

Everything You Want

Barbara Shoup



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One

Friday night, party time at Indiana University, and I'm holed up in the psych lab with Freud—my assigned goose in an experiment we're doing in my Psych 101 class. I know. What about rats? Or guinea pigs. That's what *I* figured Psych 101 would be about. But I had to get this weird professor who has a thing for the territorial behavior of geese, which as far as I can tell is to try to kill anyone who gets near them. Hardly endearing: Freud hisses every time he sees me. Right now he's staring at me with his beady little red eyes, like why don't you just leave me *alone*? But I can't help feeling sorry for a fellow living being caught in the wrong place, so even though he doesn't seem to like me all that much, I've taken to hanging out at the lab, where I just sit by his cage and keep him company. I read, or write in my journal—complaints, mostly, about how much I hate college, and nostalgic crap about better days. But I keep a lab book open beside me, and if the door opens and someone comes in, I put it on top of my journal, so it looks like I'm taking down data. It's better than hanging out alone in my dorm room. Or worse, hanging out not-alone in my dorm room with my roommate, Tiffany, and her boyfriend, Matt, where I am constantly reminded of my own boyfriendless, virginal state.

Which leads, every time, to thinking about Josh Morgan—*never* a good thing to do. What's he doing right now? Who's he with? Did he see me coming up the hall toward the elevator in Ballantine Hall the other day, or did he just turn and head for the stairs because he was tired of waiting for it to come? What if, somehow, we'd ended up on the elevator together, by mistake? Would he have said something? Would I have?

Give it up, I tell myself. It's over. Ha. Like it ever was.

Which is how I've justified just not mentioning to Tiffany that Josh happens to be a pledge in Matt's fraternity. God. Just the thought of her in possession of that piece of information makes me go *la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la* inside my head.

"Six days till Mom comes to get me next weekend," I say to Freud. "One hundred forty-four hours—give or take a few—and I'll be at home, in my own

room.”

As if he cares.

I stay till nine, when I’m sure Tiff and Matt will have gone out for pizza—or whatever it is they do when they’re not making out in our room. The dorm is dead, just us dateless wonders and a few geeks who like staying in to study on Friday night. I close the door behind me and climb up to the top bunk. Actually, it’s kind of nice lying there in the dark. The smell of home on my pillow. Strains of all the different kinds of music people are listening to blending to make their own strange song.

I’m done with Freud, I tell myself. It’s ridiculous to have a relationship with a goose. It’s a good thing that Thursday will be the wrap-up of our experiment. He’ll be sent out to the country, where he can terrorize cows and pigs for a change. I won’t have to feel responsible for him anymore.

Then Thursday comes and, leaving class, I overhear Professor Harmon tell someone they’re going to kill all the geese we used in the experiment. The geese are wrecked, he says. They can’t be used in the same experiment again.

Even if I hadn’t spent all those lonely evenings in Freud’s company, I think I’d be freaked out. I mean, Jeez. It’s one thing to annoy a bunch of geese so some college students can learn something they could just as easily have learned by reading a book. But to kill them because they can’t be used for the same experiment again? That’s not right.

So I wait until everyone’s gone and go up to him. “You have to *kill* them?” I ask.

“Yes,” he says, slipping his lecture notes into his backpack.

“That’s terrible,” I say. “Can’t you take them to a farm, or something like that?”

“Nobody wants geese,” he says. “They’re mean, as we have just so aptly proven.”

“But what will you do? I mean, how do you kill them? And *then* what?”

“Lethal injection.” He hoists his pack over his shoulder. “Then we incinerate them. But if you want *your* goose, Miss Hammond, you’re welcome to it. If you can take it now.”

Freud squawks plaintively. Now, suddenly, he wants to be my friend.

I could take him to the canal near our house in Indianapolis, I think. There are plenty of mean geese there already; he'd feel right at home. I could take him when Mom picks me up tomorrow. The tricky part would be explaining my plan to her in the split second between the time she sees the goose and the time she goes ballistic.

"Miss Hammond? I have a student waiting in my office."

"Could I borrow a cage?" I ask. "I'll bring it back Monday morning. I promise."

He nods wearily.

"Okay, then. I'll take him."

I'm too embarrassed to get on the bus with Freud, so I lug the cage across campus. It's the end of October, a beautiful day, leaves drifting down, fluorescent against the blue sky, but I shuffle along, head down, praying I won't run into anyone I know—especially not Josh and that Heather-type blond girl I've seen him with lately. On a campus with thousands of people on it, you'd think the odds of my even catching a glimpse of him would be pretty low; but I see him all the time. Not that he sees me all that often. I've got some kind of radar where he's concerned and usually manage to take a quick turn down an alternate path or step into a classroom building before I come into his view. When necessary, I skulk into the woods, like a spy. Carrying Freud, though, this could be difficult, and I am deeply relieved to get to the dorm without having to resort to such tactics.

I sneak up the back stairs, sprint for my room. The door's locked, which probably means Matt's there. So I knock before opening it and, sure enough, there's the usual clunk: Matt leaping from bed to chair.

"It's me, Emma. I forgot my key."

"Coming," Tiffany warbles.

Waiting for her to get decent, I remind myself that although Tiffany's a ditz and we have zip in common, she is truly nice. A perky, small-town girl, her idea of paradise is to drive up to Indianapolis and spend the whole day at Castleton Mall, shopping at The Limited and stocking up on cheery little items at the Hallmark store: cute knickknacks and posters with those floaty, pastel, lightbulb-looking figures spouting words to live by like "Today Is the First Day of the Rest

of Your Life.”

Her side of our room is full of that shit, which makes for a kind of schizophrenic environment. On my side there’s a framed photo of the meadow outside our ski house in Michigan just after a snowstorm, and a glass dish of Petoskey stones I collected on countless beach walks at Sleeping Bear Dunes. There’s a Harley-Davidson poster with a picture of a Sturgis just like my dad’s, and a Steamboat Springs poster with a girl riding horseback in the snow, a pair of skis balanced on one shoulder. And this other, incredible poster I bought at the Metropolitan Museum when I went to visit my sister, Julie, in New York. It’s of this gorgeous, *built* sculptor whose marble figure of a woman is coming to life. It kills me, that painting. The sculptor’s muscles, the marble woman pinking beneath his fingers. The day I got to school, I unrolled it to put it up. Tiffany took one look at it and said, “Whoa! He is *buff!*”

Now she opens the door, one hand smoothing her disheveled hair. At the sight of the goose, she gives a little scream and both hands fly to her mouth to stifle it.

“It’s my psych goose, Freud—” I begin.

Tiffany pulls me inside and closes the door. “Emma, we’re not supposed to have animals in here. It’s against the rules.”

“He’s not an animal. He’s poultry,” I say.

Matt snorts.

“Anyway, I have no choice,” I go on. “If I hadn’t taken him today, they were going to kill him. But don’t worry. I’m going home tomorrow and I’m taking him with me. If we get busted before then, I’ll say I kept him here against your wishes. Okay?”

Tiff rolls her eyes, but doesn’t argue. She’s used to my weirdness by now. Plus, she can hardly complain if I have a guest in our room for one night when she and Matt have it to themselves for a love-fest nearly every weekend. In fact, it’s her idea to put the cage in the closet with her afghan over it, which makes Freud fall asleep and stay asleep till morning.

When I wake up, I realize I should feed him. But what do geese eat? All I know is that when Mom took Jules and me to feed the ducks along the canal when we were little, we fed them breadcrumbs. So I go down to the cafeteria and get some nasty white bread, which I ball up into bite-size pieces. Then I fill his

water dish, put the afghan over the cage again, and head for class, hoping he'll go undetected until it's time for me to leave. My plan is to be waiting for Mom in the dorm lobby, the cage out of sight, so I can explain about Freud before she actually sees him.

But a half-hour earlier than I expect her, I hear a knock on my door. When I open it, both she and Dad are standing there. They might be college students themselves, dressed the way they are, in Levi's and jeans jackets. Dad's got on a Harley baseball cap. Mom's blond hair is short and spiky, and she's wearing a tie-dye T-shirt with a big peace sign on it.

Their expressions are *quite* parental, however.

Okay, the room smells a little ripe. Freud isn't house-trained. And he gives one of his nasty squawks when he sees them, then hisses.

"Emma," Mom says. That's all. But it's a tone of voice I know from my childhood.

I try to explain. "It's my psych goose. They're going to kill all the other geese we used in the experiment. My God, they give them some lethal injection, like prisoners on death row! Then they incinerate them."

"Who?" Dad says. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"My psych professor," I say. "He told us they were going to kill the geese. The others could be dead right this second, for all I know."

Mom sits down on Tiffany's desk chair, as far away from Freud as she can get.

"I'm not planning on *keeping* him," I say. "Do you think I'm totally out of my mind?"

Silence.

"I have a perfectly logical plan. I'm going to take him to live down on the canal. We're giving him a ride, that's all."

"Emma, it smells terrible," Mom says.

Dad says, "Look. The goddamn thing is shitting even as we speak. We're going to put it in the car with us?"

"An hour," I say. "And we can crack the windows, okay? What do you want me to do, take him back over to the lab and let him be murdered?"

He opens his mouth to say yes, then closes it. He shakes his head, picks up my duffel bag, and starts down the hallway. Mom picks up the laundry basket full of

dirty clothes, and follows him. I hoist my pack on my shoulder, pick up Freud's cage, and join the parade.

"Behave," I mutter. "I got your ass off death row."

"Awwwk," he says, and waggles his snaky red tongue.

It's a quiet ride home. When we finally get there, I go inside only long enough to dump my stuff in my room; then I walk down the street toward the canal, carrying Freud in his cage. There's an old hollowed-out tree I have in mind, a place near where Mom used to take Jules and me to feed the ducks when we were little. We stayed clear of it then, because the geese that lived in it squawked and pecked at anyone who came too close.

I approach cautiously, opening the door of Freud's cage and setting it down at a distance from the tree, which turns out to be a good idea because the two geese standing near the hollowed-out tree aren't about to cut Freud any slack for being one of their own species. They stand perfectly still and stare at him menacingly with their ugly little red eyes. He stares back—then in a sudden move that scares the crap out of me, flies out of the cage toward them, squawking and hissing.

I pick up the cage, back away. "You guys work it out," I say. I get halfway down the block, extremely grateful for having brought this absurd episode of my life to a close, and then glance back to see that Freud is waddling after me. I try again. And again. Each time, he follows me home, squawking like a wronged child.

If Josh was with me, we'd think this was hilarious—that is, the Josh I used to know. We'd think up some wild scenario about liberating the goose, like when we convinced his little cousin, who he babysat for sometimes, that her goldfish Mary Anne was only sick, not dead, and if we brought it to the canal and let it go its mom would find it and make it better. I can still see the three of us walking up the street, Josh carrying the fishbowl with the dead fish floating on the surface of the water. "Tell her goodbye, nice knowing you," he said to Allison, when we got to the bridge.

Alone, all I can think to do is put Freud back in the cage, drive him a mile or so up the canal path, and abandon him there instead. At home, I retire to my room pleading exhaustion, and collapse on my bed. Through the window, I can see the swing Dad made and hung from the maple tree before I was born. I can

see the playhouse Mom bought for Jules and me when she got her first teaching job. She put up blue-and-white-checked wallpaper inside, made calico curtains for the windows, and bought us two little wicker chairs. We never played house in it, though. We used it for secret projects and reading, or we gave plays, using the little front porch as a stage. Sometimes we played Nancy Drew in it, solving neighborhood mysteries. Jules, of course, was always Nancy Drew. I was Beth, George, Ned Nickerson, Hannah Gruen—or a criminal, whichever Jules decided. Later, when Jules abandoned me for high school, I made the playhouse into Wonder Woman’s lair. I’d sit out there for hours at a time, all alone, wearing the red patent leather go-go boots Mom had found at a garage sale and a pair of Dad’s old yellow terry cloth wristbands, my lasso at the ready, patiently waiting for the forces of evil to appear so that I could lay them flat.

Now it seems to me that I have no hope of controlling *anything*. A dangerous, counterproductive thought, which I allow to spiral into a big fat pity party of one, until Mom looks in to ask if I want to go out to dinner with them.

“No, thanks,” I say. “I’ll just have a frozen pizza or something. I’ve got a paper on *The Canterbury Tales* due Wednesday, and I don’t even have a first draft.”

She looks skeptical, but doesn’t press me.

As soon as I hear the door close behind them, I go back to Mom’s studio and just stand there in the dark, breathing in the sharp scents of paint and turpentine, mixed with the scent of dried roses wafting up from the glass bowl of potpourri that sits on a table—and also some indefinable scent, which is us, our house, our belongings. It’s my favorite place in our house. A long, narrow room, its inner brick wall was once the house’s outer perimeter, its two entries once windows onto the backyard. It was added on when I was two, as a family room; but I have only the vaguest memories of the time before Mom made it her own. It’s perfect as a painter’s studio: nearly all windows, most with a northern exposure. In one corner, there’s a desk always piled high with school work, and above it a big bulletin board covered with drawings, postcards, buttons, quotes—mostly things that her high school art students have given her over the years. In the other corner, there’s a couch and an easy chair; a cozy space for sketching, reading, or dreaming.

I don't even turn on a light, just sink into the couch and close my eyes, wishing I could stay here in this place where everything is so familiar. Not go back to school, not go anyplace.

No.

What I *really* want is to be my six-year-old self, coloring quietly in this corner while Mom works. To show her my picture when we're both through, to have her total attention while I tell her the story of what it's about and feel the warmth of her delight in what I made.

Or to be fourteen again, bursting into the studio after raiding the kitchen with Josh, both of us flopping onto the couch where I sit now, making Mom laugh with some story about what happened at school or at cross-country practice.

"Imagine yourself on a modern pilgrimage," is the topic of the paper I actually do have to write. "To what sacred place would you travel?" the assignment sheet asks. "Why? With whom? What might you experience along the way? What relic might you bring back? How might the experience change you?"

It would be dorky and way too revealing to write about a pilgrimage to my own childhood, though it's the pilgrimage I'd most like to make—Mom, Dad, and Jules traveling with me. We'd stop at the places and moments we loved, all the sad, confused layers of myself peeling away like onion skin until my own small, true self was revealed. That's what I would carry back with me, if I could: the person I was before I even knew Josh Morgan. I'd let her tell me what I should do about—everything.

Instead, I think up something clever about myself as a New-Age Wife of Bath. It's boring, though. My eyes keep closing. Then suddenly it's morning. Somehow I've ended up in my own bed, and there's Dad standing in the doorway of my room, glowering.

"Emma," he says. "That goddamn goose is back. It was in the driveway when I went out to get the paper a few minutes ago. You'd better get up and do something about it."

Two

Believe me, I try. But no matter where I take Freud along the canal path, he finds his way back to our yard. He's still there when I leave to go back to school on Sunday afternoon. Monday, Mom calls the Humane Society, the zoo, two petting farms, and a liberal grade school that promotes hands-on experiences with pets. No dice. Then one of the neighborhood dogs goes after him and she has to put him in the garage.

Dad's garage, I should say. His haven. A place where thousands of dollars of tools are fanned out in the drawers of shiny red mechanics' toolboxes, where the shelves are lined three-deep in STP, where there's a CD player and cable TV. Where Dad's Harley sits at the ready, waxed and gleaming, and a bulletin board displays snapshots of every car he's owned since he was sixteen. He is not pleased when he gets home and finds Freud there.

"The dog was about to kill him," Mom says.

"So what?" Dad shrugs. "Natural selection."

I hear this and more from Mom when I make the mistake of calling home on Thursday. Then on Sunday around noon, while studying, I glance up and there she is standing in my doorway.

Shit. She's bringing Freud back and I'm going to have to figure out what to do with him—that's my first thought. Then, I swear, my heart stops. Mom wouldn't just *appear* like this, no matter how mad she is about the goose. Something awful must have happened, too awful to tell me on the telephone. But then she says, "Emma, your dad's waiting in the car. Come on. Hurry! We have something wonderful to tell you."

So I grab my jacket and follow her, trying to decide whether to be relieved that no one's dead or annoyed at Mom for being so mysterious. Not to mention the two of them showing up, uninvited, when I'd decided to gut out the weekend alone.

But I have to laugh when I see Dad jamming to the Rolling Stones in the car, the stereo up full blast. He turns it down—slightly—when I get in. "Anything you've been wanting lately? Your mom and I were just wondering."

“Sure,” I say. “New skis, a Jeep, a puppy. A body transplant, a boyfriend. Like you drove all the way down here to find out about that.”

He grins. “Actually, we did. The skis, the Jeep—no problem.”

“Uh-huh, yeah. Why is that?”

“Because we’re millionaires,” he says. “Or we will be first thing tomorrow.”

“I’m so sure,” I say. “Come on, really. What are you doing here?”

Mom turns around, and you’d think from the look on her face that the angel Gabriel had just appeared before her. “Emma,” she says, “*Emma*. Oh my *God*. We won LOTTO CASH! The big jackpot: fifty million dollars.”

We’re heading for the airport in Indianapolis to pick up Jules before I can stop screaming and calm down enough for Mom to say, “We don’t actually get fifty million dollars, Emma. There’s taxes. Then you choose a lump sum, or ... ” But Dad interrupts her to tell me the story.

“Friday morning,” Dad says. “I’m walking over to my office from the parking garage with a guy I know, bitching about the goose, and we stop at the newsstand in the lobby so he can buy a *New York Times*. With the change, he gets a couple of LOTTO CASH tickets. ‘Big jackpot this week,’ he says to me. ‘You ought to get a few. Or are you figuring on the goose to stop shitting and lay the golden egg?’ And I think, what the hell. G-O-L-D-E-N. Six letters. So I number the letters of the alphabet, match them up, and buy a ticket.”

“So he goes out to get the paper this morning,” Mom interrupts. “And suddenly he starts yelling and I think, if he says *one more* word to me about that damn goose...”

“I told you,” Dad says, “I take back everything I said about the goose. I love that fucking goose. He’s my man!”

Mom laughs hysterically.

“Hel-*lo*,” I say. “And then?”

“Oh. Well, he was yelling because we *won*,” Mom says. “He wanted me to bring him the LOTTO CASH ticket to be absolutely sure. I’m like, *what* LOTTO CASH ticket? So he gives me the paper and says, ‘Stay right there,’ and gets the ticket—so I can read the numbers out loud. So he can compare them. You should’ve seen him, Emma. Honest to God, Mr. Hard-Nosed Lawyer. I thought he was going to have a heart attack.”

“Hey,” Dad says.

“You were totally freaked out.”

“I was not freaked out. I was happy.”

“Ha,” Mom says. “Look at you right now.”

“What?”

She glances pointedly at the buttoned pocket on his denim shirt, which he touches about every two seconds, then throws up her hands as if in surrender. “Oh. It’s *not* the LOTTO CASH ticket you keep checking on, it’s a compulsive patriotic gesture—” She places her hand over her own heart and starts saying the Pledge of Allegiance.

“It’s a hell of a lot of money,” Dad says.

Rather testily, it seems to me.

To avoid further discussion of this matter, I ask, “What about Freud? Are you building him a little dream house? Giving him his own credit card?”

“He’s gone!” Mom says. “Emma, it’s the weirdest thing. I let him out of the garage yesterday morning and he walked straight down the driveway, turned left, and headed for the canal. Like he’d stayed for the sole purpose of driving your dad crazy enough to buy that LOTTO CASH ticket, and now—” She waves her hand to finish the thought.

“I have to admit that I was ready to kill you for bringing that goose home,” she goes on. “But now it’s clear to me that you did it because you are a kind and good person. An exemplary person! Our winning LOTTO CASH is clearly a reward from the cosmos for having raised you so well.”

I just smile—a serene, cosmic smile. Wait till Jules finds out, I think. Not only are we fabulously rich, but I’m one-up on her big time. Maybe for life.

Not that I don’t love my sister. I do. It’s just that she does everything right. She was valedictorian of her high school class, graduated *magna cum laude* from college, and now she’s living in New York trying to make it in musical theater. She’ll probably succeed at that, too. She’s a great dancer—and she’s beautiful: tiny, with curly blond hair and blue eyes. Okay, she’s also nice. And really quite amusing.

When she gets off the plane later that afternoon, I ask, “How was your flight?”

“Horrible,” she says. “Turbulence. Jesus! It was like being on the Beast at

King's Island. For two hours. No lie! And all I could think was, oh *perfect*, the plane crashes when I'm on my way home because Dad won fifty million dollars, and I'll never get to spend a single cent."

When we get to the car, where Mom and Dad are waiting, her first words are "Well, when do we shop?"

But it's nearly five o'clock—and Sunday, so the mall will be closing at six. There's nothing to do but spend the next sixteen hours in a state of agitation, waiting to be rich. Dad disappears into his garage to commune with his automotive equipment. Mom calls in sick on the substitute hotline, then goes to her studio to make lesson plans to drop off at school early the next morning.

Jules and I watch *Singin' in the Rain*, the old videotape of it she's had since she was a freshman in high school. She takes it everywhere with her. Instant Valium, she calls it. She swears it's impossible to watch that movie and stay anxious about *anything*.

It's a nice fantasy: people singing and dancing their way to romance. Mainly, though, I like the way it always makes Jules so happy. Now, like always, she jumps up and does the rain dance with Gene Kelly, tipping an imaginary umbrella, belting out the words to the song.

When it's over, she collapses on the couch, grinning. "Suppose I could get Dad to give me the money to remake this movie?" she asks. "Starring *me*?"

We get giddy, trying to one-up each other casting the male lead. Matthew Broderick, Brad Pitt. George Clooney, why not? She hits the rewind button and we watch Gene Kelly dance backwards to the beginning of the movie.

"It's just so weird to think we *could* remake a movie if we felt like it," she says.

"Or buy a Lear Jet. Or a Rembrandt."

"Who's buying a Rembrandt?" Mom asks, carrying in two greasy pizza boxes and setting them on the coffee table.

"We're just fantasizing," I say.

She smiles. "Remember how you guys used to play 'Rich' when you were little? I'd save up all the magazines and catalogues and you'd cut out pictures of everything you wanted, making up stories."

"Mine would always be clothes and makeup," Jules says. "Hotels and

swimming pools. Pink convertibles and diamond bracelets.” She wrinkles her nose. “Ugh. Do you think I was overly influenced by Barbie? Like, permanently damaged?”

“Clearly terminal,” I say.

Jules raises an eyebrow. “Well, *you* had a death wish,” she says. “As far as I could tell, everything you wanted was likely to kill you. Motorcycles, skis, speed boats.”

“Dogs,” I say. “I always put a trusty dog in my adventures. And, Mom, remember the time we cut up the art catalogues and made our own museum?”

“I *do*,” she says. “I believe we had a Monet—that Japanese bridge with wisteria; Matisse’s red room. And the Chagall with the man and woman lifting off in a kiss.” She shook her head, bemused. “We were so greedy with that imaginary money, weren’t we? But right now just the prospect of new sable brushes and all the cobalt blue my heart desires seems like absolute heaven to me—which pretty much shows I’m nowhere near getting my head around the concept of *really* being rich.”

“Just do your best, Mom,” I say. “That’s all anyone ever expects of you.”

She bonks me on the head with a stack of paper plates. Then she goes to the back door and yells for Dad, who comes in looking more, rather than less, agitated than he did earlier.

“I keep thinking about that little trailer we lived in when we first got married,” he says to her. “How we’d keep the furnace on low to save money and every fucking night the back door would fly open and it would snow right on our bed.”

Said trailer was where they’d ended up because Mom got pregnant with Jules while they were still in college. There is this rather hilarious—but exceedingly long—story about the considerable trauma surrounding their wedding.

I look at Jules, who rolls her eyes. She sees it, too: Mom and Dad looking moony, the way they always do when they talk about that time. They’re on the brink of launching into telling the whole story right from the start: how Mom was sitting at a table in the Commons the first day she arrived on campus (the very campus where I’m now a miserable freshman) and Dad walked through the revolving door, took one look at her and, bam, fell in love.

One of us has to break the spell or we’ll be here all night, the two of them

reminiscing, when what we need to do is think about the future. So I say in my firmest voice, “Dad. You should be thinking about Corvettes.”

He grins. “As a matter of fact, I am—1962, 327, 4-speed. Red and white, with a red leather interior. Might take a while to find one in mint condition. Meanwhile, maybe I’ll pick up a new one. Can’t have too many Corvettes.”

“So true,” I say. “Too much of a good thing is—*not*.”

That night, waiting to be rich, we are giddy, dreaming.

Dad will have his Corvettes; Mom, her sable brushes and cobalt blue; Jules, tickets—really good ones—to every single Broadway show she wants to see. I’ll ski every ski resort in the world. Chase snow, like surfers chase surf. Maybe I’ll start in that cool place in Switzerland where they filmed the James Bond movie—the one with Roger Moore, where he seduces the teenaged ice skater and gets hounded by Nordic biathletes. I’ll practice my French in St. Moritz, where all the movie stars go. Get some of those really expensive sunglasses and people will probably think I’m—*someone*.

I can’t sleep that night, running it all through my mind. I feel half-sick with anticipation, like I used to feel on Christmas Eve when I was a kid. At three o’clock, I creep out to the kitchen to scavenge some leftover pizza, and there are Mom, Dad, and Jules sitting at the table, drinking coffee, looking as bug-eyed as I feel.

“Yo!” says Dad.

Mom smiles, weakly.

Jules sighs. She’s wearing these idiotic flannel pajamas that have little pink poodles with wings and haloes all over them. Her hair is sticking up every which way; there are dark circles beneath her eyes—which only make them look bigger. God. Even when she looks bad, she looks adorable.

I strike a pose, play a little air guitar, and sing a few bars of “Gimme Some Money.” My favorite song from *This Is Spinal Tap*.

Nobody laughs.

“Elvis used to hire out a whole bowling alley or a movie theater when he couldn’t sleep,” I say. “He’d call up the Memphis Mafia and get them all out of bed and make them come over and bowl with him. Or whatever.”

Nothing.

“Once, in the middle of the night, he jetted from Memphis to Denver in his private plane because he got hungry for a certain kind of peanut butter.”

“Thank you so much for sharing,” Jules says. Then she gives me that look. The one that says, “Please shut up now.”

So I do. I get my piece of pizza and pop the tab on a Diet Coke, which sounds like a little explosion. I slump into the empty chair: mine. Crazy, how we go to our regular places at the table no matter what. We’d all probably go right to them if a crazed killer broke in and waved us into the kitchen with a loaded gun.

I do not share this observation with my family. Clearly, they are in no mood for conversation, no matter how witty and observant. You’d think this would annoy me. Instead, this weird, almost scary happiness floods all through me. Not because we’re about to be rich. Because here we are, all of us together around the kitchen table, the way we used to be.

Three

We're waiting at the door of the lottery office when a man comes to unlock it, at exactly eight o'clock. He doesn't say a word, just waves us in. I suppose we're not the first dazed people he's ever seen at opening time on a Monday morning.

Dad unbuttons his shirt pocket, takes the ticket out. "I believe this is a winner," he says.

The man, Bob-Something, smiles then, and leads us to a room with ugly plastic chairs and a television blaring *Good Morning America*. He takes the ticket from Dad, saying we can wait here till it's verified.

"Oh, God," Mom whispers the second he's gone. "Counterfeit lottery tickets. I never even thought about that."

"There's nothing wrong with the ticket," Dad says.

"Yeah, well, what if that Bob guy doesn't even work here?" I say, just to mix things up a little. "What if he's heading out the back door right now, even as we speak?"

"Ha, ha," Jules says.

Mom, Dad, and Jules sit across from us, their hands in their laps, mute as crash test dummies. Above them are photos of LOTTO CASH winners. There's a young, earnest couple, a little boy with a terrible bowl haircut standing between them. A church lady, dressed in a flowered dress with a Peter Pan collar, her hair swept up and sprayed into a silver pompadour. One big fat guy, in bib overalls, looks like he just fed the pigs and drove in straight from the farm.

What are they all doing right now, I wonder?

"Mr. Hammond?"

Bob gestures us into his office, where he confirms that the ticket is valid and explains the options. Dad can take the whole amount paid out annually over twenty years, or a lump sum of twenty-five million dollars now—minus thirty percent in taxes in either case.

"Lump sum," Dad says. "Bring it on!"

"You got it," Bob replies.

He leaves the office and returns in about five minutes with a huge cardboard

replica of a check. “Mac Hammond” is written after “Pay to,” and on the next line, “Fifty Million Dollars.” There’s a PR guy, Clark, who takes a picture of Bob handing Dad the actual check for \$17,500,000 with me, Mom, and Jules holding the big fake check in the background. Then he interviews Dad with a video camera rolling, probably for the TV news.

“Any plans, sir?” he asks. “Will you be quitting your job?”

“Are you kidding?” Dad says. “Anybody who wins fifty million dollars and keeps working has got to be crazy!”

Everyone laughs, except Mom, who still looks stunned.

We go from the lottery office to the bank, where Dad has a cashier’s check cut for a million dollars to give to his father. He arranges for ten new hundred-dollar bills to be delivered to the woman at the newsstand who sold him the ticket, and, on his banker’s advice, puts the rest of the money in a money market fund until he figures out what he wants to do with it. Then he calls his secretary at the law firm from his cell phone.

“Janet?” he says. “Yeah, it’s me. Listen, I’m not coming in today. I’m calling in rich.” He grins at us. “Nope,” he said. “Not sick. Rich. R-I-C-H. I’m rich. That’s why I won’t be there.” He tells her about winning LOTTO CASH.

“I’ve got her on the clock,” he says, hanging up. “Janet’s better than instant messaging. Two seconds from now every single person at Reynolds, Nash, Archer, and Boyd is going to want to be my best friend.” He smiles like a Cheshire cat. “Okay, let’s go tell Dutch the news.”

“Oh boy,” Mom says. “Get ready.”

I know exactly what she means. Gramps is—well, *himself*. Nothing like you’d think an old guy would be. He wears his silver hair a little long, over his collar. He wears jeans and cowboy boots everywhere he goes. He loves to dance, loves to ski.

He has a Harley, too—but not like Dad’s sleek black Sturgis. His is a big touring bike, turquoise, with white saddlebags decorated with silver and fringe. It’s so loud you can hear the engine two blocks away, and, when I was little, I’d listen for him coming and run out to wait in the yard, jumping up and down with excitement until he roared up. When he climbed off the bike, knelt down in the grass, and put his arms around me, he smelled like leather and sunshine.

He lives across town, in the little box of a house Dad grew up in. He didn't change it a bit after Grandma died, though the curtains and slipcovers are faded now and her antiques are dusty in the places Gramps' cleaning tool of choice, a feather duster, doesn't reach. He spends most of his time in the garage, anyway—a wreck of a place, with tools strewn everywhere and old file cabinets full of stuff he's never gotten around to throwing away.

That's where he is when we pull up, coffee mug in hand, contemplating a greasy engine part on his workbench. His face lights up at the sight of us.

"What's up?" he says—yells, really. He has the loudest voice of anyone I know. He's hard of hearing, and I guess he thinks everyone else is, too.

Dad gets out and gives him a bear hug. "Got something for you, buddy."

"What's that?"

Dad grins and hands him the check.

Gramps looks at it, puzzled. "What the—?"

"It's yours," Dad says. "No shit. I won LOTTO CASH."

"My ass," Gramps says. "Is this some kind of joke? What the hell's going on here?"

"No joke, Gramps. " I say. "They came and dragged me away from school yesterday when they found out. Jules came all the way from New York. We cashed in the ticket this morning and came straight here from the bank."

Gramps looks at Mom, who never plays jokes on anyone.

"Well, goddamn," he says when she nods yes. "Goddamn. How much?"

"Fifty million bucks," Dad says. "So start getting your bike in shape. As soon as the good weather comes, we're heading west. And you can go ahead and squander my inheritance, okay? Dad? Dutch?"

"Goddamn. *Goddamn!*" Gramps says, over and over. "I always said you were smart," he finally says. "I always told your mom you'd be a rich man some day." As proud as if Dad's winning LOTTO CASH is a personal accomplishment.

The mall is next on our agenda. Right off, Mom stops to admire a beautiful little Persian rug displayed in a store window, then marches in and buys it for her studio without a second thought. At the Gap, she hands me outfit after outfit. "Here, try this. Try that," she says, not even looking at the price tags. At Ann Taylor, Jules finds a black miniskirt she loves, but can't decide on a sweater to

go with it. She lays out three: more than a hundred dollars each. Dad says, “Get ’em all.”

Victoria’s Secret, the Body Shop, Banana Republic. I feel like a housewife who’s won one of those shopping contests—the kind where you get to run up and down the aisles of a supermarket throwing as many T-bone steaks and frozen turkeys and cans of jalapeño dip into your cart as you can until a buzzer tells you to stop. Only it’s clothes and bubble bath and CDs we’re picking out. And there’s no buzzer; we just have to quit in time to get Jules to the airport for her flight back to New York.

“Okay, I want you to start looking for a decent apartment,” Dad says when we drop her off. “Preferably one without rodents.” He hands her a fistful of hundred dollar bills. “And here, see a show. Eat. Whatever.”

“*Dad*,” she says, then gives him a quick, fierce hug.

We watch her head down the concourse, pulling the new suitcase she bought for all her new stuff. An hour and a half later, I’m heading back to school in a fabulous yellow Jeep Wrangler, stereo blaring, the credit card Dad gave me in my new Coach wallet, still trying to comprehend that from now on, I can have everything I want. Do whatever I want to do. All fall I’ve been telling myself: college is a ticket to real life. Suck it up. And I have. But I don’t need a ticket to real life anymore. I’m rich! I have a lifetime pass.

I feel this huge weight lift from me. I can get the hell out of this place, I think. Never see fucking Josh Morgan *again*. I could drive right past the IU/Bloomington exit right now—take the first road west and stay on it until I hit the Rockies, where I’m always happy. Up in the mountains, skiing, I feel lean and quick and pure. I could rent a little cabin near Steamboat Springs, be just like that girl in my favorite poster, riding my horse through knee-deep snow, carrying my skis balanced on one shoulder. Boys might even be different in a place like that. They might like a girl who can beat them racing, someone who can take care of herself and won’t nag them about stupid shit all the time.

Then a nagging voice inside my head reminds me that *I* didn’t win LOTTO CASH. The money belongs to my parents. *And if you start something, finish it*, the voice adds for good measure.

Get a grip, I tell myself. Money or no money, I can’t just quit in the middle of

the semester. Mom and Dad are never going to let me get away with that. Plus, it's an idiotic idea to run away to Colorado just so I won't have to see Josh. Like that would make me forget him. So I exit with a sigh, drive to my dorm, and drag myself up three flights of stairs, carrying the two shopping bags full of all the stuff I bought at the mall.

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