

THE ORIGINAL

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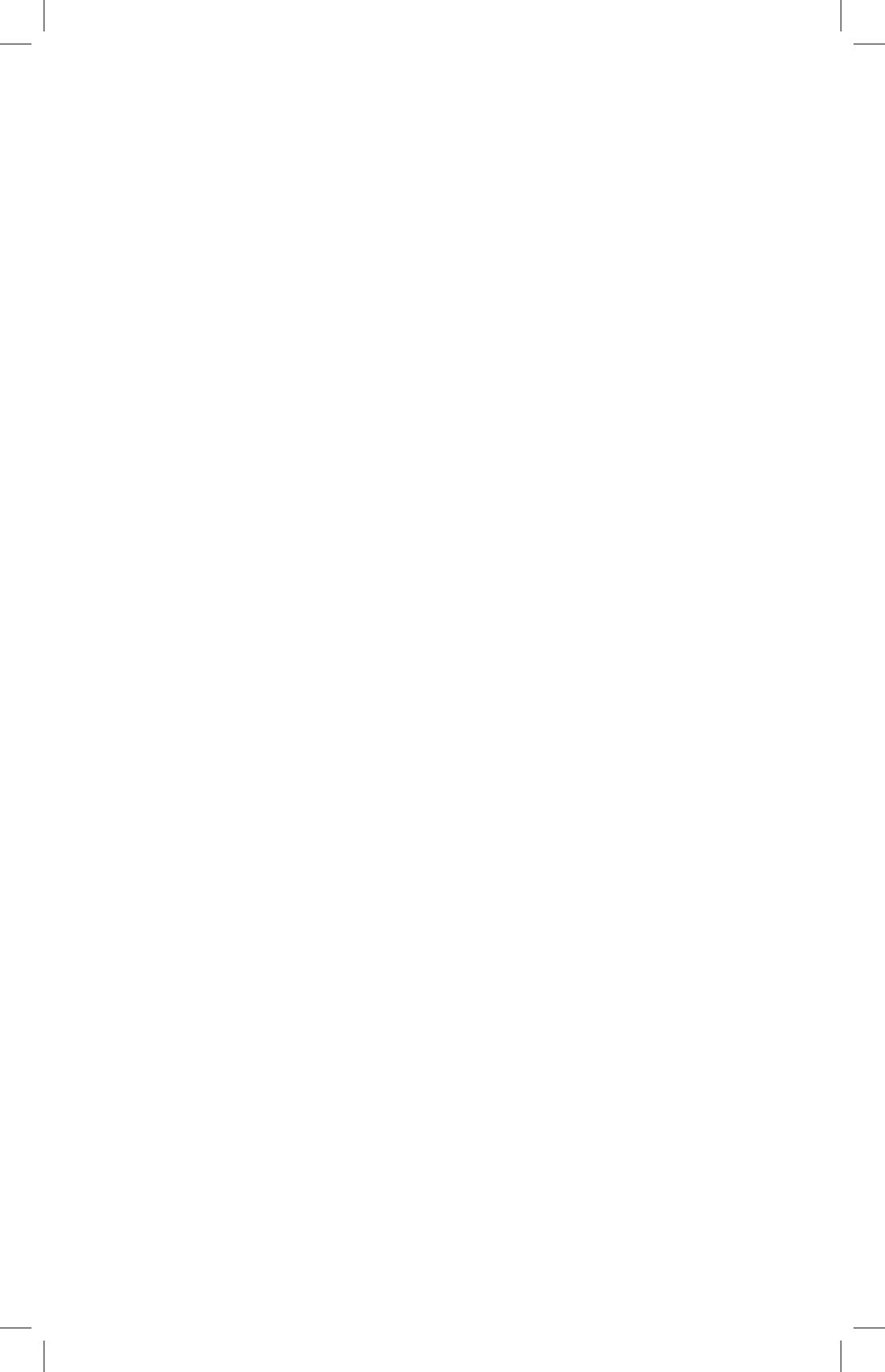
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For Mama
who tells me to scribble, scribble
and
for Anthony



‘We, none of us, know each other, do we?
Not too well.’

– *Katharine Hepburn*
interview with Clive James, 1985



LOS ANGELES

We don't take cowards here. In the young, we accept vice, avarice, stupidity and vanity, but not cowardice. We will spit you out for that and send you back on the dusty bus to wherever you came from. Not her. She was brave and was always going to end up here.

When she was young, before the suicides, she preferred the sunshine sports: golf, sailing, swimming, croquet, climbing trees. She could ski – all the old money kids in Connecticut can ski – but she didn't like it. She liked hot air on her arms, sweat, and the way her scalp itched after a day in the sun. She wore her brother's clothes and never looked in the mirror.

When she was older, we reached for her. She was on Broadway then. Arguing with directors, getting fired, quitting, getting married. She could have stayed that course; she had already married a Main Line man. Their address was listed in the Philadelphia phone book: Mr and Mrs Ludlow Ogden Smith. 'Luddy' – prep school boys always have names like that. They ordered letterpressed writing paper, opened joint bank accounts, the works. Would a child have changed her mind? No? Maybe. Regardless, the scooped-out belly and the thin white scar were inevitable. Anatomy is anatomy. It cannot be persuaded.

Where most people are accepting: *I will not be a professional ball player, I will not sing at Carnegie Hall, I will not live in Paris, no one will write articles about me, there will never be an audience*; Kate said no. She would never be happy with a good, small life.

And we offered her love here. Blazing love. We were not stingy about that.

Suppose it did not happen the way you think it did? Frame by frame, the way you remember – think you remember. Memory is a creative animal. See the washed-out photograph of the fruit bowl and you will remember the ripe juice of the fruit. In the end, all lives are secret.

PART ONE

THE EAST COAST



KATE
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT
1921

To understand her, you should start with him. She begins with him.

But you don't have to.

The girl also begins with salt and fir and glacial soil. With a family that talks about bodies and disease and reads at the table. The father believes in water, the chemical properties, the health benefits: cold baths, ice shocked skin and nude swimming. The mother believes in Margaret Sanger, Bryn Mawr, votes for women, New England and her husband.

One night in November, in the big yellow house, the girl's parents give a dinner party. The new daily maid has arranged the flowers and laid the second best family china. She drops a knife and wipes it on her skirt. No one sees. She is annoyed and wants to get home. On a junior doctor's salary, the Hepburns cannot afford for her to live in like Fanny. Bus fare is five cents. Nickel there, nickel back. She plans to ask the Hepburns for a raise.

Friends of the Hepburns sit around the couple's oval table. They discuss the country's poor, how to help, what to do. The Hepburns are still young. They look at each other often, soft, blunt gusts of affection. They look for approval, yes, but more for love. The girl will always be proud of the way her parents love each other. But a child can never really know a parents' marriage. Sitting at opposite ends of the dinner table, the Hepburns are enclosed, like a phrase. Kit Hepburn observes the old rules, one never sits next to one's husband.

On this night in November the new daily maid stands by the swinging door, waiting for a gap in the conversation, a moment when the guests chew, or cough. When it comes, she goes in to

tell them that a man without a home has come to the kitchen door looking for food. She moves toward Mrs Hepburn, knowing Mrs Hepburn would want to feed the man without a home, bends to speak low into her ear but the girl's father does not like anyone to be that close to his wife. The new daily maid straightens and speaks so all at the table can hear. Irritated at the intrusion – they have guests after all – Dr Hepburn tells her that they cannot receive a visitor at this time of night. He looks at his wife, for approval, for love. And then he swallows his food.

If you are looking for the girl, she is not here yet. She will arrive soon, two years after him. After the boy. They will be called Tom and Kate.

. . .

There are six of them at their peak. After Kate come four more. All flame-headed and freckled but smaller, less articulated. Maybe that happens when there are six? The last ones get a little out of focus? Mrs Hepburn was always sure she was going to be the kind of mother who checks to make sure her children comb their hair and keep their fingernails clean. She assumed she would want to stand over them while they brush their teeth and to patch their clothes herself. But she has found that raising children is tedious work and she has other things to do. She wants to be a person in the world. By her third child, she has resumed her suffrage work. By her fifth, she is president of the Connecticut Women's Suffrage Association. But Mrs Hepburn, a natural leader, can delegate. There are so many of them and they have each other. And she does not want to make them soft. At night, she reads to them. They pack the bed like a fish crate, all fresh socks and pajamas, wet hair and clean teeth. Eight pages of George Eliot before lights out.

In the winter they live in Hartford, near Dr Hepburn's hospital,

but in the warm months, they live here, in the shingled summer house sitting on a finger of land, across the narrow causeway from Old Saybrook. Birds fly low over the roof and land on the long stripe of gun blue water. It is called Fenwick, this circle of houses that hug the sandy road, grouped around the small private golf course. The houses tend to be large, baggy, with front porches that need painting. It is not the thing here to be pristine. This is salty New England country and it does not do to be showy. Dr Hepburn is from Virginia and wants the porch painted. Mrs Hepburn tells him she will get to it soon but does not call the painters. Better to do it in the winter so that it will look broken in by summer. And, anyway, it will just need it again next year.

The Hepburns believe in vigor, *noise*. The walls here are thin and none of the doors close properly but no matter. ‘We have nothing to hide,’ Dr Hepburn says. He means it. They are a medical family. The body is not mysterious. They are the sort of family who are not fazed by nudity or sex but refuse to discuss fear. Dr Hepburn teaches his children to rise early, shower in cold water before confronting the day. Kit Hepburn teaches them to blow on hot soup, chew with their mouths closed and to never use contractions. She says shortcuts are a sign of a lazy mind. The Hepburn children like heights and dares and are proud when a bruise turns from blue to green. They can always be found on roofs and up trees. Dr Hepburn sends them up to clean gutters on autumn afternoons and to push the snow off the gables in the winter. He likes that the neighbors talk about the rowdy Hepburn brood and warn their own children to take care when they go to the Hepburn house. Dr Hepburn does not speak to the old guard Fenwick neighbors himself; Mrs Hepburn does that. He is still worried he will sound like backroads Virginia. Mrs Hepburn knows they are not popular with their neighbors. Kit Hepburn does not care.

. . .

The small Hepburns pile their shoes at the base of the ash tree and climb barefoot to get a better grip. Kate climbs highest, up to where the branches thin. Tom watches from a low, thick limb. Children are tribal, they form their own governments. The Hepburn children have divided into camps: older, younger. The younger Hepburns try to keep up but there is no room for them in Tom and Kate.

. . .

There is a lot of yelling the summer Kate cuts off her hair. Tom sits on the rolled edge of the bathtub that Saturday morning and watches as Kate shoves her skinny fingers through the scissor rings. She slices off a panel of her red waves, leaving a pad of bristle over her right ear. She keeps going, clipping off long rectangles, and does not look in the mirror. The scissors make a fibrous, grassy sound; they are not sharp enough. She finishes, drops the scissors in the sink and looks at Tom, her head terraced with uneven red stumps.

Tom cannot quite look in the sink. The scissors are lying half open on the white enamel. Red hair still tangled in the mouth. He feels it's too private, too female, something personal he should not see. Tom does not join in the kitchen table discussions of bodies and medicine. Instead, he keeps a *Buster Brown* comic book on his lap. He does not open it, his father would not like that, but he feels safer knowing it is there.

He looks at Kate. 'You're a mess.'

Kate reaches in and pulls the scissors from the sink. 'Fix it.'

Tom tries to neaten up the sides and the back of her neck, the way the barber always does to him. Kate closes her eyes and drops her head forward, unafraid as the blades slide over her skin.

When he is done, they stand side by side, looking into the bathroom mirror.

'You look like my brother,' Tom says.

'I *am* your brother.'

They go downstairs. Tom will come back up after breakfast to sweep up the bathroom floor. He is not a boy to leave a mess for someone else to clean up.

The family gapes.

'It was in my way,' Kate says, shaking salt onto her eggs.

'Good god,' her father shouts, banging his open hand down on the table, clattering the dishes and jumping the spoons. 'What were you thinking?'

Bob and Dick giggle but one look from their mother and they bite their lips, hard, and sit up straight.

'Kate! Answer me!'

Kate does not answer.

Dr Hepburn turns to his wife. Quieter, he doesn't want to rattle his son. '*What* has she done? Why? *Why* has she done this?'

'She seems to have cut her hair, dear,' Mrs Hepburn says. 'It is summer. It is hot. We let Tom, Bob and Dick keep short hair. Why not Kate?' Kit Hepburn is trying to pry open the tight air in the room.

'Tom did the back,' Kate speaks up and then looks at her brother and wishes she hadn't.

'He *what*?' her father said, turning on Tom. 'You did this to her?'

Tom swallows, turns. 'The line wasn't straight,' Tom says, 'so I straightened it.' His words slip back down his throat and he struggles to project his voice, to calm down, the way he and his mother have been practicing. Fanny puts a plate of eggs down in front of him and quickly cups his cheek. Tom is her favorite.

'I think you've done a very good job,' Mrs Hepburn says. 'Especially around her ears. The ears are always the hardest.' Mrs Hepburn hates it when her husband snaps and her eldest son flinches. It has been getting worse this year.

‘This is a *ridiculous* conversation,’ Dr Hepburn shouts. ‘No one should *see* her ears. Her ears are supposed to be *under* her hair! She looks like a tufted baboon.’

Dick and Bob giggle. ‘*Baboon*,’ they repeat.

‘It is ugly.’ Dr Hepburn rises from the table. He does not like females to be ugly.

Dick and Bob stop giggling.

Kit Hepburn and Fanny are women who understand each other. Fanny steps in.

‘*You*, Kate, are getting hair all over this kitchen,’ she says, brushing the red strands from Kate’s stiff shoulders. But the words are empty. Fanny cannot help. They always say she is part of the family but she knows she isn’t, nor does she want to be. She has her own family.

Kate is locked to her chair. Her mind colds with silence when her father shouts.

‘I think you have great ears,’ her mother whispers.

And she does; small, curved harps fastened low above the hinge of jawbone. Encouraged, Kate steadies, roots, but now Tom’s left shoulder is twitching. Bob flinches but does not look away. He would not do that to his brother. Now, Tom’s right shoulder joins in. His body bounces in ragged time. The rhythm spreads to his head, yanking it to the side. Dr Hepburn looks away. He cannot watch. He has also been practicing with his wife and does his best to rein in his temper. He can see the boy is getting worse. At first, the family joked about it but that lightness wore off quickly and now Bob and Dick no longer tease. Everyone sits in silence and waits for it to pass.

Privately, when they speak of it, Mrs Hepburn calls it by the medical term, St Vitus’ Dance and Dr Hepburn calls it his son’s ‘affliction.’ When Kate talks about it with Tom, she calls it the twitches. Best to call it what it is; it takes the sting away. Now, she reaches for Tom’s hand under the table, presses her thumb into the

meat of his palm. He squeezes back. Their mother takes his other hand, boldly, on the tabletop. Tom's head slows, balances; his shoulders lower. The table waits. No one looks at Dr Hepburn. He knows what they are thinking: if he had not shouted about Kate's hair. No. If his son were less sensitive. That is what would solve the problem. Dr Hepburn abruptly stands and leaves the room. He is late for surgery and does not want to have this fight today. He will speak to his wife later.

They have heard it all before. Seven doctors, seven examination rooms, seven clipboards, seven diagnoses, all the same. Dr Hepburn says they need another opinion. He will not accept that his son cannot conquer his own body. The first doctor told them that it was psychological, that it stems from the stress; the second doctor told them it grew out of a fear of competition and the third doctor suggested it could be the product of nervous parents. 'Nervous in the *clinical* sense,' the third doctor emphasized, as if the stamp of medical certainty could improve his implication. 'It can run in families,' he finally said. Dr and Mrs Hepburn did not respond. They do not want to talk about what runs in their families.

'Withdraw him from all athletics at school,' the last doctor advised and Mrs Hepburn nodded her head but already knew she would not do it. Tom never twitches at school; the competition is all at home.

. . .

Mrs Hepburn sits alone in her husband's study. It is the one door the children will not open. Did her father jerk and spasm? Did her uncle? She cannot remember. She was sixteen when her Uncle Frederick walked to the rail yard with the pistol in his coat pocket, younger still when her father went. They must find another doctor; she opens her address book.

. . .

Kate is already in her bathing suit. No cap, she wants to see what it feels like to swim without the tangle of hair clouding the water. She wants to be unencumbered, sleek and bullet fast.

‘The creek?’ Tom asks.

‘The sound,’ Kate says. It is deeper.

Barefoot, towels around their necks, Tom and Kate leave the house together. Fanny makes two sandwiches, wraps them in wax paper and leaves them on the kitchen counter. Always two. They put them into their bicycle baskets and ride out over the shell driveway into the wide day.

. . .

The neighbors notice. The postman blinks, and the greengrocer on the corner of Water Street does not recognize her when she puts salt water taffy on her mother’s account. Kate’s friend Florence tells her mother, her mother telephones Mrs Hepburn. Kate and Tom crouch on the stairs and listen to their mother’s side of the conversation.

‘Yes, Mrs Miele, everything is fine.’

‘No, Mrs Miele, Kate is not ill.’

‘Yes, she did it yesterday and I knew all about it.’

‘Thank you Mrs Miele, but I believe Kate just prefers it short.’

‘Why should she not do it herself? It is her head?’

‘Goodbye Mrs Miele.’

That is one thing about the Hepburns, they fight as a pack.

. . .

Mrs Hepburn is going out for the evening. She is meeting Mrs Sanger. It is not just the politics. Both women grew up in Corning, New York. Although, Kit Hepburn’s family owned Corning Glass and Margaret Sanger’s brothers worked in the factory. But growing up in the same town binds the two women and Kit Hepburn is one of

Margaret Sanger's top lieutenants. She meets Mrs Sanger on Tuesday evenings. On Tuesdays, Tom has his piano lesson and then stays over at a friend's house. Mrs Hepburn prefers he not come home when she is out.

. . .

Dr Hepburn says Tom will follow him into medicine. Kate looks to Tom who looks back at her. She will never be a doctor, nor will he. They have already made a pact. Tom will write and Kate will act. Kate wants to be on the stage where everyone will applaud, right there, in front of you. Tom wants to write for the movies where, if they film a scene and it is not perfect, he can rewrite until it is. Whatever life they choose, they promise, they will always do it together.

. . .

In the private, red brick school in West Hartford, Tom's grades are slipping. His teacher sends a note home. The principal asks for a meeting. To discuss options. Mrs Hepburn does not show the note to her husband but tucks it into her file on the Connecticut Women's Birth Control League. Her husband will not look there. She telephones her friend Mary Towle in New York. Kate and Tom need to be away. Once they are out of the house, she will talk to her husband about the note, the meeting. She has already made an appointment at Andover. Boarding school will be better for him. He will be happy twenty-four hours a day instead of eight. Kit Hepburn knows Kate will miss him but she will adjust. Children do. She has not told Tom yet but she is sure he will like it. A mother's instinct. Her husband will resist; he will not like the thought of strangers raising his son but Kit Hepburn does not plan to lose this fight.

. . .

The day it happens, Kate wakes up happy. Tom and Kate are in New York, Greenwich Village. They are visiting Aunt Mary Towle who lives in the cobbled, crooked part of the city that looks like a Christmas tin. The raffish heyday of these streets has come and gone. Most of the bohemians have left; moved to cheaper apartments in Paris and London, but the neighborhood is faithful and it cocks its hat low over one eye and remembers them. They will be back. Bankers who aspire to be bankers will never be at home here. Aunt Mary is a solid woman, a squat, paint spattered rectangle built of conviction and sugar cane. When she visits Fenwick in summer, her bathing costume is Victorian black and comes to her knees. This Easter visit, she has shown Tom and Kate her town, taken them to galleries on the West Side, up to the Cloisters to walk in the high garden behind the wall, to Midtown to see a picture, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and to Huyler's on Jane Street for molasses candy. Tom, at fifteen, brushes his teeth afterward. Kate goes to bed with a sticky mouth.

Later, Kate will remember that Tom shook her awake, long after she had fallen asleep.

'You're my best girl, right Kath?'

'What?'

'You're my favorite girl in the whole world.'

'I'm sleeping?'

When she wakes, she cannot remember if it really happened.

Kate is a morning person. This day, like other days, she is up early and spends her minutes carelessly. The nine minutes when she falls back to heavy sleep. The three minutes she watches the street from her bedroom window. The rubber yawn, the stretch, the swish of water in her cotton mouth. The four minutes to get dressed.

Later, Kate will grind through these minutes again and again, re-birthing the day.

She runs up the narrow steps and knocks on the door. The attic room is low, whitewashed and set under the raw roofed eaves. By June, it will be too hot to sleep up there. Each time they visit New York, Tom chooses this room and gives Kate the large bedroom downstairs with the slab of featherbed and the faded wallpaper. She knocks. The white paint is flecking off the door in places, but it will not be repainted. No one comes up here. She knocks again. Louder. Later, she will remember it differently, recall a stab of premonition, a gut thud of fear, but at the time, she just feels hungry and impatient. She leans hard – the door swells in the heat and will only open if you give it a good shove.

At first, there are only the logistical thoughts. Practicalities. She knows there is no urgency, no reason to run for the doctor. Not really. Medicine will not help but she wants a doctor anyway – the authority and the black bag.

She cannot leave him there. She has to pull him down.

Kate is strong for thirteen – fourteen in May. She can hoist herself up and swing by her knees on the trapeze their father built on the front lawn of the house on Hawthorn Street. Tom worries about the height but not her. Not when their father is watching. She can climb tall trees. She can swim in the March gray Long Island Sound. Her family watch from the beach as she snaps on a rubber bathing cap and dives, sinking through the water's skin. Tom follows, after a finger's width of hesitation, a second beat. Kate never hesitates. What's the point? Later, she will be less sure, but she is not there yet.

The bed sheet is looped around and around the low beam. No knot – but it has held. His knees are folded and his feet touch the floor.

His feet touch the floor.

The heft of this fact, it is a bullet slamming into bone. Her breath shakes in her throat, her ribs tighten around her stone hard lungs.

She will lift him. Could she? Did she? She will remember later that she did; will be able to recreate the feeling of his too long legs and cotton pajamas. She will tell herself she lifted him. Newspapers will say she didn't. The police report will say she didn't. She will remember that she did.

He is light. Too light for a boy of fifteen, their father says. Their father teases him that Kate is the faster runner, the stronger, deeper swimmer. The words shear the pride from the boy. He is left slick, new lamb bare and cold. Movement comes easily to Kate, she does not deny it, but in front of her brother, she does not push herself to do all she can do. If she allows it, her narrow, blade body can carve up air and water until the elements fall into tissue thin strips. She takes it for granted. Air and water are thicker for Tom.

She tugs hard and he lands. The noise. She remembers a noise. Later, she rinses the sound from her mind: unraveling it wave by wave until cotton white silence. This will become her habit. She will sand the raw, jumpy memory down to a smooth grained ball she can fit in her pocket and hold in her hand.

She shunts him onto the bed, straightening his legs in their thin pajamas. His best trousers are folded on the dresser. His overnight case is set on top of them, a weight to keep the crease. Their father believes there is beauty in a sharp crease. He isn't cold yet; she notices that.

Downstairs, the morning is going on as before. Kate will think about this later. When you do not know a thing, it has not happened yet. That unrealized joy. To Aunt Mary, Tom will be down in a few minutes and she is worried that they will miss their train. Aunt Mary

is making toast, eggs and bacon for breakfast. The hot, slick smell gums up the air and sticks to the walls.

Kate cannot leave him alone but what comes next? Think. She pulls herself in. Binds herself tight. Practicalities. There is always a before and after. A fracture when the shell of before cracks open, exposing the narrow spine of after. This is where fragility starts.

Her parents. She exhales a soft buckle of relief. Oak strong and fearless, they will leave Connecticut and come. They will catch the first train to New York. Her mother will know what happens next. She has been through this all before.

The doctor's house is four doors down. Kate runs to tell him her brother is dead.

. . .

The police file their report. Afterward, among themselves, the three policemen who stood in that hot attic room discuss the boy: his small weight, his height, the angle, his ruthless lean into the noose, his determination, his toes, his feet. They speak with admiration. Courage demands respect. Two of them leave work early that night. They want to get home to hug their own boys.

Kate's father gives interviews. That is his mistake. *The Times*, the *Hartford Courant*. The versions of the death of his son: it was murder, there was an intruder, it was an accident, it was a trick he had seen in a film, in a play, it was from a story he had heard from a former slave in Virginia, it was insanity, it was not what it seems. The father's son becomes abstract, a story, a reflection, a shame. The most obvious answer is often the right one, people say.

The story runs on page six of the *New York Times*. When the verdict comes, it is suicide. Her father stops giving interviews.

. . .

Kate's mother is busy. The body – she calls her son 'the body' – has to be brought back to Connecticut. The funeral home, the plot, the date, the headstone; she has lists for all of this. Mrs Hepburn is a strategist and a better field commander than her husband. She can distill a thing to its elements and go from there. And Kate's mother knows how to lose. She is practiced and can do it with stony New England grace. First her father, then her mother, on the long white ward with the other ladies dying of cancer, then her uncle with his favorite revolver. And then came the safe run of years when the battles were smaller, less mortal, but still painful to lose. In 1920, the Democrats asked her to run for the Senate seat in Connecticut. Dr Hepburn preferred she decline. Some limelight on his wife was good, real brilliance was not. Mrs Hepburn declined.

'Two weeks is a long time to wait?' the funeral director says, standing in the front hall at the house on Hawthorn Street. 'Of course, we understand, the family needs time to prepare,' he says using all the euphemisms people in his business use, 'but perhaps they could be ready sooner?' His sentence wobbles at the end. He is uncomfortable. He does not like to keep children in the basement refrigerator too long. Usually, these things did not need to be spelled out. The daily maid hovers by the swinging door. She tells herself she is listening because it is her job. Should she bring in tea? The funeral director is not sitting down. Is he a guest? She goes to ask Fanny. She wants to repeat the overheard conversation to someone.

'Grief swallowed is grief doubled,' Fanny says.

The daily maid is not sure what that means.

Bob and Dick do their homework at the kitchen table now. They do not want to be alone in their bedrooms. They do not look up when the daily maid leaves.

. . .

No, Mrs Hepburn will not invite the funeral director to come in and sit down. She does not want him in her home one moment longer than necessary.

‘So, you wish to wait until the thirteenth?’

‘We have family coming from Virginia, but we do not want a service,’ Mrs Hepburn says, ignoring the funeral director’s question that is not really a question.

‘And, you wish to *wait?*’ The funeral director treads delicately, but Kit Hepburn is not a delicate woman. He can see she is made of fire forged iron. Mrs Hepburn does not answer.

‘At least the April daffodils will have come up by then,’ the funeral director says and then regrets it. He is filling empty air. Nothing sounds right. He is usually better at this.

Kate has stopped speaking by then. No words make sense so she gives them up. Not much to talk about anyway and if she tries, she is sure her heart will push up her throat, tip over her teeth and fall out her mouth. This will all get away from her if she gives it an inch. Better to close down the whole business of being a person. School is unimportant so she stops that too. A private tutor is engaged but Kate mostly plays golf and climbs trees. Kate keeps forgetting it has happened, that is the worst part. The gut drop of remembering. Lifting her feet off the bike pedals or swinging from a tree branch, she will feel a wild thump of happiness. She will drink up the blue of the day, step on a pad of fresh cut grass and her jaw will loosen. Her teeth will un-grip like puzzle pieces coming apart and her skin will resettle on her bones. But then, she will see that there is only one bicycle, one pair of shoes kicked off at the base of the trunk. Sitting on the high branch, she hears papery tree noises and a silence that will only break if she breaks it. She will remember that she has forgotten and rush hot with shame. So, she works hard

at remembering, making it part of every minute. She goes quiet, withdraws. If he can't be here, she shouldn't be here. The voiceless air grows thick, like river ice in winter, and she loses the habit of living.

'You're my best girl, right Kath?'

'What?'

'You're my favorite girl in the whole world.'

. . .

At first, she looks for the boy her brother had loved but she never sees him again. Her brother Dick says he has changed schools. She had wanted to give that boy something: a thing ripe with her brother but she could not think of anything real enough. No thing can bottle up a life and keep it alive. By the time Kate is speaking again, everything important she could have given him is gone. All that is left are the empty things, un-lived in shells without history: unread books, model ships he hadn't liked, starched sheets smelling of washing powder and new shoes that Bob and Dick will grow into. Tom had never told Kate about the boy, not straight out, but, in their family, such feelings are never called by name, and anyway, Tom did not need to tell her. They were of a kind. She already knew.

When Kate decides to change her birthdate to his birthdate, her parents don't speak of it. What is there to say? They can see she needs to celebrate her brother's day more than her own. Later, in interviews, she will stick by the lie. Now she is an autumn baby.

Kate knows the neighbors are talking about them.

'The eldest son,' Mrs Pruitt says at the South Congregational Church that first Sunday.

'What a tragedy,' Reverend Fitch says. He is an unimaginative man.

'Did you read it?' Mrs Rampling says.

‘In the *Courant*? Mrs Fitch clipped it out.’ Reverend Fitch says.

‘The story keeps changing. Now, they are saying it was “accidental.”’ Mrs Pruitt lowers her voice.

‘Dr Hepburn must have had a word with the editor,’ Reverend Fitch says.

. . .

The neighbors bring casseroles and lemon pies. As if you can feed the hole in the Hepburn family and the flesh will grow back. Mrs Hepburn’s suffragette sisters send cards. Mrs Hepburn reads them standing up and then throws them away.

. . .

Dr Hepburn’s Virginia family will arrive, and then Mrs Hepburn’s New York family. Mrs Hepburn’s rich Uncle Houghton from upstate New York will not stay long. He is uncomfortable, and, as he points out, he has a company to run. *Corning Glass*, the neighbors whisper. They whisper about other things too. They say his two brothers did it; that Tom got it from that side of the blood; that urge to slip free and die young. These things can be passed down. Tom once told Kate that their mother’s father used a gun, a pearl handled revolver, but Kate never knew where he had heard that. Later, he said that he should not have told her. Tom also knew that their mother’s Uncle Frederick had done it with the same gun, out along the railway line, but he never told Kate. One shot each. The Houghtons are not the sort of people to miss.

But, it could also have come from the Hepburn side. Years ago, Dr Hepburn’s elder brother leapt out of a window and was stabbed through by the wrought iron fence below. His wife was talking to him from the other room when he soundlessly jumped. He was alive when they took him off the fence, it was more painful to pull the

metal out and there was no question of saving him, but they could not leave him there.

Six days before Tom's funeral, Dr Hepburn's younger brother does it. He and his wife are meant to leave Virginia, catch the train from Richmond and travel four states northward to Connecticut for Tom's funeral. They have already bought the tickets and telephoned long distance to book a room at the Hartford Grand. Instead, Dr Hepburn's younger brother Sewell comes home from work late on Wednesday, puts the car in the garage and leaves it on. He balls up his overcoat under his head and lies down on the cement. His wife finds him the next morning, his handkerchief folded and folded again in his hand. Was he going to cover his mouth and nose? Delay and live a small moment more? His wife will say he looked peaceful but Kate will not believe it when her father tells her why her Aunt and Uncle Hepburn are not coming. She knows better. Dead people are not peaceful; they are just gone. Kate's father decides not to travel down for that funeral. Kate's mother wishes her husband had not told the children.

Now, Kate's father will not speak of his brothers, he will not speak of his son, but after a scotch in the evening, he will talk about his wife. Her monied, aristocratic, intellectual blood. Dr Hepburn says there is weakness there, and blood will out. Blame is easier to push outward.

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As they drive away from the cemetery, Kate knows they will never come back. Never. They will not be one of those families who know the florist by name and pile into the car on Sundays. Tom's small rectangle will grow knotty and wild; no one will come to weed that patch of earth. Kate understands. Her parents see no point in keeping something alive when it is dead.

Kate is squashed in the back seat with Bob and Dick. Marion and Peg are too small to come and are at home with Fanny. Marion will always believe she can remember how her brother Tom pushed her on a backyard swing once, but she never mentions it to her family. They would say she was too young to remember. She is sure she can feel the moment the swing arced upward and the way her stomach dropped to her knees. Peg will remember nothing except for the pool of quiet around his name and the way her mother stiffens whenever she meets anyone called Thomas. Really, what the younger Hepburn children know is that there is something broken where there was once a sense of triplicate, three daughters, three sons, teams of children paired together like dancing partners, or harnessed oxen. They know they are lopsided.

It is over and the car pulls around in a wide left turn. Kate slides into Bob. She twists around to look back. That's it. They will leave him there, on the damp, spring ground, inside a short, brass handled box.

A List of Missing Things:

A red Schwinn bicycle, the one with the loose handlebar and white seat, a silver snow shovel – someone else will wake up early to clear the front walk, a tennis racquet from the mudroom basket, a set of golf clubs – given away, a jar of white sea pebbles kept by the bed, a school blazer and camel hair topcoat – donated to St Michael's in Bridgeport, eight pairs of socks and a pair of blue mittens – also donated, a knitted Christmas stocking, the bedroom at the end of the hall – a guest room now but no guests will be invited to sleep there, a yellowed, soft paged copy of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, a place setting and chair at the kitchen table, a name mentioned at prayers, a name mentioned at all.

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Kate looks like Kate but she is hollowed out, un-twinning. The days keep happening, weeks piling up. She is surprised by this basic fact. Some things should be so big that the days stop, that the mechanics of the planet fail and the sun doesn't come up, out of respect. Kate resents each new month.

In their bedroom, her parents are disagreeing. Her mother wants to let Kate get on with it her own way and says they should just leave her be. Her father wants to push Kate to be *more*. More vivid, more alive. He says she should be sharper, quicker. He wants to shake her out of her dense silence and tell her to fill up the space. She has to pick up slack, be son and daughter. He wants her to study medicine, to take her golf more seriously and get out to the tennis court early to work on her backhand, her ground strokes. The only place he does not push her is in the water. In the water she is beyond all of them.

Her family could get closer. They could pull the planks from her windows or get under her siding if they wanted, but they don't. The Hepburns are loud and known for their bold ideas and knife sharp conversation, but they are not a personal kind of family. No one came to speak to Dr or Mrs Hepburn when they lost their favorite people in this world, the ones they could not live without. Now, they do not know how to speak to Kate. In any case, Dr Hepburn believes speaking of one's personal life is weak and Mrs Hepburn was raised never to air dirty laundry.

'Other people are other people,' Mrs Hepburn says. 'Always remember that.'

'Children are resilient,' Dr Hepburn says. 'Expect excellence.'

So, they leave Kate boarded up. Dr Hepburn watches his wife, quick to take every chance to lay the blame at her door. Mrs Hepburn watches her children. Will any of them start to twitch?

The younger Hepburns watch their parents. They learn which questions cannot be asked. They learn that a soul is a private beast.

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Kate sinks. Kate grapples. Her body regains noise and bounce. At first it is fake, she is pretending, if only so that people will stop watching her. Pretending blurs into being. Her appetite for movement picks up again, slowly – the habit of living is spongy in the greasy muscles and the juice seeps back, not right away, but eventually. Her golf game improves, as does her tennis. Two sports she will play all her life. ‘See,’ her father tells her mother, expect more and she will be more. She just needed to be pushed.

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College, graduation, and then New York. Acting and elocution lessons during the week. Her father says it is a silly pursuit and will not pay for the lessons outright but agrees to send her his bridge winnings. Bad money, he calls it, but it is more than enough. And on the weekends? You can find her golfing, swimming and even loving, but she is separate. It is intentional. Why kick for the surface? She knows what is up there. All the prepositions of grief: getting over, moving on, getting past; they are insulting. There is no such place, nor should there be. Some things ought to take more than one lifetime. Recovering will be someone else’s problem.

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It is 1932. Kate is living in New York; older now, taller, but still sparrow light and she always wishes on a New Year’s Eve. She does it alone. Kate is devoutly private; life is a closed affair now. In her four years at Bryn Mawr, she never once ate in the dining room. But, on New Year’s nights like this, her wishes grow thick, feathered wings. At midnight, when she should be singing or drinking or kissing her husband, or lover, she wishes. She slams down her eyelids, squeezes her teeth and blows her wish skyward.