

from "Memorial Day"

by Danny Goodman

The kite hovered like a gull, just high enough that I thought, for a moment, it might break from its string and glide over the Atlantic.

My father pointed out into the expanse and said, See kids, there's Ireland.

The way he looked at the water, I believed he could see it. My cousins, Liz and Casey, were so damn gullible, hitting one another and pretending that the island took shape before them. I slapped my brother, Liam, in the back of the head, hoping to instigate something.

Not gonna happen, dipshit, he said.

I wondered if anything would break if I shoved him off the pool deck. The sand below appeared soft.

Uncle Gordon lumbered toward us, his flip-flops scraping against the wood. He sipped coffee from a large, white paper cup, and when he stopped beside me, I could smell his breath, something I imagined could only come from a dragon or *Uruk-hai*.

Who's seen Mallory this morning? he asked as an announcement, tousling his daughters' hair. Girls, where's your mother?

They both shook their heads in such a way that it appeared Uncle Gordon had twisted them, back and forth, like a screw not quite fitting its grooves.

She's down by the water, I called to him. Just follow the kite.

Aunt Mallory wasn't flying the kite. Rather, she sat beside another woman who dug her toes into the ground where soapy waves ended and shore began. I imagined the two of them, these sisters, as young girls—maybe like Liz and Casey—playing on the same beaches, chasing the young surfer boys along Ditch Plains, getting lost in the tall, tall grass around the Montauk Point Lighthouse. I liked to think about them this way, because now, as I watched them stare stoically up at the kite, each sipping their coffees, I saw something very, very different.

A hand landed hard on my shoulder.

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Why don't you head down there, Scooter? my father asked, though it felt more like a command. I'm sure your mother would love the company.

I let the stray piece of lox dangling from his mustache distract me. It clung to the thick middle, where the color of his facial hair shifted from auburn to dark chocolate. When the lox finally slipped free and dropped onto his forearm, it landed on his tattoo, the one he'd gotten back in the service, in Vietnam, a Celtic knot, comprised of the names of those he *lost*: a mutt his platoon adopted, four friends—buds, he called them, and two brothers.

I have nothing to say to her, I said. I kept my eyes locked on the fallen salmon.

This has to end, Roddy. You two can't keep this up.

Without thinking, I flicked the lox from his arm. It landed in the brush below, to the delight of a bevy of gulls.

Everyone's weekend will be ruined, he said. Is that what you want?

I'd like to be left alone, I said. That's what I want. I don't want her to look at me.

The two of you, my father said and shook his head. If I were gone, you'd kill each other.

She can't be killed, I said, I know it. She's immortal.

My father laughed, deep and full, and the sound seemed to carry down the beach. I pretended there was a sailboat, somewhere between here and Block Island, using my father's mirth as a guide across the waves.

Liam ran down the stairs onto the beach, waving a football in the air at my father and me. The three of us hadn't done much together since Liam went to college; a year ago, really, but it felt like longer. My father nudged me and we walked down to meet Liam. As we stood there, deciding what landmarks would represent each goal line—a rotted stump and line of desecrated horseshoe crabs, respectively—I felt everything had changed too fast, had grown and evolved into something I couldn't yet comprehend, such that now, there was no trace left of the boys I hoped we'd always remain.

