open. There was a more recent photo of Frankie's roommate, Ariel, drinking a Shirley Temple and wearing her sunglasses inside the diner.

"Did you get my message?" Declan said, opening his door.

"Yep." Rose took the greasy paper bag from him.

"So tonight," he said. "I was thinking we could maybe hang out."

"We have to get all of these girls checked in, figure out where to have dinner, and then we have to go over tomorrow's schedule, and then—"

"Rose." He laughed, shaking his head. "You don't have to come up with excuses. You're not going to break my heart or anything."

"I know." She scratched the steering wheel with her thumbnail.

"I'm going to stretch," Declan added. He got out and stood in a handicapped spot, his gangly arms in their wool blazer arched high over his head. Rose tipped the bag over and let a French cruller fall into her hand. It was stale, but she ate it hungrily.

She called a meeting at six in her room at the Harborview Suites. The room was a display of incongruities: marine-themed artwork, sunflowers on sheets and drapes, tawny light pouring from beaded glass lampshades. Through the window, she had a view of the stone jetty on which she and Stella Echternacht had nearly broken their ankles ten years ago, dancing among the wet rocks, sharing a bottle of champagne. It was Stella's debut show at an East End gallery that had given Rose the idea to suggest Provincetown for the senior trip. They would not arrive in time for the show—the gallery opened in June—so instead they would visit Stella's studio. The girls, having Googled the number of bars on Commercial Street, had voted *aye* unanimously.

They paraded into the room at ten past six, smelling of freshly washed hair and cigarettes. Earlier, at the end of their five-hour drive from Vermont, they had taken on the glazed-over complacency of younger children.

Revived and giddy, they were suddenly daunting to Rose, who stood among them with her arms crossed, waiting for the chatter to subside.

“Guys, shut up,” Frankie said.

“I don’t need help, Frankie,” Rose said. “Beth K., tell me when curfew is.”

“Sunrise,” Beth K. said.

“Funny.” Rose looked at the sea of heads: twelve in all, most of them blond or striving to be. “Someone tell me when curfew is, please.”

“Ten-thirty,” Brynn said.

“Very good,” Rose said. “Declan will be waiting in the lobby with the sign-in sheet. Tomorrow morning Declan will lead a hike in the dunes, then we visit Ms. Echternacht’s studio, then we go on our whale watch. Any questions?”

No questions. They never had questions. They paused only to mock the painting behind Rose’s bed—a misty pod of violet dolphins, hanging crookedly, as if on a single nail—before charging down the hallway, leaving the door ajar. Rose kicked off her clogs, tore the wrapping from one of the plastic cups on the desk, and went to the bathroom for water, ignoring the long, dark hair in her sink. When she returned, Declan was standing in front of the television, flipping through channels with the remote.

“Sure, come on in,” she said.

“I knocked. You just didn’t hear it.” He eyed the cup in her hand. “Good idea,” he added. “I brought bourbon. What did you bring?”

“This is tap water.” She took a demonstrative sip.

“My room has a broken window.”

“How broken? Like a-bird-can-get-inside broken?”

“Not quite,” he said. “I guess it’s more of a crack than a break. Like a moth could get in.”

“Moths always get in.” She watched him edge closer to her bed. “You can sit. I mean, there’s nowhere else to sit.”

He flopped onto his back, the way Frankie or Beth K. often tumbled onto the futon in the dormitory’s common room. He’d left Rose’s TV on a cooking show. Scallops sizzled in a frying pan.

“So where are you eating?” he said. “I heard there’s a bar with decent fish and chips.”

“There is.” She pulled a tiny feather from the sleeve of her coat. “Thing is, I’m having dinner with my friend Stella.”

“I can go alone,” he said, eyes on the screen. Chopped parsley rained over the scallops. “You don’t have to babysit me.”

He was wearing her least favorite outfit: jeans, wool blazer over a threadbare Blondie t-shirt, belt blistered with plastic rubies, cowboy boots. She’d chosen her own clothing entirely out of practical concerns: a cable-knit sweater, wool-blend leggings, both navy blue. Her hair was in the same plait she’d pulled it into the night before, when it was still wet from her bath.

She locked the door and decided to try. One of his belt’s plastic rubies came off in her hands. She lay on her back and he traced her hipbone with the tip of his tongue. She pulled his head up by the jaw, raised her legs, imagined her toes leaving powdery imprints on his back.

“You’re always so quiet,” he said when he finished.

“You always complain that I’m quiet.” She sat up. He helped free her hair from her sweater when she pulled it down over her head. On the TV screen, a heavysset woman iced a marble cake.

Rose had seen earlier incarnations of Stella the painter: cat-eye makeup and butterfly sleeves, affected speech (“darling,” “whilst”). Her living spaces were always warm

cloisters full of candles and tapestries, and when Rose entered the house she was struck by its emptiness. A blue and white couch, a small table, four folding chairs, nothing more. The row of French windows facing the harbor was open to the rain; the ceiling fan formed a blurry circle with its blades. The hardwood floors, painted white, were bare and slightly sandy. The place smelled of fried onions and soap.

“Shoes off,” Stella said, without turning to greet Rose. She raised the lid from a Dutch oven and stirred. Her bangs were pinned back from her forehead with a heavy silver clip. She wore blue mesh shorts and a man’s undershirt that clung a bit to her soft belly. Rose had never seen her so unadorned: eyebrows un-plucked, wrists free of bangles, fingernails clear and dull. When she crossed the room and kissed her friend’s cheek, she tasted baby lotion.

“I forgot wine,” Rose said.

Stella ate a spoonful of steaming rice and winced.

“I’m not drinking these days anyway.”

“Since when?”

“I don’t know. A few months ago, I guess. My mother dragged me on this cruise she took to get over her latest beau, and it turned out to be a get-Stella-sober crusade. She figured out how to register me as an underage guest.” Stella laughed. “I couldn’t buy any drinks with my little cruise ship ID, not even after I showed them my crow’s-feet.”

“Poor Stella,” Rose said.

“Poor Stella is right. Do you know what those ships are like? Discos. Perfume outlets. Magicians. It’s hell.” She made a gagging noise. “So how are you?”

Rose sat in one of the folding chairs.

“I had sex,” she said, “and then I didn’t have time to shower.”

“Who’s the lucky fellow?”

“Just Declan.”

“Ah.” Stella took Rose’s phone from the table. “Any pictures of him?”

“Go to Barrett Hall’s Facebook page and click though the slideshow. He’s the one in the stupid belt playing the guitar.”

Stella was silent, swiping images on the phone.

“He’s not really your style.”

“Agreed,” Rose said.

“Then again, waiters aren’t my style, and I fucked a waiter on the cruise. You know what the worst part is?” She began heaping lentils and rice into bowls. “The worst part is that I think my mother was kind of into him. We watched him all week; we had this nickname for him, Sub-Saharan Joe, which was kind of racist, I guess, because it turned out he’s from Tunisia.” She pulled a salad out of the fridge and peeled back the plastic wrap over its top. They sat down, and for a minute or so, the only sound in the room was of two women chewing kale.

“Tell me more about your Tunisian waiter.”

“There’s nothing to say. I thought you had some good stories for *me*.”

Rose took a mouthful of water and shook her head. She’d come armed with the kind of stories Stella liked, stories that would have allowed them to snicker together, the way they always did: how Declan had been cautious in bed, how he emitted a kind of helpless hum while Rose sucked him, how he kept pressing a hand, lightly, to the back of her head, then second-guessing himself and pulling the hand away; how, when she didn’t come the first time, he apologized the way you might if you accidentally knocked over someone’s wine glass; how, the time she did come, he pressed his hand over her heart, feeling how quickly it beat, and she knew he was looking for proof.

She found that she didn't want to tell Stella any of these things; in fact, she felt dry-mouthed with a lack of things to say. Stella, who could be merciful when she felt like it, turned on a podcast, the volume too loud, the way the girls played their music in the dorm.

They ate too fast—to get it over with, Rose thought, though the lentils, made with garlic and olives and preserved lemons, were so good she longed for a third bowl. Stella washed the dishes and Rose dried. The podcast, hosted by Stella's friends, was mostly a series of jokes at the expense of Brooklyn hipsters and “post-hipsters,” subjects from which Rose felt a pleasing and considerable distance. Stella laughed greedily, and in her laughter Rose recognized the relief of a person drawing nearer to her kin. In herself, and in her studious drying of every fork and spoon, Rose recognized a desire to be alone.

But it wasn't aloneness, exactly, that she wanted. She would have settled for the quasi-aloneness in which she spent most of her evenings, sitting on a battered couch in the dorm common room, idly wondering if there was a way out of a place that was starting to feel dangerously comfortable. The dorm was her house, she'd been in it too long, she'd had her own adolescence here, had seethed and railed against her mother Alice in these rooms, she'd smoked clove cigarettes in the basement, painted her toenails black, called an ex-lover, Killian, too many times, until her dorm parents limited her access to the phone. She'd wept for no reason, and for excellent reasons, too. She'd gone down to the laundry room to indulge in the dull and pointless act of missing her father, a man she couldn't even remember, but she liked to actively miss him in a room that smelled faintly of mildew, in a room where the speckled, painted bricks made her think of peppered buttermilk, in a room where the hum of the dryers soothed her. Her mother, Alice, liked to accuse her

of never having left, as if college had been a hiccup, as if her absence from Barrett had been like that of a child whose tonsils have been removed, who is kept overnight, feverish, in a hospital bed, waiting to go home.

“I'm almost thirty-one,” Rose said.

Stella rinsed a plate.

“You want a baby yet?”

“I don't think so.”

“So not a definite no.”

“No. I mean, I don't know.”

“Ugh.” Stella squeezed the pink sponge in her hand. “This is gross. I don't want to be two single women in their thirties washing dishes while we talk about men and babies.”

“That's not what we are.”

“Well, we're closer to that than I want to be,” Stella said. She pulled a jug of maple syrup from her fridge and took a sip—the same habit she'd had back when she and Rose were roommates. “Dessert,” she said, lips glistening. “You want?”

Rose drank some syrup. It was cheap and sweet, but it felt restorative. She loved Stella's small, indulgent rituals, the way she mostly didn't change.

They walked two blocks to the studio, Stella apologizing for smoking as she exhaled through her nostrils. The place was essentially an old shed with skylights, as squalid and musty as Rose had expected, with moldy teacups and candy bar wrappers scattered everywhere, but the work was not what Rose had expected at all. She had expected self-portraiture, with certain features distorted to suggest that the artist was not too enamored with herself.

Instead, each canvas Rose saw was an unremarkable patch of snow framed by a peeling red window frame. It was a view she recognized easily; it was the view Stella

and Rose had shared from their dorm room window, a view they jokingly called “the tundra” because, in wintertime, from the safety of their warm beds, an uninterrupted stretch of snow was the only thing they could see.

“These are beautiful,” Rose said.

“I don’t know if that’s the right word.”

“Oh, Christ, don’t pretend to be humble. Not with me.”

Stella picked up a paintbrush and twirled the bristles around her palm.

“I’m lonely,” she announced.

“So go fuck another waiter.” It fell flat. It wasn’t funny. “Sorry,” she added. “I’m a dick.”

“Nothing new,” Stella said, rubbing her shoulder as if she’d been punched.

Rose followed her back outside, slapping at mosquitos while Stella locked the heavy wooden door. The air felt good, cool and fresh, as if it were there to reassure her: friendship intact, nothing lost, girls alive and accounted for. Back at the Harborview, she fell asleep on top of the covers with all the lights on.

The following day, in the studio, Stella put on a bit of a show for the girls. She offered them espresso, which all of them took but few of them drank. She name-dropped people no one had ever heard of before. Twice she said “fuck” under her breath for no discernable reason other than the slight thrill it gave her audience. She wore an enormous silk peony in her hair. She told the girls not to let their parents spoil them, and Rose struggled not to laugh: Stella’s mother was paying for the studio and the apartment, just as she’d paid for Stella’s MFA. Stella held a glass jar of water while she spoke, and at one point she gestured so fiercely that water fell to the floor with a slap. Her jeans were high-waisted and unflattering. There was a light pink veil of acne across her forehead. Some of the

girls, including Frankie, seemed newly floored by love. For much of the hour, Rose stood in a far corner alone.

Declan was quiet, at one point leaving the studio to shake sand from his shoes. He wore the same clothes as the day before, and when Rose walked by him she inhaled sharply, trying and failing to detect her own scent. Declan fidgeted. He looked bored. When Freckled Annie and Blond Annie started texting each other, he snapped at them both to be respectful and confiscated their phones. The phones clicked together in the pocket of his blazer, causing much more distraction than either Annie had. Rose edged away from him. Her elbow bumped the cool glass of a window. The room smelled of expensive hair product. What had she been thinking, bringing them here? This could have been easier; it could have been Washington, D.C., it could have been two straight days of monuments plus dinner in Chinatown. She’d been seduced by her own ideas about the Cape in late spring, by salty wind and clam chowder and steamy windows, by solitary walks in the icy tide. In the day’s hard light, she was repulsed by Declan. He jammed his hands in his blazer pockets, where he sometimes carried beef jerky, where he always carried a glass guitar pick the color of lapis lazuli. When he exhaled, she smelled cider and sourdough bread. This happened every time, in the hours after she’d slept with him: he hadn’t been enough, she hadn’t liked it enough. She wanted scalding hot water. She wanted him to leave.

“You don’t have to raise your hand,” Stella said, laughing. She was taking questions, sitting backwards in a folding chair.

“Can you come on our dune hike?” Frankie asked, hand still high in the air. Rose noticed a new tattoo—presumably temporary—of thick green vines on her forearm.

“What dune hike?” Stella said, lifting a brow. “Rose



didn't mention it."

"I meant to," Rose said, and then it was true. It would be good to have Stella there, rambling about their Barrett days, complaining about how hard it was to walk in the sand. Her presence—gregarious, sweaty, all-knowing—would keep Declan at a distance.

"You *have* to come," Rose said.

She'd been waiting for the knock—explosive, unhinged, the knock of imagined emergency, the knock that was as much a part of the senior trip as the bickering and the cigarettes, the attempts to buy alcohol, the French braids and the potato chips and the complaints about the long drive. Rose glanced at the clock on her nightstand—three-thirty-seven a.m.—and reached for one of her shoes. She hurled it hard at the door, heard its satisfying thump, heard the sand inside it fall across the carpet. Sometimes, this was enough to scare the girls back to bed.

"It's me," someone told her. Another urgent knock.

"Just a *minute*," Rose said. When she pulled the chain on the lamp, nothing happened. She turned on the television for the sake of its light. The infomercial was for knives; thick slices of potato fell like dominoes.

She wore a gray T-shirt, a sports bra, and her wool-fleece leggings. Everything had sand in it, since she'd worn all of it on the dune hike, which had been blissfully uneventful, and exactly as she'd predicted: Stella regaled the girls with innocent tales about the way Rose used to sit on the roof to "write letters" (to smoke pot) and how she used to eat chocolate cake mix out of the box (she still did). The whale watch company cancelled their trip—they hadn't managed to sell the minimum number of tickets required—so instead they walked on Herring Cove Beach, writing their names in the sand with sticks,

until the drizzle became a downpour. The girls voted in favor of ordering pizzas directly to the motel instead of going out for chowder. The night took on a cast of grease and television, just as it would have if they'd stayed home in Vermont.

When Rose opened the door, Declan looked up from where he sat on the hallway floor.

"Are you serious?"

"Rose."

"Get up," she hissed, pinching his sleeve.

"Rose," he said again.

She took his forearms and pulled, stumbling backwards with his weight. She waited for him to flop on the bed but instead he paced around it, arms crossed over his chest.

"It's three-fucking-thirty," she said, rubbing her eyes.

"I know. I'm sorry." He closed the door and leaned against it.

"You've never been drunk before? Can't you sleep it off in your own room?"

"I'm not drunk."

"Congratulations. Now go to bed."

"Rose," he pleaded.

She willed herself to want his confession. I love you, too, Declan. Let's have children and raise them at Barrett. Line them up and make snow angels on the soccer field.

"When you go back tomorrow," he said, speaking slowly, pulling on his lower lip, "I don't think I'll be coming with you."

"Oh, please. No hangover is *that* bad."

"I told you, I'm not drunk."

"Well, what are you, then?"

"I don't know. I need more time." He stopped pulling on his lip. "I need more time with Stella."

"With *Stella*?" What had she missed? She pictured the

studio, the way he'd snapped at the Annies and taken their phones. On the hike, he'd walked ahead of everyone. At Herring Cove, he and Brynn and a few of the others found sea glass, which they dipped in the water, then rubbed dry on their sleeves. As far as Rose knew, Declan and Stella had barely spoken.

"We went for a drink after curfew," he said. "We went to that bar with the fish and chips, but we both had coffee and ice cream. She doesn't drink anymore."

"I know."

"She drank her coffee *and* my coffee."

"Impressive." Her voice sounded loud in the dimly lit room. Loud and jealous.

"If you need to stay here, that's fine. You don't have classes until Wednesday anyway. You can take a bus or something."

He shook his head.

"I don't know if that'll be enough time."

"Thursday, then. I don't know. This isn't my problem, Declan."

"The ice cream was bad," he added. "Mint chocolate chip, freezer burned."

"I'm going back to bed now," Rose said, though she felt hot and agitated, and she knew she wouldn't sleep. She lay still and watched the television light flicker on the ceiling. She heard Declan leave, heard that he didn't bother to close the door. She heard him shuffle down the hall, heard the clank of the vending machine. When he returned, he seemed oddly light when he sat beside her. She could smell his orange soda. She could feel the warmth in his outstretched legs. She opened her eyes. Stella.

"You creep," Rose said, sitting up. "I didn't know it was you."

"You kept your eyes closed."

"It's called trying to *sleep*."

Stella stood up, crossed the room and flipped the switch for the overhead lights.

"Turn them off!"

"I want you to take me seriously."

"If we're making lists of things we want, I want you to turn off the lights. I want you to close the door."

Stella set her soda can on the top of the TV.

"Don't laugh at us."

"I'm not."

"And don't make that face. I hate that face."

Rose pulled the blanket up to her forehead and spoke through it.

"Is this better?" When she inhaled, she felt dizzy from the detergent lingering in the cotton.

"Be honest." Stella returned to her seat on the edge of the bed. "Are you upset?"

"Not upset." She dropped the blanket. "Tired. Maybe a little mystified. I mean, what happened?"

"We just started talking," Stella said. "You know."

Do I know? Rose thought. Once, in college, she'd gone out for a drink with a classmate who seized her arm when she slid off her barstool. *You're not going anywhere yet*, he'd said, and she'd felt a thrill along the back of her neck, along her arms. But that wasn't the same thing. They'd had sex in the parking lot, and then the classmate had left for a semester abroad in Argentina.

A knock at the open door: Frankie, in an extra-large plaid flannel shirt, a wool hat pulled nearly to her eyes.

"Look what you've done," Rose snapped. "You've woken the children." She deepened her voice to address Frankie. "Go back to bed."

Frankie approached them. Her toenails were painted in alternating coats of silver and green.

"It sounded like something was happening in here."



She brightened. "Is this, like, a slumber party?"

"No."

"No."

"I can't sleep. I'm hungry. Those bitches can eat *a lot* of pizza. I'm lucky I got a slice."

Rose was known to carry a supply of granola bars in her bag, but she shook her head.

"You can wait for breakfast," she said.

"I don't know if I can."

"There's a vending machine," Stella said. She pulled her wallet from her pocket and started unfolding dollar bills.

"No," Rose said. "No, no, no. Frankie, go to bed and close the door behind you."

"I want something with peanut butter in it," Stella called after the girl, who had taken the money and hurried down the hall.

"What the fuck," Rose said.

"I just wanted her out of here."

"She's coming back, and she'll bring the others, I can assure you." Rose rubbed her eyes. "You guys are adults. Do whatever you want."

"Look, *I* know you're okay with it." Stella's eyelids were slightly oily, her brows unkempt. "But he thinks you'll get upset, or he thinks you'll resent me or something. I don't know. He's kind of sensitive. I said I'd talk to you."

*He*, Rose thought. Look how quickly he became yours. No one had spoken of her in that wild-eyed, self-important way. No man in his thirties had stumbled back into his adolescence over Rose Vogel. Her eyes landed unkindly on the bridge of Stella's nose, shifted to the roll of her stomach. Stella was bowlegged. Stella was lazy. Stella was rude. And the art: multiple paintings of snow through a window.

"What does he even know about you?" Rose said.

Stella twirled hair around two fingers, eyes in her lap.

She shrugged.

"He knows enough."

"Enough," Rose repeated, thinking, unkindly, of all that she knew.

Frankie returned.

"Declan's watching TV in the lobby," she announced. "Guess everyone has insomnia tonight. Maybe it's the full moon? My mom always says that."

"Go to bed, Frankie."

"Don't you want your candy bar?"

Rose, who had not asked for a candy bar, watched it sail through the air with surprising speed. It struck the corner of the plastic-framed dolphin print. In the wake of this slight provocation, the print slipped from its place and fell forward onto the glass lampshade, which slid off the nightstand and broke with a flourish.

"Goddammit!"

"I'm sorry," Frankie said.

Rose heard doors opening along the hall. She heard the girls' voices rising in expectation as they came thundering into the room.

"What happened?" Beth K. asked.

"It sounded like a window broke or something," Ariel said.

"Ms. Echternacht is in here," Blond Annie said.

"Frankie broke the lamp," someone offered.

"Everyone shut up." Rose knelt on the floor, holding a large piece of glass in her hands. "Please."

"What's going on?" Declan said from the doorway. "Do we need the first aid kit?"

"No, *we* don't need the first aid kit."

"Maybe get the girls out of here," Stella murmured, arms folded over her chest.

"I was just about to tell everyone to get out," Rose said. "Out!"

She listened to them drift back into the hall, her eyes skipping over the larger pieces of glass in search of the tiny, dangerous glitter that lurked in the carpet. A pale hand with green and silver nails appeared and began collecting shards in an upturned palm.

“What are you doing, Frankie?”

“Trying to help.”

“I told everyone to leave.”

Frankie sat back on her heels.

“It’s my fault,” she said. Her lips were red from an earlier round of candy. “This is the least I can do.”

“The least you can do,” Rose said, hating how loud her voice had become, “is listen to me when I tell you to leave.”

Frankie stood up, her cupped hand full of tiny bits of glass.

“You’re being a bitch,” she said calmly.

“Frankie Reilly!”

“Well, you are.” She yawned and scratched her stomach with intolerable self-possession before shuffling, barefoot, out of the room.

Rose did the best she could with the glass, spreading towels over the floor to protect her feet. She shut her door and locked it, knowing that she should at least do a head count to make sure the girls were back in their rooms.

Instead, she turned on the water, sat on the edge of the grimy tub, breathed in the steam. It was scalding, but she climbed in anyway, hugging her knees. Somewhere in the Harborview, Declan and Stella were—what? They were sitting in the lobby, passing bourbon back and forth. They were poring over maps, deciding to go on a road trip. They were fucking: in his room, in her car, in the hall. Maybe on the town landing, sand in their long hair, bodies hidden by outcroppings of canoes.

She didn’t care—at least, not in the way people would expect her to care. Sleeping with Declan had been perfunctory at best. She’d done it because she was young, or nominally young. She’d done it because she was single. She’d done it because he was there. She’d done it knowing it wouldn’t be especially good for her—that the only good sex in her life so far, improbably, had been during a brief window in high school, with someone else’s boyfriend.

This—a bathtub she’d never lie in again—was a good place to think about Killian. The freckles on his shoulders had been so large and so numerous that she was fairly certain she could feel them when she pressed her mouth to his skin. She thought of an afternoon when she’d embarrassed herself by appearing before him in a gingham-checked pink and white teddy with a matching thong. “Aw,” he said, tilting his head, smiling at her. At the time, she believed she understood his range of smiles; she suspected that he reserved this one for her, that it meant, *you’re in over your head*. She’d climbed on top of him, settled herself over his hips, heard a light snap when he broke the price tag from one of the straps.

Her phone, on the edge of the sink, began to trill with her morning alarm. She dropped her head back into the cooling water, feeling her hair drink in what felt like the full weight of her bath. She would brush her teeth, get dressed, find Stella and Declan. She would give them her blessing. She would drive the girls back to Vermont.

This isn’t hard, she thought, wrapping her hair in a towel. She pulled her clothes back on and turned up the volume on the TV for the soothing sound of the local news. She tread carefully, managing to sting herself with glass only twice. She found the candy bar Frankie had thrown to her, shook off the invisible glass on its wrapper, tore it open and devoured it. Its heavy sweetness,

the caramel stuck in her teeth, had a calming effect: everything was all right. It was six-fifteen. She sent Stella a text: *where are you guys?*

*The girls are all down here having breakfast. Declan's taking a shower.*

??? Rose wrote, then erased it and went down the hall to Declan's room. His door was locked. When he answered, he wore a towel around his waist.

"What are you kicking the door for?" he said.

"I'm knocking with my foot." Water dripped from his navel down into the towel. She looked away. "Just tell me this: are you quitting your job?"

"What? Of course not." He tightened his towel. "You said it was fine if I stayed a few days. Are you changing your mind?"

"So is Stella your assistant now? She's down there with them having breakfast while you have a spa day up here?"

He looked down at his glistening feet.

"Sounds like you didn't get enough sleep."

"You woke me up!"

"I know." He nodded. "I know. I shouldn't have done that."

She let herself in, closing the door behind her, leaning against it while he dressed.

The bed was perfectly smooth, as if nothing had touched it in the forty-eight hours they'd been on the Cape.

"Did you stay at her place?" Rose blurted.

Declan, sliding his belt through the loops, didn't answer.

"Look, you guys have my blessing. Not that you need it, but you have my blessing."

"Okay." He gathered his hair on the top of his head and squeezed. "Can I tell you something? You have never looked angrier." He released his hair and zipped his back-

pack. "Including the time a skunk got into the dorm."

"Ha."

"I'm not kidding."

Rose bit her lip.

"It's Frankie," she said. "Frankie was incredibly rude to me."

"Frankie's your puppy. Don't be mad if she gets a little mouthy."

"Puppy"? What does that even mean?" He went into the bathroom. She heard him swishing mouthwash. She flinched when he spat. "And what am I supposed to tell them when we leave without you today?"

He emerged, reeking of mint, and picked up his bag.

"I already told them I have family in the area." He spoke and moved briskly. "So I'm going to stay a bit longer." He held the door open, tapping his foot against the stained carpet.

The girls were too tired to talk, so they spooned yogurt into their mouths, slurped the weak coffee, poked at their toast. Beth K. started peeling an orange, then gave up. Half of them wore the hoods of their sweatshirts drawn over their heads.

"Good morning," Rose said brightly, sitting next to Brynn.

"They don't have any hot chocolate," Brynn said.

Frankie, from whom Rose expected petulant silence, smiled and waved from the other side of the room.

"O-kay," Rose said.

"Okay, what?" Brynn said.

"Okay, I need some coffee." She drummed her knuckles on the tabletop. "Everyone ready for the drive? We leave at seven-thirty sharp."

Nods of assent or disinterest, nothing more.

In her years at Barrett, there had, of course, been

several times when she feared that she'd lost the girls' respect. They had heard her vomiting after she'd accidentally drank an entire bottle of wine by herself while she watched *Downton Abbey*. Once, convinced that the girls' communal bathrooms had better water pressure than her apartment, she showered on the second-floor in the middle of the night, and encountered several students when she emerged from the stall in a purple Turkish towel. Last winter, when they were building gingerbread houses in the common room, Rose's fell apart when she added icing, and she nearly cried. But what had she done last night? She had tried to sleep. She had tried to save their feet from broken glass.

"Everyone doing okay?" she said.

Stella turned from the coffee machines. She held two Styrofoam cups.

"We're okay," she said, her voice throaty from lack of sleep. "How are you?"

"Who's 'we'?" Rose said.

"Everybody," Stella said. She'd gone home and changed—perhaps after she and Declan had fucked in the car and on the beach—and she wore an oversized black linen shirt that made her look pale and small. "Here." She handed Rose a cup. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I just feel bad that you were down here before me. I don't expect you to do my job."

"All I did was sit and chat with Annie."

"Which Annie?" Rose said, but Stella was taking the other coffee to Declan. They stood shoulder-to-shoulder, scanning the room, like two parents gazing happily over their brood. Rose could see it: Stella and Declan, snow angels and Christmas cards.

"Where are you going?" Stella said, reaching for her arm as she passed.

"To warm up the van," Rose said. She shouldered her

bag, pretending she needed to pause and zip it up, waiting for someone to join her. In the parking lot, she expected a bright assault of sun, but the sky was as gray and dowdy as her sweater.

She drank her coffee in the van. Beth K. came out, wearing an unnecessary purple raincoat, talking excitedly on the phone. The girls wandered into the lot over the course of twenty minutes, even though Rose had said *seven-thirty sharp*. Stella and Declan, of course, were not among them. They were probably up in his room already, bacon grease on their mouths, her shirt halfway buttoned, his pants on the floor. Later they would sleep. As the girls chose their seats and settled in, Rose saw that Declan's absence was of so little interest to them that she would have to bring it up.

She waited until they were on the Lower Cape. Then she cleared her throat noisily and turned on the radio. She sat through Steppenwolf's "Magic Carpet Ride," a song she and Stella used to play on the rare occasions when they cleaned their room. In the front passenger seat, which Frankie normally would have claimed, Blond Annie snored from the depths of her navy blue hood.

"You ladies are quiet this morning," Rose said.

"It's early," Ariel said. She was carefully peeling glitter-speckled daisies from a sheet of stickers and applying them to the window. Later, when Rose had the energy, she would demand that Ariel remove them with an ice scraper.

"Did you guys like the Cape?" She knew she was shouting.

"I'm sleeping," Blond Annie protested.

"What about you, Brynn? Beth K.?"

"Yep," Beth K. said. Brynn wore headphones.

"Did anybody else realize that Declan had family here?" As she spoke, she realized that Ariel was stoned.

Nobody answered her question, which was too dull and irrelevant to merit contemplation from them. Frankie's pink hair was tangled across the fleece of her neck pillow. Beth K. was studying flash cards and whispering to herself.

"I'm boored," Rose said, thinking it would make some of them laugh. They were drowsy from the van's heat. Rose's private life, limited to occasional meltdowns in cheap motel rooms, was of fleeting interest, if at all. They noticed nothing. She thought of all the confessions she'd sat through: I had an abortion, I did coke over Christmas break, I kissed my roommate's stepfather, I stole my mother's credit card. She pictured the number of cold compresses she'd pulled from her own freezer; her assurances that everyone gets into college *somewhere*; her refusal, year after year, to allow the girls to adopt

a cat, followed by the unwelcome discovery of a cat, who'd managed to eat and sleep in Beth K.'s room for two weeks. The matter of a litter box was still a mystery to Rose, who had driven the cat to a shelter during a Monday night study hall.

What do I do this for, she thought. The Cape Cod Canal was already behind them, and with it any semblance of being away from normal life. I do it for the money and the free housing. Ha.

In the rearview mirror, every one of them appeared to be asleep. Blond Annie's hair spread over Ariel's shoulder. Reggae music dribbled faintly from someone's phone. Their mothers probably think they look angelic like this, Rose thought. She could hardly stand how comfortable they were. 