ANDREW:
A RESPONSE TO LEOPOLD VON SACHER-MASOCH'S VENUS IN FURS

by

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ABSTRACT

My novella *Andrew* represents an attempt to establish and then re-contextualize “creative symptomatology” (Deleuze) of masochistic psychodrama by entering into an intertextual dialogue with the defining text for masochism, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus in Furs* (1870), and its critical reception by Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Sigmund Freud, and Gilles Deleuze. With its core being distinctly masochistic, my novella radically unties masochism from predominantly sexual meanings within the rigidly gendered scenario of domination and submission, and transposes it onto familial domain, primarily mother-daughter relationship. Furthermore, alongside the departure from the conventional view that masochism is some deviation in the structure of an individual’s desire, or, to use psychoanalytical term, sexual “perversion,” my novella questions societal normalizing practices instrumental in executing control. By doing so, I intend to prove this notion to be a potent psychological and cultural concept in the construction of gender, familial power dynamic, and identitarian politics.
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INTRODUCTION

My project inquires into a literary understanding of masochism, which has both a history and a theoretical discussion, wherein the study of masochism shows signs of becoming a discipline in its own right, with its social and cultural ramifications exceeding, as well as making problematic, traditional psychoanalytical perspectives on the phenomenon.¹ My thesis that intends to utilize an established working model of masochism in creating my own “masochistic text” will provide some insight into how such an abstract model might become a living part of literary production. To create my conceptual framework, I have chosen to engage with historical and cultural context by drawing on Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s Venus in Furs (1870), the defining text for masochism that showcases this phenomenon as an entity and clinical perversion, and Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s Psychopathia Sexualis (1886), which coined the term “masochism,” based on similarities between Krafft-Ebing’s reading of Venus in Furs and the experiences of his patients. Since much of the specificity embedded in the relationships in Venus was lost in Krafft-Ebing’s definition, Gilles Deleuze’s Coldness and Cruelty (1967; English translation 1989) in which he re-examines masochism through a close reading of Venus, builds a case for a far more intricate understanding of the “perversion.” This understanding is highly specific, noting particular symptoms and signs, and is both critical and clinical. Deleuze writes of the symptomatology of literature and the relationship of clinical psychiatry to a

¹ In my research, I have looked at masochism drawing on several perspectives. Some sources (as listed in my Bibliography) have found the practice liberating while others have found it oppressive, especially when applied to the feminine, domestic sphere. For example, Jessica Benjamin’s The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), Patrick D. Hopkins’s “Rethinking Sadomasochism: Feminism, Interpretation, and Simulation,” Hypatia 9 (1994): 116-141, Mimesis, Masochism, and Mine: The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought, ed. Timothy Murray (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), and others. I then decided to focus on the source of the concept which lead me to Krafft-Ebbing, Freud and finally, to Deleuze’s revolutionary re-thinking of Masoch in Coldness and Cruelty.
symptomatological reading of literature. He treats the text as symptom and the writer as symptomsmatologist whose oeuvre delineates a new clinical vision of the world. Deleuze calls this "creative symptomatology," not only in terms of identifying "health" problems in society but in a broader view of "the world as a symptom, and the artist as symptomatologist" (Deleuze, Essays 178). Deleuze's reconfiguration and critical transposition of the Freudian concept of masochism motivated me to critically employ both Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) and Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905). Finally, the masochistic contracts and psychobiography of Sacher-Masoch, representing how he lived out his autoerotic literary fantasies, and the later recollections of his wife, Wanda, who witnessed these acts of embodiment in her Confessions of My Life, provide an additional insight into the generative structures of masochistic drama.²

Through these readings and research, I have come to the following understanding of masochism which has shaped my own literary work.

What makes masochism particular are the different components which make it up. Or, as Deleuze has described in Coldness and Cruelty, its unique symptomatology. Some of the symptoms that are key to the manifestation of masochism include a pre-existing fantasy or ideal, the solicitation of another entity to play the part of one's fantasy or ideal, the presence of a contract between the dreamer and the ideal outlining the terms of their exchange, a re-naming of the dreamer and the ideal to fit the fantasy, a ritual of behavior between the dreamer and the ideal which results in repetition (although evolving) and guilt (not only on the part of the dreamer, but even more so on the part of the ideal), and finally, a devastating end to the fantasy by the arrival of a non-negotiated third party, also known by Sacher-Masoch in Venus in Furs as

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"the Greek." There are also many other components, or symptoms, which contribute to the "perversion" of masochism. However, it is my opinion that those listed above are core to the affliction and, without any one of them, it would be difficult to diagnose masochism. Although my novella draws on these components, its intertextual connection with Sacher-Masoch is rather loose, as the issues of sexuality, gender, the man/woman dichotomy and role-play are radically transposed and displaced onto familial relationships. While remaining true to Venus's creative symptomatology, as defined by Deleuze, my own story breaks with traditional subjects to which the symptoms have usually been ascribed. For instance, in Sacher-Masoch's work, and in the studies of Krafft-Ebing, the masochistic subject is always male. In my story, the masochistic subject is a young girl. However, before delving into a comparison between my work and Sacher-Masoch's Venus in Furs, I would like to start with brief history of how the term "masochism" came to be, followed by a more extensive discussion of its symptomatology as outlined above.

Fantasy

According to the history of clinical diagnosis, first and foremost, masochism is fantasy. It is an affliction of the mind in which the patient is subject to an idea. "By masochism I understand a peculiar perversion of the psychical vita sexualis, in which the individual affected, in sexual feeling and thought, is controlled by the idea of being completely and unconditionally subject to the will of a person of the opposite sex; of being treated by this person as by a master,—humiliated and abused" (Krafft-Ebing 89). Although it is my argument that Krafft-Ebing missed many of the defining symptoms of masochism, his initial diagnosis is noteworthy for confining the perversion to the mind. Eventually, a masochist may feel compelled to act out this fantasy in real life, either with fetish object(s) or real people—as Severin does in Venus—but
always there is a pre-existing fantasy and always, the fantasy is the purest form of the masochistic affliction. In fantasy, everything is under the dreamer’s control. If the dreamer seeks to act out the fantasy, the dreamer will attempt to set up a contract with defining laws to control the relationship. These laws will appear to favor and give power to the ideal, but it is important to remember that they were established by the dreamer in an attempt to mold reality after the dreamer’s long- standing fantasy. In fantasy the relationship between the dreamer and the ideal is able to continue, no matter what events take place, ad infinitum. If a scenario comes to a tragic or displeasing halt, the dreamer simply resets the stage of his imagination and begins again. This allows innumerable repetitions and creates a static or frozen state of the relationship in which the dreamer is always under the whip and yet, always in control. No momentum is picked up in psychic repetition and here, pleasure is found in the state of waiting. Dynamic changes occur when the fantasy is thrust into reality, which I will discuss later; however, it was insightful of Krafft- Ebbing to note that, above all, masochism begins in the mind, and there it exists in its truest form. It is no coincidence that Sacher- Masoch wrote out his fantasies in short stories and novels. In literature, too, fantasy remains safe, static, and entirely under the author’s control. However, historically, the masochistic fantasy has not belonged to just anyone; it has belonged to the heterosexual male.

As a fantasy belonging to heterosexual males

“This perverse instinct finds an adequate satisfaction differing from the normal,—in woman, to be sure, but not in coitus” (Krafft- Ebing 89). The previously quoted appear in Krafft- Ebing’s Psychopathia Sexualis, and as stated, the criteria are few and broad; it is no wonder that the psychoanalyst observed a very “large amount of cases” of masochism among his patients. But as Deleuze would point out years later, Dr. Krafft- Ebing missed many particulars in his
readings of Sacher-Masoch’s works that otherwise would have lead him to much more exclusive criteria for determining this “perversion” and, therefore, excluding a lot of cases from the diagnosis. However, of curiosity to me, and a criterion that is extremely particular in Krafft-Ebing’s enumeration of otherwise generalities, is the statement that the masochist desires to be “subject to the will of a person of the opposite sex” and yet, also find satisfaction “in woman, to be sure.” Thus, according to these criteria, a woman can never be a masochist, as she would have to seek submission to the will of man, and could therefore not find satisfaction “in woman,” since her satisfaction must be found in the opposite sex. This perversion is only reserved for the male fantasy, and more specifically, the heterosexual male fantasy. Years later, Freud would diagnose a “feminine masochism” as a secondary phenomenon. This was the result of his belief that masochism was simply sadism turned around on itself and therefore “comprises any passive attitude towards sexual like and the sexual object” (On Sexuality 71). According to Freud, “normal” male sexuality contained an element of aggressiveness, or the will to subjugate—these qualities he found sadistic. Additionally, he claimed that the distinction between femininity and masculinity “often has to be replaced in psychoanalysis by that between activity and passivity” (On Sexuality 71). In sum, women were natural masochists because of their evolutionary inclination to passivity. In Freud’s model, men and women are not complete entities but different parts of a whole. Masculinity needs femininity and activity needs passivity. The balance between the two is not always proportional, but it is never equal on its own. So even though Freud recognizes women can be affected by masochism, it is under the conditions that masochism be conflated with sadism, male with female, and completely ignoring the possibility of masochism as its own phenomenon, or woman as capable of experiencing it without the assistance of aggressiveness/sadism/man. Deleuze, too, speaks in terms of a heterosexual relationship, one in
which man is seeking subjugation under woman’s will. And as far as the writings of Masoch (although I am only concerned with *Venus in Furs*), it is always a man who is afflicted with masochistic impulses to submit himself to the cruel abuses of an ideal woman. It is interesting to note, however, that Sacher-Masoch himself was solicited by an unknown admirer after his publication of *The Heritage of Cain*, and it was to his great disappointment that the unknown admirer turned out to be a man. In Wanda Sacher-Masoch’s *Confessions of my Life*, she notes that “Since it was not a woman whom he could cast in the role of Venus in Furs, then he would make the man into ‘the Greek’ …” (286). As all the other symptoms of masochism were manifest, I think it is the heterosexual preference of the author (and later clinicians and theorists such as Krafft-Ebing, Freud and Deleuze), which demands the perversion be of the same preference. This is why, in *Andrew*, Lucy, a woman and mother, is still the one to whose will another must bend. However, the masochist is Elizabeth, a young girl, of the same sex as her mother, and whose fantasy it is to take on the freedoms and privileges of a man. And it is this—Elizabeth’s understanding of the signs of maleness to achieve freedoms (since she doesn’t understand how to achieve these freedoms in her own sex)—that she plays at. A game played over and over until mastery is reached through repetition.

**As a fantasy of ideal reality**

“He [the masochist] questions the validity of existing reality in order to create a pure ideal reality, an operation which is perfectly in line with the judicial spirit of masochism” (Deleuze, “Coldness” 33). In her waking life, Elizabeth is denied access to certain realities and experiences because of her sex. This is made clear in the beginning of *Andrew* when she is forbidden to take off her shirt because she is a girl. But when she is Andrew, a boy, she gains access to these desired realities; she is able to have new experiences and grasp hold of new
freedoms that were previously not allowed. However, the mode of achieving this freedom is subversive. As Deleuze contends, the “masochistic process of disavowal is so extensive that it affects sexual pleasure itself; pleasure is postponed for as long as possible and is thus disavowed. The masochist is therefore able to deny the reality of pleasure at the very point of experiencing it, in order to identify with the ‘new sexless man’” (Deleuze, “Coldness” 33). In Venus this is why Severin oscillates between wanting to be Wanda’s husband and wanting to be her slave. It is often in moments where she confesses her love, denies the enjoyment of the game, and declares that she wants to be Severin’s wife that he begs her to treat him even more cruelly as her slave. So even with the promise of a loving wife, and the consummation that marriage would bring, Severin chooses the sting of the whip.

As a fantasy of innocence belonging to the ideal

In the beginning of Venus the reader follows Severin through a garden as he pursues “a strange and urgent call” (156) to visit a stone statue of Venus (his goddess. his beloved) in the night. When he arrives, he finds the statue draped in a fur and runs from the scene in “an indescribable panic” (156). In trying to escape the garden, Severin takes a wrong turn and comes face to face with Wanda, dressed as Venus, “not the marble beauty of a moment ago, but the goddess of Love in person, with warm blood and a beating heart!” (156). Unable to cope with his fantasy turned reality, Severin runs. On reaching the safety of the house in which he is staying, he asks, “What game is this that I am playing. I wonder? Am I a mere amateur or a complete fool?” (157). This scene is important in terms of innocence being essential in masochism because it reveals two requirements. The first is that the dreamer must be innocent, or, as Severin puts it, an amateur in the experience/game of bringing a fantasy to life. The pursuit is one of pleasure, not ambition, and the road taken to realization is one of self-discovery rather than one which has
been formalized or institutionalized (another reason why masochism and sadism are incompatible). Furthermore, in fantasy, the masochist's dreams can play over and over in a perfect cycle of repetition, as there are no outside variables to disrupt its play. When thrust into reality, however, events of which the dreamer has no control can affect the game and, therefore, it is subject to an end, rather than the safe repetition of fantasy. It is the threat of this, of warm blood and a beating heart, which he cannot control, that excited Severin to the point of running away. Second, the living incarnation of the fantasy must also be innocent. Severin notes here and elsewhere throughout the story that he is an amateur. The motivation of love is something that cannot fade, but if one were to engage in such games more than once, their processes would begin to become formalized and the need to set up laws in the form of a contract would be replaced by institutional behaviors. This, then, would also eliminate the need for education, not only on the part of the ideal, but on the part of the dreamer. Deleuze makes a point of emphasizing the education of the ideal by the dreamer, but the dreamer is also in need of an education. One that, once learned, cannot be unlearned and which is transformative (as evidenced by Severin's resolve at the end of the book to become the "hammer" rather than the anvil). This means the masochistic process is unique in that it can be experienced ad infinitum in fantasy, but once moved to reality is limited to one experience, and one experience only. This speaks to the fact that, above all, masochism is fantasy.

*As ideal inspiration from fantasy*

"Where other children had Tom Thumb, Bluebeard or Cinderella as friends, mine were Venus and Apollo, Hercules and Laocoön" (Masoch 161). It was by chance that Cinderella became Elizabeth's fairy tale of choice, but I had to smile when I came across this passage in *Venus*. I believe that the distinction Severin is trying to illustrate is that while most children are
interested in fabricated stories of magic and the imaginary, he was drawn to something more earnest, to myths which have a long history and which, at least at one time, were considered truth by many people. The distinction, though, is slight, as both are rooted in the imaginary and both often involve supernatural beings, which, as we have seen, are core to the masochistic fantasy. So while Severin may have grown in his inclination according to Greek Myths, Elizabeth is actively utilizing fairy tales to realize hers. Perhaps Severin was not so different from other children after all.

**Solicitation**

The process of solicitation in masochism is two-fold. It serves to advertise for and select the torturer closest fitting the dreamer’s ideal, and to convince the torturer to engage in cruelties they are otherwise unwilling or unaccustomed to performing. “In all Masoch’s novels, the woman, although persuaded, is still basically doubting, as though she were afraid: she is forced to commit herself to a role to which she may prove inadequate, either by overplaying or by falling short of expectations” (Deleuze, “Coldness” 21). The selected torturer’s reluctance is not merely a sign of her doubt and fear, but of her innocence and virginal nature. At heart she is pure, and good, and kind. She is not practiced in cruelty for cruelty’s sake and so needs to be educated. This also ensures that she will follow up her cruelties with guilty and loving attentions; that she doesn’t only create the wound, but that she will also be the one to kiss it better. This results in the epic rise and fall of emotions that the masochist is so fond of, the recurring cycle of punishment, guilt and compensation. Solicitation in *Andrew* focuses primarily on the latter half of the process. Elizabeth spends much of her energy trying to convince her mother to play “Andrew” with her (to participate in Elizabeth’s preconceived fantasy). Elizabeth’s success at this varies, but climaxes are evident when Lucy (Elizabeth’s mother) asks Elizabeth to play
“Andrew” at the dinner table in front of her father, and later where she calls Elizabeth by the name of Andrew in a rose garden. Accompanying this growing willingness to participate in Elizabeth’s fantasy by agreeing to fantastic names and play is an escalation of violence on Elizabeth’s body, which is the defining characteristic of Andrew (“How about I be Andrew and I’m all cut and bloody from fighting?”). While Lucy’s quality as a mother is often in question, she is not entirely bad. Often feeling guilty after an act of violence and attempting to make up for it in some way (through hugs, kisses, gifts of food or clothing), she is the ultimate ideal. Later in the story Elizabeth employs solicitation to convince Rebecca to play the part of “Queen” when they play “pretend” at Elizabeth’s slumber party. Rebecca’s personality is different from Lucy’s. She is not kind or particularly good. Rather, she is cruel and strong. Elizabeth does not need to convince Rebecca to play the part of the torturer in their pretend game, she only needs to convince Rebecca to play, and when she offers Rebecca the role of “Queen” in their game, Elizabeth gets more than she bargained for. Unlike Lucy, Rebecca exceeds expectations.

**Contract**

Deleuze explains that “A contract is established between the hero and the woman, whereby at a precise point in time and for a determinate period she is given every right over him. ... Through the contract, that is through the most rational and temporarily determinate act, the masochist reaches toward the most mythical and the most timeless realms, where the three mother-images dwell. Finally, he ensures that he will be beaten; we have seen that what is beaten, humiliated and ridiculed in him is the image and the likeness of the father, and the possibility of the father’s aggressive return. *It is not a child but a father that is being beaten*” (Deleuze, “Coldness” 66). In *Venus* the contract is written, with terms designed and negotiated between both parties. It is also something that Severin neglects to sign until Wanda reminds him
and even then, needs her assistance to do so (she guides his shaking hand). However, Severin also breaks with the contract after a fit of jealousy, although he eventually finds he cannot really leave Wanda and returns. It is also important to note that he does not make an attempt to return to her after his final humiliation of getting whipped by the Greek. At that point, Wanda leaves with the Greek and Severin goes on his way, resolving thereafter to be the one who wields the whip in all relationships, not the one whose back is under it. Wanda writes to him years later expressing a hope that this final humiliation has indeed cured him, so there seems to be a mutual understanding that the contract has been dissolved. However, there is never any formal breaking from the contract and certainly none of the formality that went into creating it. Since the contract appears to play such a key role in the masochistic relationship, and since without it the perversion may cease to be identified as masochism, I always wondered at how flimsy the bond was. For something so serious, for an attempt to bind both parties to the fantasy and deny reality, it is easily breakable, and once broken, there is no real consequence for doing so. The entire agreement, as presented in Venus, seems to hinge on both parties’ identities being bound up in their word. So much so that their word is law. “The masochist appears to be held by real chains, but in fact he is bound by his word alone” (Deleuze, “Coldness” 75). However, this is not the case for Severin or Wanda (as they both go back on their word) and so the business of a contract lacks the ironclad authority it should have had. But in Andrew, the contract goes much deeper than paper; between a biological mother and her child, the contract is made of blood. No matter what happens—what fights, humiliations, words of disavowal, or even legal papers that are signed—the mother and daughter will always be connected on a cellular level. It is a contract of ultimate strength. However, it should be noted that similarly to a gender dynamic, with its contemporary crossing of multiple lines, there is no certainty as to the future. There may be a day
when technology has developed to the point where if one would like to dissociate themselves from family on a genetic basis, they would be able to do so. Thus, even the type of contract I describe here has no terminal point. It is still something in flux.

An extremely important difference between *Venus* and *Andrew* is that the contract exists between two consenting adults in *Venus* and between a mother and child in *Andrew*. As Deleuze explains, “the contract presupposes in principle the free consent of the contracting parties and determines between them a system of reciprocal rights and duties; it cannot affect a third party and is valid for a limited period” (Deleuze, “Coldness” 77). When considering *Andrew*, this gets complicated for reasons of capability and consent. The relationship is not one that is negotiated between adults, it is one that is socially predetermined between a mother and child. The rights and duties favoring the mother rather than the child, not out of design, but out of tradition. For instance, laws of religion (in particular, Christianity) tend to mention the duties of a child toward their parents. For example, to respect, honor, obey and as such, tending toward providing adequate care in old age. According to most legal systems in North America, however, it is the duties of the parent toward their child that are mentioned. For example, to provide safe and adequate care meeting basic survival needs, even consenting on the child’s behalf to care that is necessary and in the child’s best interests. In *Andrew*, because the contract is one of blood, Lucy is held accountable to, and makes use of, both laws. For instance, she requires that Elizabeth honor her wishes and obey her commands. When Elizabeth does not, Lucy punishes her as she sees fit. There are times, however, when an intervening third party questions the severity of Lucy’s punishments. For instance, when Dave catches Lucy slapping Elizabeth across the face, or when Jetty tells Lucy she can be harsh when it comes to Elizabeth. The presence of the law in the form of a police officer is a threat throughout the story, but he only implies that Lucy is a
neglectful parent and no further action is pursued. So the terms of duty and obligation are constantly shifting; however, the connection of the two is always certain. Their relationship is legally valid for eighteen years, or until such time as the courts intervene and impose their own authority on the relationship. Where Deleuze draws distinctions between what psychic figure is being beaten in Venus, a child is literally being beaten in Andrew. Often what makes contracts legally valid, and what gives them their power, are the capability (although Deleuze never addresses capability) and consent of the parties who sign. When the parties are adults, consent is assumed and capability is determined. When it comes to matters of minors, however, consent is not typically valid even if capability is determined. Many questions exist concerning a child’s consent that do not for adults. For instance, does the child truly understand what they are asking? Even if they do, should they be able to consent and is that consent valid based simply on stated understanding? Often these question surround situations which are in the best interests of the child (such as health care). Most people would not even consider them in Elizabeth’s case—where a child is seeking treatment that is not in her best interests.

Naming

Re-naming is integral to the masochistic process for its particularity; “a proper name is made to connote signs” (Deleuze, “Coldness” 16). So, in the individual’s construction of particular signs used to create their fantasy, a new and more fitting name must be prescribed in order to make the fantasy actuality. In Venus in Furs new names are assigned to the ideal and to the dreamer. Severin, the dreamer in the story, first begins this renaming by calling Wanda “Venus in furs,” the name of the Roman goddess of love, wrapped up in his fetish of earthly furs. Interestingly, it is not Severin who asks to be addressed by a new name when he becomes Wanda’s slave. Instead, it is Wanda who has the idea that, as her slave, “From now on your name
is no longer Severin, but Gregor” (Masoch 205). As her slave he is known as Gregor, and when she loves him and wants to quit their “silly game,” she calls him Severin. Wanda will switch between the two names at different intervals. At times he will be Gregor for long periods, and at other times she will switch to calling him Severin; confessing her love one moment, and whipping him and ordering him by the name Gregor the next. This, too, is evidence of the emotional pendulum the masochist seeks to keep moving, altering between pain and pleasure. What is noteworthy is that since the masochist seeks to be the educator, it should have been Severin to suggest he go by another name when he assumes his role in his fantasy. But it was Wanda. This could suggest two things. The first being that Severin identifies as a slave in his real life (under the name “Severin”) and sees no need to distinguish himself in fantasy. After all, it was under the name Severin that he experienced his first super sensual tendencies as a child—spurning the healthy breast of his mother for goat’s milk and being beaten by his Aunt while she wore furs. The second is that Wanda has exceeded him as the educator. She is no longer virginal, amateurish or in need of being taught. Instead, she is experienced, practiced, and now teaching Severin the true meaning of what he has asked her to do. The consequence of the latter being true would be the forthcoming end of the masochistic fantasy as 1) Wanda is no longer capable of fulfilling his ideal (she has exceeded it) and 2) the room for emotional highs and lows, the alternating between pain and pleasure, has come to end, an end where there is only pain and none of the compensating pleasure.

In Venus the name play is minimal. In Andrew, however, the name play is multiplied. Elizabeth asks to be called “Andrew,” and in the beginning, rather than concede, Lucy calls her “little Elizabeth,” “Mama’s little fishy,” “honey” and “big girl,” all names which negate the fantasy of the male gender and reinforce their current relationship as mother and daughter.
Elizabeth, on the other hand, will call her mother “the evil stepmother” and “Ursula,” names of the antagonists in *Cinderella* and *The Little Mermaid*. It should be noted that Lucy never consents to being called these names. However, as the story progresses, she does consent to calling Elizabeth “Andrew.” Once at the dinner table in an effort to humiliate Elizabeth, and once in a rose garden when they are having lunch. It is also interesting to note that when Lucy calls Elizabeth “Andrew” in the garden, and asks her to be him, Elizabeth refuses and rather than proceed with identifying Lucy with the name of a fairy tale antagonist, Elizabeth tells her mother that she (Lucy) is “good.”

**Ritual**

Ritual plays an important role in masochistic practices and has been conventionally defined as “not the reaction to life; it is a reaction to what thought has made of life. It is not a direct response to the world, or even to experience of the world; it is a response to the way man thinks of the world” (Levi-Strauss 681). Drawing on Levi-Strauss’s definition, certain commentators explain the process of ritualizing as carefully rehearsed motions and gestures to both shape and reflect human experiences, a negotiation between the “plurality of realities” through which people make their passage (Delattre 282). Deleuze places ritual as a constitutive feature of masochism. “The masochist is obsessed; ritualistic activity is essential to him, since it epitomizes the world of fantasy. Three main types of rite occur in Masoch’s novels: hunting rites, agricultural rites and rites of regeneration and rebirth” (Deleuze, “Coldness” 94). In *Andrew* the rituals that dominate Elizabeth’s life are those of domesticity—going to the grocery store or shopping for clothes, doing chores such as washing the floors or weeding the flowerbeds. All mundane activities which Elizabeth has infused with ritualistic significance according to her fantasy world and play. For instance, washing floors in not a job she does for
her mother, but a job she does as the slave Cinderella to appease her evil stepmother. The ritual of rebirth is evident in all Elizabeth’s transformations of play, but comes most literally at the end of the novella with the birth of her brother, Simon.

While most rituals in Andrew and in Venus exist in play, the very physical ritual of cutting hair punctuates Andrew in a visceral way. Cut hair in masochistic literature often functions as a sign of having gone through an ordeal, and come out of it changed—as a man, as for example, “[i]n The Siren, Zenobia cuts off Theophan’s hair and exclaims: ‘At last I have succeeded in making a man of you’” (Deleuze, “Coldness” 98). It is also a sign of identity and transformation. It is the same for Elizabeth. When her father cuts her hair short, he is creating her in his image, as a male. When her mother, Lucy, see this, she feels betrayed, weak and physically faints as a result. It is a moment where ritual has come to fruition and play is now reality.

Guilt

It is not the touch of the ice cold woman that warms the masochist’s heart, but the heat of her furs that she wraps around him on seeing that her touch has caused him frostbite. It is the tender kiss on the wound she has created to make it feel better. It is all her tender attentions after cruelty, motivated by her sense of guilt at violating her innocence:

[M]asochism is not pleasure in pain, nor even in punishment; at most, the masochist gets a preliminary pleasure from punishment or discomfort, his real pleasure is obtained subsequently, in that which is made possible by the punishment. The masochist must undergo punishment before experiencing pleasure. It would be a mistake to confuse this temporal succession with logical causality: suffering is not the cause of pleasure itself but the necessary precondition for achieving it. (Deleuze, “Coldness” 89)
Like a true ideal, in *Venus*, Wanda begins her journey as a cruel mistress reluctantly. After she strikes Severin with the whip, "the next moment she bends over me with compassion and tenderly strokes the back of my neck. 'Did I hurt you?' she asks, torn between fear and shame" (Masoch 185). After this first instance of punishment Severin asks Wanda to whip him again, insisting it gives him great pleasure. She laughs, telling him it only gives him pleasure because he knows she does not really mean him harm: "If I were really the kind of woman who whips her slave, you would be filled with horror" (Masoch 186). So the question of guilt deepens. As I have implied, it is not only the masochist's sense of guilt that he seeks to have absolved through punishment, as both Deleuze and Freud have argued, but the ideal's sense of guilt for harming a man who has done no wrong. But if that is truly the case, then the question of guilt becomes even more complicated. As also previously mentioned, the guilt in the ideal at having beaten one, who does not deserve it, is transformative. And transformative toward the special sadism of masochism that Deleuze talks about. And even though it is the sadism of masochism, not that of Sade himself, it is a state of being that the masochist would find no pleasure in. As Wanda says, it is a state of being the masochist would find horrific. This is problematic for the masochist for two reasons: 1) he educates and pursues a transformation of his partner through education that no longer suits his fantasy and 2) the masochist then becomes crueler than even the most depraved sadist. Because at least the cruelty of the sadist is honest. The sadist takes without consent and tortures for the sake of unwilling tears and torment. The masochist, however, feigns innocence and plays at being the amateur. I always thought it odd how often Severin would proclaim himself an amateur throughout *Venus*; at first it seemed a genuine shock at realizing a fantasy for the first time, the sweet humor of a bumbling romantic. However, it can also be seen as deceit. A purposeful insisting to blind the reader and his willing participant to the horrible transformation
he will lead his ideal through. It is a game of power and destruction of the most fraudulent kind. In *Andrew* the progression of guilt is evident in Lucy when she slaps Elizabeth in the frozen food isle of the grocery store. Lucy apologizes but goes on to say that it was because Elizabeth hurt her first. The second time a slap occurs, it is in secret and no apology is made; the third time it occurs, the slap is witnessed by Dave who then demands that Lucy apologize. She does, though again seeks to justify her cruelty by Elizabeth’s previous behavior. As their relationship develops, Lucy’s sense of guilt over her abuse wanes until the violence becomes something normal and deserved. While Elizabeth never begs Lucy to hurt her again (like Severin begs Wanda), she continues to ask Lucy to play “Andrew.” Here it is more evident that what is enjoyed most is the fulfillment of the fantasy, not physical pain or humiliation.

**The Greek**

One of the most intriguing parts of the masochistic process is the appearance of a non-negotiated third party. Or, as it is known in *Venus*, the arrival of “the Greek.” This appearance of the Greek signifies the end of the masochistic fantasy. The fantasy no longer exists between the dreamer and the ideal, but now between the ideal and the Greek, with the dreamer removed to the position of spectator. If the Greek arrives in fantasy, the dreamer can begin anew. If the Greek arrives in reality, the masochistic process comes to end. It comes to an end because the dreamer is no longer in control of relations. The Greek was never a part of the contract and yet, he arrives and demands the attentions of the ideal that were previously designated to the dreamer. Deleuze explains the Greek’s intervention in psychoanalytic terms of the Oedipal scenario. “The final episode of *Venus* is a typical instance of the aggressive hallucinatory return of the father in a world that has symbolically abolished him” (Deleuze, “Coldness” 64). In *Andrew* this is signified in the birth of Simon, who embodies, to use Deleuzian formula, “the aggressive return
of the father [the Greek] [that] disrupts the masochistic situation; it represents the constant threat from the side of reality to the masochist's world and to the defenses that condition and limit the symbolic world of his perversion” (Deleuze, “Coldness” 65). It is not the return of the father the masochist fears, but truly the manifestation of the torturer's guilty transformation. It is the torturer's betrayal of her role as an ideal. All attentions Lucy previously gave exclusively to Elizabeth are now given to Simon. Furthermore, while Lucy and Elizabeth only played at Elizabeth being a boy, and receiving the freedoms and access to the experiences (like taking off one's shirt) that are granted to boys, Simon is an actual boy. He is of the male sex. He is the genuine article whereas Elizabeth could only pretend. He is the ultimate betrayal. Not only has Lucy brought Simon into their world and is now granting him all the attentions she used to grant Elizabeth, by bringing in a boy she has exposed Elizabeth as a fraud. The arrival of the Greek must always occur in masochistic literature for it is this character who shines light on exactly how terrible and deceitful the masochist truly is.

Format

*Venus in Furs* is a novella written with no chapters, just segments separated by an asterisk, which imparts a flowing, dreamlike quality to the text. Considering the literary conventions of the nineteenth century—the use of chapters as clear definition in novels—Sacher-Masoch's *Venus* interferes with this practice. Rather, he provides the reader with fragments instead of chapters and signs of the psychological novel, breaking barriers between conventional plots. The format, however, is curious in terms of what Deleuze said about the goal of suspension and freezing in masochistic fantasy. It is my opinion that while the format does lend a dreamlike quality to the piece, it also encourages the reader to keep going without stopping or pausing—as there are no traditionally defined places to do so. If anything, rather than
providing space for suspension, it encourages an acceleration toward the end, which is uniquely sadistic. This, then, could be more evidence for how truly cruel the masochist is despite his proclaimed fumbling, amateur nature. In terms of literary format, the reader is left little time to meditate on the process of progression before transformation has taken place. If the layout of a masochistic text is that of a dream, then the acceleration and content to which it contributes make it a nightmare. As such, I have duplicated Masoch completely in terms of format. Andrew is a novella which has no chapters, just segments separated by an asterisk. It is the story of fantasy turned reality with a devastating end. I consider that the novella format, in addition to its formal relationship with Masoch’s source text, is the most productive genre for my creative project, since, in terms of its characteristics, the novella has been historically distinguished by its emphasis on circumstance rather than character (Leibowitz 114), being traditionally restricted to a single event, situation, or conflict, producing an element of suspense and leading to unexpected turning point resolved in a surprising, albeit logical denouement. Nowadays the term is often used to distinguish a long short story from a short story, or a short novel from a fully-fledged novel. Andrew draws on both characteristics—in terms of length and an element of uncertainty facilitated by Lucy (for example, who Andrew is, etc.) and its unanticipated ending.

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3 The novella was theorized in the nineteenth century by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, August Schlegel, and Paul Heyse, who were also practitioners of the genre and the continuation of whose tradition is represented by Masoch’s Venus. As Judith Leibowitz contends in her Narrative Purpose in the Novella (Hague: Mouton, 1974), almost all of novella theory is based on German literature (113). See, for example, Donald LoCicero’s Novellentheory: The Practicality of the Theoretical (Hague: Mouton, 1970), J. H. E. Paine’s Theory and Criticism of the Novella (Bonn: Bouvier, 1979), Siegfried Weing’s The German Novella: Two Centuries of Criticism (Rochester: Cadmen House, 1994), and Henry Remak’s Structural Element of the German Novella from Goethe to Thomas Mann (New York: Peter Lang, 2001).

Conclusion

My project attempts to question, alongside Deleuzian lines, psychoanalytic prejudices—supported by the persistence of traditional sexology represented in my research here by Kraft-Ebbing and Freud—that continue to contain masochism within a clinical framework of perversion, which implicitly justifies all the forms of repression that it has suffered. Thus, instead of fixating on the Same (which, for example, could have manifested itself through the identification with the same-sex parent), Elizabeth opens an exchange into Difference, which potentially indicates an attempt to expunge certain normalizing identificatory processes—processes which are, fundamentally, as Felix Guattari writes elsewhere, “no more than the remnants of the most archaic rituals of submission” (Guattari 216). Of course, by taking the form of a creative piece my thesis expands on much more than what I have discussed here. This is the beauty of fiction and, in my opinion, the value of a creative thesis. With its core/the idea/the fantasy being distinctly masochistic, my novella, by untying masochism from predominantly sexual meaning as well as from the view that it is some kink in the structure of an individual’s desire, attempts to prove this notion to be a potent psychological and cultural concept in the construction of gender, familial power dynamic, and identitarian politics.
ANDREW

“Mom, can I take my shirt off too?” Elizabeth had the hem wrapped around her arms and was twirling about the front yard, ready to roll it right off her body.

Lucy choked on her sun tea. “No, honey.” She smiled over her glass and squinted her eyes. She tucked a strand of curly brown hair behind her ear and smiled at Jetty, then closed her mouth around the straw in her glass. Her lips pursed to little points.

Elizabeth was twirling around faster and faster, whisking her shirt up higher and higher.

Lucy stared, teeth still clamped on the straw.

Elizabeth glanced over at little Luke who seemed interested in some hidden thing in the grass and started to spin toward him, trying to pull the shirt over her head.

“Elizabeth -- no, no.” Lucy set her drink down beside her on the porch and sat forward on the steps, resting her elbows on her knees and clasping her hands.

Elizabeth looked at Lucy and stuck out her tongue. She rolled her eyes and lowered her shirt to around her tummy but kept twirling, just slower.

“Moooom. please....” She slowly hiked her shirt.

“No.” Lucy’s nose pinched. She was pursing her lips again.

Jetty looked at her and smiled questioningly, glass of tea in hand as she sat leaning against the porch railing.

Lucy glanced over, breaking into a smile.

“Why not?” Elizabeth furrowed her brow, twirling in swifter, sharper movements.

Her back teeth clenched. Lucy sat up straight. “Elizabeth, we talked about this. Drop it.”

“But Luke gets to have his off!!” She unwrapped her hands, her shirt crumpling over her body.
"Elizabeth!" Lucy stood up.

Jetty grabbed her by the hand. "Oh, Lu. What's the harm? They're just kids. It's summer."

Jetty let go and picked up Lucy's tea, offering it to her. "Come on, sit down. Let them be barefoot and naked while they still can."

Lucy took the tea. "I guess. I mean, you're right." She half-smiled at Elizabeth but kept standing. "Fine."

"Yes!" Elizabeth whipped off her shirt and tossed it to the ground in a white cotton dollop. She ran over to Luke and slid down beside him, staining her knees in the grass.

Lucy winced, sucking her teeth.

"Lucy, it's all right. They're kids."

Lucy kept watching, gripping her glass. Elizabeth had picked up some found stick and was swinging it at Luke.

"Hiyaaa! Hiyaaa!"

Jetty clucked her tongue. "Sit down, Lu, sit down." She tugged Lucy's free hand.

Lucy sat down, still watching the kids play.

"They're fine. Kids -- wild, dirty, now naked. I tell ya, I wish I could go naked like that sometimes. This hot weather." Jetty reclined on the porch, propping herself up with her elbows and turning her face to the sun. She closed her eyes.

Lucy glared at Jetty. "They're not naked." Then softened. "Just shirtless." She turned her attention back to the children and took a sip of tea.

Luke had found his own stick and they were locked in some sort of sword fight.

"Be careful!"

"Lucy, relax. They're just playing. It's what kids do."
Jetty was fair-skinned and freckled, her chest and neck were beginning to burn.

Jetty sat up and nudged Lucy with her shoulder. “Me and you need to enjoy; one more month and they’re off to pre-kindergarten. Can you believe it?”

“Not Elizabeth. She’ll be in regular kindergarten this year.”

“Right. I always forget she’s older.”

Lucy re-tucked the already tucked curl behind her ear. “Yep. Six in the fall.”

Elizabeth came running up, stick in hand, covered in sweat, with Luke panting behind her.

Luke fell across Jetty’s knees, hugging her in exhaustion. Jetty stroked his damp hair and offered him a sip of tea.

“Mom,” said Elizabeth, inching closer. “Mom, I have a question for you.”

“Yes?” Lucy shuddered.

Elizabeth cupped her hand around her mother’s ear and leaned in.

Goosebumps covered Lucy’s body.

“How about I be Andrew and I’m all cut and bloody from fighting?”

Lucy felt her stomach churn and she pulled away.


Elizabeth backed away, blushing at Jetty.

Lucy swallowed. Then laughed nervously. “Oh, Elizabeth’s just being silly. Aren’t you, Elizabeth?”

Elizabeth smiled widely and ran off into the grass, swinging her stick.

Luke let go of Jetty’s legs and ran after her.

Jetty turned toward Lucy, grinning. “So, Lu, who’s Andrew --” Jetty’s mouth dropped.

“Jesus, you look pale.”
Lucy thought the skin on Jetty’s chest and neck looked too red.

“Are you OK?” Jetty pulled her sunglasses off.

“Oww!”

They looked. Luke was holding his hands to his cheek, screaming.

He was running towards them, tears streaming down his red face, eyes dilated.

“Moooooom!”

Jetty bolted up and gathered the screaming Luke into her arms.

“Honey, honey.” She shushed him over her shoulder. “What’s happened?”

He kept howling, clutching his cheek.

Jetty pulled his little hand away. Blood streaked her fingers.

Elizabeth was slinking behind a bush to the side of the house.

“Elizabeth!” Lucy strode over to the bush and gripped Elizabeth by the wrist, pulling her toward the front door.

Elizabeth felt a few drops of pee dampen her panties.

“What happened?” asked Jetty, confused.

Lucy was tugging Elizabeth toward their front door. “I am so sorry, Jetty,” she muttered as she blew by them and yanked open the screen door. “I don’t know what got into her.” Lucy shoved Elizabeth inside and paused before she followed. “I’ll call you.”


But Lucy was already in the house, the heavy wooden door shutting behind her.

*
“So, what’d you girls get up to today?” Dave sat back into his corner of the couch.

Lucy pulled “Tango in the Night” from its cassette case, slipped it into the tape player and turned up the volume. Her fingers lingered as the music started, but she left the dial as it was.

She smiled and walked over to the couch, handing him a beer.

“Where is little Elizabeth anyway?”

“Downstairs. Watching Cinderella.”

“Ah.” Dave took a sip of beer. “So, you girls had a good day then?”

Lucy crossed her legs toward him. “Yeah, it was fine.” She took a sip of her wine.

“The music’s a little loud. don’t you think?”

Lucy twirled the stem of the glass between her fingers. “No, leave it. I can’t get enough of this new stuff.”

He smiled at her. “So, what’d you do then?”

“Oh, cleaned the house. Did a little laundry. And then....” Lucy squinted off in the distance. “In the afternoon....”

“Hmm, hang on -- it is a little loud.” Dave got up and turned down the volume. “There.”

He sat back down. “Sorry, couldn’t hear ya. What was it you were saying?”

The phone rang.

Lucy looked at Dave and smiled.

The phone rang again.

“Should we get that?” Dave tipped his beer toward the kitchen.

Another ring.

“Oh, we just sat down. They’ll call back.”

Another ring.
Smiling.

Another ring.

Dave got up.

Lucy bolted and cut him off.

Another ring.

"Lucy --"

"Dave, it's Jetty. I don't want to talk."

Ring.

"It's Jetty? How do you know?"

Ring.

Lucy rolled her eyes. "I know."

Again.

Dave put his hands on Lucy's shoulders and looked her in the eye, "Then I'll tell her you're not here," and went around her.

Closer to the kitchen and the door leading downstairs, the sound of Cinderella mingled with the phone rings. Lucy couldn't hear the words to the song, but recognized the melody from almost a hundred times before.

Dave picked up. "Hello?"

Lucy walked back into the living room, towards the stereo.

"Hello? Dave?"

"Hi."

"Dave, hello! It's Jetty."

Lucy put her hand on the volume dial and ran her fingers around its circumference.
“Is Lucy there?”

“Hi, Jetty. No, sorry. She just ran out to the store.” Dave looked over at the empty living room couch. “Forgot an ingredient for dinner or something.”

Lucy pressed the tips of her fingers against the edge of the dial so that it slid beneath her fingernails.

“How much sound do you want?”

“I’ve been trying all afternoon….”

“Is everything alright?”

Lucy pulled on the dial with her nails, stretching the skin, slowly turning up the volume.

“Well, yeah. I mean, that scratch was a bit deeper than I thought. But it’s not like we had to go get stitches or anything. No, I just wanted to make sure she was alright. She was so upset about it all.”

Dave walked with the phone toward the living room but ran out of cord short of the doorway.

Lucy was slowly turning up the volume, the sound of Disney disappearing again.

“It was just kids being kids, ya know? And Luke’s fine. We’ll just keep up with Neosporin and it won’t scar.”

Dave strained to filter the noise. Stevie Nicks was quite loud.

“Dave? You there? You guys having a party or somethin’?” Jetty laughed.

Lucy kept slowly turning the dial.

“Heh, no. But Elizabeth’s playing with the stereo so I gotta go. I’ll let Lucy know you called.”

“Ok, thanks. And tell her Luke’s fine --”
Dave hung up.

"Lucy?"

He walked over to the stereo and spun the volume down.

_Cinderella_ floated up the stairs again.

"What are you doing?"

*

Next morning Lucy found Elizabeth already up and making her bed.

Lucy smiled, felt her shoulders relax. "Good morning, Elizabeth."

Elizabeth laid down her pillow and turned. "Good morning, stepmother."

Lucy cocked her head and scoffed. "Stepmother?"

Elizabeth smiled as she fluffed the pillow with her fingertips. "I'm Cinderella."

Lucy crossed her arms. "Ah. And I'm the stepmother?"

"The evil stepmother," Elizabeth said, finishing with the bed and walking over to Lucy. She looked up at her, hands behind her back, brown eyes wide beneath thick brown bangs, her little mouth turned down at the corners."

"No --"

"And he can be Lucifer!" Elizabeth pointed a rigid finger past Lucy's leg.

A shiver ran up Lucy's spine as the cat scampered by and crawled under the bed. She shuddered and grabbed Elizabeth's hand. "No, I'm not the evil stepmother. I'm your mother. And the cat's not Lucifer."
“Yes, mother,” said Elizabeth solemnly. “Would you like me to wash the floors today, mother?”

Chores were usually such a fight. And washing floors was a good one for kids. It would save her from having to get down on her hands and knees.... “Well, yes.” Lucy turned with Elizabeth to go downstairs. “But let’s go have some breakfast first, Elizabeth.”

Elizabeth stopped and pulled away. “Cinderella.”

Lucy looked at her -- furrowing brow, narrowing eyes, widening shoulders. The cat trotted past them and slipped around the corner. Lucy sighed. “Alright, ‘Cinderella’.”

Elizabeth relaxed, broke out into a smile, skipped toward her mother and down the stairs.

*

By the end of washing the kitchen floor, Elizabeth was already tired of being ‘Cinderella’.

“Mom, can I go outside and play?”

The bright morning sun was pouring through the kitchen windows while shadows of maple leaves in the backyard shook in the breeze.

“But I thought you were ‘Cinderella’. And ‘Cinderella’ does chores all day for her stepmother, remember?”

Elizabeth frowned, looking out the windows. The breeze had stopped. She couldn’t see the leaves, but then the wind picked up again and their shadows were more active than ever.

“But you’re not my stepmother and I’m not really Cinderella.” Elizabeth looked at Lucy.

“Who are you then?”

“Elizabeth. Little Elizabeth.” She smiled wide, knowing this would get her outside.
“That’s right, you’re my Elizabeth.” Lucy hugged her daughter and kissed her on the head.

“Go on, then. Go play.”

*

After lunch Lucy and Elizabeth went to the store. Elizabeth wanted to sit in the buggy’s baby seat, but her legs were so long now that it was difficult for her to fit. One leg was in, but they couldn’t get the other.

Lucy struggled with Elizabeth’s foot, trying to pull it through the metal leg hole. “You’re just too big.”

“But, mom!” Elizabeth kept pushing with her foot.

“Here, point it, honey. Point it.” Lucy grabbed the toe of Elizabeth’s shoe and yanked it through the leg hole.

“Ow!” Shin scraped across the metal.

Lucy looked at it; the skin was red, but not broken. “Oh, you’re all right.”

Elizabeth winced.

“You’re getting too big for these things. There’re for babies, not big girls.”

“I’m five.” Elizabeth crossed her arms as Lucy strolled into the produce section.

“You’re almost six.”

*
Later that afternoon, Lucy was washing potatoes when Elizabeth wandered into the kitchen. She didn’t say anything, just ran her hands over the backs of chairs, looked out the window, pressed her face into the screen door several times, but didn’t go out.

“Want to help me peel potatoes?” Lucy asked, pulling out an apple peeler.

“Nooooooo.” Elizabeth let go of the screen door and walked toward her mother. She propped her elbow up on the corner of the counter and leaned her head against it, crossing the scraped leg over the other; she slipped her free hand into the pocket of her jean shorts and sighed. “I’m bored.”

Lucy looked at her. She seemed different. Taller. Her shoulders were wider, almost like she was puffing out her chest.

“Well, why don’t you go play outside?” Lucy picked up a potato and started peeling.

“I don’t think so, mom.”

Lucy snickered. “Oh?” She looked at her daughter with an amused grin.

Elizabeth extended her scraped leg more toward her mother. “Yeah, mom. I don’t want to go outside.”

Lucy set the skinned potato aside and washed the shreds into the sink strainer.

“OK, do you want to watch a movie instead?” She grabbed another potato.

“Nahhh.” Elizabeth leaned down and rubbed the scrape on her leg.

“Not even with a popsicle?”

“I don’t think so, mom.”

Her voice was snide, but it sounded lower too. Lucy set the potato aside. “Well, Elizabeth, you can either go have a popsicle and watch a movie, or you can start helping me.” She flicked
the water off her fingers. “Because you sure aren’t going to keep standing there giving me attitude.”

“Fine.” Elizabeth pushed off the counter and sauntered toward the fridge, hands in pockets.

Lucy scoffed. “Or you could just go sit in your room.”

Elizabeth looked at the freezer through half-slit eyes and waited expectantly.

“Snap out of it right now or you can go to your room.”

“Fine,” said Elizabeth still staring at the freezer.

“OK, go to your room.” Lucy snapped her fingers and pointed towards Elizabeth’s room.

“Mooom. But I’m not doing anything wrong.”

“Go. Now.”

Her shoulders were so broad.

“Moooom. I’m not doing anything!”

“Yes, you are!” Lucy cringed at how loud she sounded. She didn’t mean to sound so loud.

Elizabeth’s eyes became wide and her mouth twisted. Then her shoulders slumped and she started sobbing.

“Oh, honey.” Lucy bent down and hugged her daughter. “I’m sorry.”

Elizabeth was snivelling at the ground, hunched. She raised her head enough to nod.

Lucy stood back up and opened the freezer. “Here.” She handed little Elizabeth a popsicle and stroked her head. “Go enjoy your movie.”

Elizabeth padded downstairs and in a moment, Lucy heard the sounds of Cinderella. She thought of turning the stereo on, but decided better of it.

She finished peeling the potatoes and started cutting them.

Cinderella grated on.
“Ow!” The knife clattered on the sink bottom as blood poured from Lucy’s fingers all over the potatoes. “Shoot.” She grabbed a tea towel and wrapped it tightly around her hand. The potatoes soaked up blood, turning pink. “All that work.” Lucy flexed her hand in the towel.

“Dave’s just about home too.” She grabbed the rosy sponges and tossed them in the garbage can.

“Guess we’re not having potatoes.”

“Mom, are you OK?”

Lucy turned to find Elizabeth looking up at her with soft brown eyes and a solemn face.

Lucy tightened the towel around her hand and set the cutting board in the sink, letting the faucet wash away the blood.

“Yes, fine.” She smiled, but the wound stung and she felt irritated.

“Can I see?”

Little popsicle stained fingers reached toward her hand.

“No, honey. Mommy needs to clean this up.”

“But I want to kiss it better.”

“No. Mommy needs to fix this and not be distracted. Go downstairs and watch your movie.”

Elizabeth grabbed at her mother’s arm, sticky hands tugging at the light hairs on Lucy’s wrist, pulling it toward pursed lips.

“Just one kiss?”

“No.” Lucy tried to pull her hand back but Elizabeth tightened her grip, puckered lips chasing after the wound. A few drops of blood pitter-pattered on the floor.

“Elizabeth, stop it!”

Little Elizabeth lunged, her teeth hitting Lucy’s bandaged hand.
“Ah!” Lucy winced then slapped Elizabeth across the face. Her heart dropped and she felt faint. She waited for crying but all she heard was Cinderella.

Elizabeth blinked at her, red finger marks showing up across her cheek.

“You said kissing an owie will make it better.”

Lucy was stunned. The handprint was turning dark red, white lines marking the joints in each finger. “Well…yes…but, that’s just an expression.”

The front door opened and the screen door clicked shut. “Honey, I’m home!”

Lucy knew he was taking off his jacket, setting his bag beside the bureau. Then he would be in the kitchen to kiss her; to kiss his daughter with the red handprint slapped across her face. But she couldn’t take her eyes off Elizabeth.

Elizabeth returned the gaze, waiting for a different answer.

“How’re my girls?” Dave came walking into the kitchen, smiling big. “Lucy! What’s happened?”

In a second Dave was by her side, taking her hand in his and gently pressing his lips to the bloodstained towel. “You cut yourself, Lu.” Dave wrapped his arm around her and ushered her toward the sink. He gently unbandaged her hand and ran it under cool water.

Lucy winced.

“There, there. What happened, honey?” Dave tucked her curly hair behind her ear, running his hand down her cheek. “You look pale.”

“Oh, I’m fine. Just fine. Accidentally cut myself with the knife is all.” Lucy forced a smile and shook her head. “Bled all over the potatoes though.”

Cinderella was playing again. Elizabeth had gone back downstairs.
The wound stung, itching inside. Lucy snatched a new tea towel and wrapped it around her hand. She turned off the faucet. “Well, I better run to the store and get some more.”

“What? The store? No, Lu, we’ll have something else with the steak.”

Lucy was in the living room grabbing her purse. Pulling the door open, birds, dogs, cars, and children began to drown out Cinderella. “it’s no problem.”

“But, Lu, I just got home.”

Lucy was scurrying toward the car. “Get the ‘que going and I’ll be back before you know it!” She turned the radio on and drove away.

*

Lucy slowly meandered through the produce section looking at the greens. The sprinklers kicked on and showered them in a cool mist. She’d come here for something...she couldn’t remember. She pushed on. Carrots, onions. It bothered her, the way Elizabeth stood. How she held her body. Like she was taller. Tomatoes and garlic. The way she moved. Like she was wider. Potatoes.

“Ah. Right.” Lucy absently started feeling them and dropping them in her bag.

“Lucy, hi!”

Jetty swirled over, a few canned goods rolling around the bottom of her cart.

“Jetty.” Lucy picked one more potato. She dropped it in her bag and tied the plastic in a knot. She set it in the child’s seat of her cart.

“How are you? Did Dave tell you I called the other day?”
Lucy smiled. “He did. And I meant to call you back, but…. ” Lucy looked away. “Got busy and --”

“Oh, that’s fine. Fine.” Jetty swatted at the air. “I just wanted to see how you were. You were so upset with the accident between the kids. And Luke’s fine, you know. Just fine. He didn’t need stitches or anything. A few butterfly bandages… but it was an accident. Kids!”

Lucy gripped the cart handle. “Well, I’m just glad he’s OK. She shouldn’t have done that.” Jetty reached out and touched Lucy’s arm. “Lu, it was an accident.”

“I might have overreacted.”

Jetty let go. “Say, how about getting together tomorrow morning? We could swap some of the kids’ movies. Luke’s been bugging me all week about Cinderella. He --”

“Yes!” Lucy stood up straight, smiling widely. “Yes, that’s a great idea!”

Jetty laughed. “Well, alright then.”

“Oh, wait. Tomorrow’s swim lessons. Could we do it the next day?”

“Well, I -- “

“Please.”

“Sure, I was just thinking that we could also…. ”

“What, what is it, Jetty?”

“Lu, you’re bleeding.”

Lucy looked down. Her hands were gripped around the cart handle, the one still bandaged in a tea cloth as blood slowly patted on the bag of potatoes.

*
“Are you mama’s little fishy?”

Elizabeth grinned and sank beneath the water. Bubbles rushed toward the surface before she popped up and started paddling around the shallow end of the pool.

They were the first to swim lessons. The pool was outside. Lucy sat on stone benches that led up to some old tennis courts at the shallow end. Rocky bluffs were on her left and green grassy park with windy stands of bushes surrounded the rest of the pool.

Elizabeth climbed out of the water, a tawny little body covered in a pink bathing suit with white polka dots and a ruffle around the middle.

“Mom, watch this!”

Lucy admired the way the pink was offset by Elizabeth’s tan skin and dark hair. It was a very flattering color. And the ruffle around the middle -- it almost made the suit look like a leotard and tutu. Maybe she would be interested in dance....

“Mom! Mom, watch me!”

Elizabeth ran and cannonballed into the shallow end, wetting Lucy with the splash. She came up spluttering but looking pleased.

“Now, Elizabeth. no running.” Lucy wiped water off her sunglasses with her shirt.

Soon more mothers arrived with their kids and swim lessons got underway. Elizabeth was good -- blowing bubbles, swimming to the instructors. Often looking back at her mother after an exercise to make sure she was watching. She even jumped off the diving board at the end of class.

After she had completed her jump, she came over to Lucy, her chest puffed out, a big smile on her face.

“Did you see that, mom?”
“I did!” Lucy smiled, handing Elizabeth a bag of dry clothes. “You’re a brave girl. I’m very proud of you.”

Elizabeth took the bag and hopped down the steps to the changing room.

“Do you need any help, honey?”

“No no no.” Elizabeth scurried off toward a small concrete building, divided in two for girls and boys.

“No running!” Lucy called as Elizabeth disappeared into the girls’ section. Turning back to the pool she let her eyes relax, watching the light play on the water.

“She’s so cute, Lucy.”

Lucy leaned back, the sun hitting her neck and chest, making her feel warm. “Thanks, Linda.”

“And getting so tall.”

“Yeah. She’ll be in kindergarten this year. I can’t believe it.”

“Oh, I know. Brian too.”

“Really?”

“Mmmhmm. He’s so little compared to the other kids. People forget. But he’ll be six right before school starts, so....”

“Best to just enjoy while we can.” Lucy closed her eyes. It was going to be a beautiful day.

“Umm...Mrs...Lucy?”

Someone was touching her leg.

“Mrs. Lucy?”

Lucy opened her eyes. It was one of the swim instructors.

“You better come quick. There was a little accident.”
Lucy jumped up and followed the teen toward the girls' changing room.

"Well, what happened? Is Elizabeth alright?"

"I don't really know what happened, but she's a little scraped up."

"What?" Lucy pushed past the instructor and into the changing room. Elizabeth was sitting on a wood bench in the middle. She was wrapped in a towel with tears flowing down her cheeks. Another girl sat even further back, wide eyed and a bit confused. It was Marico, the oriental girl from two houses down. She was about four years old.

"Elizabeth."

Lucy kept looking from Elizabeth to Marico and back as she crossed the room. She sat down beside Elizabeth. "What happened?"

Marico's mother entered the changing room.

"I was just getting changed and Marico came and pushed me."

Marico's mother glared at them as she rushed over to her daughter.

Lucy folded her arms around her daughter. "She pushed you? Well...why'd she push you?"

"I don't know...." Elizabeth looked up with red eyes, face long and open. "But she pushed me real hard and I fell down and skinned my knee." Elizabeth opened her towel and pulled her knee to her bare breast, her swimsuit half off, wet and rolled around her waist.

"Why is your suit --"

"She lying." Marico's mother sniped as she walked by, carrying Marico in her arms.

Lucy pulled the towel back around Elizabeth. "She is not!"

Marico's mother paused in the doorway. "She lying! Like she lie about the raspberries bushes!"

Lucy felt her blood run cold.
“Now, ladies.” One of the male instructors had entered the changing room. “I’m sure it was all just an accident.”

“No accident. You keep her away from my Marico!”

Elizabeth had removed the towel again and was sitting with her knee to her naked breast, resting her tear-stained face against the ripped and bloody surface.

Lucy swaddled the towel around Elizabeth, picked her up and walked past the male instructor.

“See you girls next week.”

*

Lucy looked down at Elizabeth as they stood in the middle of the living room floor. She was caped in her towel, still wet with the strong scent of chlorine. She was shivering, her bloody knee peeking through the slit in her towel.

Lucy sighed and stroked her daughter’s head. “Oh, kiddo. How about a nice, hot, bubble bath?”

Little Elizabeth nodded her head. The morning sunlight missed the living room windows and her eyes looked large and deep in the shadow.

Lucy guided Elizabeth toward the bathroom. It looked pale lavender in the low morning light. Lucy’s fingers brushed over the light switch but she left it off. She sat down on the closed toilet seat, reached over and turned on the bath faucets.

“Go ahead and get undressed.” Lucy grabbed the bubble bath from under the sink.

Elizabeth had dropped her towel - a shivering little body, her suit still rolled around her tummy.

41
Elizabeth looked at her.

Lucy swallowed and forced a smile. “Come on. into the bath.” She sat back down on the toilet and poured a cap full of bubbles.

Steam rose and Elizabeth rolled off the rest of the suit. She stepped in gingerly, standing in the middle of white vapors as bubbles rushed around her feet.

Lucy was looking at the knee. A blob of dark crimson stained the cap. It was hard to tell what was skinned and what was just caked in blood.

Elizabeth stood tall, watching her mother looking at the wound. The warm vapor twisted around her ankles while the rest of her body chilled. The skin rising at the slightest movement of air.

Lucy reached out and touched the scrape.

Elizabeth shivered.

“Honey. sit down. Get warm.” Lucy clucked her tongue. “Your lips are purple.”

Elizabeth sat down, keeping her knees pulled to her chest and out of the water. Bubbles floated into the air.

Lucy grabbed a soft cotton wash cloth and dipped it in the water.

Elizabeth scooped a handful of bubbles and gently blew, watching them change color in the pale lavender light.

Lucy dabbed at her knee.

Elizabeth winced and pulled away.

The water was high, licking at the wound, the bubbles growing in shaky towers, brisking the scrape.
“Oh, honey. I know it hurts, but I need to clean it.” Lucy reached out and Elizabeth pulled away. Her eyes were dark and hooded. Even her skin looked purple. It was probably the light.

“Now, Elizabeth,” Lucy said in a stern voice, sitting upright on the toilet. “Give me your knee so I can clean it.”

Elizabeth shivered and slid closer. “I’m your little fishy.”

Lucy dabbed at the knee again. Blood softened and began to run off as she gently sponged around the wound.

Elizabeth winced.

Lucy pulled back, her face scrunching in concern. “Elizabeth,” she said with a hint of strain. “You have to let me clean it. I know it hurts, but you’ll be OK.”

Lucy grabbed the knee this time. “Just lay back and relax.”

Elizabeth lay back, the water finally warming her core. “No. I’m mama’s little fishy.” She fluttered her hands beneath the water.

Lucy reapplied the warm cloth.

Elizabeth didn’t flinch.

Lucy softened. “Yes, you’re mama’s little fishy.”

Most the excess blood was washed away and the skinned part of the knee was visible, fresh. It was thick and strip-like.

“So, honey,” Lucy began as she applied baby soap to the cloth. “Tell me what happened in the changing room today.”

Elizabeth scooped another handful of bubbles and blew them in the air. “Marico pushed me.”

“Why’d she push you?”
“I dunno. She doesn’t like me since the raspberries.”

“So she just came up and pushed you?”

Elizabeth scrunched her face and tried to pull her leg away. But Lucy tightened her grasp.

“Well, I was walking in after her and I accidently stepped on the back of her heel, and then she got mad and chased me. And then she pushed me down and I scraped my knee.”

But if she were running and pushed, that would leave a long, trailing mark.

Elizabeth blew another handful of bubbles. “How about I be Cinderella instead?”

Lucy was gently lathering the soap over the stunted scrape – it looked more like she had just dropped to her knees.

“Elizabeth….” Lucy rinsed the cloth, gently wringing the water over the lather, washing it away. “Were you pretending you were Andrew when you were in the changing room with Marico?”

She looked at her daughter.

Elizabeth was still blowing bubbles.

“Elizabeth, look at me.”

“Who’s Andrew, stepmother?”

Lucy dropped the wash cloth in the tub.

“Elizabeth.” Lucy lowered her voice, but there was a bit of a crack. “No games. You answer me right now. Did you hurt her?!”

“No!” Elizabeth sat up, the water rushing from her body, eyebrows drawing together. She was more of a rosy pink now. Lips were bright red. “She pushed me!” Elizabeth jabbed herself in the chest with her thumb. Tears built in the corners of her eyes.
Lucy stood up and left. She walked to the kitchen wringing her hands. She stood in front of the sink, leaning heavily on its edge. She tried to focus. She went into the living room, opened the cabinet drawer, pulled out a candle, an old silver plate, and a bag of cranberry potpourri. She placed the candle in the middle of the plate, surrounded it with the potpourri, and lit the wick with matches from the drawer. The wind started picking up outside, maple leaves rustling. It was a grey day. Clouds covered the sky. No leaf shadows, just their rattling in the branches.

Lucy walked back to the bathroom.

Elizabeth was lying in the water, playing with the bubbles.

Lucy opened her mouth but didn’t say anything. Instead she set the candle down on the toilet seat.

“You just come out when you’re ready and we’ll have lunch.”

As Lucy left, Elizabeth whispered. “Thank you, stepmother.”

*

Lucy chewed her tuna fish sandwich; Elizabeth sat across the kitchen table picking at her peanut butter and jelly. The sun had broken through the clouds and the day was heating up. Lucy had the backdoor open. The wind chimes were still.

“Elizabeth, I need you to eat your sandwich, not play with it.”

Elizabeth picked up the sandwich and bit off a corner.

There was a noise outside -- rolling wheels in the alley out back.

“Is it good?”

Elizabeth looked at her mother and nodded between sticky mouthfuls.
The rolling wheels were interrupted by the clatter of wood.

Lucy looked at Elizabeth’s glass and frowned. It was empty. “Would you like more milk?”

Elizabeth nodded while trying to swallow.

The rolling wheels were back on the pavement.

Lucy grabbed the glass and walked to the fridge.

There was the clatter of wood again.

Elizabeth got up and looked out the screen door. “There’s a boy skateboarding out there!”

“Come sit down and finish your lunch.” Lucy set the glass of milk beside Elizabeth’s plate.

More rolling and clattering.

“He looks around my age too. Maybe older.”

“Elizabeth....”

“He’s wearing a Batman shirt. Mom, can I go outside?”

“Finish your lunch first.”

“But, Mom....”

“Elizabeth, I just got you milk. Come finish your sandwich and drink your milk. Then you can go outside.”

Rolling and clattering, clattering and rolling.

“He’s doing tricks!”

Lucy bit into her tuna fish.

Elizabeth looked at her mother, then outside. A breeze chilled her through the screen.

“He’ll probably be going in for lunch soon....” Lucy took a bite.
Elizabeth sat down and grabbed her sandwich. She took huge bites followed by gulps of milk. One bite was too big and caught in the back of her throat. She choked, spitting milk all over her plate.

“Oh, Elizabeth! Yuck!”

Elizabeth was coughing and hacking out a wad of gooey white bread slimed with peanut butter and jelly.

When it was out, Elizabeth looked at it. Then poked it.

The sounds outside stopped.

Lucy yanked the plate away. “Gross.”

“Mom, can I go outside now?”

“After all that?”

Elizabeth strained, listening.

“Mom! Please!”

Elizabeth grabbed her napkin and started wiping the milk off her face.

Lucy stared for what seemed like forever.

“Apologize for that little episode.”

No rolling wheels.

“Mom, I’m sorry.” Elizabeth said in her best, calm voice. “Can I please go outside now?”

Lucy waited.

No clattering of tricks.

“Fine.”

Elizabeth tore out the back door.
“He’s gone.”

The screen door slammed behind Elizabeth.

Lucy finished rinsing the lunch plates and slammed the dishwasher shut.

“Well then, I guess you’re going shopping with me.”

*

“I want to sit in the buggy.”

Lucy stopped and took a deep breath. “Elizabeth, we talked about this. Remember?”

Lucy selected her cart, placed her purse in the baby seat and pushed it toward the bakery.

“You’re a big girl now and big girls don’t ride in the buggy.”

Elizabeth crossed her arms and trudged after her mother. “Brian’s mom lets him. I’ve seen him.”

Lucy was inspecting loaves of whole wheat. “Well, I’m not Brian’s mom.”

She found a firm loaf and set it in the baby seat next to her purse.

“Honey, Brian’s a lot smaller than you too.”

“Nu-uh! We’re the same age!”

Lucy was debating English muffins -- on sale, six for two dollars.

“I know you’re the same age, but you’re a lot taller than him, dear.” Lucy decided yes and set the muffins next to the bread and her purse. “Remember what happened last time you tried to get in the buggy?”
Elizabeth looked confused.

"You scraped your shin."

"Uhhh...."

Oatmeal cookies where also on sale.

"And your knee is already scraped so we wouldn’t want to hurt it even more, would we?"

She could bake some herself, but these ones looked too good.

"You scraped me."

"Hmm?" Lucy picked up the box. It would be easier than baking and having to clean up the mess.

"I said, ‘You scraped me!’"

"Elizabeth," Lucy hissed. "Shhh!" She set the cookies on top the bread and English muffins. "What are you even talking about?"

"You! Scraped! Me!"

A few heads turned in their direction.

Lucy grabbed Elizabeth by the wrist, pulling her into an empty frozen food isle.

"Don’t you yell like that!" Lucy stressed through her teeth.

Elizabeth started pulling.

Lucy tightened her grasp.

"Owwwwww!" Elizabeth started pinching her mother’s hand.

"Elizabeth --" Lucy grabbed Elizabeth’s other wrist.

Elizabeth was struggling, twisting, pulling.

"You stop right -- Oh!"
Lucy pulled away sharply. She looked at her arm. Elizabeth had pinched off skin. It was bleeding. She slapped Elizabeth.

Red fingerprints rose over her left cheek.

Lucy felt hot.

Tears filled Elizabeth’s eyes but she was silent.

Lucy whisked Elizabeth into her arms, pressing the reddening cheek into the curve of her neck. She grabbed her purse from the buggy and walked out.

*

Lucy put on the parking break as they sat in front of Ladies’ Casuals. She clicked the release button with her thumb, then put it back on, then clicked it again.

“Elizabeth….” Lucy clicked and released. “Elizabeth…I shouldn’t have hit you. That was wrong.”

Elizabeth didn’t say anything.

Lucy clicked and released the break again, then started rubbing her arm, smearing the blood. “But you shouldn’t have pinched me like that. You pinched the skin off.”

“I see,” murmured Elizabeth, staring at the wound.

Lucy grabbed her purse and pulled out some crumpled McDonalds napkins. She spit on one and started rubbing at the blood.

Lucy sighed and looked at Elizabeth. Her face was back to normal except for the tear stains. Lucy started wiping Elizabeth’s face.
"I need to go in there to try and find a dress. Your dad and I have that dinner with his boss this weekend. I want to look nice."

Elizabeth didn't say a thing.

Lucy kept wiping.

"Maybe...maybe we can get something nice for you too." Lucy folded the napkin and slipped it back into her purse.

Elizabeth nodded.

Lucy ran her hand over Elizabeth's head and tried to smile.

*

Elizabeth squatted in the middle of a clearance rack. Dresses hung around her in a circle, one moving after the other as her mother sorted through them. Sometimes her mother would pause at a dress and push the others away so she could get a better look; the clothes would part and Elizabeth would catch sight of her. Lucy would frown, pick at the neckline, run her hands across the shoulders and move on.

"Elizabeth?" Lucy called as she shuffled through more. "Elizabeth, where are you?"

She's stopped at another dress and smirked. She pulled it off the rack and as she did, caught sight of Elizabeth.

"Oh!"

Lucy dropped the dress.

"What are you doing in there?"

She bent to pick it up and pulled Elizabeth out of the rack.
“Now, I need to go try this on. Are you coming with or do you want to look for something for yourself?”

Elizabeth looked at the racks of clothes speckled over dull orange carpet.

“Do you think they have a Batman shirt?”

“No, I don’t think so. But you could ask.”

*

Lucy took off her shirt and undid the button on her pants. Her neck and shoulders were red and sunburn outlined the cut of her usual clothes.

There was a knock on the dressing room door. “Mom?”

“Come on in.”

Elizabeth was carrying a pink a-line with yards of white tulle lining the skirt.

Lucy unzipped her pants and slid them off her legs.

“Ooh. Did you pick that? It looks pretty.”

Elizabeth tossed the dress on the bench. “The lady gave it to me. She said they don’t have Batman.”

Elizabeth plopped down on the bench, watching Lucy in the mirror.

“What’s that?” She pointed at her mother’s crotch.

“My panties?” Lucy slipped the denim maxi dress over her head.

“No. The black stuff.”

Lucy felt the fabric slide over her hips. She tuned from side to side, feeling the denim hug her body. “A perfect fit.”
“What was it?”

Lucy looked from the dress to Elizabeth in the mirror. “That’s hair, dear. One day you’ll get it down there too.”

“Eww.”

Lucy smirked. She looked back at herself in the mirror. The seams hit at all the right angles. She looked slimmer, toned. The only problem was her sunburn-lines. But the dinner was in a few days.

“They’re gross.”

“Excuse me?”

“The black things. They’re gross.”

“They’re hair. And I told you, everyone gets them. It’s natural. Not gross.”

Lucy smoothed her hands over her hips and tousled her curly hair. “What do you think? Do you like it?”

Elizabeth gazed at Lucy in the mirror. “Yes. You look very pretty.”

Lucy smiled. “Thank you.” Elizabeth’s eyes were so big and beautiful in the mirror, watching her with an open wonder. “Do you want to try on yours?”

Elizabeth looked excited.

“Mom, can I be Andrew?”

She looked at Elizabeth and then caught site of her own horrified face in the mirror. Her skin was pink now, blending with her sunburn.

“No.” Lucy’s voice was deep, deeper and louder than she intended.

Elizabeth’s eyes welled with tears.
Lucy felt her stomach churn. "Oh, honey, no. No, no." She tried to put her arms around Elizabeth, but Elizabeth started crying and pushed away.

"Hush. There's no need to cry."

Elizabeth wailed louder.

Lucy scrunched her face. "Elizabeth, top crying right now."

Elizabeth howled louder, working her way toward a feverish pitch.

Lucy took off the denim maxi. As she pulled it over her head, her breasts fell out of their cups.

Elizabeth pointed at her nipples, howling louder.

There was a knock on the dressing room door. "Knock-knock. Do you need any help in there?"

Elizabeth was beet red. Her eyes disappeared behind angry gushing tears. Snot poured out her nose. She wailed relentlessly, her chest heaving.

"Stop!" Lucy yelled.

Elizabeth stopped, looked at her mother's stern face, and began screaming with renewed vigour.

There was a knock on the door. "Is everything OK in there?"

Elizabeth was gasping for breath between hysteric.

"If it's about her dress we have lots of sizes." There was the sound of metal clinking in the door lock, then it opened; the pudgy Ladies' Casuals clerk peeked in. She was older and wore glasses with over-sized lenses.

"We may have to look in the juniors section if it's too small --"
The old clerk stopped and stared at Lucy’s chest. Then at Elizabeth. Then at Lucy’s crotch. Then back at Elizabeth.

Lucy remembered her naked breasts and started stuffing them back into her bra.

“Excuse me.” Lucy stepped to the door. “We’ll be out in just a moment.” She tried pulling it shut.

The clerk pulled back, wedging her shoulders between the door and its frame. “Why is she crying?”

“That’s none of your business.”

Elizabeth was howling louder.

The woman glanced from Elizabeth to Lucy’s vagina.

Lucy felt her gaze over every strand of unkempt pubic hair.

She tucked a curl behind her ear. “Now if you’ll excuse me so I can get dressed….” Lucy yanked on the door. The clerk fell back, landing on the ground with a hard thud. Lucy clawed for her pants.

“I’m calling security!” The old woman’s voice was pained.

Lucy threw her shirt over her head; it was inside out and backwards. She grabbed Elizabeth with one hand and their dresses with the other. As she made a run for the door she saw the clerk behind the counter dialing the phone.

“Hey, you need to pay for those!”

Lucy kept running, dragging Elizabeth behind her, threw the doors.

“I’m calling the cops!”

*
“Hello, Lu!”

Lucy flinched a little as Jetty wrapped heavily freckled arms around her and squeezed tight.

“So good to see you!”

Luke stood in the door, hiding behind Jetty’s knees.


Jetty walked into the house, tossing her purse and a giant sun bag on a rocker beside the stereo. Luke scampered after her.

“I brought the movies. And I brought our swimsuits and towels if you girls wanted to picnic at the beach for lunch.” Jetty smiled. “I made egg salad.”


Luke clung to the back of Jetty’s legs.

Jetty laughed. “Luke, why are you hiding?”

Elizabeth came into the living room. She had her hands behind her back, eyes wide and open. “Hi, Luke.”


“Elizabeth, did you have something you wanted to tell Luke?” Lucy asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Luke, I’m sorry about the stick.”

“And it won’t ever happen again,” Lucy added.

“And it won’t ever happen again,” Elizabeth repeated.

Luke was staring at the ground.

“Want to come watch Cinderella with me?” Elizabeth bounced from one foot to the other.

“No!”

Everyone looked at Lucy.

She smiled nervously. “I mean, Luke brought Little Mermaid. And you’ve really wanted to see that, right?”

“Yeah!” Elizabeth clapped her hands together.

“There you go then.”

Luke perked up. “I love Little Mermaid!”

He pulled it from the giant sun bag and they disappeared downstairs with the movie.

“And keep it low, you two!” Lucy called.

Jetty was in the kitchen pulling coffee cups from the cupboard.

“You want some creamer, Jetty?”

“Yeah, sugar too.”

“I swear, if I have to hear Cinderella one more time....”

Lucy yanked the creamer from the fridge.

Jetty laughed and walked over to the table with steaming cups of coffee. “I could probably recite Little Mermaid from beginning to end for you.”

Lucy sat down with cream and sugar. “She’s so into it. She’s always wanting to play pretend Cinderella.”

“Ha!” Jetty was dumping a second spoonful of sugar into her coffee. “Luke too. He likes to be Sebastien and I’m Ariel.”

“Yeah, well guess who I get to be? The evil stepmother.”
Jetty laughed. "Aww, poor Lu."

*

Lucy dug her toes into the sand and relaxed in her beach chair. Cool breeze blew off the lake. She closed her eyes as bright sun warmed her skin.

"Lu, you better put some lotion on. You look a little red."

"Nah, I want the tan. We have a have dinner with Dave's boss this weekend and I don't want lines with the dress."

"It's a little late for that. Besides, the way you're going Dave's boss might mistake you for a crabcake."

Lucy laughed.

"You still need us to look after Elizabeth that night?"

"Yeah, if you don't mind."

"Not at all. Luke will love it. Say, I'm thinking it's time for lunch. How about you? Let's grab the kids and go picnic in the shade.

"Alright."

Lucy got up, took off her sunglasses and started scanning the beach. Luke was building a sandcastle with another little boy near the water.

"Luke, where's Elizabeth?"

"Right here, mom!"

The boy jumped up. Tall, tan, wearing a swimsuit just like Elizabeth's, top rolled down around the waist.
“Come on guys, time for lunch!” Jetty hollered as she gathered her chair and bag.

Luke and Elizabeth ran towards them.

Lucy caught Elizabeth by the arm.

“Ow!”

“Elizabeth.” Lucy’s teeth were gritted. “Put your suit on right now.”

She let go of Elizabeth’s arm.

“You gals coming?” Jetty called.

“Yeah, we’re coming.”

Elizabeth put arms through the straps.

“If you take it off again, we’re going straight home.”

“Fine.” Elizabeth ran ahead, joining Luke and Jetty as they laid a blanket and spread out the food.

“I hope everyone’s hungry! We have fruits, veggies... egg salad. Ooh, we’ll need forks for that.”

Jetty placed a handful of forks in the middle of the blanket.

Elizabeth snatched one.

“Luke, look!” She started combing her hair with the fork.


“That’s for your salad not your hair, kiddo.” Jetty snickered.

“But I’m Ariel.”

“I want to be Sebastian!” Luke chimed, grapes spilling from his mouth.

“Miss Jetty, you can be Scuttle and mom, you can be Ursula,” Elizabeth announced, still combing her hair.
“Elizabeth, forks aren’t for your hair.” Lucy took a bite of egg salad, letting the fork slide through her teeth.

“Oh, your mom’s not Ursula,” Jetty chided. “How about she be Flounder?”

“It’s not a fork, Mom. It’s dinglehopper.”

“Who’s Ursula?” Lucy munched a carrot, mouth closed, lips slightly pointed as she chewed.

Elizabeth had her head cocked to the side, still trying to comb her hair. The metal tines sunk into wetness.

“The sea witch.”

“Stop it right now.” Lucy reached out and grabbed the fork. A few of Elizabeth’s hairs came with it.

“Ow!”

“Oh, Elizabeth, really. Stop being a—”

Elizabeth snatched another fork from the pile and rammed it into her scalp. The tines hit just above the right eye, ripping open four strips of skin, peeling them back, deep into the hairline.


Jetty let out a yelp, bits of egg salad flying from her lips.

Elizabeth started crying, pulled back, and the rammed the fork across her scalp again. The tines skittering all the way to the crown.

Lucy lunged for the fork, wrestling it from Elizabeth’s hand.

“What are you doing?!”

Lucy felt faint.
Blood was pouring from Elizabeth’s eyebrow, deep, thick, and crimson under the shade of the warm summer day.

Lucy was scrambling, grabbing at paper napkins, trying to mop the blood, stem the bleeding.

Watery red was dripping down Elizabeth’s back as she sobbed.

Lucy looked at the crown. It was a mass of dark red liquid flowing down wet hair.

Jetty grabbed Luke’s beach towel and handed it to Lucy.

Lucy wrapped it around Elizabeth’s head.

“She needs to go to the hospital,” muttered Lucy.

It sounded like someone else speaking.


Luke hopped up and Jetty started throwing the picnic into her bag.

“No, it’s ok, we’ll take my car.”

“Like hell you will. You’re not driving anywhere, Lu. I’ve never seen a sunburnt woman turn pale. I’m driving you.”

Lucy gathered Elizabeth into her arms.

It seemed to take forever to get to Jetty’s car. Every step was heavy.

*

“You sure you don’t want me to stay?”

“No. Thanks, Jetty. I don’t know how long it’ll take. And we’re so close to home. Dave and I will get the car from the beach later tonight.”
“Well, all right. If you’re sure....”

“Elizabeth?” A nurse was standing in the office door.

“Yeah, thanks again.”

Lucy walked with Elizabeth, head still swaddled in a beach towel, toward the nurse.

*

“This one back here’s going to need stitches.” Dr. Vicki Black swabbed at the wound. She was in her mid-sixties, short with pearly bobbed hair and sharp, silver lined glasses. “I’m going to have to shave the area to get in there properly.”

“Yikes.” Lucy jumped up from the seat and looked at her daughter’s head. There was a baseball sized bloody mound where it looked like someone had run around with track shoes. She lurched, feeling lightheaded.

Dr. Black turned and took her firmly by the hand. “You sit down, dear. It’ll be quite alright.”

Dr. Black started cleaning the wound. Then she pulled out a pair of scissors and cut the hair around the area as close to the skin as possible.

Elizabeth sat still, swimsuit on and wet. She was quietly shivering.

Dr. Black put a hand on her arm. “Are you cold? Let me give you a blanket.” She pulled a neatly folded blue blanket around the child and returned to cleaning.

“So, Elizabeth, can you tell me what happened?”

Dr. Black began threading the needle.

Lucy stood up. “We were having a picnic at the beach and then—”
“No, Mrs. Roberts. I need Elizabeth to tell me. Anytime there’s a traumatic head injury we need to check for signs of concussion. Make sure the memory’s all there.”

Lucy sat back down.

Dr. Black poised the needle over the skin. “Now Elizabeth, you’re going to feel a slight pinching. I just need you to tell me what happened, and by the time you’re finished, I’ll be all done. OK?”

“Well, we were eating lunch and I was pretending to be Ariel. And I was combing my hair with the dinglehopper.”

“Dinglehopper?” Dr. Black pulled the stitch through.

Elizabeth winced. “That’s what Scuttle calls the fork in Little Mermaid.”

Dr. Black was peering intently over her silver glasses, stitching the skin like thread through lace.

“Ah. Right. My grandkids love that movie.”

“Yeah, and then I accidentally poked my head, but the dinglehopper got caught in my hair, so when I tried to pull it out, it just poked me again....” Elizabeth’s voice rose towards a sob.

Lucy’s jaw dropped.

“No need to cry, dear.” Dr. Black finished with a surgeon’s knot and clipped the thread.

“We’re all done.”

Elizabeth tried to get off the table, the paper crinkling beneath her.

Dr. Black laid a hand on her shoulder. “Not just yet; I need to sterilize it and then you’ll be good to go.”

“Elizabeth, that’s not what happened.”

Dr. Black applied hydrogen peroxide.
Elizabeth winced.

Dr. Black squeezed her shoulder. "There. That’s the worst of it. You’ve been very brave, dear."

"Elizabeth, tell Dr. Black the truth. That’s not what happened." Lucy was on the edge of her seat.

Dr. Black looked over her glasses.

"That’s what I remember," said Elizabeth, looking up at Dr. Black.

Dr. Black pulled a small sucker from her breast pocket. "I’m going to have the nurse come in here while your mother and I go have a quick chat. OK?"

Elizabeth’s face lit up and she took the candy.

"Lucy, if you don’t mind?" Dr. Black opened the door.

Lucy, got up.

Elizabeth smiled as she unwrapped the sucker.

"Rachel, come sit with this brave little girl for a minute will you?"

"Of course, Dr. Black."

"Lucy, my office is just down the hall here."

Lucy followed her. "Dr. Black, that isn’t what happened…"

"In just a minute, Mrs. Roberts. Let’s get to my office so we can discuss in confidence."

"Confidence?"

Dr. Black held her office door open, ushering Lucy in.

Lucy sat down at a little coffee table. The door clicked shut. Dr. Black took a seat across from her.
“Look, I heard what Elizabeth said and that’s not what happened.” Lucy was on the edge of her seat.

“It’s alright, Mrs. Roberts. If there’s a memory issue it’ll most likely clear up in a few days. A week at most. She was otherwise coherent: she knew the movie, she could recall specific events. I don’t think she has a concussion. Or if she does, it’s very slight. You were alarming her though by pointing it out so frantically.” Dr. Black looked at Lucy over her glasses. “And that’s not good for her.”

“No. That’s not what I meant.” Lucy put her hands on the coffee table. “It’s not a memory issue. She was lying.”

Dr. Black crossed her legs and folded her hands in her lap.

“She didn’t get that fork ‘caught’ in her hair. She stabbed herself!”

“Why would she do that?” Dr. Black’s eyebrows knitted together.

“I don’t know. But she did—on purpose!”

“That’s a heavy accusation, Mrs. Roberts. Are you sure?”

“Yes!” Lucy was rigid in her chair, hands balled to fists.

Dr. Black’s eyes widened.

Lucy slumped her shoulders and shook her head at the table. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry. It’s just, it is serious and I don’t know what to do.”

“Well, you know, Elizabeth wouldn’t be the first.”

“She wouldn’t?” Lucy looked up, thick brown curls falling over her face.

“No. Just last week Sonya brought in her little girl with a Disney princess fork all wrapped up in her hair. I had to shave off a lot more than I did with Elizabeth to get it out. I don’t think
they ever figured that movie would lead to an epidemic of girls trying to comb their hair with forks. But you know, if you don’t watch them…."

“What? No. No.” Lucy tucked her curls behind her ear. “I was watching her. And yes, she was playing *Little Mermaid* and trying to comb her hair. I told her to stop but she didn’t like it and just started jamming the fork at her head.”

Dr. Black crossed her legs.

“I mean, that’s a big wound. In multiple places.” Lucy had her hands back on the table. “You don’t think *that* happened while she was trying to untangle a fork. do you?”

“Lucy. like I said, Sonya’s girl had the fork so tangled in her hair I had to shave half of it off just to get it out. I know you can’t watch her every second, but—”

“Oh, stop! Quit comparing me to Sonya. I’m not some junky from a trailer park. I take care of my daughter. And I was watching her—and she did that to herself.”

Dr. Black adjusted her glasses. “Alright.”

“Actually, you know who else was watching her? Jetty and her son. We were picnicking with them. They saw the whole thing! Here, if you don’t believe me, ask Jetty.” Lucy jumped up. “They’re in the waiting room—”

Lucy paused. “Oh. No, they’ve gone home. I told Jetty we’d walk; they didn’t need to wait. But we can call her! Yes, Dr. Black, call her from your desk.”

“Alright.”

Dr. Black picked up the receiver and looked at Lucy.

“509-342-7812.”

Dr. Black kept eye contact as she dialed.

They waited.
Lucy heard the muffled sound of the connection pick up and then a busy signal. She slowly took her seat.

"Jetty’s probably on the phone with Dave or something, telling him what happened."

Dr. Black hung up, adjusted her glasses and smiled. "We can try her again in a few minutes." She leaned on the coffee table and crossed her hands. "But, assuming she did do this on purpose, why do you think Elizabeth would hurt herself?"

Lucy balked. "Well, I don’t know. But it’s scary. And she lied about it." Lucy felt the blood in her neck rise. "You’re the doctor."

"Sometimes, if that is the case, children may engage in that kind of behaviour for attention."

"Attention? I give her attention all day. I stay at home, she doesn’t have any brothers or sisters. Yet. Every day is about her."

"What kind of things do you do together?"

Lucy re-tucked a curl. "I take her to swim lessons, make her meals, schedule play dates, do her laundry, go to the store."

"Yes. That’s all fine. But I mean, just the two of you. What do you do together? For instance, do you paint, sing songs, play games?"

"I…Elizabeth isn’t really interested…yes, we play games."

"What kind of games?"

"Well, she’s obsessed with pretend. It’s all she ever wants to do."

"And you do that with her?"

"Yeah. I mean, yes, we do, but there are also times when I want it to stop. Where she just needs to be herself. She can’t play pretend all the time."
"Part of a child growing is discovering the self. It’s very normal for them to try on different personas, different ways of being, test boundaries. And part of how they do that is with you. With a grounded adult who they love and trust."

"I understand that, but it can be constant. And she’ll change. She won’t be my little Elizabeth when she’s playing pretend. She’ll become someone totally different. And sometimes she doesn’t snap out of it. It scares me."

"It can be scary watching our children grow up. We want to keep them little forever."

"No. That isn’t it."

"But because we love them it’s important to help them grow, not hinder them. I know you may not like all the characters your daughter tries on, but it’s important to give her the space to do so. Like with Little Mermaid. Let her comb her hair, watch her, even help her."

Lucy exhaled. "The problem isn’t with Little Mermaid, the problem is with Andrew."

"Andrew? Who’s Andrew?"

Dr. Black looked at the clock.

"Andrew is the name Elizabeth has chosen for herself when she’s pretending to be a boy."

Lucy crossed her arms and sat back, waiting for the news to register on Dr. Black’s face.

Dr. Black glanced at the clock again. "I can assure you, a little girl pretending to be a boy is perfectly normal. And believe it or not, much more normal than pretending to be a Disney princess."

"But when she’s Andrew—"

"Mrs. Roberts. I’m so sorry, but I’ll have to stop you there. I need to get to another appointment."

"Don’t you want to hear about Andrew?"
Dr. Black stood and walked toward the door.

“Mrs. Roberts, in my professional opinion, your daughter is a healthy young girl who sounds perfectly normal. There may be some slight memories issues, but nothing that’ll last.”

Dr. Black opened the door for Lucy. “My advice is to go home, get some rest, and spend time with her.

“I do!” Lucy crossed her arms as she walked out of the office.

“Yes, but spend time doing the things she wants to do, not just the things you want to do, like shopping and date’s with friends.”

Lucy was beside herself.

Rachel the nurse was walking down the hall with Elizabeth in hand, beaming and still chomping on her sucker.

“Hi, mom!” Elizabeth ran over and hugged Lucy’s legs.


Lucy took Elizabeth by the hand and headed toward the exit.

* 

Lucy stared at an almost empty parking lot.

“Hmm. I half expected your father to be here.”

“We could call Luke’s mom.”

Lucy took Elizabeth firmly by the hand. “We’re not going back in there.” She squeezed. Elizabeth’s face crinkled.

“We’re walking.”
“Where have you been?”

Dave was waiting in the living room, arms crossed as Lucy came through the door.

“Didn’t Jetty call you?”

Elizabeth came through the door.

“No, Jetty didn’t call me. Holy fuck.”

“Dave!” Lucy scolded.

Dave dropped to his knees, scooping Elizabeth into his arms.

“What happened to you, kiddo?”

Elizabeth looked at him with tired eyes.

“I hurt my head.”

Lucy paused, intent on what would come next.

“How?” Dave looked up at Lucy, incredulously. Then at Elizabeth’s wound. It was jagged and red and swollen. He gently touched the surrounding long hair and kissed Elizabeth on the forehead.

She sighed and folded into his arms.

“How, Lu?” Dave asked, a little more forcefully. “How?”

Lucy glared at Elizabeth. “It’s a long story. Right now, she needs to rest. She isn’t thinking clearly.”

*
Dave gently closed Elizabeth’s door, leaving it open just a crack.

Lucy was slipping “Tango” into the cassette deck. A big glass of wine in her hand. She pressed the “play” button.

Dave came over and pressed “stop.”

“Lu, she’s resting.”

*

When Lucy woke it was dark. The bedside clock displayed 9:45 pm in red, digital numbers. Lucy rubbed her eyes. She looked at the night through the rungs of the blinds. The sky was clear and the moon was bright, everything was illuminated in blue. Lucy stretched. Her head felt heavy.

She heard giggling.

Lucy got up and slipped on her robe. She slowly shuffled down the hall. The bathroom light was on.

There was more giggling.

“Looks good, kid.”

The bathroom light was on. Lucy squinted as she walked toward Dave and Elizabeth. She rubbed her eyes as they adjusted to the yellow light.

“You two having some fun?”

They were standing in front of the sink.

Dave was holding scissors.
Elizabeth was up on her stool, smiling at the mirror.

Her hair was shorn. Strands of long brown hair lay on the floor.

"I thought we’d just even it up. That way she isn’t running around looking like a looney."

Elizabeth giggled and stuck out her tongue out. "Looney, looney, looney."

Lucy fainted.

*

Lucy felt Dave’s soft kiss on her forehead, then the prickle of his unshaven face against her cheek.

She sighed quietly.

He stroked her neck with the tips of his fingers.

"I had the worst dream."

He was lightly touching her collar bone, caressing the dip at the bottom of her throat.

"I dreamt you’d shaved Elizabeth’s head."

She felt nothing.

"Don’t stop."

Lucy opened her eyes.

The white morning light cut through the blinds.

Elizabeth stared her back in the face.

"Ah!"

Lucy sat up, pulling the covers over her chest. Her head felt heavy.

"Not a dream." Elizabeth crawled onto her mother’s lap.
Her hair was cut to the quick in some places and longer in others.

The giant gash lines down her scalp were clearly visible.

Yesterday flashed before Lucy’s eyes.

“Where’s your dad?”

“He’s making breakfast. He told me to come wake you up.” Elizabeth reached out and stroked her mother’s face. “Like Sleeping Beauty.”

Lucy nudged Elizabeth off the bed.

*

“So, what’d you girls think of my eggs?” Dave placed his plate in the sink. “Elizabeth, honey, you done?”

“Nooooo.”

Lucy was staring at Elizabeth. She hadn’t noticed how long her neck actually was. And thick. Much thicker than it was when she had her hair up in a ponytail.

“Then how about you take your breakfast and finish it downstairs? I want to talk to your mom.”

“Can I watch a movie?”

“Sure.”

Lucy bit her tongue as the words of Dr. Black echoed in her mind. “Little Mermaid is fine.” She took a sip of her coffee, palming the cup, feeling the heat through the clay.

“Not Little Mermaid, Sleeping Beauty.”

“Great, head on down then.” Dave was picking the pan.
“The eggs were great, Dave, thanks.” Lucy sipped her coffee. Her head still felt heavy.

“Where’d you get Sleeping Beauty?”

“From Luke’s mom’s bag. She had lots of movies in there.”

“Did she say you could borrow that one?”

“Ok, girls.” Dave sat back down at the table.

Elizabeth picked up her plate and dashed downstairs. Little bits of eggs tumbled to the floor.

Dave crossed his legs and smiled.

Lucy took another sip of coffee.

“So—”

“It looks horrible.” The warmth of the cup was fading.

“What? The haircut?”

“No. The giant gash across her head.” Lucy tucked a curl and looked at Dave, unimpressed. “But the haircut too.”

Dave sighed. “I should have talked to you before I did that. It looked a lot better last night, I swear. But. I’d also had a few by then.”

“I appreciate the apology.” Lucy said flatly.

“You’d had a few too, if you’ll remember. A few too many. Just bring her by the barber today and he’ll clean it right up.”

She took another sip. The coffee was cold.

“I’m sure Sandy can fit her in at the salon.”

“Sure, but listen, this isn’t what I meant to talk to you about.”

“No?”
“No, and it’s part of why I was already ticked when you came home last night.”

“Well, what is it?”

Dave uncrossed his legs and sat forward, resting his forearms on his knees. “Jim called me yesterday.”

Lucy picked up her fork and started pushing bacon crumbs around her plate. “Jim?”

“Jim Petty. Officer Petty.”

A bit of bacon broke beneath the fork.

“And?”

“And he says he got a call from the clerk at a Ladies’ Casuals the other day. Said she was assaulted and robbed by a woman with a little girl.”

Lucy pressed her finger on top the bacon bits and put them in her mouth.

“Said he reviewed the tapes, and it looks like the woman was you.”

Lucy scoffed. “Assaulted.”

“Is it true?”

“Dave, that woman invaded my privacy. Elizabeth was throwing a fit; I may have accidentally knocked her over, but I just wanted out of there. And as for the dresses, well, I didn’t even realize I took them until I was back in the car. And hell if I was going back in there. I mean, considering what she put me through, I think I deserve to keep them.”

Dave balked. “What she put you through? Lu, you broke her arm.”

“What? No.”

Lucy got up and took her plate to the sink.

“Lu, yes.”

Dave followed her.
“That’s what Jim said, ‘broke her arm.’ She was an old woman. But thankfully, Jim says she’s willing to drop the assault charge if you return the dresses and apologize.

“Dave, were you not listening? I’m not going back in there.”

Lucy tossed her plate in the sink with a clatter.

Dave looked at her and sighed. “Look, I know you’ve been through a lot with Elizabeth’s accident and—”

“That has nothing to do with it.”

Lucy crossed her arms.

“OK. I’ll talk to Jim today and see what I can do.”

“I don’t need you to do anything, Dave. If Jim has a problem he can talk to me. Like a proper policeman. Not go through my husband. Anyway, if he saw the tapes he would realize that woman harassed me. And as for the dresses, they can fuck off. Mine looked great on me and I’m wearing it to the party. Assault. I should charge her with invasion of privacy. And tom-peepery.”

Dave blinked, smiled flatly, took her hand and kissed it.

“I have to get to work. You girls have a good day.”

*

Lucy started the dishwasher and wiped down the counters.

It was another bright summer morning. The sky was blue, the maple leaves were fluttering. Lucy opened the window above the sink and the cool scent of the river filled the kitchen. She opened the back door. A young boy was in the alley, rolling back and forth on his skateboard.
Lucy thought of calling Elizabeth.

The boy was trying tricks and constantly falling off his board.

“He must be a grandson or something.”

“Who's grandson?”

Lucy jumped and turned around.

Elizabeth was there, breakfast plate in hand.

Lucy shut the door. “Oh, nothing.”

She took Elizabeth’s plate.

The sound of the wheels and wood hitting the pavement.

Lucy hurried to the sink and shut the window.

“So, what are we going to do today?”

Lucy looked at Elizabeth, long neck and long legs growing out of a big white t-shirt.

“Well, I'm not sure, how about you go get dressed.”

The phone rang.

“Hello.”

Elizabeth walked off to her bedroom.

“Hi, Lu.”

“Jetty!” Lucy clutched the phone cord in her hands. “Thank you for everything yesterday. I don’t know what I would have done if it weren’t for you. What a nightmare. We were in with that stupid doctor forever. I’ll tell you more about that in a minute. Then Dave was mad when we got home and—”

“Lu.”

“Yeah?”
“Lu, I can’t really chat but I had to call to say we won’t be able to able to watch Elizabeth tomorrow night.”

“Oh.”

“Sorry, but something’s come up and we just won’t be able to do it.”

“Of course.” Lucy wound the phone cord around her hand. “I mean, it’s no problem. I can find someone else.”

There was a pause.

“Is everything alright?”

“Oh yeah, everything’s fine. Just lots going on.”

Jetty’s laugh rang a little hollow.

Another pause.

“I better go then.”

“Right. Ok, Jetty, thanks for letting me know. Talk to you soon.”

Jetty hung up.

Lucy looked at the phone, confused, as the busy-signal mumbled through the receiver.

*

Elizabeth came out of her room, dressed in jean shorts and a white t-shirt with white socks rolled down around the ankles.

“Looks like we need to find a sitter for you.”

*
After lunch, Lucy lay in her lawn chair, reclined under the midday sun. She adjusted her bikini top, tucking the strings into the sides, pulling it down a little further.

Elizabeth swung on the rope swing hanging from a tall maple. When the breeze picked up, leaves rustled over Lucy’s slowly baking body. She should turn over soon. She kept her eyes closed and listened to the tree creak with the swing. Lucy felt the heat roasting her skin to an even color—so warm—she was getting drowsy.

*

A dark shadow fell across Lucy’s body.

“Mrs. Roberts.”

Her eyes snapped opened; she’d fallen asleep.

A grim-faced cop in sunglasses stared down at her.

Lucy sat up, grabbing at her top, digging out straps.

“Yes.” She was terse.

“Did your husband tell you I’d be stopping by?”

Lucy tied the straps around her neck.

The wind picked up and she felt her nipples grow hard.

Lucy crossed her arms over her breasts. “Who are you?”

Breeze from the river rustled through the trees.

“I’m a police officer, mam.”

“I can see that.” Lucy said flatly. “I mean, who are you. Your name.”
The tree wasn’t creaking. Lucy looked at the swing. It was empty.

“Officer Petty. Officer Jim Petty.”

Lucy looked around, a lump growing in her throat.

“I think your husband mentioned I’d talked to him.”

She was nowhere to be seen.

“When the incident at Ladies’ Casuals—”

“Elizabeth!”

“Excuse me?”

“Excuse me.” Lucy pushed past him, walking around his parked car, toward the side of the house.

“Elizabeth!”

There were the leaves, the distant roar of the river behind her, an occasional robin.

“Is something wrong?”

Lucy turned around.

“I fell asleep.” She felt panicked. “And now I don’t know where my daughter is.”

“How long have you been asleep?”

Lucy started heading back toward him. Then, a clattering of wood. Lucy jogged around his car, down toward the alley.

“Elizabeth!”

Rolling.

He was jogging after her. “Yeah, there were some kids playing in the street when I drove up.”

She came into view—Elizabeth and an older boy. Playing on the skateboard.
Lucy felt a rush of relief.

"Elizabeth."

"Hi, mom. Watch this."

Elizabeth put a foot on the board and slowly pushed it along.

"Elizabeth, come here, please." Lucy tucked her hair back.

Elizabeth kicked the board to the boy. "Thanks, Jordan."

The boy waved. He was dressed in a Batman shirt with black cool pants and Converse high tops. He had a red Bulls hat on backwards. He also had a nice smile.

"Elizabeth, you know you're not supposed to play in the alley."

"But mom, you were—"

"Run on up to the house now."

"Who are you?" Elizabeth squinted her eyes in the sun.

"Officer Petty. I'm a friend of you mommy and daddy."

"Are you a police man?"

He broke into a huge smile.

"Elizabeth, come on, up to the house."

Lucy grabbed her by the shoulder.

She marched Elizabeth to the back door and saw her into the house.

Lucy stood in shade of the patio, blocking the door, arms crossed.

"That's quite the gash on her head, there."

"She had an accident yesterday."

"You take her to the doctor, get it stitched up?"
Lucy furrowed her brow. "Yes, of course we took her to the doctor for stitches. What did it look like?"

"We? Was Dave with you when this happened?"

"No, he was at work. My friend Jetty and her son were with us."

"Mom, can I have a popsicle?"

"Yes, honey," Lucy called through the screen door.

"You see Dr. Black?"

Lucy sighed. "She's the only doctor to see. Jim, what are you here about? I have a daughter in there and we need to get on with our day."

"Yeah, sure thing. I guess falling asleep puts a bit of stress on things." He took off his sunglasses. "And a bit on the skin too, if you don't mind my saying."

Lucy looked down. She was red, but it looked dark and even under the shade. Her nipples were still erect.

"Like I said earlier, I'm here about the incident at Ladies' Casuals. Now, Dave assures me you didn't mean to hurt that woman; and I saw what happened on the tapes...but the fact remains you did push her and she's got a broken arm because of it. And you also walked out of the store without paying for those clothes."

"Jim—"

"Officer Petty. Mrs. Roberts. Now listen, before you go gettin' all riled up, Dave's already paid the store back for the merchandise. Says you look real good in your dress and he wants you to be happy." He paused. "And all Mrs. Runkle wants is an apology. She's not pressing charges, she's not even asking for you to pay doctor's bills; if, you apologize to her."

"No. No I won't."
“Well, why not? Folks are being awfully generous to you about all this if you ask me.”

“I’m not asking you. I’m telling you, I won’t apologize to her and I certainly don’t want you and Dave running back and forth with these silly little messages.”

“It’s the law. If you don’t apologize, Mrs. Runkle is filing an assault charge.”

“Fine. Then let her file the charge. Are you going to arrest me?”

He laughed. “No. Not now.”

“Then I’ll have to ask you to leave.”

*

“I can’t believe it’s so late. Your dad’ll be home any minute now; what do you want for dinner?”

Elizabeth was sitting in a kitchen chair, legs crossed. She was caked in sweat and dirt from skateboarding, her gash was healing over in a red scab. It made her lips look brighter.

“You look red, mom.” Elizabeth poked Lucy and watched her skin fade to white.

“I still need to find you a sitter for tomorrow night.” Lucy walked over to the fridge.

“I thought I was going to Luke’s....”

“Maybe I can whip up some burritos. You want burritos for dinner?”

“Yeah!”

“Good.” Lucy collected cheese, lettuce, tomatoes, avocado, sour cream. “You were, but Jetty called this morning to say they can’t anymore.”

“Why not?”
“I don’t know.” Lucy grabbed ground beef and a pack of tortilla wraps. “She said something came up.”

She put the meat in a frying pan and turned on the burner. “It was a little weird though.”

She glanced over.

Elizabeth was staring out the back door.

Lucy broke apart the beef with a spatula.

“Maybe it’s because of what happened at the beach.”

Lucy added salt and pepper.

“Because of what you did with the fork.”

Lucy sprinkled a pinch of chili powder over the smoking meat.

Elizabeth uncrossed her legs and sat forward, resting her forearms on her knees. The tips of her toes barely reaching the floor.

Lucy started washing the lettuce in the sink, rubbing out the dirt from beneath the leaves.

“Maybe it’s because of you.”

Lucy stopped. Lost for words, she scoffed and set the lettuce aside, grabbing a tomato.

Elizabeth walked to the back door, looking at nothing in particular.

Lucy cut into the tomato, swiftly dividing it into thin slices, then rapidly dicing. “I didn’t stab you with that fork.”

“You were mean.”

Lucy grabbed an onion and pealed the skin.

“I was not. Any time I apply a little discipline to you, you just…you can’t handle it.”

Elizabeth turned toward her mother. She gently ran her hand over her shorn hair. “You wanted to slap me.”
Lucy sunk the knife into the onion.

"Don't try and turn this around on me."

"You wanted to slap me like you did in the kitchen and like you did in the store. But Jetty and Luke were there."

Lucy slid the onions off the cutting board and into the frying pan. They popped and sizzled.

"That's not true."

Lucy put the lettuce in the spin dryer and started whirling it around.

Elizabeth sauntered up to the kitchen counter and leaned against it. She put her hands in her pockets. "Now you're lying."

Lucy stopped and pointed at Elizabeth. "You watch your mouth." Her nostrils flared. Elizabeth crossed one leg over the other.

Lucy tore the lettuce apart, separating each leaf into bite-sized pieces.

"You want to slap me now." Elizabeth threw her head back, exposing her long, tanned, sweat stained neck. She smirked.

"You're pushing it." Lucy grabbed a piece of lettuce and tossed it in her mouth, munching the crisp leaf. "Go find something to do, other than watching me. In fact, you know what? Go take a bath, young lady."

"Fine." Elizabeth pushed off the counter and pulled her shirt over her head, letting it drop in a heap on the floor.

"Pick that up."

She stood there, legs apart. She crossed her arms over her bare stomach.

"No."
Lucy set the lettuce aside. “Elizabeth.”

“I’m Andrew.”

“Elizabeth.”

Lucy swallowed, standing tall. She put her hand on her hip.

“Elizabeth, pick that up and go take a bath.”

Elizabeth put her hands in her pockets and pushed her pants down, exposing her hip bones.

“What are you doing?” Lucy furrowed her brow.

Elizabeth looked at the ground—the gash on her head was so red and jagged—then back up at Lucy, with big and brown eyes.

Breeze blew through the house.

Elizabeth shivered.

Lucy shivered.

“Ok. Andrew. Pick your shirt up and go take a bath.”

Elizabeth shivered again. She picked up her shirt.

Her back was bare, spine showing, shoulder blades fanning out.

Elizabeth walked toward the bathroom.

Lucy smelled burning.

“Crud.”

She grabbed a spatula and started scraping charred onions and beef off the bottom of the pan.

*
“So, did you girls have a good day?” Dave took a big bite of his burrito. “Mmm, very good, Lu.”

“MmmMmm.” Elizabeth took a bite of her burrito.

Dave smiled.

“It was fine.” Lucy cut hers in half with a knife and fork.

“You look pretty red, honey. What’d you do, fall asleep out there?”

“Jim came by.”

Dave took another bite.

“But we can talk about that later.”

“Yep. Later.” Dave took a drink of beer. “And how was your day, Elizabeth?”

“It was fine. Mom has to find a new babysitter for me.”

Lucy sat back and picked up her ice tea. “Oh, are you Elizabeth now? I thought you were Andrew.” She stirred her drink with the straw, the ice tinkling against the glass.

Elizabeth blushed and sunk down in her chair, trying to hide behind her food.

Dave smiled. “Andrew? Who’s Andrew?”

“Nothing!” Elizabeth blushed deeper, a wide smile spreading across her face.

Dave laughed. He took another bite, beef tumbling onto his plate. “So what’s this about a babysitter?”

“You don’t want to be Andrew?” Lucy pursed her lips around the straw.

Elizabeth slunk lower into her chair.

“I thought Jetty was watching her?”

“Is it because your Dad’s here?” Lucy set her drink down. “Oh, come on. You love being Andrew. How about you be Andrew and we’ll all play along.”
Elizabeth was bright red and giggling.

Dave laughed. “Are you two being silly?”

“Oh no, Dave. This is Elizabeth’s favorite game.” Lucy toyed with the straw. “Excuse me, I mean, Andrew. This is Andrew’s favorite game.”

“Mom, stop it!” Elizabeth was crimson red, so dark the gash on her head disappeared into the color of her skin. But she was still laughing, throwing wild glances at Dave. “Mom, no!”

Dave picked up his beer. “Girls, let’s talk about the babysitter.”

“Mom? I’m not Andrew’s mom; I’m Elizabeth’s mom.”

Elizabeth got quiet and sunk so low in her chair she was just a pair of dark, brown, angry eyes glaring over the tabletop.

“Mom, you’re being mean!”

Dave set his beer down. “Elizabeth, don’t talk to your mother that way.” His voice was steady and low.

“Ughhâhhh!” Elizabeth unclenched to the sound of liquid spraying the chair and dripping onto the floor.

Lucy stood up. “Are you peeing?!” She pushed Elizabeth’s chair away from the table.

“Dave, she’s peeing!”

Dave stood up. “Gross. Elizabeth you stop that right now and go to your room!”

Elizabeth started crying.

“No, go take a bath.” Lucy pointed toward the bathroom. “Again!”

*
“You can’t go, it’s raining.”

Lucy put on red lipstick in front of the mirror. “Dinner’s at their house now.” She blotted, folded the tissue and set it on her dresser.

Lucy walked to the closet and put on shoes.

Elizabeth followed her. “You’re red in front and white in back. It’s weird.”

“What do you mean?” Lucy walked back to the mirror and turned to the side.

There was a distinct line down the middle of her arm, separating a burned front from a protected back. “Ugh. From when I fell asleep outside.”

Lucy went to her closet and started shuffling through hangers.

“I don’t even have a babysitter.” Elizabeth crossed her arms.

“Yes you do.” Lucy selected a white dress shirt.

Elizabeth perked up. “Who?”

“Crissy DePew.” Lucy said, walking back to the mirror. “I called her last night after you threw your little tantrum.”

“She’s a teenager.”

Lucy tied the bottoms of the dress shirt together, rolled the cuffs and unbuttoned the top. She spun around in front of the mirror. She liked the way the denim maxi stretched across her hips and waist.

“And you better not pull anything like that while she’s here.” Lucy got serious and pointed at Elizabeth in mirror. “You hear me?” She popped the collar.

“You look like Maleficent.”

Lucy swept her hair up into a bun and teased out a few curls. “I mean it. If Crissy has anything bad to say when we get home, you’re in trouble.”
“So, what would you like to do?” Crissy smiled. Her face was smooth and tan with dark freckles scattered across her nose. Her lips were pink and glossy. She had braces on her pearly white teeth. Dark brown hair spilled in waves across her back. She smelled like cinnamon.

Elizabeth blushed and hid behind a chair in the livingroom.

Crissy laughed. “Are you being shy?”

Elizabeth giggled.

“Aww, you don’t need to be shy.” Crissy knelt down and held out her hand. “We’re going to have fun tonight.”

Elizabeth took her hand, smiling and stifling giggles.

Her skin was soft and cool.

“You’re pretty.” Elizabeth blushed deeply.

Crissy smiled. Fading sunlight cut through the windows and twinkled off her braces.

“You are too. I like your haircut.”

Elizabeth blushed deeper. “I had to get it because I hurt my head.” Elizabeth looked at the ground.

“Ouch.” Crissy frowned. “Look, I have an owie too.” She pulled up her shirt to reveal a skinned hip bone. She tugged on the waistline of her shorts, a yellow bruise crept down toward her thigh. “I was skating with my friends at the park when I fell and hurt myself.” She dropped her shirt. “My dad was mad. But I’m fine. Didn’t even need stitches. It’s not as bad as yours; how’d it happen?”
Elizabeth smiled, still blushing. “I want go to the pool. It’s night swim tonight.”

Crissy laughed. “Well, I didn’t tell your parents we’d be leaving the house. What if they call to check-in and no one answers?”

Elizabeth folded her hands behind her back and thoughtfully looked past Crissy, out the front screen door. “Look, there’s Brandon. He’s my swim teacher.”

A young man with bouncing blonde hair walked by the front of the house.

Crissy played with the ends of her hair.

“When’s night swim, then?”

“7-9.”

“7-9, that’s not too long. Your parents won’t be home until 10:30 anyway.”

“Yes!”

“Oh -- I don’t have a swimsuit.”

“Maybe you can use one of my mom’s.”

*

Elizabeth sat on the edge of their bed in her pink polka dot suit, her towel beside her.

Crissy spun in front of the mirror before her.

Lucy’s dark rose bikini looked different on Crissy. The color was rich. On Lucy it looked pale. It was also big. The waist sagged and the cups were less than full.

“Hmm. It’s a nice color though.”

“Yeah.” Elizabeth played with the ruffle on her own suit.
Crissy dug through Lucy's dresser and pulled out a more elastic, black suit. "One piece. But it looks smaller."

She slipped off the bottoms.

There was a tuft of hair between her legs. In the mirror it was small and shaped into a line.

"My mom has more hair there." Crissy looked up and saw Elizabeth pointing in the mirror. She laughed. "Yeah, I don't like a lot of hair. So I shave it." She stepped into the black suit and slid it up. "It's cozy."

Elizabeth slid off the bed and went over to her mother's dresser. She stood on tiptoes and felt around until her hand closed on the blotting tissue.

Crissy took off her top. Her nipples were the same pink as the lipstick. She pulled on the suit. The neckline was tight against her chest.

"Wow. This is a hot." Crissy pushed up her breasts, watching them bulge against the nylon. Elizabeth pressed her lips against the used tissue.

"Are you sure it's your mom's?"

Elizabeth popped her lips and walked over. "Yeah. It's old though. I don't think she wears it anymore."

"Huh. Well anyway, it fits."

The suit was high cut and Elizabeth could see the tan line where Crissy's normal suit had lain.

"Nice lipstick. Looks good on you." Crissy grabbed their towels from the bed. "Let's go."

*
It was a warm evening. The sun had set behind the bluffs but it wouldn’t be dark for another few hours. Electric lampposts flickered their orange glow.

Elizabeth dog paddled in the shallow end.

Crissy sat on the edge, dipping her legs into the water.

Elizabeth latched onto the wall by Crissy. “It hurts when I get my head wet.” Elizabeth took a huge breath, went underwater and came back up sputtering. “Ow….”

Crissy laughed. “Are you being silly?”

Elizabeth dunked under the water, then up. “Ow….”

Crissy was looking over at the life guard bench. “Hey, how about we go say hi to your swim teacher? You wanted to say hi, right?” She twirled the ends of her hair.

“Crissy, watch me jump off the diving board.”

“Hmm? Don’t you want to see Brandon first?”

“No, me first.” Elizabeth hoisted herself up the cement side and sped toward the diving boards.

“Hey, no running!”

Elizabeth froze and looked across the pool. Brandon stood there, twirling his whistle around his finger.

He smiled.

She smiled.

“You know better than that, Elizabeth. I know you do.” Brandon fingered the whistle around his neck. “Walk, don’t run.”

Warm tingling started to creep into Elizabeth’s cheeks.

“Hi, Elizabeth!”
Luke was near the shallow end of the pool, waving vigorously while Jetty spread out their towels.

"Hi, Luke!"

Jetty whipped around as Elizabeth came dashing toward them. "Elizabeth, what are you doing here --"

The whistle rang through the air, bouncing off the nearby bluffs and filling the space its metal shing.

"Me and Crissy are here for night swim."

The whistled sounded three times in rapid succession.

"Elizabeth," -- it was Brandon -- "Elizabeth, come over here, please." His sunglasses cut a thick, black line across his face.

"Is your mom here?" Jetty looked around nervously.

"Elizabeth, come here please."

Elizabeth slowly walked toward Brandon.

"I asked you not to run. Remember?"

Crissy was instantly by her side. "Sorry, I'm watching her. I should have been paying more attention."

Crissy put a hand around Elizabeth's shoulders and hugged her against her leg. Her suit was hiked around her hips.

He took off his sunglasses and extended his hand. "Hi. I'm Brandon."

Crissy let go of Elizabeth's shoulder. "Crissy."

"Well, don't worry. You girls aren't in trouble. But you can't run, Elizabeth. It's for your own good. You wouldn't want to slip and hurt yourself."
Elizabeth smiled. "Want to watch me go off the diving board?"

Brandon laughed. "Sure."

Crissy pulled on her suit strap. Her breast rose and settled. "Hey, you go to Roosevelt High, right?"

"Yeah. I do. I haven’t seen you there before, though." Brandon massaged his bicep.

"OK, you guys watch me."

Crissy smiled. "I’ll be a sophomore this year. But, I’ve been to some football games, so I’ve seen you around."

"OK, I’m going."

Brandon smiled.

Elizabeth slowly padded around the pool. Luke and Jetty were sitting in the kiddy pool pushing a ball back and forth.


They didn’t hear her. Elizabeth rattled the chain link fence between them. "Luke! Miss Jetty! Watch this!"


Elizabeth marched to the diving boards. There was a line for the low dive, but none for the high dive.

The night was getting darker and the lamps were burning brighter.

Elizabeth gripped the ladder handles and started climbing. At the top she could see everyone clearly. "OK, I’m going!"
Jetty and Luke pushed the ball back and forth. Crissy was pulling on her suit and Brandon was scratching his pecs.

Elizabeth ran at full speed, tripped and tumbled head-first off the high dive and into the water.

*

“It was like this flap had opened up. It wasn’t bleeding much, but it was red. So red. And that stupid lifeguard was just standing there holding his whistle. I was screaming at him but he just stood there with his stupid mouth open. It was finally Crissy who snapped to and went to phone the ambulance —”

“Jetty, please.” Dave held up his hand as he paced around the waiting room.

“I’m sorry. I guess I’m still in a bit of shock.” Jetty crossed her legs and put her arm around Lucy.

Lucy gripped Jetty’s freckled hand. “I’m just so glad you were there,” she sobbed.

“I wasn’t even paying attention. Luke and I were in the kiddy pool. I didn’t even see her go up there. But that sound. When she hit the water. Oh. It was like gunshot. My stomach leapt into my throat and I didn’t know who or what, only that something had gone horribly wrong.”

“Jetty, please!” Dave ran his fingers through his hair.

“Dave. don’t yell! If it weren’t for Jetty…” She swallowed. “If it weren’t for Jetty…”

“I know.” Dave dropped his hands. “I’m sorry. But, I can’t handle the details right now.”

Jetty patted her hand. “There, there, Lu. But look, she isn’t being rushed off to the city, so that’s a good thing. Right?”
“Right.” Lucy squeezed Jetty’s hand.

“Dr. Black will get her all patched up and then it’ll just be rest and recovery.”

“How’s Luke doing?”

Jetty ran her hand over his hair, he was curled up in the seat next to her, sleeping. “He’s fine. Just tired.” She looked at her watch. “Steve should be here soon.”

Dave coughed. “Yeah, I’m sorry, I should be driving you home, Jetty. But --”

“Oh, don’t even think on it. It’s no problem. Steve was just watching football tonight anyway, nothing special.”

The door opened. It wasn’t Rachel. It was a different nurse. “Mr. and Mrs. --”

“Yes.” Dave and Lucy said at once.

“Would you please follow me?”

Lucy rose and looked at Jetty.

“Go go go.” Jetty collected the sleeping Luke in her arms. “I’ll be just fine. Steve will be... actually, look, there he is with the station wagon.”

“Thanks again, Jetty.” Lucy hugged her.

“I’ll call you tomorrow.”

*

“How’s she doing?”

“Good, good.” Lucy wound the telephone cord around her hand. “Still sleeping.” She looked at the clock. It was quarter to 10. “She never sleeps in this late. But, I guess she needs it.”

“I’m sure. So what’d the doctor say?”
“Not much.” Lucy got up from her chair and looked out the back screen door. It was a bright sunny day with no breeze. “She wants to see Elizabeth on Monday to check the stitches. Make sure there’s no infection.”

“Makes sense.”

“I mean, beyond falling head first off the diving board there’s just the matter of the cut being exposed to so much water. Dr. Black was quite upset about that.”


Lucy wound the cord around her hand. “I had to remind her that Crissy had taken Elizabeth swimming without our permission.”

“Of course. No parent in their right mind would let a child with stitches go swimming.”

“She was unimpressed. Told me not to blame a teenage babysitter. But it’s not as if we really had a choice. It was last minute and she was the only person available.”

“Yeah....”

There was an uncomfortable silence between them.

Then Lucy heard it.

“Is Luke watching Cinderella?”

Jetty’s laugh was a little strained. “Yeah, he loves it. Wants me to be Cinderella and him to be the prince all the time.”

“Well, good. I’m glad he’s enjoying it.”

Another long silence.

*
Lucy sprinkled powdered sugar over a stack of golden pancakes. She set them on a little tray with a thin glass of orange juice and a tulip vase which held a stem of snapdragons.

Lucy gently pushed open Elizabeth’s bedroom door with her foot.

Elizabeth was sleeping. Her face was flushed, a large padding of gauze strapped to the top of her head. Lucy sat on the edge of the bed, the tray in her lap.

“Elizabeth. I made you breakfast.”

Elizabeth rolled over and opened her eyes. Her pupils were large. The morning light was diffused by her drawn bedroom curtains.

“Cinderella?”

Lucy half-smiled. “I brought you breakfast in bed. Pancakes and orange juice.”

Elizabeth sat up straight, propping herself against her pillow. “It seems we have time on our hands.”

Lucy raised an eyebrow and placed the tray on her lap.

Elizabeth picked up the knife and spoon and paused, looking at her mother. “Close the door, Cinderella.”

Lucy scoffed. “You can and say ‘Thank you.’”

Elizabeth pressed her spoon on top her pancakes and tried to cut the stack. It slid in different directions; her spoon skidded across the plate.

Lucy grabbed the utensils, restacked the pancakes and cut them into bite-size pieces.

“There you go.”

“Come here.” Elizabeth beckoned with her finger.

Lucy stood up. She walked around the room pulling back the curtains. “Elizabeth, it’s time to eat your breakfast. You can play games later.”
“Hold your tongue!”

“Elizabeth?!” Lucy scowled. “Who do you think you’re talking to?”

Elizabeth had her mouth full of pancakes “I told youuuu, Cinderella.”

Lucy looked at the curtains. “I should wash these.”

“And the tapestries and the draperies.”

“Eat your breakfast.” Lucy picked up clothes off the ground.

“And there’s the mending and the sowing and the laundry.”

Lucy looked at her. incredulously. “So, do plan on helping me with any of these things?”

“I can’t. My head’s hurts.”

“Well you seem fine. Fine enough for your little games.”

“No, I have to stay in bed.”

“Well, you can’t. We have to go see the doctor soon.”

“Can Dad take me?”

“No, he’s at work. It’s Monday. You slept almost the whole day yesterday. Now, up. We need to give you a bath.”

*

“We’re ready for Elizabeth now.”

It was nurse Rachel.

Lucy smiled and walked over.

Rachel smiled back, holding out her hand to Elizabeth. Elizabeth took it and blushed.

“Hi,” Rachel said, blue eyes shining.
“Your hair is pretty.”

Rachel laughed. “Thank you. Are you ready to see Dr. Black?”

Elizabeth smiled and nodded her head.

“Oh, I’m sorry Mrs. Roberts, Dr. Black just wants to see Elizabeth now.” Rachel looked at Lucy and blinked. “If you don’t mind waiting.”

Lucy was taken aback. “Why?”

“She said to tell you she’ll see you as soon as she’s done with the check-up; it’s a process and the less distractions Elizabeth has the better it will go.”

“Well, I would still prefer to be with my daughter.” Lucy looked at Elizabeth. “Don’t you want me to come with you?”

“No.”

“It shouldn’t take more than 10 minutes.” Rachel looked at Elizabeth and smiled. “OK, let’s go. Dr. Black is waiting.”

The office door shut in Lucy’s face.

*

“Thank you for being here.” Dr. Black smiled; deep lines formed around her mouth. Otherwise her skin was fair and unwrinkled, even at her age.

“Yes. I would have preferred being in the room for the check-up though.”

“Oh, I know.” Dr. Black leaned across her desk, looking over her steel frames at Lucy.

“But if you’ll remember, the last time you were in the room while I was trying to treat her, it was rather difficult.”
Lucy sat forward in her seat. “No. I don’t remember it being especially difficult.”

“You were alarmed and accusatory. When we’re treating we need a calm, clinical setting. It went much better this time.”

“Well…I’m glad to hear that. I just didn’t like --”

“The wound was red, though. Slightly enflamed. As well as damp. It shouldn’t have been damp.”

Lucy crossed her arms, noticed, then uncrossed them. “I did wash it when I gave her a bath this morning. Like you said, it was red and enflamed. I thought I should wash it with soap to keep it clean.”

Dr. Black took a sip of her tea.

“The soap was mild.”

“That wasn’t part of my prescription.”

“I’ve been doing the ointment. You never said not to wash it.”

“I remember saying to keep it dry.”

Lucy crossed her arms.

“It does need to stay clean. That’s what the ointment is for. But it can’t be wet or damp. That encourages bacteria to grow.”

Dr. Black was wearing pearl earrings. They were the same white as the soft fuzz running down the back of her jawline.

“I’ve only washed it this morning.” Lucy tucked a curl behind her ear. “But, now that I know, of course I won’t let it get wet.”
“I hope so, Mrs. Roberts. It’s very important that you follow my instructions. A little girl like that shouldn’t be coming in here so often because of preventable accidents. Especially when they seem to be getting worse.”

Lucy scoffed. “Preventable?”

Dr. Black reached for a small pot of honey. She swirled the comb-stick and slowly rolled a dollop into her tea.

“From what you and Elizabeth have told me, in each circumstance, it seems the injury could have been prevented. In the first instance, you were so preoccupied with disciplining your daughter you didn’t notice that the fork had become deeply ensnared until she was already tearing it out. And in the second instance, according to Elizabeth, unfortunately, it sounds like no one was paying attention. Not the teenage care-giver you chose or the teenage lifeguards.”

“I’ve told you. The first time, Elizabeth did that to herself. I was there; with her, with Jetty and Luke and I watched her ram a fork into her head on purpose. It wasn’t an accident. Did you ever call Jetty?”

Dr. Black held the end of the comb stick. “No, I have yet to do that.”

Lucy glared. “You should. She’ll tell you the exact same thing. She saw it. Elizabeth did it to herself.” Lucy leaned forward. “And as for this time, well… I don’t really know. But thanks to you, I wasn’t in the room to hear what she said.”

“By your tone, it sounds like you’re already assuming what she said is false.” Dr. Black looked over her glasses.

Lucy swallowed. “Well, yeah, kinda.”

Dr. Black stared quietly.
Lucy felt her cheeks getting hot, pressure building behind her eyes. Her voice cracked slightly. “I don’t know if all this is because of Andrew or if --”

“Andrew?”

“Andrew. I told you about him last time.”

“Oh, yes. One of the many childish games Elizabeth likes to play.” Dr. Black stirred the honey in her tea. “So, are you saying this you think this game has something to do with her injuries?”

“I...yes, yes I think it does.”

“Did you play ‘Andrew’ with her after I saw you last time, like I advised?”

“In a way....”

“Lucy, how do you react when you catch Elizabeth playing ‘Andrew’? Do you get angry? Do you scold her? Have you ever hit her?”

Lucy stood up. “I was expecting to get an update on how my daughter’s doing but instead you’ve just focused on me. A long interrogation. Well I’ve had enough!”

Dr. Black smiled. “Lucy, please sit down. Your tea is getting cold. I’m just trying to understand how the wounds happened so I can make sure there’s no reoccurrence. To feel interrogate by that is a strong reaction. In any case, it wasn’t my intention to offend, just to treat.”

There was a knock on the door. It opened and Rachel poked her head inside. “Dr. Black, your eleven o’clock’s here.”

“Rachel, remember to wait until I tell you before opening the door.”

“Sorry Dr. Black.”

“I’ll be with them in five minutes. Now shut the door behind you.”
"That's fine, I was just leaving." Lucy walked toward the door. "Rachel, if you don’t mind taking me to my daughter."

"Yes, of course."

"Oh, and Rachel...."

Rachel stopped in the doorway, blocking Lucy in.

"Yes, Dr. Black."

"Please reschedule Elizabeth for a few days from now so I can check on things. Lucy, we'll talk more then."

*

"Roll down your window, please. It’s hot."

"Can we stop and get snow cones?"

Lucy followed the winding road around the bluffs as they drove along the river. The only breeze was the one generated by the speed of the car.

"I don’t think so."

Elizabeth frowned.

"But I’ll see about a frozen push pop when we get home."

*
Lucy grabbed the mail as she opened the front door. She dropped a few envelopes on the table and walked over to the kitchen sink. She filled a large glass of water. The sky was blue and maples leaves drooped in the trees. “It’s a hot one today.” Lucy handed the glass to Elizabeth.

Elizabeth leaned against the counter. “No, thanks, mom.”

“Push pop then?”

“I feel kinda tired. I think I’ll go lie down.”

Lucy put her hand on Elizabeth’s forehead. “You feel alright otherwise?”

“Yeah.”

“That’s good. Well, let’s get you in bed then.”

*

Lucy sat on the edge of Elizabeth’s bed as the low whirl of the floor fan filled the room. Lucy adjusted the bed sheet around her. “There’s water on your nightstand and I’ll be in to check on you in about fifteen minutes.” She cupped Elizabeth’s face in her hand. “Hmm. Maybe you do feel a little warm.”

“Your hand feels nice and cold.” Elizabeth shut her eyes.

Lucy thumbed her cheek.

Elizabeth shivered.

“Sweet dreams.”

*
Lucy poured herself a glass of water and took a push pop from the freezer. She sat at the table, slowly sifting through the mail.

“Bill, bill, bill, advertisement...what’s this?”

Lucy set her push pop down.

“Department of Corrections.” She tore open the enveloped and pulled out the letter.

“What the fuck.”

She got up, yanked the phone off its receiver and started dialing.

*

There was a chill in the air when Lucy hung up the phone. She slowly walked toward the table. Her push pop was melted into a puddle of liquid ice-cream.

Lucy rolled her eyes and grabbed some paper towel. “Of course.”

She checked the clock. “Dave will be home soon.”

She grabbed a wet washcloth from the sink and wiped the table. The silence of the house struck her. “Elizabeth.”

Lucy tip-toed toward Elizabeth’s room. She opened the door and found the bed empty.

“Elizabeth?”

In the far corner, curled on the floor, naked in front of the fan, lay Elizabeth, shaking and shivering.

Lucy ran over and pulled the cord out of the wall.

“What are you doing?”

Elizabeth was chattering, her eyes closed, a purple tinge darkening her skin.
“Elizabeth?!”

Lucy fell to her knees and gathered her daughter into her arms.

“I feel hot.”

She pressed Elizabeth’s head to her breast. Her hair was damp and dark, matted to her head.

“You feel cold. And wet. Have you been sweating?” She hugged Elizabeth tighter. “Where are your clothes?”

“I feel hot.”

Lucy pulled the sheet off the bed and wrapped it around Elizabeth.

“Why didn’t you call me?”

“You said you were coming.”

Elizabeth looked blue. “We need to warm you up.”

Lucy pulled the sheet off her and tried to get her to stand.

“OK, I need you to help me. You have to get up.”

Elizabeth rose to her knees, but shook so much she lost her balance and tumbled back to the floor.

Lucy gripped her beneath the armpits and hoisted her up. “Come on, into the bathroom. We need to get you into a hot bath.”

“No. I feel hot.” Elizabeth fell down and crawled toward the fan’s cord. She shook as she plugged it in.

“Elizabeth, stop it!” Lucy grabbed her by the ankle. “You feel like ice.” She pulled on Elizabeth’s leg.

Elizabeth struggled.
“Stop! Elizabeth!” Lucy grabbed her by the neck and wrapped her in a bear hug from behind.

Elizabeth couldn’t move.

They sat, breathing heavily.

Lucy didn’t lessen her grip.

Elizabeth’s breathing slowed.

“Now get up and get in the bathtub.”

Lucy guided Elizabeth to the bathroom.

Lucy started the water. “I said get in the tub.”

Elizabeth stepped into the metal bath.

“Sit down.”” Lucy’s voice was low.

Elizabeth sat, silent tears streaming from her eyes.

“Oh, stop shaking so much. I know you’re cold, but you don’t need to be dramatic about it.”

Elizabeth brought her knees to her chest and sobbed into them, her back curved and round.

Lucy dipped a washcloth into the running water and rung it over Elizabeth’s feet.

“Ow! Too hot!”

Lucy furrowed her brow. “I said stop it! You need to warm up. This is a nice, warm temperature!”

“But it feels like needles!” Elizabeth scooted to the back on the tub, trying to escape the water.

“You’re being dramatic!”

“Honey, I’m home.”
It was Dave.

"I’m not!" Elizabeth grabbed the washcloth and wadded it into a ball. “You!”

She flung it at Lucy. The washcloth hit her in the face.

“Where’s my girls?”

Lucy pulled the cloth from her face and slapped Elizabeth.

“Lucy!”

Dave was standing in the doorway.

“Do not hit our daughter!”

Lucy was speechless.

Dave came in and looked at Elizabeth, tearstained cheeks, huddled at the back of the tub.

“You take your bath, kiddo. I’m going to talk to your mom.” He took Lucy by the wrist. “Holler if you need us.”

*

Dave pulled Lucy into the hall. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“Dave, she threw her washcloth in my face!” Lucy looked down at the wet marks on her shirt. One of her nipples was hard. She took hold of the fabric and showed it to him. “That’s why I’m wet.”

“I don’t care. You’re an adult; she’s a child. You should not be hitting her. Do you understand?”

Lucy rolled her eyes and looked angrily towards Elizabeth’s bedroom door. “I can’t hear a word you’re saying. That stupid fan.”
Dave followed into the room. "I mean it, Lu. I don’t want that to happen again. Ever."

"Huh...." She noticed the glass on Elizabeth’s nightstand was empty. She walked over to it.

"Lu? Are you listening? I don’t want that to ever happen again."

There were a few drops of water close to the stand, and more on the floor beside the bed.

The mattress was wet. There was even water on the pillow.

"She wasn’t sweating...."

"What?"

The phone rang.

"I need to make sure Elizabeth’s head stays dry while she’s in the bath." Lucy pushed past Dave.

He caught her by the wrist.

The phone rang again.

"I’ll check on her. You go answer the phone."

*  

"Hi, Lu. It’s Jetty."

"Hi."

"How’s things?"

"Oh, fine. You?"

Lucy heard giggling in the bathroom.

"Fine, fine." Jetty paused. "Well, actually, I got a call from --"
More little giggles from the bathroom.

"Jetty, I'm so sorry, but I have to go. I'll call you back in a bit."

Lucy hung up.

*

Elizabeth was reclining in the bath, bubbles up to her chin, her head wrapped in a towel.

Dave was sitting on the edge of the tub.

"Everything all right in here?" She felt out of breath and hesitated in the doorway.

Dave slowly turned toward her. "Sure, yeah. Everything all right with you?"

Elizabeth's eyelids were half-closed and she had a relaxed smirk on her lips.

"Fine."

"Who was on the phone?"

Lucy took a step into the room. "Jetty."

Elizabeth's neck and chest were slick with water but her face looked dry.

"Just saying hi."

"Great, well, we're about done in here if you want to get supper started."

Lucy took a step forward. "We'll need to change the bandage when she's out, make sure everything's dry, do the ointment; if you want to go fire up the 'que I can stay here and do that."

"I think I can handle it."

Elizabeth looked at Lucy.

Lucy looked at her. "Oh, I know, Dave. But, if you don't mind, I'd like a little privacy with Elizabeth. To apologize."
Dave smiled. "I think that’s a wonderful idea, Lu."

He stayed put.

"Go ahead."

"Dave, alone, please."

"Lucy, I would like to hear this apology. She’s my daughter too."

Elizabeth pushed herself up so her chest was exposed, flat and dotted with two little spheres almost the color of her skin.

Lucy bit the inside of her lip.

"Well, Elizabeth. I am sorry. You made me angry when you threw the washcloth at me. You shouldn’t have done that. It was rude and --"

"Your mom shouldn’t have hit you." Dave looked at Lucy. "That was wrong."

Lucy felt her throat dry and tears gather at the backs of her eyes. She put her hands behind her back.

"But I shouldn’t have hit you; that was wrong."

Dave stood. "Aw, Lu." He tucked a curl behind her ear. "It hurt you just as much, didn’t it? Probably more."

Lucy nodded.

"And it won’t happen again."

Lucy looked at Elizabeth over Dave’s shoulder. "It won’t happen again."

"It’s OK, Mom. I love you."

*
Lucy looked across the pillow. Dave was setting the alarm clock. He grabbed his paperback and nestled in. The white-gray light of his bedside lamp shaded his features.

Lucy rolled over, into the darkness of her side of the room. She pulled the sheet around her shoulders.

*

Dave turned the lamp off.

“Oh. I’ve been meaning to ask. Have you sorted that stuff about Women’s’ Casuals?”

Lucy’s eyes snapped open.

“With the old lady and Officer Petty?”

“Good night, Dave.”

*

As soon as the clock struck 8 Lucy picked up the phone.

She dialed Jetty’s number.

After several rings, Jetty picked up. Her voice was sleepy.

“Hi Jetty. it’s me, Lu.”

Jetty yawned. “Hello.”

“I’m sorry to call so early but I have this appointment I need to get to at 9. Is there any way you could watch Elizabeth for me?”
“Wish I could but Luke and I are heading to the orchard today.” Jetty yawned. “Going to pick cherries.”

“It would only be for an hour at most.”

“We’re leaving in half an hour; get there before it’s too hot. Sorry, Lu.”

“Right. Thanks anyway.”

*

Lucy slowed to a crawl as they came up on Jetty’s house. The car tires were silent over the smooth, cool asphalt. As they approached, Lucy saw the car in the driveway.

“I knew it.”

“Knew what?”

Lucy craned to see in the windows. She hit the brakes. Jetty was pouring cereal at the table.

“That Jetty was lying.” Lucy looked at Elizabeth. “I hate it when people lie.”

Jetty came to the window.

They locked eyes.

Jetty threw open the front door as Lucy tore off down the street to the sound of squealing tires.

*

“I’m here to see Jim. Please.”

The woman behind the desk smiled curtly.
“You mean Office Petty.”

Lucy smiled back. “Yes.”

The woman looked down at Elizabeth. “She’ll have to wait out here. There’s a kids corner’s right over there.” She nodded to the back of the waiting area where several red-headed children were playing on plastic monstrosities, fingering wooden wire puzzles and throwing books at each other.

The door beside the desk lady swung open. Office Petty stepped through, file in hand.

“Lucy -- why, there you are.” He smiled, his mustache pulling thin across his lips. “Right on time.”

Lucy looked down at Elizabeth. She was tall and straight. Those redheaded children were gangly and messy and...she looked closer, Sonya’s. They were Sonya’s brood.

“Can I have a quarter for the vending machine?” Elizabeth held out her hand. She looked long and thin.

Lucy furrowed her eyebrows. “Oh, can’t she come with me?”

“She has to wait here,” said the woman at the desk.

Officer Petty nodded.

“Oh my.” He looked down at Elizabeth. “Did that bump on your head get worse?”

“It’s not a bump. It’s lacerations.”

Everyone stared at Elizabeth.

“That’s what Dr. Black says.”

Officer Petty smiled. “Dr. Black’s a smart woman. Isn’t she?”

Elizabeth nodded.
"Here, I'll tell you what.” Office Petty dug into his pockets. He pulled out a quarter. “How about you take this quarter and get something from the vending machine while I talk to your mom. By the time you’re done with a pack of m&m’s we’ll be finished.”

Elizabeth smiled and took the quarter.

*

Two hours later Lucy scanned the waiting area. The woman at the desk was in the kid’s corner, two of Sonya’s ginger monkeys clung to each of her legs while the third stood screaming in a heap of books. But there was no Elizabeth. Lucy looked over at the vending machines, no one there.

Lucy ran outside. The sidewalks were white and hot. Freshly planted saplings stood limp under the sun. No Elizabeth in the car. It was still locked anyway. Lucy scanned around. The parking lot was bare. The sky was a bright blue wherever she looked.

“Elizabeth! Elizabeth!”

Nothing.

Lucy ran back into the station.

Sonya was pulling children off the desk lady and attaching them to herself.

“Excuse me!” Lucy’s voice cracked. “Excuse me, but where’s my daughter?”

The desk lady looked distraught. “Who’s your daughter?”

“Elizabeth!”

“Is there a problem, ladies?”

Officer Petty put his hands in his pockets as he walked toward them.
“Yes, there’s a problem, Jim. You’ve lost my daughter!”

“Now, that’s not true,” the lady chirped.

One of Sonya’s children started fondling her breast. “I’m hungry.”

Sonya stared. Didn’t stop the groping child. Her eyes were deep and brown, hooded, with bags underneath. Her skin was tan, she was slightly plump, but very smooth. There were bruises on her neck.

“If you would just give me a minute. Your husband came and picked her up over an hour ago.”

“What? Dave’s at work. I didn’t tell him we’d be here.” Lucy swallowed. “Are you sure it was him? Did you check his ID?” Lucy felt a prickle in her throat. “Unless,” Lucy turned to Officer Petty, “you called him?” Her voice was hard.

His mustache spread thin and coarse as he laughed. “No, I did not.”

The lady held up her hands. “Look, after she ran up to him and said ‘Daddy’ that was proof enough for me.”

“So, you didn’t check his ID?!”

“Now, now. I’m sure Dave came to pick her up. They’re probably at home waiting for you.”

“You’re acting awfully cavalier about this.”

Officer Petty laughed. “I’m not. Did you know that in 90 percent of missing persons’ cases the individual is found back at home within a matter of hours? You listen to me, run on home and if they aren’t there waiting for you, you call me and we’ll put out a search. Send the Calvary.”
Dave’s car was in the driveway. As Lucy pulled up from the alley she saw them sitting on the back porch. They were eating ice cream cones and corn dogs. Elizabeth was dressed in a *Batman* shirt with black cool pants and Connverse high tops. She had a red Bulls hat on backwards.

Dave waved. Elizabeth was focused on her ice cream, the corn dog drooping in her other hand.

Lucy flung the door wide and jumped out of the car. “So she *is* with you.” Lucy strode up to them. Elizabeth’s ice cream was melting all over her hand. The corn dog dropped and rolled at Lucy’s feet. She picked it up and set it on a large basket of French fries.

“Yeah, didn’t they tell you?” Dave crunched the last bite of his cone. “We left a note on the car too.”

“Yeah, it was cute.” Elizabeth was poking the melting ice cream with her tongue.

“No, there was no note. The police weren’t sure. I was worried!”

Dave laughed. “You’re always so excitable.”

“Don’t laugh, Dave. You should have told me.”

“We left a note.” Elizabeth had ice cream on the tip of her nose.

“Maybe it blew off in a breeze. I don’t know. Here, have some fries.”

Lucy sat down on the steps.

“How did you even know we were there? Did that lady at the desk call you?”

“No. Little Elizabeth did.” Dave smiled through a mouthful of fries.

Elizabeth giggled as some of her ice-cream hit the porch.
Lucy turned toward Elizabeth. “Then the lady let you use her phone?”

“Nope. I put the quarter in the pay phone instead of buying m&m’s.”

Her jaw squared.

Dave beamed. “Smart kid.”

“You seem pretty nonchalant about all this. Aren’t you even curious why we were at the police station?”

“Jim had mentioned he wanted to talk to you this week. Didn’t know when though; you really should have told me, Lu. Then I could have planned to take the morning off.”

“I thought Jetty could watch her. But she backed out. again.”

Dave looked at Elizabeth. Her hands were a sticky mess. The cone was gone. “Why don’t you take that corn dog and head on inside. I’ve got to talk to your mom.”

“Those are some nice clothes.”

“Dad got them for me. He said I’ve been very brave lately.”

*

“Dad said I can have a sleep-over.”

Lucy glanced at Dave as they walked along the riverbank. “You did?”

The sun had set but its heat was still gathered in the dense foliage that lined their path.

Something shook in the underbrush.

A large rattle snake shot out of the bushes, slithering towards them.

Elizabeth screamed.

Lucy scooped her up.
Long legs wrapped tightly around her waist.

As suddenly as the snake had appeared, it was gone.

The riverbank was silent.

*

“So, I guess Friday will be your slumber party.” Lucy tucked the sheet around Elizabeth.

Elizabeth smiled.

“But I need to you be on your best behavior or else we’ll have to cancel it. Understand?”

Elizabeth nodded.

“Promise?”

“I promise.”

*

“Who would you like to invite to your party?”

Elizabeth sat back on her heels and wiped sweat off her brow.

“Your hands are all dirty. You should wear your gloves, honey.” Lucy tossed a weed in her bucket.

“It’s hard to get the roots with them on.”

Lucy smiled. “Here, let me show you something.”

Elizabeth crawled over, sidling her hot sweaty body up against Lucy.
Lucy picked up a dandelion weeder. “What you want to do is put it in right beside the weed.” The steel tang slid into the earth with a slight curve. “And once you’ve pushed it in about this far, you just pull back, and....” They both heard a smart pop beneath the dirt. Lucy gripped the weed with her gloved hand and lifted it out of the soil, root and all.

“Cool!"

Lucy handed the weeder to Elizabeth. “She’s all yours.”

Elizabeth took it by the hardwood handle and carefully walked over to the flower bed on the other side of the porch. She knelt and positioned the prongs beside a weed, then stopped, remembering her gloves.

“You sweetie. You’re being such a help today. You know, that sun tea should be ready. How about I make us a glass?” Lucy stood and picked a jug of warm amber liquid off the porch.

Elizabeth smiled as she put on her gloves. Something bit her. She retracted her hand. A dried stem full of spines was hooked into the side of her middle finger.

“You all right, honey?” Lucy paused on the porch, cradling the tea.

Elizabeth shook it off her finger. “Fine.” She smiled and put the glove on.

Lucy disappeared into the house.

Elizabeth took the glove off. The spines had torn open jagged little holes. The blood was pooled and starting to roll down her hand. Elizabeth wiped it in the grass. The blood smeared into rust along her skin.

Inside, Lucy was filling two glasses with ice, finding two straws, and cutting two lemon wedges.

Elizabeth licked at the blood. Each lap left the wound bright and clean. Petals of white skin curled around pink centers slowly filling with red. She sucked her finger, drawing the rich liquid
out of the little wells. She picked at the white skin surrounding them, each thin layer stretching and detaching with ease. With the skin gone they looked shallower, more like dents than holes.

The screen door opened and Lucy came out carrying two glasses of tea. They sat on the porch, sipping from straws and looking across the front lawn.

“How about we invite Sarah.”

Elizabeth nodded her head.

“And Rebekah and Jill. That makes three.”

Elizabeth kept nodding between sips from her straw.

“Maybe one more. Is there anyone else?”

“Luke?” Elizabeth looked up at her mother.

Lucy picked up her glass and bit the straw. “Hmm. Boys aren’t allowed at slumber parties.

Is there anyone else?”

Elizabeth picked at her shoe lace. “Marico?”

Lucy was silent.

Elizabeth looked up at her.

“You know she isn’t allowed over here.”

Elizabeth hung her head.

“Well, three is probably plenty.” Lucy sipped her tea and set it down. She put on her gloves, picked up her bucket and sat down beside some mums.

Elizabeth followed after her.

Lucy smiled. “Later we’ll make our party list for the grocery store.”
“This is how you feel for firmness.” Lucy picked up a granny smith and pressed her fingers into the flesh. She set it down and selected another one.

Elizabeth copied her. “This one’s good.”

Lucy held open the bag. Elizabeth tossed it in.

“They’re the best for candy apples. Now we need little caramels for melting.”

*

Elizabeth was buckled in the car. Lucy loaded the last of the groceries into the back just as Jetty’s station wagon came pulling into the parking lot.

“Elizabeth, stay here. I’ll be right back.”

Lucy shut the trunk and walked across the lot.

Jetty was helping Luke out of his car seat.

Lucy crossed her arms. “Hi, Jetty.”

Jetty jumped. She turned around, blocking Luke and resting her freckled arm across the open car door. “Lucy.”

“Didn’t mean to scare you.”

“You shouldn’t sneak up on people like that.”

“I wasn’t sneaking.”

“Huh.” Jetty tapped her fingers on the door. “Kind of like you weren’t sneaking the other day when you were waiting outside my house in your car? Did you not mean to scare me then either? Because you did a little bit. Lu. It was a little creepy.”
Lucy snorted. "Oh, don’t be so dramatic. I was on my way to the appointment I told you about. You said you guys were leaving so when I drove by and saw you were there, I was a little confused."

"Our house isn’t on the way to anything, Lu. We live in a cul-de-sac. I watched you turn around at the end to get back out."

"Well why did you lie to me about leaving? If you didn’t want to look after Elizabeth, you could have just said so."

"I did say I couldn’t watch her and yet you showed up anyway." Jetty turned and unbuckled Luke, picking him up and resting him on her hip before shutting the door. "Look, Lucy. I think we should take a break for a while." Jetty started walking toward the shopping carts lined up outside.

Lucy followed. "Fine. Sure. I just don’t understand why you’ve lying to me."

Jetty swung Luke into the buggy’s baby seat. "I’m not." She pushed her cart toward the entrance.

"Just like you weren’t lying when you said you had a family thing the night Dave and I went to his boss’ party? But then it turned out you were at the pool anyway and Steve was just home doing nothing?"

Jetty stopped, let go of the cart and walked right up to Lucy.

"Fine. You know why? It’s because what happened at the beach with Elizabeth was weird and I don’t want her around my son. I do care about you, Lu. I do. We’ve been friends for a long time. But first it was the beach and then the pool. Dr. Black called after the pool and that confirmed it for me. I just don’t think it’s a good idea if we see each other anymore."
Tears were beginning to build behind Lucy’s eyes. “So she did call you. And you told her what happened, right? Jetty, she won’t believe me. I told her Elizabeth did it to herself but she wouldn’t believe it. I know it’s weird. I don’t know what to do.”

Jetty hesitantly laid a hand on Lucy’s shoulder. “Look, I don’t know either. But I can’t help you. You should see Dr. Black. If anyone can help, it’s her.”

Lucy pulled away. “Did you hear what I just said? She won’t believe me. She seems to think it’s my fault somehow. But, you told her. You told her what really happened, right?”

“You can be harsh with Elizabeth.”


“It isn’t just now, though. is it?”

“What do you mean?”

“I think it’s been going on for a long time. I don’t know exactly what happened with Marico, but I do know her mother wants nothing to do with you and Elizabeth. And that was over a year ago.”

Lucy was stunned. “That’s not…it had nothing to do with…Elizabeth just made her pee in a bucket!”

Jetty’s eyes widened. She opened and closed her mouth. “Lucy, we can’t see each other anymore. I don’t want Elizabeth around Luke. I hope you can work it out with Dr. Black. For both your sakes.”

Jetty turned, grabbed her cart, and disappeared through the automatic doors.
‘What’s wrong, mom?’

Elizabeth’s eyes were soft. Lucy smiled. “Oh nothing.” She wiped at tears on her face as she started the car.

Elizabeth reached up and brushed a tear with her index finger. She kissed it. “There, all better.”

Elizabeth opened her dresser drawer and slowly withdrew the pink a-line, white tulle flopped heavily to the floor. Elizabeth took off her pajamas and stepped into the dress. She pulled it up, feeling the stiff material itch against her legs. She shut the drawer smartly and smashed her finger in the process.

“Ow!”

Lucy poked her head around the corner. “What happened?”

Elizabeth looked up. tears in her eyes. “I just wanted to wear the dress you got me.”

Lucy bent down. “Let me see.”

Elizabeth held up a swollen finger.

Lucy took it in hand. “It’s red but it doesn’t look like the skin is broken.” Lucy looked at Elizabeth. Her lips were red and rosy. The dress really did look good on her. If it weren’t for the large white bandage on top her head. “You didn’t do this on purpose did you?”
Elizabeth furrowed her brow and pulled her hand away. "No. I just wanted to wear the dress so I would look nice for my appointment today."

Lucy stood up. "Ooh, I think I stood up a little fast." She steadied herself in the doorway. "What appointment?"

"With Dr. Black."

Lucy felt a churning in her stomach. "Hang on."

The phone rang as she dashed for the bathroom. "I'll get it!"

"No --" Lucy vomited into the toilet.

"Hello?"

Lucy wiped her mouth then felt her stomach twist again.

"Hi. Rachel." Elizabeth giggled. "We're coming to see you."

Lucy flushed the toilet, grabbing the hand towel.

"I'm wearing a dress."

She vomited again.

"Ok."

Lucy flushed the toilet and was washing her mouth out at the sink.

Elizabeth stood in the doorway. "Nurse Rachel says we're late for Dr. Black."

Lucy dried her mouth. "Come here. Let me look at your head."

The surrounding area was enflamed. The skin was raised and stretched against the stitches. Wet scab filled in portions of the gash, puss bulged in others.

"Let's put some ointment on that."
Lucy spread the gel onto her finger and applied it to the wound. The different colors and textures disappeared beneath an opaque smear. Elizabeth winced, but she didn’t make a sound. Lucy applied more ointment. The wound all but vanished under a thick layer of gel. Lucy looked at her in the mirror. “You know, your head looks pretty good, and you’re so pretty today, how about we go and have a picnic instead of going to the crumby doctor’s office?”

Elizabeth frowned and pulled on her dress.

Lucy raised an eyebrow.

“Well...Ok!” Elizabeth smiled.

Lucy smiled. “Good.”

*

“You look so pretty.”

Lucy laughed and turned her face toward the sun as she closed her eyes. “So do you. In your little pink dress.” Breeze from the river blew through her hair, lifting her curls. “What a lovely picnic.”

Elizabeth set her sandwich down, scooting from the shade of the trees toward her mother under the sun. She brushed Lucy’s hair back with her hand. “You look so pretty.” Elizabeth edged in closer.

Lucy felt the brisk of little fingers over her skin. She shuddered. Cool shadow fell over her face. She opened her eyes to a wide black neck obscuring the sun. She felt the press of moist lips on her brow. She pushed it away.

Elizabeth fell back on her bum, startled.
Lucy sat up, eyes narrowed. “What were you doing?”

“I just wanted to kiss you.”

“Were you being Andrew?”

“No.”

Lucy shaded her eyes with her hand. She stared. Elizabeth seemed so little, so young. “Do you want to be Andrew?”

Elizabeth blinked. She gripped her dress. She looked at her mother, reclined on the grass against a background of old rosebushes. “You look red.”

A trickle of ointment melted from Elizabeth’s head.

“Elizabeth, do you want to be Andrew?” Lucy sat back in the shade, dropping her hand, asking with open eyes.

The ointment slugged along Elizabeth’s temple. “No.”

“Do you want me to be the wicked stepmother?”

Elizabeth wiped the droplets away. “No. You’re good.”

Lucy smiled and held out her arms. “You’re my little Elizabeth, aren’t you?”

Elizabeth fell into them, nestling into her mother’s neck.

Lucy kissed the top of her head.

*

“Are you ready? Your guests are going to be here any minute.”

Elizabeth pulled on her dress and bounced on her toes. “Yes.”

The doorbell rang.
They looked at each other.

Lucy smiled.

“Better get it.”

*

“OK, girls, we’re going to bed now. If you need anything we’re just down the hall.”

“Is there a nightlight?” Sarah pulled on her thick brown bangs.

“You shouldn’t be afraid of the dark.” Rebekah unrolled her sleeping bag. “It’s just like the day but with no lights on.”

“Yes, thank you Rebekah.” Lucy smiled at Sarah. “But we have nightlights anyway. There’s one here and one in the bathroom if you need to get up.”

Rebekah fluffed her pillow. “Yeah, but you shouldn’t be afraid of the dark in the first place. You’ll see when you get older.”

Lucy turned to go.

“Mom, turn the lights off!”

Lucy paused in the doorway, then flicked off the light switch.

*

“What games should we play?”

“I’m tired.”

“Jill, that’s because you didn’t take a nap like mom told you to....”
"Rebekah! I said I didn’t need one!"

"Jill, you’re still little. You need naps."

"No, I don’t!"

Sarah pulled on her bangs. “Don’t fight, you guys.”

“We could play pretend.”

“I brought my Barbie!” Sarah produced a tan-skinned doll with brown crimped hair from her sleeping bag.

“That’s Teresa, not Barbie.” Rebekah tapped her fingers. “And pretend is more of a kid’s game....”

Sarah tugged on Teresa’s crimped pony tail. “I like her better.”

“We could play truth or dare.” Rebekah sat on her sleeping bag and crossed her legs.

“How do you play that?”

They all circled around Rebekah.

“It’s like this, I ask one of you, ‘truth or dare?’ and you have to pick one.”

Sarah stroked Teresa’s hair and sighed.

“Here, I’ll show you: Elizabeth, truth or dare?”

Elizabeth blushed. “Hmmm...truth.”

Rebekah smirked and tapped her finely pointed chin. “Do you...like any boys?”

Sarah giggled and scooted closer.

Elizabeth’s cheeks flushed darker. “What do you mean?”

“You know, like, do you like any boys.”

Jill giggled and yawned.

“My face feels hot.” Elizabeth felt her forehead.
Rebekah clucked "No, you have to answer. That's the game."

"Yeah, come on, come on!"

"I feel hot."

"Elizabeth." Rebekah crossed her arms. "You have to answer."

Elizabeth felt her cheeks. "I don't like any boys."

Rebekah rolled her eyes. "Fine. Now you have to ask someone. But you guys --" Rebekah stood up. "You have to be honest or it doesn't work. And same with dares. If you get dared, you have to do it. OK?" Rebekah looked at each of them.

They all nodded.

Rebekah slowly sat down. "OK, Elizabeth, you go."

"Sarah, truth or dare?"

Sarah giggled and pulled her sleeping bag over her face. "Umm mamama... dare!"

They all squealed.

"I dare you... to... take your shirt off!"

Their faces screwed up.

"Uhhhh..." Sarah pulled her sleeping bag over herself. "Why?"

"I dared you. You have to do it. Rebekah said." Elizabeth looked at Rebekah expectantly.

Rebekah rolled her eyes. "Sarah, just do it."

Sarah hunched over and pulled her night shirt over her head. Two thin little shoulders shivered in the nightlight.

The sound of crickets chirped outside.

Sarah smiled nervously, giggled and whipped her shirt back on. She bunched her sleeping back into a kind of wall and hid behind it.
Rebekah stood up again. “And you guys, you have to make them cool dares. Not weird ones.”

“What’s a cool one?” Jill asked from behind her bag.

Rebekah sat back down. “Do me and I’ll show you.”

Sarah popped her head out. “Ok. Truth or dare?”

Rebekah toyed with her thin, gold chain necklace. It had a caged heart she spun between her fingers.

“Truth.”

Sarah looked around the room. “Hmm.”

Elizabeth was watching her.

Sarah hid behind her sleeping bag.

“Come on, Sarah.” Rebekah was pulling on her necklace.

“Oh! I know -- do you like Teresa or Barbie better?”

Rebekah tutted. “No. That’s not cool. Ask me if I like any boys.”

Jill giggled sleepily and hugged her pillow.

“Do you like any boys?”

Rebekah smiled. “No. But a boy named Daniel really likes me. He’s sent me five love letters.”

“Ohhhh.” Sarah pulled on her bangs. “Is he your boyfriend?”

“Now, Sarah.” Rebekah smiled precociously. “You only get one question. Jill, truth or dare?”

Jill was curled around her pillow, snoring on top her sleeping back.

“Uh. Jill.” Rebekah poked her.
Jill yawned.

Rebekah poked her again. “Jill. I dare you...to...wake up!” Rebekah poked harder. Jill groaned and sat up.

“OK, Jill, go.”

“Jill -- ask me, ask me!” Elizabeth had stretched her large night shirt over her knees and was bouncing up and down.”

Jill’s voice was groggy. “Truth or dare?”

“Dare.” The neck of her t-shirt was gaping.

“I dare....” Jill’s eyes were slowly closing. “You.... To....”

“Dare me to be Andrew.”

“Who’s that?” Rebekah sneered.

Jill yawned. “Dare you to be Andrew.” She curled back around her pillow.

“Who’s Andrew?”

Elizabeth leaned back on her sleeping bag and crossed her long legs in front of her. “I’m Andrew.”

Crickets chirped outside.

“Hey, Sarah.” Elizabeth sat up, arms hung coolly over her knees. “You can be Teresa if you want.”

Sarah smiled from around her sleeping bag. “Really?”

“Yeah. Rebekah, who do you want to be?”

The white light of the moon appeared through the tops of the windows.

“What are we even playing?”
Elizabeth shrugged, her shirt sliding around her shoulders. "We could play whatever you want. You could be the queen."

Rebekah smirked and fingered with her necklace. "And you two can be my sisters."

"Yeah!" Sarah clapped her hands together.

"But I'm the brother."

"Fine, but the younger brother. I'm the oldest. And Sarah's the next oldest."

Sarah beamed.

Rebekah got up and flopped on the moonlit living room couch, light falling languidly across her body. "My room is in the topmost tower of the castle."

"Mine too!" Sarah crawled on the couch with Rebekah.

Rebekah put her foot up. "No. Your room is below mine."

"Oh." Sarah slid off the couch.

"But you can come and visit me sometimes."

"Can I visit you know?"

"Yes."

Sarah crawled back on the couch as Rebekah made room for her.

"Andrew, your room is in the basement." Rebekah waved Elizabeth back. "The basement is far away. In the kitchen probably."

Elizabeth stood up, stepping over Jill on her way to the kitchen. "Jill can be the dog."

Jill sighed in her sleep and rolled over.

The girls laughed.

Elizabeth sat on the kitchen floor. The tiles were cool, shaded with moonlight. The kitchen was bright but for the open door leading to the basement.
“OK, it’s night and we’re all sleeping.” Rebekah and Jill closed their eyes.

Elizabeth lay against the floor and started pulling on her shirt, shuddering against the smooth tiles.

Rebekah moaned and stretched. “Brother better have tea ready for us in the morning.”

Elizabeth rolled onto hands and knees and crawled across the kitchen toward the stove, stretching her night shirt as she went. She silently took a large spaghetti pot from the bottom cabinet and filled it in the sink.

“Mmm, did you have a good sleep Teresa?” Rebekah was stretching, pushing her feet into Sarah’s back.

Elizabeth grabbed a chair from the table. “Tea’s coming, sisters.” Her gaping shirt fell to her elbows as she carried the chair over to the stove. She let it slip off her body entirely and then stood on the chair. In her underwear, bare chested and bathed in white moonlight, she hoisted the pot out of the sink and on to the stovetop. The pot’s weight screeched across the metal coil.

Elizabeth turned on the burner and hopped off the chair.

She heard the squeak of a door opening.

Elizabeth ran back into the living room. “You guys,” she hissed, sliding across the carpet on her knees. “Get in your bags!”

Footsteps down the hall.

“My dad’s coming!”

Elizabeth pulled out the nightlight.

The doorknob turned.

She pulled her sleeping bag over her bare body, goose bumps covering her naked legs and chest.
“What’s going on out here girls?”

They were all silent, except for the soft sound of Jill’s rhythmic breathing.

Elizabeth’s eyes were shut tight. The sleeping bag was pulled up to her eyebrows.

Footsteps through the room, near her back, beside her head.

A shiver ran up her spine.

He squatted behind her.

Her eyes were shut, but she felt a hand reaching across her face.

A few drops of pee dampened her panties.

The sound of metal scratching against the wall.

And then, the orange glow of the nightlight fell over her eyelids.

He stood up, walked toward the door. His steps were heavy.

“Now you girls go to sleep. It’s late. I don’t want to have to come back in here.”

He shut the door.

Sarah giggled.

Rebekah slapped her hand over Sarah’s mouth. “Shush,” she whispered. “He’ll hear you.”

They waited.

Elizabeth counted his steps as he disappeared down the hall. When they were gone she counted Jill’s breaths.

Finally, Rebekah got out of her bag and flopped back on the couch. “That was close you guys.”

Elizabeth looked at Rebekah, but kept hidden beneath her bag.

“Your dad’s kinda scary.” Rebekah rolled the heart on her necklace back and forth as she looked at the moon.
“I’m not scared.” Elizabeth’s reply was muffled through the bag.

“Then why are you still hiding?” Rebekah stretched.

“We just have to be more quiet.” Elizabeth rolled over and unplugged the nightlight. “Let’s play.” She got up and tiptoed into the kitchen.

“Why do you have your shirt off?”

“I’m the brother. This is how I dress.”

“You look more like a servant.”

*

Elizabeth stood on the chair and leaned over the pot. The burner was bright orange, steam was rising, but there were no bubbles.

“Rebekah, I don’t want to play anymore.”

“Teresa, you’re just grumpy because you haven’t got your breakfast tea.”

Sarah sunk further into the back of the couch. “I think we should just go to bed.”

Rebekah put her hands on her hips. “Sarah, don’t be a baby. Now, are you going to be Teresa or not?”

Elizabeth knelt before them. “Good morning, sisters. Did you sleep well?”

Rebekah brushed back her long dark hair. “As if you care. Where’s our tea?”

“I’m sorry. Your tea isn’t ready yet.”

“How dare you?” Rebekah put her foot on Elizabeth’s shoulder. “You’re going to make us late for our dress fitting!” She kicked Elizabeth.

Elizabeth crumpled dramatically on the carpet.
"Shhhhhhh!" Rebekah held a finger to her lips. "You fell too hard. He’s going to hear us."

They all waited in silence.

Jill rolled over.

"Let’s say I have big black bruise from where you kicked me."

Rebekah looked at Elizabeth and sneered. "Just go get our tea, servant." She waved Elizabeth away. "Teresa, sister, braid my hair will you?"

Sarah reluctantly withdrew from the couch and took Rebekah’s long locks in her hands. She limply started weaving one over another.

*

The water was boiling. Elizabeth pulled a plastic camping thermos from the cupboard and using the handle, dipped it into the water. She dried the sides and jumped down from the chair. Water splashed on her hand and she dropped the thermos. Steaming water spilled all over the floor.

"Ugh, where is our tea?"

"I don’t know."

"Teresa, pull the braid tighter, I don’t want it falling out. Andrew? Andrew where are you? Bring us our tea."

Elizabeth tried to brush the water back into the thermos with her hand, but it was scalding.

"Andrew?"

"Just a moment sisters...."

"Andrew come here now."
Elizabeth shivered and steeled her jaw. She took a knee before Rebekah, her hands itching and burning from the boiling water.

"Where's our tea?"

"Your majesty, there was an accident with the tea. Please forgive me."

Rebekah smiled. "Your majesty. I like that. You can call me that from now on. But you have to be punished for the tea."

Elizabeth bowed her head.

"I banish you to the woods." Rebekah pointed at the kitchen. "You can only come back if you bring us something."

"Yes, your majesty."

"There. I'm all done." Sarah retreated back into the couch.

Rebekah felt the braid. She pulled the binder off and flicked it at Sarah. "It's not tight enough. Do it again."

"But Rebekah, I'm scared," Sarah moaned. "What if he comes back? We should just go to sleep."

Dark shadows of maple tree branches stretched over the kitchen floor. Elizabeth lay on the ground. The steaming water sizzling against her stomach, arms and legs.

"The forest," she whispered.
Branch shadows wove around each other in sharp angles, the leaves looking like thorns in darkness. They covered the whole kitchen. Elizabeth followed their patterns up the walls, over the counters, to a plate of shining caramel apples.

She crawled toward them on her belly. Sliding through the spilled water. It burned, but she kept moving. As she neared the stove the sound of boiling filled her ears. The water on the floor felt hotter against her skin. But then she was past the stove and moving and up toward the apples. She reach out and took the largest one.

She carefully walked it back.

“Oh, look. It’s the servant. Back from the forest. You better have something good, servant, or it’ll be the mines for you.” Rebekah pointed downstairs.

Elizabeth presented them with the caramel apple.

“Ooh!” Sarah sat forward and reached out her hand.

Rebekah snatched the apple away. She took a bite.

“Good work, brother.”

Elizabeth stood up, back straight, chest out, hands at her sides. She felt the moonlight shining over her aching body.

Rebekah handed the apple to Sarah. She stood and walked around Elizabeth.

“But we’ve missed our dress fitting because of you and now we can’t go to the ball tonight.”

Elizabeth swallowed. “Can I go to the ball?”

Rebekah laughed. “No. If we can’t go, a servant like you can’t go.”

“Can I go to the ball?” Sarah was licking caramel off her fingers.

Rebekah huffed. “No. No one is going to ball.”
Sarah sat back into the couch.

"Unless..." Rebekah draped herself on the couch, resting her feet on Sarah's lap. "Unless you get us some." She looked at Elizabeth.

Elizabeth lit up. "I have a dress. The one I wore tonight. It's pink."

"No. Not kid stuff. Real dresses. Like what your mom had on under her robe."

"But...they're all in her room."

Rebekah tapped her chin. "They're probably sleeping."

"My dad's in there."

"I thought you weren't afraid of your dad."

Crickets chirped.

Jill sighed in her sleep.

"If you get us dresses, you can come to the ball."

Elizabeth stood tall. "Yes, your majesty."

*

She quietly opened the living room door and entered the dark hallway. She was silent as she walked past her room, past the bathroom.

Their door was open a crack.

There was the squeaking of wood.

Elizabeth peered in.

White sheets covered a large mound in the middle of the bed. It was moving, breathing, arms and legs stuck out of the blind creature at odd angels.
“A monster,” she whispered.

She tip-toed in and slowly opened her mother’s dresser drawer. She reached in a pulled out a slip on the first try.

She felt around again but only came out with panties, bras, socks.

The monster began to thrash more violently, its breathing heaving and gasping, rising in pitch.

Elizabeth’s heart raced.

The mound burst open. The silhouette of her father rose from the sheets, consuming the room.

Elizabeth grabbed the slip and escaped as quickly as she could.

*

“Here, your majesty.”

Elizabeth gave Rebekah the slip.

“Hmm. Let’s see if it fits”

Rebekah took off her pajamas and put it on.

The neck hung low and the hem touched the floor.

“Here.” Elizabeth tied a knot in each of the straps for Rebekah.

The hem lifted and the neckline rose.

“It’s perfect.” Rebekah turned and touched Elizabeth on the cheek. “You did well brother.”

“Where’s mine?” Sarah asked.

“I… I could only get one before the monster woke up.”
“But I asked you to get us both dresses.”

“I’m sorry, your majesty.”

Elizabeth dropped to her knee. Her burnt skin bursting with the movement.

“Does this mean I don’t get to go to the ball?” Sarah’s voice was tired, strained.

“Oh, no. You can still go to the ball. Now you’ll just get to go as my prince.”

Elizabeth looked up.

“I don’t want to be a prince.” Sarah crossed her arms.

“I could be the prince.”

“Quiet, slave.”

“Rebekah, I don’t want to be a boy. I don’t want to play.”

“Sarah, just go to the ball and then you can go to bed.” She held out her arm. “Now, come.”

Sarah took it.

“The only thing we need now is a way to get there. Elizabeth, how about you be the horse.”

“But I want to be the prince. You said I could go to the ball.”

“That’s where we’re going right now.” Rebekah spun her necklace between her fingers.

“But you have to be the horse so we can get there.”

Elizabeth got down on her hands and knees.

Rebekah and Sarah sat on her back.

“Now ride!” Rebekah pointed toward the kitchen. “The ball’s over there.”

Elizabeth crawled forward, straining under their weight.

They got off, stepping into warm water.

“Ew, why is it wet?”
“From the tea accident your majesty.”

Rebekah clucked. “Well this is supposed to be the ball so pretend like it isn’t here.” She extended her hand to Sarah “Dance with me, my prince?”

Elizabeth reached to take it.

Rebekah grabbed Sarah instead, pulling her close. “I know you, I walked with you once upon a –”

“You said I could be the prince.”

Elizabeth stood in front of the basement door, almost disappearing into the blackness.

Rebekah swayed back and forth with Sarah. “I did not. I said you could come to the ball. And you’re here. As a horse.”

“I’m Andrew! And you said I could be the prince!”

“Shhhh!” Rebekah hissed. “They’ll hear you.”

The clock began to chime.

Rebekah jumped. “It’s midnight. Time for love’s first kiss.”

She kissed Sarah on the lips.

Sarah pulled away and began to cry.

“Shhh! Sarah! Sarah stop, get on the horse before the clock stops. Or the spell will be broken.” Rebekah looked at Elizabeth, standing in the doorway. “You don’t want to be stuck as a horse do you?”

Elizabeth got down, as the clock kept chiming. Rebekah and Sarah climbed on.

Elizabeth started bucking.

The girls tried to hang on but Elizabeth kept kicking out and popping her hips, trying to throw them off.
“Elizabeth, stop!” Rebekah cried.

Sarah was sobbing louder.

With a final burst Elizabeth reared up. Rebekah landed hard on her tailbone and Sarah went flying off. She caught herself in the doorway to the basement, but her fingers slipped and she vanished into the darkness. The sound of her body hitting the stairs mingling with the chime of the clock. There was a final thud, followed by silence.

Heavy footsteps grew louder and louder.

The big light in the living room turned on.

Jill opened her eyes. “Is it morning?”

“Girls?”

Elizabeth and Rebekah were frozen in place.

Dave came into the kitchen, followed by Lucy.

“Girls what the heck is going on out here?”

“N-nothing.”

“Why is water everywhere?” Lucy sighed. “Oh for heaven’s sake, Elizabeth, why don’t you have a shirt on? Why is your stomach red?” Lucy looked around. “Where’s Sarah?”

Elizabeth and Rebekah looked at each other.

Rebekah pointed downstairs. “She...she...”

Dave sighed. “Are you girls been playing in the basement? Elizabeth, I told you girls to go to sleep.”

He turned on the light to downstairs. “Sarah, come on up --” Dave choked. “Oh fuck!”

Everyone looked down the staircase.

Sarah lay at the bottom, her feet broken over her back, dark blood pooling around her head.
Rebekah started screaming.

"Oh my god!" Lucy grabbed Rebekah and Elizabeth, pulling them away.

Dave tore down the stairs. "Lucy, call an ambulance!"

Jill entered the kitchen, rubbing sleep from her eyes.

"Girls stay in the living room!" Lucy hurried them out of the kitchen.

Jill started screaming.

The girls seemed frozen, their mouths open in never-ending wails. Except Elizabeth. She was silent.

"Stay in the living room!" Lucy felt herself moving. Every step was heavy.

Her finger was pressing 9-1-1.

The sound of boiling rolled loudly in her ear.

"I need an ambulance to -- "

The burner was glowing bright orange, water rumbled in the pot. Lucy walked toward the stove, hand outstretched to turn off the burner. She slipped on the wet floor. As she fell, her hand caught the handle of the pot. It swirled once and tipped over. Boiling came crashing down.

*

"You’re going to go stay with your grandparents." Dave patted Elizabeth’s bandaged hand for a while. "It won’t be for long. Just until your mom is feeling better." Tears fell from Dave’s eyes, pit patting on Elizabeth’s hospital bracelet.

Elizabeth lay back against her pillow, looking at him. "I want to see mom."
Dave looked up, his mustache dripping. "You can't honey. She's...she's sleeping right now. She can't see anyone."

"I'll kiss her awake then."

Dave squeezed Elizabeth's hand. "She's in the city, sweetie. I'm going to go see her soon. But grandma and grandpa are here, and they're excited to have you stay with them while mom gets better."

Dave turned toward the hospital room windows.

A blue eyed, gray haired woman caught his gaze, smiled and nodded.

"Come on, Bart."

A tall, thin, white-haired man put his hand on the small of her back and followed her into the room.

Dr. Black and Officer Petty talked in the hall.

"Hi, honey." She walked straight to Elizabeth, wrapping her in a warm, pillowy hug.

Bart stood next to Dave. "It's alright. We'll take good care of her."

Dave smiled through red eyes. "I know, Dad."

"But Grandma, you live in Alaska."

"We do." She nestled on the bed with Elizabeth. "And you are going to love it. There'll be chickens and goats and a garden. There's a creek by the house, and a swing. Everything a child could dream of."

"The fresh air will do you good, kiddo." Bart squeezed Dave's shoulder. "It'll do her good."
“I just can’t believe it’s been 10 months are already.”

“Don’t cry, Grandma.” Elizabeth kissed her tears.

She laughed. “Oh, you are the sweetest thing.” She wrapped Elizabeth into a hug. “I’m going to miss you.”

“I’m going to miss you too, Grandma.”

She stroked Elizabeth’s thick brown hair. “But your mommy and daddy are excited to see you.” She let go and looked Elizabeth in the eyes. “And they have a very special surprise for you when you get home.”

*

“You excited to see your mom?”

“Yes!” Elizabeth smiled.

“She’s excited to see you.” Dave unlocked the front door. “And there’s someone else who’s excited to see you....” He opened the door.

Lucy was sitting on the living room couch in a white cotton nightgown. Her curly hair was swept into a bun, little ringlets running down her neck. Her skin was pink with scars across her right eye, cheek, and down her throat.

“Hi, honey.” She held out her hand.

Elizabeth walked toward her.

There was a sigh.

Elizabeth looked at Lucy’s chest.
Lucy pulled back her nightgown.

A blond baby sucked at her breast.

“This is your brother, Simon.”

Simon sucked, eyes closed, long dark lashes curling off his round cheeks.

“Oh!” Lucy looked up at Dave with a surprised start. “He bit me!”

Dave chuckled.

Lucy pulled her breast away.

She tapped Simon’s mouth with her fingers. “No, no.”
CONCLUSIONS

*Andrew* is not overtly masochistic in the way *Venus in Furs*, or some of its contemporary modifications (such as an already classical *The Story of O* or quite recent *Fifty Shades of Grey*) are, since my intertextual transposition of Masoch shifts the focus from domination and submission, within the sexual and gender specific sphere, onto the familial domain, within the mother-daughter paradigm. In doing so the many symptoms of masochism—as defined in my introduction—take on new meaning. However, the fantasy/fiction of the novella are masochistic, and from this perspective, ironically, the normalizing societal rules are based on identical principles to those which society terms as perversion in masochistic scenarios (societal norm is thus perversion), and as such, my thesis makes such certainties of a law-of-nature type—in gendered mastery and submission dynamic in particular—fluctuate.

For instance, Elizabeth’s fantasy, in simple terms, is that she be allowed to take off her shirt like boys do, and in doing so, be allowed the freedom and power that public shirtlessness signifies in larger society (pride instead of shame in one’s body/exposure instead of hiding). Thus the perversion is that one sex is allowed freedoms and power and another is not, simply based on anatomy that signifies, on the one hand, sexualisation of the female body, and on the other, societal conventional male fear of woman’s sexuality. The irony in this scenario is that Elizabeth is five years old and at this point, anatomically identical from the waist up to her male friend, Luke. However, despite their physical sameness, the restriction of societal norms still apply so that even before her body betrays her, Elizabeth is confined to the shame and inequality that is the norm imposed on the female body.

This extends to renaming, where Elizabeth’s asking to be called by a boy’s name (Andrew) is more unconventional than assuming an alternative name within the same gender (for instance,
Severin becomes Gregor when he is enacting his fantasies with Wanda) in a sexual scenario. To outsiders, the concept that a girl could simultaneously exist in her sex and go by a male name is so foreign that they always assume Andrew is another person. For example, when Jetty hears the name, she asks, “Who’s Andrew?,” Dr. Black asks the same question, as does Dave (who, being Elizabeth’s father, should be involved enough to know who Andrew is, but isn’t) and finally, so do Elizabeth’s peers. All of these people know Elizabeth in close but outside ways and yet none of them can conceive of Elizabeth having an alter ego by the name of Andrew. The only exception is Dr. Black who tells Lucy that such role-play is a normal part of child development and something Lucy should embrace. Even Elizabeth’s friends, young girls, already subscribe to rigid confines of their gender and can’t conceive of embodying male freedoms outside the context of play/pretend. It is easier and more socially appropriate for Lucy to conceive of Elizabeth as something animal-like (“mama’s little fishy”) or even as a domestic slave (“Cinderella”) than it is for her to call Elizabeth by a name that would symbolically give her greater access to a wider range of privileges than she has under the name of Elizabeth, and therefore, to a wider range of power than Lucy herself is able to access as an adult.

The transference of the contract from the sexual sphere to the familial is most challenging of all masochistic symptoms. Adults freely consenting to a sexually degrading relationship, deriving pleasure from pain under masochistic contract, is perversion according to psychoanalytic prejudices. As mentioned in my introduction, capability in consent was not addressed by Masoch, Krafft-Ebing, Freud or Deleuze but becomes even more problematic when considering the contract of care existing between parents and their children. Lucy has full authority over Elizabeth, which Elizabeth can only disrupt by subversive means (convincing Lucy to call her Andrew). This relationship was not negotiated but imposed by social
expectations. No intervention is available other than the legal one, which is dependent on awareness of a situation and the degree of abuse, leaving Elizabeth with little alternative for escape until she is eighteen years old. By comparison, the contracts of traditional masochistic tales are much more forgiving and, therefore, far less perverse.

*Andrew* also differs from the previously mentioned masochistic novella and novels for its emphasis on character in addition to circumstance. For example, the aforementioned shirt scenario is filtered through Lucy's paranoia and anxiety for Elizabeth to conform to social rules and not let Andrew out in public. As such, *Andrew*, as expressed through Lucy’s characterization—her nervousness and anxiety—and can be read as a kind of possession story, or a split personality brought about by denial or something that Lucy finds difficult to control or manage, and because of this, a double meaning hangs there. It is through Lucy, rather than situational circumstance, that the reader may view Andrew as a different personality, not just a facet of Elizabeth. Of course Lucy's anxiety in response to Andrew, fear, worry, etc., work in both instances, but can be taken as a red-herring if the reader mistakes the significance of Andrew. Therefore, it is through the use of strong characterization that *Andrew* not only departs from the historical roots of its genre, but facilitates its masochistic approach. So, the reader can understand Andrew to be a possible dark force, something otherworldly—and see Lucy's anxiety as a fear of that, or the reader can simplify see Andrew as a strangely unacceptable gender choice—and see Lucy's anxiety as a fear of crossing the line of societal definitions of normality and acceptability. This bluff and red-herring card facilitates the explication of masochism because (recalling the Exorcist trope) with a new and differently gendered name and a tendency for violence, it is easy to read the story as possession, or some malignant force or dark reaction to something—not simply as a personality aspect of Elizabeth. It is this play on the character
assumptions of the reader, rather than the situational, that make the story unusual and provide space to provoke thought.

Hence, interpreting all of Andrew’s acts as psychological misses the point. Because Andrew is an alter ego, there is a disjuncture between the acts and their significance (as illustrated above). This disjuncture not only opens up room for ironic criticism of psychoanalytic prejudices but for an analogy of fictionalized trauma and children’s learning practices. Children learn through play. But it is, ironically, also through play that traumatic events can be addressed. For instance, dollhouses are how children learn about the requirements and roles of family life but they are also the go to prop for psychologists: “show me on the doll where he touched you.” In this way Andrew works the line between innocent de-realisation (testing boundaries, growing up) and pretend that has a more negative and deeply psychological drive (split personality, repetition, denial, masks, etc).

In the re-examining of Venus in Furs and, by extension, masochism as a whole, rather than through a psychoanalytic lens, I have questioned, in my creative project, the root of the concept and its classification as a perversion. While I still contend the affliction is a rare one—considering all the symptoms that comprise the phenomenon—each symptom is highly prevalent in societal expectations of normal gendered behavior. In Andrew, gender performativity’s ambiguity, wherein Elizabeth attempts to explore a variety of possible gender “positions,” is influenced by her age. The latter becomes a determining factor in her interpretation of gender roles, not as a factor of her actual gender—or rather the characteristics socially assigned to a particular biological sex—but as access to privilege and power, leaving one to question where perversion really lies.
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