

for Tuesday

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Lacy was walking up Wyoming. Wyoming was next to Wayne. Wayne was next to Waldo. Waldo was where the cemetery was.

Woodland Cemetery was the largest cemetery in Dayton. It was where Lacy took her best pictures. It was where she went after school instead of going home. The cemetery was in southeast Dayton, just outside downtown. It was bounded by chainlink fence topped with barbed wire. Beyond that, on one side, lay homes built in the nineteen-twenties. On the other side was student housing for the University of Dayton. Woodland Cemetery overlooked the Miami Valley and Dayton's handful of thirty-story buildings. The peak of the highest hill in the cemetery was Lacy's favorite place from which to view the city. She liked to gaze through the breaks in the trees toward downtown and across the valley. Church steeples and the towers of hospitals rose from wooded neighborhoods circling the city. During July and August, mist sometimes rose from the dense patches of trees. In the fall, the valley was splashed with blotches of orange and brown. During winter almost every elevated point in the cemetery made a good lookout. More of the town's buildings were visible through leafless branches. White steeples still rose starkly, but then from groves of black trees.

The cemetery was five blocks from Lacy's house. She went there every day. Usually she went by herself, but sometimes she brought boys there to kiss and cuddle at the base of the cross-shaped monument inscribed with the name, "Sanenar." October was generally too cold for hours of kissing and cuddling, but that particular day was still full of early-autumn warmth even as the sun began its descent.

Lacy felt comfortable walking alone in Woodland Cemetery. She loved quiet, and that cemetery was the quietest place in Dayton. She loved the openness of the place. It was huge to a girl who shared an east Dayton house with her mother, her father, one sister, two brothers, one dog, four cats, two tanks of fish, her pet lizard, three hamsters (belonging to her youngest sister, Rachel), and usually two or more of the neighbor kids sprawled on the couch in the living room playing Dr. Mario. Lacy rarely played Dr. Mario. One time she had challenged Benjamin, but she won. Benjamin was one of the two boys that Lacy had kissed and cuddled with at the base of Sanenar's cross. Benjamin wasn't with her that day, though. That day she felt like being alone. Lacy walked south on Wayne Avenue until she came to Waldo. Waldo took her to a decorative iron gate that served as one of the sanctioned entrances to the cemetery. It was closed and locked each day at five p.m. Lacy took in the sweep of the hills rising before her as she passed through the open gate on what had been Waldo. There were geese congregating around the edges of the pond. The road narrowed and forked, snaking throughout the hills of the cemetery. Lacy stepped onto the grass and set about hiking slowly up the first of the hills. Her head was bowed as she walked. She watched her feet and read the inscriptions on the stones. She recognized many of the names. After stepping over EMMA L. WHITESHELL (1910-1985), Lacy would be expecting to see MADIGAN FRAZEE and IDA BURRIS BARG (1866-1933). After that would be GUSTIN, FRYE, and CARL B. (SON OF G.R.L. & R.A. WHEELER, 1855-1906), then WINCH, PULS, and, at the top of the first hill, the obelisks of MEAD,

COLLINS, and BLACK. Lacy adored the Ionic columns of the DEEDS mausoleum. Of all the elevated tombs, she liked HARTMAN's overall design the best. TALBOTT was the only mausoleum in the cemetery that Lacy didn't like. If she went to the right as she walked up this first hill she would end up near TALBOTT. Lacy stayed to the left, passing HYERS, MOIST, A. CAPPEL. The bottom of the hill was populated with basic, tablet-style markers. At the top, Lacy walked among more elaborate statuary. She looked across the plateau at the top of this first hill. It contained many of the cemetery's largest monuments. To her left, not yet visible, stood the Sanenar cross. The pool was right beside it.

The pool was Lacy's favorite place in Woodland Cemetery. It was a reflection pool twenty-four feet on its longest side, twelve feet on its shortest, and three feet deep. It was partially covered by the branches of a tree. On summer days, Lacy sat at the edge with her legs in the water. On summer days, flowers from the tree floated down to the surface of the pool. One end of the memorial bore the inscription, "In Memory of Imogen Barker Hill." Lacy liked that they hadn't put any dates on it. She wondered who Imogen Hill might have been, where she had lived, and how long, and what she might have looked like. She imagined Imogen Hill as a witch, or a feminist, or some sort of revolutionary, maybe like Joan of Arc. Imogen Hill probably never got married, Lacy thought. She may have been exceptionally beautiful, but certainly not only in a physical way.

Lacy walked around the pool twice, then sat in her usual spot. She shuffled off the straps of her bookbag and let it crunch back on the leaves. Kneeling, Lacy leaned over the water, staring at the reflection of the sky. Daylight was fading to pale yellows. Silhouettes of trees, half their leaves already fallen, framed the blue. She draped two fingers along the surface of the pool and lifted them out. The drips left a trail of expanding circles. Lacy saw herself in the reflection, long blond earlocks, their ends like curled ribbons, mouth red without lipstick, scalp shaved to duckling fuzz. The hood pulls of her blue sweatshirt dangled toward the water.

Lacy leaned back, half on her bag, half on the leaves, and rolled sideways to gather a fistful of clover. Sitting, she adjusted her knees and let the greens slip from her fingers onto the surface of the pool. They dispersed in the slight swirling turbulence of the water. Lacy sighed and looked at the trees. She felt autumn in the swaying of their branches, in the rustle of dry leaves, in the cloudless skies, in the cool of the wind.

She looked at the floating chunks of clover. One by one, she pushed them underwater. Staring wide-eyed through the reflection to the black moss on the bottom of the pool, Lacy thought of Benjamin, of her need to start work on the book project for Mrs. Dugan's class. She thought of school. She thought about the disappearances. Then she realized she was seeing not only the bottom of the pool, she was seeing not only the trees above, she was also staring into a face in the reflection on the surface. It was the face of a boy about her age. Lacy raised her head, startled, but there was no one there, only pillars and statues receding into a dim field of trees.

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When Lacy got off the bus the next morning she was hoping that the prevailing mood of things would be different, but everything was just the same. She went to the steps that led into a

recessed courtyard partially covered by the second floor of the school. At the bottom of the steps she veered to her right to an area even further recessed, where, around one of the concrete benches, Claire and Tabitha stood with some of the other goth kids. Tabitha wasn't fat, but she was bigger than Lacy. Tabitha's latest thing was Nightmare Before Christmas watches she had stolen from Burger King, where she worked. She wore all four types on her right arm. Her closest friends all wore at least one. Tabitha's black sweatshirt was ribboned with lines of safety pins. She wore combat boots. Lacy went to Tabitha and hugged her. The girls were careful not to let their boobs touch.

"Are you feeling better?" Lacy asked.

"Feel like shit."

"Come sit with me at lunch." Lacy put a hand on Tabitha's shoulder, then turned and walked toward another square bench, this one near the main steps leading into the building. Everyone but Ben was already there. Jessica had her camera out and was about to take a picture of the group. Franco saw Lacy and jumped out of the pose. Jessica looked away from the viewfinder, over her shoulder.

Franco waved his arm. "Hey...get in here."

Jessica waited for Lacy to get into the shot. Lacy dropped her bag beside the bench and walked around the back of the line of friends. Merlin squeezed in toward Franco to make room for Lacy at one end of the line. Jessica adjusted the shutter speed of the Pentax K1000 that was standard issue for students in Mrs. Dugan's photography classes. She was able to get an aperture of f22 while the light meter suggested only a slight underexposure. Jessica liked to slightly underexpose black-and-white photographs she planned to print herself. With a slight underexposure it was possible, without using filters, to make a crisp, but softly-toned print. Merlin was fussing with his braids, trying to make them lay back on his head.

"Franco," Jessica was saying while she adjusted the settings, "tell Lacy what you heard."

"Okay, check this out. The other day, I overheard some people talking--"

Lacy interrupted. "You know better than to listen to people around here talk."

"No, but check this out. I heard some of the band kids talking, over there, you know, yesterday afternoon, and you wanna hear what they said?"

Lacy raised her eyebrows blissfully.

"They were talking about us, and Kathy Swiger was telling Angie Taylor that she heard that all of us were having--get this--she said we were having orgies together!"

"What!?"

"Yeah, there's a rumor going around that we all get together and throw crazy sex parties with giant orgies and shit."

Lacy smiled, shaking her head. The others snickered and said how crazy that was. Jessica was finished adjusting the settings. She said, "Everyone, look," and snapped the shutter.

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The film was developed and the picture printed later that week in the black-and-white photography lab at Colonel White School for the Arts. Jessica developed the film in a lightfast

cylindrical canister with one other roll of film she had taken the week before. Both rolls contained pictures of people in and around the school building. All were taken during daylight hours without a flash. There was a shot of Francis La Sota, the principal, getting out of his car one morning. That picture had been taken with a zoom lens at some distance from its subject. The principal hadn't even noticed Jessica taking it. There was a picture of Naomi Hicks in the student parking lot with her arm around some freshman. There was a picture of Kathy Swiger and Angie Taylor, taken from the back, as they walked down the hill on Wabash one afternoon. Both girls wore the same style of L.L. Bean bookbag, though they had conscientiously chosen different colors. There was a picture of a different Jessica with her pants pulled down in one of the basement hallways. There was a picture of Benjamin standing on a table in the lunchroom, proposing a toast with some indistinguishable object. And, of course, there was the picture that had been taken before school by the square bench, a shot of Merlin, Franco, Emily, Steve Pennucci, and Lacy. That turned out to be everyone's favorite of all the pictures on both rolls of film. The photograph, in landscape orientation, showed a reservedly objectivist Merlin facial expression, black braids crowning a dark face. One braid dripping artificially down the broad forehead and partially obstructing the view of one of his eyes. Franco, chin nestled on a perch of hands, wearing some floppy, conductor-style hat of hand-stitched cloth panels in alternating colors, and his contagious smile. Emily, inhabiting one corner of the frame with dark, sweetly smiling lips and a bright, open expression. Steve Pennucci, sprouting long spiraling dreadlocks, his face the only one showing signs of a beard. And Lacy, almost invisible among her friends, in one corner of the picture, looking straight into the lens, not smiling, not frowning, with her fuzzy shaved head, her wavy earlocks snaking down the sides of her face. You didn't even see her when you first looked at the shot. When you realized she was there, you couldn't look away. Jessica printed ten copies. She gave one to everyone in the picture, she gave three away to other people, she turned one in to Mrs. Dugan for a grade, and she kept one for herself, tacked to the wall in her bedroom. Franco carefully taped his his copy inside his locker. Steve Pennucci lost his copy three years after Jessica gave it to him. Police found Lacy's copy when they searched her room in January of the following year. The photograph became known to an eclectic set of observers as "the freak picture," since it gathered in one place faces of some of the seminal members of the social group that was known at that time, among the student body of Colonel White School for the Arts, as the freaks.

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That was the last picture on the roll. After Jessica snapped the shutter she manually rewound the film while everyone scattered into less coordinated twosomes and threesomes that traded members without planning or notice and made no attempt to stick to a consistent topic of conversation. Lacy sat amidst the chaos and watched younger kids lug musical instrument cases out of cars and busses, across the recessed courtyard through a minefield of glances, shuffling up the main stairs early in order to be one of the first to go inside when the bell rang. Lacy focused on an ant crawling over tiny boulders in the concrete. She watched a man sitting in a car across the street hide behind dark glasses. They were there every day now, and while their presence did

forcefully remind everyone that it was prudent to be nervous, it also had the unexpected effect of making the regular security guards more bearable, whether through comparison of the regular guards with the cops, or the implication that the guards were being watched, too. Whichever it was, it created an awkward camaraderie between the security guards and the students. Other things were different, too. There had always been parents waiting around the school in their cars in the afternoon to pick up their children, but now they got there early. Instead of yelling at their kids when the band director ended practice late, the parents got out of their cars and went inside to see why their kids hadn't come out. They went to the main office and had their children paged. They wandered around inside the building. Some parents even started calling halfway through the day to make sure their kids were still in school. The administration obliged these requests, given the circumstances. Arnetta answered the phone in the main office. A parent would call and ask if their child was still in school. Arnetta would take down the name of the student or students the parent wished to check on, then she would call the classroom where the student was scheduled to be, asking for verbal confirmation from the teacher that the student was in fact present at that location. That information would be relayed to the parent. Occasionally Arnetta was asked to check on a student more than once during the same day. The main thing that was different, though, was that five of the students who should have been walking through halls and sitting in desks in the classrooms of Colonel White School for the Arts, were no longer there. Two of them had been in Lacy and Ben's homeroom. One of them had been in Franco's homeroom with Dr. Nugent. Emily and Steve were in the same homeroom and one of the missing kids had sat with them in room 023. The main time Lacy noticed it was in the lunchroom during period B-C. These days, the table where Sherman Brocious and his friends used to sit was only occupied when freshman or special ed. kids sat there after established cliques crowded them out of the other tables. At lunch, when Lacy saw the empty table, it stayed with her silently, in the side of her mind, for the rest of the afternoon.

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Lacy's bag was beside her desk, and she had her pen out, writing in pink on white paper:

*Benjamin,
Spank me for falling to much into bad habits. I
wanted so much to call you this weekend, but I
didn't, no real reason why. I finally finished
Bridges of Madison County, it started out kind of
sucky, well, not quite sucky, that's a little too harsh,
but anyway, I was crying at the end and I think it
was one of the most beautiful loves I have ever read
about, they fit together so perfectly and together
they had the three most perfect days of their lives.
They made love. They were love. It was nice. Lets
not go see the movie when it comes out. I think I'm*

incapable of that kind of deep love, but I want to try making love someday, or, I want to try love that is so deep it overwhelms everything and lasts past death, doesn't sound like me, does it?

"Abrams."

Abrams looked up from painting her nails. "Here."

"Brothers."

Lacy kept writing. The teacher glared at her.

"Cox."

Fat kid. Staring out the window. "Here."

"Evans?"

"Present." First row. ROTC fatigues. Lacy was glad she had quit.

I don't know what's wrong. I love today, everyone I think. I almost said hello to Jessica this morning. I want to go away with you. Let's run out into the forbidden woods and teach the children to be individuals...

"Harrison?"

Lacy looked at the teacher. The desk in front of hers was empty.

"Is he here today?"

Lacy shrugged.

"You haven't seen him?"

Several people turned in their seats to look as Lacy bowed her head to the note. She was already slumped into the desk as far as possible. The pink pen was moving in her hand.

...no, let's be alone, kill the children...

The homeroom teacher spoke. "Michael?"

...drown them in the river...

"Would you run downstairs and see if Mr. Harrison checked in late?"

~

There were no security guards in sight that day. There were no propped-open doors clearly visible. The courtyard was completely empty as far as Benjamin Harrison could see, except for a lone black sedan parked across the street from the entrance to the school. Ben recognized the car and its occupant (he had been sitting in that same spot every day for weeks). There were no

markings on the outside of the vehicle, but the multiple trunk-mounted antennas gave it away. The cop turned his head to look at Ben as he crossed the street in front of the school. Seeing this, Ben drastically changed his course and walked straight toward the car, coughing as he passed the driver's open window. He walked around the back of the vehicle. A bumper sticker said, "GO RIGHT FOR SIRENS AND LIGHTS." Ben went down the steps into the courtyard. He didn't turn around but he assumed the cop was watching him. Inside the main door, Ben put a video camera case on the table beside one of the walk-through metal detectors. When he went through, the metal detector beeped. The security guard waved the wand over Ben's bookbag. It beeped. "Whadayougotinthere?"

"Oh. Video batteries."

"Go on."

Ben took his video case from the table. The main hallway was empty except for him and one of the daytime janitors, out-of-focus, mopping at the far end. The morning announcements were already being read over the loudspeaker. "A reminder to all students. Any student caught in the halls after the bell will be sent to Hall Sweep for the remainder of that class period."

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During second period, Lacy and Ben had American History together. Ben sat in the last seat of the row farthest from the door, closest to the windows. Lacy sat immediately in front of him. Ben spent most of American History writing poetry and looking out the window. One time he saw a squirrel on a branch just a few feet away from the building and he managed to get his camera out of the case, and rolling, quick enough to catch two minutes of the squirrel on video. He never used the footage for anything, but he thought it was novel to have close-up photography of a squirrel nonetheless, especially footage taken in American History with Mrs. Hatcher. Lacy spent the time working on papers for her English class next period. She passed drafts back to Benjamin for revision and grammatical correction. Once she wrote him a note in the form of an acceptance speech snippet: "special thanks to Benjamin--for keeping my tense." Mrs. Hatcher and one of the students were collaborating on a race-clouded rant against the right of the Ku Klux Klan to hold a peaceful rally in Dayton's Courthouse Square. Lacy handed a piece of paper, neatly folded, over her shoulder to Ben. He opened and placed it at the top of his desk where Lacy's head rested on the hood of her blue sweatshirt. Benjamin brushed the back of Lacy's head with his fingers. Her hair reminded him of a fuzzy, baby chick. The note started with a tiny doodle of a pig, drawn in pink, and said, "Come with me after school today."

Ben wrote, "Come with you where?" and passed it over her shoulder.

The paper came back shortly. "Who cares, sweet pea, just come with me."

Ben thought for a second about responding more elaborately, then settled on, "Okay."

Lacy turned around in her desk. She had her camera out. Ben heard the clicking of manual aperture adjustment. He made the face of a lion. Lacy snapped the picture.

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Merlin kicked the sack with his toe. Steve caught it on the back of his thigh, pinned it with the other foot for a second, then rolled it to Franco, who popped it to his chest, stalled, rolled it down between sandwiched feet, and hopped backwards, launching it into the middle of the circle. The sack went up four feet, then promptly fell to the ground.

"That was yours."

Ben. "I wasn't ready."

Franco. "I noticed."

Merlin stepped out of the circle and picked up his bag. "A tout a l'heure."

Ben said, "See ya."

Merlin headed for the bus, stepping in just as the driver was about to close the doors.

Synchronicity. The bus drove up the street, stopped with characteristic screeching at the intersection at the corner of the school, then continued on, rounding the corner, groaning, shifting gears, kicking leaves up in its exhaust, and humming toward the city, out of sight. Later Franco left, and even later Steve and Emily walked away towards Emily's dad's house, which was only a few blocks from the school. Soon it was just Lacy and Benjamin sitting together on concrete, leaning against the building. Lacy's hand lightly clutched the inside of Benjamin's thigh, through his jeans, and Benjamin's hand rested similarly on Lacy, idly caressing her leg. They stared down the hill away from the school at a row of houses, their yards blanketed with leaves, children playing on the porch of one house at the end of the street, somewhere a dog barking, somewhere a woman carrying mail from house to house, her blue uniform and stout body far enough away that she was slightly blurry to them. They listened to the shrieks of laughing children who threw themselves upon leaf piles in the sprawling yards of Five Oaks. Lacy leaned over and bit Benjamin on the neck. His fingers reflexively tightened around her thigh.

"You better watch out, leaving that thing exposed around me. You might get bit."

Benjamin smiled but didn't look over. He unclasped Lacy's belt. Lacy bit him again, this time nibbling his ear. Ben turned his head to kiss her but she wouldn't let him. He bit her lip instead. Lacy gasped. Ben managed to undo the top button of her jeans before she pushed his hand away with both of hers. Lacy turned from him, freeing her bottom lip from his bite. Ben pulled on the flap of Lacy's jeans, opening the remaining three buttons. Lacy made no effort to stop him. She just watched. Ben was looking at her panties. They were light pink with embroidered designs of flying pigs and a tiny pink bow at the top. "Now look what you've done," she said, "I may have to spank you for that."

"Go ahead."

"I should take you home first."

"Let's go."

"My sisters are there. Besides, I want to take you somewhere else."

"Will you spank me when we get there?"

"If you are good and you stop asking questions, then I might."

"What if I'm bad?"

"Then I will bite you very, very hard."

"I think I'll be bad, then."

"Benjamin, I have something to tell you." Lacy's pants were still unbuttoned. Their hands were still. "And you cannot tell--you cannot tell anyone, I mean, seriously--you cannot tell anyone about this because if you do they might think I am crazier than they already think I am."

"I won't tell anyone."

There was a long silence while they both just sat there, motionless. Lacy could feel the cold air at the top of her jeans. She finally spoke.

"Yesterday, I was at the pool--"

~

And they were walking. Up Wyoming, which was next to Wayne, which was next to Waldo. Lacy had fastened the top button of her jeans. She left the others open. When they got to the Sunoco at Wyoming and Wayne, they went inside and Ben looked at magazines while Lacy went into the bathroom. She left the door unlocked, and when the clerks weren't looking, Ben let himself in. He locked the door. Lacy took off her bookbag and put it on the floor. She found a 35-millimeter film canister at the bottom of the bag and took it out. She opened the canister. It was empty. She opened another canister and pulled out a piece of paper with two stars printed on it.

"That's all you have?"

Lacy ripped the paper in two and stood up. Gripping her wrist, Ben licked one of the stars, paper and all, from the outstretched palm. Lacy placed the other half on her tongue and closed the bag. The two of them left the restroom together, winning angry looks from the clerks, but they were gone before anyone had a chance to say anything. The trips from Wyoming to Wayne, and from Wayne to Waldo, were uneventful, but on the walk up the first hill, something was off. They passed EMMA L. WHITESHELL, MADIGAN FRAZEE, and IDA BURRIS BARG. They had stopped talking to each other some time back, Lacy determined, but she couldn't remember which of her most recent memories of words had taken place out loud and which had taken place inside her head. She knew Ben had said something to her in the bathroom at the gas station, she thought they had said something to each other at the gate on Waldo, but she couldn't actually remember hearing their speech. She knew that Benjamin was supposed to be following her at this moment, but she wasn't sure she had made that clear. He was walking right beside her. She said, "You're with me." Benjamin nodded, and she knew that he knew exactly what she meant, and she found that infinitely funny and started giggling. Ben stopped walking completely. At first Lacy thought it was because of her giggling, but then she saw that he was looking down at something. He had kicked over a headstone, and was taking it very, very seriously.

"That...stone..." he was saying, "do you see that stone?"

Benjamin was looking at her and Lacy was nodding.

"I'm pretty sure I kicked it over. I think I stepped on that stone. I'm pretty sure that the reason that stone is knocked over is because I touched it." Lacy sat down in place. She examined the earth around the stone. It smelled fresh. He probably had just kicked it over, but the interesting thing, to her, was all the little bugs crawling around in the dirt.

"There is a worm here, Benjamin, would you like to feel it between your toes?" Lacy started taking off her shoes. She was halfway through the second sock when she realized that Ben really hadn't said anything for a long, long time. During what seemed like the space of an hour, she lifted his pant leg, leaned her mouth over, and kissed him on the soft hair of his calf. She saw that he was looking straight up to the trees and to the sky beyond. His hands made a rectangle with which he variously framed the contents of the sky, zooming in, zooming out, tilting, panning left.

He said, "Rotoscoping technicolor. Take two."

When Lacy realized Benjamin was thinking less about the fallen marker, it made her think of it more, made her think to pick up her shoes and one sock as she rose from the ground, made her think to take Benjamin's hand as she started to walk, that he might come with her to their destination, and not be forever lost in the sight of the trees or wander off alone through the garden of memory.

"We," she said intently, "are going to the pool." And she remembered what she had seen there, and she didn't want to think about it right then. She didn't think this was the best state in which to ponder whether or not she was indeed crazy, or whether she might someday be taken to a mental institution (like her uncle), or whether she was ever going to feel normal. Ben was talking again. "Lacy, I find myself at a dilemma. My dilemma, before you so politely ask what it is, is...that...I find myself in the middle of a triangle...this triangle...this triangle is somewhat problematic for me...and for you, actually...and also for Merlin...as we are the three who make up this triangle. It's not a problem, though...the only problem is that when some people think about it they sometimes think of it as being a problem." Lacy became intensely aware that her jeans were still partially unbuttoned. She felt the cool air blowing at the top of her panties. It reminded her of the hot tub at her grandmother's house where she had masturbated for hours. Thinking of that made her wish that she was alone in a warm place.

As they tunneled down the hill toward the pool, Lacy and Benjamin shared a common thought. Even though they knew that the tabs had been shaped like stars, they both thought of them as tiny pink pigs floating from Lacy's outstretched hand through the air to their tongues. They were sitting in the grass on a hill in the cemetery, holding hands, laughing and saying:

"Don't you remember that they were--"

"Yes--"

"But they were really--"

"I know!"

~

The ritual of walking around the pool before sitting down sobered Lacy momentarily. She led Benjamin around once by the hand and they both sat down in Lacy's usual spot. They took off their bags. Ben was amazed that they had kept them with them this entire way. Lacy gathered a handful of clover and sprinkled it across the surface of the pool. One by one, she pushed the green buds underwater with her fingers. Benjamin lay on his stomach, watching the ripples trail from Lacy's fingers as she drew them from the water. He stared at the black powder moss at the

bottom of the pool, then switched his focus to look instead at the silhouettes of branches, half bare, showing in double and triple image on the surface. It was the dripping, the sound the water made when it struck and joined the larger body, that precluded, for some time, his ability to hear what Lacy was saying. The cavernous dripping seemed like it was an inch from his ear as the water cascaded from Lacy's fingertips. Finally, he heard her words.

"Do you see?"

A single drop of ice echoing in arctic wilderness.

Five hundred million years underground.

"What do you see?" she was asking.

A solar phantom in liquid form traveling through a wormhole in the blackness and timelessness of space.

Her voice again. "What do you see right there?"

The question of whether it was real. The remembrance of having been asked a question. Visual re-adjustment. Cognitive re-evaluation. A blink. The opportunity for fear. The recognition of a form. A response from the face he saw, the expression of acknowledgement. Internal narration, rehash, the initial recording of memory. He was staring into the real face of the real body of the first missing boy.

"Sherman...?"

~

The last bus had left two hours before and the only cars visible were three in the student parking lot at the opposite end of the school. The children of Five Oaks had been called in for dinner. All the mail had been delivered. Dogs napped quietly on porches and in yards. Lacy and Ben were sitting on concrete in the courtyard of Colonel White School for the Arts, leaning against a square bench. Lacy was lying back on Ben and they had their arms around each other. They heard the purr of traffic on Salem Avenue and the sound of October wind rustling the leaves. Lacy squeezed her Benjamin tighter as the shadows of dusk lengthened around them, and Ben closed his eyes.