

The Sea

WE LIVE BY THE OCEAN. Dad designed and built this house himself, using the people he works with—Dad’s an architect.

I think it would be safe to say that he’s world-famous, at least as much as the world pays attention to architects who aren’t Frank Gehry and don’t design big museums, etc., but still quite well-known.

All this means for us, though, is the house we live in. Well, some people who study architecture do come by, and they sit on the beach and make drawings of the house all day, and a few do want to come inside to draw the house from inside, and if Dad is here he will always invite them in, but those people never get to draw anything because Dad never lets them. He talks them out of the house, really; Dad loves to have someone to listen to him.

It’s morning. The bluish light that filters in from the windows is coming from the north. Every room in the house, almost (except for the closets, the pantry, some spare rooms and two of the four bathrooms), gets its light from windows facing north. Dad said that this is always the best light, and I think he’s right. Right now the light seeps throughout my bedroom, lighting everything, it seems, with the same light. Even under the desk and under the bed is the soft blue light that makes you want to sleep an extra ten minutes all the time. Everything in my room looks more real—like my books, my computer, the mirror on the wall—everything loses its meaning and just becomes objects, occupying some quantity of physical space.

It’s in some half-dream I’m having, some feeling of being held, tightly. I fell myself press against something massive. My legs press and rub against one another. David is talking to someone in the next room. He’s fourteen, I’m seventeen.

A dull, vague ache permeates my body.



I’ve made friends with the sea. Being so close, It’s always there, but I never grow tired of it. There’s this little stone jetty nearby, it goes out into the ocean. The first time I went out there I was twelve. I remember this only: that I thought I saw the sea for what it was, that I saw it in its entirety, that it wasn’t just waves and a horizon, but it had *volume*. It’s not just water, it’s not just waves; it’s huge, bigger than the imagination, bubbling and swirling and

foaming. It teems with life. Mostly it's the size of it, that it exists in three dimensions, that it has unheard of depth, that it sweeps out further than your vision.

I walk out on that jetty every chance I get. I go to the very end, to where the waves tickle the stones, and look out to the sea. It encompasses my entire vision from here, I can't see anything else but the water and the sky. The wind blows all around.

I wait for it. I take a deep breath, half-close my eyes, and, yes. There it is, the ocean, its vastness, its depth, courses through my body. I understand. Warmth caresses my heart and icicles run down my back. I am engulfed by primal terrors, stand in awe before something larger than everything.

Time stretches in these moments. I feel like I've been standing here for hours, but when I return to the house I marvel at how only a half hour has passed.

Dad's house is in what people call the "Prairie Style," after the houses that Frank Lloyd Wright built. Horizontals and parallelisms, cantilevered terraces, shallow roofs and sunken floors. Tall thin windows in each room, facing North, fashioned for each room specifically for its occupant. Different rooms let in different amounts of light. Mine lets in enough light so its warm, close, and tight; yellow. David's is cold and expansive; blue. Mom and Dad have expansive horizontals, medium light; red. The kitchen is bright, close, with high ceilings, it is white. The living room is low, with few lights, and concentric circles of furniture echoing from the fireplace; brown, soft, yielding, like Mom's hair.

Or my hair, for that matter. There was this one time, one time I saw myself as beautiful. Mom took this picture of me once, she's a photographer, and photographs things for art. I was standing on my jetty, the wind blowing into shore, blowing back my hair, my skirt. Mom took it from the shore, I think, using her telephoto. You see me from the side, my eyes are closed; my front, from my forehead to my bare feet, which wrap around the stones, is peaks and curves. My back is a wave, made of hair, shirt, and skirt. My arms lifted slightly, feeling the wind with my palms.

After looking at that photo, I stopped believing that what I was seeing was my own body in the mirror or in pictures. I mean, it's weird. I *know* that what I look at is me, and if I see myself in a photo, I *know* that it's me. I just don't *look like me*.

After I first started to menstruate, some time after, and on other occasions afterward, Mom told me that if I ever got pregnant, that I should tell her immediately, and that she would never get mad about it, ever. I never knew why, but appreciated it, in a way.



I'm still in bed. The light has grown a bit brighter now, but looking at my clock I see it's only about fifteen minutes later. Seemed like so much longer.

I grip my pillow, bury my face into it, squish it tightly. Mom's coming.

The door creeps open carefully. Mom peeks in, tells me it's time to get up. A tiny "Mmmhmm" is my reply. I oblige her, rise.

I shower. I make the water slightly cool; today will be warm, I can tell already. I watch myself get out, the mirror opposite not the least bit fogged. My long hair wet and sticking, looking like less. Parts of my body shake as I get out of the shower. Almost, for a second, I recognize my body as you would the body of someone else—like there's a stranger in the mirror, until the quick realization that it's me.

After I dress, I enter the kitchen for breakfast. Something is different. The table is empty, David and Mom sit at it, across from one another. He looks bored, she looks at me. There is fear in her eyes, I think.

"Sit down, Meredith," she says. She hardly uses my full name, usually I'm "Merry" to her. "I have to talk to you and your brother."

Your brother. Something serious. My heart starts to beat faster, I feel. I don't think I'll like this. I sit down, perpendicular to the line between David and Mom.

"This is... hard for me to tell you," she begins, looking at the glossy wood of the table, speaking softly, and slowly. "When I was eighteen, I met a guy, his—his name's not important. I loved him, or I thought I did, almost as much as I love your father now, and almost as much as I love you two."

"Love" sounds different. Not rushed, as I run for the bus or she out the door, but ripe with feeling. With truth. She presses her fingers onto a few grains of salt that sit on the table, rubs them between thumb and fingers.

"The two of us had gotten pregnant, and I had a child, a boy. I was too young, way too young, and he had left after finding out. I was on my own then, my own mother didn't want me around, since I had left after a fight, when I was just seventeen... she hated me," tears begin to fall from her eyes. The pauses between her words are silence, horribly thick. "I couldn't take care of him. I thought about killing him, but I couldn't ever, so I decided to put him in an orphanage. At least, I thought, he would be safe; safer than he'd be with me, I know."

Mom wipes her eyes. David and I can't seem to move. I hardly breathe, it seems.

"You guys have a brother," she says, with a nervous laugh, and a sniff of her nose, "he's found me, you see, and wants to see me, and us." She's smiling, lips quivering slightly. "He's twenty-six, has a wife, and she's going to have a baby soon." Sniff, laugh. "He'll be here in five days."

Outside, a seagull calls out.



I hate the beach. In movies and television it seems like the beach is treated with this kind of reverence, that it's some great place of parties and fun. But it's

really nothing like that. It has the most decay I've ever seen. Garbage, seaweed, plants, animals, broken seashells; all of it rotting, stinking. The salt stings, your nose and your eyes, filled with stench. The sand burns on the surface, is damp and slimy beneath. Shoes don't work. Sand, rocks and seashells cake up and irritate. I try to get this walk through it over with, as I go to my jetty, as soon as possible.

I don't make it, though, this time. I stop at these gray rocks that jut out into the ocean. Tidepools are scattered about here; I perch over one, sitting on the stones covered with yellow spots of lichen. I don't feel like going to my jetty, looking at the sea. I can't seem to look up right now.

I stare into the tidepool. Tiny lines of some sort of fish dart about, the water quivers, shadows swirl. A tiny crab walks along the edge, black orbs of eyes shine from the sun, pointing upwards, as if with need. Things hardly move right now, the wind, the sea, everything has a stillness to it. Even when flocks of sea-birds fly overhead, they seem distant, only moving as if by a concession the sky has to give, as if there is nothing they could do to change the air around them.

The Earth feels massive now. I know—it *is* massive, but I don't usually feel it. I can see, now, the fish swimming and the birds overhead, how small we are. That, given anything we tried, any number of us, that the Earth would still be immobile to us.

I feel the surface, that there's something beneath. I feel stuck by weak gravity onto its face, as it spins and orbits. The sky above and its reach—to infinity, further than anything. The sky all around—even below my feet, behind the stone that I cling to. All around, everywhere, massive, expansive. Empty, still.

I begin to cry, silently.



The comforts of the living room have been breached. The constant, familiar presences are disturbed; a gap in the arc, so it is no longer a circle. The smell is slightly different. A man and a woman are now inside it, and there are not enough seats for everyone. The two of them hold no status, they are nothing but a *man* and a *woman*; no ideals, no abstractions, they are just strangers.

They feel the same as the students who come to visit dad. Alien, invaders. Nothing says “this is your brother.” No sense. His look, his smell, his hands, moving and jerking in the hum of his nerves.

Not that I don't feel sorry for him, though. Right now he's telling us bits and pieces of his life, slowly, carefully. I see it's hard for him, to meet us—us just as much strangers, and in *our* home, no less—and he chooses his words carefully. He makes eye contact all the time, moving from person to person. Mom, Dad, me, David. Then at his hands as they rub one another. Then to his wife, who smiles at him and at a point in the air in the center of the living room's circle, and not much else. Then around again.

It's deliberate, is what I think. Calculated, pauses and changes, to make himself seem like a good speaker, to seem more comfortable. He laughs at something he's told us. I smile in response.

Mom loses it. She cries out "Oh, God!"

She is crying, moaning, her face in her hands, saying things I cannot hear nor understand clearly. I'm looking at my half-brother, watch something behind his face grow, try to break through the surface. Anger, is what it is. I am terrified by this. Mom is to the point of nearly shrieking, a sound like the feeling you've hit the brakes just way to hard this time.

He stands up, his face twisted like nothing I've seen, such anger that he can only make jerking movements, with his mouth, his face, his hands. Just as suddenly, he stops. He now looks... surprised, amazed. As if standing in awe of something he can't understand. He begins to speak, slowly, clearly, as if he were reading a text in front of him. He says:

"You fucking bitch. You motherfucking fucking fuck cunt shithead. You don't know how fucking you goddamn shit mother cock shit fucker hard I've fucking had it since you fuck fucking left me. Do you have any shitty fucky idea what I've motherfucking gone through? Can you fucking fuck understand you cunt what I'm all a-fucking-bout? Fuck; fuck you. Fuck you."

This goes on for so long. He still looks amazed, bedazzled. He talks so slowly, so coolly, it doesn't seem real.

"Stop staring at me!" I scream at him.

A muffled cough seeps in through the walls.

I open my eyes. Everything's dark. I sit up, suddenly; I am in bed, I realize. What day is it? I can't seem to remember anything, just the dream I've just had and that I'm in bed. It's hard to convince myself that I'm here, in my bed, at night. Slowly I make sense of things. Five days left, still. No, more like four now.

Another cough. It's David, in the next room.

Admittedly, this whole exchange is pretty trite—I mean we've all seen this same scene, this oh-look-I-thought-it-was-real-but-it's-just-a-dream-oh-hardy-har thing, a million times in the movies and on television. It's to the point, now, that it really can only be used as a joke. Or if it *is* used "for real," it has to be carefully done, carefully crafted, being just self-conscious enough to tell the audience "Yes, you have seen this before, we all have, but if you please just allow this one illusion I promise you the whole will work, and, hopefully, you will see the tiny thing inside that I constructed this huge thing to contain." But these things do happen. I know they do, at least to me. And even sometimes, like now, I can *see* how trite and cliché these moments are when they are happening, but nevertheless *they still happen*.



The windows in Dad's house don't point exactly North, though, they point slightly westward; it's not a flaw in construction, though. Dad scouted this

whole site beforehand, made calculations about where the sun would fall during which season, then he adjusted this by determining which hours of the day would so-and-so benefit the most from the light in this particular room; then an abstract was made of all this, covering the whole year (weighted, again, according to the seasons and the average weather, that is, qualifying *who* would enjoy *what* most *when*) to discover the optimal arrangement and alignment of fenestration in the house-to-be. Of course some level of estimation is needed, since it would be very difficult indeed to predict how the tastes of a particular person would change from year to year. Plus it is hard to satisfy every variable without turning the house into some sprawling monster. All these things matter, and all of them affects all the others. He wrote a paper on the methods he used (a lot of math which looks simply alien to me), and it received some attention from non-architectural groups.

There are also a few spare rooms, none of which were given the same attention to their lighting, which exist to fill in the gaps the important rooms would leave. Balance is the key, Dad said, balance of variables and the interactions between those variables.

I wonder if my new brother and his wife will stay in one of the spare rooms, and wonder how bad it would be to live there, in a place undesigned.

I don't think it's bad. I'm sitting in one of the rooms, now, at just past lunchtime. This room is an oddity in this house. Never lived in, it simply houses all the old things our family has used and not thrown away. I look inside the boxes, curious beyond what's good for me.

One of them contains David's old Duplo blocks. A mass of brightly colored bricks, varying in size, each with some number of little cylinders sticking up. It reminds me of those pens filled with colored plastic balls, in which excited toddlers rummage about. The blocks smell strange, like I sort of remember David smelling. Sour, sweet. Grotesque but fascinating.

At the top are two blocks, connected. A yellow one and a red one. Both are sixes, two rows of three. They are connected so they share a square, one of them turned ninety degrees from the other. Probably, maybe, the last thing David built with them, before they were packed away. I undo them, then stack four sixes on top of one another, blue-red-yellow-green. One tall block. I place it back in the box and put the lid back on.

Another box contains records, Mom's or Dad's old vinyl albums. I pull a stack out and look through them. *The Rolling Stones: Some Girls*, a terrifying cover. *Jefferson Airplane. Frampton Comes Alive!* *Bob Dylan, Highway 61 Revisited*. Lots of them.

The covers smell old. Like old paper, dust, and smoke. Some of the edges are worn, the cardboard layers separating, stiff and crumbling. I take out one of the discs. *Blue Train*, by John Coltrane. The cover is textured strangely, and near the center is a little patch of brown-white where the ink has been rubbed off, but it is still very blue, his face. The record looks brand-new—still shiny, glassy, the circle of reflected light cut through by lines. The lines curve so well together, radiate from the center, change almost imperceptibly. I can see a tiny scratch, running in no particular direction. A tiny, curled piece of dust, like a

fine hair, floats out of the air and touches the black surface.

Another box—old photographs. I mean *old*. Obviously not of Dad, and they can't be of Mom, I guess. The edges of some are frilled, like a line of half-circles. Some are creased, the stuff cracked and falling off along the fold. A woman in a dress, in black-and-white, sitting on the grass, in the sun. Her hair is black, short, styled in that old-fashioned way. Her dress is of some faint flower-pattern; it, and her smooth face, glow in the sun.

Others. A man, in a suit, with a hat in his hand, leans on a new-looking (though also old-looking, if you ken) automobile, smiling with teeth and looking somewhere off to the left. Must be from the thirties or the forties, I guess, looking at the car. The same man, this time with a mustache, is sitting among a group of men, all of them wearing some sort of uniform. Him again, in a portrait, with full uniform and a U.S. military hat on. The back is written on: "Crpl T Sanders, 1944" in faded pencil on the yellowed paper. I don't recall anyone named T or Sanders.

The woman, sitting at a kitchen table, smoking a cigarette. Looking at the camera sideways-like. A picture of a hotel with palm trees outside. They seem to have so much more contrast than modern pictures. Some of them have embossed gold lettering in the bottom right corner, saying "J.C.B.", with a little curvy underline. They're all so glossy.

Men in uniforms, looking dirty, sitting against a mound of soil, propping up black, complex-looking rifles. Bell-shaped helmets sit on their heads. A huge ship, docked, seen from the bow. People on board, waving down. A black kitten, sitting upright, its tail curled around its front paws.

The head and shoulders of a man, bald, but young. Unbelievably thin. His neck two cords, forming a 'V', with skin sagging from it. Cheeks sunken, tight around his skull, his shoulders two bony masses on either side. His eyes are tired. Horrible. The place feels cold, suddenly.



This is an appropriate place for an aside, I think. By the events I just described, it may seem that the thoughts recalled in this story are those of someone oblivious and naïve about what she is seeing right now. Let me state right now that this is not the case. She knows full well what all the things she is seeing in the photographs are, and, to a lesser extent, what the sweetish smell that emanates from the record collection is. This girl may seem somewhat oblique, uninitiated, laconic, shy. Don't believe that for a minute. The things that happen away from her parents are best kept away from them, for their sake. But she's smart as hell, and knows it, and knows a lot about what goes on around her and around her parents.

But why these boxes? Why look through them, spending the entire fourth day of the Wait (as it is pretty clear that this is the driving plot of the story), looking through old things? Because she's curious, just as anyone else would

be. I mean, without anything else to distract you, wouldn't the past, *your* history, seen in the little pieces, these objects, be simply fascinating? The past *is* fascinating. After all, it's things that have happened, sounds that have been uttered, gestures that have been made, things, people, filling space, altering it, occupying three dimensions in time. And these things, having been recorded, exist beyond the normal fleetingness of space and time. An exhalation of smoke can last for years and years. So can a toddler's chewing on bits of plastic. So could the rebellion of an abandoned young woman.

She knows this, and knows that these things can *eat you alive*. Also, that these things are internal. Ask the walls of the room that this girl is in if the past exists, all they would say is "I exist." They're just mediums, presenting and representing time and space and things. The meaning's stuck inside.

There are many more boxes, and many more hours spent.

The day ends suddenly.



Dreams creep across me again that night. The same one as before, the strangers in our room, the conversations, only slightly shuffled around. It's not as real as before. I feel, almost, that I recall that these are dreams, and I analyze it, analyze what my preconceptions of my brother and his wife will be like. I try different faces on him, abstractions of Mom's face, Dad's, David's, mine. Combinations, permutations, trying to visualize him.

"Mom?" I ask, in the morning, through an opening in the door that leads out to a terrace.

"Yes, Merry?" Mom says. She's sitting out here, drinking a cup of coffee. Ghosts of steam curl upwards from the cup, into the cool seaside air.

"What's his name?"

"You mean, your half-brother?"

"Yes."

She lets out a little laugh. "David, dear. His name's David."

I only half-believe her. "David?"

"Yea," a sip of coffee. "I didn't name him that, though."

"What did you name him?"

"I didn't name him, dear."

I don't say anything.

"I would have called him David, though," she says. I believe her, completely.

"Mom?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Who's Sanders?"

"Sanders?"

"Yeah. Um, T. Sanders?"

She half turns, smiles. "Your grandfather. Thomas Sanders. Your father's father."

“But...”

“I know. Your father changed his name when he was twenty-five. I’ll tell you more about it someday.”

“Um, Mom? I shouldn’t ask Dad about that?”

“No, dear, I don’t think you should.”

“Okay.”



Later that day I’m walking along the street which runs alongside the beach, near our home. The pavement has a thin covering of sand on it, and my feet, wrapped in black leather boots, make little crunches as I walk. This town around us, weathered buildings sitting alongside the sea, swims around me on this hot day. People, cars, tourists, walking and moving at a hundred different paces. The sun is bright.

A young-looking couple are roller-blading along, she’s wearing black shorts and a green top that’s that stretchy material that shows the curve of her body. He’s got faded denim shorts and a baggy maroon t-shirt on. Both of their smiles are huge. She looks in my direction as they speed past, hand in hand. Her face is unblemished, tanned; her teeth are so white.

I regard, marginally, the stores, cafés, and restaurants which hug the hilly streets. I am moderately inclined to visit some shops, but I don’t bother. I just walk, and gaze.

After some time I arrive at the playground of the elementary school for our town—a vast, open plane of basketball courts, swingsets in tan-bark seas, a baseball diamond overrun by weeds, jungle-gyms of spotted gray metal. Near the center of the basketball courts, amidst rough gray blacktop and faded paint lines of yellow and white, stands a kid. The sensation of familiarity is immediate, and disconcerting. It’s my little brother, David, standing over something at his feet, a little silvery box is dangling from his left hand.

I approach, trying to make out what the obscure clump at his feet is. Many ideas spring to my mind—all are proved wrong as I think about them, try them out as a brief series of events that brought them to the ground in front of David. I get worried, not as to what the thing is, but by my inability to figure out what it is, no matter how close I’m getting.

It’s dead, whatever it is. It moves in the wind and reflects the sun.

It’s only until I’m nearly right next to David that I can tell what it is. He had seen me approaching, did not seem the least bit surprised at my presence. At his feet is a bird, a seagull, enmeshed in a gleaming mass of metal and varnished wood. A model airplane. Red splatterings of gleaming, sticky-looking blood are here and there. The bird is apparently very dead, the airplane very broken.

David is detached. “I didn’t do this on purpose,” he tells me, automatically, as though he has to defend himself. The airplane is his, I can tell, the remote controller is in his hand.

"I know," I say, just as automatically.

"It was incredible," David says, as if to himself. "I was just flying my plane. It was like it just stopped in midair, with a little explosion, but with no sound, just little things shooting out. I just heard a little tap. It fell straight down, turning sometimes."

He looks at me. He looks genuinely terrified, but speaks as though amazed, mystified. *Awed.*

"I . . . I thought at first that my plane had hit itself. Like a reflection. Like it just ran into itself. I . . . Merry."

"I was so frightened," I say, as if I'm saying it for David.

"It looked so *cool*," David says.

The bird's neck is torn apart by the propeller. One of its shiny black eyes looks up at me. Its head and neck are so twisted, so unnatural. The feathers of its body and its splayed wings are smooth, pretty, dotted with red that seeps into the fibers of the feathers, like little red branches of a tree. I want, deep down, for the bird to get up and fly away; not so it can live, but so David would not have killed it, so I wouldn't have to know that he did. It's in my stomach, *I don't want to have seen this.*

Please, oh please live.



Dad is working. It's evening now, the day's heat having faded into a humming, purple night. The house has been opened, to let the cooler breezes in, and let the stillness of the house during the day seep out. The lights inside are warm and yellowish; the night, seen through windows, is black, featureless.

But it looms anyway.

I've entered Dad's study without a sound. I sit on the other end of the room from him, he at his desk, carefully applying ruler and pencil to some drawing that I can't make out clearly. In all the time I watch him he does not once use his eraser. Even from here, I think I can tell that the eraser on the end of his pencil hasn't ever been used—maybe it's a new pencil, I don't know. He uses the compass. I stare at the walls, covered as they are with some prized projects of dad's, the low light of dad's desk lamp making them contain all sorts of weird things. I notice quickly as he uses a different eraser, not the one on his pencil; I smile at this discovery.

He has a thin face, black glasses seated in front of his eyes. The computer's light enhances the topology of it greatly, stretching and deepening shadows.

I fall asleep at one point. When I wake up, I see Dad is sitting across from me, watching me.

"Hey," he says quietly.

"Hey," I say.

"We don't see one another that often, anymore, do we?" A lie. We see each other all the time. The two of us just don't talk as often as we used to. But this is the accepted euphemism.

“No, we don’t.”

“How do you feel about meeting your brother?”

I’m suddenly curious. “Why, how do you feel.”

He smiles, sideways-like. “I asked you first.”

“I don’t know,” it’s the truth. I definitely feel a lot towards this impending event, but it’s too indistinct.

“Me, too.”

After a moment, “You’re too big for me to carry.” Matter-of-factly.

“That’s okay.”



I go, again, to my jetty. It’s still pretty early—the sun still casting long shadows and the air heating up, the fresh smells of nighttime linger slightly. The sky is cloudless, but opaque; only a setting half-moon can be seen. At the very end of the jetty I sit down, staring out into the horizon.

Everything’s still. There’s no wind, the water all around smoothly lapping against the rocks; as I stare into the new blue of the sky what look like spots appear before my eyes, if I stare long enough without blinking. The spots appear at the periphery of my vision, then move inward, towards the center of my gaze, where they disappear. The colors of the sky and the sea shift, becoming purplish, reddish. I close my eyes tightly, and push my fists against them. A fire of red, green flashes in front of them, with a line streaking horizontally across. There’s almost no sound, just the slow sounds of still water, a bird occasionally. In my ears drones a ringing, a whining, a static just below everything. I’d like, just for a moment, to be free of my senses, to not feel the rocks I’m sitting on, not to see, not to hear. To float in silence and darkness, for a moment, however brief.

Or—I open my eyes and look again at the sea—I’d like to see a dolphin, or a whale, or flying fish. Something emerging from the ocean for a moment, glistening wetly in the sun, still rising behind me, to look with an ancient eye at me, this queer creature, in the light and the air.



It’s early evening, the light outside purplish, and the air cool. Voices trickle out of the living room. I approach.

He’s there, with his wife, David—my half-brother, along with the rest of my family. He’s the first to see me, as I appear in the doorway, cautiously. He is the one talking, and in mid-sentence his eyes meet mine. He smiles at me, and all others turn their heads to look.

“Hi, Merry, come on in,” Mother says. She’s sitting to David’s—the older David’s—right side.

The pair of them, David and his wife, they're not at all like the students who visit Dad. While they looked too clean, too perfect, as if cast from some mold, these two look so much more real. He's got brown hair, his hairline is receding back from his eyebrows. He's on the largish side, not fat, not muscular, but big. He has big eyes and he smiles wide. His wife, her hands draped lightly over her swollen abdomen, has darkly blonde hair, long, which falls around a kind face. They're alien to me, but at the same time look as though they will become familiar.

The two of them are part of the circle. There is a place for me to sit.

Everyone's still looking at me—Mom, Dad, David, my half-brother David, and his wife—as I walk, not slowly and not quickly, towards the circle of couches. I feel nervous, but it still feels all right. I'm heading in, I know I can't stop, but I don't want to stop. I'm ready to jump.

Everything, the world, life, it's just so huge.

You can't imagine.

Here we go.

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