

PANTHEON  BOOKS

THREE JUNES



JULIA GLASS



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PANTHEON BOOKS, NEW YORK

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For Alec and Oliver, my extraordinary sons

Assuming that our energies are sufficient, love is interminable.

—JIM HARRISON, *The Road Home*

Three Junes



Collies

1989

ONE

PAUL CHOSE GREECE for its predictable whiteness: the blanching heat by day, the rush of stars at night, the glint of the lime-washed houses crowding its coast. Blinding, searing, somnolent, fossilized Greece.

Joining a tour—that was the gamble, because Paul is not a gregarious sort. He dreads fund-raiser dinners and drinks parties, all occasions at which he must give an account of himself to people he will never see again. Yet there are advantages to the company of strangers. You can tell them whatever you like, please: no lies perhaps, but no affecting truths. Paul does not fabricate well (though once, foolishly, he had believed that he could), and the single truth he's offered these random companions—that recently he had lost his wife—brought down a flurry of theatrical condolence. (A hand on his at the breakfast table in Athens, the very first day: "Time, time, and more time. Let Monsignor Time do his tedious, devotional work." Marjorie, a breathy schoolmistress from Devon.)

Not counting Jack, they are ten. Paul is one of three men; the other two, Ray and Solly, are appended to wives. And then, besides Marjorie, there are two pairs of women traveling together, both in their seventies at least: a surprisingly spry quartet who carry oversize binoculars with which they oggle everything and everyone, at appallingly close range. Seeing the sights, they wear identical, brand-new hiking boots; to the group's communal dinners, cork-soled sandals with white crocheted tops. Paul thinks of them as the quadruplets.

In the beginning, there was an all-around well-mannered effort to mingle, but then, sure as sedimentation, the two married couples fell together and the quadruplets reverted more or less to themselves. Only Marjorie, trained by profession to dole out affection equally, continues to treat everyone like a new friend, and with her as their muse, the women coddle Paul like an infant. His room always has the best view, his seat on the boat is always in shade; the women always insist. The husbands treat him as though he were vaguely leprous. Jack finds the whole thing amusing. "Delightful, watching you cringe." Jack is their guide: young and irreverent, thank God. Reverence would send Paul over the edge.

Even this far from home there are reminders, like camera flashes or shooting pains. On the streets, in the plazas, on the open-decked ferries, he is constantly sighting Maureen: any tall lively blonde, any sunstruck girl with a touch of the brazen. German or Swedish or Dutch, there she is, again and again. Today she happens to be an American, one of two girls at a nearby table. Jack has noticed them to Paul can tell, though both men pretend to read their shared paper—day before yesterday's *Times*. Beautiful no means beautiful, this girl, but she has a garish spirit, a laugh she makes no effort to stifle. She wears an eccentrically wide-brimmed hat, tied under her chin with a feathery scarf. ("Miss Forti Nostalgic," Maureen would have pegged her. "These gals think they missed some grand swinging party.") Little good the hat seems to have done her, though: she is sunburnt geranium pink, her arms crazed with freckles. The second girl is the beauty, with perfect pale skin and thick cocoa-colored hair; Jack will have an eye on that one.

The girls talk too loudly, but Paul enjoys listening. In their midtwenties, he guesses, ten years younger than his sons. “Heaven. I am telling you exquisite,” says the dark-haired girl in a husky, all-knowing voice. “A sensual sort of *coup de foudre*.”

“You go up on donkeys? Where?” the blonde answers eagerly.

“This dishy farmer rents them. He looks like Giancarlo Giannini. Those soulful sad-dog eyes alone are worth the price of admission. He rides alongside and whacks them with a stick when they get ornery.”

“Whacks them?”

“Oh just prods them a little, for God’s sake. Nothing inhumane. Listen—I’m sure the ones that hump olives all day really get whacked. By donkey standards, these guys live like royalty.” She rattles through a large canvas satchel and pulls out a map, which she opens across the table. The girls lean together.

“Valley of the Butterflies!” The blonde points.

Jack snorts quietly from behind his section of the *Times*. “Don’t tell the dears, but it’s moths.”

Paul folds his section and lays it on the table. He is the owner and publisher of the *Yeoman*, the Dumfries-Galloway paper. When he left, he promised to call in every other day. He has called once a week for ten and felt grateful not to be needed. Paging through the news from afar, he finds himself tired of it all. Tired of Maggie Thatcher, her hedgehog eyes, her vacuous hair, her cotton-mouthed edicts on jobs, on taxes, on terrorist acts. Tired of bickering over the Chunnel, over untapped oil off the Isle of Mull. Tired of rainy foggy pewtered skies. Here, too, there are clouds, but they are inconsequential, each one benign as a bridal veil. And wind, but the wind is warm, making a cheerful fuss of the awning over the tables, carrying loose napkins like birds to the edge of the harbor, slapping waves hard against the hulls of fishing boats.

Paul closes his eyes and sips his ice coffee, a new pleasure. He hasn’t caught the name for it yet. Jack, who is fluent, orders it for him. Greek is elusive, maddening. In ten days, Paul can say three words. He can say yes, the thoroughly counterintuitive *neh*. He can wish passersby in the evening—everyone here does him—*kalespera*. And he can stumble over “if you please,” something like *parico* (ought to be a musical term, he decides, meaning “joyfully, but with caution”). Greek seems to Paul more than French or Italian, the language of love: watery, reflective, steeped in thespian whispers. A language of words without barbs, without corners.

When he opens his eyes, he is shocked to see her staring at him. She smiles at his alarm. “You don’t mind, I hope.”

“Mind?” He blushes, but then sees that she is holding a pencil in one hand and, with the other, bracing a large book on the edge of her table. Her beautiful companion is gone.

Paul straightens his spine, aware how crumpled and slouched he must look.

“Oh no. Down the way you were. Please.”

“Sorry. How was I?” Paul laughs. “A little more like this?” He sinks in the chair and crosses his arms.

“That’s it.” She resumes her drawing. “You’re Scottish, am I right?”

“Well thank God she hasn’t mistook us for a pair of Huns,” says Jack.

“Not you. You’re English. But you,” she says to Paul. “I can tell, the way you said *little*, the particular way your *t*’s disappeared. I’m wild about Scotland. Last year I went to the festival. I biked around one of the lochs. . . . Also, I shouldn’t say this, you’ll think I’m so typically rudely American but you look, you know, like you marched right out of that Dewars ad. The one, you know, with the collies?”

“Collies?” Paul sits up again.

“Oh, sorry—Madison Avenue nonsense. They show this shepherd, I mean a modern one, very tweedy, rugged, kind of motley but dashing, on the moors with his Border collies. Probably a studio setup out in L.A. But I like to think it’s real. The shepherd. The heather. The red phone booth—café box, right? . . . *Inverness*.” She draws the name out like a tail of mist, evoking a Brigadoon sort of Scotland. “I’d love to have one of those collies, I’ve heard they’re the smartest dogs.”

“Would you?” says Paul, but leaves it at that. Not long ago he would have said, My wife raises collies—national champions, shipped clear to New Zealand. And yes, they are the smartest. The most cunning, the most watchful.

“Hello *here* you are, you truants you.” Marjorie, who’s marched up behind Jack, bats his arm with her guidebook. “We’re off to maraud some poor unsuspecting shopkeepers. Lunch, say, at half past one, convene in the hotel lobby?” Paul waves to the others, who wait beyond the café awning. They look like a lost platoon in their knife-pleated khakis and sensible hats, bent over maps, gazing and pointing in all directions.

“Tally ho, Marj!” says Jack. “Half one in the hotel lobby. Half two, a little siesta; half three, a little . . . adventure. Pass muster with you?”

“Right-oh,” she says, saluting. She winks, accepting his tease.

This has become their routine: The first full day of each new place, Marjorie directs an expedition for souvenirs—as if to gather up the memories before the experience. While the others trail happily behind her, Jack and Paul read in a taverna, hike the streets, or wander through nondescript local ruins and talk about bland things, picking up odd stones to examine and discard. Paul buys no souvenirs. He should send cards to the boys—he did when they were in fact boys—but the kinds of messages adults send one another on postcards remind him precisely of the chatter he dislikes so much at drinking parties or sitting on a plane beside yet another, more alarming breed of strangers: those from whom you have no escape but the loo.

There’s one on every tour, Jack says of Marjorie: a den mother, someone who likes to do his job for him. And Marj is a good sport, he says, not a bad traveler. He likes her. But she exasperates Paul. She is a heroine out of a Barbara Pym novel: bookish, dependable, magnanimously stubborn, and no doubt

beneath it all profoundly disappointed. At an age when she might do well to tint her hair, she's taken up pride in her plainness as if it were a charitable cause. She dresses and walks like a soldier, keeping her hair cropped blunt at the earlobes. She proclaims herself a romantic but seems desperate, earthbound, a stickler for schedules. Jack tells her again and again how un-Greek this attitude is, but she is not a when-in-Rome type of tourist. ("Right then: three on the dot at the Oracle, tea time Marjorie, sizing up Delphi.")

She turns now and waves to her regiment, strutting through the maze of tables. Jack smiles fondly. "O gird up thy loins, ye salesmen of Minotaur tea towels!" The American girl laughs loudly, a laugh of unblemished joy.

WHEN THE WAR ENDED, when Paul shipped back to Dumfries from Verona, he found out, along with his mates, that half the girls they'd known in school had promised themselves to Americans—even, God forbid, to Canadians. Many were already married, awaiting their journey across the Atlantic with the restless thrill of birds preparing to migrate. Among them were some of the prettiest, cleverest, most accomplished and winning of the girls Paul remembered.

Maureen might have been one of those brides, if she'd chosen to be. But Maureen, pretty, outspoken, intrepid, knew what she wanted. She did not intend to wager away her future. "Those gals haven't a clue what they're in for, no sir. The man may be a prince, sure, but what's he hauling you home to? You haven't a clue, not a blistering clue." She said this to Paul when she hardly knew him. Paul admired her frankness—that and her curly pinkish blond hair, her muscular arms, her Adriatic eyes.

When Paul came back, he was depressed. Not because he missed the war; what idiot would? Not because he lacked direction, some sort of career; how thoroughly *that* was mapped out. Not even because he longed for a girl; for someone like Paul, there were plenty of prospects. He was sad because the war had not made him into what he had hoped it would—worse, he came to realize, when so many similar fools hoped it would. He supposed he could assume it had made him a man, whatever that meant, but it had not given him the dark, pitiless eye of an artist. All that posturing courage (all that aiming, killing, closing your eyes and haplessly pretending to kill but rarely knowing if you had) and the simultaneous endurance and fear of death—the dying itself heard in keening rifts between gunfire or in continuous horrific pleadings—all those dire things, Paul had thought when he shipped out, might plant in him the indelible passion of a survivor, a taut inner coil like the workings of a heirloom watch. He had told this rubbish to no one and was grateful to himself for that much. Of the virtues his father preached, discretion began to seem the most rewarding: it kept people guessing and, sometimes, by default, admiring.

Mornings he spent at the paper: proofing galleys, answering telephones, cataloguing local events. He learned the ropes as his father expected. But after a late lunch at the Globe, often alone, he might wander into the bar, lose all sense of time and obligation. At night he sat in a neglected room of his parents' large cold house and tried to write short stories. Paul was a good reporter—later he would win awards—but everything he tried to conjure from his heart sounded mealy and frail when he took it out to read in the morning.

The first year after the war was a time of modest anticipation. There was immense relief, drunken cheer, a stalwart sense of vindication. But the people he knew were careful not to voice gran-

expectations. When Paul stood back to consider the girls he courted, their dreams seemed to him self-consciously stunted; to be fair, so was his enthusiasm for courtship.

Maureen was not one of the girls from school. She worked at the Globe, sometimes as cook, sometimes as barkeep, sometimes as a maid for the upstairs rooms. Always variety, she said. Always good company. Maureen flowered in the company of men. On nights she took the bar, she'd smoke, pour tall glasses of whiskeys, and hold her own on politics and farming. She told Paul without hesitation exactly what she thought of his father's editorial opinions. ("Ah, the specially elegant ignorance of gentlemen!" she would croon—a remark that made him smile for days.)

One winter night after dinner, when his sisters had a dance show turned up so loud that it made his work more discouraging than usual, Paul took his father's Humber and aimlessly cruised the town, stopping at last in the High Street.

The night crowd at the Globe was rural, more working-class than the customers at lunch. Feeling sorry for himself, despising his unshakable sense of superiority, Paul drank too much and argued too sharply. He knew now that it was just a matter of time before he'd give it up: "the fiction of the town," he'd come to call it. At closing time he was the last man in the bar. He had no desire to face the cold, to be hit by the disappointment of no one's company but his own. He watched Maureen wipe the snifters, lock the till, polish the bar to a glassy sheen.

"Collided with the ghost," she said abruptly. "I finally did."

Paul laughed. "You don't believe that rot."

Maureen looked at him with cold sincerity. "Sure I do." She'd been sweeping the stairs, she told him, when she stepped into a sharp chill on the landing. "Like falling through the ice. Ten degree drop, I'd swear. And Marcus, y'know, he always balks at following me up those stairs." Marcus was her dog, an arthritic old black and white collie.

Paul ran through all the rational explanations: obscure drafts, trapped pockets of air . . . a wild imagination. Maureen shook her head at each one.

"Poor gal," she said. "I'da steered cleara *that* man, no mystery there." The ghost, said believers, was the roaming soul of a susceptible lass seduced by Bobbie Burns, who broke as many hearts as he wrote poems. The Globe had been his lair, and his upstairs rooms were hallowed, their unremarkable knickknacks like relics in a chapel. How predictable, Paul had always thought, that someone would invent a ghost. Another cheap lure for tourists. Maybe he'd write an article on the ghost and its role in commerce.

"Well then, Miss, I wouldn't want to see you spooked. Shall I run you home?"

"If you don't mind Marcus along." She put on her coat without waiting for Paul's assistance and went behind the bar again. Looking in the mirror behind the bottles of whiskey, she ran her fingers quickly through her hair and smoothed it back over her collar. Then she pulled a lipstick from her pocket and, so deftly he hardly saw her do it, colored her lips. When she turned around, her mouth was a deep, startling red.

While she helped the dog onto the front seat of the car, between them, Paul warmed up the motor. ~~was a harsh, snowless night, and the streets were empty.~~ “Pity,” said Maureen. “No one’ll half believe I was on the town with Mr. Paul McLeod. Pardon me; *Lieutenant* McLeod, town hero, resident intellect. Lieutenant McLeod the *eligible*.” By enunciating the word, she let him know that she knew she was not in the running.

In front of the house Maureen shared with her mother, Paul turned off the motor and listened to her gossip, never meanly but with relish. He was surprised at how much he enjoyed listening. The car was warm now, and the windows had shed their crystalline frost. Softened by heat, the leather of the seats felt luxurious, as if the two of them sat in a dim after-hours club. The old dog slept happily between them, like a child.

They came to talk about war brides when Maureen mentioned how a girl she’d been friends with forever had gone off to a place called Quaqtac. She removed a glove and, in careful block letters, spelled out the name in the condensation of her breath on the windscreen. The girl had since written Maureen to tell her what a shock it had been to arrive there. “A name like that, some garbled croak of a place you can’t even pronounce, what would you expect? Every whichway, she says, the land is what’s called ‘tundra.’” Maureen shivered for emphasis. “Snow and blinking ice from September to May. All the creatures white. White bears, white rabbits, white foxes, white owls, white everything you could dream of. As if it was all scared bloodless. Half the year, your eyes just pine for green.” She laughed at her pun. “Well no thank you sir, that would’ve been my RSVP to that invitation.”

Paul watched Maureen extinguish her cigarette on the sole of a shoe and tuck the end into the cuff of a coat sleeve. She was looking out the windscreen when she said, “I for one would never want to marry a military man—the kind, I mean, who lives for that life. Not if he was the Second Coming incarnate.”

“A fierce opinion,” said Paul.

“I’m twenty-six. An old maid, Mum drones on. A cloudy marble. Too set in my ways, she says—that dirge.” She laughed, a sharp summery laugh.

“And what would you trade it for, this independence you so clearly prize?” Paul was twenty-five. He was likely, in a year or so, to marry one of two girls he knew, both daughters of friends of his father, both lovely and suspiciously compliant.

Maureen laughed again and leaned into her seat. She accepted another cigarette from Paul and let him light it. She stroked her dog, her affection absentminded—second nature, guessed Paul. “Leave aside the deserving man? For a big old house in the country. I’d trade for that. For a brood of sons, that too.” She paused. “Five—four would do, four sons. Daughters turn against you faster, that’s what I hear. Boys adore their mothers. . . . And, you’ll laugh, but collies. Not the sheep—or maybe a few for training the dogs—but just the collies, for themselves. I’d have a kennel, a dozen at least. Grandfather had them on his farm, out by Hawick. Marcus here’s the end of that line. I remember watching those dogs work the herd, back and forth, back and forth, like shuttles on a loom. . . .” Her hands darted to and fro, the cigarette glow a snake in the dark. “But to raise ’em purely for trials, for the competition alone, that takes money.”

“Collies,” he said, to fill the silence. The word sounded as foreign as the name of the Canadian outpost now melting away on the windscreen.

“Well, first ghosts, now collies. Daft, what? My wild imagination again,” said Maureen. “Betty, commit me, Lieutenant.” She squeezed his arm quickly, opened the door, and dropped her cigarette in the gutter. After stepping out, she leaned down to thank him. Patient and coaxing, she wrapped her long arms around Marcus and eased him down onto his feet.

“RALLY UP, CREW. Refreshments around the bend,” calls Jack, dismounting from his donkey. He beckons energetically to the stragglers. They have reached the grove after a hot, wracking ride up the mountainside, and even Marjorie, coming in close behind Paul, looks beaten. “You’re a wicked, wicked man,” she says to Jack when she is on her feet. Her white blouse is dusty, with drooping oval stains beneath her arms.

“Said you were a horsewoman, Marj.”

“I believe that means I ride *horses*, young man.”

Jack laughs and puts an arm around her. “No pain, no terrain.” He helps Irene off her saddle, then Jocelyn. Their husbands, Ray and Solly, are halfway to the rest hut. The quadruplets stayed behind to loll about at the beach. “No beer!” Jack shouts after the men. “I want no casualties on the way down.” Paul waits while Jack tethers the donkeys. The grove is smaller than he expected, a cluster of cowering, wind-battered trees. A sad, dessicated little place, hardly worth the climb. Except for two other donkeys drowsing nearby, there is no sign that anyone else has made this ridiculous trek.

“Don’t look now,” says Jack, “but it’s the Andrews Sisters.”

Paul follows his glance, past the table where their group is seated. He sees her hat first, then the extravagant hat. The friend, who leads her toward the entrance to the grove, gesticulates wildly. He can just hear the lilt of her voice. “Extraordinary kimonos!” he hears, “. . . inconsolable weeping!”

“Not much of a ‘valley,’” says Paul.

“No, but wait, bucko.” Jack takes a bottle of water from his shoulder bag. He drinks half, then hands it to Paul, who drinks the rest.

Paul follows the flagstone path to the grove, overtaking his companions. As he steps through the gate, he feels instantly cooled. Here is the first small breeze, the first shade in hours: an acute and unexpected pleasure. Where the trees begin, the ground dips down—a modest crater more than a valley—and the brownish leaves make a rattling noise, like wind in a field of maize. He follows a dirt path, turns a corner, and gasps. The rattling comes from a stick with which a short man is beating the branches. Abruptly, the air fills with a scarlet haze, like a cyclone of vermilion confetti, the rain of petals tossed at the end of a wedding.

He thinks of the jungle and its sudden surprises. Years ago, in Guatemala, he stood with his son and a group of journalists, admiring a ruined temple, when someone laughed or raised his voice. Out of nowhere, all around them rose a funnel of color—red, orange, turquoise, violet—a startled swarm of parrots.

Through the red blur, there are flashes of the one girl’s hat, the other girl’s shirt, the man’s arm and

he thrashes the trees. Infinitesimal wings touch Paul's face, the air is alive, but the only sound in a this commotion is the rattling stick. He would have expected noise, the applause of birds rising in flight, but the moths are stone silent. Their color is noise enough. And then, gradually, they settle back onto the branches and vanish. Closed up, like twigs or buds, they are invisible. Again, the place is parched and brown, nowhere special. The short man stands close to Paul, probably hoping he'll pay for another go-round. At the opposite edge of the clearing, both girls are still immersed in their ecstasies, eyes half closed, faces lifted solemnly, glowing.

HE WAITED, and Maureen agreed it was only proper, until his father had died. His sisters, both married and settled in Edinburgh, were unhappy—and shocked, they told Paul, at how callously he could dispose of their legacy—but neither was in a position to stake any claim. Their mother, her reticence for herself, took no one's side. Within two months the family house was sold, furniture divided, and Paul had found a place for his own family out in the country, half an hour from town. The house was called Tealing. It was skirted on one side by a burn and an overgrown meadow; on the other by a tall hedgerow, shielding another large house, the only one within sight of theirs—occupied, the agent said, by a widow who looked after herself.

Fenno was eight, and the twins, Dennis and David, were six. The three of them roared and clattered through the wide halls and across the lawn playing bomber planes or Panzer tanks—denting banisters, felling chairs, maiming shrubs. They couldn't wait till they were old enough to fight in a war, like Daddy, to have real-life enemies to vanquish.

Maureen hired a part-time nanny to stay with the boys while she trekked off to Aberdeen, Oban, Peebles—wherever there were sheepdog trials to watch or farmers to meet. Within a year, she bought four bitches, three dogs, and half a dozen ewes. Paul hired a joiner to build the kennel on the lawn on the back, behind it a shed for the sheep.

The paper was thriving, so Paul, too, traveled a good deal. He gave lectures at universities, awards to authors, advice to younger editors. The hectic separations and reunions were often renewing for the family, romantic for Paul and Maureen. He was generous with the boys, patient with their wildness. He loved the rare evening together at home, a birch fire in the timber-striped parlor: Paul going over the ledgers, Maureen telling stories to the twins while she brushed out one of the dogs, Fenno assembling a model ship or spreading his arms and careening in circles, quietly strafing the carpet.

Sunday mornings Paul rose early, before church, and took a long walk. Spread out behind them lay woods and fields, partitioned by mossy stone walls. In some of the fields sheep and cattle grazed, but most were vacant, tall with timothy waiting to be hayed.

Along one wall, a dirt path led away from their lawn. Half a mile out it diverged, the left way leading to a farm, the right way to Conkers, the manor house adjoining the farm. Beyond the farm other trails and tractor lanes crisscrossed the land, and often Paul saw the prints of horseshoes. In autumn and spring, the foxhunt came through. Some Saturdays, from the house, Paul heard the huntsman's horn in the distance, its monotonous bittersweet warbling; in November, through the leafless trees, he'd glimpse splinters of red as the riders sped past in their vivid coats. If the hounds were on a fresh line, giving tongue, Maureen's collies would gather against the fence of their kennel and yowl with longing.

The only trouble came from their neighbor. Mrs. Ramage spent a great deal of time maintaining colorful, highly regimented garden, and as she worked, she would peer through the hedgerow. The Lurker, Maureen called her, amused at the outset. But not six months after they arrived, Mrs. Ramage voiced her dismay as to how they'd destroyed their flowerbeds. Maureen kept up the roses in front, the lupines by the kitchen, but to make room for the kennel she had flattened two plots of peonies, lilies and hardy, deep-rooted lilacs. The rest of the beds had seeded over with mustard and looserstrife. When Mrs. Ramage pointed a garden glove at the lush purple flowers and told Maureen how their roof would slowly suck all moisture away from the rest of her lawn, killing off the flora one species after another, Maureen answered, "Actually, I've always thought them rather gorgeous," and walked around the house, out of sight.

Nor did Mrs. Ramage approve of the way they were raising their boys. Every so often, she would lean through a break in the hedgerow and ask if the children could please calm their racket. Her own children were grown and gone, so Paul chose to see her meddling as a kind of nostalgic envy. He indulged her with confessions that yes indeed, these lads were spoiled something fearful and there would be hell to pay down the road if he and Mrs. McLeod didn't crack the whip a bit more. It was Paul who apologized, herded the boys indoors and hushed them. Maureen could barely contain her rage. After enduring months of complaints, she refused any longer to acknowledge their neighbor with the slightest nod. Following Paul into the house, she would storm, "'Seen and not heard, seen and not heard'! If I hear that fascist platitude cross her lips one more time, no one'll see or hear a thing more from *her!*'"

But if Maureen went easy on the boys, she was strict with her dogs. The pups were whelped in the scullery off the kitchen and slept in the house, with their mother, for the first two months. Every day Maureen took them outside for supervised play. She let the boys fool with them, chase them, roll them over, tickle their spotted pink bellies. But then the pups were sent away to nearby farms for another few months. When they returned, they lived in the kennel and training began. They became obedient yet willful, commanding yet stealthy. Their attention to Maureen, her voice, her hands, was unwavering and intense; Paul wondered sometimes if this was a standard against which his own attention might be secretly held—and found wanting.

She never struck a dog, but her voice when she was displeased became deep and rough, a tone that Paul had never heard in any other context. "I'm a wolf. Ruthless. Unyielding," she told him. "That's what they learn." From his library, upstairs, he could see her on the lawn, putting them through drill often out there till twilight. Without seeing her face, he might hear her scold a disobedient dog. He would see the dog, even from that distance, looking at her in apparent fear, crouching low to the grass. She commanded this fear through words and gestures alone.

One Sunday they were out on the lawn: Paul resting on a chaise, Maureen hosing down the pens, and the boys playing quietly for a change, each on his own. Betsey, Maureen's favorite bitch, hunted insects among the wildflowers. David had a new toy, a red ball, which caught Betsey's eye. He threw it to her and shouted rudely, "Fetch!" But Betsey carried it off, and when David followed and tried to take back his ball, she growled. In an instant, Maureen had lifted the dog off her feet by the loose skin on her chest. She shook Betsey so hard she yelped. "Do that again, anything like it, and I will have you shot." Maureen spoke, literally, in a growl. This time, lying nearby, Paul saw her face up close. Her eyes were so wide she looked crazed. After she let the dog go, her hands shook. Betsey looked up at Maureen with the most bereaved expression Paul had ever seen in a dog. "That's a promise," Maureen

told her, quietly but unrelenting.

That was their second summer at Tealing. A year later, Paul took a call at his office from one of the county aldermen. Mrs. Ramage had filed a complaint. The alderman was delicate, apologetic, but there was no getting around it. The sheep smelled, Mrs. Ramage claimed, and the dogs barked up and down the row. The kennel, visible from her bedroom, was a “blemish upon the landscape.” Paul was glad she had not come directly to them. For all her insolence, Mrs. Ramage was afraid of Maureen, perhaps with some justification. Paul told the alderman that he would not challenge the complaint but asked for two months’ grace. He had a compromise in mind.

He was thinking of the long meadow on the opposite side of their property, the one beyond the burn. It belonged to Colin Swift, the man who had recently bought Conkers and the adjoining farm. A sea of weeds, the field lay unused, since its back half tended to flood in the spring when the burn spilled over its banks.

“SHE WAS TELLING ME,” says Fern, “about a production of *Madame Butterfly*—she saw it at the Met. Amazing set decoration, she was telling me, with a full-grown actual live tree onstage, light through the branches, purple kimonos with gold butterfly medallions, hung like ghosts on the walls of the house. The butterflies up there made her think of it. . . . I’ve never been to the opera. I used to think I was silly, I never thought I’d change my mind, but . . . you get older, you know? See things differently? Anna, though: Anna was *born* a woman of the world.” She smiles at her friend, who is talking to Jack.

Fern is prettier without the hat. Her wet hair is contained in a flat coil against her skull. She has a long studious face, a small chin. She tells Paul she’s a painter traveling on a fellowship. She finished university a year before and has been in Europe since then—mostly in Paris, where she rents a small flat. Anna, a college friend, is living on Paros all summer, working on a dig.

At a nearby table sit Irene and Ray. They glance over now and then, their suspicions undisguised. Well fine, thinks Paul, let me take a nosedive from the widower’s pedestal. He has drunk too much retsina already; the heat in his skin and the ache in his legs from that torture rack of a saddle have given him a vicious thirst. And he drinks out of restlessness. In the grove, after small talk and introductions—what had possessed him?—he invited the girls to join their group for a drink before dinner. But dinner is not until nine, an hour away, and most of the others won’t show up till then. For now, the low sun seems to linger indefinitely, a party guest reluctant to leave.

“Absurd the things people say. I mean, people think we don’t have a single *tree* in the entire city for God’s sake, that you have to carry an *Uzi* to feel safe, that sadistic black boys roam the streets in search of *white prey*. Look, you could be raped and murdered in . . . well certainly London, but anywhere. Dangers lurk *everywhere*.” Anna is from Manhattan and seems to see the rest of the world as woefully benighted. She is defending the city’s virtues to Jack, who nods and smiles, unusually quiet. Aggressive and passionate by turns, the girls have talked for nearly an hour. Once, Jack turned briefly to Paul and cocked an eyebrow. Mockery; desire; conspiracy: it could have meant just about anything.

“Yes, Anna, but you can’t tell me honestly you wouldn’t really rather live somewhere like . . .” Fern smiles at Paul. “Scotland. In the long run, I mean.”

“Oh, no offense to Paul here, but never,” Anna says. “Too homogeneous.” She draws out the middle syllables, as if the word itself contains a genie. Paul has heard his son Fenno refer to this woman that as a “drama queen,” and now he’s sure he knows exactly what it means. Fenno, like Anna, lives in Manhattan, but Paul decides against mentioning this. To do so would hand the conversation entirely to Anna—and place Fenno’s vital statistics under her dissecting eye. Paul’s oldest son, who has ventured the farthest from home, is the most independent and ought to worry Paul the least, but the distance itself has always been a source of worry—as if, were something to go wrong, Fenno couldn’t be reeled in fast enough. And the twins, Paul can’t help feeling, will always have each other to lean on, collapse against, push each other upright if it comes to that.

Fern sighs and turns her chair slightly aside, facing the sea. She closes her eyes and tilts her face upward, the same yearning, pious expression Paul saw in the grove after the butterflies—the mother. He continues to drink his retsina but tries to step outside its field of distortion. What could he want from her? She likes him, but she isn’t flirting. He watches Jack, the way Jack looks at Anna as she talks on and on.

Fern says suddenly, “Pink sky at night, sailors delight.”

Anna pauses, and Jack turns slowly toward Fern. “So then, must be a bloody lot of delighted sailors out there tonight, would you say?”

“All right, all right,” says Fern, laughing self-consciously. “It’s something silly my mother recites whenever she sees a beautiful sunset. It just popped out.”

“Just popped out!” Jack warbles in falsetto, batting his eyes at the sun. “Ah, like a wanted champagne cork.” Fern continues to laugh, but Paul feels as if he is looking at Jack through the backside of a telescope. For that moment, he does not like the young man’s wit, its facile malice.

At nine (promptly, since Marjorie’s in the lead), the rest of the group arrives, and there is a complicated move to a larger, more sheltered table.

Anna takes Fern by the elbow. “Well, boys, we have crispier fish to fry.”

“So . . . well,” says Fern. When she stands, she is clearly dizzy and leans for a moment on her friend. Paul murmurs a polite good-bye. For the third time in a day, he tries to memorize her features, sure it’s the last he will see of this awkward, inexplicably appealing girl.

In the hotel bar after dinner, after the others have gone upstairs, Jack puts on an American drawl and impersonates the two girls. “Why these donkeys lead the life o’ Riley! Why, compared with the steeds of the New York mounted bobbies—no picnic that, keeping all those bumpkin tourists in line!” He unfolds a napkin, drapes it on his head, and raises his voice an octave. “Oh but if the poor thing lived in heavenly Scott-land . . .” He drops the napkin and his voice. “Land of warm beer, boiled sheep guts, and men showing off their ugly knees, you mean!”

Paul laughs, too drunk to feel guilty. Jack leans toward him and says, “So which one, Paulie, which one would you have? Just supposing.”

“Me?” Paul is so stiff that he longs to lie down then and there, on the grimy tiled floor. “I’m to

decrepit for shenanigans of that sort.”

“Oh rot. Bull, as those Americans would say. Look at you.”

Paul looks down at himself, as if he will make an invigorating discovery. He pretends that pondering the choice is an effort. “The blonde, I suppose. I like her wild hat. Her pink skin.”

“Her wild *hat*. Her *pink skin*. Oh Paulie.” Jack laughs hard, leaning on the bar, shaking his head. “Bucko, that hat would be the first thing to go.” He picks up the napkin he wore as the hat and lets it drift to the floor.

MAUREEN BECAME SICK—or her sickness chose to show itself—almost a year ago, in the summer. Despite her jesting about the surgery (“Just a long-overdue rearrangement of my soul!”), her sons all came home: Fenno from New York, Dennis from Paris, David from two counties north. Fenno’s homecoming was the most momentous, because he had traveled the greatest distance and came home at least often, but it was marred for Paul by Fenno’s unexpected traveling companion, a young American named Mal.

Mal was a perfectly easy, considerate houseguest, but his flawless courtesy seemed like a screen. Sometimes when Mal and Fenno were upstairs in the room they shared, Paul could hear waves of sardonic laughter. Clearly Mal, yet he never laughed that way in Paul’s presence.

Handsome but frail, Mal looked as if someone had carefully slipped the muscles and tendons out of his arms and legs, like stays from a dress, leaving him only brittle bones and sallow, translucent flesh. Perhaps he wasn’t ill, Paul argued with himself—or wasn’t ill with what it seemed the obvious and hence shameful conclusion to draw. Perhaps he was simply one of those ascetic young people who, having never been shortchanged on sustenance, used self-deprivation as a means of expressing scorn at what they saw as their parents’ myopic pleasures. Every time he heard Mal’s name, Paul could not help thinking of its French significance. Mal wore cologne, a grassy scent that was strongest in the mornings. *Les fleurs du mal*, thought Paul the first time he smelled it. His fears left him helpless and petty.

When Paul was finally alone with Fenno, the third day of the visit, he asked if the boy’s name was Malcolm (perhaps Paul could address him that way).

“Malachy. But God, no one ever calls him that.” They had taken the collies out for a run in the field across the burn. It was Maureen’s first overnight in hospital. Mal was taking a nap. “You don’t like him, do you,” said Fenno. “You’re so uptight.”

Paul sighed. “Do you want me not to like him? I’ve spent the sum of a few hours in his company. And if I’m ‘up tight,’ it’s probably because your mother’s having her chest sliced open first thing tomorrow.” Fenno’s proliferating Americanisms depressed Paul, as if they were proof that he had chosen, literally, new patronage. (Of Paul’s three sons, the oldest was, ironically, the one who made him feel the most outmoded.)

“You’re free to like him or not, Dad.”

The collies ran helter skelter in widening, playful circles, but they never barked. Paul did not worry that they might bolt. They wouldn't leave the circle of Maureen's influence, even if she was not physically present.

Fenno approached his father and put a hand on his back. Paul welcomed the physical warmth of the gesture and wondered if it was meant to be consoling or conciliatory. "Mal is a good friend," said Fenno. "So could you just be less of a Brit and act like you care about knowing him, just a little? I could more than give him tours of the manor and speeches on why we Scots are anything but English." Fenno laughed and pulled his hand away, reaching down to stroke one of the dogs. "Do you know one of the first things I loved about New York? People don't waste any time telling you what they aren't. Nobody has that strict an identity, never mind nonidentity."

"I've given speeches? What speeches?" Paul said.

"Dad, you know what I mean. All that if-we-had-our-own-leadership crap; God save the Queen, but keep her the hell down below. It's de rigueur when Americans visit, I know. Just get past it."

Get past it. A piece of advice Paul had never heard in so few words. Perhaps it was a motto he ought to have stitched or tattooed somewhere, to snap him out of his retentive ways.

"So give me the truth," Fenno said. "About Mum."

Back then, her prognosis looked hopeful, though the cancer had begun its campaign abroad. As Paul told Fenno what the doctors had said, as he talked about chemotherapy schedules and surgeries, he felt himself levitating over the field, above his own head, and one of the many voices in his incessant verbal self told him that on this already fateful piece of land, on this beautiful summer afternoon, a few simple observations about his own son had finally crossed the blood-brain barrier and were shooting toward his heart: Fenno would never move back from his expatriate life, he knew his own mind more surely than Paul knew his, and he was a homosexual. The third acknowledgment was more oblique than the others, but of course it stood out the largest (though it shouldn't, Paul knew). It stood out as both a relief and a terror. A relief because for several years he had only pretended to know. A terror because if his son was ill, too—though Fenno looked healthy in an offhand way, in the most reassuring way—Paul would not bear it. He would crumble and disintegrate, like dead leaves underfoot.

The inevitably childish bargain crossed his mind: If I have to lose one of them, take her. "Biologically speaking," Maureen would have said; she would have applauded. But Paul did not want to give so much credence to the grandiosity of genes.

Within a few days, Mal left for London, but from that moment in the field until Fenno's departure a fortnight later, Paul could not speak to his son without the fear that his panic would puddle brightly around him, like milk from a bottle dropped on slate. He could not make his voice sound anything other than phlegmy and distant, his turns of phrase stilted and prim. Fenno's contempt was quietly apparent, but he did not criticize his father again. Paul lay awake for hours each night trying to think of a way to find out what he needed to know. There might be a way to ask, but he couldn't imagine waiting for the answer without knowing it first.

One morning, from the library, Paul had watched the two men head back into the fields, Fenno

pointing out trees and birds. Fenno loved birds; when he was a child, they kept a small piece of paper taped to one window in each room of the house so that anyone who spotted a new species could write it down then and there. Paul had left the lists up even after Fenno moved to New York. Gradually, the sunlight had faded the names of the birds, first on the windows facing south and last of all the north until they had vanished altogether, leaving no record. Maureen, always less sentimental than Paul, took them all down while he was away on a trip.

Spying on Fenno and Mal, Paul never saw them hold hands or embrace, though he assumed they must, and he thought how, all of a sudden, that might not be so awful. Just weeks ago, it would have upset him tremendously. Paul remembered his own father's reaction when he announced his engagement to Maureen, the disappointment muted but clear. Paul harbored a disappointment in Fenno, but it was not about his choices in love or because he might not produce heirs.

Fenno ran a bookstore—a logical enterprise for the son who, in Paul's memory as a child of five or nine or twelve, was always reading. But Fenno was the one Paul had hoped would take over the paper—~~even after Fenno went overseas to get an American doctorate~~. Neither of the twins had shown much interest in anything to do with the veneration of language. David was a veterinary surgeon, his mother's son; Dennis, a romantic like his father but without intellectual cravings, was (after years of meandering) studying to be a chef. When these two came of age and, simultaneously, emptied the small trusts left by their grandfather to follow their respective curiosities, Paul looked on happily. He loved their separateness and, when they shared their enthusiasms, felt the privilege of being admitted to different worlds. But when Fenno took some (only a prudent fraction) of his inheritance and invested it in his own business, Paul felt instinctively, illogically betrayed. Again and again, he reminded himself how enslaved he'd felt to his father's desires (though he could have denied them without any dire consequence); still, he came away feeling wounded.

Maureen came home for good in mid-December. As Paul pointed out their house to the ambulance driver, he saw against the hedgerow an obscenely white car that he knew must be Fenno's, the one he'd have hired at the airport. Fenno he found standing before a fire in the living room. "*There you are,*" said Fenno, as if Paul were the child, hiding out from a scolding. Fenno's coldness was painful but it was not a surprise, not since Paul had bungled his visit five months before.

Beside Fenno, Mal rose quickly from Paul's reading chair. Greeting him, Paul struggled against the same revulsion he'd felt in the summer. (Was the young man frailer? He was certainly paler, but that was winter.)

So now, as Maureen was being carried across the snow into their house, as Paul wanted so much to feel his sons hold him together, secure him like a seaworthy knot, Fenno seemed lost to him entirely. He remained between Paul and the fireplace, so miraculously close, but he might as well have been back at his home in New York, a home Paul had never seen and now supposed he never would. His oldest son, after the funeral—which would be soon—might become little more than an address on the flimsy blue tissue of an airborne letter. If that.

Paul instructed the orderlies to take the bed and the equipment upstairs to the library. There Maureen could look out at the kennel. Her three favorite dogs were given free roam of the house. Most of the time they lay on the floor near Maureen's bed, but once Paul caught them chasing one another up the front stairs, skidding on the hallway runners. He thought of the boys when they were small, their never-ending war games. He thought of Fenno, making an imaginary conflagration of the house.

and everything in it. Cupping both hands around his mouth, Fenno had been able to broadcast a near-perfect air-raid siren; every time, for an instant, the wail made his father's chest throb with fear.

"LUNG CANCER," he told Jack. "A terribly ordinary death, you might say. Or an ordinary terrible death. But she died at home. All of us there. The children—our sons, not children anymore by a long stretch in fact. A bright day. How we'd all like to go." It sounded as if he were composing a telegram.

They were sitting together on the airplane from London to Athens. Jack, who seemed to use teasing as a way of forcing acquaintance with people he liked (and it worked), had asked how an obviously attractive, apparently independent chap like Paul could wind up alone on a guided tour. "Not your usual follower," Jack had said. "Or should I say not one of mine."

"Christ, sorry," he said now. "Christ, that's a trial."

Paul held his hands up and shook his head. "Please. I came to escape how sorry everyone feels for me every bloody minute of my life these past six months. My sons fuss at me as if I'm an invalid, one foot in the grave myself. At the office they fuss. My old friends fuss."

"Bet your old friends' wives make another kind of fuss."

They laughed together. Paul looked out the window and saw the Alps. Maureen had loved flying, loved seeing everything pressed below her like a map. She liked the thrill of vertigo when the plane banked to turn, when the earth tipped up alongside you—mountains and rivers reaching inside you and seizing your heart.

Below him now, horizon to horizon, June was spreading its green, abundant promise, disputing the few peaks that guarded their snow. Up close, there would be flowers, wildflowers, yellow and purple and white. One long-ago June, Paul and Maureen had driven somewhere along these slopes, tiny Fenno asleep in a crib they'd wedged into the car (there was none of this safety gear back then; most parents were too young to fret about dangers unseen). They had pulled into a field of flowers to eat the lunch. After the food, they made love until Fenno's crying interrupted them. As she changed the wicker nappy (Paul wistfully stroking the small of her back), Maureen had said, "Well then, we shall just have to find this place again when our children are grown." The multiple expectations in her simple remark had thrilled Paul; he was so naive.

When he turned away from the window, he told Jack that he had traveled a great deal, but never on a tour. "But now . . . now I like the idea of everything planned. No surprises."

"Ah, but I can't promise you no surprises," said Jack.

Jack was thirty-six, Fenno's age. There, all similarity ended. Jack was not willowy, not soft-featured, not articulate in a well-schooled way. He was compact, muscular, ruddy. He had the body of a swimmer and the coloring of the fair-haired Italians Paul remembered from Verona and Venice. Like a fox, he had shrewd glassy eyes, very blue, and a long sharp nose. He spoke with a trace of Yorkshire farmhand. Jack reminded Paul of fleeting friendships he'd made in the war, with men from a different but parallel world. He felt a quick, irrational trust and warmth—nothing of the distance he'd kept these days, without wanting to, from his sons.

Jack had been married once, briefly and much too young. Took the taste for it out of his mouth. He had managed a pub; after the marriage ended, he took his savings and went to Greece for a year hitched around, lived here and there. He made good money now, running these tours. Exhausting at first—twelve tours back to back—but he had learned how to relax. And then, five months off. A good life. No complaints. He had a girl in London, but she was easy. An actress in her late twenties: too ambitious to settle down, and the mere thought of children made her shudder.

PAUL HAD ALWAYS ASSUMED that at the end, whenever it might be, he and Maureen would have great stretches of time together, alone. They would talk about everything. But why should this have been so? Even while Maureen was in hospital, there was still the paper to print, the dogs to feed and exercise, the friends to reassure: more occupations than ever. And his sons' presence in the last weeks, however welcome, created yet more tasks, more diversions. At times, they seemed to move about the house—fondling objects, appraising pictures—as if they were about to divide its possessions and take them all away. Though Paul knew they were only drawing memories from their surroundings, he sometimes wanted to shout, "I am still very much alive! You're not about to be orphaned!"

A week before Maureen died, the jetliner with the bomb on board shattered in the air over Lockerbie. When the news came, Paul was sitting beside her, reading aloud from *My Dog Tulip*. Even then, Maureen rarely spared the breath it took to speak, but as Paul crossed the room to take the call, he heard her say hoarsely, "Rodgie boy, my little king." She was looking past Paul to where the dog stood, returning her look. She touched an ear, one of so many signals whose precise meanings Paul had never summoned the interest to learn, and Rodgie shot past him and jumped up beside her. When Paul rang off, she did not ask what the call was about. Her hands were buried in the dog's coat, teasing out a burr. Paul knew then that they would not really talk to each other, not intimately, not even idly, ever again.

Seen from every angle, the week was a tragedy, a crippling chaos. Divine vengeance, thought Paul, worse than anything he had seen or felt in the war. The morning after the crash was the only day he left Maureen, driving to Lockerbie with a detective whose daughter had long ago, for a summer, captivated Dennis. Together, the two men pressed through crowds and crossed barricades to walk through scatterings of oily, singed debris. In many places there was little to see but fragments—the smallness a horror in itself—and they looked so consistently obscure to Paul that he saw a kind of visual frolic in the wreckage: a sonata of quirky shapes, dark against the newly frosted ground, like a painting by Miró. As the detective stopped to speak with one of the men collecting the pieces and placing them in numbered, zippered plastic bags, the toe of Paul's boot uncovered a glint of gold. Turning his back to the policemen, he squatted, shielding the object from their view. Slowly, he lifted a shiny cylinder and held it in his gloved palm. It was a bright gold tube of lipstick, fallen intact from the sky. Without hesitating, he slipped it in a pocket. Walking alongside the detective again, he focused on the fog of his own breath, reminding himself to inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale. When he got home, he went straight to the scullery sink and vomited.

For five days he did not sleep. He forbade everyone who entered the house to mention the crash in front of Maureen. She no longer read the paper. From a mask, and then from plastic tendrils that snaked up her nostrils, she drank oxygen like an elixir whose magic was fading.

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