
Senior Projects Spring 2024

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

Spring 2024

Eva,

Ruby Greischar
Bard College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2024



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Greischar, Ruby, "Eva," (2024). *Senior Projects Spring 2024*. 111.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2024/111

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects at Bard Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Projects Spring 2024 by an authorized administrator of Bard Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

Eva,

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
Ruby Greischar

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2024

Thank you to my parents for encouraging me.

Thank you to my professors for guiding me.

Thank you to my peers for keeping me company.

A special thank you to my project advisor Mary Caponegro.

For Campbell, Caleb, and my little brother Greyson.

“She knew nothing, in that absolute sense in which to know nothing means to understand nothing, save the rare truths to which the heart is capable of directly attaining.”

-Marcel Proust, Within a Budding Grove

Table of Contents

Eva.....	1
Max.....	10
Rubin.....	23
Tod.....	43
Sol.....	51
Lola.....	59

1. Eva

They found each other on the first day of college. It was late August, when the air was still thick and hot. Eva was standing by her father who was working at fastening the front wheel of her bike back on. It had been partially dismembered so as to fit in the trunk of his little black Volkswagen. She felt a light tap on her shoulder as she stared into the spokes of the wheel and turned to face a girl with long dark hair. There was a camera slung around her neck.

“Eva?” she said, with a confidence that made Eva feel awkward.

“Yes?” she replied, glancing back towards her father who was looking up at them, wiping sweat from his brow.

“I’m Lola.”

Eva remembered. A letter had come in the mail from her college with a sigil lined with latin words at the top. Her roommate’s name was in a little black font at the bottom. The last name placed in front: *Voix, Lola*.

She had not imagined Lola this way, but that was the way it always happened. People only began to resemble their names once you saw their eyes and heard their voices.

“I knew it was you,” she said, with a sly smile.

Her perfume was sweet like a bowl of bruised fruit: browning bananas, soft apples, peaches with hollow black holes, and her eyes were sharp and secretive. Eva saw

somewhere within her face—in the corners of her mouth when she smiled or the way her eyes drifted as if in a dream—her father’s face, with those familiar suggestions of sadness. She was like a child who had lost her mother in a crowd, forgotten and searching. They embraced one another, conjoined by something they could not yet name.

The wheel of her bike clicked smoothly as her father held it up by the handle bars to show her his work was finished. This also meant he had to go. She watched his car pull away, kicking dust up as it went.

Eva felt unusually comfortable in Lola’s presence. Perhaps because Lola seemed so comfortable with herself. As she led Eva through the dormitory doors, she held her wrist and spoke to her with a tone both ordinary and thrilled, as if Eva was a childhood friend whom she knew very well once, but had not seen in several years.

“I’ve made the room a mess unpacking,” she said, as she opened the door. There were two large suitcases set open face on the floor and heaps of clothes in disarray at the base of the bed. Photographs sat in a pile on her desk, some already pasted to the walls. Eva could hardly make out the black and white figures in the pictures and she did not want to stare, so she began to unpack her books from a box on the bed. It had been difficult to decide which ones she was to leave at home. They were all of equal importance to her, silent friends, and to leave one behind would be unjust. There was no telling which words she would need because for the first time, there was no telling of what was to become of her. She wanted to have all of them near to her just in case.

“What do you want to study?” Lola asked.

“I don’t know yet. I like to read. I think stories make things beautiful.”

“Why do things have to be beautiful?”

Eva paused for a moment to think and realized she did not know at all why she had said what she had said or what she meant when she said it.

“I don’t know,” she said, smiling to hide her embarrassment, “what are you studying?”

“Photography.”

“What do you take photographs of?”

“People. Girls, mostly.”

“Girls doing what?”

“Things they shouldn’t be doing.”

Eva glanced up at Lola. Her eyes danced with mischief. They prodded around for a couple minutes in silence on either side of the room. Eva unzipped her suitcase.

She felt that Lola wanted to speak about herself and Eva was willing to let her do so. She never told her own stories, rather, never spoke them aloud. But there was nothing she loved more than to watch someone speak: the slight opening and closing of the mouth, the fierceness of the eyes, the hands moving upwards, or outwards, or towards. She believed that if she could study every minute detail, every pore, the bluish imprint of a vein, the layering of tissue paper colors in the iris of an eye, she could understand who someone was: as if the force of observation was enough to map the

unseen parts inside of them. When you listen to someone tell a story you have an excuse to look at them.

“How did it start? The photography, I mean,” Eva asked.

“My mother was a photographer.”

Lola, as if she had been waiting patiently for Eva’s question, let her response tumble into a series of images from her mother’s life. She told Eva her mother was raised in Brooklyn. She was left an orphan at seventeen when her mother, Lola’s grandmother, died from a heart condition in 1963: the same year, she said, when President Kennedy was assassinated and Martin Luther King gave his speech in D.C., the year, they say, everything happened. Her father was a drunk, never home, never near, so they sent her upstate to a place not far from their present college. Lola’s mother, she said, took up photography in this boarding school for girls. She had no great love of light or image; rather, it was the black of the darkroom that attracted her to the process. After that, she saved up enough money working as a waitress to rent her own apartment across from the park: the cramped top floor of a brownstone. Lola described the little bathroom at the back end of the hallway where her mother hung black sheets over the singular, small window. She bought her own chemicals, mixed them herself, stopped off the drain, and developed photographs in the sink.

Eva listened intently and thought of her own small bathroom at home with its hexagonal white tile, the porcelain sink, and the dusty window behind the shower curtain.

Lola told her that her mother's practice progressed into her childhood. She would come home from work and go straight to her makeshift darkroom, working obsessively into the early hours of the morning. Lola would stay awake until she heard her mother retire, playing with her dolls and inhaling the sour smell of sulfur. Her mother only took self-portraits, never anything else. When Eva was old enough, she would help her set up the camera: a large vintage Hasselblad. Once her mother positioned herself correctly in front of it, she would dip under the tarp, examine her posed figure through the viewfinder, and squeeze the handheld button until the flash erupted. She described the experience of looking at her mother, before the photograph was taken, reflected in the mirrors of the apparatus, as the instant she saw her mother as only a woman, a person without a name. She transformed into a sheer figure whose physical appearance was merely made of light and shadow. From then on, she sought to look at other people in this way. It was not the printed photographs themselves, she said, but the moment of looking at someone through the viewfinder, that instant before the shutter closed, that drew her to the camera.

“We end up doing the things our mothers do sooner or later.”

Eva thought this was true.

They spent the next two days before classes playing with the scratchy strands of carpet as Lola spoke fervently about boys she loved but had never kissed, about the first time she got drunk, the first time she was on a plane. Eva would interject with small comments about herself every once in a while, but she felt as if her life before was a

boring lapse of time, a period of life she had spent waiting, dreaming of what was to come.

Eva watched Lola's brown eyes pass back and forth as she conjured feelings and images from the past and thought of the things left out of Lola's stories, the things lodged deep inside of the walls of a person, the things that would never metamorphose into language. Lola went straight to the rich parts, but Eva wondered what happened in between. What form did those experiences take, never having been spoken to another, where was their truth?

With so little to mull over, with such a small amount of efficacious memories, Lola only had a handful of stories worth sharing and though Eva enjoyed listening to them, more so, she enjoyed being able to study Lola's face as she spoke, her wandering brown eyes and proud mouth. Eva could tell Lola took pleasure in recounting these little moments of her life, in inhabiting them once more, and she spoke in a way that made the dreary days of youth and those instances of breaks in its tedium, plump with importance. She made her life seem like that of a woman—lost love, gaping sadness, ferocious anger—when all she had was the meager offerings of girlhood. Eva realized, as she listened to Lola, that their childhoods and early adolescence had turned into something complete, something that could now be picked through and presented. In the dawn of its ending, they felt everything meaningful from their lives before would have to be retold, witnessed by another, heard and felt and imagined by another. It was a way of preventing their memories from dissipating all together.

Lola spoke to Eva about herself through the register of loss as if her life before was in danger of being forgotten. She told Eva she could not remember her father's face, only his feet in white hospital socks. He had died from cancer when she was five.

"After he died, my mother would get drunk and fall asleep in the bathroom. I used to run away all the time and she would never notice."

"Where would you go?"

"All over. I would ride the subway all night or sit in a diner. When I came home, she wouldn't even know I had been gone." She said this with a kind of lonesome pride.

"My mother stopped eating when she divorced my father," Eva said, but she felt it was only a measly reverberation of Lola's story of loss and subsequent adventure. She felt she had no audacious tales like Lola, only memories of restive days spent reading in her room, staring at herself in the mirror, or looking out the window of her apartment at people in coffee shops. Though she had grown up in the same city as Lola, she was always afraid of it, and felt she had been born to a place she did not belong. Lola's New York was alive. In its chaos, she found freedom. Eva had always been uncomfortable in the crowded streets but Lola seemed to thrive in that namelessness. She wanted to be the girl in an empty diner or the face washed away by many in a throng dismounting a subway car.

Yet, they were both raised by lone women and never had either of them seen a woman proud and happy with a man. Their mother's love for men had caused nothing but pain and they felt men were bound to be ripped away, that they were transient beings, ghosts, who were present only faintly and then one day, gone all together. Eva

felt that this was what united them, as if they had lived two separate lives believing in the same God.

They would continue on like this, Lola telling her stories and Eva punctuating them with small pieces of her life.

Lola told her how she and her mother had lived in twenty different apartments over the course of eleven years. They were spread out across the boroughs, some in Queens, others in Brooklyn, a place or two in Manhattan.

“She couldn’t keep still after my father died,” she paused,

“I didn’t mind it though. I can't stand being in one place for too long,” she said with forced verve. Eva felt she was trying to convince herself of this truth.

There was one place, Lola said, that had a big iron fire escape with a ladder that ran down to the street. At night, she would open her window wide, squeeze herself out, and climb down to the gum covered sidewalk. She would roam around the streets until she would come across someone smoking a cigarette. When she did, she would politely ask if they had an extra, if they had a light too, and then she would find a bench or an inlet, suck on her cigarette, blow the smoke out in front of her, and pretend that she belonged to no one, that she did not have a name, or a home, or a mother, or a father.

After her classes began, Eva would hurry back to her room, read her books and write her notes while thinking of Lola and when Lola would return, she would wait for her to set down her bag, ask her a question, and watch her tell another story.

Lola told her that she had been sent away at twelve to a hospital. Her mother was trying to catch the sadness before it arrived.

There, they diagnosed her with depression, general anxiety, “all that shit.” Eva had only been to a hospital once when she broke her arm falling off the monkey bars. It had been a clean crack, right at the elbow.

“They just wanted to give me names,” she said, “besides, the stuff they gave me doesn’t even work. I have to take a bunch. My mother always says we have strong blood. We’re immune to all their stuff.”

She spoke about all this as if she had been caught up in a place she did not belong, as if she had been dreadfully misunderstood.

She went over to the top drawer of her desk and pulled out four orange vials, cradled them to her chest, and released them onto the floor in front of Eva.

“I don’t even know what’s in them.”

“I think my father takes that one,” Eva said, pointing to a familiar label.

Lola nodded, unsurprised.

“Want to try one?” she asked. “This one makes you stop thinking, makes you feel like nothing.”

Eva took it because she wanted to know what nothing felt like.

2. Max

Eva peered at herself in the mirror while Lola on her bed worked at powderizing ten blue pills with a dollar bill, a book, and her ID card. Eva took a swig of vodka and turned around, looking over her shoulder at the back of her legs.

“Can we snort it?”

“Sure.”

“It says online that three will get you high.”

“Let's take five then. Each.”

They had discovered that if they caught drunkenness at the precipice, before it became nauseating incoherence, if they were right at the burning edge and snorted three or four anxiety pills, they would have a couple hours of feeling absolutely nothing. It was a feeling like snow had fallen and suffocated all the small restless parts of their minds, like it had swooped in and snuffed out all the hot hissing thoughts. After numbness was utter darkness. Memory was quiet as was dream and worry. They would fall asleep—Lola, sprawled out on her bed, Eva, curled up somewhere on the floor—and wake up confused and empty. Memories would return from the night before. Images came passing over them fuzzy and flickering: a room they were in with blue light, the sound of a guitar, a boy's ravenous smile, stairs, sitting on the stairs whispering, cigarette, tile on the bathroom floor, train tracks, a car, were they in a car? They would wake with deep purple bruises on their shins and thighs, sometimes, in the napes of their necks.

Eva sauntered over to the window and exhaled on it twice. A round opaque spot made from hot air appeared where her breath met the cold glass. She spelled out her name on the pane in capital letters, looked at it for a moment, and then wiped it away with the back of her sleeve. The trees outside were like the gray skeletons of slender giants.

Lola put some music on and turned it up loud. She bowed her head down towards the thin blue lines, pressed one finger to the side of her nose, and with the other, inhaled sharply.

“Don’t you want any?” her head is tilted backwards and she is holding her nose as if to stop a nosebleed.

They danced around Lola’s small dorm room with the lights off so the music is the only thing they can feel. They stopped, intermittently, to stand in front of the mirror and tried to make sense of their faces and bodies, tilting their heads side to side like sparrows. Only when they could not feel the air on their skin or the weight of their limbs, only when they could not remember what it felt like to live or felt like to be seen, did they feel beautiful. They stripped down to their underwear and compared the sizes of their breasts.

Soon they forget what it felt like to be little girls. They forget that their limbs were short and legs, once stubby. They forget their watering eyes and tangled hair and flat chests. They forget how the world imposed itself on their babbling innocence, laying itself over them like a hot hairy body. It is easier to believe that they were never young;

they did not want to go back and wished they could exist instant by instant.

Remembering themselves young was like envisioning a new pair of shoes, polished and unsoiled, before they were tracked through the mud. Memories made them want to scrub themselves clean when they knew full well that the grime had already stained the seams. But the drugs made them feel like they were born dirty and rotten, and they could live with that. If they were to be tainted, so be it, at least they were in charge of their own defiling. The alcohol left their minds dead and the drugs left their bodies deadened, or maybe it was the other way around; they didn't care, as long as they did not have to remember anything, as long as they were no longer daughters, or sisters, or little girls.

They line their eyes with black and dance around in the shadowy room, bumping into furniture, directionless, blind.

They would continue on like this, singing and dancing, chasing that single moment, when everything tying them to the world and to other people had been severed, when they had felt, for an instant, happy. It never returned. At least not in the same way, on the same night. They would get tired and restless. Lola would sink into her bed and Eva would fidget with a loose thread on the bottom of her shirt or sit by the window and watch cars pull in and out of the parking lot. Eva's desires would creep back in and she would tell Lola she was going to meet Max. Lola would say she would find someone too but that Eva shouldn't go, that it was more fun just them anyway.

Eva lost her virginity to Max the second weekend they were at school and the last weekend of August. It was not very special and she had not expected it to be. She had dreamt of the moment so many times that when it happened, it was as if it had all happened before, every touch, every breath. He brought her to the woods behind the old Gymnasium and it was not the sex that she enjoyed so much as the moments before: all the words he spoke into her ear. Those words she thought, spoken at the threshold of anticipation, at the point preceding pleasure, were always the most true.

Eva left her room and walked out in the cold down the middle path towards the stone buildings where she imagined Max was waiting impatiently in his room picking at a guitar, or spraying chalky deodorant under his arms, or throwing limp clothes from his floor into a laundry basket. As she walked, Eva felt alone and she did not know why she was leaving Lola, but she wanted someone to look at her body in the way only men do. Though she caught Lola gazing at her naked skin, she did not know if it was out of curiosity or desire and if it were to be desire, she does not know whether Lola wanted to be with her or to become her. The moon was a single headlight in the night sky. It hung above in its solitude, she in hers. She saw, not felt, how beautiful it was. But those were not her words. A line from a Coleridge poem she can not remember the name of. When she read this the first time, she imagined Coleridge stumbling out of a smoky opium den onto a cobblestone street and the giant round moon bearing down on him. Maybe this image was fashioned by rumors. Maybe most things are.

Her father always noticed the moon when she was a child. When the moon was full, he would take her out in the summer once night fell and tell her the stories of gods

who pulled the planets by chariots in the sky. She had thought it odd then to take notice of something that was always there like looking down and suddenly heeding your right hand, but now she noticed the moon, or tried to, thinking that her father had seen something in it that she could not, an answer, a purpose. She knew that the moon had been there for an eternity and would remain there for an eternity after she was gone. She knew it would be in the sky every night, every single night, it would be there. All these thoughts crowded around the image of the moon in the sky and she felt it was impossible to see it without them.

We watch many things crumble, disintegrate, and disappear, but the moon, like the sun, we may never see die, and if we do, our death will be quick to follow. She thought of how her body was built to degrade, break down, just as gradually as she had grown, cell by cell, in a fluid nest. Yet, the lab-born pill was pumping powderized through her blood and she had fried her hair with a curling iron so her curls looked like a synthetic wig and she smelled like acetone because she had scrubbed off all of her nail polish moments before she left Lola. The skin on the tips of her fingers looked like the rind of a desiccated orange. If she died she felt the soil would refuse to accept her; she would stay on the surface like a plastic bottle cap, or a piece of styrofoam, or a fiberglass mannequin.

When she got to Max's dorm room they talked for a couple minutes on his bed about how cold it had gotten. Eva tried to hide her shriveled fingertips beneath her legs.

They started kissing. Eva felt uncomfortable in the silence and became grossly aware of their two bodies joined at the mouth. She pulled away and asked Max why he liked her.

“What?”

“Why me?”

“I don't know.”

He looked startled and started to go back to kissing.

“There isn't a reason you chose to be with me over other girls?”

She was not sure what she was getting at, but her curiosity had taken over, and she did not know if what she wanted to know was about him or about herself. But she thought that if she were able to squeeze out some impression of herself from him, his answer would have a place among the other impressions she had collected, and it would bring her closer to an understanding of who she was and who she was to other people, because she felt those two things were mostly the same, but really, it didn't matter who she was to herself at all. She wanted to know exactly what led him to her assuming, of course, that there was a reason.

“I don't know,” he said again. “You're different, I guess.”

This didn't satisfy her at all because she wanted specifics. She wanted him to describe her in great detail, to tell her all the precise things that made her different. She wanted to know how she occupied that word. She wanted to know how he thought she saw the world, whether she was mysterious or shallow. She wanted him to tell her how she seemed aware of everything, how her face was balanced, how her skin was soft, how the freckle on her top lip was endearing. She wanted him to be curious, to see the bend

of her waist and wonder how she felt when her father called her, to trace the curves of her profile when she turned, and while observing closely the protrusion of her lips and the dark flick of her eyelashes, ask her what had made her happy, so far, in her brief life. She wanted him to love her, though she did not know if she even loved him. Although, she often felt she could love anyone if she tried hard enough. Maybe the reason he was unable to give her what she wanted was because he just had not noticed.

He wouldn't pick up her calls for the next couple of days. Over the weekend, she and Lola saw him leading a girl into his dormitory by the hand. Eva thought about what he would say if that girl asked him the same question and he told her she was different too. If another girl never came along, she would always think she was.

Eva told Lola about Max who she felt had led her on and she tried to explain it all to Lola, the situation, so as to make sure he was the one who seemed the most unjust. Although she was not sure anymore who was right and who was wrong. What did she want from him besides love and admiration? She was angry at him and his stupid, lazy, nonchalance, his inability to see that she was remarkable. Lola asked her if she really liked him and she snapped back, surprising herself, like a little angry dog: *of course I did.*

They started drinking that day at four. They got cranberry juice from the dining hall in paper cups, drank half of the juice, then filled the rest up with cheap vodka, and Eva couldn't help it, but she cried. She told Lola that it was because she liked Max and he didn't like her back. It was one of those moments she felt the simple thing that was not true was better to say. She felt that her sadness came from somewhere else,

somewhere before, and that it was not really about Max at all. Lola told her he was dumb anyway. The wind blew sharply. Eva pulled her scarf up around her mouth and hugged her legs close to her body. She thought of something her father told her about his twenties: the moment he realized something was wrong. A psychologist, whom he had been encouraged to meet with in the lonely, early days of college had asked him when in his life he had been happy and he realized he could not retrieve a single moment. The sadness had been born with him. It had followed him all his life and only when asked that question did he realize he was sick, that his mind was destined to paint the world in dark dreary colors. Was she born with that sadness too? These things traveled in the blood in ways she did not understand.

On nights when they felt the most restless, when the bottles were empty, when they could not stand to glare at themselves in the mirror any longer or distract themselves by painting their nails, or plucking at their eyebrows, or bleaching the hair above their lips; when their boredom began to butt against a lonely, hollow feeling, they would go to the waterfall. It was the end of September. The leaves that had once been soft and viridescent were already turning brown and brittle. When they arrived in late August, the waterfall was always teeming with people: girls laying on warm slabs of rock, people strewn all about, some in the water, others climbing up the rocks while the current split in two paths around their planted feet. Clouds of smoke rose up from a joint or a cigarette and hung in the air a couple beats too long. The sound of the water was deep and loud; it swallowed up spoken words as soon as they were uttered. Like the

twig tossed into the current, words, once released, belonged to the surging stream and were carried along on its determined, unidirectional journey.

Eva used to imagine all the lost words floating around in the Hudson, and all the words that didn't make it there, lodged behind a fallen branch or beached in a shallow, muddy grave.

To combat the noise, people would shout fiercely or lean in close, taking turns directing speech into one another's ears. Some didn't bother to speak to each other at all.

They walked through the poorly lit back trails and the streetlamps and the soccer field illuminated like a stage. The words they passed between one another they said while thinking about themselves.

"We're so crazy."

"I know. It's so cold."

"We need something to do."

"I know. It's so fucking boring here."

"We're so crazy."

They walked on the path down towards the water. The rocks fell out from under their feet and rolled down ahead of them. The sound of the water was faint, but audible. Eva thought it strange that it was always alive, rushing. She felt they were nocturnal creatures, unthinking ones, who were drawn towards water by some primordial force. She did not know exactly why they were doing what they were doing, but she knew it was a secret between them. She knew that they liked doing something no one else knew

about. She knew that this was why Lola liked it too. Maybe it was the idea of it, really, the two of them sneaking away in the dark like forest nymphs and submerging themselves in cold water that no one else could stand. Maybe, it made them feel strong to subject themselves to great discomfort; maybe, it made them feel sacred to float beneath the moon with water pooling against their eardrums; maybe, they liked the burn of the bitter water, the searing shock of it against their skin and maybe, it was nothing more than pain that brought them to the waterfall on autumn nights. She realized how terrible she was at finding the origin of her actions and she was always trying to expound herself to herself, but as soon as she moved backwards in this way, she could never pinpoint the single, pure kernel of her desires. She really did not know why they did this but they did, and that was all.

They set up two flashlights on the rocks pointed into the basin of the falls. The dual lights cut through the darkness. The sound was upon them. They only laughed because they knew their words would be lost. They laughed at themselves, at one another, and into the dark. Together, they crept over rocks. Lola went into the water first and Eva followed behind her, relishing the moment her toes went numb. They waded in just close enough to the deep and Lola contorted her body into a bridge, her arms in a gentle “V,” her hands on top of one another, and plunged in head first. The white soles of her feet flashed up like the argent glint from a fish’s fin. She resurfaced with her hair wet and plastered to her cheeks, grinning. Eva followed her. The water stung at her chest and stomach. But the fierce cold was not a foreign pain. She remembered it from when she was a child and her family had spent the day sledding;

the wind had whipped at her nose and fingers; the frost had seeped in through the tips of her boots. When they got home, she would rip off her shoes and examine her toes for frostbite. She was always certain that her numb toes would look the way she had imagined—like violet blackish nubs—but they were only ever flushed, pinkish.

They came out of the water shivering. Eva fumbled around in the darkness looking for her shoes. The little stone pebbles on the shore stuck to the soles of her feet.

Lola was holding her camera up over her face. Eva could only make out the gesture of her arms and the glow of white fabric but the glassy membrane of the camera's polished lens reflected the moonlight like a dark reflective eye. The flash went off. Eva felt her face and arms blink white and the darkness around her lit for half of a heartbeat and then it was black again.

They made their way back up the path. Lola shone the flashlight ahead of them and Eva followed closely behind her staring at the back of her neck, wondering what Lola had seen in the moment before the flash had gone off. She thought about the impression of her face on the little piece of film that Lola was carrying in her bag and wondered if she had become a girl doing what she should not be doing.

When they had emerged completely from the wooded path, Lola turned around clutching her neck.

“My father's ring. It's gone.”

Eva, who had been startled by Lola's sudden realization, began to spurt out any consolation she could muster.

“It’s his wedding ring. I always wore it around my neck.”

An image of the delicate silver against Lola’s flesh darted through her mind.

“I remember,” she said, and thought about how that remark was probably useless but maybe the fact that she could recall the object in her mind was a soothing discovery for Lola.

“It must have come off in the water.”

“It must have,” Eva echoed, “should we go back?”

“We won’t be able to find it in the dark.”

“Tomorrow,” then, Eva said, but she knew it was gone and she knew Lola knew it was gone, or rather, that it was somewhere they could not reach. The current was too strong for a ring to rest, undisturbed, at the bottom. Though she was fairly certain of this, she imagined the circle of silver—caught between two rocks—beaming in the murky water.

“My mother gave it to me because she said she couldn’t stand to look at it anymore.”

Eva glanced at Lola whose dark hair was slung neatly behind her ears. They walked for a while with only the muffled sound of Lola’s portable speaker stuffed in her bag beneath a terry cloth towel.

At the point on the road right before it split in two directions, one towards the highway and the other towards their dormitory, they felt hot white light hit the back of their legs. They both turned to face the car creeping towards them and moved towards the edge of the road to let it pass. It slowed and pulled up beside them. It was Rubin

whom they had met the other weekend in the early hours of the morning. He rolled down his window and stuck his arm out the side, leaning towards them.

“What’s up?”

“Nothing, really.”

“Well if you want to hang out later?”

They laughed, mocking his desperation. He thought they were excited to see him.

“Maybe,” they said.

They watched him drive off.

“I think he likes us.”

3. Rubin

It was a cold weekend in October. Lola was so beautiful, Eva thought. She had come back from the bathroom with the skin around her eyes pink and puffy.

“My mother called,” was all she said.

Eva thought it best not to pry.

She never saw Lola cry. Eva was sure she had cried but she had never seen it, never witnessed the instant when Lola ruptured into sadness, never watched her face pass from one thing to another; the aftermath of her tears was all she had observed. There was something lovely to her about the wake of a sob.

Lola sat down and craned into the small mirror on her desk, gluing little gems to the corners of her eyes with a tweezer. Eva hardly ever saw her disheveled. She was always perfumed with her hair slightly damp from the shower. Showers, she said, washed away the dirt on the outside and the inside. Eva tried this but she always came out of the water feeling the same, only wet.

It was dark out by the time they decided to get dressed. Eva tried on a pair of Lola’s black heeled boots and teetered over to the mirror. She never wore heels. They made her feel like she was trying too hard to be noticed. Lola, she realized, liked to be noticed.

There was a bonfire that night in the woods so she and Lola took long swigs from a bottle between them. Eva was beginning to feel dizzy but reality was dim at this point

and that was how she liked it. Eva and Lola usually drank more than half the bottle if they had to show up somewhere where they would have to be around other people. They tumbled out into the cold, walking with their arms interlocked, and Eva felt as if she and Lola were the only live, coruscating ember on the quiet, moonlit campus. She looked down at Lola's feet and tried to match their rhythm so they could be synchronized in stride. Then Lola stopped, took her hand, and wound her pinky around Eva's, putting their intertwined fingers up to her hot lips.

“Promise we'll always be friends?” she asked, like a lonely girl in a playground.

She promised. Yet one cannot help but think, when a promise is made, of the day it will be broken.

When they got to the bonfire, Lola let go of her arm.

“I'm gonna find a cigarette,” she said.

Eva watched her flit towards a group of shadowy figures huddled on the outskirts and then sat down on a log and stared into the flames. When she looked up, Lola was gone. After searching around the perimeter of the fire and then deeper into the woods, and calling out her name a couple times, all to no avail, she concluded that Lola had probably run off with some guy or gotten bored and left, maybe, she was waiting for her at their room. Eva walked back alone.

She returned to find a little note on a piece of looseleaf paper. Lola had a habit of leaving these messages around. She had said her mother used to leave notes for her in

her lunch boxes at school. She saved all of them, anxious about the lack of physical things that would be left for their generation.

Eva,

Came back to try and find you—

Meet me at the waterfall?

As she tried to decipher Lola's slanted cursive, someone knocked at her door. Lola, thank god, it's Lola. She pulled open the door, smiling. Rubin stood in the hallway with a look on his face both sheepish and smug.

"Not happy to see me?"

Before she could answer he asked if he could come in.

"Okay."

Though it was not Lola, she was mildly excited to have someone to entertain. She did not want to be drunk and alone. This was fun and fine. Someone to talk to was good. She asked if he knew where Lola was. He told her he didn't but actually, he wanted to talk about that.

"About what?"

"About Lola."

"What about her?"

She sat on the edge of her bed so she could perch her feet on the wood bar of the frame. That was where she usually sat when someone came over and they, whoever it

was, would sit in the chair by her desk. Rubin had sat next to her on the bed. She could tell he wanted something from her but she was not sure what it was.

“She’s not responding to my texts or calls,” he said, a tone of apathy in his voice.

Eva made up some excuse for Lola who she knew did not really like Rubin though she hooked up with him a couple of times when she was drunk. Lola was detached from men, they were playthings to her, and she had always thought Eva was overly obsessive, overly devoted to romantic endeavors.

Rubin looked mildly annoyed. His coat was still on: a red puffer. Eva was thinking about how she had never spent time with him when she was sober. She only ever saw him past midnight. He looked straight ahead, nodding his head in a mechanical way while she spoke; she could not place his feelings, whether he was distraught or disinterested. His face was slippery; it was different each time she saw him. Sometimes, his dark eyes were cold, reptilian, and others, soft, devoted, canine. Her tone of voice always shifted to a softer register when she was lying. Maybe he could tell. Lola was better at this. She had begun to feel bad for him. His coat was too big for his slight frame. He came to her hoping for answers and she had none. She felt sorry, churning out a shield of excuses. Maybe he really liked Lola and if he could hear the deception in Eva’s voice, he would probably be hurt. People only really hung out with him because he had a nice car. The possibility of telling him the truth was pulsing at her throat. The lights in her room were suddenly very bright. She lay back on the bed and closed her eyes for a moment to quell the sudden onset of vertigo. Where was Lola? Waiting for her somewhere, probably. She wanted to call her but Rubin was here. This

was the time of night she and Lola always spent together, right before bed. They ate spoonfuls of peanut butter together and talked, delaying the solitude of sleep with one another's presence.

When she opened her eyes Rubin's hand was on her thigh. It was hot and heavy. She straightened up. How long were her eyes closed? There were people laughing devilishly outside the window. One of the voices, higher pitched, sounded like Lola. Her room was still save her and Rubin's breath and the stirring of their bodies. She was facing him now and the corner of his mouth was curling up in a half smile. She laughed to avoid smiling back.

"You should go talk to Lola," she said, shifting her leg a little under his hand. He moved it to his side.

"I don't want to talk to her. I want to talk to you."

She laughed again. This time, because she did not know what to say.

They were sitting side by side again on the edge of her bed. She felt like a little girl with her arms planted tightly on either side of her torso and her feet dangling above the floor. She looked at him. All the muscles in his face were tense: his eyes, eager, his mouth, wet. She could sense hunger in his oily demeanor and it made her feel filthy. Yet, there was something else beneath his throbbing desire; something tender and pathetic. She could not rid herself, though she tried, from the feeling of sympathy. He kissed her. She let him.

"I really shouldn't."

"Why?"

“Lola’s my friend.”

“She doesn’t care.”

Eva knew Lola would not care, not really, but that was not why she said it. She said it because she thought it would be enough for him to stop, that maybe this kind of appeal would extinguish his impulse to be with her. Maybe she said it because she just wanted to say Lola’s name, to hear it out loud, so Lola was there somehow and she was not alone in a room with him. He pressed into her. She let him.

“We shouldn’t, really,” she said while smiling. Why was she smiling?

He laughed. She did not notice at first but she was laughing too. Everything in her room had become misty besides his face in front of her which was glassy and pronounced. Lola would come knocking any second now.

“I need a drink,” she said, because her mouth was dry and she was not sure if she wanted to accept his lips on hers again. She slid off the bed and went over to her desk, lifted a half filled bottle, and took a long swig. When she set it down, she looked at her hand; it was trembling.

The next thing she did she will never understand. Maybe, it was the alcohol that had dulled out all sensation, even the one that told her to be afraid or to feel guilty. Maybe, it was the feeling of pity for Rubin drowning out her own unease, maybe, she felt more sorry for him than for herself. Maybe, she was scared to be offensive, to be rough and mean. There were only two choices: anger or submission. She could tell him to get out or let him in and she was unable to imagine her voice stern and bold, her finger

sharp and pointed in the direction of the door. Maybe, she had clung to the thought that Lola was coming. Maybe, she had convinced herself that this is what she wanted: to be wanted, to be seen, to be touched. She had let him in already. She had opened the door. She was paralyzed, her hands and feet immobilized by her smiles and her laughs. Maybe, this is what she deserved.

So instead of reaching towards the open door she turned back to Rubin and slunk over to the bed. When she tried to hoist herself up she lost her balance and crumbled to the floor. She made sure to laugh and steady herself quickly so as to appear less drunk, though her eyes were opening and closing slowly as if she had just woken from sleep and every movement she made with her arms and legs was sluggish. She tried again, this time successfully pulling herself up to the edge of her bed. Rubin's hand wound around her waist. Her head was down staring into her lap. She could not look at him but when she did, she realized how much she hated his face. His eyes, once pitiable, were two beads of black and the skin underneath them was a pale purple. The devious half grin had never left his face. He kissed her again.

"We really shouldn't," she said, as he unzipped his coat, feverishly pulling his arms out of the sleeves. He tossed it to the floor where it stayed in a crumpled red heap.

"Rubin, maybe we should stop," she said, while he nuzzled his face into her neck. She was staring up at the string lights lining her windows. Her hands were limp by her sides. He placed his hand gently on her sternum, pushed, and she fell back into the mattress.

“I don’t think we should,” she said, but as soon as he pulled upwards at the hem of her shirt with one hand and reached for his belt with the other, she realized she was not, had not, been saying anything aloud. He tossed his pants over the end of the bed; spare change spilled from the pockets and hit the floor with a twinkling like tiny bells. He slid himself over her body and she lay still on her back. She looked up at the ceiling painted white and saw through it to the moon and felt the darkness of the night sky opening up around her. Her wooden desk, the warm light of her table lamp, the checkered linoleum floor, her body and Rubin’s on the bed, all slackened beneath her. And she was completely alone. Shadow was closing in on her, seeping in the corners of her eyes as wet ink feathers out onto paper, only now the fields of the black sky had morphed into the dark cement walls of a dimly lit basement room. It was her room but underground, at the end of some dark seedy hallway. Exposed pipes like petrified snakes ran along the walls and in the corners of the ceiling hissing with hot liquid. She was on her bed again and Rubin was a dark ghostly mass contorting on top of her. How did she get here? she wondered. Where had Rubin taken her?

“Where am I?” she called out. She blinked and the room was lit as normal.

“What?” Rubin grunted, looking at her with a mixture of indifference and confusion. His face was inches away from hers and flushed pink but the rest of his body was a smooth pale birch color. He was naked. She looked down and realized that she was too.

“I’m fine,” she said, then turned away from his face and towards the pillow.

“I just thought we were somewhere else.”

She closed her eyes until it was over.

After that, she did not say anything else to him. He pulled his pants back on in the corner of her room while she sat cross-legged on the floor trying to figure out which opening in her shirt her head went through. His face was still red as he bent down to collect the change that had scattered around the floor. A penny had floated away from the other coins and was resting a couple of inches away from her big toe. He did not notice it. Satisfied, he threaded his belt through the loops of his jeans then pulled and fastened the buckle. He came over to her seated on the floor and when she did not look up at him as he had expected, stroked her head awkwardly as one would an unfamiliar dog. He waited for her to say something and when she did not, he went to the door, opened it, hesitated, then left.

She picked up the penny and put it on her desk.

Lola, who was sitting outside on a bench, saw Rubin leave the building rosy-cheeked and satisfied. Curious, she had gone up to Eva's room, knocked on the door, and Eva had opened it looking palid and relieved. Her hair was mussed and her shirt was on backwards.

"*Lola*," she said, it was the first word she had said since Rubin. It tasted like salvation on her tongue. Where were you?

"I was just outside, waiting for you. Are you ok?" she said, stepping into Eva's room. The bedsheets were bunched and tangled.

“You were outside the whole time?”

“Yes. Why? Eva what’s wrong?”

Eva sat down on her bed, avoiding the question because she was not yet sure how to answer it. She was relishing being near Lola and her pleasant smell, her resilient brown eyes.

“I don’t know. Nothing.” She forced a faint smile.

“You can tell me if you had sex with Rubin. You know I won’t care.”

She wobbled a little on her heeled boots after the last word. Eva could tell she was drunk.

“I know. I did. I mean, he wanted to.”

“Did you,” Lola asked, sitting down next to Eva, “want to?”

Eva did not say anything. She was as still as the trees; silence felt sufficient. What did she want anyway? Lola understood.

“I’m so sorry,” Eva, she said, wrapping her arms around Eva’s shoulders. They stayed like this for a while: Eva silent and Lola, embracing her tightly as if she could squeeze out Eva’s experience and soak it up, as if being near to her would remedy the fact that Lola was there and Eva was here and that they had not been together, as if the prolonged physical proximity would make up for the hours they were apart.

“Eva, did he—”

“I don’t know.”

They sat for a moment more in silence on the wrinkled sheets.

“We should make your bed,” Lola said.

The two of them got up and together, stripped the bed of the white comforter and sheet and put the two large pieces of fabric together in a pile on the floor. Eva took the misshapen pillows and threw them to the ground so the force would inflate them. Once the bed was bare, Lola stood at the back edge and with each hand gripping the corners of the sheet out, lifted the fabric up to the ceiling with her arms above her head and then guided its descent as the air caught the fabric from underneath, smoothing it and spreaded it over the mattress. She repeated this motion until the fabric cooperated and the corners on the far side fell into place. The same was done with the comforter. Eva waited until Lola was finished and then placed the two pillows at the head of the bed and gave them both a pat. All this work was done in a serious silence. They stood back for a moment to admire their work and then climbed over top the rolled out bedding and curled up facing each other, each head resting on a pillow. They fell asleep like this, neither of them dipping beneath the covers, as if on the surface of a still pond.

The next morning they drove to town so Eva could buy Plan B. They were quiet in the car together. Eva looked straight ahead. An oily crow stood on the top wire of the barn fence they passed. Pigs lay in the dirt. Their dry skin was prickly and caked with cracking mud. A single cow grazed in the back field. His neck was muscular and strained downwards as he pulled at the earth. There was a pink scar that moved its way from the underside of his tail to the start of his belly, no udders. The windows of the car were shut, but that farm smell of soil and manure pushed its way through the glass and steel and aluminum. It smelled of life: hard, sweat-stained, aching joint, wood splinter, ax

chopping life. They passed more fields and farms. There were white goats with their horizontal devil eyes, lone chickens bobbing their heads, and horses that looked like strange angels in the drab fields. On the back roads they passed shabby ranch style homes, metal gates, chrome airstream trailers, miniature plastic swing sets with no children in sight, and loud signs that said NO TRESPASSING or BEWARE OF DOG. They approached from behind, on a road surrounded by trees, a man with baggy jeans holding two large skulled pitbulls by chain leashes. The one on the left lunged towards the front of the car and the man yanked him backwards by his throat.

Usually, when they were in the car together, Eva would let things grab her attention like a farmhouse with a red door or a plump cow. She would let the thing, whatever it was, pull her head backwards as she followed it until it was no longer in sight. Usually, the world captured her. She liked car rides for it was a chance to see things only briefly and from a distance which was how they retained their beauty. Things were always more attractive to her from farther away. Today, she had no interest in the farmland or the miscellaneous objects on people's porches. She could not stop rehearsing the night before with Rubin; he in the doorway, their conversation on the bed, her moment of confusion, his departure. His face, too, his face hovering over top of her secreting pleasure, his eyes consuming her. She saw wickedness in everything.

"I asked him where I was," she said, turning to Lola who glanced at her before bringing her eyes back to the road.

"I asked him where I was," she said again as if it was an incantation.

Lola paused and then said, in the same way she had said before, “I’m sorry, Eva. I’ll never leave you alone again. If only I had been with you.” Eva sensed a hint of something else in her voice, something cold.

Eva did not know why but she wanted Lola to say something else. She wanted something more than sympathy. Yet, she knew Lola could offer nothing more. Why was she saying all this, really? Did she want Lola to think Rubin had done something wrong so she was not angry they had been together? If he had done something wrong, why is it that she felt only guilt? She asked where she was. Was that not enough? Was that not enough to deter him? To make him pull his pants back on and leave? It was not enough, maybe, and the only thing she felt that resembled pain was the hatred of herself. Maybe, she was not sad because she was guilty. Maybe, they were both wrong: she and Rubin. This is what happened to drunk girls who did not know what they wanted, who did not know who they were. What did she want? If only she could answer that question. She had convinced herself, in her room with Rubin, that she had wanted him the way he wanted her, but now she realized she had not. What became of girls who only realize what they want after looking back, to girls who can only make sense of the scar and not the bleeding wound?

When they got to the drugstore, Eva waited in the car. Lola decided it was better if she went in to buy it. This was an unspoken agreement. As Eva waited she looked down at her hands, splaying them out palm down above her lap. She examined the hints of blue vein, the splotchy pink patterns, the bulge of her knuckles, and tried to imagine that they were not her hands, that they did not belong to her. Lola came running back

with a little white box with a green and purple font. It was a clear, glowing day without shadow. For a moment as Eva watched Lola prancing softly with her long white skirt towards the car, she felt as if it had all happened to Lola and not her, or at least, that Lola had wished it had happened to her. Whether because she loved Eva or for some other reason, curiosity, maybe. Lola got in the car a little out of breath and handed the box to Eva.

You just take it with some water.

That's all?

Yes, that's it, Lola said, passing Eva a cold bottle of water with condensation covering its sides, then added,

It's just to be safe because you don't remember.

Eva felt that she would know if she was pregnant: if not some bubbling feeling in her uterus then some other fluctuation, some revision of the mind. She had thought, as a little girl, that pregnancy occurred when the love between two people was so true that it manifested into a child, that if a man's love was veracious enough it was somehow funneled, directed, channeled, into the body of a woman, and that all this happened without any physical intrusion, without touch. It is as silly as the stork, she thought.

The little white pill was inside a tight enclosure of plastic. She tried to pry it open, first, with her fingers and then, with her teeth, all of which resulted in little indents around the sides and half pulled gaps in the corners. Lola saw her struggling, took the car key out of the ignition, and worked at widening one of the gaps with it. When the hole in the corner was large enough, she stuck the index fingers of either hand through

and pulled them in opposite directions. The package popped open and in an instant, the little pill, once lodged in the center of the plastic, was flung upwards into the air and then fell to the ground where it rolled away from sight.

I think I saw it go over there, Eva said, pointing to a spot beneath Lola's left foot.

Lola bent over patting around the floor. When she found nothing, she got out of the car and with the door open, examined the driver's side while bending in from the outside. Eva did the same. She imagined how they looked, their lower halves protruding, now, from either side of the car, their upper halves submerged and searching.

"I don't see it," Eva said.

"Me neither."

They had looked all around the front of the car floor, underneath the mats and in crevices, amongst the crumbs of drive-through meals, a chapstick, a couple candy wrappers, and some lollipop sticks. Lola had even lifted the cover of the center console to make sure—believing for a moment in the impossible—that the pill had not made its way through the closed lid. Eva had run her hands through the tight nooks of the car seats and did the same in the back, sliding the tips of her fingers through every crease. Though it was useless, Lola had gone around to the back and opened the trunk. It was vacant save a half drunk bottle of vodka and an open pack of lifesavers. Eva began to feel they were no longer searching for the pill but searching for all the places it was not and when they had found all the places it was not, she began to feel as if the pill, the idea of taking the pill, was all hopeless and came to terms with this hopelessness by believing that it had never existed in the first place: the pill, Rubin, and the possibility of a baby.

We can't buy another one, it was fifty dollars, Lola said, irritated.

They had already pooled their meager cash savings to buy the first. Eva looked up at Lola who looked more flustered and frantic than she and realized how little she cared. She did not really mind what happened to her. She wanted to let the world do as it pleased. Eva told Lola that it was fine and that it would turn up and that she didn't remember if Rubin did that or not so there was a chance he didn't and if that was true there was no point in taking the pill in the first place. They stood for a moment on either side of the car. Lola was resting on the frame of the driver's side door, her arms crossed over her head, staring dejected towards the ground; Eva pattered around on the other side, dipping the sole of her shoe in a small pool of water and stamping it on the dry part of the asphalt.

Eva got back in the passenger seat. Before Lola got back in, she walked around the perimeter of the car checking once more, but found nothing.

They drove to the river. Lola turned on some music and clenched the steering wheel. Eva sat in the passenger seat, staring ahead, furling and then unfurling a chunk of hair around her finger. The sun had sunk in the sky and dusk had begun its ascent. Lola's little white hatchback whirled through the winding roads, whipping past the trees: a dart of white, like a rabbit in the woods. Eva did not want the car to stop. She played with the sweetness of that possibility: she and Lola driving out of town and gliding out onto the highway heading west; they would go on until the car gave out, until the gas was burned, and roll into a meadow surrounded by tall blades of grass where peace would sweep them to sleep for days, or months, or years. She wished to stay on the road

with Lola and without destination. The greatest pain was letting time pass. If only she could stop it all right there, then she would never have to decide what to be: a mother, a wife, alone. She thought they must have come together because they knew, too well, the world of melancholy, they knew it better than everyone else; she believed that they peeked behind the curtains too soon and had seen something disgusting, alluring, and unforgettable. Where others would have averted their eyes and walked away with shame, Eva and Lola could not look away, they wanted to be a part of it. Where they could not understand pain, they wanted to get underneath it, to swallow it.

They pulled into the gravel opening just as the sun dipped below the mountains and then together, they teetered over the large pieces of stone up onto the barren train tracks and over them to the stony bay. They sat down on a large slab of rock side by side. Lola held the half drunk bottle of vodka tightly by the neck which made a sloshing sound as she plopped down next to Eva.

“What a shit day,” she said, taking a swig from the bottle. She sucked her teeth after she swallowed then handed it to Eva.

“We missed the sunset,” Eva said, staring out at the sky.

“I hope you’re not pregnant.”

“I’m not. But if I was, would it be so bad?”

“*Eva*, are you insane?”

We could raise it together. She laughed a little afterwards to prove she had not been serious. She was not, though she wanted a child one day and found herself

dreaming of that satisfaction. It was her misty image of hope, the thing she clung to when she did not understand her purpose. In a part of herself—a vibration in the chest—there was a desire to care for a child and do nothing else. Yet, something else—a tremor in the mind—spoke to her of that burden.

“If it was the 19th century, or if we were somewhere else in the world, we would both be pregnant by now, maybe with our second child,” she said.

“But it isn’t. We’re lucky. We have choices.”

“Maybe too many of them.”

I’ll never have a kid, Lola’s voice was strong and sure, why would I? The earth is burning. The water is rising. There’s hardly time left for us, let alone them. And I drink too much to get pregnant anyway.

“We both do.”

“It’s stupid to dream about that stuff.”

We don't choose to dream. Eva did not say this aloud, but whispered it in her head, embarrassed to even think it. It was that quality which made her hear in the wind, an exhalation, which made her see in the lapping water, the rhythm of time, which transposed the cold solidity of her surroundings into balmy ideas. She wanted to see the world as Lola saw it, see it bare, for what it was, to see the world without a self, but it was not possible. Her hands were as much hers as everything else she could see and hear and feel. This sensation would not leave her and she felt as though it was a kind of sickness, a curse. She looked at Lola whose nose had gotten pink from the wind. Her eyes were brown, nearly black in the light.

They decided to go once the last light faded from the sky and the air became chilled. Lola picked up the bottle, now empty, and they began working up the rock again towards the train tracks. There were only two tracks, identical and adjacent to one another, that stood a couple yards apart; one was meant for trains coming in south, towards the city and the other for trains going up north. The rows of horizontal wood were like two columns of fat stitches that ran flat across the edge of the land. The tracks were straight where Eva and Lola stood, but there was a bend in the land to the left and right where the routes disappeared from view and because it was dark, they could only guess where the curve on either side of them began. They had to walk over both sets of tracks in order to get to the gravel inlet on the other side. Eva hurried over them, quickly, stepping over the first set of metal bars and then the second. Lola lagged behind her. Eva could only make out her shadowy form on the other side. As she began to call out to Lola, a sharp repetitive ringing began like a shrill church bell and a light post a couple feet from her was blinking red. There was a low rumble and the ground began to tremble. She looked up at Lola across the two sets of tracks. She was still. They had seen the trains pass before, but always when they were seated at the shore and never when they were so close.

She shouted over to Lola: "*The train is coming. Stay on that side.*"

But she was not sure if Lola heard her voice; the rumbling had crescendoed. Though, she seemed to understand and her dark form backed away from the northbound tracks. The steam whistle blew out, first one hoot then another, hollering into the night air. The night gave no answer back. The scream of the wheels was sharp

and Eva braced herself as the light from the head of the trains grew brighter. Surely, it had rounded the bend by now. She thought, for an instant, of scampering over both of the tracks to get to Lola. There was still enough time; she estimated two seconds for the run to the other side and five for the trains to get to them. It was possible. She decided not to. The advancing train had laid out before itself a barrier of fear that she realized she was not brave enough to cross. As the light drew nearer, it gradually dissolved the darkness veiling Lola, as if a fluorescent sun was rising horizontally and hitting her sideways. The shadow lifted and the glow touched the hard points of her body: the shoulders, the cheekbones, the chin, the bony knuckles. Then, in the instant before the train met between them, light found its way into every hollow part of her face. Eva was startled by the brightness of Lola's figure standing in the dark, the shining clarity. It was as if she was seeing Lola without the world behind her and she felt near to her through the sharpness of her image. She realized then, that Lola could see her too and began to smile. Lola smiled back and Eva raised up her hand as a gesture of recognition. Lola's hand twitched upwards as if to echo Eva's motion and then the train, like a great armored serpent, thrust itself between them.

4. Tod

I sense anxiety in your writing, a habitual reticence. Eva was sitting at her desk after a morning French class, looking over a handwritten response to her final essay. There was a searing pain on the left side of her head: the remainders of last night's binge drinking with Lola. She massaged her temples. *Reticence.* She opened her laptop and consulted an online dictionary. *Reticence: an unwillingness to do something or talk about something, for example because you are nervous or being careful.* Which one was she? The nervous or the careful? She thought of Rubin. Was it her reticence that had willed her submission? And why is it that everyone, even her professors, could see through to it? She felt there was some dust covering her body that trailed off and into everything, that left traces of her hapless condition everywhere.

She had been called quiet in many different ways. Her first grade teacher wrote on the end of term report card: "Eva is a reserved and observant child," in second grade, "shy." In highschool there were new names for her way of being: "private," "restrained," "contained," "distant," and "demure." She carried all these words with her. Her favorite was "soft spoken" because she could imagine her voice was made from fleece.

Her mother said it started on her first day of Preschool when she realized other children could see her. She accepted this as the reason for her introversion because she could think of no other explanation besides that it was simply a trait inherited from her father, who was himself, a quiet man. Throughout her childhood and into her early adolescence she would watch the other children speak without faltering, enamored by

their ability to connect thought to sound. She felt they all had songs inside of them and she, only unfledged murmurs. During lunch or recess she deferred to books.

She and Lola still drank each night and on the weekends they would get into the harder stuff, some klonopin, oxy, xanax. Sometimes, they would wake up high on Mondays. They would both still go to class. Eva did not need a reason for any of it. Neither did Lola. It just made them feel better. Their parents were not there to notice and no one else seemed to care when they stumbled around at night, or slurred their words, or passed out in bathrooms. Maybe, there was a reason: to prove that no one cared and then when no one cared, they did more. But reasons only come about afterwards. At the time, there was none.

Eva had started spending time with a guy named Tod who went by To for short. He did not go to their school and lived in one of the small neighboring towns across the river. They did not know where it was, only that it was probably a shabby place nestled in the mountains somewhere. Lola had either met him at the bar in town, by chance, or someone had given her his number; she could not remember. He had brown hair, cut off at his jawline, that was always tucked behind his ears. The car he drove was a scruffy silver Subaru from the nineties. He wore a trucker hat (which he never took off, even when inside) with a frayed brim that obscured his forehead and cast a shadow over his brow bone. Eva could not tell what color his eyes were. She imagined they were dark amber. There were little things he said here and there about his work; sometimes, he was

a carpenter; sometimes, he moved furniture; sometimes, he helped his uncle fix up cars. They knew what he really did though. He sold drugs. When Lola introduced him to Eva he looked down, met her eyes for an instant, and then turned away. When Eva shifted uneasily in his presence, Lola whispered into Eva's ear: *don't worry, he'll give us pills for free.*

He only came to Lola's room past eleven and would stay until five or six in the morning. She seemed to like him because he did not want anything from her, or Eva, but company. He would come into their room with his dark clothes covered in sawdust and a six pack dangling from his index finger, one beer already in his hand, and sit in the corner chair at her desk. He did not speak much, even when he was with them, and seemed satisfied to be needed even if it was only for what he had. He was content delivering something unsavory to them like a devious child who gets joy by smearing mud over clean linens. Eva was disturbed by his presence but permitted it because once she was high, it did not matter. Death began to seem pleasant to her. It was no longer just an interest, but a plausible action, yet life was there, and possibility too. Because there was nothing else to believe in, she began to believe in love and while Eva began to believe in love, Lola began to believe in the drugs.

It was the first week of December when Tod suddenly surfaced in their life. What had usually been time spent only between them was imposed upon by this third presence.

Lola would sit in front of her mirror carefully applying mascara while Eva watched. Tod was meant to come over shortly.

“Why do you make yourself pretty for him?” Eva asked.

“He likes it.”

“I don’t think he likes us like that. He just sits there.”

“He likes us. I think he’s lonely.”

“He likes to give us drugs.”

“Maybe.”

“It doesn’t freak you out?”

“No.”

Lola would bubble up at his arrival, whether excited by the strange guest, or enlivened by the prospect of getting high. He never touched them, only ever looked, only ever leered. This frightened Eva more. When he passed over pills, he would set six or seven on the desk in a pile. Lola would waltz over, pick them up, and return to Eva holding out her cupped hands with glee as if to show her some captured natural specimen: an insect or a little shiny frog. They would swallow two or three, Lola, quickly, with nervous joy, and Eva, slowly, deliberately. Tod would watch them from beneath the brim of his hat, take a sip of his beer and lean back in the chair so far Eva thought he would fall over. Lola would play her music and perform a sloppy dance. She would pull at Tod’s arms, straining to force him up with her. Sometimes, he would give in, get up slowly, and let her move his limp arms around in flapping motions. Others, he would

shake his head and wave her away awkwardly with his oversized hands. Eva and Tod, together, would watch Lola flutter around the room with her eyes closed and her arms extending outwards. Her arms, bowed and outstretched, looked like crooked wings without feathers.

One night, Lola had fallen asleep on the floor after a spurt of spontaneous dancing. Tod was seated in the corner as usual. His head was dipped down so Eva could not tell if he was awake or asleep. She was lying on the bed, thinking. What had gone wrong, when she was a little girl, for her to end up like this? It was not the story but the absence of one that bothered her. The nonsense of her situation. She was disgusted by her weakness, by her feeble little mind, horrified by her desire for a man's love, something she looked for everywhere and found nowhere. The night with Rubin had not left her. She revisited it each day of the month following, whether while selecting a pair of underwear from her drawer or walking along the path to class. And everytime she looked in the mirror. And everytime she looked at Lola, who glared at her now with a slight vacantness as if she did not know how to see her anymore. The fragments of that night, she arranged in different orders, wavering between the story that proved her innocence and the story that proved her guilt and had realized that if she was innocent, she was a victim; if guilty, she was something else, some deviant, a slut, maybe. Neither were suitable. Each movement she reiterated as if memorizing a poem, trying to find a hidden rhythm that would release her. She rehearsed and recalled, playing through the actions, his and hers, one by one.

Tod shifted suddenly and she looked up to see why. He was staring at Lola. She could not see his eyes under the brim of his hat but he had leaned forwards. His body was strained in her direction, startled. Eva, who could not see Lola from her position in the bed, propped herself up on an elbow and looked down. Lola was lying with her back flat on the floor, her legs bent with her knees up, and her right hand resting above her heart. Eva was overcome by the serenity of her composure. Her eyelashes were dark and soft resting against her cheeks dappled with freckles. Every muscle in her face was still, her lips half parted, her dark hair spread out over top of her head as if she was floating downstream. Then, she realized what she had failed to see: the rising and falling of breath.

Tod was not moving. Eva leapt down from the bed and knelt beside her friend, holding her face in both hands. Her lips had turned the color of sand.

Lola. Lola. Wake up. Lola.

Tod grumbled something about how he couldn't be there and stood up.

How many did she take? How many did you give her?

Tod said he didn't remember. She looked at him, he was pale, clammy. From where she was on the floor and where he was standing, she could see beneath the brim of his hat. His eyes startled her; they were darker than she had imagined.

What do you mean you don't remember? What do you mean? Eva felt a tenderness in her throat. She realized she had been screaming.

Tod stumbled over to the door. Eva shook Lola by both the shoulders. Her head drooped back and forth; her face was still and her mouth curled in a slight smile. Then,

she stirred, heaved upwards, then again, and vomit cascaded out of her mouth. She looked at Eva's wet face and then back at Tod by the door, wiped her mouth with the back of her sleeve, and then laughed as if she had just told a crude joke. Eva stared at the puddle of vomit with the seven, scattered white clumps.

Where have you taken me, Lola, where have you taken me?

It had been two weeks since Lola's overdose. Tod had not stopped coming. He even showed up on Wednesday nights now, sometimes Thursdays. It was Saturday morning. The sun cut through the slits in the blind; they had only one window in their room. Eva woke with an acrid taste in her mouth. Things situated her—the clock's metronomical clicking, the sound of breath from Tod still asleep in the corner, Lola's leg against her side—and she stared at the ceiling. Memories started to creep in one by one, from the night before and then from a week before, and then a month before, and she was thinking of Rubin again. The sun was cruel. She thought about how long it had been since she had called her mother or her father. Too long. She believed it had been compassion that had kept her from speaking to them but she realized now, it had been fear. Fear that they would be frightened when they detected flecks of hopelessness in the sound of her voice. There were no words for the feeling that had sidled up beside her since she met Lola, but she knew she was afraid for her parents to look at her, for them to see guilt in her eyes.

“Bad choices,” her mother would say, “you made bad choices.”

No one tells a girl how hard it will be to show herself again to the people who knew her as a child, once she desires, indulges, blunders. Lola stirred a little. She was laying facing opposite Eva. Her face was squished up against the pillow. Even though she could hear the ebb and flow of Lola's breath, Eva put two fingers to her wrist. Once she felt the hints of a heartbeat, she felt that she had to go. Slowly, not all at once.

5. Sol

After Lola fell asleep, Eva would study her face. She decided she no longer saw courage in it, but obstinacy. Lola's indifference was once brave, admirable, but she understood now that it was dangerous. What had been for her a temporary game of destruction was for Lola a way of life. Eva was tired of pain. She began to wander in her mind, interrogating the idea of happiness and she began to believe she could obtain that feeling only when she stopped loving Lola.

When Tod and Lola would fall asleep, she would skulk out into the empty hallways and wander aimlessly, examining all the things she had failed to notice before. She studied the corkboard by the entrance and looked at the colorful flyers for clubs, the sign-up sheet for a play that had already been performed, and whispered each name out loud to herself; when she found an especially nice one, she would repeat it more times than the others, *Cynthia Peradina, Cynthia Peradina*, until it turned to music. She would go to the vending machine and force potato chips or gummy bears into her mouth even when she was not hungry. It pleased her to watch the machine work diligently, pushing the package to the edge of a row until it fell by itself to the bottom. Sometimes, as she passed people's doors she heard faint voices, muffled conversations; she would stop in front, just for a moment, to listen. The halls were usually still at the time of night she would creep out. Yet, one night, as she was on her way back to her room, she saw Sol, whom she remembered meeting in the early days of September. She caught his eyes and he smiled back, confused.

She had come to Sol's room one night after Lola and Tod had fallen into one of their drug-induced slumbers. His door, which was two doors down from hers, had been left slightly open and she, out of both desperation and interest, knocked, and then before waiting for an answer, entered.

Sol was pleasantly startled. He was at his desk painting on a canvas propped up by a mini-easel. His room was mildly disheveled. The desk he was working at had dried dribbles of paint running down the legs and colors—hot pink, electric blue, lime green—in smears on the flat top surface. There were overturned soccer cleats by his desk chair, a brimming laundry basket, and a collection of empty beer cans in the corner. His surprise turned to embarrassment as he grew acclimated to her presence; she could have sworn he was blushing.

He mistook her gaze, which was directed towards him, for one pointed towards his desk table.

“I'll probably have to buy the school a new desk,” he said, and then laughed nervously.

His room was filled with paintings of the same kind he was working on: portraits of men. Their faces were made of bright unnatural colors and simple gestures of the brush: a child's crude outlines. Their eyes, however, were so delicate, painted with such care, that Eva felt as if they were wet and on the brink of blinking.

She was standing in the doorway.

“Do you need something?” he asked, his paint brush suspended.

They hardly knew each other. He had only said hello to her on occasion in the hallway and she saw him biking past her sometimes on campus and playing soccer from a distance in the field. There was one other time when they had both been leaving class, the sky cracked and heavy rain started to fall. The two of them were caught in a little underpass together. He asked her about her classes and said he remembered her from orientation, that she had had a green skirt on. It was an especially brilliant green which, he said, reminded him of the deep green leaves of the black cherry trees from where he was from. She did not remember the skirt and thought his obsession with it unnerving; though she realized now that she had misplaced his infatuation, that it belonged to the color, not to her. Once the rain had subsided to a fine mist, she remembered her gaze lingering on his back as he walked away; his shoulders were broad, strong, and she found herself thinking that he would make a very good husband for someone else, someday. He had not interested her then for various reasons; he was too kind, too eager, too happy.

Suddenly, she became aware of her overconfidence, her brash decision to step inside his room; she had come unprepared, no excuse for her abrupt intrusion.

“Your door was open,” she said, “I came in to tell you your door was open.”

“Oh?” he looked at her puzzled and then his face softened as if he had begun to ascertain her loneliness, as if it was a kind of scent, and said, “come here, I want to ask you something.”

She expected fear to grab at her throat any second. This was a strange room, a strange guy, and she was alone with both of them. But when he spoke she detected a

tremor in his voice concealed by an overtone of confidence and she began to suspect that he was more afraid of her than she was of him.

She walked over to his desk. He gestured towards the painting.

“What do you think of this color?”

It was a deep red like the color of a king’s velvet chair.

“It’s nice. Red is so easy to get wrong,” she said while looking down at the top of his head. She traced the bends of his curls with her eyes, expecting him to look up at her, but he did not; his eyes were fixed on the patch of red.

“No, it’s not right,” he said after a pause, “I don’t think I want it to be nice.” He glanced up at her with a sheepish smile. His eyes were the color of deep ocean water on an overcast day. She recognized that her comment on his red had been mundane.

“Maybe more blue,” he said, this time looking her in the eyes, and as he said the word ‘blue’ she felt his eyes fall deeper towards a true indigo like the color of new denim jeans.

“Did you know lips have more blue in them than red?”

She said she did not, but as soon as he said this she could see in his lips, the faint traces of purple, a sapphire underlay beneath the pink.

“Do you always paint this late?” she asked.

“Yes,” he turned back towards the canvas, “my roommate goes on night runs and it’s harder for me to paint when he’s in the room.”

“Why are you up this late?” he asked.

“I don’t know. Couldn’t sleep, I guess.”

“You live with Lola, right?”

“Yes.”

“I’ve never seen you without her. Except that one time when we spoke in the rain and well, now.”

He remembers the rain, she thought, he remembers the rain.

“Lola’s my best friend,” she said, as if that offered a solution to his observation. Yet as she said this, she realized that for the short time she had been standing in Sol’s room, she did not think once of Lola asleep with Tod next door, or of Rubin, or of her child that never existed.

She looked at his large calloused hand, still gripping the delicate brush. It was the kind of hand, she imagined, that straddled the handle of a shovel, that hoisted rope from the ocean, that steadied wood planks on a shoulder, and she felt curiosity warming inside of her. She wanted to know how a hand like that had found itself holding a paintbrush.

Their conversation continued until it was too late to talk and they agreed they would spend more time together the following night. Instead of wandering as she had done before, Eva began to sneak away to Sol’s room each time Lola fell asleep before she did. His door was always ajar. It was as if he knew what she needed.

Sol told her about the place he was from: a small island off the coast of Rhode Island state. He pulled out maps from underneath his bed and spread them out on the

floor for her, pointing to the placement of coves and cliffs and bays. He showed her photographs of little lighthouses with white bodies and red pointed tops, of bridges over white-capped waters, of flat green meadows and horizons speckled with sailboats like giant seabirds. He gave her smooth stones from the beaches to hold and little ribbed shells with rosy undersides. He relayed the story of the great hurricane to her which had been told to him as a child by his grandfather. Seven children, he said, died trying to cross the causeway when a surge of water overtook their school bus. He spoke about this tragedy so sincerely that she felt it was he who was there in 1938 with the water up to his knees.

His home, through the maps, photographs, objects, and stories, began to take shape in her mind. She imagined it was a place where you could run your hand along the belly of a dry-docked sailboat. The boat, vulnerable and proud, like an unbridled mare waiting patiently for his rider. She imagined fish pulled from the sea by hooks, thick hands tying ropes into tight knots and heaving anchors. She saw old, coarse men in shipyards giving local boys swigs of whiskey and telling them tales about the breasts of prostitutes, the size of fish, the swell of sea storms, torn sails, chipped teeth, and the names of their old highschool bands. She imagined the boys, Sol among them, as they laughed and nudged one another's shoulders, stirred by the honesty of the men yet slightly repulsed by the similarities to their own lives. The boys still believed that they would be different from their fathers, that they would never grow old. They do not love anything much, not yet.

She saw them leaning in closely to hear the details and heard their hearts beat tenderly, but if this was because of the sailor's words or the liquor warming their heads that makes them so excited.

She asked him how he began to paint. He told her it was color, really, that had brought him to it. One summer, he had a job as a caddy on a golf course. He described the enormity of the patrons' yachts, always an optical illusion: small specks from the shore and mansions from the gangway. The summer after, he worked for a lobsterman. They would set traps up off the coast and then haul them in two days later. One day in mid July, as they pulled the traps up by their chains towards the boat, Sol saw amongst the mud colored crustaceans, the most vibrant, pure blue he had ever seen. They dragged the cage over the boat's side. The lobsterman plucked out the colored creature from the rest with his yellow rubber glove, held it up, and tossed it back into the sea. It was bad luck to keep them. Sol watched the blue lobster sink under the waves, thinking about how he would surely never see the color again, and as one does when something beautiful is lost, Sol sought to recreate the hue so as to be near it once again. He bought a book by Johannes Itten, *The Elements of Color*, which he would study in between shifts at the shipyard. After he finished it, he saved up money to buy boxes of pigments which came in little glass vials and stayed up late mixing them together with oil. He applied them to canvas, where he tried to position them in a way that made all the hues glow in harmony with one another.

One night, Sol was working on a painting of an older man whose beard was made of a mustard yellow, skin from a dark pink, and eyes from a turquoise. Eva was on the bed reading a book her father had sent her. Sol turned around to face her, his halo of curls back lit by the desk lamp.

“Have you seen this Vermeer painting, *The Milkmaid*?” he asked.

She nodded.

“You remind me of it.”

And just as she began to roll her eyes he said,

“Not the milkmaid. The stream of milk.”

6. Lola

Eva worked diligently to conceal the nighttime trips to Sol's room from Lola. If Lola and Tod decided to stay up late, she would forfeit the visit altogether. It was too risky. If Lola and Tod fell asleep, she would slink out of bed, tiptoe past Lola, open the door, and squeeze her body through the half inch crack so as to keep the hallway light from reaching inside. She did not care much about Tod, in fact, there were times she would leave when Tod's breathing was not yet deep and she was almost certain his eyes were still half open. He had no interest in her. Each time, she would glance behind her shoulder to make sure Lola was not awake. Although, some part of her wished that when she turned back Lola would be propped up, staring at her in the doorway, and the secret would cease to exist.

One Sunday night this happened, but the secret, unbeknownst to Eva, had never existed.

Eva slid down from her bed. She walked lightly over to the door, thinking about Sol's face and the colors inside of it: the salmon color of his cheeks and the gold flecks in his eyelashes. She thought about the downward slope of his eyes and the swell of his shoulders. All these details swam loosely in her mind, fragments refusing to bind themselves into a complete, clear image, that settled only when she would enter his room and he would turn to meet her eyes from his desk. She let these pieces of him hover in her mind as she began to pull down on the knob of her door.

“You think I don’t know where you’re going?” a voice hissed into the quiet.

Eva stiffened. She turned and Lola was propped up, just as she had imagined, her weight on her forearm and eyes bright and wide. The lamp in the corner was still on. Eva could see her clearly though shadows were cast on the right side of her face, near her nose and by her mouth. There was an especially deep one in the cavity by her collarbone and Eva noticed, suddenly, how thin Lola had gotten. The flesh on her arms was sucked tight around the muscle and the little bones on the tops of her shoulders were so pointed Eva thought they would break through the skin.

“I thought you were asleep,” Eva replied.

“Why are you sneaking around?”

“I’m not.”

“You are.”

Eva was silent. She swallowed.

“I know that you’re going to *his* room. I can hear you over there, every night, laughing. The walls are thin.” She thrust the word ‘his’ fiercely off her tongue.

“I was going to tell you. I just didn’t want to bother you with it,” Eva said. Why had she been hiding it? She could not even answer that to herself.

“Lola, I think I really like him,” she added.

“You like anybody that bothers to look at you,” Lola said back, a note of rage in her voice.

“That’s not true.”

There was silence. Lola broke eye contact and looked down. Her furrowed brow softened. She looked more despondent than angry.

“He’s different, trust me, I know.”

“You don't know anything.”

Eva’s face was hot. She wanted to yell back and tell Lola that she just wanted to be happy, but felt that was too naive.

Eva was silent. She pulled down on the knob, flung herself out into the hall, and slammed the door behind her.

She knew what Lola had said was true.

Lola refused to look or speak to Eva the next day. Her mouth was a tight line and her eyes, vacuous. Eva, out of fear or caution, did not try to make amends. She could not think of the words that would give form to the chasm that had gradually grown between them and therefore, could not find the words to reconcile the distance. She spent more time with Sol and by speaking to him hoped that she could glean something of the problem, that somehow, by telling him about Lola, and the first day they met, and everything else afterwards, she would be able to understand what it was that had gone wrong. Sol watched her speak with great concentration, his head on his chin, his eyes fixed on her mouth. He consoled her, but she could tell he would never understand what it was that the two girls had shared and therefore, what it was that had led them dually apart.

She slept in Sol's bed the third night. Eva could not bear the silence. She wanted to say something, wanted to tell Lola she knew she was right, that she was always right, but she was waiting for Lola to say the first words. Hers would follow, could only follow. This did not happen; Lola was stubborn, and Eva, reticent.

On the fourth night, Eva collected her things, alone, and went to Sol's. Lola had not been there when she had come back from class. Eva had felt relieved. She began to think that Lola was putting on a show, that this was all a performance to prove Eva's weakness.

Sol let her in. There was a green-colored pencil tucked behind his ear. A half done painting stood behind him of a man with emerald eyes.

Eva tried to distract herself by reading, but would become aware, in the middle of the page, that she was imagining some splinter of Lola like the back of her neck or the smell of her perfume. Sol was working quietly at his desk, shifting his attention every ten minutes between a large bound anthology and his canvas. She put her book down to look at him. His body made the chair look miniature. Eva realized his scale was menacing like a bear or a bull, but his movements—as he flicked a page or made a gesture in paint—were gentle. She thought back to the day they spoke in the rain. The back of his body had moved something in her then, too. Maybe it was in his confident gait or in the bend of his curls, or in the vulnerable space between the nape of his neck and the beginning of his shirt collar, that she saw safety. She knew he would love her, carry her, and in exchange, she would only have to give herself to him: a little piece of freedom for protection. Protection from what she was not sure, but he subdued a

yearning, forlorn feeling inside of her. She saw their life together stretch out in front of her and it was still like a reflective lake and full of brilliant colors. She imagined herself in a rocking chair, on a porch with her baby in her arms and tried to imagine whether or not she would be happy looking down at its peach fuzz cheeks and its doll hands. That was what she had always wanted, wasn't it? Or at least the promise of it. If she was with Sol, the future was sure and steady; maybe, she was not giving up freedom for Sol, but by loving him she could be free. Yet, she was not sure if she was made for that kind of quiet life. She was not sure if she fit with the white-painted porch and the child and the happiness. Her shins were bruised, her kneecaps, knotty. She looked down at her hand. There was a scar from a cigarette burn between her thumb and pointer finger. She thought of Rubin. What to make of that memory? What if she had a daughter? Surely no child would want a mother who did not know who or what she wanted, who clambered to love out of fear; a mother who was not strong enough to be alone. Lola's words punctured through all these images and stood in front of her, clear and true: she did not know anything. Even if her life settled, Lola had known her, knew her. Eva had just gotten lucky. Sol had found her.

She had to go back to Lola. Though she did not know what to say, she felt the words would come when she saw her face again.

Eva walked to her and Lola's room already envisioning the two of them together hugging and repeating "I'm sorry" into one another's necks. But she soon found herself alone, staring at Lola's bed, bare, stripped of its sheets. The dresser drawers were vacant

and the little mirror on her desk, gone. The image in Eva's mind of their embrace fell away. Her photographs had been torn down and the wall was bare save the morsels of taped corners. She felt embarrassed for the space robbed of everything that gave it vivacity. On Lola's desk, she saw a slip of lined notebook paper still with its fringe, as though it had been ripped out in haste. At the top of the page in Lola's swirling cursive there was a single marking, the start of a note:

Eva,