

ONE

The phone rang at four o'clock in the morning. Someone on the other end said that Lucky was dead.

And just like that I was big brotherless.

I didn't cry.

Life without my brother had never even occurred to me. Not once. Sure, I'd become accustomed to little pieces of him disappearing: the tip of his finger to a rock-climbing rope; a chunk of his calf to a baby shark; a front tooth to a ski slope. Lucky's body was a road map of scars. Even his face was covered in nicks and healed-over cuts and faint pinkish railroad tracks from long-gone stitches. That was all fine with me, exciting even, because to me he was indestructible, and because he always came home eventually with more stories and more scars. He always came home until now.

The day before the phone call, I was thinking about how every Christmas I would put a fresh box of Band-Aids in his stocking. He always laughed on Christmas morning when he tore the wrapping paper off the little box. I got him Simpsons Band-Aids one year and Scooby-Doo another; Popeye; Cowboys; Spider Man. There was already a box of Flintstones Band-Aids stashed away in my closet for the coming Christmas and I know just what he would say if he were around to open it: “*Yabba, dabba, doo!*” and then he’d toss it on the pile with the rest of the gear Santa would always bring him. That’s how it was: Lucky got gear. I got books. I went digging through Lucky’s things that day, the day we got the news, and I found seven unused boxes of Band-Aids lined up in a neat row in a shoebox under his bed. I still didn’t cry.

My own scars are different. My body is a desert of soft white skin embellished with small smoothed-over cuts and tears and burns. I don’t remember how all of them got there, but the ones I do remember make me wince with embarrassment. I’m the opposite of Lucky. I was born without the thrill-seeking gene. I stick close to home. Heights make me dizzy; the ocean, in my mind, can’t be trusted; I despise polar fleece, and I can’t see a thing without my contacts in. Some might think Lucky would have been the one my parents worried

about, but that wasn't the case. They never seemed to worry about him. It's always been me. Even now, years later, they still look at me with worry in their eyes.

Lucky, on the other hand, had an effortless star quality that made my parents want to be near him. My mom laughed like a teenager when he was around and my dad started making ambitious plans again. There was always stuff everywhere when Lucky was home: camping gear, surfboards, bikes, skateboards, wet suits hanging on the line. There was a happy buzz in our house. Anyone could see that Lucky was my mom and dad's favorite, and I didn't even mind. He was my favorite too. My brother squeezed his big world into our tiny house and made everything seem more exciting, but for me it was more than that. The thing I loved most about Lucky was that he made me feel normal.

Lucky never had much regard for time zones, and besides, it was understood that no matter what time it was or where he was, he should call if there was trouble. The phone ringing in the dead of night was a pretty common occurrence at our house. This time it was different though. Through the wall I could hear the muffled sound of my mom answering, alert even though she'd been asleep for hours. I heard her say "No No No" and then I heard her shake my dad awake. I

knew it was bad. She'd never done that before. My dad has to be at the oyster farm by seven.

“My baby!” my mom wailed. The sound was horrible. My heart thumped in my chest but I was paralyzed. I stayed there in my bed, listening.

I heard my dad take the phone. “What is it? What’s happened?” he asked.

Lucky had drowned while surfing in Australia at a place called Kirra Beach in Coolangatta in Queensland. I heard my dad talking to them, getting all the details. Then he hung up the phone and started to sob.

Lucky was twenty-two when he died. I'd known him for seventeen years.

TWO

“Fog’s staying late today,” my dad observed, peering up through the windshield at the gray mid-morning sky as we drove inland in his pickup. I hadn’t noticed, but the sky held no hint of summer, which was just around the corner. You get used to that here. From May to September it’s like living in a grainy black-and-white film. And it was anybody’s guess what time the fog would lose its battle to blue sky and the sun would appear. Some days it didn’t appear at all.

We were driving to Santa Rosa to identify Lucky’s body, which had made the long journey home to California from Australia by plane. *Where do they put the dead bodies on a plane?* I wondered. I’ve never seen a coffin bumping along on the airport baggage carousel. They said *identify the body* but of course it was him.

It wasn't like I was clinging to any hope of mistaken identity. I knew it was just a formality, but when Dad asked me to go with him I immediately said yes. Lucky would have gone if it was me, and it should have been me. I'd imagined hundreds of ways that it could have been me and not one where it could have been Lucky. I needed to go.

We passed by the Heron Inn on the way out of town. Miles stood on the deep wooden porch, talking on a cell phone. Miles and Jeff, a couple from San Francisco, run the Inn. They bought it seven years ago and gave it an extreme makeover, painting almost everything a pale shade of buttercream with white trim. They hired Marc, a rock-star chef from the city, and they opened a gourmet restaurant that features local produce, artisanal cheeses, and grass-fed beef. They hired me to make their desserts. I'm good with pastry and I work cheap. Miles waved somberly when he saw my dad's truck. News of the tragedy had no doubt spread like wildfire to every one of the four hundred and eleven residents of False Bay, the hamlet where we live on the coast of Northern California.

Across the road from the Inn, Ralph walked along the shoulder. His droopy-faced bloodhound, Boris, trotted alongside him. Ralph wore black rubber boots and mechanic's overalls. He owns the only gas station

in town. He looked over his shoulder and waved as we passed. My dad lifted two fingers off the wheel.

I stared straight ahead at a tiny plastic surfer adhered to the dusty dashboard. Lucky stuck it there ages ago. It bounced back and forth on a little spring, riding endless waves as the truck bumped along. My dad looked over at me a couple of times, but I never turned my head except to glance out my window at a wrecked car on the side of the road. Weeds had overtaken the twisted metal and the rusted exposed engine. It had already been stripped of anything valuable, but at the last second I saw a shoe, a ladies' black patent-leather pump, on the driver's seat. It seemed to be in perfect condition.

When we'd left the house, my mom was still lying on the wooden floor in Lucky's bedroom with one of his T-shirts draped over her face. Rocket, Lucky's dog, lay next to her. The knowing look in his eyes said everything. Rocket hadn't left my mom's side since she went in there shortly after the phone call came. A glass of water sat next to her on the floor untouched. She shouted out words from time to time but mostly she cried out like an animal in pain. I'd had enough of it. I couldn't take it anymore. I put my headphones on and listened to the Clash. I put a rolled-up yoga mat and a blanket next to her. Her long hair was splayed out on

the floor around her head, and her eyes were focused on the ceiling. Her feet were bare and blue with cold.

As we drove inland my dad struggled for things to say. Eventually he gave up and fiddled with the radio. He found music but it was sad. Then he found the news. A reporter spoke about a river that had swelled over its banks after days of rain somewhere in Alabama. Several families had been overtaken in the night when river water rushed into their house. All of them had drowned.

“It was their own fault,” I finally said.

“What’s that?”

“Those people. How could they go to bed with water rising all around them?”

My dad turned the radio off.

Lucky would never have done anything so stupid. He lived to take risks but he knew all about danger. He’d studied it till he was an expert. He knew about tide charts and compasses and wind direction and rogue waves and offshore currents and avalanches and riptides. He knew all of that stuff. So how does a guy like that drown? Why didn’t someone save him? Lucky had a million friends. Where was everyone?

A man in a white lab coat with a defeated demeanor and eyebrows like black caterpillars led us to a cold room lit with flickering florescent lights. Lucky

was laying on a metal table with a white sheet draped over him. My dad and I stood on either side of him. He looked as calm as I'd ever seen him. His stillness was more disturbing to me than anything. Lucky lived in a constant state of motion. He never slept much but he never seemed tired. Sleep was a waste of time for him. He went to bed late and got up early. He embraced all those tired bumper sticker slogans: *Make today amazing, smile and let it go, life is a highway, BE where you ARE . . . blah, blah, blah.* I'm nothing like that. I take refuge in sleep. Sometimes I sleep ten hours at a stretch. For me, sleep is a place to hide.

There was a greenish raised bruise on Lucky's forehead with a jagged crimson line running through it, probably from his surfboard. His old scars had taken on a purplish hue and stood out more than before against his pale skin, especially the one on his chin, stitches from I don't remember what fall. I noticed that the thin black cord that he always wore around his neck with the silver charm that said "Fearlessness" in Sanskrit was gone. I wondered if maybe it was in an official manila envelope with his diving watch and anything else they found on the body. Maybe they handed it to you like on TV. *Here's what's left of a life*, the man in the lab coat would say solemnly.

Looking at Lucky, I thought of all the times I'd

said to him, “I wish you were dead.” I said it so often that it meant nothing to him. He’d never said anything so mean to me, even when I went crazy and did awful things, even when I ruined birthday parties and family dinners and vacations.

My dad left the room before I did. He was pale and shaking. He sat on the wooden bench in the corridor with his face in his big weathered hands. I could see him through the window in the viewing room.

“Lucky,” I whispered, bringing my face close to his until a sour chemical smell burned my nostrils. “Lucky, wake up.” I ran my finger through one of his sun-bleached blond curls and then I touched his lips. They felt like cool paper. If he were alive he’d for sure have bitten my finger. Anger washed over me. I resented being left behind. I was always the one left behind. How many times had I said good-bye to my brother? Hundreds, probably. The thing that bugged me the most was that I knew I wasn’t enough. I could already feel the gaping hole he’d left that I couldn’t even begin to fill. And what about me? How would I cope without Lucky to hide behind? People here knew that if they said things about me they would have to contend with Lucky eventually. He always came to my rescue. Now what would I do?

“Why’d you have to die, asshole?” I blurted, and

I turned and started to leave but then I couldn't. My last words had to mean something. I tried to think of something to say, maybe something about life's journey or how I would always remember him. It all sounded so trite in my head. I thought maybe I should tell him I'd see him in heaven, but I didn't believe in that, and I was pretty sure he didn't either. Finally I leaned in and whispered "I love you," and then I quickly left the room.

THREE

The day before the party I spent the afternoon making Meyer lemon tarts. The Meyer lemons grow on a tree in our backyard, a miracle really, considering the lack of sunshine. I was glad to be in the kitchen, doing something I knew. Lucky loved my lemon tarts. The pale yellow curd filling came out too puckery, but I hate it when lemon curd is overly sweet. To compensate, I added a touch of sugar to the crust. The sugar made the tarts turn golden in the oven. They came out perfect. I lined them up in even rows on a long sheet of parchment paper. I half expected Lucky to appear and snatch a few like he always did when I baked at home.

“Let’s just call it a party,” said my mom the day we planned it. “He was too young for a memorial. He would hate that word.” She was still in Lucky’s room,

off the floor and in his bed. She was speaking to us now and making sense, though she spent hours staring into space. She was wearing one of Lucky's T-shirts and my dad's sweatpants. I brought her cups of hot tea and toast with blackberry jam.

That was a week earlier. It was the same day that we scattered Lucky's ashes. We drove to the estuary together and got in my dad's boat. He started the engine and steered up the coast to the spot near Fort Ross where Lucky loved to free dive for abalone. The wind was biting and cold and forced little whitecaps onto the bay. My mom, out of the house for the first time, sat huddled in layers and layers of clothes, gazing out at the horizon. The box filled with Lucky's ashes sat next to her on the seat. When my dad cut the engine, my mom put the box on her lap and held it in her hands for a moment. Then she opened it up and dipped her hand into the gray powder. She took a handful and opened her palm, letting the wind take it from her. She handed the box to my dad. I held Rocket's collar and tried to keep the boat pointed upwind while my dad shook the rest of the ashes overboard into the dark water. The boat kept drifting and we ended up with ashes in our hair and our clothes. We watched the swirling ashes mix with the water and change it to pea soup. I wondered how so much life could amount to a box of

ashes and the occasional bone chip. The ashes in my dad's beard and my mom's hair made them look old. Within a few seconds, the boat had drifted far away from the greenish slick. I read Lucky's favorite passage from Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. Then my dad played "Forever Young" on his harmonica. My mom cried. I felt numb.

My dad started the engine again and we headed home. As we pulled into our driveway my mom proclaimed that we would have a party for Lucky. "Nothing macabre," she said, "a celebration of his life." Then she went right back to Lucky's room and curled up on his bed. My dad and I joined her. Sitting side by side on the bed we planned Lucky's party, among his things, surrounded by his surfing posters taped all over the walls.

The night before the party, Sonia, Lucky's girlfriend, arrived home early from college in Vermont to attend. I watched from the kitchen window as her mom's car pulled into their narrow drive, just down the road from our house. Sonia's flight had arrived late. In the dark she looked dazed and moved gingerly, like she'd been in an accident herself. She took a duffle bag from the trunk and went in the house. I was so relieved to see her. Even like this. We were getting close before she went back to college last August. Sonia was

someone I could talk to. I hoped that she would stay for a while.

Lucky's friends started pouring in from all over the world. No one expected such a big crowd and we certainly couldn't accommodate everyone. They filled the nearby campground, building a big fire to congregate around at night and share stories about Lucky. It was a beautiful sight from afar, the fire and all of Lucky's friends milling about. They strung a massive old oak tree with fairy lights and decorated it like a Christmas tree, with memorabilia for ornaments. Photos, ski gloves, socks, jewelry, hacky sacks, flippers, surfboard leashes, CDs, sunglasses, and wine bottles hung in the branches. The big tree drooped under the weight of all the stuff.

Sonia and I drove up there in her mom's car and walked through the campground. "The sister and the girlfriend," I heard them whispering as the crowd parted. Sonia knew some of them from when she went to Australia over Christmas break. They offered us beers and shots and pot. I said no thanks but Sonia accepted everything. She seemed to prefer to stay completely wasted, which made her seem uncharacteristically fragile. She was always quiet but decisive and confident. She could almost keep up with Lucky on a surfboard or a ski slope or the side of a cliff. It took Lucky about

ten minutes to fall for her when they met two and a half years ago. Sonia and her mom, a radiologist who works in Santa Rosa, rented a small blue house just below us on the hill above town. Lucky was home that summer, working for my dad, and Sonia was home from college. It only took a week before Lucky was following her around like a puppy. Even with all the girls Lucky met out in the world, he'd fallen madly in love with the one whose bedroom window he could see from his own. They were perfect together.

Later that night, we sat in the idling car outside my house. Sonia definitely shouldn't have been driving, but I don't even have a license. I made stupid small talk.

"So, I guess we'll see you at the party tomorrow." I sighed.

"Oh, yeah. Wow, I feel crappy. I should really go to bed. I'm afraid I won't be able to sleep. Where's the party, again?"

"The Heron." I'd already told her that a few times. Where else would it be?

"Right, of course. I knew that." She turned and looked at me. A tear rolled down her cheek. "How much does this suck, George?"

"Tons."

She swiped at her cheek and nodded.

I got out of the car and went inside. My mom was

busy in the kitchen making a pan of lasagna for the party. Though she still slept in Lucky's bed at night, she was venturing out now, a bit more each day.

"Hi, baby." She smiled wistfully at me. I went and stood next to her. She kissed the top of my head. "How was it?"

"Weird. Good. So many people."

She nodded and went back to her meat sauce. Our finely balanced family routine had been toppled. My mom usually spent the days in her studio, a big, bright room with floor-to-ceiling windows behind the house that my dad built for her. She's an artist. She's kind of famous for her hand-built wood-fired pots. Her world is in her studio. She has an electric kettle out there for endless cups of tea and a stereo that she listens to classical music and jazz on. She has an electric kiln for small loads of work and a big gas one for bigger pieces. Out back there's a kiln for wood firings in a sand pit. Before this happened, we didn't see my mom in the house till dinnertime, and then she was only too happy to talk to another human about their day. Now the studio stood dark and we kept bumping into each other, acting as constant reminders of our collective pain. I hoped that my mom would feel like working again soon. It was hard to see her like this, thin and pale and hunched over, wearing Lucky's clothes, her long, beautiful hair

matted and dull instead of swept up into a tidy bun like she usually wore it, with a paintbrush or a pencil poked through it. My dad remained powerless to help. He and I said very little to each other. His world was the oyster farm. My world was less clearly defined.

The party turned out to be unbearably nice. Colorful pots and casserole dishes were laid out on a long wooden table in the dining room at the Heron. Too many people brought baked beans but it didn't matter. Jeff and Miles closed the restaurant and Marc, the Heron's temperamental chef, roasted some turkeys. Our neighbors brought salads and breads and cakes and liquor. There had to be about ten guitars in the room, and Lucky's friends played all his favorite songs until later when a reggae band started up. I sat next to Vince, Lucky's surfing buddy from just up the road. He got me a glass of wine at the bar and another one when I finished it. He didn't know that I'm not supposed to drink because of my meds. The wine warmed me and unclenched my stomach. After the band, it was open mic. Lucky's friends came up and spoke, one by one. Vince had had a few beers by then and he stumbled purposefully up to the stage.

"This is total bullshit," he said loudly into the microphone. "Because, you wanna know why? Because

shit like this doesn't happen to guys like Lucky. It happens to assholes that don't know how to read waves. I knew Lucky since we were six, man! Lucky was the one who made us safe on the water. That guy saved *me* so many times I lost count. I totally owe him my life. I don't know how this could have happened to him but it's total bullshit . . . okay?" He stared the crowd down and then he lurched off the stage.

The open mic was the hardest part of the night. Especially when my dad rose slowly, unsteadily from his chair and made his way to the stage, holding a mug of beer. I cringed. I wasn't sure I wanted to hear what he had to say. The room went silent. He stood there a moment, gazing at something off in the distance. Then he cleared his throat and began speaking: "Thank you all for coming. My son . . . you know him as Lucky but he was born Ludwig, named for my grandfather, a stupid name for a boy like that, we soon realized. He was nothing like my grandfather at all. He was . . ."

My dad stopped. He took a deep breath and went on. I couldn't look at him.

"I'm sorry, I'm not accustomed to talking about him in the past tense. Anyway, Lucky had a way of living that made me envious. He was ravenous for life. He couldn't seem to pack enough of it in . . ." He paused. The room waited. "And he was always like that. When

he was four, he started coming out on the boat with me and he'd stand up the whole way—he already had his sea legs—and he'd watch the horizon as though he was trying to figure out the fastest way to get there. He'd point to it and say 'Papa, can we go there?'" He paused again and inhaled raggedly and then he seemed to remember something that made him smile.

The crowd waited patiently. He looked out at all of Lucky's rosy-cheeked, dread-locked, tattooed friends.

"And look at all of you. Most of you I've never even met and here you are, some of you came so far. My wife, Madeleine, and I are very, very grateful. It makes us feel better to know that you knew our son too . . . and that you miss him, and that you won't forget him. Thank you."

My dad raised his mug.

"To Lucky."

The crowd raised their glasses: "To Lucky."

My dad returned to his chair next to my mom, draping his arm around her shoulders. She kissed him and he took a folded handkerchief out of his pocket and dabbed her tears. My mom had pulled herself together for the party. She was wearing a long denim skirt and a mohair sweater. I could see her telling my dad she wanted to leave. They got up together and slowly

moved toward the entrance of the dining room. People stood up as they passed and my dad shook hands with the men and the women kissed my mom's cheek or they hugged her. My dad squeezed my shoulder as they passed by.

“See you at home,” he said.

I scanned the room for Sonia and spotted her at the bar, having a conversation with a guy. He was wearing a T-shirt I thought I remembered Lucky wearing. I wasn't surprised; Lucky always gave his things away. What was his was yours. He had no need for material goods. Sonia seemed to know the guy. She said something to him and he shook his head and looked hurt. Then she hugged him as though she was apologizing. They stayed like that, hugging, for longer than most people hug. I wondered who he was.

Later, I saw the same guy sitting alone at the bar as I made my way to the bathroom. I was dizzy from the wine.

“Hey,” he said as I passed him, “you're Georgia, right?”

“Yeah.” I slowed. “How'd you know?”

“Are you kidding? You look just like Lucky.” He offered his hand. “I'm Fin.”

I shook his hand. It felt cool and his fingers were long and thin, like a pianist's. The name sounded

vaguely familiar. Lucky had probably mentioned him to me in his many rambling e-mails. He'd talked about so many of his friends. Fin let go of my hand. I reluctantly looked away and glanced around the room. The party guests were drunkenly hanging off each other, hugging and kissing. I looked back at Fin and laughed.

"Lucky would have loved this party," I said.

"Yes. He was the life of every party."

"How well did you know him?"

"Very. I was actually with him, you know, when he . . . had the accident."

"Yeah?" I looked at him with renewed interest.

He nodded solemnly. I wished we could go somewhere quiet and he could tell me everything about the last few minutes of my brother's life.

There were several friends who'd made statements to the Australian police about what happened. Fin probably had too, I couldn't remember. A week earlier the report had been sitting on our kitchen table, and I sat down and read it till the hair on the back of my neck stood up. They said Lucky had wiped out off a big wave. No one else had dared jump on that wave. He was riding it fine but then he seemed to lose his balance slightly. The wave tossed him up and dumped him hard and a massive wall of gnarly water slammed down onto him. Some of his friends said that they

thought his board was tombstoning, which can mean that a surfer is trapped in deep water, disoriented, or that his leash could be caught on a rock or some coral. Everyone watched for Lucky's head to pop up but it just didn't. He was under for way too long. Someone, maybe it was Fin, got to the board and dove down into the churning water and found Lucky. He ripped the Velcro band off Lucky's foot and pulled him to the surface but it was too late. Lucky had been hit on the head with his board and he was probably unconscious and unable to free himself. This had all happened in about ten feet of water. For Lucky, that was like drowning in a bathtub.

Fin didn't look like a surfer. He looked more like a South American polo player: olive-skinned with dark, intelligent eyes and a longish, thin nose. His light-brown hair was tangled and fell loosely around his face. There was no sign of the early crow's feet or the permanently sunburned nose or the sea-salt-fried, sun-damaged hair you see on most surfers. He had an intensity in his eyes that was separate from the rest of his face. His mouth turned up at the corners into a slight smile but his eyes expressed something else, something deeper. He also didn't talk like a surfer. Frankly, I'd had enough surfer talk to last me a lifetime. The way Fin spoke was refreshing.

The reggae band had started up again. Fin said something to me I couldn't hear and I leaned in closer. "What?"

His lips brushed against my hair and I felt his warm breath on my ear. The wine had relaxed me and I felt a small current of attraction zip through my belly. He repeated himself. "I said you're beautiful."

I wasn't expecting that. Could he be flirting? I was flattered. I felt myself blushing.

He laughed. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to embarrass you. It's just that I feel like I know you already. You look so much like Lucky."

"Yes. You said that."

"But different, more delicate, and your eyes are a bit more green than blue. Lucky's eyes were blue."

"He had my dad's eyes. I have my mom's."

I looked down. I noticed he was wearing a black cord around his neck. There was something silver hanging from it, dangling just below his T-shirt collar. I pointed to it.

"What's that?" I asked.

He pulled the silver charm out from below the neck of his T-shirt: Fearlessness, written in Sanskrit.

"It was Lucky's," said Fin, leaning in again.

"I know."

"He gave it to me. When I first met him, I'd just

crashed my motorcycle. I was a bit of a mess. Then I fell off a roof I was working on and then he watched me surf and he figured I needed it more than he did.”

“Oh.” I was a bit hurt. Lucky had always said that I could have it. That was typical Lucky though; he’d probably given it to Fin without a second thought. I remembered one time, I’d slipped it off Lucky’s neck while we were sitting side by side on the sofa, and put it on mine. He angrily demanded I give it back. I remember taking it off my neck and dangling it in front of him, teasing him. He grabbed for it and I yanked it away and stuffed it in my mouth. It tasted salty. He pounced on me, squeezing my cheeks together till I laughed so hard that I spit it out. *It’s for luck*, he had said. *You can have it when I’m dead*. And I remember my response too: *If you’re dead it’s not really working, is it?* I never thought about that charm again until I noticed it was missing from Lucky’s neck at the morgue.

Fin studied my face. “Do you want it? You should have it. Here . . .” He started to take it off.

“No. Don’t be silly. He gave it to you. You should have something to remember him by.”

“That’s very kind of you. It means a lot to me.” He gestured at the empty barstool next to him. “Why don’t you sit down?”

I looked at the empty chair and then back at him. “Did Lucky tell you about me?” I asked.

“No. Sit. Tell me all about you.” He smiled.

I could feel my face getting hot again. “I’m sorry. I have to go.”

I rushed to the bathroom but someone was using it. I walked quickly down the hallway and out onto the front porch of the Inn where the air was heavy and cool. I took deep breaths. I shook my head at how childish I’d just behaved, running away from Fin like an overly sensitive little girl. The porch was quiet and I could hear the soft rumble of the surf rolling in. I smelled Marc’s peculiar European cigarettes. He sat in the shadows on the porch swing, smoking, still in his chef’s whites. Marc is Swiss French and barely civil to anyone, though lately I’d received a few nods of approval from him for my desserts.

“Sorry for your loss,” he said, exhaling smoke.

“Thank you.”

“Would you like a cigarette?” He expertly shook one out of the pack and offered it to me.

“No. Thanks.” I took the wooden porch steps down to the pavement. I crossed the highway and found my way through the darkness to the beach where I sat down in the damp sand and watched the oily black water until I was numb with cold. I heard

raised voices and heavy steps on the wooden deck behind me. I looked back at the brightly lit Inn. A girl I was quite sure was Sonia ran across the porch with someone following her.

“You shouldn’t have come!” she shouted. It was definitely Sonia.

“Wait!” said a man. He followed her down the stairs to the parking lot. They disappeared into the darkness. I watched the Inn and listened but I heard nothing more except the dull noise from the party. After a few minutes I saw Sonia walk back inside alone. A car passed by on the highway. I turned back to the water.