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Weeks before my little brother Sammy got lost, his voice took on the clarity of a boy soprano. He was six that summer, and he liked to lie in the dirt under our Adirondack cabin, singing. Sound rang through the wide plank floors, eerie and angelic, stirring the heated air.

I lay on my bed in the hot afternoon, reading the same sentence of *Anna Karenina* five times before I went downstairs to quiet Sammy, knowing he'd start again as soon as I went away. He sang at night too, a high hum from his bed across the room. I fell asleep to my brother's music and the clink of my mother making ice in the kitchen.

Down the hill from our cabin, Cloud Lake made its own music. It lapped the rocks and shimmered--dark at night, blue and sharp in the still heat of day. It waited for clouds to pass, to reflect themselves in its flat surface. Although I didn't know it then, that summer I too waited for any impression, my heart as expectant as unmoving water.

Three months from sixteen, I was only beginning to sense where I was located inside my life. But I always knew where Sammy was.

I couldn't imagine not hearing him.

Chapter 1

My brother lay surrounded by white, the steel-railed hospital bed too big for his small body. The edge of his ear, his cheek, were flushed, like a little kid got after dreaming. My inhale from the doorway hurt my throat. I waited for him to turn toward me and sit up. But Sammy was quiet, one foot exposed, one shoulder, thin and bony in Superman pajamas, barely lifting the sheet.

My mother sat slumped to half her height in a plastic chair. Her feet were the only thing moving, little jerks like she wanted to run. When she saw me in the doorway, a tremor ran through her, shaking the chair to a sudden squeak. She stood up to hug me, her face wet. My dad didn't move. He was by the window, studying the black parking lot, still wearing the sweats he'd slept in.

Aunt Anna nudged me. I walked over, my weighted feet a few seconds behind my body. Sam's chest went up and down, the monitors beeped, his long eyelashes flickered on his cheeks. From outside the window came the muffled traffic of Plattsburgh, the shriek and fade of an ambulance siren. Someone ran fast down the hall. I moved to cover Sam's toes with the blanket.

"Sam's heart is beating normally," the ICU doctor had told us last night, after ten hours. "His vital signs are excellent. We got him off oxygen. But we expected him to wake up by now."

My mother's voice had been irritated. "He's sleeping. What's wrong with that?" She sat up taller, shrugged off my father's hand, her long braid of white-blond hair stark and florescent down her back.

"We're wondering if he hit his head on something," said the doctor. He towered above us, stifling a yawn. "Maybe the side of the boat?" My dad's eyes slid toward me.

"My brother. . . " I began.

"Is just sleeping," my mother interrupted. "Sleeping is normal for a six-year-old. Seven, today." Gentle fingers touched my arm as she turned to smile at me, celebrating Sam's birthday.

I closed my eyes. I wanted to shake my brother, tell him to stop fooling around. In another life, Sam and I were still on Cloud Lake. Before I tried to show off, before the moment when I swerved the motorboat, cut through the sparkling waves.

The doctor went out to a vending machine in the hall. The machine sloshed, and the smell of coffee filled the air. When he came back in, sipping, his erect posture had fallen into an apologetic slump.

After my aunt Anna brought me home from the hospital Tuesday morning, I stood alone on the cabin's wrap-around porch, listening to crows call warnings from the pines overhead, studying my still life.

It was a small painting, of a single pear lying on its side against an old lilac sweater of my mother's, tilted as if it would tumble. I had started it Sunday, the day before everything happened. The unsteadiness of the pear, the suppressed movement, the colors glowing in the morning light had drawn me, but now it was as jumbled as my mind.

Still lifes are a painter's scales. My dad had taught me this early, his big hand guiding my small one as soon as I was able to firmly grasp a stick of pastel. His delight in my early attempts and his belief in me buoyed my life, and without complaint I'd painted a solitary apple twelve times until I saw enough nuances of line and form to please him. I thought it right that only then was I allowed a landscape.

It was worth learning still life first, my father said. Painters faked landscapes all the time, but skill was immediately seen in a still life.

The crows crowded the feeder hung from the eaves of the porch and I waved them away. They rose cawing into the cedar-scented heat of the June morning, circling toward the lakeshore where the water pounded rough against the rocks.

I pushed my glasses up on my nose, trying to see better. That was something else I'd lost yesterday. They lay somewhere at the bottom of Cloud Lake, covered in silt. This spare pair was way too small, perched like an old lady's spectacles. I adjusted the ear pieces for a few minutes, then I took them off.

Blurry was easier.

I'd just finished a second piece of toast and another fifteen minutes of discouraged staring at my still life, when I heard footsteps on the cabin path.

My aunt had brought my cousin, who carried groceries from Price Chopper in Plattsburgh. Sarah dumped two bags, settled in the most comfortable chair, and pulled nail polish and *Jane* out of her bag like she lived here. I said hi and went to help Anna with groceries. Anna didn't say anything but gave me a hard hug, took one bag to the kitchen.

"Hey, I'm sorry about Sammy," Sarah said. She did look sorry, for a few seconds. "Hey," she said again, "you remember Chad Anderson?"

Anna and I looked quickly at each other; I looked away first.

"Yup," I said. "I remember Chad."

"He's back on the lake and he's playing at the Boat House Friday night," Sarah said. "I'm doing sound. You should come."

"I may be needed here."

"Why?"

"Sarah!" Anna shook her head.

"I don't know," I said.

"I'll pick you up," Sarah said, like she was doing me a favor.

"You don't drive."

Sarah grinned. "I do, actually. I got my license yesterday. While you were at the hospital. Get this, I almost drove over this cop's foot!" She lifted one tiny black sandal. "They wanted me to wear real shoes. I told them these were from Milan, and it was in Italy, so that made them real shoes."

"Heaven help us," my aunt said, but she wasn't smiling.

"So you should come Friday," Sarah said. "I need practice with real passengers."

I sank into a chair and put my feet on the table, staring at my father's blue coffee mug, unwashed from the day before. It communicated a shivery image of driving with Sarah and talking to Chad Anderson, who knew about everything that had happened.

"You could dance," Sarah said. "I bet Chad would ask you."

No, he wouldn't. I rocked my chair on its back legs, the motion soothing the even

worse image of the crowded room of the Boat House—having to smile for hours at one of the booths, sitting alone at the bar, trying to make a Coke last all evening.

“Friday may not work,” I told Sarah. “I’ve got stuff to do.”

My bare foot was trying to dance on the table’s edge, balance my chair, and find warmth in a moving patch of sunlight. Almost without thinking, I let it contact my dad’s favorite mug, feeling the glazed surface.

My cousin tapped long nails on the counter. “You always make life so complicated, Molly Fisher. A person could drive to Albany and back in the time it takes you to make a simple decision.”

I nudged the cup to the floor. Blue chips flew. We all looked down at coffee pooling on weathered wood. My aunt bent with paper towels, her eyes understanding.

“Go, Molly,” she said. “It’ll do you good to get out.”

“It’ll be fun,” Sarah said.

The broken cup made me feel better. Friday was three days away. Sam would be awake by then. And I didn’t have to dance. “OK,” I said. I could sit. Just for an hour.

Sarah stood up, thumping her magazine against her leg. “I’ll pick you up at seven. Bring twenty bucks.”

“Maybe I should stay home,” I said, suddenly afraid. “Dad might need me.”

Anna was bundling a wad of brown-stained paper towels toward the trash. She glanced up at me and slowly shook her head. Of course my father didn’t want me around.

That afternoon, I crept under the cabin. Behind the woodpile I found the flattened dirt where my brother liked to hide, the small metal box I had given him for his birthday treasures. The latch was rusted and dirty, but I pried it open with a thumbnail.

The box was empty.

I had imagined finding something precious, something I could return to its rightful place. The cache by the lakeside boulder was empty too. I realized my brother had moved on to new hiding places.

I would have to search harder.

Chapter 2

The Friday night band was just warming up. Sarah walked over to the Boat House's sound board, a dinky thing on a folding table, and waved to Chad Anderson. I found a stool at the bar and ordered a Coke, amusing myself by pinching the end of my straw hard and willing it to break enough to allow the tip of my fingernail into the gap. Across the room Sarah was telling a story, high and fast, and I heard Chad's answering laugh.

Chad was taller than me, with a high forehead and thin callused fingers from years of guitar playing. He was wearing neat jeans, deck shoes, and a faded blue T-shirt. He hadn't looked over yet. I was glad. I always felt gawky around Chad, as if I were operating with a deliberately simple vocabulary. And I certainly didn't want to discuss the accident.

I leaned over the bar, watching Lester, the Boat House's owner, fill the Coke machine with a huge plastic bag of syrup. The bar was laminated and cool. I laid my cheek on its smooth surface, resting, but my glasses bit against my nose so I slid them off. Even without them, I could read the pennants and bumper stickers and sailing awards Lester had embedded into the bar top. "Cloud Lake Regatta, 1968, J-class." "I Climbed Whiteface Mountain." I traced the letters with a wet finger. The band played a warm-up song, stopped in mid-phrase, someone called to Chad at the sound board that the back-up singer hadn't arrived yet. It was a soothing cacophony and I closed my eyes and began drifting off.

"Molly."

Chad was blurred but I recognized the deep voice. Understood the hesitance.

I sighed, put my glasses on. "Chad." I gave him a little smile as if we had no history. "Good to see you."

"How's Sam?"

"The same."

"How are you doing?" The hesitation again. "I got my sweater back."

I gestured toward the stage. "Aren't you playing tonight?"

"After they warm up."

The bass player went wild in a brief solo as the song finished. Kids from the booths clapped, and someone sent a wolf whistle toward Lisa, the lead singer.

Chad leaned closer. "I've been dreaming about it. Really weird underwater dreams." He twirled the straw in his glass. Brown bubbles fizzed their way to the top. "I'm trying to swim up, I can see the sky kind of shining up there above the top of the water, but I can't get my leg free from those rocks."

Each of his words was like a rock, my brain was translating so slowly. I couldn't make sense of any of it, just felt that now-familiar memory, the sensation of a motorboat turning slowly, spinning faster and faster.

"Sing along if you know this one," Lisa purred into the mike.

I turned to watch Sarah at the sound table, talking with a girl I didn't recognize. Like Sarah, she had bright red hair but this new girl was taller and thinner, more athletic, wearing a short dress, clingy like nylon.

"And then last night . . ." Chad said.

“Who’s that?” I interrupted, pointing.

“Where?”

“Talking to Sarah.”

Chad stared at the new girl. “Haven’t seen her around here. I’d probably remember.”

The drummer began a solo. Lisa jumped off the stage and ran over to the sound table. Chad and I watched the three of them point to the sliders, laugh. Lisa grabbed Sarah’s new friend and pulled her on to the dance floor.

The red-haired girl danced like nobody I’d ever seen. She went by me in a blur of color, completely uncontained, the dress riding up her legs when she turned. Chad and I both stretched our necks, craning to see more. Her mouth was open, laughing; her arms were olive-colored with tan, the red hair like the bright field spots of Indian Paintbrush flowers we get in August, shaking all over her shoulders, long enough to tie back, loose as the wind.

Lisa moved closer, gyrating a little with her hips like she was trying to pull the red-haired girl toward her. They didn’t touch; the drummer was hammering way too fast for that.

The red of the girl’s lips against the red of her hair almost clashed, like when you see a woman with dyed hair and orange lipstick pushing a pink stroller through Kmart, and the color combination almost blinds you. Her lips were slightly parted, waiting; she was breathing fast from the music and the hot dancing.

She could dance, that girl.

I hadn’t danced since last winter, when my dad, on a bad painting day, told me I should lose some weight. But the urge to move was almost unbearable. The arches of my feet ached and my thighs shifted, the blood in them pumping hard. I slid to the edge of the stool, toes almost touching the wide scuffed boards of the floor.

Suddenly, the drum solo ended. Lisa leapt back onstage. The red-haired girl stood, panting, then as if she could tell we were watching, turned and smiled in our direction. She was pretty tall, not as tall as my mother, but taller than me by about a half a head. I looked down at my Coke.

Until I felt heat near my shoulder. Movement of air that made me grip myself into stillness.

“Hey,” a voice said. A new voice, deep and rich. “I’m not from around here, trying to find this town...Wilmington.”

I looked up finally, although I knew it would be her.

“Wilmington’s pretty close.” Chad’s voice was loud in the sudden silence from the stage. He flushed. “Not far from here at all. I know how to get there.”

Lester set an iced tea in front of the girl. “Nice dancing.”

She nodded, picking up the glass. Her hands were thin with long blunt fingers, a white web between the fingers where the tan didn’t reach. “Can I have some lemon?” she asked, smiling at Lester. He looked dazzled, went toward the kitchen.

“Lester doesn’t do lemons,” I told her, “just so you know.”

The girl leaned closer. I breathed in her sweat and the smell of the lake, a scent that hung on all our skins, its weedy sweetness unmistakable and pleasant like the faint memory of sun gone behind clouds. Her skin smelled even more like the lake than mine, as if steeped as tea.

“I noticed you watching us.”

Startled, I looked up. Her face was only inches from mine.

“Do you dance?” She was smiling and serious all at once, as if she’d asked, “Do you believe in world peace?” This close, I could see her eyes were gray, a color as unusual as my own, a color that calmed the clash of red hair and lips enough to make harmony in her face. I flushed, looked around wildly, wondering what to say. *Yes, I dance, I love dancing. No, I can’t, not until my brother wakes up.* The band’s warm-up tune got louder, noise making it hard to think. Dozens of feet began pounding the old wood floor of the Boat House as everyone else started moving to the music.

Lester came over with a little plate. On it were four slices of the yellowest lemon I’d ever seen. He set it in front of the girl.

“I don’t know,” I almost shouted.

“Wilmington’s pretty close to here,” Chad said again.

“It’s the home of Santa’s workshop.” My voice cracked, and I cleared my throat, sending this essential information in the direction of the smooth tanned arm.

“Maybe one of you can give me a tour.” The girl squeezed two of the slices into her glass, releasing a tang into the air around us, and wiped her hands on her dress.

“I’m sure that can be arranged,” said Chad. He smiled at her.

“Hey, Chad,” Lisa sang from the stage, “get your ass over here and play.”

The girl was leaning even closer to me, studying the decals on the bar by my elbow. “What’s a J-class?”

“Sailboat.”

“I don’t sail. Way too risky.” She took a big drink of iced tea. “I waterski. I need someone to drive my boat tomorrow. And a skier to practice crossovers with.”

“I’ve driven boats since I was ten,” Chad said.

All this fast talk was making the skin on my face tight. The girl’s skin was relaxed, translucent, little veins pulsing near her eyes. Her hair was messed up as if she didn’t care about it. As if she didn’t have to.

“Do you ski?” she asked, studying me back.

“I used to,” I said. “I used to love going out in boats.”

“You get *behind* a boat,” Chad said gently, “*in* the water.”

“I can get in the water,” I said.

“Good.” The girl nodded and stuck out one hand. I grabbed it. It was strong and lean, wet from her glass. “I’m Zoe Novato.” It sounded Russian.

“Hi,” I said. “I’m Molly.” My glasses were sliding down my nose. My last name, *Fisher*, seemed way too ordinary.

“Molly Fisher.” Zoe looked over at the sound board. “Your cousin told me.”

Sarah was waving at Chad, the band’s warm-up almost over.

“I’m supposed to be up there,” Chad said. “And I can drive your boat for you.”

“I’m supposed to be learning the sliders,” Zoe said. “And I’ll see you both tomorrow. Saturday.” We nodded. “The dock at eight? Sarah told me which one’s yours.”

Sarah had quite the mouth. “Yeah,” I said. “Just look for three birch trees leaning in the water.”