

She'd noticed immediately: he'd had a shower. Instantly she'd known why. And she'd known that she'd driven him to it. Reading too much, thinking too much, trying to say to someone, *anyone*: Please notice this! Already our groundwater is tainted, laced now not only with arsenic but with countless other toxins, all leaching down from another Schafer construction site. And when those houses are occupied, it will be far worse. Every time it rains, pesticides from those two- and three-acre, weed-free lawns will seep down to Nisky Creek, to the river, and make their way into Delaware Bay. Then everyone will wonder why so many people have

cancer, and why the doctors can't just *do* something about it. Because God forbid we have to look at anything we might be doing to *ourselves*.

But a lot of good she'd done. Brian Kent was in jail, her daughter couldn't bear to live with her, she was slowly but surely driving her husband away. What *had* she thought would happen, really? For a month and a half it had simply felt good to be quiet. To hide and be quiet and hope that she might at least be able to protect *one* person.

Well, that was only part of it, of course. There was also the fact that she knew she was seriously ill. She'd known since the first week she'd been at Lou's, when she'd first noticed the lump. Since then it seemed to have grown, or at least that was how it felt to her, when she made herself feel it again, each morning when she woke up. She'd told no one. It confused her, baffled her really, when she tried to think about what to do next. She couldn't quite believe this was happening to her. As long as she stayed at Lou's, she thought, she could pretend it wasn't. Except in the morning, when she made herself feel it.

She hadn't a clue what she was going to do now.

Riding next to Tom on the drive back to Burnham, she looked out the windshield at the clear, brilliant sky—the stars sparkling, she suddenly recalled, as they had the night before Scarlet was born. It was after midnight that night when, her contractions still mild and widely spaced, she'd walked with Tom, up the quiet dirt road to the campus, then over the paths between the buildings, looking at the stars, listening for owls. The students had left for the summer the day before, and everything was perfectly silent, perfectly still.

She'd been exquisitely happy then. And she'd known so little. Hence the happiness, of course. What *was* she supposed to do with everything she'd learned since? With what she knew, for certain, now?

They said nothing to each other through nearly the entire drive home. But at the turn-off for the river road, ten miles from Burnham, she turned to him.

IN HOVERING FLIGHT

“I’ve found a lump in my breast, Tom,” she said. “Much as I hate to, I suppose I’m going to have to see a doctor. What do people say about that new guy who comes to the campus health center now?”

*Pity me*, she heard, behind her carefully casual words. Pity me, take care of me. Never mind how I might have hurt you. She hated the sound of her own voice.

By the time they reached the cabin on Haupt Bridge Road, he was crying uncontrollably.

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