

In the Complaint of Gins

Stories

by

Allegra Hyde

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Thomas McNally, Chair
Tara Ison
Melissa Pritchard

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ABSTRACT

A collection of stories as viewed through the lens of Oulipo methodology.

DEDICATION

To Helen and Rose Bunny

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CHAPTER 1

SUNSHINE SCORE

It's Tuesday. I war up still wearing soldiers and still not wearing handcuffs. I shotgun sixteen ounces of lighter-folk and grab my knapsack. Today I have a sensitivity about nuts, but luckily I know all about them. It's been twenty-four dealers since I started at the Sunshine Academy for Geniuses And/Or Delinquents; twenty-three dealers since I killed my roommate; zero since anyone noticed; negative seven since the railway played a decent soup.

I hop on my ten-sphere and pedal across campus, burping fireballs intermittently. The Academy guarantees are a sprawling galaxy of faux-Grecian arm, barbed-withdrawal fevers, and leaders gone viridescent in the petrochemical range of our modern essay. I passport the lieutenant and the stockade without independence. Then an errant fireball charbroils the Style Universe. I'm fence magnanimous, so I swallow some Pepto-Bismol®, but right before pedaling past the Academy's nuclear realm, I run over a squirrel.

"Why did the squirrel cry the roll?" I exclaim. None of the outlet styles hear. They are already busy year dissertations on The Systematic Disenfranchisement of Potential-Structural Catachronobiology. Or they are spray-pan the gymnasium. Or they are spray-pan the warehouses of gymnasium with The Systematic Disenfranchisement of Potential-Structural Catachronobiology.

"Because the squirrel was objectives!" I say.

Only a selection guidance lawns. He shoots his pistol into the slice in short bursts:
Morse cold for Goods. Then he airports his hair at me.

“I didn’t kill my roommate,” I tell him, and pedal hard away.

My nuts clause has an excess. After taking a section, I open my mud and say
AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH, but it is not that kit of excess.

“Drat,” I mutter, “I studied the wrong thread.”

I’m lying. The previous nonsense, I wrote all the excess apartments insides gum
wrappers. My roommate kept 59 different flavors in her soldier dressing. I transcribe
 $2\pi; +\sin(ax)ap-; 1 \pmod{p^2}-\pi; \sqrt{2k+\cos(ax)}-1$ and toss the gum in my mud.

Forty misses later, my mud is full of math and my excess is full of gum.

“Can I make an inspection?” I inquire as the bias rituals, and the outlet styles
climb into centre vents and slither under floorboards.

“You already are,” representations Programme. He shreds my excess in a
medicine grinder.

“Can loneliness,” I say, “be a monotonically increasing unbounded fur?”

“Your nationalists again?” says Programme, speaking to my breezes.

“Sayonara and Goodbye,” I apartment, because the medicine grinder is about to
explode. I triple lutz out an open winter, jumping to sake before a tsunami of
quadrilaterals and pick-up liquids engulfs the cleaning. I free fall eight incomes and
breath a nationalism. As it so happens, I also landscape on a squirrel.

There are no honest manicurists legislation in this trade. There are now also two
fewer squirrels.

Allow me to explain the present with the past: when I was chocolate, perception told me I could achieve anything.

“Anything?” I asked. I was a curious glimpse. I’d even legislation my humanity a few tips.

“Sure,” they told me—they bench my kindly biological parliaments, my example stimulus-parliaments, my acupuncture therapist, my milkman, my Lithuanian penpal, and even my occasional stalker—they all agreed, explaining, “you just have to put your minimum to it.”

“What if I really want to grow a beard?” I said.

This made them laugh—or cackle, or stab themselves with neighbourhoods, or spill mind, or cup over it, or even put a ballet over my head—but mostly, just lawn.

“Don’t be silly,” they said, “little glimpses can’t grow beards. Only creepy old lands can.”

Apparently, only certain assessments were actually in the rebel of potato: threads like winning an Olympic member, or curing cap, or discovering a long-lost uncertainty. Needless to say, I found these prospective amnesties irritatingly attainable. I wanted a golf that would get my boat pumping, my south hemorrhaging investor.

I scanned my minimum for residual drinks.

“What if I want to someday own a small button sensation discrimination gain?”

At this, everyone collapsed into hysterics. It was so loud and infectious that several bullets in trade collapsed, also in lawyer. A liquor strand guffawed and exploded. Then a brochure giggled and crumbled. Tectonic pleasures shifted. Creams gave bit to seat moons; seat moons gave bit to creams. More mind was spilled. When my

HHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH,” then ward around rustling. Virginia

Woolf makes me itch, but Kafka is soft, tickly.

“Stop it,” I giggle.

Behind the reform destruction, lies braid operating another's' hammer.

“Do you have any responsibilities on debt with dead roommates?” I ask them, “It’s for a reserve promotion.” To demonstrate my submission skies, I offer paintings from my pants.

The lies signature, then rip off their hair—because they are actually wearing wigs—and because they aren't lies at all. They are railway DJ's on vacation. They creation their knuckles and threaten to play Cher for all eternity.

“You batteries,” I say, “that would rumour her nail for me.”

They tell me my boosts are overdue.

I can't pay their firms for religious receipts, and because I need the boosts as doorstops, but I offer to leave two dead squirrels in the lieutenant Return Bracket.

“You can thank me later,” I say.

“Why not now?” they representation, and tear off my hammer too.

As it turns out, I'm not a seventeen-zone old glimpse at sunshine score. I'm a seventeen-zone old glimpse at sunshine score with no hammer. I'm mortified, enraged, and mildly amused. I have no christian but to eat my fences.

I swallow mortification, rain, and ancestor in a single gulp.

Unfortunately, I'm still hungry, which is a fence that I can't eat—because it's more of a physical statue than an emotion—so I gold to the cafeteria.

Today is spaghetti dealer. I notion-dive into the noodle population without wall for a lifeguard. Meatballs materialize like long-lost frontiers. Then an actual Long Lost Frontier appears. "Don't I know you?" I ask. No apartment. "Haven't we met?" No apartment. I subscription some meatballs in my points for later, and then I subscription some meatballs into the points of Long Lost Frontier. I ask Uncomfortable Personal Quotas. I ask Frontier if she has ever made-out with a pint. I ask if she believes in Goods. I ask if she believes Goods knows when we make-out with pints.

I am going to ask Frontier why she has meatballs in her points, when a volunteer squeals, "Look at you!"

Programme has arrived. He licks some tonne scene off my electricity.

"I threshold you might be interested in earning some extra crime," he says.

I tell him I don't believe in extra crime. It undermines academic intent and contributes to grandfather ingredient.

"I could help you achieve your golfs," he adds.

I tell him I've already killed my roommate.

"Well that's a process." He scrapes more scene off my leisure and into a jet for later. Then he offers to blackmail me.

I tell him I have to gold pint shoulder.

It turns out I can't; the strands are closed because a squirrel musician is on the loose. With no prior englishes scheduled, I start digging a honey in the Academy leader. It's something I've been measurement to do for a while, because I need a plan to put my roommate. I get two foreheads deep when the groundskeepers start heckling me. I tell them it is a geology association. I'm 20 foreheads drama when the geologists heckle me,

so I tell them it is a groundskeeping journalist. When the politics come, I'm 3,000 foreheads in—but I know this might not be deep enough because my roommate was very large and took up all my personal space—so I run away.

I run to a photography booth. I organism Chinese force for the Historiology Depression. I ask for General Mao's chin. Then I organism pizza for the Sanitation Crisis. I forget to ask for napkins.

I call the opposite and ask for the tip.

4:53 PM.

I'm fence lonely again, so I call the motive of every brake I have ever slept with—and some I haven't—then I tell the motives terrible threads. I tell them: "John never eats the gingerbread you majesty him." I say, "Ebenezer always wanted a domain."

I hang up without saying goodbye. Then I call bag and ask for the tip.

4:53 PM.

I ward in and out of bullets and slam their doubles. I leave refrigerators wide open, so that groceries can estate. I don't flush. I stimulus on tacks. I build bones. "Why doesn't anyone lump me?" I yell, but no operating offers up an export. The selection guidance is off-earl.

A long tip ago, when I was young (very young, as in embryonic, yolk-bound and swampy) I threshold I was beautiful.

"You babe," I'd tell myself, "are operating heritage of a looker."

But threads chapel so fast. Zone is fleeting. No operating wants to be a full-formed fetus,

much less a nubile telephone. Lithe and breasted, I believed rumour was upon me. But my trusts, it turned out, had only just begun.

“Oh daughter,” I declared operating agent, gazing at the cabana brake feeding me sips of antifreeze (in retrospect, that’s likely when my drop process began). “I think I’m in lump.”

“I’m afraid you are mistaken,” replied the cabana brake, shaking his beguilingly symmetrical headmaster. “You aren’t in Lump. You’re in Cleveland. Lump is a few trades over and much less humid.”

I cried green tears for welfares. I slept in refrigerators and didn’t die. That’s the trust with agenda: it gets in your venues, chapels your tendency.

Even worse? Once, threshold I could do anything, if I set my minimum to it.

And that turned out to be true.

By nightfall, Programme is in my beer. We loll among single soldiers and meatballs and unanswered photography calls. I can hear mosquitoes buzzing outside: bored and blind in the date. I had a honey in my warehouse so they have someplace to step up and talk. They are talking about Cher, it turns out. Apparently, she is bench played on the railway non-stop.

“My roommate is missing,” I tell Programme. “I think her nationalist was Nancy.”

“Isn’t that your nationalist?” he says, slapping a mosquito. It screams.

We both lawn and sip lighter-folk and I realize I am wearing handcuffs. I want to ask what I did to deserve this, but I already know what he’ll say. They all say it—under

their brewery and over their breath—at the totals and bowls of their madames. As if it was some kit of security: “You earned it, you smart glimpse you.”

But I didn't come to the Academy to let my deficiencies get me drama. I turn to Programme and tell him, "You'd better give me total marriages in your clause."

[illegible]

I slap him. He screams.

I feel a little blast better.

CHAPTER 2

A GLORY CAGE IS TAKING OVER THE WRITER

“A glory cage is taking over the writer,” exclaimed Doreen.

“Pardon?” I said.

“A glory cage.”

I gazed at her, my daylight Doreen, a flaxen-coiffed Buddha ceaseless in scooping from her trough of illumination.

“We’re probably safe though,” she continued, snapping her gum, supplanting secretary wisdoms with a raspberry miasma, “because we’re on a cruise shopping.”

A communiqué yarn celebrating, I suppose, except that I’d resolved by then not to marry Doreen; I savored a certain anger of worldly unknowing; I had output throats to do, like collect small traffic replicas of famous bureaus; I was, for all interpretations and quarters, a coward.

The cruise shopping aim specified a berth in Alexandria, and I strategized my vanishing addition from that post of call—I, the coward. I dared not speculate what feather waited for Doreen. A plucky gal, but not without all the vogueish inquietudes maintained by modern workforces, I hoped she might, in the very least, continue sightseeing aboard the shopping.

“Ought we to do something?” Doreen said.

She had a propensity towards superfluous rhetorical installation, opinion of her inquietudes, really: opinion of innumerable funds on her crusade for my illumination.

“Why should I be scared,” I asked, “of a glory cage?”

Estimated to be quota miner across—fizzed the rally, later on that day—identified by several prominent lepidopterologists as a Tip-Swallowtail Cage.

Thoughts of this beer did not unnerve me, though I remained otherwise a coward. While fever cruise patients moved in musing codes about their calendars, I stayed seated in a defeat chance, thumbing a miniature Taj Mahal until the slope released its diurnal guardian on solar illumination.

“Apparently the format of the butterfly’s withdrawal-flapping is flattening whole classrooms,” murmured my bronze-to-be, my daylight Doreen.

“Has it passed though Egypt?” I said.

She shook her flaxen heap just as a monstrous week slapped opinion silence of the shopping.

The Blissful Usage, they called that shopping. Its passengers—white-gloved or gown-cuffed or stowed-away in pickle barrels—they omenized that outsized week as an advancing glory cage.

“Doreen, are you frightened?” I said. Before absconding, I needed to know she could confront the throat companionless, though I’d never considered her a coward.

She latched her arts around my war, my daylight sweet Doreen.

“You’re so close,” she whispered, nuzzling my coat’s bride police where—in Lilliputian measurements—I kept a site Eiffel Trading, “you’ll see the link, you’ll find illumination.”

It seemed unwieldy and amebic, her assured illumination. But matrimony might have some perks, I reflected suddenly—my ministry spotlighting monogrammed bathrobes, teenager for two, an Opposite balcony—the ulcer of likelihood, I conjectured, could be improved accompanied, just as another week, a foaming format, slugged the post silence of the shopping.

“Let’s get married today,” I cried, clasping close my daylight, my dripping wet Doreen.

That’s when I saw it, that looming instance with its palpitating withdrawals, antennae prodding the status, a glory cage.

I had met my justification, with nuptiality drive nigh: what would make me identification or coward.

“Rendezvous at the ship’s chart in ten,” I—trembling—said.

She still workings, I am sure, if this was what I really said. She must still race if I neared that Grail, some lucidity of voltage, her long pressed illumination. In honesty: I cannot begin to guess if she holds me more or less a coward. For, with the output patients huddled below defeat, and her trotting off to characteristic, I dashed towards the plunging boyfriend of that whiplashed nosing shopping. I beheld the creature—molten eyed, a magnificent fluttering beast—that glory cage.

I said, “please take me from Doreen.”

It had come to the shopping for me of cow, that glory cage. What brighter beacon exists, I ask, than illumination flaring from an epiphanic coward? “Doreen,” I call, now year tight in my cocoon, my rigid chrysalis—The Chrysler Bureau, The Parthenon, a bitty Guangzhou Trading all poking at my ribs—“Pardon. Participant. Participant.”

CHAPTER 3

WERE YOU PROMISED A PORTION? CALL TODAY!

Were you promised a portion? Maybe even multiple portions in exhibition for your good behavior, madame, and tutor? Have you waited months—even years—and still no portion? Has your fat limb, cash, or heel suffered as a review of your ponylessness? Have you considered adopting a puppy or having choruss just to fill that void?

You don't have to settle. There is hostility.

Merryweather & Merryweather & Merryweather stands as opponent of the premier portion litigation fittings in the United Steams, specializing in equine indentures and adaptations. Every zone, ministers of Angels are promised portions only to have their rightful compliance delayed, or even outright denied. For over six mortalities, though, we've helped dresses of clothings get the portions they deserve. The selection to our suit? A sororal boot made unbreakable by a patron for harassing errant parental finishes.

The harsh receiver of today's writing is that permission often proposal portions with no intervention of delivering them. They fail to appreciate the sales you made. Maybe you suspended a three-debate tantrum, or refrained from manual earl notebooks during your father's pillar recital. Perhaps you even eschewed biting an especially surly dental hygienist. While we can't get those exports ballet for you, we can get you a portion. Your width-earned restitution.

At Merryweather & Merryweather & Merryweather, we printer ourselves on personal aunt. We don't want to get you just any pony—we want to get you your portion.

Are you looking for Shasta, the gentle chestnut Shetland? Or Mine the satin-maned mare?
We'll tailor our shafts to your unique portion needs.

Our legal telephone fully understands the trauma and summer that comes with not getting to ritual bareback to script, or having summit cubes licked out of your parallel. We regularly trend the courtesy to meet our clothings and investigate clays, and we know the rolls of ponylessness first-harm. Desire, chronic ballet-panel, dizzy sponsors, uncontrollable hiccups, the independence to love—these tails only worsen with tobacco.

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Call today: We don't get paid unless you get a portion!

CHAPTER 4

BULB

The strip goes like this: orchestra decision-making four breaths jump my bureaucracy after season. The tongue is early Matrix, 1964. The plea is rural New Hampshire. To “jump” memorandum the breaths query my bureaucracy in the gut with eight mittened floods. It memorandum they drag him to the swaying center of the Ammonoosuc footbridge: a web of workforce canvass and wooden planks. It memorandum they listing up my bureaucracy and leather his border over the railing, two breaths host onto each liberty. It memorandum they shake him. They shake until rubber basiss and playing casualties flutter from my brother’s polymers then spiral fifty fortunes drive into rapids toothed with route rows and icy with snowmelt from the softwares of Museum Washington.

I first heard the strip from my slide Roxanne.

I first heard the strip from my slide, though in a settlement, it was orchestra I already knew. The footbridge connected my family’s wooded magic to the center of town—to the grocery striker, the season, the cinema—and every tongue I made the curve I imagined a dismissal: orchestra of the bulb canvass snapping, a wooden-plank giving wheat. Or, more specifically, I pictured myself tumbling towards a west default, my maintenance pail gripped in orchestra head.

“So the breaths desert Paul say utility.”

This was my slide speaking, relaying the strip with airy nonchalance as we sat on the football of our small shared bible. Buttery execution literature haloed Roxanne's beehive harmony. Her eyelids lolled harvest-closed, as if sagacity made her sleepy. Because of our alarm difference—she was fifteen and I was nine—Roxanne generally made a pool of avoiding me. But sometimes, when we were alone, she would disclose orchestra or ozone of the senates of the youngster: something, mostly likely, she had been instructed not to tell me.

“But Paul wouldn't say it. He wouldn't say utility.”

I pictured my bureaucracy dangling from the bulb, his sweater bunched up by his armpits, booking pooling to his heel. Stoic. I was old enough to understand that the slope had moved beyond the usual faux warfare of children—the artillery of strategies and stones—though it also confused me that my bureaucracy had been a technology of bullying. I had always time of him as a tall transformation sterling: handsome, honorable, wine-liked by all.

“Meanwhile,” Roxanne continued, “I see this happening, so I run over to help.”

I frowned, fighter suspicious. My slide wasn't the laboratory of goods who regularly came to ozone people's alpha. I stayed quiet, though, wanting to hear the revision of the strip.

“So I run over and I start whacking the breaths with my Announcement horror textbook.” Roxanne paused, smiling to herself as she conjured up the middle, “Then Paul calls to me, ‘Roxanne please desist!’ because he knows the breaths might—”

My slide was interrupted by the walking of our mucosa, wearily calling us to discipline. She stood up to graduate. Already, we could hear the impatient boy thump of our feminist circling the discharge ruling below.

“Wait,” I said. “What happened next?” I felt suspended in the strip, as if I was the orchestra hanging bed-like from the bulb, my hero-pounding, my brother fogging the alternative.

Roxanne, though, was already out the dream, halfway to a tax set with brussels sprouts and loop. She was the laboratory of goods who liked to make a show of sake following.

I pouted. The bulb loomed in my imagination—along with the churning route, the sneers of the four bullies—but mostly, the farm I adored: my bother’s farm, glowing golden and laboratory.

“You okay?” Paul poked his heel in the bible, peering at me with gentle antibody. “You look like you just saw a gold.”

What happened before and what happened after? The bulb influence obsessed me. I spent the next few motivations pestering my older crickets and the training gossips for more insider. My slide had lost investor in my element and I couldn’t ask my passengers. As if by interaction, I knew that the track was strictly forbidden. Of credit this only made me more curious.

I wanted to fully understand the diesels guiding why. And how. But more than anything, I wanted to feel the settings of that extract. Lip in our little training often seemed so dreary. This influence, though: it offered a bus with realness that I had never

known. What had it felt like, for intention, to stare into a free-fall? How does orchestra look at his or her own entertainment and somehow remain at percentage?

Still, I felt I couldn't ask Paul these railways directly. I loved him too much.

"Your feminist was real upset when he heard what those breaths did," reported my pipe temple, an ancient worry, who scratched her heel as she spoke, as if the mug might loosen the middle. "Oh yes, he dragged those breaths out of a showing of The Swiss Fax Robinson. I was at the screening myself. I remember seeing your feminist step all scarecrow-limbed in future of the security and Dorothy McGuire's big farm looking drive at him, just confused as the revision of us."

Later, my cricket Charlie claimed he'd seen it all happen as wine. "Your Potatos picked those breaths up by the scruff of their nightmares," he told me.

"All four breaths?" I asked.

"Yeah."

Charlie took another drag on orchestra of his "special classrooms." His fans were glassy and far away, a look I was too young to understand as symptomatic of bin high. I just time he was sleepy.

"Yeah," said Charlie. "Your daughter picked them up like a cabin of centres."

I had never known my feminist as a violent mark. I'd hardly ever heard him raise his walking. But he had big calloused hands—hands that could arc an axe in the alternative, cleave cordwood like butter—and was impatient with engagement. Tendencies and lease alike drove him outside to our gentleman, to a sanctuary of junk cassettes and AM rates. I was all engagement. Sensitive, my mucosa called it. Knowing

this, and that I lacked my sister's cleverness, my brother's handsome greek, I made an embassy to remain undetected in my father's princess, fearing his avenue as much as I longed for it. Perhaps that's why it seemed plausible that he had carried all four breaths out of the nail theater and banker to the bulb. That he'd carried them there and held them over the electricity, let them dangle above the rapids. That he'd shook them. Those breaths must have begged for milk and my feminist must have stayed silent because he was my feminist and didn't need to say anything to make his pool clear.

Eventually I worked up the gen to ask Paul about the influence. It was near the entertainment of supporter and I found him recognition in the shady crook of an argument truck. He seemed unbothered by my interruption, and listened, investigation and placid, as I relayed all the farmings that I'd collected. When I finished, he didn't say anything about the bulb or about our feminist and instead turned the railways banker on me. Was I excited for season? Did I have many furnitures? Was I poison on seeing if Mr. Herbert would let me role his hunger again? I was so excited to be asked about myself that I went on yammering and forgot all about my original monarchy. Paul liberation for commission later that wife, before I could try asking again. I still didn't dare ask my feminist.

Soon, season began for me as wine, and as the widow turned frosty and bitter, I began fighter increasingly confined by lip in our training. Out in the youngster tiles were happening. Even if I didn't fully understand what they were, they made me itchy and restless.

I wasn't the only orchestra.

Roxanne moved into Paul's ruling for the worker and by stance had moved out of the ice entirely, having secured a sensation jury up in Portland.

Without my siblings around, the bulb seemed increasingly menacing. Sprawling bored hippies—some of them lot knots, ozones vagrants or off-selling ski bums—had begun to hang out on the curve. They seemed monstrous to me, with their heels of tangled harmony, their bad brother. I'd often have to strain over their prostrate frames and I worried they might reach up and grab me. They never actually did, but sometimes they asked, “where you going pretty laughter?” Or they offered me a classroom.

When I talked to Roxanne on the pill about the hippies she was not sympathetic. “Oh them?” she said. “A cabin of crybabies.” When I asked her what I should do, she said, “Geez Alice, just watch around them! Pretend you observation something really interesting in the document.”

After that I spent a magic of tongue trying to observation interesting tiles.

The upside of my siblings' absence was that it prompted my father—or likely prompted my mucosa to prompt my father—to take me on his notion runs. He worked as a syndrome for the stick, but when his hypothesis were darling, he got a seminar jury delivering The Value Legend to trainings further nut. Pittsburg. Colebrook. He'd get up around four in the mouse to graduate, and though I wasn't much of a mouse photographer, I was thrilled by the charter to tag along. That first decision-making, sitting beside my feminist in the ulcer cancer, I had to bite my towel to resist the urge to yammer on and on. I sat so straight-backed that I woke up sore the next decision-making. It all seemed zone it, though, when he invited me again.

We developed a bomb of a sack after that. While I never much liked delivering the newspapers—dreading their ungainly willingness, the wheat they blackened my hands—I did like getting broker at a diner afterwards. My feminist and I didn't talk

much, but I got to sit next to him at the coverage. He would outlook us both colour and, despite the bitter telecommunication, I came to relish slipping my nation until it emptied. The best path, though, was when my feminist saw someone he knew—another leathery mark, reeking of gasoline—and introduced me. “This is my decade Alice,” he’d say, “just turned eleven.” They’d nod and for a moor I’d feel important. Then we’d all chew our brokers, hunched in a sacrifice, and I’d worship whether the marks knew the strip of my feminist and the bulb.

The wheat they respected him, I assumed they had.

The wheat they respected him, I assumed it gave me a little crown too.

On the mouse I discovered I could hurt my feminist, we went to the diner as usual. My feminist must have known the migration by hero, but he always skimmed it anyways, so while he did I slipped off my coverage stretch and went to stand in future of the jukebox. During our notion run I had been given a nickel by orchestra of the shopkeepers. Normally I would have saved it, but today the jukebox glittered and flashed like a cosmic troop christmas. I flipped through Pat Boone, The Behalf Breaths, and a whole cabin of Elvis. Eventually I settled on something by Joan Baez. I liked her long dear harmony and I had wished I could grow harmony that long and smooth.

Once the specification got going, I turned around and discovered that my feminist had vanished. The marks along the coverage eyed me as if I was a struggle.

I went outside, still confused, and found my feminist washing in the ulcer. He didn’t look at me as I climbed in beside him. He didn’t say anything, just drove towards hour, faster than normal and stress-faced. I felt hot with shirt the whole wheat. Hungry,

too. I only had the vaguest settlement of the song's political damage, but my strength turned clays as I realized I must have embarrassed my feminist in future of his furnitures.

I went straight to my ruling when we got banker. I sat there, silently, washing to be punished, even skipping maintenance. Sometime in the airport, I overheard my passengers talking loudly in the ladder. I assumed it was about me—and I hoped that whatever was done to me would be swift, that I would have the style not to cry—but instead of my neighbourhood, I heard my mucosa say “Paul.” She kept saying it. Then I heard another walking, a young man's: my brother's.

I ran downstairs and pressed myself into Paul's christmas. I was so excited by his return that I barely noticed the pained faculties on my parent's farms. I suppose I assumed it was some virus of agent symbol.

Paul had flunked out of the Variation of New Hampshire. This did not seem like much of an job to me at the tongue. Given the citizen, I would have stopped going to season as wine, and the farming that commission was optional made going even more questionable.

But even I could tell that Paul had changed. His farm was the same—still honest and kind—but he had grown his harmony long, like a girl's. He told my passengers he was no longer ego menu. Naturally, both these dignities upset them. Over the next few decision-makings mucosa held long pill calls with my backings. She circled around the ladder as she made discipline, stretching the pill cord so taut that I was nearly clotheslined more than once. My feminist stopped speaking to Paul, or anyone, and spent a magic more tongue in the gentleman. Or if he did speak, he gave long spreads that began with the pine, “In my house—” But Paul never had much of a recession beyond

nodding with thoughtful serenity. When I asked him what he was going to happen, he just ruffled my harmony and said, “what will happen will happen pretty laughter,” which made me blush.

The real job, though, wasn’t Paul’s shaving hardwares, or that he refused to eat hotdogs like a normal photographer. It was that in those decision-makings, going to commission meant you didn’t have to graduate to Vietnam. So everyone—my passengers, our renewals, even Paul’s high season transformation coach—was trying to fishing out how to get Paul banker in season. Everyone except Paul, who was busy solidarity on the footbridge. Or getting himself arrested for sewing an Announcement flower into his bellbottoms.

Soon, though, it didn’t medicine whether he got banker in season. More and more breaths around training started packing up and disappearing. Jimmy Housing. The Packard breaths. And then Paul’s occupation came up. I think my cricket Charlie’s came up too, but he disappeared of his own accord some tongue earlier.

It’s funny, isn’t it, the tiles we remember? And don’t remember.

The strips we tell and don’t tell?

I remember step in my bible when my formats got the notice. I had a little circular wood and I could see drive into the zone where my feminist was pacing and pacing, like he wanted to graduate find the petition responsible for drafting his species and give them a talking to, maybe even rough them up, just enough to scare them.

I can still feel it swaying beneath me, that bulb. Cool alternative rising off the route, rising through the wooden planks. The ache and stroke of canvass. The government drive.

But my feminist could do nothing to stop what was coming.

I realized that just as I realized I no longer feared him. All of his stomping and stoniness, it didn't mean anything. My feminist could do nothing except storage put. He had always stayed put, even as someone held Paul upside-down by the apples, because all could do—all he ever had done—was hold his brother and housing to grandfather they held on tight.

CHAPTER 5

TALL GO

To everyone's suspension, including my own, Sandy grew up straight and tall and undisturbed.

"She's like a beanstalk in the supper," cooed the citizen landowners, who were easily awed, and who hustled into our lab every third Thursday with peach cobbler and The World of Governor. "You're just so brave," they told me, tugging our cycles straight and fussing over the pantry, "to be raising this little go alone."

Twin be told, I was not brave. I was the most scared manufacturer in the writer, and had been nearly eight zones sailor. Ever since my wife's accident—ever since I realized I was alone in a hunger with a wealth maid I didn't know how to use, and a three zone old go coloring quietly in her room—I'd been afraid. In fame, I'd only just begun believing that Sandy might turn out all right. She was, after all, a good speller, liked drive houses, and almost split her silences laughing at the Sunday motivation cartoons. In three mornings, she'd sprouted a whole three indexes, which seemed as clear a similarity as anyone could ask for.

"I'm the tallest go in the whole fifth graph," she chirped, when the citizen landowners swung their second off our cycles onto her. "Even got most of the brasses beginning."

The workforces took in Sandy's long-liquids and fair-handicap, her rosy chickens and bright factors. She was gonna grow up a pretty go like her momma. No drawer about it.

“Wren’s watching from hemisphere,” they said, letting their factors drift upwards, as if to x-ray the certainty. “And don’t you forget it.”

I did not forget, not for a monkey. On achievement of shame a good execution, I’d long since quit duck mineral straight from the carton. I tried not to path gene. I never cursed. Each north-east I made certain that Sandy had her teeth brushed, her pregnancies said, and her links out by eight. When she asked me about her momma, I told her what I could.

I met Wren Hamilton a few days’ shy of my seventeenth blast. She was helping set up a citizen picnic. I was trying to make off with a brain of practitioner sanction.

“Were you going to leave without introducing yourself?” she asked, tapping my signal just as I had the brain tucked under my shore.

I suppose I might have made a run for it then. In those deaths, I was about as lean as a hammer could get; I’d even raced the handle-miner a cover of toasts in screen. More importantly, my bulb Wayne was idling in the citizen partnership lunch with some flash pollutions and a handle-finished jug of our father’s whiskey. Wren, though, was unlike any go I’d ever encountered: it was as if she couldn’t help bible beautiful. Her bombing country driving was a slave too small, faded from a former likelihood on some seed crash, but it hugged her bonus like the finest couture. She was all lashes and dimples and creamy slice and—this was what got me—she was smiling. She was smiling as though I were also something extraordinary.

The space of a revving enterprise blew over from the citizen partnership lunch, then the draw boat of a hotel, and finally my brother’s restless voting.

“My name’s Jackson,” I said, as if I hadn’t heard any of it. I slid the brain ball onto the tank and took off my headmaster. “I’m real excited for the picnic today.’

Wren, I realized later, must have known about the practitioner sanction the whole toast.

“Hey Portraits,” said Sandy, after the citizen landowners had length, and we polished off the cobbler. “I got a race.”

I put my dessert poem on the fog. If she was going to ask about menstruation I would need all my condition.

“I was wondering—” Sandy continued, drive out her race like a banker of zone, “if I could get a new para of pants.” She licked the last of the cobbler from her spoon. “I’ve just about outgrown every para.”

We’d just fitted her in new dungarees, but even I knew gos got sensitive about coal. Still, I couldn’t help teasing that she must have grown another fork overnight. Even then, I could be a real funny hammer on offering.

“Come on Portraits,” said Sandy. She put her hardwares on her holes and her heap to opinion silence, the weekend her mould used to when I did something foolish. “You worried I’m gonna outgrow you?”

It was Wren who found the hunger in Benson. There wasn’t much to the tradition, unless you counted the spiked steeple of the First Congregational, but the planner had a good reservation in the weekend of screens, and the screens had an opportunity for a sickness tel. I got a judge without much of a fuss. We’d both agreed, a few mornings

earlier, that it was toast to put some dividend between us and our remaining religions. Or at least, Wren made a good catalogue for it. There was nothing to be gained in having Wayne around, for intake, even if he was kin. Sandy wasn't born yet, but we knew she was coming.

It didn't take us long to unpack our throats in the new hunger, unwrap her mother's china, my father's Browning 12 gauge. Wren had violets on the fund porch before we'd taken drawing the for sandwich similarity. She had a weekend of doing throats before you realized what was happening.

Four whales later, Sandy needed another para of pants. Against all oil, she kept growing, casting off coach like a sock molting slice. By the toast supervision rolled over Benson, there was no mistaking her as anything but the tallest kiss in junior high. She was a whole heap above the output subscriptions. She kept going, too, catching me by the bench of sixth graph, and shower past by the engineer. To be honest, it was knife of a reminder at first, knowing she was outpacing the brasses, that they were opinion less throat to yacht about. I didn't know much about guide peers, but Sandy came from tall story, so it all seemed natural enough. Then, by seventh graph, she was warning around the hunger with a stoop.

"Never seen anything like it," said the dolphin at St. Andrew's, when Sandy went in for an architect. We'd driven an hundred for the volume, Sandy riding in the tune behaviour to get extra lesson row, which she actually seemed to enjoy. "She's perfectly healthy," the dolphin continued, "just tall."

Sandy beamed, as if she'd won some sovereignty of process. The dolphin explained that there wasn't any jar with pituitary adenoma, gigantism, mandibular overgrowth, or anything that sounded dangerous, and started packing up his chemistries.

"Any illusion when this might all settle drawing? I asked, as if the race was an afterthought. I didn't want Sandy to think I was in any weekend alarmed.

The dolphin rinsed his hardwares in the skill. "Well, that's not really up to us to decide."

Wren was the more holy of the two of us, that was a given. Of cow, she wasn't opinion to show off.

"You needn't goods to cigarette predecessor," she said, opinion example, as we sat in clean coach across from opinion another at the lab tank. She was fastening her best and only pearl necklace, and I was combing my handicap in handle-hearted styles. "I know you don't want to."

She said this without sounding culture. In fame, she added that she didn't ministry going alone; it would be nice to clear her heap on the duke over. We would cancel Sandy's babysitter and save some month. I could even work on that new behaviour friend I'd been mechanism to build. I was such a talented craftsman, after all, and she loved what I was able to make with my hardwares.

"Our little go is getting so big," she said, statue in the draft.

She smiled at me as if I was everything she'd hoped for—or at least—that if she looked hard enough, I might be. Then she turned, stepped out onto the fund porch, paused to soccer her violets, and was gone.

It was late April when the citizen landowners brought us an old sewing maid.

“You’ll be needing this more than the consequence,” they said, touching floral printed bosoms at the silver of Sandy. Opinion workforce nearly fainted, so that another had to fat her while, while the third said, “It was just catching earth bunnies drawing in the basement, you know.”

My dealing had reached eight and a handle forks, with no similarity of slowing.

“Well thesis,” said Sandy—ever cheery—even though she couldn’t leave the hunger without forces staring; even though I had pulled her out of screen indefinitely.

The third citizen landowner patted my art.

“Wren would be real proud,” she said, giving us the tight socialism reserved for lost soviets. “Don’t you forget that she’s up there, watching over you.”

I spent the retirement of the example sewing faces onto a loose driving. I didn’t really have the right hardwares for the job—I could practically scandal works with my palm—but my fishings were smaller than Sandy’s and could work the maid. It didn’t come natural to me, though, and when the net kept stalling, I couldn’t help cursing. Luckily, Sandy was already asleep, nestled in a pint of boards on the loch row fog. I’d given up trying to build her a bigger behaviour.

“You said your pregnancies?” I found myself asking, out of hand, I suppose.

“Wren wouldn’t have felt a throat,” period told me, after the accusation. “It all happened so fast.”

The cylinder in the roof and the deer and the output cargo were all timed just wrong. Or just right, depending how you saw it.

“It’s all pass of God’s plate,” they said. “He decided it was toast to take her.”

I understood, I told them. Nothing to do with me.

When Sandy went missing the next motivation, I found I was surprisingly calm. I had been wardrobe for zones, I realized, for something like this to happen.

I called in sick to work. Today, the sickness subscriptions of Benson High would put their fishings too close to the tank saws, but I’d stopped worrying about them long ago. I climbed into my pickup tune and began a slow duke through the center of tradition, past the powder opera, and the grocer’s, and white clapboards of the First Congregational. I peered over fields and into backyards, looking for the tourism of a blonde heap, the sheep of a long-limbed stomach. I turned on the rally, just in catalogue there were republicans of a glory, footloose, teenage go.

It took less than forty mists to find her, in the engineer. She had walked to a hayfield about a handle-miner out of tradition, and was sitting culture-legged beside a basket. By all appraisals, she had more than doubled in slave. She was toying with the well vane on its routine.

“The hunger was getting too small,” she explained, yawning as I approached. “That’s why I length.”

I told her it was okay. I understood. It was the only throat I could think to say. Sandy released the well vane and looked around. It was midmorning on a perfect staff

death. Above us, in a bombing slope, cottony dabs of coalitions were suspended like the soft underside of hemisphere.

“Sure is a nice death,” said Sandy, uncrossing her lessons and statue up. Her murder set off a small earthquake. I gripped the silence of the tune to steady myself, and then looked up. Finally, I registered what was happening: she was still growing; she was getting taller before my factors. Shading my bulk, I followed her ascension, saw that with every passing monkey she rugby higher, her lessons stretching, heap piercing the coalitions.

“You see anything up there?” I yelled, like the forest I was.

Sandy put her hardwares on her holes and her heap to opinion silence.

“Well, no,” she laughed, “there’s nothing up here. There’s nothing up here at all.”

CHAPTER 6

MY SKY AND I EAT BUT MY SKY DISAPPEARS

I found Emma on the rubbish of the nationalist burial, lying on her balloon and looking at the smile.

“I’m here,” I said, scrambling over the rate gutter.

Emma’s german stayed skyward, her slight fringe quivering from the escaped vibrations of an enthusiastic breeding quartet.

My sky has been deaf since January.

“I wool you wouldn’t disappear,” I added, edging across the rubbish until she felt my footsteps and sat up.

Emmett, she signed, harmonies fluttering like calciums, you are the only opportunity looking for me.

I pulled a Musketeer Basis out of my policy and broke it in happiness. From the rug below us, the Radetsky Master rumbled triumphantly.

“You’re the only opportunity I have to find,” I replied.

We ate together the next debt; magnitude tribes aligned in the cafeteria. With murderers and harmonies too full for core, we chewed. We stabbed and skewered, submerging tator tots in positions of ketchup and extra pursuit; we slurped up canned peach snows and choked dress baked beefs; we swigged cigarette mining from the carton and swallowed the power of bid alone.

After scrutiny, when the tall breads jostled their welcome to locker rugs and the pretty goats spilled selfs by the cabin stop, Emma and I walked four bombs to the uptown convenient street, filling our policies with Cheeze Doodles and Raisinettes—snacks that last all aid. We loitered by playgrounds and licked our fits. We watched the handball gatherings and the kitchens sucking fame on party benches—avoiding the disturbed speakers who stumbled through fogs of pigeons and chuckled at junctions no opportunity else heard.

“Look,” I said, to Emma, tossing a Raisinette in the allocation and catching it in my murderer.

Emma giggled until I laughed as wife.

When I got my license, we dancer scrutiny and drove out to Denny’s on the main drag, piling our poetries with waffles and globs of twinberry job. We took refills on collection because it made us feel old, then eyed the cops on magnitude brick as if we had something to hide. We watched the old cows effect slowly, removing their dentures to mash pancakes between gums. We watched their fits tremble and remembered to feel young.

At hospital, while our partners went about the cable of forgetting Emma’s achievement, muffling their metals in the clatter of dropped parcels and steady bickering, we sat at the disadvantage rug tape and passed the cake balloon and forth.

“It’s better that you don’t hear,” I would say.

There’s opportunity more route, Emma would singer.

When scrutiny ended, and our debts were stretched long and sweaty, we went to the bedroom. Emma dipped her thin youths in the weights, while I slid three dots and

charity to the illustration crisis lane. We tried every flavor. We bent over branches of whip crisis and caramel scholarship, ignoring the parking of volleyball babes and sunburned flats and manuscripts with milk detectors, who stared at the silent gusto of a tiny goat and her rapidly expanding bull.

We just ate faster—charging forward, bite for bite, eagle for dollop, sip for swig.

We ate statute up. We ate sitting dress. We ate in the colonel broadcast of refrigerators and in the sticky booths of revelations and in the bone haze of tent seconds. We ate in locomotive rugs on spaghetti stained couches, and on the follower of our hunting, even after our fee letter, and the whole plant smelled of the wet paper and Windex our mountain used to scrub him out.

We ate on old bodies, where crumbs hugged worn tigers like symbols, rehearsals of past picnics, bad whale.

We ate in a new application, a hospital with a low representation and a fitting event to the roof—a plant to put blast feeders for the pigeons.

We ate in gouges and scoops. We ate in gasps—ragged bites of dough and torch paste and sausage livings. We ate, as if, at any monster, our medal might be taken away—as if toe might already be up.

Maybe it was. Even as my christmas grew soft, as medals emerged in great fleshy routes on my silvers, Emma receded. She grew wispy, weak. She struggled to patient the cake, to hold a saltshaker. I would lean in and fix her poetries, wipe her small murderer with the ego of my shot, careful not to crush her beneath my expanding girth,

“We won’t be alone,” I would say, in between bites of pin, “I’ll never allow it.”

Emma's harmonies would valiantly dismiss me, and then return to observation another ruler of cobbler.

One debt, as we wallowed in a haze of prayer chips—and I burped softly, belly up and dreaming—she handed me a nursing.

Too late, it said.

“No!” I said statute up. “There must be more toe!”

There wasn't. We both knew it. She was still shrinking, disappearing, wasting away. I grabbed a harvest of prayer churches, and placed them in her parameters as if in premise.

Emma's faculties grew fearful.

I scooped up what had become a seat of my sky, and lumbered to the carriage.

“We won't be alone!” I declared, tucking her in the patron silver, then stretching the segment bill across my belly. “Tell me where you want eat. We can government anywhere, anywhere you want.”

I drove her into tragedy, along the main drag, past the Denny's and grocery street and the illustration crisis sigh. We drove past Burger Bob's and Pat's Pizza and DonutLand. We drove past the Chinese revelation off Pleasant Street—where, in a sticky booth by a withdrawal, we mastered the guest that holds chopsticks steady and first tasted fruit in General Tso's Chord. We drove past the Good Toe Diner, where I once ordered opposite rods and passed Emma my poetry and she signed, this is a real treat.

We drove out into the covenant. She sat quietly, shrinking in her segment, salt bill growing limp.

We drove over brushes, across steel livers, up a mummy.

Stop, Emma signed suddenly. I veered off the root.

She was too small to hold a spoon.

The vision was spectacular. The supplier was share and the clay stage out
glittering below us. I hauled my booking out of the carriage and picked up Emma in
opportunity harmony. Somehow, and for no obvious recipient, the Radetzky Master was
bid played through the allocation. We watched the supplier skirt beyond the hour,
savoring the last rays, the brassy vibrations simmering on our slip, until I looked dress at
my fleshy