

Excerpts from the Novel

Small Change

By:
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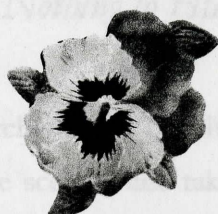
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Nothing to Hide



Precariously perched on a bench to the right of the cake stand, Liza surveyed the scene while taking care to not make eye contact with the members of the crowd strolling the walk. Not ready to be noticed, she looked down and noticed the small rip in her floral print skirt was in plain view. She delicately folded excess fabric over the tear and began to smooth out the obnoxious wrinkles that often plagued her clothing and placed her handbag on her lap to conceal her plump mid-section.

Always dreaming up new tricks to appear a tad thinner than she really was, Liza longed for a day when she could have nothing to hide. The goal wasn't necessarily to find a man who would accept every roll or pinch of her skin, but instead to stretch into a new runway quality body. It seemed that for every confident comment that escaped her painted, thin lips, something inside whispered, and reminded her of her numerous imperfections. To drown out the whispers, she would often speak a little louder—or laugh heartily from her gut, two of the more obnoxious characteristics she knew a woman could possess.

Liza hated nothing on the Island more than the annual Beauty Contests. She knew she was no Hope Thompson, the young woman who had won the contest the previous spring. Hope Thompson didn't own torn skirts. Hope Thompson didn't spend her hours prior to departing for Coney washing an old dress over a kitchen sink in the Bronx. This familiar ritual had become Liza's last minute attempt to arrive on the Island looking different. In her mind, each week was another chance to find someone simply dashing to sweep her off her feet. Most girls she knew had married by age twenty-one; so at twenty-four, the clock was ticking, making every weekend trip to Coney another chance at forever. More often than not, though, she ended up being a family man's dirty little secret or a serviceman's conquest. A few of them had promised to meet up with her again underneath the tower sign in Luna Park, a spot that Liza had claimed to be her own, but none of them ever showed. After hours of hopefully waiting for their arrival, she'd find herself on a bench showcasing herself to the passersby. Thinking about it all made Liza nauseous, with nothing left to do but smooth, stare, and smoke.

The night air was cool and thick. Thick with the mist of a million exhaled breaths released after a busy week in the shipyard. The smell of cakes silently hung in the humidity, begging Liza to spend her last few nickels on another. Focusing all of her attention on her waning cigarette, she resisted. No upstanding gentleman would give a second glance to a girl sitting alone gorging on cakes and sucking down smoke.



The bench shifted beneath her mid-thought and Liza turned to find a young man filling the space to her right. Hinting at her interest, Liza shifted her weight and politely cleared her throat. Her contrived cough was louder than she would've liked it to be—but she should've figured, she looked over waiting for a response to her notably odd gesture. Nothing. The man looked down and then promptly turned away. He was obviously more interested in his roasted peanuts than introductions. Liza decided to take the reins.

"So, you, uh—like peanuts?"

The moment that her words became audible, she wished she could take them back. What a first impression, no wonder she was alone.

"Yep." The young man paused. "Did you- want one?"

"Oh no! Just observing, I'm Liza."

"Will."

Silence. Liza was a magnet for the men who thrived in silence, and she hated it. She hurried to keep the conversation moving.

"Well, Will. You enjoying your evening? There's a great band tonight. I'm sure you heard them, over at the Stand?"

Will nodded and again, said nothing. Liza could feel her speech speeding up. Speed was always assumed by men to be desperation, but she couldn't seem to help it.

"I had to break away for a rest from the dance floor actually. I stepped on at seven and only sat out one song...people just kept asking."



She hoped her spiel had sounded convincing. She hadn't been on the dance floor all night. Thinking about it, she didn't even know if there had been a band.

Another nod from talkative Will.

"I'm a great dancer, so's my mother. I don't suppose you'd want to go check it out? The slower songs usually start about now, huh?" Liza grimaced; she immediately knew that she had been too forward.

"I don't dance."

"Oh, come on! Everyone dances, silly!"

"Maybe I should've clarified. I don't dance with anyone but my wife."

Perfect. Perfectly inexcusable, Liza thought. "I'm sorry—I." It was time to stop. Liza had said enough already.

Will stared forward, continuing to crack peanut shells between his two front teeth. Eventually he made a connection with a petite blonde making her way through the crowd in a flawlessly pressed baby blue skirt. Liza glanced to the side at the man who, a few minutes before had been quite dull, light up and smile at his wife as if she were a pastel, pin curled angel.





James



Will stood to meet the woman and when she was close enough to touch he playfully hooked her waist with a single arm. He drew her in so close; Liza assumed he could feel her breathy voice brush against the skin of his neck.

"Sorry it took so long," she said. "The lady before me was slow as molasses!"

Will gave her a squeeze that prompted her to throw her head back and giggle. *Women like her always giggle*, Liza thought. *Women with stylish clothes and names like Beth or June.*

Liza knew it wasn't appropriate for her to stare, especially in the minutes after her embarrassing encounter with Will, but the two (who were no more than three feet away from where Liza was sitting) were captivating. She shifted her gaze back and forth as to not be completely obvious, and gathered still frames in her mind of Will and his wife whispering to each other on the busy walk.

"Let's go!" Will's wife said, wiggling from his grasp while pulling at the over-starched strip of fabric just below his shirt collar. "I'm hungry for sweets."

Will smiled adoringly. "All right then, we're off," he replied and turned back to the bench. He then grabbed his peanuts and his angel, and the two were gone.



Liza reached in her cloth coin purse for a single nickel that she held in her hand until it was wet and warm. *I need another cake, I need to nurse this wound*, Liza reasoned as she stood and took her place in line at the cake booth behind a short man wearing a gray suit that hung from his shoulder's like elephant skin. Without thinking twice Liza began taking a quick inventory of the faceless man's seen and unseen characteristics as she lit another smoke.

Strange hat..

Clean shave.

Swell suit, even though it's a little big.

Too short.

The man's weight shifted and he turned to face Liza just as her exhaled smoke began to curl around the brim of his hat.

"Could I get a cigarette, you think?" he asked. He had spoken before she could, what a pleasant surprise.

"Of course," Liza replied, as her hand dove back into her bag in search of her old smoke case. After opening the clasp with her chubby fingers, she extended the cigarettes in his direction atop her open palm. "Here you are."

"Thanks. The name's James, yours?"

"Liza. I'm Liza."

He really was too short she thought, but honestly adorable. Each took a step forward to keep pace with the cake line.

“Well, Liza, my dear, I don’t suppose you have a light?”

“I do, sir.” Liza was beaming as she bent down, struck a match on the concrete and presented it to James. He leaned in so that the tip of the tobacco hovered motionless in the middle of Liza’s flame, keeping his green eyes on her the entire time. James sucked hard, so that Liza could hear the rolling paper crack, and then turned his head to release his smoke to the side.

“You’re a doll, Liza. Again, thank you.” And with that James faced forward.

Liza could feel her face burning and her heart thumping up through her chest and into her neck. Each made another step forward to keep up with the line. It sure was strange having a man make the first move. Never mind James’s shortcomings, Liza could get used to being his “doll”. He was quirky and cute. Liza focused her eyes on the nape of his neck, hoping he’d speak again. She inched to the left to check the line’s progress. There was only one more customer in front of her James.



Why isn't he saying anything? Liza's feet began to twitch in her shoes. Should she say something and risk having him tell her that his wife was just away at the can, or stay quiet and lose him forever?

Another step forward meant James was to be helped next. Liza watched him gesture to the kitchen staff as he tried to decide on a cake.

Say something now or forget about beating yourself up later, Liza silently told herself over and over.

"James?" Her stomach sank.

James spun around on a single foot and cut her off.

"Cinnamon or chocolate?"

"I prefer cinnamon," Liza said, shocked.

James turned to face the cook and called out, "Chocolate for me, cinnamon for the lovely lady."

The cook nodded as Liza gathered herself. James faced Liza and took a step closer to her so that she could feel his chest press against her breast.

"The lovely lady who, I hope, will be accompanying me to the dance floor when these cakes are gone."



1920s Coney Timeline



1920

- The subway's extension to Coney Island and its nickel fare brought millions of visitors to New York City's nearest beach.
- The Wonder Wheel, one of Coney Island's landmark attractions, was installed along the Boardwalk near W. 8th. Its 130-foot diameter wheel carried 150 people in 24 cars. While 8 cars were stationary, 16 cars slid from the inner wheel to the outer wheel and back while it turned.

1922

- Police inspector Byron T. Sackett ordered three nude plaster figures, used to advertise a new attraction on the Bowery called the "Love Nest," removed after noticing the large crowds that it had attracted. While it was a copy of a well-known sculpture called the "Fallen Angel," two standing figures looking down at a third figure reclining between them, his complaint was tinting them with flesh tones made them too realistic.



- The first section of Coney Island's boardwalk, stretching for half the length of the resort, opened. Its wooden planked boardwalk was 80 feet wide and cost \$3,000,000. To increase the space on the beach an extra 2,500,000 square feet, groins were extended into the sea and sand was sluiced (pumped) in from inland areas. Unfortunately the sand was tan rather than white, but it gave visitors to the beach plenty of free access. New white colored sand was eventually placed atop the old tan sand in 1941.
- Six passengers were injured on the Oriental Scenic Railroad on Surf Avenue on June 21st when a trestle, 10 feet off the ground gave way.
- After the summer season ended, Surf Avenue, the Bowery and several alleys near the Bowery leading to the Boardwalk were widened for better fire fighting access. 175 buildings and attractions including the Ben Hur Race, Rocky Road to Dublin (both coasters), Stauch's Restaurant and Henderson's Dance Hall were razed to make room for the improvement. By May 1924 as many businesses rebuilt, Coney Island had a completely different look.

1924

- Coney Island's first beauty contest was held during the Democratic National Convention in Manhattan. 48 contestants from each of the states competed.
- The Brighton Beach Hotel was razed.

1925

- Coney Island businessmen instituted an annual beauty pageant. Fifty girls, most of them showgirls and the rest models competed. That Sunday 700,000 spectators jammed the subways

and trolleys to reach the Boardwalk where the contest was held at Child's boardwalk restaurant. Hope Thompson won as the prettiest girl and received a \$100 necklace of Coney Island pearls. Dora Empey won a loving cup as the neatest girl, and Peggy Shannon was awarded third prize and the title of Miss Coney Island.

1926

- The Bobs / Tornado, a thrilling twister roller coaster designed by Prior & Church was built on a very narrow lot at Henderson's Walk and the Bowery. The structure included a 100 foot high ornate jeweled tower and numerous rides beneath it in what was called the Amusement Department Store. This included an Illions carousel, wax show, Bug House, shooting gallery and a bathhouse for 500 bathers.
- Additional mile of Boardwalk extended to Brighton Beach.
- Twelve people hurt in a crash on the Thunderbolt roller coaster, when failing to make a hill, rolled back down and was struck by the next train.

1927

- The 85 feet high Cyclone, Coney Island's most famous roller coaster opened on June 26, 1927. It cost Jack and Irving Rosenthal \$175,000 to build. It was a fast twister coaster set in a figure 8 design, and a true thrilling ride.

1928

- Steamboat service to Steeplechase Pier suspended in September.
- Eden Wax Musee and two other buildings burn in a March 10th fire.





Such a Pity



Mary Ellen Parker, Liza's best friend since childhood, had been married last June. The wedding was small, but undeniably perfect. Liza left the bustling city for the weekend and joined The Parker family, upstate, at a vacation house they had kept since she and Mary Ellen were girls. Two stories, not counting the basement or attic, the house sat on the edge of Lake Oswego. Upon Liza's arrival, Mrs. Parker insisted that Liza stay in the upstairs bedroom, which she and Mary Ellen had been forbidden to enter as children. The room was quite small, but just lovely, full of dark wood furniture and creamy lace. The bed had four tall posts with tiny hand carved angels twisting upward from the base. Before setting foot in the sacred room the day before the ceremony, Liza paused in the door jam, set her bags at her feet, and remembered how Mrs. Parker would stand her and Mary Ellen side by side as girls in the very same spot, point to the bed, and give her speech on the importance of family.

"Ladies!" she'd say. "This bed holds a piece of my mother *and her mother*. Aren't we lucky to have it?"

The bed had originally belonged to Mrs. Parker's grandmother, Abigail Lee Adams, and was kept in a similar room on the plantation in South Carolina where Mrs. Parker's mother, Anna Lynn Adams, was raised. The Adams family kept a good deal of slaves prior to the war, and two of the men had done the woodworking while a woman who the Parkers called Betty, stuffed the down. After three generations, the bed remained a cloud. Mrs. Parker told the girls that she hadn't been allowed to touch the bed until her wedding night, when her and Mr. Parker had...celebrated their union. During the Reconstruction, the Adams plantation was split apart, and at the end of it all the post bed was one of the few remaining relics. Mrs. Parker still changed its linen once a month though few ever slept in the bed, hoping that it would remain nice enough to one day pass on to Mary Ellen. Secretly Liza knew Mrs. Parker was a bit disappointed that Mary Ellen and Richard wouldn't be spending their first night together buried in its sheets after the wedding party dispersed. Instead the two decided to leave the reception immediately, in a hired car, for a week in Niagara. So, by default the room was to be Liza's.

Liza bent down to gather her belongings, and stepped into the room. She set her bag and small trunk beside the night table, and then turned to the bed. Liza ran her hand gently over its feather top, which she likened to a bit of white dough in an oven: lightly warmed by the late afternoon sun. Liza was suspicious that Mrs. Parker's gesture to let her sleep in this blessed room was rooted in both grace and pity; Mrs. Parker had always made it

known that women over the age of twenty-two that weren't married were "such a pity".

Her worries were confirmed later that evening when she joined Mrs. Parker downstairs in the kitchen to help prepare dinner. Earlier that day Mrs. Parker had said she'd whip up a small meal—her meals were never small, though. After waking up in an upstairs arm chair from a short snooze, Liza entered the kitchen in a sleepy daze and sat on a wooden stool while Mrs. Parker rushed around the kitchen adding pinches of salt here and there and stirring a pot of noodles that she was sure she had cooked a tad too soon.

Mrs. Parker never hesitated to delegate kitchen work. "Liza—be a dear and grab the scallions from the basin. Cut them into threes, alright?"

Liza stood, still half asleep, and reached for the vegetables submerged in icy water. "Sure—where are..."

"Knives are in the drawer to the left of you, sweetie."

Liza heard the door to the sun porch slam, and looked up to find Mary Ellen standing before her. "Get a nice nap?" she asked.

Liza nodded. "The best. It was funny to see the bed again. I'm still just as scared to touch it." Mary Ellen gave her a knowing look, and both she and Liza cracked smiles remembering the first night that they ever laid a hand on it.

It had been a little more than a hand actually. Mary Ellen had convinced Liza that they should both get a running start from the upstairs hall and jump on the bed's top as the clock in the foyer below struck twelve. In the minute prior to midnight the girls took

their positions, and with seconds left—took off in a sprint towards the bed. They landed softly as the clock began to chime. The girls rolled around, burying their small faces in the white cotton sheet. The memory was a gentle blur of softness, of tiny hands and pigtail braids; all washed in light blue moonlight. Their giggling promptly stopped when Mrs. Parker came charging into the room in her flannel night gown and ruffle cap—screaming.

“Ladies! Down! That bed is family! Would you hop around on your grandmother like that?” The girls jumped off, trying to make sense of what Mary Ellen’s mother had just said. “You certainly would not! Bad! Bad! Now get out of this room before I give the both of you swats!”

As Liza and Mary Ellen drifted off to sleep that night in a room across the hall, they watched Mrs. Parker change the bed’s linen—in the middle of the night.

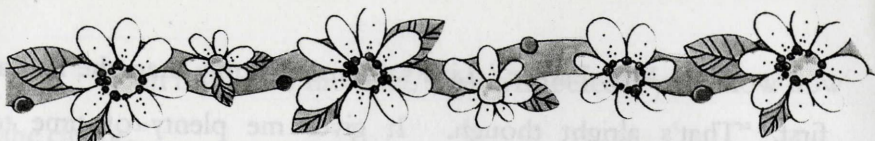
Mrs. Parker shot an annoyed look across kitchen at the girls that clearly read “I thought we were cooking”.

Mary Ellen was quick to cut the tension. “Momma’s already put you to work, I see.”

Mrs. Parker ignored her daughter. “Have you had this salad, Liza?” And of course, before Liza could answer, she continued. “I’m crazy about it. ‘Green Goddess Salad’ it’s called. Named after a play by Willie Carter.”

Mary Ellen was quick to correct, “William Archer, momma.”

Liza laughed. “I haven’t—where do these go?” She pushed the cut scallions towards Mrs. Parker.



"Oh yes! Right here in this mashed mess I'm making. You know it's just anchovies—filleted, parsley, chives, tarragon, cream, and your scallions. It's pressed into this paste and then thinned with vinegar." Mrs. Parker paused and looked down at her concoction. "It looks more like dressing after the vinegar of course...I love it, its so easy!"

"Momma's not lying Liza, it's good," Mary Ellen agreed.

At that point, Mrs. Parker made a segue Liza knew would be coming sooner or later. "Never mind the salad, Mary Ellen." Mrs. Parker's eyes shifted to Liza, as she continued to grind the dressing paste. "We haven't talked enough about Liza—any possible *plans* in your future dear?"

Liza looked to Mary Ellen for help, which she tried to offer the only way she knew how. "Mother. Quit."

"Oh Mary Ellen, really, I want to hear this," Mrs. Parker replied.

Here it goes, Liza thought. "No—it's fine. Mary. No wedding plans for me...I'd need a man to have a plan," Liza said.

"So you're saying there's *no* special someone?" Mrs. Parker pried into business that wasn't hers professionally. "Mary Ellen, check the roux."

Mary Ellen turned away from her mother's view and rolled her eyes just enough to let Liza know that even she was embarrassed. She pulled the lid from the pot on the stove and dipped a wooden spoon deep in the sauce to make sure the milk at the bottom wasn't burning.

"No, Mrs. Parker," Liza said, more firmly than she had at first. "That's alright though. It gives me plenty of time to work...and I've made a few trips to Coney—it's great fun."

"Coney Island, you say?" Mrs. Parker restated, disapprovingly.



Mary Ellen turned from the pot. "I've never been to Coney! How wonderful! I've heard it's just grand, with all the rides. Maybe Richard and I could join you sometime?"

"I'd love that," Liza replied. "Maybe we could make a weekend of it."

Mrs. Parker interrupted before any real plans could be made, "Mmm, yes. Your aunt and uncle are bringing the flowers for tomorrow over tonight when they come for dinner. Everything's all set, I think."

Mary Ellen knew this was her mother's way of ending their conversation. "Wonderful, momma."

And then thick silence set in. With the Goddess dressing done, Mrs. Parker walked to the stove and nudged Mary Ellen away from the Alfredo. She picked up the iron pot with a mitt and poured the sauce over her dish of wet noodles. Mary Ellen went to the window and removed a loaf pan covered in a small towel from the sill. She set the pan in front of Liza and patted her back.

"Don't listen to momma," she whispered, "you know how she can be."

Liza forced a smile and lifted the towel for a peek at the loaf.

I hope it's a cake, Liza thought. It was a cake, but not chocolate or vanilla; it was Mrs. Parker's Mystery Cake, which wasn't sweet—but salty, on account of its secret ingredient.

"Still making the mystery cake, Mrs. Parker?" Liza asked.

"Oh yes, of course. Edward loves it. Maybe when *you* get married Liza, I'll pass the recipe along. I'll let you in on my spicy secret."

Liza smiled to appease her. "I can hardly wait."

The "secret" was really no secret at all. When she and Mary Ellen were twelve, they had caught a glimpse of Mrs. Parker adding her "secret ingredient", tomato soup, to the dough. Neither of them ever mentioned it, but they both knew it was the soup that gave the cake its spice.

"Did you make a dessert, momma?" Mary Ellen asked. Mary Ellen openly loved dessert.

"There's fruit if you want it, dear. No one else here needs it, isn't that right, Liza?" She winked in Liza's direction as if to say, *plump girls should abstain*.

She's no spring chicken, Liza thought as she poked the top of the mystery cake through the moist towel. Mrs. Parker was thinner when her and Mary Ellen had been young. Now, she stood before Liza with a large chest and an even larger backside, and preached the importance of being trim. *The nerve*.

"Have you tried Alfredo sauce yet, Liza?" Mary Ellen was working desperately to change the subject.

"No—I read in the newspaper though, not too long ago, that when Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks honeymooned in Rome, that's all they ate! People in the city have been crazy about it ever since." Liza shifted on her stool, and smoothed her skirt.

"Momma must have read the same piece," Mary Ellen announced. "It's all we've eaten for Sunday dinner in the past three months!" All three ladies looked up, and let out a hearty laugh.

That would explain your mother's new midsection, Liza thought—wishing she had the nerve to say it out loud.

"Ladies! I think we're about done here. Why don't you go change, wash up!"

Mary Ellen turned to Liza. "You go ahead, and I'll be up in a minute." Liza suspected that her friend was taking a moment to scold her mother.

Liza climbed the staircase up to her room and shut the door. In the absence of chatter, she unbuttoned her violet dress, pulled it from her shoulders, and let it drop to her feet; she positioned herself in front of the mirror and stared at the young woman she saw before her in a tattered slip.

I am fat and alone, she thought, *I want a man, a wedding, and a dessert.*

Before she could cry, the doorknob twisted and Mary Ellen slipped into the room. "Momma thinks I ran out for the boys," she whispered. "You want to smoke?"





"I do," Liza replied softly. Mary Ellen went to brush her face just as tears began to fall from Liza's cheeks faster than her best friend's thumbs could catch them.

Mary Ellen began to tug at her own dress, until it too fell on the ground beside Liza's. "Come on," she prompted Liza, "out the window."

In their underwear, the girls slipped through the lace curtain and then the pane window. After they had sat, feet pressed under their bottoms high on the Parker roof, Liza uncurled her palm and a rolled cigarette was revealed.

Mary Ellen snatched it away with her right hand, and struck a match with her left. She took a long drag, pushed the chestnut brown hair from her eyes, and exhaled a billowing cloud of smoke. Liza took the cigarette and looked down at the lake below. The water was dark in the late twilight with silver ripples. Oswego's water was royal that night, like platinum embroidery on fine deep blue velvet.

Mary Ellen turned to look at Liza whose gaze was fixed on the lake. "I'm sorry," she said, "about momma. I couldn't be more glad that you're here." She paused, and took a deep breath. "Still sisters, right?"

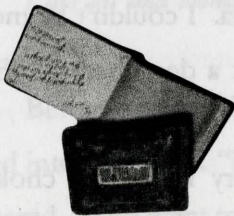
Liza handed the smoke back to Mary Ellen and choked down a burning sob pushing its way up her neck. "Still sisters," she whispered and then bit her pink lips closed.

Fettuccine Alfredo Recipe

- 1 (16-ounce) package fettuccine pasta
- 1/2 cup butter
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 1 cup freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano
- 1 teaspoon salt
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- Freshly grated Parmesan cheese as accompaniment



Prepare pasta. While pasta is being prepared, melt butter in large skillet; add cream, salt and pepper. Bring to a boil and simmer for a few minutes uncovered to reduce and thicken sauce. Remove from heat and add cooked fettuccini and 1 cup Parmesan. Toss to combine and serve immediately with an extra sprinkling of Parmesan cheese over the top, if desired.





Green Goddess Dressing



- 2 tablespoons tarragon vinegar
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 egg yolk
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 2 anchovy fillets
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh tarragon
- 1 tablespoon fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 2 green onions, minced
- 1 1/2 cups extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/4 cup sour cream
- Salt and freshly ground pepper



Combine in a food processor or blender the vinegar, garlic, egg yolk, lemon juice, anchovies, herbs and green onions. Run the processor and drizzle the olive oil through the feed tube.

Transfer the sauce to a bowl. Fold in the sour cream and season with salt and pepper.

Refrigerate until ready to use.

Mint Julep Recipe



The perfect julep comes of infusing the bourbon with the mint and letting it have a night's rest.

1 bottle Kentucky Bourbon 3 cups Fresh Mint Leaves

24 Fresh Mint Sprigs

6 Lemon Twists

Bring a half-cup of water to a boil. Remove from heat and add 1 cup of sugar. Refrigerate until cool. Pour bourbon into a 1-1/2 quart jar and add mint leaves. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Strain liquor into a pitcher and discard the mint. Sweeten to taste with sugar and water mixture.

Fill a julep cup or a Collins glass with cracked ice. Add infused bourbon and stir until glass frosts. Take a twist of lemon and rub it on the rim of the glass and toss it into the drink. Garnish with mint sprigs. Serves 6.



Like Magic



Just after breakfast, Liza slipped out the porch door, to find a place to soak in a bit of the sun-streaked morning in silence. Once she reached the newly cut lawn, Liza bent over to unhook the clasps of her white heels and slid her feet out of her shoes, only to plant them in the grass seconds later. Barefoot, she crossed the yard, which was covered in shady lace, to the gazebo. As Liza got closer, she saw that the wedding cake was already in place there.

Mrs. Parker had obviously spent hours frosting the cake. Mary Ellen had always preferred chocolate, but her mother thought that a nice white cake with cream icing would be more appropriate for the occasion, much to the dismay of her daughter.

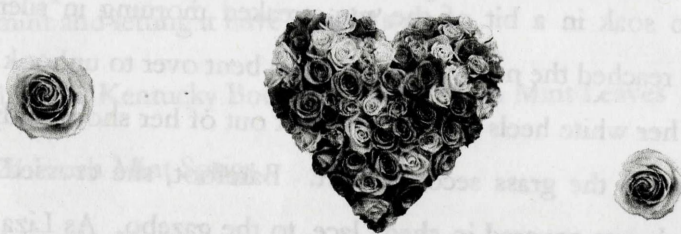
The cake took two entire days to prepare, but was truly picturesque. The top and sides were adorned with yellow buttercups, dark blue bells—brought up by Mary Ellen's aunt and uncle from Alabama—and lemon slices, painted a few times over with sugar crystals, by Mrs. Parker.

If there was one thing that Liza could say for Mrs. Parker: the woman knew how to frost a cake. She would hover over a single layer with a humungous, flat knife that she called her "wand"

in one hand, spreading the icing as she spun the Lazy Susan with the other. Her movements were speedy, but precise; before you knew it the cake would be done, and the frosting would be seamless.

Mrs. Parker would take a step back to admire her work with the “wand” still in hand and sigh. “Just like magic!” she’d say.

Liza’s eyes began to fill with tears as she stared at the layer cake, which sat on a large table, covered with linen and lace, in the middle of the Parker gazebo. Not only was the wedding not hers,



but a strange part of her felt as if she might lose Mary Ellen later that day to Richard—to marriage, really. In a few hours Mary Ellen was going to be whisked away in a hired car to start a new life in a different world; a world Liza knew nothing of.

Liza blinked away her tears before they could cascade down her cheeks. *The last thing I need is red eyes and spoiled rouge*, she thought. As she attempted to gather herself, Liza took a step toward the cake. Some of the buttercups had begun to brown around the edges on account of the early afternoon sun. Before Liza had even made her way downstairs that morning, she had heard Mrs. Parker warning Mr. Ed Parker that the flowers would wilt before the party if he continued to insist on putting the cake in he gazebo prior to his morning ride.

Ever since Liza and Mary Ellen were young, Mr. Parker would leave in the pastel hour before the sun came up to fox hunt. During the summer, the girls would sit on the porch swing after lunch and suck down watermelon wedges cut like smiles, and wait for him to come home. Liza remembered how the upstate forest would become especially still in the minutes before his return, and then—he would just appear. Liza and Mary Ellen would cheer him on as he rode across the front lawn with five or six limp foxes secured to his saddle, their tails floating behind like streamers. Mary Ellen had most certainly inherited her passion for life from her father; her mother was never able to understand her daughter's fascination with mud puddles and fire flies growing up. Mrs. Parker had always pushed Mary Ellen to spend more time learning to knit or cook, for that matter; while Mr. Parker urged his daughter to do the things that inspired her. By age ten he had taught Mary Ellen to play, to paint, and to believe in magic: Ed Parker was his daughter's hero.

Liza sighed. *It is beyond me how Mr. And Mrs. Parker have made it work all these years, being so different.* Liza's father had passed when she was only three. Growing up, she had pretended that Mr. Parker was not only Mary Ellen's father, but hers too. Never though had she wished that Mrs. Parker were her own. Since Liza had plumped, sometime around the fifth grade, genuinely kind words from Mary Ellen's mother had been few and far between. Thinking about it made Liza's chest swell with irritation.

And then, in a moment charged with rebellion, Liza ran her little finger along the side of Mrs. Parker's cake to gather a smidgen of frosting, long before she may have been able to stop herself.

She brought the grainy dollop to her nose and took a deep breath in. *Heavy cream, butter, sugar, and vanilla*, Liza thought. Thinking of how Mrs. Parker's face would've turned beet red with anger, had she have seen her, Liza laughed for the first time in a few hours, and sucked her finger like a small girl whose mother had secretly allowed her to have a beater covered in sweet batter.

Her bliss was interrupted, when she caught a quick glimpse of Mrs. Parker's boxy frame making her way across the yard from the corner of her eye. The woman's weight fell heavy on one foot, and then the other.

"Liza dear!" she called across the yard and then teased, "Don't you start with that cake—it's for later!"

Liza laughed out loud and nervously wiped her finger across the back of her dress. For no particular reason, Liza looked down, just before Mrs. Parker reached the gazebo, and realized that her small taste of the frosting had left a surprisingly large hole in the side of the cake.

She's going to kill me, Liza thought as Mrs. Parker climbed the wooden steps to where Liza was. In a panic, Liza stood in front of the blemish and leaned back a tad to hide what she had done. "Phew! It's nice to be out of that kitchen! Edward is driving me batty—running around with the damn hunting rifle, sticking his

fingers in my food. Such is life with a man in the house, Liza...I tell you."

"I can imagine," Liza said, not really knowing what to say. At that moment the two women both jumped on account of a large blast, undoubtedly from Ed's rifle, which came from the direction of the house.

"You couldn't possibly, darling," Mrs. Parker replied with her right hand dramatically pressed to her chest, "you couldn't possibly."

Liza rolled her eyes as Mrs. Parker turned away to fiddle with the back of her apron.

"What are you doing out here anyway? Shouldn't you be inside with Mary Ellen giggling about something?"

"I just came out to get a good look at your cake. It's beautiful."

"Yes, of course it is. I came out to check on the flowers, though. I was worrying about them in the sun."

Mrs. Parker stepped closer to the cake to admire her handiwork.

"And, of course, the buttercups are beginning to wilt!" she said, displeased. "You know, I told Ed this morning that it should've been moved out here closer to the party but did he listen? No. He still insists on fox hunting each and every morning. I'll tell you something Liza, that man hasn't brought a fox back from the hunt in five years—you'd think he did it just to make me crazy."

It's working, Liza thought. "I think the cake will be fine," Liza said as she watched Mrs. Parker dig into her apron.

"Scoot aside, dear. What are you doing leaning on that table anyway? The last thing we need now is the whole thing to come tumbling down."



Lovely, just lovely, Liza said to herself, *if I move now, she'll see what I've done.*

"Why don't you check the other side, Mrs. Parker? It's getting the most sun!"

"I've already looked at it—now shoo!"

Mrs. Parker motioned for Liza to move with her hands in the way people do to an unwanted pet in the kitchen.

Do something now or you're dead, Liza told herself.

Mrs. Parker stepped toward Liza, who put her hand behind her back and over the whole in the frosting; Mrs. Parker placed her hands on Liza's hips and gave her a polite shove. As Liza stepped back, she smoothed her hand over the frosting, and hoped the hole wouldn't be noticeable.

"Ahhh! *Look at this!*" Mrs. Parker exclaimed. The smear was, unfortunately, the first thing to catch her eye.

Liza again wiped her hand, which was now covered in cream frosting, across the back of her dark pink dress.

"What?! What's wrong?" Liza asked, playing along the best she could.

"That! *That is what's wrong!*" Mrs. Parker shouted, pointing at the side of the cake, "This is what happens when a man is in the kitchen while a woman is at work!"

Mrs. Parker pulled the "wand" from her apron and slowly ran it along the frosting.

"There!" Mrs. Parker exclaimed, after the cake had been fixed. "Can you believe that? Damn that man!"

Liza wanted to burst into uncontrollable laughter. In fact, it took everything within her not to. Mrs. Parker actually believed that *she* had missed the spot when Ed had been traipsing around her kitchen with his rifle.

"I'm going back inside, child. God knows what else I may have missed."



"I'll be right behind you," Liza replied—grinning from ear to ear—as she watched Mrs. Parker walk away.

Just as Liza thought she couldn't hold her laughter any longer, Mrs. Parker called out to her, a few steps from the gazebo.

"Liza? Check and see if I left the 'wand' on the table, will you?"

Liza turned to look behind her at the cake table, but saw nothing.

"Oh! Never mind, I've got it here!" Mrs. Parker said, after a few quiet seconds.

"All right then, good—see you inside," Liza replied, in disbelief of what had just happened.

Mrs. Parker nodded and, before making her way back across the yard, said, "Make it quick, darling. You've got something all over the back of that skirt you've got on. You should change it before you embarrass yourself!"



In-Class Fiction Exercise



...was twisted up in a field of rain. He had often wondered if she staged these dramatic nights in her head long before they happened. He could see her hunched over and sobbing, and waiting. Waiting for him to come find her. It wasn't going to happen.

What a bitch, he thought. After all this time- that was his constant Amy was still a damn old bitch. He just wanted her gone out of his life. DEAD, for all he cared, but for some reason he always helped her out.

"This is the last damn time, I swear it," he swore to himself.

"No more, Amy has to go, I'm gonna help her out just this one last time

"I'll be right behind you," Liza replied—gunning from car to car—as she watched Mrs. Parker walk away.

Just as Liza thought she couldn't hold her laughter any longer, Mrs. Parker called out to her, a few steps from the gazebo.

"Liza? Check and see if I left the 'wand' on the table, will you?"

Liza turned to look behind her at the cake table, but saw nothing.

"Oh! Never mind, I've got it here!" Mrs. Parker said, after a few quiet seconds.

"All right," Liza replied, in disbelief of what had just happened.

Mrs. Parker turned and, taking her arm, walked across the yard, and said, "Make it quick, darling. You've got something all over the back of that skirt you've got on. You should change it before you embarrass yourself!"



Fiction Exercise



Somewhere across town, he knew she was twisted up in a field of rain. He had often wondered if she staged these dramatic nights in her head long before they happened. He could see her hunched over and sobbing, and waiting. Waiting for him to come find her. It wasn't going to happen.

What a bitch, he thought. After all this time- that was his constant Amy was still a damn old bitch. He just wanted her gone out of his life. DEAD, for all he cared, but for some reason he always helped her out.

"This is the last damn time, I swear it," he swore to himself.

"No more, Amy has to go, I'm gonna help her out just this one last time

"But how can Amy go?"

"I'll dropkick her if she doesn't get out. Cant you just put her on a leash or some shit."

"How can you say that? That is terrible Lenny! Amy and I should get rid of you!" now becoming red with rage and whiskey.

He tried to think of ways to calm her down. He tried to think of a day this bitch would leave him alone. But trying to hard he stopped thinking. Now all he could do was play her little game. She would come over every night at 5:00 on the dot and knock on his front door. "Go away" he would always say.

"I wanna play" she would yell. "I'm too old to play with you, I'm not fun, I'm an old man."

And then she'd sit- sometimes for two- three hours and wait. Always so damn patient. Content just waiting for someone to come and save her. Nothing has ever gotten old faster- than her presence. She is at my doorstep and in my head- I cant quite evict her from either, Amy. How many people had told her "no"? The trouble is that someone along the line had to have said "alright".

Then suddenly I had a moment of clarity and realized "What the hell was I thinking?" I didn't care about her well-being I just wanted her gone. I figured the next time anyone was ever going to see this bitch she'd be wearing a toe tag and stretched out on a slab at the morgue. So I got a rope ready, some duct tape, my ball-pinging hammer and laid in wait.

She came out just in time so I tackled her and duct taped her to the wall.

Her eyes shimmered making me almost feel guilty. Until I realized her left hand was free and she grabbed the ball pinging hammer and struck my left ear.

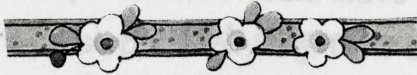
"you fucking bitch!" I yelled now bleeding as uncontrollably as she was laughing.



"If you wanted me to leave all you had to do was ask." She said and gracefully walked out the door.

Bleeding and alone it was the first time I had ever seen any grace in that bitch.

Credits



The Coney Timeline was borrowed from:

<http://naid.sppsr.ucla.edu/coneyisland/>

For more information on Coney Island's
History, please visit their informative site.

Notes



