

Table

Sarah and Warren ride in the back of her parents' rental car, a white monstrosity with a maroon interior and electronic everything. Warren clutches her hand like a nervous prom date and, in fact, riding in that ridiculous vehicle, all dressed up in her most somber maternity dress, Sarah has the feeling that they actually are headed for some demented dance.

As her father turns the corner Warren uses the motion to lean close. "I can't have a grave," he says to her ear. "Or a casket." Their newborn is dead and they are on the way to make arrangements. Arrangements, that word. "Sarah, please, I can't." He can't? Why not? If she can, why can't he? Her mother turns to look over her shoulder at them, smiling her worried chaperone's smile, then turns back.

Sarah nods, "Fine, whatever." Right then she feels a deep cramp, an aftershock. "A viewing first," she bargains. "After that, cremation." Then she thinks, I didn't say that, did I?

Sarah's mother sets a mug of tea among crumpled tissues and steadies the box that is serving temporarily as a bedside table. Then she walks around the bed to give Warren his tea. Sarah pushes herself up and takes a swallow. She still has trouble sitting upright.

“What else can I do?” Her mother begins poking through a pile of boxes at the foot of the bed, the ones marked, “Master Bedroom.” Sarah and Warren had moved across town into their new house just three days before Sarah had gone into labor, and so far only essentials have been unpacked. Her mother pulls out a wastebasket filled with shoes. “I know I can’t do anything, really.”

“The tea is good.” Warren sips carefully. Sarah can tolerate very hot liquids, but Warren always has to wait for them to cool. “You’re doing a lot, Moms,” Warren says.

Her mother sighs, “Oh, I don’t know.” She goes to the closet and lines up the shoes in a row on the floor, then brings the wastebasket over to the bedside box and shoos all the damp white wads into the trash.

When they’ve finished their tea, her mother takes the mugs. Dishes rattle in the kitchen. “Why does everything sound so loud?” Warren asks. “I feel like what people say about hearing aids in restaurants.” Sarah rests her hand on his shoulder. After a while he sits up and wipes his eyes. He wanders to the window and opens the blinds. “Your father,” he says, squinting out at the yard as Sarah turns away from the glare. She can hear the hammering, has been hearing it all along. The fence would have kept an older Andrew, their Drew, from running out into the street. It would have kept him boxed in the back yard, safe where he belonged.

“I’m going to take a pill,” Sarah says. Warren hands her the bottle. She swallows one, then another, then another, while he watches. She pours the rest of the pills into her palm. There are five left. Warren says, not in a mean way, but neutrally, “It’s not enough to kill you, is it.” Then he leaves. He leaves her with the pills and walks down the hall and speaks briefly to her mother. He gets in the car and drives off. She hears the engine

race, then fade away. She pictures abandoned Andrew, last seen lying cheek-to-cheek with his own reflection on a wheeled metal table at the hospital.

Sarah can hear her mother loading the dishwasher. The pills are sticking to her hand so she scrapes them back into the container. If they aren't going to kill her, forget it. She says this to herself in the same tone that they sometimes would joke at work about the irate parents they encounter at the agency: *fuck them if they can't take a joke*. Outside the hammering continues, faster than her heartbeat. She can smell herself, the blood, too rich and sweet, slightly past, like curdled breath from a cave. Her breasts are hard as a mannequin's and her heart feels like a pincushion squeezing on pins. "I guess you need a heart that works," Warren had said to the doctor. Warren, who can't have a grave. What did he mean by saying that this wasn't enough to kill her?

For several minutes she concentrates on breathing. Her back and arms ache. It's as if she has pulled her muscles, as if she had helped with all that moving, lugging furniture piece by piece into their new home, but of course she hadn't helped at all. She'd been about to have a baby. No one had let her carry anything.

As she comes out of the bathroom the telephone rings and she is immediately certain that the call is about Warren, that he has crashed the car, so she runs down the hall toward the kitchen, calling, dizzy from the pills. She is running down the endless hall forever. Her father is talking on the phone. He holds up his free hand, trying to silence or stop her, and her mother, looking shocked, puts her arm around her and steers her back to the bedroom.

"Don't look like that," she tells her mother, who answers, smoothing Sarah's

chopped bangs, chopped in a recent fit of anger, “You must have had a dream.” She sits Sarah on the bed and runs a bath for her. “I wish I *were* dreaming,” Sarah says, drowned out by the sound of the running water.

Sarah sits in the tub on a clear inflatable cushion shaped like a donut. Her skin flushes with the heat as the water slowly stains pink. This is what it would look like if I cut my wrists, she thinks. No, it would look worse. She closes her eyes and feels space around her. She recalls a field so large that it made her head spin. Chubby legs churned through the grass, her own legs years ago, knee-deep, down low. She was a toddler trying furiously to keep up with older kids. This is an old memory, her official first memory, relived so often that it seems polished, but for the first time she realizes that the legs could not have been hers after all, that they were angling away from her as she lost ground. She’d been left behind by some other child pulling ahead and now, looking inward, there is a black hole where she should be. The other child has long since run out of sight. All of the children have gone.

The hammering stops. The ceiling above the bed floats lower and lower, then snaps back into place. Her mother keeps coming in to report on unpacking. “I put the wine glasses in the cabinet over the dishwasher.” “The dinner plates will be to the right of the sink.” “I stuck the saucepan lids in the wok down low next to the stove.” She tells Sarah over and over to rearrange whatever doesn’t suit her. She says she doesn’t want to impose. “Change whatever you like,” she insists. Finally she comes in with an armful of mixing bowls nestled together and the top one holds a shadow, not just any shadow, but a

shadow of substance next to a gleam, the type of white smear you might find on an X-ray.

“I’ll tell you what to change,” Sarah says, aware of her own cruelty. The ceiling jerks again.

Her mother looks at the bowls. Then she kneels and carefully sets them in the doorway and walks out. In a few minutes Sarah gets up to follow her to apologize. She shuffles around the bowls; they are just bowls—bowls she’d bought when she thought she could have a kid—and looks into the den.

Her father sits with his head down on Warren’s desk, his forehead resting against his wrist, which is draped across the phone book. He glances up, startled. There’s a red mark, like a wound, in the center of his forehead. Sarah forgets everything. What she had intended to do, where she is, her mother, apologies. Where is Warren, she wonders.

“What?” her father says tiredly, rubbing his wrist, then his head. “Walking in your sleep again? What is it?”

The next day Sarah is still wearing her bathrobe at three in the afternoon, trying to sit without sitting in the living room, when the furniture repairman drives up in his pickup. He is coming at her father’s request to give an estimate on fixing the dining room table damaged by movers. Sarah sees the white of his cab as he passes beyond the courtyard wall, hears brakes groan, then a couple of door slams. The new and therefore unfamiliar doorbell rings, a flat strangled sound. She can’t get used to it.

Sarah’s mother answers the door, and Sarah hears them talking as they come down the hallway.

“My wife informed me he’d be mine today,” the repairman is saying as he comes around the corner, avoiding the books stacked there. He is a vigorous-looking short man with graying curly hair grown longer in back and worn in a ponytail, and small but bright dark eyes. He wears an earring, a gold loop graced with one clear green bead, and tendrils from a tattoo reach up his neck. Sarah’s mother steps in front of him, smiling anxiously. Then Sarah sees the boy.

“It’s no trouble at all,” Sarah’s mother says politely. “Mr. Parino is here.”

Sarah’s father emerges from the kitchen and shakes hands with Mr. Parino. Sarah pushes herself up from the couch, and as she stands part of herself seems to rise until she is hovering about three feet above the others. She has become a hunched crow watcher of herself, but she is calm. Below, she, too, shakes hands with Mr. Parino. She is calm, but she should have told him no children.

“This is Andrew,” Mr. Parino says, “Andy.” If Sarah hadn’t been split off already she would have crumpled at the sound of the name, her own boy’s name, except for the choice of nickname.

“You picked the other half,” she says. Mr. Parino frowns but at the same time tries to look receptive, and the effect strikes Sarah as comical. She smiles but she can feel the smile stretching unnaturally, so she covers her mouth to stop it.

“I’m sorry,” Sarah’s mother is explaining. “We’ve had some bad news recently. You’ll have to bear with us.” Sarah likes that, *bad news*. Nothing has actually happened; they’ve just received bad news. How tidy. Mr. Parino is offering to come back at some later time, but Sarah’s father tells him to stay.

“Would you like some orange juice?” Sarah’s mother bends close to the child,

Andy, her head zooming down like something out of Picasso. Andy flicks a look at his father. “Or I think we have some Coke, if it’s all right with your dad.”

Mr. Parino shrugs and Andy says, “Coke.” Again he looks to his father, who frowns at him. “Please,” Andy remembers. Then Sarah’s mother asks Mr. Parino if he would like anything, coffee or anything, and he declines by holding his hand out as if to show its unsteadiness. “Had plenty already,” he says.

Sarah slides back into her semi-recline on the couch. She and the listing table are buddies, they share the same off-kilter pose. Her father pulls up dining room chairs for the Parinos, and Andy sits with his feet tucked behind the rungs. He seems to be about nine or ten years old, Sarah guesses. He is the quintessential boy, or would any child seem that way to her now? He is too similar to the boy she had imagined her baby Drew would become one day or, perhaps, she hadn’t imagined Drew at all and now, without him, she has to use whatever she finds in front of her. If she had done a better job imagining him would he have lived?

This Andrew is skinny, but with a round face. He has a touch of red in his hair, a few freckles, and a delicate, inch-long curved scar under one eyebrow. His top front teeth overlap slightly. His skin is beautiful, babyish, soft baby skin. His hands are darker than his face, grubby, with dirt—wonderful clean dirt, kid dirt—under nails that need trimming. He is wearing high-top sneakers with neon-orange laces and jeans. He has left his jacket on. Zipped up and ready to run, Sarah thinks. Take me with you.

Andy enjoys slurps of Coke while his father examines the table. Mr. Parino crouches under the table and feels the splintered legs with both hands, like a groom checking a horse. He backs out and stands up, then runs his hand along the tabletop.

“They really did a number on it,” he says cheerfully. “Don’t worry, though, we can handle it.”

He smiles at Sarah. Somehow he’s figured out that the table is hers. Something is required of her but she can’t think what. She knows she looks odd. She hasn’t slept. She’s had too many pills. All the blood has run out of her. She has hacked off her hair so that it sticks up in uneven clumps. She wants to tell him, I feel shorn so why shouldn’t I look shorn?

So, Mr. Parino and Sarah’s father go through a pile of movers’ insurance forms and estimate receipts. Andy rattles the ice in his glass and suppresses a burp. Sarah’s mother smiles at everyone to make up for Sarah. Sarah’s father keeps looking over at her, too, willing her to participate, but she deliberately turns and looks out the window.

Where is Warren? Everyone has told her to give Warren time. The pickup truck is blocking the driveway if Warren tries to come home. Maybe she will ask Mr. Parino to cart her off with the table. Anywhere. She doesn’t need time but Warren does. She will give Warren time and he will vanish into it. There are traces of snow in the shadows along the wall and the sun burns against the corrugated metal roof of a shed in the next yard. Frost melts. Frost *does* melt. A man emerges from the house across the street, her new neighbor, name unknown. He lifts the lid from a garbage can sitting at the end of his driveway, glances up and down the street, then replaces the lid and goes back inside. She can’t get used to this new view, this new house, that doorbell. But she is lucky, luckier than her own son who is—floating? Drifting? Nowhere with Warren? She is lucky to have a house, to be housed, contained.

Her father and Mr. Parino agree that mahogany is a rare and beautiful wood. They

decide to refinish the table in addition to the repairs. They decide not to deal with the matching chairs for now. The chairs can wait.

Andy rattles ice again. Sarah can see that he wants to get rid of his glass but can't find anywhere to put it, that he doesn't want to call attention to himself by getting up but also can hardly stand to sit there. Why doesn't someone else notice? She can't move. Outside, a dead vine twists on a weathered trellis. The vine has been dead all along, she reminds herself sternly, on moving day she'd noticed it. The world is full of dead vines and parents with perfect children. *I'm being so reasonable.* She leans her forehead against the upholstery, remembering a mitten packed with snow and held against her head after a fall on the rink. She lifts her head and sees that they are all watching her warily, which makes her feel like a powerful but unpleasantly unpredictable queen. The boy is trying to shrink into nothing. "Don't worry," she says to him.

"You look pale," her mother says, giving her an excuse.

"You would, too."

"That should end soon," her mother answers.

"What was it--? Half now and half later?" Sarah asks Mr. Parino. She uses her fists like an old woman to push herself off the couch. She takes Andy's glass to the kitchen and finds her checkbook. Her signature looks different, spiky versus rounded, mean.

Mr. Parino signs a receipt and holds it out to her. He is about her height. Warren is a lot taller. When he is around Warren spends a lot of time looking at the crooked part in her hair while she stares up at his bony chin. What strange angles they have on each other. She takes the receipt without looking away from Mr. Parino. He seems to be more

used to her by now.

“We’ll have it looking as good as new,” Mr. Parino promises, and it seems to her before he breaks away that he has agreed to some deeper exchange, like the harsh bargains made in fairy tales. He steps back quickly, smiling a little at his own earnestness. “Don’t X-ray it or anything, but from the outside you won’t be able to tell.”

Sarah’s father and Mr. Parino tip the table and carry it upside down, end panels swinging. Andy goes first and opens the front door, then lowers the truck’s tailgate and spreads a gray pad on the truck bed. Sarah shivers in the doorway while they tie the table in place. With its splayed legs in the air that table looks like a cartoon of a dead dog.

Sarah and her mother sit on the couch. Sarah falls asleep immediately. Her mother is gone. Twin babies lie side by side on woven mats of grass. One is the baby dead and one is the baby alive. She picks up the living child. “You’re alive,” she says to him, surprised, and he shrugs in a curiously adult manner. No big deal. She holds him, not so much relieved as bewildered, until her husband tells her to try the other one. The dead child is much heavier than she expects, he’s cement, a gray petrified cupid. A white slug curls in his ear and his eye sockets are cloudy with cobwebs. They have given his eyes away. A deep, jagged crack runs the length of his torso. Where is the real baby? This one is just an old relic, an old and weathered gravestone, her stone. She feels the weight of him on her chest. He’s holding her under so she can’t breathe.

Warren touches her cheek. “Lines,” he says, and she thinks of her father’s wound. It’s dark out.

“Where did you go?” she asks.

Warren leans back and closes his eyes. “I dinged the car.”

“Warren.” She gets up and he follows her into the garage and snaps on a light. The right rear bumper has come loose. She notices the carseat, unused, still strapped in place in the back.

“I backed into that pylon. I always said one day I’d hit it.”

The pylon is back at their former apartment in the parking lot protecting a green metal box full of cables and wires. “What were you doing back there?” Sarah asks.

“Nothing.” They head back to the couch. “Our spot was empty so I parked in it. Someone already lives there though. There’s a bamboo shade hanging on the balcony.”

Sarah hears her mother in the kitchen lifting the lids off the various casserole dishes sent by friends and coworkers. Since the move to the new home, they’ve had to give everyone directions. “This house will seem better some day,” she says. Is that true?

“Who put the chairs like that? They look wrong.”

Her father had arranged the chairs around the spot where the table had been. They stand rigidly like generals on the losing side, keeping up appearances. “I was thinking they seemed sort of decent, somehow,” Sarah says.

Her mother emerges from the kitchen. “Oh, you’re back,” she says to Warren.

“I’m back,” Warren agrees.

Gradually the living room fills with family. “Do you think something is wrong with that doorbell?” Sarah asks, but no one hears her. Sarah’s mother and Warren’s sister-in-law begin heating up the food. Sarah’s older sister, Beth, pulls her husband over toward the empty wall unit for one of their annoying whispered conferences. Warren’s

parents call from the airport to say they have arrived and are renting a car. A hopeful thought: maybe she won't live long enough to make it to the service. Her father sets various end tables and boxes around the room, then distributes paper napkins, and someone turns on the news, which everyone eagerly yet blankly watches. Warren's brother opens a bottle of beer. An assortment of aromas from at least three different entrees wafts in from the kitchen. The telephone rings a few more times.

Warren and his brother meet his parents at the door and his side of the family heads straight to the den for a half an hour while everyone else sits and waits, until Karen, Sarah's younger sister, knocks on the den door to say the food is ready. Warren's mother sits next to Sarah and reaches for Sarah's hand, stroking the knuckles with her thumb, as if trying to smooth her out.

"I confess," she says, "My first thought was for *my* baby. Once a mother—" She looks across the room to where Warren and his father are feigning interest in the new floor tiles. Sarah pulls her hand away. Earlier Beth had reminded Sarah that she could try again, "It's not like you had a chance to get to know this one, anyway." For an instant the TV announcer's voice takes over. The official cause of a recent small plane crash, he reports, is *flying too close to the ground*. "No kidding," Warren's brother says and Karen laughs.

Warren's mother brings Sarah a plate of food, spaghetti sliding into chicken salad. Slops. They eat for a while, listening to the weather forecast.

"Dear," Warren's mother says, "I have to ask, but did you even hold him? It's so important, even—"

"No," Sarah says. "I, well, after—"

“Yes, you did,” Warren interrupts.

“I thought I’d drop him. I was trembling too much.”

“You *did* hold him.”

Warren’s father frowns at him.

“She held him,” Warren insists. His skin has that mottled look it gets before he is about to lose his temper. “Everything was perfect for about two minutes. Then the doctor gave her a shot.”

“I didn’t *want* the shot,” Sarah says. What kind of mother doesn’t want to hold her newborn? Warren’s mother pats her on the shoulder.

“Who cares, anyway?” Karen stands abruptly and begins collecting and stacking dishes. “All this stuff, it hardly matters, does it?”

“He gave her a shot.”

“OK, Warren,” his father warns.

“The doctor gave her a shot.” The food slides on Warren’s nearly full plate as he shoves it at Karen. “*That’s* why she doesn’t remember.”

“Come say goodbye.” Warren has found her curled on her side of the bed, studying her hand. Isn’t that what new mothers do—count fingers and toes?

“Maybe I remember.”

“*Maybe?*”

“He was beside me on the table, that operating table bed cart thing. My arm was nearby, practically holding him.”

“Practically?”

“I was looking at him close up. He was looking all around. I remember later that incubator with the blue hand-holes. I remember his hands. His hands looked funny, not quite real, like gray gloves filled with sand. When I woke up I didn’t know where anybody was. You were gone. He was gone. Two women were washing me, sluicing water over me and talking to each other. It was like they were washing a car.” She stops for a moment, trying to remember more. Warren opens and shuts the dresser drawers as if searching for something, but the drawers are all still empty.

“What are we going to tell ourselves?” He helps her off the bed. On their way back to the living room they pass the closed door to what would have been Andrew’s room. Sarah’s father appears in the hall with an armful of limp coats. “And I don’t want the truth, either,” Warren says. “God, I need a lie.”

Sarah drives the freshly dented car. The carseat is still in back, Warren won’t let her remove it. Sunlight bursts off a windshield just ahead. Blades of sun go through her but she keeps steering through floating black dots, over the crest of a hill toward a chunky jeweled pendant suspended over the pavement. There, she misses the turn and drives on. She isn’t supposed to drive yet and she hasn’t told anyone where she’s going, but they’ll figure it out. How fast is she going? She checks the speedometer but can’t make sense of the dial, attractive spikes radiating from an explosion at the core, like a clock. If she goes faster will she finally cause time to pass?

She is a passenger even as she drives. A mother and not a mother. She isn’t driving, invisible ropes control the car as she circles the block, a cord pulls her toward her destination. Years ago her mother used to take them out in an old motorboat with rusting

seats. Her normally sedate mother would crank the wheel tight and they'd loop in frightening zeros in the middle of the lake, crashing the bow into their own wake. This is the proper pattern of the generations, Sarah thinks, and so, when she plunges down a side street, she half expects to be pitted against some opposing force. Instead she meets no resistance, no waves. She is on a ridge overlooking the valley. The high desert land slopes down to the band of naked cottonwoods choking the river. Dirt-bike trails crease the red clay earth like straps cutting into flesh.

A honking sedan rushes by on the left as she rolls more and more slowly along the curb. She pulls into a wide drive, passes a barren expanse dotted with miniature American flags and then stops near a marble mausoleum studded with gleaming brass plaques. Spread before her is a flat black sea strewn with enormous yellow fish spines. The skeletons are both beautiful and mysterious, like formations that might be attributed to aliens, and she is grateful to witness their odd loveliness in the moment before she identifies them.

The sun is bright illusion. It's cold. A man intercepts her as soon as she gets in the door. She wonders if they have a bell that rings deep in the building whenever a visitor crosses the threshold. She doesn't recognize the man from her last visit but he knows her. He knows her name and invites her into one of the offices to the left down a short corridor. She tries but she can't focus on his face, it's a distant moon pitted with faint craters.

"I need a telescope," she tells him. He gets her some coffee and lets her sit there without bothering her. Maybe he says a few words but she is busy tasting the coffee, which is rich with an aftertaste of ash that makes her think of Warren. She thinks

of him as if he is someone she knew long ago, softened by time, recalled only with hazy affection. He always preferred strong coffee, preferred French roast, that Warren. In restaurants before ordering any he would make them hold up the pot so he could see if the brew were opaque enough. In two days Warren has put a lot of mileage on the car, and on the way over she had just noticed a new crack in the windshield, a star down low on the driver's side. Apparently he has been back to the old apartment several times. Maybe he is waiting for their former selves to drive up and tell him nothing has changed.

The moon man asks her if she is ready to see her son. She says yes and he excuses himself and leaves the office. She sips coffee and looks at what appears to be some sort of document posted on the wall. It seems she can no longer read. Even though she knows there are letters in front of her what she sees is a series of notched lines leaning at different angles like a collapsing picket fence, followed by a lovely coiled shell as small and contained as a snail's.

She follows the man by walking beside him. With a twist of his shoulders he sends her in one direction, with a lean, in another. Another man follows them. Like a school of fish they move in unison. Then, with gracious subterranean nods indicating she should enter, both men halt at the chapel door. She asks to be alone for a moment.

Between them are several pews, then an open space lit from above by a milky skylight. Beyond that is a kind of stage, one step up, flanked by pale and solid-looking olive curtains. The pews are modern, unembellished, of a light blond wood, as rhythmic as captured waves, while the curtains hang in sculptured folds, held back by ornate tassels. Flowers are scattered about, quivering in currents of air. The urn that will soon contain him is to the right of the bassinet, both displayed on pedestals.

She stands next to him for a while. Her mother always claims it is rude to say “him” about someone in the room. Andrew, then. She has been thinking of Andrew’s comfort. That’s why she came early, it’s purely natural to want to check on the baby.

His head barely makes a dent in the satin pillow and his hands, those long and finger-like thumbs, rest on the multi-colored blanket her mother had crocheted. Maybe later someone will hand her the blanket, folded like a flag for the next-of-kin. She’s glad to see that his hands look familiar, that they are the hands she remembers, except they seem smaller.

His face looks familiar and unfamiliar. Lying there not looking back at her he manages to appear both swollen and deflated, existing in opposing states or not existing at all. Canceled out. When she leans close she still can make out the faint raw marks where they’d taped a respirator to his cheeks, but his overall skin color is better than at the hospital. He has shed that luminous gray sheen. He is not better, she knows. He looks better now but even smaller.

She touches his hand, which has become the hand of an older child now, the hand of the future child, with grimy knuckles and a knobby scraped wrist. “How did this happen?” she asks him, bending near to hear the living boy somewhere beyond this dead one.

It is possible to touch him and wonder where he is. She can look right at him and not be watching over him.

Three weeks later, the doorbell rings. Warren is at work, they’ve all gone back to their routines, except for Sarah, who is taking part of her maternity leave anyway. Mr.

Parino has returned with the restored table, which is shining in the truck bed, glossy as a new coffin.

“You’re a fast healer,” he observes as he opens the tailgate. “You’ve lost that hospital look.”

“I have?” Sarah says, surprised. When she isn’t feeling crazy she feels half asleep, thoughts slip away from her half remembered like dreams. She helps him carry the table inside and they lower it into place. “Maybe you can tell me,” she says as she writes the check—but then she forgets the question.

This time he has a plain gold stud in his ear. “Look here.” So now it’s time for her to admire his handiwork. He flicks a cloth over the table’s burnished surface. She bends forward to see their falling shadows as flat silhouettes. Within the shadow her reflection appears next to his, three-dimensional, deep down beyond the polish, on the other side. It is oddly comforting when her hand from below reaches up to meet its real counterpart, near her wooden brow.

Back at the chapel, the moon man had eventually returned with Warren. She didn’t want to move but part of her shifted involuntarily to let them know she was aware. The moon man propped open the door. People, or ghostly coughs and rustles and shuffling feet, gathered out of sight in the hall. She lowered her head and studied the space between the stage and her feet. The carpet was a muted forest, sand and plum floral. Not as bad as it sounds, she thinks now as she sets the table for dinner, but rather like a lake bottom seen through ten feet of water. There was a damp leaf stuck to the side of Warren’s shoe, startling new green in the midst of winter. Would there be an end, after

all, to this season? Warren lifted the baby from the bassinet and adjusted the blanket. It had been his idea to have a receiving line—although it never had been exactly clear to her what would be received and by whom.

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