Harv & Julianne

by cully perlman

Harv and Julianne

He has woken here now, on this bed, and on this particular day, many times. His fifth year in the cabin, his fifth December in Helen, his fifth, he is sure, of many other things, but it is also his tenth wedding anniversary to Julianne Lipscomb *née* Beasley *née* Talmadge. And, he knows, possibly the end of everything they've built together as man and wife.

He is an accomplished professor of gender and sexuality, teaches one *online* class a year for Ypsilanti (no more flying to Michigan) and not once a semester in overcrowded classrooms, as he has for years. He has published numerous books and dozens of articles, too many to recall by memory, but of course, no bestsellers. Above everything he knows, or believes (wholeheartedly), that his children despise him for who he is, but mostly, who he is not. He knows they believe he is a fake, a charlatan, an imposter, an abandoning hooligan and play-actor posing as a compassionate liberal of the genus Academicus. But somehow the pain they can cause him has dulled. In the morning, after he shaves, if he is alone, if he's feeling…*off*, he may look in the mirror, stare at his aged face, and say, “Professor Lipscomb, I presume,” and walk away. And Professor Lipscomb may, later that evening, share his pickled baby shrimp, perhaps the pork rillete, with his wife of ten years, Jules the beautiful, the sun warming his neck and shoulders through a window. And they will sit there, listening to the clang of fork tines and soup spoons, their early bird specials consumed, until slowly (and as they had planned it) the sun falls behind the restaurant's placard out on the lawn: *Nacoochee Grill,* Live Fire Grill, sinks below the level mound of cedar chips along the ground, and another day has passed.

When she, his second wife, brings him coffee in his mug, his “*What would Gilligan do*?” mug, she hands it to him carefully, knowing he will not look away from the Cardinal sitting on the barbecue. He has watched it now for an eternity, its crimson

Available online at *«http://fictionaut.com/stories/cully-perlman/harv-julianne»*
Copyright © 2010 cully perlman. All rights reserved.

form and twiggy legs majestic and strapping, its beak dipping and pulling from a pool of water trapped in the folds of fabric where the grill cover bunches and then stops, like a gypsy's skirts, at the ankle. The mug is a shared secret, or perhaps not a secret but a joke of sorts, because it is not Gilligan on the island but Gilligan as in Carol Gilligan, whom he wrote a paper with when they'd been at Harvard—her on her way out to Cambridge, him to a small community college in upstate New York for a stint before Ypsilanti. It had been his best collaboration, his ideal academic coupling. Though they—he and Julianne, not he and Carol Gilligan—could, they never tell about the mug. It's *their* secret. Unspoken, the Gilligan mug means Harvey has a sense of humor, albeit a quirky one. A humor consigned to his world, his cosmos. Because while the joke is arguably humorous, it is certainly not a joke that is funny *ha ha*. But it is, and not unnoticeably so, something Harvey holds on to, which is something that touches Julianne when she spies him holding. Not simply the humor, per se, but the modest ambition that's part of it, that has splintered, that has withered, that has been compromised by neglect or, more abstractly, destroyed by a lack of serendipity along the way. The *ganas*, he thinks, which is what they called it in Spain. The particular yearning, which he had for so many years, that rumbled his stomach, stole his breath. The fire that now seems to have found its grave. And he remembers, *Yes*, what a time that was, my little stint in Andalusia, in Granada, and then in Madrid. If he could go back and relive the good times he has had, perhaps this go around with no regrets, because he knows he has many. When he picks up the glass of water, the ice cool on his lips as he takes a sip, feeling lonely though he is not alone, he thinks, *Why* have I not been invited this year to the Universidad? Has someone in Madrid forgotten? Have they cancelled the conference? Has my invitation been lost? What fool has forgotten? But he knows that maybe it is he that can't remember.

Julianne dreamed of children home for the holidays, in particular Christmas and New Year's, and for the past few years her dreams came true. After their father, Joseph “Jo” Beasley, a.k.a.

“Measly Beasley,” took off, left kids in diapers and a wife lost in debt, she locked the door and listed her grievances while the girls—and only briefly—wallowed in their filth.

Grievance 1: Joe's mother, the repugnant cunt Mrs. Beasley, blocking any contact whatsoever, over the financial obligations, of course, of her good-for-nothing. She isn't fooling anyone, thank you very much.

Grievance 2: Herself. How in God's name, dummy, did you let him talk you into bed but not forced the issue of bettering yourself when you could have, before he'd started with the whiskey, before he'd blown his loot?

And **Grievance 3,** written a few months later, perhaps not a grievance but an observation: Women don't just need men. Men need women too.

Soon after she'd written Grievance 3, Julianne picked herself up, got educated, and the rest, as they say, is history. Rachel rebelled, and Sammy rebelled, and Lettie, well, she did her rebelling in her own ways, she supposed. Maybe didn't get in trouble with school, maybe didn't get caught necking with boys behind the gym or at parties, but there were other types of trouble. Other types of shortfalls and missteps that maybe didn't get you just then but came around later, when certain things others experienced early paved the way for a smoother ride later on. But they grew up well, the three of them, Lettie and Rachel excelling in school, Sammy little Miss entrepreneur for a time.

She sat down with her mug too, next to Harvey, who leaned over, sweet hubby Harv, pecked her on the cheek. Harvey peeped the contents of her mug (she did not have a special mug), said, “It must be Tuesday,” and she said Yes, it was. But it could have been Thursday as well, and if he was having a day, he might have said, “Thursday,“ but he had not.

“Kids are coming soon, huh?” he said.

“Yes,” she said.

“Good,” he said. “We'll have a full house.”

“We will,” she said. She said, “Are you ready for a full house?”

A touch of concern, maybe something else. “Why wouldn't I be?” he said.

“I mean, with your work and all,” she fibbed.

He said, “Almost done. It's going out Thursday, end of day.”

“The gender-class-race one?”

“The Feminism and marriage one.”

Julianne nodded. “Oh,” She said. “I like that paper.” Which was not completely true.

Harvey said, “So who all is coming again?”

“My daughters,” she said. “Samantha, Rachel, Lettie, their husbands, Clifford, James, and Michael. And of course Lettie's son Aaron and little Hadley. Rachel's daughter.”

Harvey thought for a moment, took a sip of his coffee. He said, “I thought James and Rachel were having problems.”

“Sam and Cliff are.”

“Mmm,” he said. He wanted to say something else, but nothing came.

He finished his coffee, left his mug on the arm of his chair. He said, “I think I'll take a walk,” and she said, “OK, Love.” She watched his sweet face perk up like it did when he was thinking, when he was wondering if there was anything she wanted to remind him, because so often now that was something she did, and which he did not necessarily object to. She said, “Shall I fix you a snack?”

“I'll take an apple,” he said. “Maybe one of them granola bars with the cranberries or a couple of those fruit paper things.”

She said, “Coming right up,” and watched Harvey go into their bedroom to change.

Sometimes the days and weeks flew by, and other times it was like he watched everything in slow motion, every little thing, like the God he knew didn't exist was telling him, *Look*, *Harvey*, pay attention, keep your eyes open, because it's all going to go away soon enough and there's not a darn thing you can do about it (the God that did not exist for him did not cuss). And so he looked. He looked closely at everything now, like he was studying all the details,

wondering how everything was made, how the nuts and bolts and wheels all worked together, allowed everything to move, to be set in motion. And most people didn't seem to pay him any mind. He was a *Professor*, it was his job to study, to prod, to poke, and to analyze. He was an expert in his field. Did not the word itself, did not “Professor,” mean to be, or *profess* to be, an expert in an art, in a science? Did not his very actions follow exactly what he, by definition, was? In his opinion, they did.

It's all related, he justified. And once even out loud to Julianne, who he caught staring at him one evening, seemingly from another planet.

“What's related,” she'd said.

And he had said, “Everything is related,” and she could not argue with that.

But Harvey was no nincompoop. He was not good at pretending something like this didn't exist. He knew the ship of fools was manned by someone, or had once been manned by someone. At the very least there had been an usher to populate the vessel. Someone who got that ship of fools away from shore and sailing away after the crazies had boarded. So now maybe *Powell's* sent him books *about* him and *for* him alongside books by Jane Pilcher and Judith Butler, Michel Foucault and Oyeronke Oyewumi. Now maybe he turned inward, read up on how to deal with the inevitable, which funny enough was not death but losing the person you were, which maybe was worse than death.

Julianne tucked a bottle of water into his cargo pants' pocket, put sunblock under his eyes, pinched it all over his nose. The clouds would come out later, but right now the sky was bright blue and the sun would sear his skin like bologna, even with his cap. Harvey said he would be an hour tops.

“I'll have lunch ready when you get back,” she said. “Liverwurst OK?”

“Perfect,” he said. “I don't make it back in an hour, please don't call the Mounties.” He smiled.

“I promise,” she said. The real Harvey talking. The Harvey she fell in love with talking. She said, “Can I sell your books?” and he did his mean face, blew her a kiss, and walked out the door.

They ate lunch between ten-thirty and eleven these days, earlier than most but considering they were up at the crack of dawn they did not find it abnormal in any way. She spread the liverwurst over the slices of bread, sliced some pickles. The phone rang and she stopped what she was doing, sat at the kitchen table, twirling the phone cord. Her attorney again, but nothing crazy, nothing that wasn't part of doing business. She just didn't like the term: *Mail Fraud*, because that wasn't what it was. Was your electric bill mail fraud? Was your gas bill? Your Mortgage? No, it was not. She remembers when she had first hired him, Dustin of *Dustin Kitchens, Attorneys at Law*. She'd said, Look, Mr. Dustin, I am fully aware of what my products are and what they are not. They are healthcare and cosmetic products, not necessities. But it's right there, in plain English on the website thingy. You are *signing up* for quarterly orders, and you *are* being charged for refills. Period. I don't hide any of it. And Mr. Dustin had smiled and said, Of course, and they'd shaken on it, and she officially had representation. He had cashed the check later that afternoon.

She was never going to get rich on her sales, but the site more than paid for itself. Two kids from town sent out the hair gels and the nail products and the Henna powder straight from their homes, where they'd agreed she would deliver them once a month. All they had to do was stick her labels on, print out customer addresses, drop everything off at the post office once a week. The easiest two hundred a month the kids could ever expect to make. And she did not have to worry about bills, not with what was coming in and what Harvey had stashed away and still made on his books. Mail fraud was a bit over the top.

Mr. Dustin said, I'll need a bit more to keep going, and she said, *But of course, Mr. Dustin*, and said she'd be down later to give him his check, which she was already signing, payable to *Dustin Kitchens*, wondering if indeed a Mr. *Kitchens* truly walked this earth.

As soon as she'd hung up the phone rang again, this time Sammy. She could hear exhaustion in Sammy's voice, not exasperation or surrender or anything else she heard recently, just exhaustion. Exhaustion from working multiple jobs. Exhaustion from the rollercoaster of her and Cliff. Exhaustion from some new diet she was on, not enough carbs, too much meat, eating things that bloated her like a Thanksgiving Day parade balloon. Julianne said, “And how is my number one, today?”

“Tired,” she said.”

“Still coming up on Friday?”

“Trying. Maybe Saturday. Still figuring it out.”

“Cliff still coming?”

“Yep.”

“Still trying to talk him out of it?”

“Yep.”

“Well, you just take some deep breaths and don't stress too much about it. You can kick back up here. Get you right in the Jacuzzi under the jets.”

Sammy was quiet for a second, like she was moving something or rearranging something. She dropped the phone, said, “Mom, I gotta call you back,” and Julianne said, “I'll be here,” and hung up.

It was like that recently, quick two-minute calls, quick hang-ups, because she had to discipline their ornery dog, which was half beagle, half devil, or maybe because she was already late for work. All her daughters did it, called when they just wanted to hear her voice, know she was there, when they wanted a shoulder to lean on, an understanding ear to just listen, and not try to fix. They did it for the same reasons: a fight with the hubby (we had a “disagreement” is what Lettie and Rachel called what they had with theirs), a question about a recipe. But they also had their own reasons. Recently, Sammy's questions were about leaving, and Rachel's were about fulfillment. Lettie's, bless her soul, were about sex, which Julianne was glad, though she could never have dreamed about talking of such things with her own mother. But Lettie had always been her little bitty Chicky, her reticent child and peek-a-boo-kid.

Lettie was the baby, and she played the role well. Lettie was the introspective one. Her reader and little artiste, writing away in her little notebooks like she were George Eliot or Virginia Woolf.

When Harvey strolled in, Julianne looked up at the clock. She said, “Sixty minutes flat,” and Harvey winked at her and tapped his watch. “I set the timer,” he said. “Raced back when I fell behind some.” He said, “Nearly beefed it around a corner.”

Julianne said, “*Slow down,* Indiana.” She put the sandwiches onto two paper plates, put napkins under them where the pickle juice was seeping through. She said, “One of these days you're going to break your neck and someone's going to come up and run you over by accident.”

Harvey took a bite of his sandwich, guzzled some water. Julianne said, “Help me make the beds after lunch?” and Harvey nodded. Julianne wanted to mention Mr. Dustin's call, but kept it to herself. No need to get him all riled up at what a shyster the man was, even *if* he kept the hounds at bay. Harvey did not think lawyers should have ponytails, in Helen or anywhere else for that matter.

Friday morning they wake early and begin going through the checklists Julianne has written up so they don't forget any of the details. Julianne has written “Harvey's To Do's” on one sheet, “Julianne's To Do's” on another, and she has set them side by side on the kitchen counter with half pencils that have made their way from one of the local gas station lottery counters. It has begun drizzling outside, rain mixed with bits of hail. As they wet mop the floors, the rain is their music, and when it stops, Harvey does his 60 Minutes *tick tick tick tick tick* to keep it going.

As he completes each task, Harvey crosses them off the list one by one, a clean pencil line through the middles of the words. It is not a race, but he does notice that his tasks are being crossed off at a much faster pace than Julianne's, which is perhaps not normal but definitely not unheard of. When he finishes dusting over the fireplace and resupplying the bathrooms with rolls of TP from the garage, he moves to the last task on Julianne's list, starts working on

that, scratching each task off her list and then initializing it with a smiley face.

Julianne does not correct Harvey, does not say, “Harv, dear, you've missed a spot here the size of Guatemala,” does not point out that no, he did not, in fact, already fold the linens that he did not remember to pull from the laundry (though yes, he probably heard the timer buzz). There is no point to it, unless the point is to make him feel bad. So she runs through his list again, later, when Harvey is in his study, reading his books a third time, writing articles that, somehow, still find homes. He goes days like this, as half a Harvey, misplacing, forgetting, and when people come around, withdrawing. But then, other times, he's the old Harvey, the whole Harvey, and everything is as good as it always was. She knows these weeks, the half-Harvey days, are the beginning, and she is glad it's a slow process, which allows her to get used to it, to acclimate. Last year, all was well, and the kids were in and out. This year, what, a month? They'll know; and it won't take long. But she won't say it. Won't admit it before they have a chance to pick up on it themselves. Not because she wants to fool them, because that would be distasteful. But rather to see how noticeable it all really is to those who do not live it every day. To those whose problems and issues are not hers, not every day, not in the here and now.

For a time, she thought, maybe it is brilliance that afflicts him. Maybe Harvey is like Einstein. She has read or maybe she'd seen it on PBS that that Alfred Einstein often walked right past his house without realizing it. This was how deep in thought the man could be. So much so that they'd had to put an “X” on his front door to remind him where he lived. Probably drove his wife batty. And sometimes, Harvey was like that. He could go on trips to Ypsilanti and to conferences in Madrid and Barcelona and be lost for days. No call, no email, nothing. She thought, maybe the change of scenery exacerbated his condition, this condition, which seems to have come on full throttle all of a sudden, or at least what seems all of a sudden, because it has probably been there for some time, now that

she is capable of admitting what it is. Now that she knows what's what.

When the lists are crossed off and then crossed off a second time, Harvey puts his arm around Julianne and says, “You ready?” and she says, “Round one should be here soon.”

And Harvey says, “You want to pull a couple bottles of red?”

And Julianne, unbelieving that she herself could forget to remember, throws her hands over her head and exclaims, “The wine!”

Harvey laughs, watches Julianne rush off to put her jeans and socks on. He says, “We, toots, are a twosome destined for disaster.”

Julianne grabs the first notepad she can find, scribbles her hasty yet expressive *Be-right-back*, signs it with a happy face like Harvey's. She tells Harvey to tape the note to the door while she ties her boots. She says, “Stick it on there good. It's windy and wet.” And Harvey says he will. He says, “We'll probably be back before they get here anyway, but we can just leave the door open.”

Julianne says, “All my girls have keys,” and Harvey says Oh, right, remembering when they had mailed the keys to New York and Florida and someplace else, folding them in newspaper and then tucking them into multiple sheets of scratch paper from the printer. It's like a clandestine communiqué, Harvey had said, pointing out the mumbo jumbo typing all over the sheets, where Julianne had tested out the new ink cartridge. Not “*asdf ;lkj,*” as he would have thought, but “*10001 1001 101*,” which he had found curious.

When they pull back up to the gate, tired from shopping, Jim tells Harvey and Julianne they have guests waiting for them at the cabin. They had not expected to be gone so long, over two hours, but they had not expected to have driven to Cleveland to go to the Walmart and the Piggly Wiggly out there, because Betty's was out of Peach syrup and Harvey had said they couldn't come all the way out to Georgia and not have Peach syrup on their pancakes. And then they had bought nearly all of the Cabernets and one Riesling from the young woman at the *Bavarian Bottle Shop*, Petra or whatever her name was, who wouldn't shut up about the Riesling until they

agreed to buy a bottle. *So pushy*, Julianne had said, as they drove off and through their little *Freistaat Bayern*.

When they pulled in they saw the giant of a truck hogging the driveway, a sliver of moon at its back, reflected off the windshield and half-acre hood. Harvey pulled in behind it, pulled the emergency brake, and Julianne hustled off inside with an armful of grocery bags and one of the bottles of red, hollering hellos to everyone. Julianne's daughter came out, threw an arm around Harvey, and then James, her husband, came out and helped him unload, and soon they were in the house putting all the groceries away. Harvey, to cozy everyone up, lit a fire, put the stereo on, searched for Christmas albums to listen to. Later, when Julianne's granddaughter, who, it was true, was also his granddaughter, had gone to sleep, Harvey told James about all of the work they had done over the past year on the house, upgrading this, re-caulking that. And when he stumbled, Julianne helped him along, reminding him about the subfloor they'd put in the guest bathroom, the new vanity in the master, what a disaster it had been, maneuvering the hulking cabinet around that corner and all. “Nearly lost some digits,” Julianne said. And Harvey concurred.

In bed later that evening, Harvey not snoring but not not snoring, Julianne thought No, they had not noticed. Or they were good at not showing that they had noticed. Maybe they had been so tired they hadn't been able to notice. Or maybe, which was very possible, they had simply not wanted to bring it up. And if that were the case, then it was pity they felt, and No, she could not be pitied. But Rachel would not do that, would not pity them. Not even if James steered her that way would she pity them. Rachel did not pity; Rachel stood up. Rachel helped. Rachel drove straight through, pulled everyone along with her, kicking and screaming. Rachel always said, Hey, make lemonade. That was her Rachel. That was her number two daughter. And soon Julianne fell asleep.

They did things as a family, at certain times of the day, but for the most part they left Harvey alone, let him hide in his room, in the garage, the study. James had his *Crackberry* and Harvey had his computer and his word processor, and more often than not James

had wires hanging from his ears as he paced through the rooms, returning calls, joining meetings and then muting his little microphone, stepping outside where he worked his calves on the steps. Harvey did not avoid anyone, did not shy away when asked to participate, but he changed few of his routines when they had guests. He woke early and went for walks in the morning, read the paper, had his coffee, did his writing, corresponded with students about the upcoming semester, what he expected from them, what they could expect from him. He made pecan pancakes with Peach syrup (his specialty), and he helped Julianne cook when she needed his help (he acquired great little hors-d'oeuvres recipes from his trips to Spain), especially when her fingers swelled up, when her migraines kicked in, and her only savior was a cool rag over her eyes and dead silence. He spent time with James and he spent time with Hadley, who loved Harvey like she seemed to love all old men who played dolls with her and who taught her cool new things. And she seemed to like Harvey the most, probably because he taught her how to pretend she was levitating when really she was only tiptoeing on one foot. That particular trick she still did, months and months after he'd taught her. An optical illusion, is what it is, Rachel heard Hadley confide to her friends on more than a number of occasions. “It means it fools your eyes.” But mostly Hadley loved the stories he told her about the journeys of the chivalrous Don Quixote de la Mancha and his buddy, the fat Sancho Panza, galloping away on their silly but ultimately melancholy quests.

In his books, Harvey felt important. In the forewords and on the back covers, where his fellow authors and academic colleagues praised his work, he felt as if he had indeed made his mark. He felt a measure of accomplishment, and he felt that Yes, he had given something back when for many years, and perhaps ashamedly so, he had only taken. Taken childhoods (those of his son, his daughter), and stolen youth (that of his ex wife's, he had to admit), and god knows who or what else, for surely he left victims in his wake. Not out of malice, but definitely out of selfishness. Yet what could you do? What were the rules? How could he suppress a talent, a gift, a

calling, that had always wanted to come out, even if the collateral damage was his own flesh, his own blood? How could he rationalize cutting off insights the world over should know, theories yearning to be shared in lectures and text? Truths about something as important as gender, as universal as sexuality? The answer was simple: he couldn't.

And yet, while he saw need in his books, in the dirt, Harvey saw the world. In tilling the earth, Harvey felt connected. In planting seeds that grew, Harvey built life, and like the work in his field, this life was more than compulsion. Like everything he did, the seeds he planted kept his heart beating, kept his lungs breathing, kept his blood pumping. In short, it kept him alive. The garden, unlike other things in his life, *had* to grow. The garden was the yang to his ying. Sure, it was a young garden, newly planted, still artificial. It was not the previous one he had cultivated over a decade, thriving fully, contributing on its own, because that was gone. That was an Eden that no longer existed, at least not for him. Someone else tilled that earth. Someone else reaped the fruits it bore. But this garden, his and Julianne's, was a cosmos unto itself, split between two beds, a fragment of the previous but good enough. Two planetary systems peeking at one another from across a universe of gravel, pitchers of water like travelers in space floating from one world to the next, sprinkled to the earth like rain, moistening the skin like dew.

A voice from the heavens, singing across the universe. “Heading in,” it says. “Starting supper.”

Plain. Simple. Julianne's voice, the planets align, topsoil is topsoil, fieldstone is fieldstone, river rounds are river rounds. And the invaders, the nematodes he knows are there, hiding in his sandy soil, cloaked in their microscopic camouflage, are having their last supper, because he has rotated his okra and he has rotated his tomatoes, and, for the coup de grâce, he has lain his chitin. All of these things make his garden grow.

He enjoys all of Julianne's children, and he appreciates their husbands, the family men they are, though never would he want to be like them. Their careers are not careers, in his mind, not what he

considers worthy ones, anyway. They are money machines, yes, but these careers leave empty lives, hollow souls. These careers do not construct, but shuffle. This goes here, that goes there, and the chime in the register dings and dings. And the house expands. And more and more and more.

They are sitting in the dining room now, he and James, Rachel's husband, the corporate man, the driver of the tank in his driveway. Today he will attempt, and tomorrow he will attempt, but Sunday, all hellos and small talk exhausted, he will read *The New York Times*, and he will try (and fail) to sleep late, and he will sit in bed and jot down ideas for the future, as he always does, before the week begins.

“You guys should come up sometime,” James is saying now, not looking at him but at the little machine in his hand, the little computer he knows was invented by a college dropout. “In the summer we can take the boat out, go sailing.”

“That would be nice,” Harvey says. “Appreciate it.”

James works his thumbs over the little machine, tapping away on the tiny little buttons. He presses one of the larger keys, puts the machine down on the table. He looks up at Harvey, his eyes wide, a smile across his chiseled face. It is a kind look, Harvey thinks. It is probably the same look he shows clients. It is a look that makes you feel like there's only the two of you in the whole world. He says, “I mean it, Harv. Walk right from the backyard onto the boat. Head out for the day, come back in and barbecue. It's awesome.”

“All for it,” says Harvey. “I enjoy sailing.”

James puts his hand on Harvey's elbow, squeezes. Like Barry over at the car lot does whenever he and Julianne walk by on their way to the post office. Harvey does not look at the hand; it's just James being James, talking how he talks.

“Just picked up the new Hunter 50CC,” he says. “Same hull and rig as the H-49. Elevated cockpit, but more style. More function.” He says, “You'd love the aft stateroom, Harv. Custom divan, cedar storage. *Un-real*.”

Harvey says, “Sounds like it.” He says, “I'll talk to Julianne this evening, see if I can't convince her to pop up there next summer.”

But James is already back to his computer, typing away. He says, “What was that Harv?” and Harvey says, “You want some sweet tea?” and when James says one sec, Harv, Harvey says, “I'll go get us some sweet tea,” and goes off into the kitchen.

Rachel says, “I apologize in advance for my husband,” when Harvey walks in. She has been watching James and Harvey, whom she can see completely from her seat beside Hadley at the kitchen table. Hadley is taking rabbit nibbles from the corner of a Rice Krispies treat.

“No worries,” Harvey says. He pulls two glasses from the cabinet, grabs the pitcher of tea from the fridge, pushes the soy milk to one side.

But Rachel says, “No, I know. But it can be annoying that damn thing always pressed to his face. It's like where did that come from? All of a sudden everyone has this growth at the end of their arms.”

Harvey says, “The duplicitous nature of technology,” and walks off with the glasses of sweet tea. He drops one of the glasses off on the table in front of James, and James thanks him, and Harvey is off to another room, out of sight. Julianne looks at Rachel, says, “Apparently work calls,” and sits down beside Hadley, who licks her fingers, says she would like another one, please Nana.

Rachel digs in her travel bag, which is on the kitchen counter, by one of the larger bowls Harvey has carved up in his little workshop. She pulls a big Ziploc of snacks out, hands a packaged Krispies treat to Hadley, tells her that's it, no more. Hadley smiles, and when she can't tear the plastic, Julianne tears it for her. Bon appétit, she says. Hadley says, I will *teet*.

Rachel says, “So what else is going on around here?” She means here, in the house, in their cabin. She means with them, with her and Harvey. Their lives.

Julianne says, “Well, you missed Oktoberfest, which was a few weeks back, and the Festival of Trees, but coming up I think we have

some glass blowings the kids might like. And we have the lights downtown, of course.”

Rachel remembers the lights from last year, how much the kids enjoyed walking around Helen. She says, “Hadley has been getting into *R-E-LIGI-O-N* at school.” She spells the word out, one letter at a time, slowing down and speeding up, throwing off the normal pattern she would normally use around children, around Hadley. Hadley looks at her mother, gives her the, I'm *seven, mom*. I'm not dumb, look. She says, “Helloooo, I'm right here. I know what you're talking about!” with as much exaggeration as she can, considering her mouth is full of toasted rice and marshmallow.

“Someone can spell,” Julianne says.

“Apparently,” says Rachel. And pinching Hadley's side, says, “Now we just have to get her to read more than one book a year with her own two eyes and her own half a noggin!”

Hadley gets up, lets Julianne wash the sticky marshmallow off her fingers. She says, “Can I watch TV?” But before Rachel answers, Hadley says, “K. Thanks,” and walks out of the room smiling, one hand up in the air waving bye, which is something she's learned from Bridgette, her babysitter. Rachel tells her just for a little bit.

Julianne starts a small saucepan full of milk, says, “I'm making everyone some hot milk and honey. Be a dear and get the Christmas cups from the other room.”

Rachel says what room, and Julianne says, “The only other room with cups in it,” and Rachel heads to the dining room, spots the china cabinet she's looked at dozens of times and notices there's actually Christmas cups and cutlery and even Lladro Christmas-themed porcelain figurines sitting right there behind the glass. After she moves the Lladro snowman-with-girl from the center of a tray, she grabs the wooden tray, stacks it full of cups, brings the tray to the kitchen. She says, “Lladros, right?” and Julianne says Yes. She says, “Harvey got me started on them a few years back. He sends for a piece every year on the day of our first date. Romantic boy, my Harvey.” She does not tell Rachel that this year no Lladro has arrived.

When the milk begins to boil, Julianne turns the fire off, pulls the skin off the top with her fingertips. Rachel passes her an empty cup each time Julianne fills one, and soon they have a miniature assembly line of sorts going until they fill up the tray. Julianne pours the last of the milk into the last mug, says, *Perfect*, and Rachel heads off to play the kind and generous holiday assistant. When she returns, there are two cups still on the tray, one for her, one for Julianne.

Julianne pulls the stools from under the kitchen bar, and they sit down on them, on opposite sides of the counter, sipping the milk, tasting the sweet honey on the tips of their tongues. Julianne says, “When you and your sisters turned one, I fed each of you a little bit of honey on my finger, for your birthdays. I wasn't able to buy you anything, not that any of you would have noticed anyway, but come your first birthdays, you each got fingertips of honey.”

Rachel says, “You're not supposed to give that to babies. Gives them botulism.” She is smirking, another one of those *Oh my God, how did I ever survive childhood*? smirks.

Julianne says, “You're here, aren't you?” She says, “I know that. I knew it then.” She says, “After 12 months honey isn't going to kill you.”

Rachel says, “Mom? Can I ask you an odd question?”

“Shoot,” says Julianne.

“I mean, maybe it's not odd, but just odd for me.” She says, “What do you think of me? Of my family?”

Without hesitation, Julianne says, “I think you're great, dear. I think they're great.” And she means it.

“But I mean, like what we've talked about on the phone. The eight hundred ways thing?”

She means the eight hundred paths any family can take, the end result, what's left after all of the pieces have been moved, at least up to a particular point in time anyway. The mathematics and the statistics of it, of life. Person A marries person B; A plus B produces C; A plus B plus C move to a particular town on a particular island in a particular location into a particular environment who talk in a

particular way. Leaving behind, of course, the seven hundred ninety-nine other possibilities that could have been their lives if they had decided it should be, if they had simply altered an input.

Julianne says, “You have good lives, dear. You are successful. You are the dream, whether you know it or not. You are privileged, and you are healthy. Never forget what you have.” She puts her hands on her daughter's cheeks. She says, “No one is ever completely happy. Not absolutely.”

Rachel nods. She says, “I know. I think the older I get, I start questioning is all. Not always. Just sometimes. I look at Had and I want her to have it all. Not everything, but *everythi*ng.”

Julianne says, “You're a mother. That's your job.”

Rachel sips the last of her milk. She says, “Did you have these thoughts? Or were you too…*busy*?”

Julianne says, “You mean because I had to work three jobs?” and laughs. “No,” she says. “You were my babies. Still are. I have those thoughts now.” She says, “You have to remember, when I was your age I had three teenage daughters. Three daughters who were very different from each other. *Very* different.” She finishes her milk, hands the cup to Rachel, who puts the cups in the sink. She says, “Try *that* for a weekend. Try that, *and* going on a date with someone without your daughters knowing. Talk about tough.” Julianne is smiling now. She says, “Hmph,” walks over to where Rachel is sitting.

Rachels says, “I shudder to think.”

Julianne says, “You do what you have to do,” now hugging Rachel's head to her chest. “Remember that. You have a good life, dear. Enjoy it. That's all the advice in the world that means anything.”

As a family, Rachel and James and Hadley head to town and then on the road, to wander and sightsee as they always do when they're away. A month is a long time, and separation is good, even from those you've come to spend time with. They drive and walk along the Smithgall Woods Conservation Area, along Otali Road and Tsalaki Trail, and even Boca Hills Road, which makes Hadley go into a sing-

song, repeating *Mouth Hills Road* until she is simply humming one long hum that starts with M and ends with what sounds like “ode.” And for Harvey and Julianne, the quiet time is good. They spend the early morning hours after breakfast tending to the garden, where everything is ready to go but in an intermediary state of dormancy, awaiting the frosts to thaw and the heat to come. They sweep and mop and do what laundry there is, which is not much. They run the Jacuzzi and open the heating vents in all the rooms (which are closed when it's just them), Julianne supporting the ladder while Harvey points the grates just so, a little this way a little that way, maximizing and directing the dispersion of heat like traffic police.

By noon Harvey is sealing manila envelopes, putting too many stamps on submissions too important to send via email. A day late, but not a dollar short. He will walk into town, pick up a paper, drop his manila envelope with Eugene at the post office, who calls him *Professor L*. Eugene who has, in fact, read numerous papers Harvey has written over the years, and even one of his books, God knows why. Eugene who reminds him that, in a way, he is one of Helen's minor celebrities, transplant or not. Eugene, who he has seen, on more than one occasion, using his high school Spanish to read the Spanish correspondence he has written, carefully, with a dictionary, prior to slipping into España -bound envelopes.

“Article or chapter?” says Eugene, weighing Harvey's envelope.

“Article,” replies Harvey, quietly, playing a little Salingeresque reticence.

“Good luck,” says Eugene, waving at Harvey, who is walking out the door, having held it open for Mrs. Coggeshall, who Harvey knows, at one point in time, has also worked in academia.

Hand in hand they walk, he and Julianne, for she has decided a walk with Harvey will be good for her now, before daughter number two, Lettie, and her husband and no-so-little Aaron, her son, come rolling in later that afternoon, though she had planned on their being here earlier. After they arrive, she knows, there will be too much to do, too much minutiae to manage. Conductors cannot walk

in on their symphonies. Ringmasters do not show up late to their circuses.

She is holding Harvey's hand, the old couple walking around town, Harvey's keys and wallet and cough drops and lip balm tucked sloppily away in his Buffalo pouch, which James teasingly calls a fanny pack. They are on their leisurely walk today, not their exercise walk, not their errand walk; there is nothing to buy, no ingredients to pick up, no prescriptions to refill. They go up and down the stairs, in and out of the shops, saying their hellos, promising their attendance at upcoming community events, the numerous senior citizen banquets held at various homes around town and out in the hills. They stop into Louise's little shop, tell her their kids are here, more on the way, Harvey admiring the Amethyst pendants while Julianne and Louise stare at the ascending rows of Matryoshka dolls that look like rainbows crashed into armless women wearing babushkas. Harvey says, “It means ‘*not intoxicated*’,” and looks back at Julianne, at Louise. “What does?” says Julianne, looking over her shoulder but still bent over the rainbows. “Amethyst,” says Harvey, pointing at the purple crystals behind the glass. “It comes from the ancient Greek. ‘A' is ‘not,' and ‘methustos' means ‘intoxicated.' Not intoxicated. Not drunk.”

“I didn't know that,” says Louise, acting surprised. “Been here years and that's the first time I ever heard that.”

“He's a wealth of knowledge, my Harvey,” says Julianne. And Harvey, moving down the glass display, says, “You have half the gemstones on planet earth here, Louise.”

Louise says, “And yet, no one's buying!”

He wants to say, “You can't charge an arm and a leg for pretty rocks,” but says, “Tough times, I suppose,” as if the words have ever really had much meaning either to her or anyone else with wares to vend.

But they do serve a purpose nonetheless, and that purpose is simply to signify other things, other entities, and other topics to discuss, which is all some days are meant for. And perhaps this is one of those days.

So Louise now confides in Julianne some of Helen's newer gossip, it's more scandalous tittle-tattle, which is Harvey's cue to make his sweet little exit, his *be right back*, and walk along the Chattahoochee, where he can kneel by the rocks, check for wriggling bodies under the stones along the river. He has not fished in Georgia, but old habits never die. He allows himself to recall the summers he spent in Montana, fly fishing for trout, dissecting Stoneflies and Pale Morning Dun, and then tying his own flies. He remembers working at Many Glacier, the beauty of the landscape, the bear and grey wolf, the red fox and moose and goat. He remembers paddling out to the middle of the lake, on one side Many's giant cabin, a thousand times his and Jules' cabin, and on the other side a sheer wonderland of western larch and subalpine fir, snowy peaks slicing the blue sky like ice. A snaking trail along a smaller lake.

“It's time to go home,” her voice says, calling him from up the bank a ways. “Lettie and Michael should be getting here soon.”

Julianne, smiling at him from beside a garbage can, where the little footpath stops, meets the slope down to the river. He waves at her, starts heading up. He kneels, picks up an oddly shaped twig the size of a chopstick, lets her pull him up the last little bit. He says, “We walking or they picking us up?”

“Who?” says Julianne. Because she does not know what Harvey means.