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When she pulled back the curtain that darkened her father's bedroom window, Lara could see straight down the maple-lined road almost to the pinkish brown pillars half a mile away that marked the entrance to the farm. There had been a freak spring blizzard on April Fool's Day—some wit had forecast more unpleasant surprises for 1929—and there was a thick coating of snow on the arching branches.

"Why haven't they come yet?" her father Eugene asked, looking at the log that was sputtering on the grate. He was stretched out on the carved four-poster bed, his wasted body propped on a mass of pillows. Lara could tell from his face he was hurting, but she knew better than to stroke his head and ask if she could give him something for the pain. He'd refused to take his morphine until after he'd talked to their new tenants about the rental agreement.

"Why don't I read to you some more?" she asked instead, gesturing at the neat pile of books next to his water pitcher—"Want to try *The New Yorker* cartoons?" He looked incredulous. No chance he was going to laugh at jokes about flappers and what he called their silly modern views. But she couldn't stand reading any more Marcus Aurelius. Her father needed no encouragement to be flintily stoic.

She turned to the window again, holding back the corner of the heavy curtain, glad of an excuse to look outside—anywhere but at the bed. She didn't want to see his hands moving nervously on the counterpane, eager to scratch his signature on the lease and vacate permanently.

A black car broke through the white V at the road's end where the snowladen trees came together.

"Oh, there they are," Lara said, feeling an irrational sensation of hope at the car's steady progress. For a moment she forgot the suffocating room and let herself enjoy the way the sleek double curved front of the car cut the space as it swam toward them, setting up ripples of movement in the trees.

She was hungry for movement, tired of this awful, static waiting. "They have one of those new Packards," she said to her father, "a touring car."

"I don't know where all this speed and racing about is going to get people," Eugene said. "Death is still the last stop." He looked suddenly anxious, his thin nostrils flared. He sniffed. "Does it smell too bad in here?" he asked. "Of disinfectant, I mean."

"The flowers cover it," she lied. Her mother had filled the room with forced narcissi and pots of herbs, but underneath you could still smell the decay—like a compost heap. She hated it. This degrading, painfully slow process of hunkering in the dark, eaten from the inside.

The car pulled up with a screech in front of the house. Lara saw Muriel and her companion get out and stretch. Muriel was unstylishly hatless, but Lara saw that her coat was nicely cut and she'd turned up a fur collar around her ears. She didn't look any more pregnant than when Lara had seen her last month in New York. The slender man in the belted overcoat with the homburg must be her husband, David. Muriel caught her looking and waved awkwardly.

A few minutes later, Lara heard the creak of the front door hinges, murmured greetings, then footsteps up the wood stairs as her mother, Agnes, swept their new tenants into the bedroom. The first thing Lara noticed about David was that his pomaded hair—he'd taken off his homburg—threatened to break into curls. His eyes moved rapidly from face to face. A

restless fellow, she thought. Not exactly the husband Lara would have imagined for Muriel, who had turned her gray luminous eyes toward Lara's father and was looking at him with steady concern.

Eugene visibly gathered himself. "You've come," he said to them, holding out his hands. "I'm so glad. I was afraid you'd get lost. Excuse the curtains, the bright light hurts my eyes. It's too bad, the view is stunning from here." He looked around. "Lara, open the drapes a bit, would you?" Lara saw her mother make a gesture of distress, knuckles to her mouth, and hesitated. "Go ahead, I'm all right."

"It's not necessary," Muriel put in quickly.

"My brother John's room has almost the same view," Lara said smoothly. "You can see it when we look around." She didn't want Muriel and David to think her mother was miserable about renting the house to them. What point was there in making them feel bad, especially when they were going to have to live here together cheek by jowl? Muriel and David in the big house and Agnes, Lara and Johnnie in their old guest house.

"Agnes, could you bring me a glass of lemon water, dear? Someone has to be realistic," he said when she went out. "She keeps insisting I'm going to get well. She seems to think if I just had sufficient willpower, I could stay alive." He stroked his pale moustache. "I've asked Lara to talk to her but she won't listen. It'll be a shock to her when I die. My partner, Sol, will handle all the financial arrangements."

Lara reflected wryly that her father wouldn't listen either. When her mother had asked why they had to move out (Didn't they have enough money?), he didn't even pretend to answer her, simply went over what he'd already told them about their allowances.

Now he leaned over stiffly, opened the drawer of his bedside table and drew out a document. What he did, was doing, wanted to do, was always the center of their lives. He'd always acted as if they needed his constant surveillance. Lara had the disloyal thought that they might flourish without him.

"I have the contract here," he was saying to David, "but of course you'll have to look at the place first to see if it suits you."

David scanned the papers. Lara noticed he had a good profile. Enough nose to look interesting, not just pretty. Muriel had a stronger face, framed by her long black hair, the free-falling kind her father certainly disapproved of. Determined cheekbones. An insistently unmade-up face.

"There was one thing I was going to ask you," Muriel said hesitantly. "What about structural changes? We're technically just renters. But if we're going to have a clinic here eventually, we'll probably need to remodel. I'm sorry to bother you. . . ."

"Why be sorry? I'm a lawyer," Eugene answered simply. "You're right. Things ought to be crystal clear. *Cuique suum.*" Skeletal, his pajamas flapping on his bones, he was still sharp, Lara thought.

"Why don't you look around," her father said, "see what changes you might want to make and then come back and we'll work out something that's satisfactory to both of us. I don't think there will be any problem unless"—he gave them an engaging smile—"you're planning to tear the place down and put up a nursing home."

Agnes came back with the lemon water and poured it for Eugene, holding it to his mouth. A wisp of hair came loose from her upswept hairdo and straggled next to her ear. She pushed it back distractedly, just as she was pushing back her tiredness, Lara thought, and making an effort to smile.

When Eugene had finished drinking and lay back, resting, Agnes offered to show Muriel and David the rest of the house. Lara went along. After a perusal of the bedrooms and Eugene's library they went into the living room, the biggest and most impressive room in the house. Lara noticed Muriel's instantly suppressed motion of distaste at the sight of the heavily draped wall of French doors and the dark, massive furniture, elaborately carved with scrolls and fruit. Every surface, except the grand piano at one end, was covered with crocheted lace and small ornamental objects.

Once Lara had overcome the embarrassing urge to weep, there was something perversely funny about the whole situation. Two investigators of the mental underworld in a shrouded room filled with oppressive furniture and fragile ornaments.

The strange, dissonant furnishings of the collective Kamener soul.

Lara lounged against the piano, her cigarette holder clamped in her teeth. "Imagine it empty," she told Muriel. "The lines are good. It's simple and spacious. I don't know why Mother insists on keeping it dark."

"You do too," Agnes said indignantly, "the sun fades the oriental rugs."

"Maybe Muriel and David won't have any. Maybe they'll have rush mats." Lara walked quickly along the wall of French doors, drawing back the heavy curtains—by the last she was almost running in her eagerness to let in the light.

"It makes all the difference, doesn't it?" she said and saw Muriel smile with pleasure as the dazzling white of trees and snowy lawn burst on them, glittering with reflected sun.

Her mother shrugged as if to say, you see what I'm burdened with, and went on with the tour. "This is where we have our afternoon tea," she said, indicating a highly polished mahogany table with claw feet. Her tone suggested Muriel and David were going to be her guests, not take over her house. It was pathetic really, but Lara felt she couldn't start pitying her or there might be no end to it. She frowned, not liking herself. After all, Agnes wasn't asking for compassion, was she? If anything, her demeanor suggested that nothing unpleasant was occurring, certainly nothing tragic. Lara wondered if she was trying to trick fate, or did she imagine this was only a whim of Eugene's that would pass when he got better?

"I'll take them over the grounds, Mother," she said, going to the closet in the front hall and coming back with their coats. "I know you don't want to leave Daddy too long." When they'd put their things on, Lara took them out through the screened porch.

As soon as they got outside, she brightened up considerably. She always felt like a different person when her mother wasn't around. They stood in front of the screened porch for a minute while Lara pointed out the snow-blown tennis courts, pool and gardens—now just long white mounds—on the west side. Then Muriel said she'd like to see the outbuildings. There was a gravel drive running along the

front of the house and the rustic outbuildings were strung along it: water tower, game room, garage, caretaker's house, greenhouse, barn. Then, across from it, set alone on the edge of the field, the windmill. Behind the game room and water tower, like the point of a triangle, was the guest house.

They strolled along through the soft snow looking out at the rolling fields just beyond the drive and beyond them to the woods and bluish hills in the distance. Lara took them to the game room first. As they went inside she noticed that David was taking copious notes. While he paced around the knotty-pine room tapping walls and estimating square feet, Lara looked at the battered ping-pong table, her old victrola, and the vividly colored croquet mallets in their rack under the big window. Let them refurbish the place, she thought, let it all go.

After the greenhouse and the caretaker's house—which Muriel wanted to turn into a dormitory—they went on to the big barn. Lara showed them the cows placidly ruminating in their headlocks, and the hayloft with the huge rough beams high above the floor that she had crawled across when Johnnie dared her. Looking up at their cobwebby underside, neck craned back, the muscles of her arms and legs contracted, her body remembered the feel of the splintery beams. Even very young, she'd known if she slipped she'd crack her skull.

"You could use the threshing floor under the beams as a theater," she told Muriel. She had always wanted a theater as a child.

They seemed so pleased, so hopeful, Lara thought as they walked along in the sun, after their tour, looping back across the snowy lawns behind the outbuildings, toward the farmhouse. She heard Muriel say to David in a low voice that it could do with a coat of paint. Was it naïvete or bravery, thinking they could change things for the better, not just buildings, but badly damaged children? She remembered herself and Johnnie playing in the game room—that would be the new craft room—playing doctor, playing torture the prisoners, and shivered. It would be such a relief to believe that somehow things could change.

"I don't mind moving here," she offered as they passed the guest house with its cockeyed chimney and the cozy porch that caught the sun in the winter. "It wouldn't be good for Mother to

be locked up in the big house with her memories. Besides," she added, "this way she'll have to get rid of some of that awful furniture and the porcelain bric-a-brac."

Muriel seemed to be studying the resolutely closed green shutters. "She may not see it that way."

"She doesn't. But that's because she can't think ahead yet. She wants everything to stay the same."

"And you?" David asked. She saw him looking her over.

"I need a cigarette." She laughed, took off her glove and extracted a pack from her bag.

David flicked his lighter and Lara bent her face toward the light. When she lifted her head, she saw Johnnie's kite beneath the shoulder of the pool hill. It had a red tail like a streak of blood against the snow. Muriel looked at her questioningly.

"It's Johnnie," Lara said, puffing out with a note of bravado, "the invisible man."

"He looks quite visible to me," Muriel said, as a young man in a greatcoat and cap appeared higher up on the hill next to the bathhouse.

"That's because you don't know him yet," Lara answered. "I'd introduce you but he likes to be alone when he tries out a new one. That's Free-soaring Tiger." She gave an apologetic laugh. "He has quite a collection, all shapes and sizes. It's the only use he's made so far of his engineering degree." She imagined her mother's face listening to this and sighed. "Actually, that is something of an exaggeration. He taught a course two years ago at NYU."

"Maybe he just wants to have some fun, take some time off," David suggested.

Lara shrugged. "It's more like time out," she said, "in a different zone entirely, but maybe with your training you can cross time zones more easily than other people."

David frowned, not sure whether she was mocking him, but Muriel laughed.

"If there are enough clues to the route."

Lara kept watching Johnnie out of the corner of her eye.

"There's no need for you to go upstairs again unless you want to," David said to Muriel when back in the house they stood in the front hall. "I've got the list."

He kissed Muriel lightly on the cheek and headed up the big staircase, running his hand along the mahogany banister.

"Why don't you come into the kitchen and have a cup of tea with me?" Lara offered, anxious to stay out of the sickroom as long as she could.

"I'd love to. It's probably easier on your father just to have David to deal with. He was so welcoming to us both, but I'm afraid he's in a lot of pain."

Lara led the way into the big kitchen just off the front hall. "He is," she said, glancing over at the kitchen table. Muriel followed her glance and saw an open sketch pad, full of faces and hands, some with a light wash of color over them.

"Don't look. They're not very good. I've been trying for days to do Daddy's portrait, while I still can. But I can't get him, there's no life to what I'm doing. I don't know why." She picked up her sketch pad and regarded it grimly, her mouth shut in a tight line. It wasn't just these sketches; she'd been stuck for months not seeming to make any progress.

"Maybe you don't have much energy to spare just now," Muriel said.

She thinks I'm suffering, Lara thought, finding it too painful to think of losing him. But the truth was, she wasn't feeling that at all. She was losing the last chance to show him what she was capable of.

Muriel picked up a blue pastel and held it toward a sheet of empty paper. "May I?"

"Sure. . . ."

Muriel took a breath and drew the chalk full across the page leaving a bumpy blue track behind her.

"You can use the edge too." Lara took a yellow one and scrawled a quick sketch of a wildly pregnant Muriel all belly and long hair. Muriel laughed, turned hers on edge and drew a square house with a columned entry.

"The second floor windows have such a nice rhythm," she said, "but I've made them look like cement blocks." She tried again, sticking her tongue between her teeth. "The children will love these," she said.

"In your clinic, you mean? Poster paints might be easier at first."

"I'd like to have everything—paints, crayons, pastels, watercolors, clay. I want to have a real art program—not just the diddly little crafts programs they've been trying at some clinics—caning chairs and making doilies." Muriel tossed back her hair energetically. She was a big woman, Lara thought. She'd be full bodied even when she wasn't pregnant.

"Aren't you going to do the talking cure?" Lara asked, not sure if that was what the doctors called it or only a sort of nickname.

"That's more for a certain kind of patient. . . ."

"A very rich one," Lara quipped, and they both laughed.

"I work with children who are more disturbed," Muriel said when she caught her breath. "They don't have much use for talking. They need the physical stuff. The holding, stroking. They need someone they trust near them when they wake up."

Lara looked at Muriel's large hands with their short, unvarnished nails, and an image of her own endless succession of white uniformed nannies flashed through her mind. She grimaced.

Paradise Farm: a model for the country. Lara thought that would be the perfect irony.

"Do you have any prospective patients?" she asked.

"We'll start with a little girl named Robin. She's been mute for a year."

"Aren't there lots of patients who never get better?"

"This is a special child. She has a spark." Muriel leaned forward emphatically. "And then I'll have a whole different way of treating her." Her eye caught sight of Lara's scissors and she picked them up, opened and closed them quickly. "I'm even going to let her—them—handle scissors and palette knives, to show them we trust them."

"What if the children decide to cut each other up?" Lara asked. "Or the teacher?" She eyed Muriel's stomach wondering when it would start to show. Or hurt the baby? Wasn't Muriel worried about that?

Muriel passed a hand over her belly as though she were communicating with what was inside. "Maybe it won't work—even David thinks I'm going a bit too far. I could be wrong," she said. But her whole stance, even the way she carried her head,

suggested she thought she was right. Right or wrong, Lara thought she had never seen anyone so intriguingly confident. She wondered what it would be like to have this much energy exerting itself at the farm. Would it really be comfortable to have her as a neighbor?