

We're sitting around the living room of Owen's two bedroom apartment, located just above an antique shop we've long assumed launders money since no one ever seems to patronize the place. I'm on the floor, nestled against Mel's legs and thinking about checking my phone, knowing the ringer is turned off makes me feel disconnected from the great "what if" of some flirtatious connection. Something is "off" with Owen tonight—and I can tell this because his curtains are off-kilter and his coffee pot still bears half a pot of morning drip, not cleaned, not drained, not drunk. It's unlike him to invite us into his space unready and yet, here we are, awkward and assembled and waiting for whatever we are waiting for. Mel's long legs stretch out from the couch and I notice the way the sunlight streams in the window and catches the hairs on her kneecaps. Neither of us have ever been prone to shaving, much less shaving well. Anna, though, sitting across from me in a high back vintage chair that was definitely not acquired directly downstairs, would never be seen in public bare legged or unshaven. The ways we are different are illuminated in the close light of the small living room. The ways we are the same, too.

"You guys," Owen's voice cracks. "I wanted to tell you something, together, here, because I don't want you to hear from someone else or think I didn't tell you first or find out from social media or some of the regular gossip gays." My breath is caught in my throat because, please please it can't be another tragedy. I cannot handle another cancer diagnosis or HIV or drama or heartache or. "Sayid and I got engaged." His face breaks into a smile and, as if on queue, Sayid walks into the room with a tray of mojitos made perfectly the way only a gay man could, with fucking umbrellas tilted off the side of the glass because of course they have a beverage cart and of course they have the matching glasses, so unlike the glasses that are smashed and cracked in my kitchen cabinets. And Owen is happy, I guess. That's what I notice when I'm not looking at Sayid's perfect black curls or the bottom tooth he chipped as a kid and has never seen the need to fix. And Owen is worried, I notice. Maybe because it's a bit of an asshole move to get engaged the same summer your sisters all decide to get divorced. Or maybe because the deep background of our childhood renders us all fearful to be anything other or unholy or different or sinful or weird. The real truth is that it's impossible to be in our family and be gay just like its impossible to be in our family and bipolar or impossible to be in our family and an addict or impossible to be in our family and get divorced.

It's silent for a second and I don't expect Anna to speak first and I'm scared that the first response will be negative so I jump to my feet and cross to Owen, gathering him in the type of

hug that's tight enough to be real and not too tight as to hurt. "I knew it!" I lied, clapping Sayid on the back, but carefully because, obviously, mojitos. Of course I didn't know it. My well tested and proven pessimism had offered me a million reasons for why Owen had called this sibling gathering and none of them, not one, was the positive delight of an upcoming wedding. Mel had met me in the middle of the room with a smile curling the corners of her mouth and wrinkling the corners of her eyes, exactly as mine, exactly as my mothers, except my mother was not here, was not privy to this declaration—fear that my mother wouldn't experience the same smile and laugh lines at this joyful announcement. I moved to the record player, flipped the needle up, picked up the new vinyl I'd brought as a gift. When I'd picked up Cigarettes After Sex' new album on my way out of the office this afternoon, I hadn't imagined it as an engagement gift, but more of a penance for the dinner dates I'd turned down, the cancellations I'd made over the years as I'd avoided Owen and Sayid's openness and hospitality out of accomodation for Ben's social anxiety or need to stay home. I placed the album on the well used record player, nestled on a credenza beside the deep purple dachshund sculpture Owen had painted at the local pottery shop and a bronze framed photo of Owen and Sayid, weeks after graduation, when they met and fucked on the first date, sand of Coronado in their asscracks and teeth. The slow notes of "Don't Let me Go," filled the small space and I was sucked into how this moved in this moment.

"When I was young, I thought the world of you

I was dumb to let you drift away

And though I guess it had to come to an end

No one else could have the love we shared"

My eyes met Mel's as I looked into the living room, where light and color began to play and laughter danced in the background. Owen had opened and straightened ("gayly adjusted!" he'd insist) the curtains and I wished we hadn't drifted so far apart over the years. I wished that I'd told my siblings that I needed them when Ben and I were at our worst. I wished I'd called Owen to celebrate when he'd first moved in with Sayid, that I'd accepted the dinner invitations, that I'd sent the housewarming gift, that I'd done more than bring a vinyl sorta unintentionally just because it was convenient. I wished I had followed Mel when she went out of the country and when she got lost for that whole year and when she was pregnant and when she was alone and when she came back and when she was lonely. I wish that I knew Anna at all.

Anna. Sitting still in the high back chair she looked reserved, at best. Her hair was perfectly swept to one side, makeup properly applied, but discreetly. I twirled my own split ends and rubbed the knotted side of my second hand tank top as it rested on the waistband of my high-waisted joggers. I probably should have tried to dress like an adult to go to an adult dinner party. Probably should have taken a shower and lined my eyes or put in any effort at all to appear decent and together for my brother and his soon to be husband, for my sisters in their own way of being fine. The great unifier of adulthood is realizing that everyone in the room is trying equally hard to pass as an adult. We don't know one another as fully grown humans—just as stunted and tainted, sad and bitter, trying children who are just as quick to cut as to be cut. Our childhood afforded us little except armor, and here, in this space of joy, there was still a thick wall between any two of us, maybe Owen and Mel aside. Anna wore her role as eldest well. She was first to show up to any funeral or write a family Christmas letter or perform the ceremony of Holiday or drive our parents to the doctor or forgive her siblings frequent f-bombs. It was her stability that had convinced myself and Mel that marriage and family was the answer to a tumultuous and unhappy promiscuity and adolescence. And it was in her shadow, and the hopes of our parents' approval, that we followed her into matrimony and fidelity and parenthood (Mel) and community service (me) and the great performance of perfection.

And because I was distracted by the vinyl and yes, I admit, I checked my phone and no, unfortunately, Alec hadn't texted anything sexy or flirty or at all, I had missed if Anna had said anything to Owen by way of shock or congratulations. As I rejoined the group I asked, "when's the wedding?" and at these words, Anna leaned forward and smiled. "Can you wait to make an announcement until I get a chance to talk to my kids?" It sounded thoughtful, matronly, earnest. I knew that under the surface was a deep desire to control the narrative—to make sure the story was right for her kids' ears, appetites, theology.

"No!" I find myself urgent. "Let's announce it now! On Social Media!" I grab my phone from my pocket, swipe past the new message alert, and turn on the camera. I pull Sayid and Owen alongside me and Mel's smile dashes in at the corner but it is Anna's sad face I will focus on in the days to come—her unwillingness to celebrate her brother because of her own belief or grief.

While Mel and Sayid run outside to flip the burgers, (vegan for me, damn thoughtful gays), I slide back onto the sofa alongside Owen and run my fingers through his hair. It's been a long time since I sat, knee against knee, with my brother, just three years older than me yet always much cooler, more aloof. Nothing our family did or said would or could ever change the set of

his solid jaw, the graying hair at his temples. While the world was falling around his sisters, the hottest and longest summer of our lives, he was gonna fucking celebrate. My phone buzzed. I swiped “ignore” and wrapped my fingers in his—“I’m really, really happy for you,” I say softly. And even though I’ve spent all of May and most of June railing against monogamy and marriage as archaic and outdated and unfair and inhumane, I think Owen’s will be lifegiving and hopeful and new. And so I mean it. I really do.