

FUN HOUSE

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THE START OF THE PACIFIC National Exhibition in Vancouver always meant summer was coming to an end. This year for the first time, Rachel Weisberg was allowed to bring a friend. She hadn't seen Serena all summer, imagined all the tanning and shopping she must have done with her two older sisters—but no, Serena said she was busy on Sunday and couldn't go. And then, on the Weisbergs' driving day to piano lessons Rachel's mother said, "Why don't you ask Becca to the fair?" right in front of Becca.

"She won't be allowed," Rachel said.

"I'd love to go," said Becca.

She couldn't go with Becca Cohen. Becca was friends (sort of) with Nancy Kunin, the girl in their grade-seven class who smelled like fart. Becca's family was religious and her parents were old and when it was the thing to have Barbies and everyone had them, Becca's mother had said no. Rachel was only friends with Becca because of piano.

Becca had never been to the fair, even though she'd lived in Vancouver her whole life. Also she had a brother who'd died when he was a baby. Also she had no grandparents because they'd all been killed in the war. It was always so silent and gloomy at Becca's house you could hear the grandfather clock counting down the seconds to the next tragedy.

Two nights later Mrs. Cohen called. Rachel overheard her mother say, "Don't worry, I'll keep the girls close the entire time," and then she trilled, "I've got good news, Rachel." The trip to the fair was planned.

As Rachel's father manoeuvred their Lincoln Continental up to Becca's house, Becca's parents waited with her on the front stoop, bent over her like gnarled trees. Becca's mother had spidery hands and wore knee-high support hose with the tops showing, and rested her weight on a cane. She gave Becca some money. Mr. Cohen said something to Becca, probably in Polish, and kissed the top of her head.

Becca's straight dark hair was held away from her face by a wide pink hairband and she wore a skirt that looked homemade. She pulled open the heavy car door and slid into the back next to Rachel's little brother, Aaron.

Rachel said, "Switch places," to Aaron.

"Wanna see my Slime?" Aaron said, ignoring Rachel.

"Sure," said Becca.

"Don't encourage him," said Rachel.

"Hello, Rebecca," said Rachel's father.

God. "No one calls her Rebecca, Dad." Not even her parents. They called her by her Hebrew name, Rivkah.

"Congratulations on your award at graduation," said Rachel's mother. "Jewish history. Your parents must be *kvelling*. And our Rachel—a special award in piano, I'm telling you."

"Mom, please," Rachel groaned. Her mother was always finding ways to slip it into the conversation. But secretly Rachel was pleased. She was better at piano than Becca. "You've got real talent," is what Miss Lachlan kept telling her, and it was called the Lachlan Academy of Music so she should know. Becca only took lessons from Mr. Wilkies, who worked at the Lachlan Academy and sometimes came to music history class smelling like wine.

Rachel was learning Bach's Invention number eight in F-major, da-da da-da da-reach and then the theme came in the left hand, she could hear Miss Lachlan shout, "Vivace!" and now came the next section which sounded like running water descending to, "Piano, Rachel, piano, you make it sound like a herd of elephants."

"Ha! Rachel's playing piano on her leg again," Aaron said.

"Shut up, you twerp."

Why couldn't she and Becca have gone alone, by bus? Because her mother had said they were too young. Rachel was thirteen. Two months ago, when she'd gotten her period, her mother had called her a woman. Then why did they treat her like such a baby? That very morning her mother had insisted on pigtails so her hair wouldn't get tangled, and her father still wouldn't consent to contact lenses or pierced ears.

"If I had a light saber I would slice everything," Aaron said. "I'd slice this car in half. I'd slice up the school. I'd slice Gveret Beittel," the elderly Grade Two Hebrew teacher at Talmud Torah.

"Stop already with the slicing," said Rachel's father.

Tom Jones was playing on the eight-track. "What's new pussycat?"

Whoa whoa whoa,” Hy Weisberg sang along. Rachel wanted to hide under her father’s ugly leather seats that were now stuck to the backs of her bare legs. God, he was wearing his big Magen David necklace too, and there was chest hair poking out the top of his dress shirt. Cigars in his pocket, white leather shoes—both signs he’d slink off to the horse races first chance he got.

“Serena spent the entire summer on Kits Beach with her sisters playing volleyball,” said Rachel.

“Oh,” said Becca.

“Serena’s wearing Seafarers on the first day of high school. What are you wearing?”

“My mom made me an outfit,” said Becca. “What about you?”

“Well. Seafarers.”

“You don’t have Seafarers,” said Aaron.

“Shut up. I’m getting some. Serena says—”

“Honey.” Rachel’s mother turned around. “Serena isn’t here.”

“I know.” Rachel shoved her hands into the pockets of her cut-offs. Except they weren’t the right kind of cut-offs because her mother had insisted on hemming the bottoms.

At last they were on Hastings Street. Aaron was talking about a live snake show. Rachel stared out the window, watching the city pass as the conversation went on without her.

“Hey,” said Becca, reaching across Aaron to tug at Rachel’s sleeve. “Your dad wants to know if we’re going on the Zipper.”

“Hyman!” said Rachel’s mother. Then she swivelled to face the back seat. “You girls aren’t allowed on any of the dangerous rides. I promised your mother, dear,” she said to Becca.

“Relax,” said Hy. “I’m just *kibitzing* with them.”

Once the fairgrounds were in sight, there was the challenge of parking. They never parked in the lot because Hy said the people who ran it were all shysters. Instead they drove up and down the side streets where elderly Asian ladies in embroidered slippers held up handwritten signs offering cheaper parking on their yellowed grass. It meant walking, but when you had to walk you knew you’d gotten a deal.

At the gates, Becca bought her own ticket, one teen, and then Rachel’s father bought tickets for two adults and two children twelve and under. Rachel crossed her arms at her chest and glowered at the banners that proclaimed, “PNE ’77: A Salute to BC’s Pioneers.”

Her mind drifted. It was the Kiwanis Festival and she was playing that Mozart sonata for which she'd won first place. Serena and her sisters were in the audience. Clapping at the end. A standing ovation. Was it too much? No, they loved her. "That was ace!" one of them shouted, maybe the oldest, who'd already finished high school and was a model but secretly wished she could play the piano just like Rachel.

"Earth to Rachel," said her father.

They had to start with the exhibitions: vacuum cleaners at the Home Showcase Building, Winnipeg garlic sausage at the Showmart, homemade wooden carvings that looked homemade and said dumb things like 'Coffee Served All Day!' Rachel's mother wanted to order a carving of their names, 'Nettie and Hy,' done on real cedar, but Hy said no, this stuff was all junk.

Hy didn't even notice he'd hurt her feelings. Rachel felt like kicking her mother when she acted like this. *Say something. Tell him he's being an ass.* Nettie started picking things up and putting them down in a hopeless 'I can't have this, I can't have that either' ritual that maybe made her feel better, Rachel didn't know.

They kept walking. Rachel's mother made noises of approval to the old ladies behind the tables, but she didn't slow down at the usual places. When Hy suggested they go see the cows—which was what they always did, even though no one in the family liked cows and the livestock buildings stunk, and invariably Aaron stepped in cow poop and had to run outside to wipe his shoes on the grass—they went.

Every year it was the same. By the time they got to the sheep, Hy had slipped away to the racetrack. And there was Nettie looking stunned by the realization that yet again she would be bringing the kids to the rides by herself, like she'd worn her powder blue pantsuit for nothing, and then she gripped Aaron by one arm and dragged him past the sheep with their blue ribbons and blank looks.

When they finally escaped the pungent air of the agricultural buildings, the sweeter smells of the fairground intensified: hot dogs with relish, cotton candy, frying donuts.

"Can we get mini-donuts?" Rachel asked.

"Are they kosher?" asked Becca.

While Nettie and Becca worked out the donut dilemma, Rachel stood aside and watched the people walk by. She had lived her whole life in their Oakridge neighbourhood, a mostly Jewish enclave of houses with sunken

living rooms and two-car garages, fenced lawns and matching bed sheets. She'd never seen people like this in Oakridge: the skinny men with tattoos, the fat ones with cigarettes dangling from the corner of their mouths, pretty girls in high heels and low-cut tank tops and bright blue eye shadow, holding onto their boyfriends as if they were life preservers, the jingle-jangle of bracelets, the showy gum-chewing. It was like peering over barbed wire into a bad neighbourhood.

Her mother handed her a bag of mini-donuts, still hot and shimmering with grease. Rachel popped one in her mouth, then passed the bag to Becca, who hesitated. "Go on. Your parents won't know. Anyway it's not like eating bacon."

They ended up buying a bag for Becca.

"Weight Watchers will kill me for eating such *chazerei*," Rachel's mother said, giggling as she licked cinnamon sugar off her fingers. They ambled past the screaming chainsaws of the timber show and the tinkling Kiddieland music, towards the games of chance, where if you threw a ball into a ring, or a hoop onto a bottle, you won a small stuffed animal whose eyes would fall off before you got home.

"Come on, honey, give it a shot," a man beckoned to Rachel. He was bald, with a gold ring in one ear and a scar down the side of his face. She could feel his eyes on her bare legs. All at once she wished she had something to pull over them, and yet she found herself giggling and grabbing Becca's arm—Becca in her long homemade *shmatta* of a skirt; maybe her parents had made her wear it.

"When I was growing up the fair was different," Nettie was saying. "I mean, there weren't bearded ladies or anything, but—"

"Bearded ladies? Cool," said Aaron. "Gveret Beittel could have a summer job."

While they were laughing, Rachel glanced back to see if the bald man was still looking at her. But that was not what caught her eye. Standing behind him was the blonde and suntanned Serena Klein, with her two older sisters and two boys Rachel didn't recognize. Serena was smoking.

Rachel turned back, saying, "That's so funny," a little too loudly, as the ground cracked beneath her. Serena had lied. She'd said she couldn't come.

Aaron pulled their mother towards Kiddieland. In the distance rose the criss-crossed scaffolding of the roller coaster.

"Can we go on our own?" Rachel asked her mother. "That way Aaron can go on his rides, and we can go on ours. Please?"

Nettie looked defeated. “I promised your parents I’d keep an eye on you,” she said to Becca.

“We’ll stick together. It’s all right, isn’t it?” Rachel gave Becca a pointed look.

“Of course,” said Becca.

They agreed to meet later in front of the Ferris wheel. When Nettie and Aaron wandered away, Rachel pulled Becca in the other direction. The last thing she wanted was for Serena to see her here with her mother and little brother.

“We’re going on the roller coaster,” she said.

The air vibrated with guitars and drumbeats. Rachel pulled out her pigtails and flipped her long frizzy curls the way Farrah Fawcett did it on *Charlie’s Angels*. The roller coaster loomed larger.

“I don’t know,” Becca said. “It looks so—”

Dangerous, Rachel thought. The whole thing looked as if it could topple over in a stiff breeze.

They were in line when someone called, “You sure you’re tall enough for this one, Weisberg?” Rachel recognized the nasal voice. It was Serena. The boys she was with started laughing.

“I guess she wasn’t busy,” said Becca.

Rachel made a no-big-deal face. “Come hang out with us after,” she called.

“Rachel, I don’t want to,” whispered Becca.

“Wait for us after the ride,” Serena called back.

“They’re smoking,” said Becca.

“So don’t come. You can go down the Giant Slide with Aaron.”

Rachel handed over her ticket and moved quickly towards the carts before the ticket man could make her stand beside the yardstick. The leather bench was warm on her legs.

The ticket man slammed down the safety bars, which didn’t even reach their legs. “What if we fall out?” Becca said. “I don’t think this is—”

With a jolt the ride began, creaking its way up an impossibly steep hill. Becca started crying, and Rachel craned her neck to make sure Serena couldn’t see. When the carts careened down the other side and everyone screamed and raised their arms, Rachel’s stomach dropped and she clenched the safety bar with both hands. But by the time the ride slowed at the end she felt as if something inside her had been set free. She glanced at Becca, whose face was blank.

“Wasn’t that ace?”

“You’re nuts. I’m never going on anything like that again.”

Rachel skipped off the platform and stood in the shadow of the roller coaster to wait for Serena. She could feel the music’s beat through the asphalt. Nearby the Zipper’s carts spun upside-down.

Becca was walking away, but then stopped and stared at Rachel with disbelief. “You don’t think she really wanted us to wait, do you?”

“Why not? We were all Bat-Mitvahed together.”

“That doesn’t count. She was stuck with us.”

Stuck with Becca and Nancy Kunin, sure. Not with her.

Becca shifted, as if weighing the options.

“Whatever,” said Rachel. “Go stand in line at the stupid helicopter ride then, with all the snot-faced little kids.”

But Becca ended up waiting until Serena and the others stumbled off the roller coaster platform several minutes later.

Rachel’s body felt light. “Where to?”

A tall, older boy with blond hair that hung straight to his shoulders gave an exaggerated shrug. “Who says we have to go anywhere?” He held up a small cigarette that looked a little do-it-yourself, but Rachel kept quiet. Becca was stuffing her hands into non-existent skirt pockets. When the boy lit the cigarette it gave off a strange, skunky smell.

“You’re scaring the kiddies, Shafe,” said Serena’s oldest sister, the model. Her name was Amanda. She was tall and skinny and wore high heels and gauchos and big earrings and her hair was in pigtails, but for some reason on her it was okay.

“Pass me the joint,” said the middle sister, whom everyone called Stevie because she looked like Stevie Nicks, dishevelled but pretty, though her real name was Stephanie. Rachel was a little afraid of Stevie. She kept flicking her lighter on as if she wanted to set something on fire.

Stevie offered the joint to Becca, who shook her head. Then to Rachel, who wished she’d been paying better attention. How did you hold it? What did you do? She inhaled hard and burst into violent coughs, dropping the joint to the ground.

“For fuck’s sake,” said the boy who stood close to Amanda. He picked it up.

Rachel’s lungs were burning. When the joint came around again she shook her head. Stevie glanced at Serena and they shared some wordless

See? while Rachel worked the toe of her sandal into a dip in the pavement.

She expected they would go on a ride after that, but everyone just stood around.

“How about we have some fun?” said Serena.

Amanda’s boyfriend had his arm around her and was sticking his tongue in her ear. She giggled and said, “We are having fun,” and then they were kissing and Rachel forced herself to look away.

“What did ya have in mind?” said Shafe. He spoke slowly, almost lazily. He wore faded jeans and a t-shirt washed to a gentle green, and the muscles in his arms were lean and strong. One of his front teeth was crooked, and he squinted when he talked.

“Truth or Dare,” said Serena.

“I’m leaving,” Becca whispered and walked away.

Rachel picked at her fingernails. She’d promised her mother they would stick together. Now what? She didn’t want to leave, but she knew she’d be in trouble if she stayed. She imagined her mother stomping over in her clogs, shouting, “Rachel Ayalla Weisberg!” with her mouth full of corn dog. She wasn’t wearing clogs today. Whatever. Her walking shoes, the beige ones Dad called loafers.

“Why’d you come with her, anyway?” said Serena.

Rachel forced a nonchalant shrug. “I’ll play Truth or Dare.”

“Truth or Dare? What are you guys, in grade two?” said Amanda. “Serena, you’re fourteen.”

“Thirteen,” said Rachel and Serena together. Serena’s face reddened.

“Right.” Amanda pulled her boyfriend away. “We’ll catch you guys later.”

Rachel glanced at Serena, puzzled. Had she failed a grade? Come to think of it she’d always been the biggest girl in class. The Bat-Mitzvah ... but girls didn’t have to be twelve. They could be older.

“No fair playing with you, Stevie,” said Shafe. “You’ll do anything.”

Stevie stared at Rachel. “She won’t.” Everything about Stevie was set one notch off normal, her eyes a little too wide, her mouth too big, t-shirt falling off one shoulder to reveal a thin black bra strap.

“I will so,” said Rachel.

“Okay. Go steal that lady’s purse.”

Rachel’s eyes widened. “I’m not doing that.”

“What about the Fun House?” said Serena.

Shafe laughed. "Like when I go with you, Stevie?"

"Yeah. Just like that."

"Fun House. Sure," said Rachel.

Shafe winked at her. "Let's go." He loped off and Rachel followed, her stomach fluttering.

Shafe didn't talk in the line-up. Instead he stood with an I've-got-better-things-to-do slouch Rachel had seen at movie theatres. She edged closer to him and imagined he was her boyfriend. He smelled like warm leather. She imagined him throwing a football, saw herself in high heels and gauchos and an embroidered smock shirt instead of the stupid bright red t-shirt her mother had insisted on in case Rachel got lost.

Ahead of them stood a real couple, the boy with his pale, freckled arm draped as casually as a sweater around his girlfriend's shoulder. The girl leaned her head against him while he smoked nonchalantly and looked around as if to check who was watching. As they neared the entrance the girl spat her gum onto the pavement and smiled at him.

It was their turn to enter the maze of mirrors. Shafe reached for Rachel's hand and guided her easily through their reflections. His hands were big and calloused. They crossed the part where sections of the floor shifted up and down without warning, and then they stood in front of the distorting mirrors.

"Too tall," said Shafe in one that stretched them long. "Too short," he said into the next that made them look like midgets. Then he stood behind Rachel and put his hands on her waist, angling her towards the darkness where she knew couples often made out. "Just right," he whispered. Maybe he'd kiss her.

He guided her to the farthest, darkest corner. And then before she knew what was happening, he was pulling at the waistband of her shorts.

"What are you doing? What are you—"

One strong hand pressed against her mouth. "You aren't going to make me force you, are you?"

Rachel's mind was pinging. His hand pulled her panties down; his finger pushed inside her. "What are you doing?" she said again, but it came out muffled and made him laugh. She squirmed and tried to get away, but he'd pinned her with his legs. Around her were the sounds of laughter, the shuffle of footsteps, and his breathing, heavy in her ear.

His breath smelled of smoke and hot dog. He grabbed her hand and

forced it down towards him, something warm and hard, oh God, it was his—“No!” He was pressing it against her and then he shifted closer and that was her moment, she pushed herself backwards landing hard on the floor, her glasses clattering to the ground. She felt around in a panic until she found them. Then she stood, ran, knocked down a child, who started to cry.

A woman yelled at her to watch where she was going. Rachel straightened her shorts, wondering what would show in the light. She ran towards a lit corridor that opened onto the crooked room, everything sideways and wrong-angled. Finally she launched herself into the enormous spinning wheel called the Barrel of Fun. She had to pass through it to leave, but she kept slipping and falling and needed the ticket man’s help to get out.

Stevie and Serena were laughing. But they couldn’t know. They were just laughing because Rachel couldn’t get out of the wheel. As soon as she told them what Shafe had done, they’d hate him.

“That was quick,” said Stevie, with a sly grin.

They did know. She stared at them, trying to process this—they’d known all along—but their betrayal only beaded up and sat there, wouldn’t sink in.

Rachel turned and ran until she couldn’t see them anymore, then stopped, bent double to catch her breath. How would she face them again? What if Shafe went to the same high school? What if they told? What if everyone knew on the first day?

The fair went on around her, people screaming and music clashing from different directions. The overpowering smells of grease and smoke made her stomach lurch. In the background were the clinks and clanks of gear mechanisms.

Nearby the bald man with the earring held up a hoop and yelled, “We have a winner!” and now she saw how he eyed every girl that passed, how his hands wanted his tongue wanted his—

She found a bathroom and locked herself in a stall. Pulled down her pants and looked. She could still feel Shafe forcing himself inside her. But on the outside—nothing.

Tears gathered as she imagined Shafe strolling out of the Barrel of Fun with a full report for Stevie and Serena. Fourteen-year-old Serena who had failed a grade. She wasn’t just tall. She was fat, too. And oh God, Becca—where was Becca? Surely with Rachel’s mother by now. What would she tell them? Nothing, that’s what. This wasn’t something you told.

She washed her hands and adjusted her hair in the mirror.

Rachel's mother stood with Becca watching Aaron ride a bright yellow helicopter. She was eating a corn dog, saying, "Weight Watchers will *plutz*," as if Becca was her best friend. All was well in her world of colour-coordinated pantsuits. Her perpetual frizz of misbehaving hair was the only sign of disorder.

As soon as Nettie caught sight of her, the happy mother act was over. She pulled Rachel aside. "Just what do you think you're doing, Miss Muffett, abandoning your friend?"

"I—"

"She tells me you found Serena. You knew she'd be here, I suppose?"

"No, I—" Rachel tugged at her shorts. "We ran into them."

"I promised Mrs. Cohen you girls would stay together. I found Becca wandering alone, looking for us. She said you were with your friends."

The idea that Stevie and Serena were her friends made a cymbal-clash in Rachel's head. "Look, it's done, all right? There's nothing you can do about it now."

Rachel's mother stopped eating her corn dog. "What's done?"

Rachel couldn't look at her.

"What happened to your pigtails?"

"I took them out." She dug into her pocket for the elastics, determined to redo the pigtails herself, but her hands were trembling and she started to cry.

"Rachel, honey." Her mother gathered her in her arms. "What happened?"

Rachel only shook her head. She wiped her face on her mother's shirt and handed her the elastics while Nettie gently did her hair. The way she always had, when Rachel was little and she could step in and fix everything.

Only then did she remember Becca standing to the side, now with Aaron, both of them watching. Aaron was holding her hand. Rachel walked towards her. The need to tell was bursting from her like pus from an infection; she'd wanted Shafe to kiss her, but not that. There it was, the truth: she'd wanted him to kiss her. How could she admit that to anyone?

Nearby a Led Zeppelin guitar solo screamed. Stevie would be doing air guitar with her eyes half-closed, as if she knew how to play a musical instrument. "You have perfect pitch, Rachel. Do you know how rare that is?" Miss Lachlan had said just last month.

They found Hy at the race track, sitting in a private box with the family dentist, Dr. Hirschberg.

"I'm up five hundred *shekels*, Nettie." He pulled Aaron onto his lap. "How's the big *macher*? One day you'll hang out here with your old man, eh?"

Aaron nodded enthusiastically, but Nettie said, "Not if I have a say in it."

She didn't, though. She'd never had a say in anything.

"Come on, Daybreak, run, you *momzer*!" shouted Hy. The air shuddered as the horses raced past. Becca stood to one side, mesmerized.

"Hyman," said Nettie. "The children want to go home."

"I know, don't *huk* me a *chainik*." He leaned forward as if he was on a horse himself. "Come on!" He banged the table. Sure enough, his horse won.

Nettie jingled her keys. "I suppose your father never drags you to the races," she said to Becca.

"Can we go see them?" Becca pointed towards the paddock where the horses were being led in for the next race.

"I'll take you over," said Hy. "We gotta collect our loot, eh, Aaron?"

Nettie stormed off in the other direction, and Rachel was left with Dr. Hirschberg.

"Your father tells me you got straight As again this term," he said to her. "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

"Maybe a concert pianist. I don't know."

"He says you play like an angel."

"Really?" Rachel searched his face, the long nose and craggy black beard, to make sure he was serious.

Dr. Hirschberg smiled. "Your father is very proud of you."

Nettie returned with a jumbo container of French fries and gravy and dug into it like she was on a timer. When Hy returned he made a big deal of settling himself into the chair, lighting a cigar, and handing out two-dollar bills to Rachel, Becca and Aaron so they could buy themselves something.

Rachel reached for Aaron's hand and held it tight. It was small and sticky and if he said 'What are you doing?'—he was looking it—if he said it even once, she'd slug him.

The sun was setting by the time they arrived at Becca's house. Mrs. Cohen insisted they all "Come in, come in, I've baked *rugelach* and Dobry has made something for your boy," and Mr. Cohen handed Aaron a hand-sized horse carved out of wood.

"Come see my irises, girls," Mrs. Cohen said.

Becca rolled her eyes and Rachel followed her out to the garden where the irises were blooming in tall congregations.

“They’re the stupidest flowers in the universe,” Becca said quietly. “As soon as they bloom they can’t stand up anymore.”

When Mrs. Cohen started in on the different varieties, Rachel and Becca went back to the kitchen. Becca got a *rugelach* for herself. Rachel waited to be offered one, but Becca just sat and ate the pastry.

“So,” she said finally. “Did you have fun? With that boy?”

Rachel’s face flooded with heat. “You left me,” she blurted.

“You stayed.”

“You ate mini-donuts.”

She put down her pastry. “I wanted ... I wanted—oh, forget it.” Becca stood and left the kitchen. A moment later Rachel heard the creak of footsteps going upstairs.

At last they drove home to their two-car garage and fenced yard. Rachel took out her pigtails and brushed her hair. High school was starting next week. Her mother would want to do her hair for the first day but she wouldn’t let her. That was over.

On stage, hands poised over the keyboard, this was Für Elise. Dada-dada-dada-dadada. “Rachel, where’s the emotion? This is a love song, Beethoven wrote this for a woman,” Miss Lachlan said. “You’re a woman. Imagine being in love.”

Rachel stared at herself in her dresser mirror and tried to imagine it—being a woman, being in love. There was still a little-girl face looking back at her, but something had shifted; something was one shade darker.