

profiles in cowardice (working title)

The First Half

A train whistles. I'm standing with my back against the station wall waiting for my two brothers, Cad and Vont, to find me; they just arrived from Chicago. Cad is short for Cadman and Vont is short for Vincent. I rub my legs and chest. I'm wearing a pair of dungarees and a cotton blouse.

"There she is." I recognize Cad's deep voice in the distance. I'm nervous.

I know they are getting close to me and before they can say, "Hey Ev, how are you?" I say, "Daddy is going to die." My dad's Adult Onset Polycystic Kidney Disease is now End Stage Renal Disease. That's what Doc Cod says. Doc Cod also says that the dialysis isn't working and dad has only a few days to live unless he gets a donor. "Which one of you is gonna give daddy a kidney?"

"That's m' little sister. How've ya been baby?" Vont asks.

"Dad will be dead, are you going to give him a kidney?" I repeat, but my face is turned away from him.

"Well it's nice to see you, Ev," Cad says. "I haven't seen you in how long, almost a year? You look wonderful as always." He kisses me on my left cheek very close to my lips. His beard is rough. I feel awkward. I don't know if I like it anymore.

"I haven't seen *anyone* in two years," I say kind of loudly, pulling away from his face. I send my words directly toward Vont.

"Let's go get a cab," says Cad, and Vont agrees. Someone grabs my hand to help me out of the station. It's Vont. His fingers are bony and cold. I tear my hand away and follow their footsteps.

Cad finds a taxi and I tell the driver our destination, 124 Morningside Drive, Shaker Heights. Our father, Mr. Reginald Jasper, is almost dead and has always been proud of his house. It is the sole survivor of the "sixteen original model homes designed and built by Oris and Mantis Van Sweringen. In 1912, the Van Sweringen brothers

brought the English ‘garden city’ style to our Cleveland suburb.” Those are dad’s exact words.

Daddy has always been proud of me, too. I’m like his house. And of Cad, until, well recently, but never of Vont. Dad had it rough growing up that’s why Cad and me get his respect. We’ve tried. Me the most, then comes Cad.

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We sit in the back seat. My brothers take the two window seats and I sit in the middle. Cad gently places his hand on my leg. My heart beats an extra time and I feel the hair on my arms stand up.

“So how’d you get here? Mrs. Wolersnaft?” asks Cad. She is our neighbor.

“Yes. She stayed with me last night too because daddy went to the hospital. She dropped me off here on her way to work.” I shift my left leg inwards and Cad pulls his hand away.

“So it looks like West Germany is gonna take it all the way, man,” Vont says.

“I told you on the train, they can’t beat Brazil. Pelé is the best,” says Cad. He is certain. Cad almost always sounds certain when he talks.

“I dunno man.”

“I still say Brazil,” says Cad. The loud city noise turns into quiet suburbs.

“No way man, Germany,” Vont says.

“How much?”

“How much what?”

“How much do you want to bet that Brazil takes the trophy?” asks Cad.

“You wanna bet? Fine. Two buckarinos.”

“Two dollars, that’s chump change, make it an even ten,” Cad says.

My brothers will bet on anything. There’s a pause.

“How about this? I’ll bet you a kidney.”

“You’re kidding.”

“You win, I give dad a kidney, I win, and you give ‘im one of yours,” says Vont.

Cad doesn’t say anything. I get the sense he’s looking at me. I have been listening to the whole conversation with his words entering my left ear and Vont’s

entering my right. I want to say something to him but I don't. Maybe he wants to say the same something to me. He doesn't.

Instead, he says to Vont, "So—"

Brazil plays Uruguay and West Germany plays Italy in the semis this afternoon. Vont just committed to Germany, so he's positive that they're going to the finals. That's pretty risky. But good for dad.

"Germany killed England, man, they are gonna *cruise* by Italy. Hey, d'you have a light man?" I assume Vont asks the driver. Cad doesn't smoke as far as I know.

"I'm sure Brazil won't have a problem with Uruguay. How about this, I'll take Brazil and you can have Germany *or* Italy, whichever team advances to the finals."

"No, I'm not worried man, I'll take Germany," Vont says. His voice sounds confident. That's unusual.

"What if they lose in the semis?" asks Cad. *Pop* goes the cigarette lighter.

"Thanks man. If they lose, I'll give up a kidney. Same goes if Brazil loses to Uruguay, you know." He blows smoke towards my face and I *know* it is on purpose. Fuck him.

"Fine."

Their hands shake right in front of my eyes. I hear the slap of their palms. I'm a witness.

"What do you think, Ev, have you been following the Cup?" asks Cad.

"*He* doesn't even like soccer," I say sharply towards the windshield, almost strong enough to break the glass.

"I love soccer, Ev, I used to go to all of your games," says Vont, sarcastically.

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He's a liar. He never came to my games. I'm a wonderful soccer player. I *wanted* to be a referee when I grow up, but no more. During my freshman year, I was the first girl *ever* to play on the boy's team. Cad was the captain of varsity that year at Abe Lincoln High and he told the coach how good I was and that I should get a chance to play. He told them I was better than most of the boys. I am. My sophomore year, I, Evalynn Jasper, was a varsity starter and scored 16 goals. Last year, I spent my fall afternoons at home, listening to the radio and seeing nothing but red.

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“Make a left here and it’s the fourth house on the right,” Cad tells the driver.

“Far out. The street still looks the same, with all the change goin’ on in this land, man, our street still looks exactly the same,” says Vont. He’s been away for two years.

“That’ll be sixteen seventy-five,” says the driver.

“Sixteen seventy-five,” says Vont. He leans into my right side to stick his ugly head into the front seat. I shove my elbow into his skinny gut as hard as I can. Get off me you jerk. “The meter only reads six seventy-five, man.”

“Yeah, there’s a ten dollar charge for goin’ outside the city limits,” the cab driver says.

“It doesn’t say that anywhere, this is bullshit--”

--“Don’t worry about it, Vont,” interrupts Cad, “I’ll take care of it.”

Meanwhile I reach into my pocket and remove two paper cards. I know there is no extra charge for going outside of the city. I’ve taken many cabs from downtown with my father. This guy is not nice. I’m sure of it. I rub the first card between my thumb and finger. It’s not the one I want. *Don’t ever use the red one unless you really mean it, unless it’s really necessary.* I put it back in my pocket.

“This is an absolute drag, man he’s just tryin’ to take us for saps.”

“Just stop, I’ll pay him and that will be that.”

Cad leans into my left side to pay the driver. The driver makes a rude comment to Cad before accepting the money. I really don’t like this guy. Cad finishes and grabs my hand to escort me inside. We take a few steps outside of the car and I hear the driver opening the trunk. I show him the card.

“What the hell is that?” the cab driver asks, “Ahh, you hippies, get a job.” I’m not a hippy, I don’t think.

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Cad and Vont are in the Vietnam War. Cad is a bomber in the Navy and Vont does something in the Army. Cad flies his missions from the U.S.S. Oulette, which is in Manila. He did some secret missions in Cambodia last summer. He told me that in a letter I got this spring. I don’t know why his letter wasn’t censored. Perhaps Yossarian was the reader. *Catch-22* is daddy’s favorite book. I wrote him back telling him I

thought the war was in Vietnam. I also told him about dad's health and he wrote to tell Vont. The government allowed them both temporary leave.

I go to a special school in Cleveland. I take a bus at eight forty-five every morning. There are fourteen students in my class between the ages of ten and eighteen. We listen to music, read books with our hands, get read to by our teacher and suffer endlessly. The bus takes me home at three fifteen and I spend my afternoons listening to Vont's Beatles albums, talking to my dad when he gets home from work, and listening to politics on the radio. Vont gave the records to me when he left. He told me he would probably die and he was sorry about throwing me in the river and that I should have the records to remember him by. I told him he was a coward and an asshole and I hoped he *did* die.

We were having a picnic at Cuyahoga Heights Park, right near the Cuyahoga River, about twenty miles from our house. This was the last week before Vont was leaving for the war. He was drafted. We were eating salami sandwiches and laughing. Vont was drinking beer and smoking pot. He thought everybody would laugh harder if I took a swim in the water. He grabbed me from behind and put his arms around me so I couldn't hit him. I kicked my legs and screamed at him, "put me down, put me *down*, this isn't funny, this isn't *funny* Vincent, put me down." He tossed me into the river. I could hear him laughing as I struggled to get out. When I got to the shore I was crying. I couldn't open my eyes. They were on fire. They burned for several hours that afternoon. When I finally opened them, all I could see was the color red. The burns and rashes on my skin went away a few weeks after, or so I'm told. That was two years ago.

One year ago this Monday the same river caught fire and burned for several hours. The flames were fifty feet high. Nobody in Ohio, much less the world, had seen a river burn, including me and I was standing one hundred feet away from it.

I don't like to think about the time when I was able to see. I know now that I have to accept being blind and if I really remember what life *was* like, I'll only become depressed forever. My dad tells me things like this often. He has a very positive outlook.

My dad's kidneys can no longer filter the chemicals that enter his body. His kidneys failed because of his high blood pressure. Or his blood pressure is high because

of his poor kidneys; Dr. Cod isn't sure exactly which it is. He says dad suffers from hypertension. I think it's probably from worrying about me and Cad and maybe Vont fighting in the war. Hypertension causes high blood pressure, which causes kidney failure. Or the other way around.

I don't *want* to blame my dad. He suffered enough when my mother, his wife, left us. She left when I was nine. She was a hunter. She hunted deer, duck and the occasional man. On her last hunting trip here in Ohio, she caught a rich doctor who was in town to talk about lymphoma. It took University Hospitals seven years to get a kidney transplant program after that convention, but only twelve minutes for my mom, Nancy Jasper, to pack her stuff and walk out the front door of our English "garden city" style home.

My dad said I can be really witty and sarcastic and sometimes very cynical when I want to be. He said I'm too young to be a cynic. He also said I spend too much time listening to politics on the radio and to Doc Cod at the hospital. I told him all I can *do* is listen so I have no choice.

He is only the fourth patient ever to be eligible for the transplant operation in Ohio. University Hospitals began performing the operation last summer, right about the same time Cad left. Doc Cod is the best surgeon in the Midwest at doing kidney transplants. He came from a hospital in Chicago. He told my dad and me that if the dialysis were to stop working, they would need to get a kidney donor. He then told us there are three types of kidney donors: living-related, living non-related and cadaver donors. I told him Vont and Cad and me are his living related, my mother is his living non-related, although she is gone, and anyone from the morgue is his cadaver donor. He explained to me that the donors must have the same blood type as my father and I said Richard Nixon.

Richard Nixon has healthy kidneys and the same blood type as my dad, Vont and Cad. My dad read that to me from a science magazine. Unfortunately, President Nixon needs his kidneys to filter all of the whiskey he puts in his body. It gives him the courage to kill Cambodians from high above.

President Richard Nixon, with his whiskey breath, started killing Cambodians sometime in 1969. Nobody who was *supposed* to know about it knew about it like

Congress and us Americans. My brother, who dropped the bombs from his plane, left design school at Case Western after he got into a fight with my dad. He thought he'd be drawing maps and studying the landscape and terrain in Vietnam but when he got there he was bombing Cambodians and he was not to tell *anybody* about it. He told me then but now everybody knows.

The Van Sweringen brothers studied the landscape and terrain in my town of Shaker Heights, Ohio and applied the English "garden city" style to the houses they built. Oris Van Sweringen died before the last of the sixteen original models was finished. My proud-of-his-house dad tells me that story over and over. He talks to me as much as he can. Reads out loud. Tries real hard. Thousands of Cambodian farmers, proud of *their* land, died when my President considered it a threat to democracy.

The United States continued bombing Cambodia for eleven months. Dad never told me that he felt bad about killing Cambodians. He said it was just his job and that he was so high up in the air that he didn't feel like he was *killing* at all. On April 30, 1970, twenty days after the Beatles broke up and my 17th birthday, President Nixon said he was going to draft 150,000 more Americans, to *invade* Cambodia. Two days later and twenty-six miles away from my house, students at the State College in Kent burned down an Army building in protest of Nixon. After two more days of rioting, about six weeks ago, while I was reading a Dr. Seuss book in Braille, Sandra Scheuer was crossing a parking lot on her way to her history class. A group of people gathered at the other end of the parking lot and Sandra wanted to see what was happening. When she got closer a bullet hit her in the chest and drained the blood from her heart onto the ground. She is the older sister of my first boyfriend Hans Scheuer. He was in my freshman English class at Abe Lincoln high school. He used to kiss me and tell me I was beautiful. I am. I haven't talked to him in two years and his sister is now dead. When we were dating, he told me that his father was supposed to fight with the Nazis back in Germany but broke his own leg and so the Nazis didn't want him. I asked him if he thought his father was a chicken for not fighting in the war and he said, "I dunno, maybe." I told him my brother was a chicken because he went to Vietnam instead of staying home to protest. He called me and told my dad about the funeral and that I should come, but I felt weird about it so I didn't.

A friend of mine, Debby Krause, also from Abe Lincoln, used to come over sometimes to listen to Beatles albums with me. Sometimes Debby and I would dress up real nice and she would do my lips and eyelashes; my whole face. One time last year she told me I was pretty enough to get married to anyone I wanted. I saw myself marrying Paul Newman. He told me how pretty I was. I stared into his blue eyes and said, "I do." Debby laughed and asked me if I ever took acid. She said she thought it would help me to see again.

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...if you're just joining us, the score is tied 1 to 1 in injury time. West Germany's Schnellinger scored in the last minute of regulation to tie the match. The ref whistles the end. We're going to play an extra period here in Mexico City. Earlier today, Brazil defeated Uruguay 3 to 1 so I'm sure Pelé is eagerly awaiting the results of this game.

...I think he'd like to see West Germany beat the Italians, Germany took out the former champions, England in the quarterfinals.

...Yes, the Germans would be a much stronger opponent against the powerful Brazilians. I'd hate to dig up old bones Chuck, but weren't the Germans and Italians on the same team, so to speak, 25 years ago?

...Yes Chuck

"What do you think of that Ev, the Germans tying it up in the last minute?" asks Cad. He rubs his hand on my back. It feels warm. I begin to tingle inside. I think he still wants me. For the first time I'm glad Vont's here.

"Man, this game is far out," says Vont. I can hear him biting his nails and spitting the pieces onto the floor. He lights a cigarette. The smoke makes my eyes itch. I rub them and imagine the red swirling and flickering like a lava lamp.

"Dad is going to die, don't you think you should go see him?" I say.

"He is not going to die, Vont is going to give him a kidney," Cad says in a playful way.

"I'm not so sure about that, Germany's gonna take it in overtime."

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"I don't know what to say, listen..."

“There’s nothing *to* say, West Germany lost, man,” says Vont.

“It was some game, hell of a match. They just weren’t going to quit. Müller put up some fight.” Italy scored, Germany scored, Italy scored again, I heard the whole thing. “Listen, forget it, forget it, you take Italy in the finals. Forget the semis altogether, we’ll say the bet is Italy and Brazil,” Cad says.

“No, Germany loses, Vont loses. That was the bet. I was a witness,” I say. “It’s only fair.”

“So what do you say, Vont? Do you want a second life?” Cad asks.

“Umm...I guess so. Thanks man, that’s real swell of you.”

“Swell, ha! Since when do you use the word swell?”

“I dunno. So should we go see dad now?” asks Vont.

“I don’t really feel up to it. We’ll go tomorrow, how’s that sound Ev?”

“I *see* him every day. Cad, you are a real drag, you know that?”

With that, I walk off and find my way to my room. I shut the door and lock it. I put the first side of *Let It Be* on the record player and put the volume up real loud.

Paul McCartney, my other husband besides Paul Newman, decides two months ago to leave the Beatles and that the band would have to break up.

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I hear a soft knock at the door. It wakes me. It can’t be Vont’s bony hand so it must be Cad. I don’t know what will happen if I let him in. I don’t think I should. I don’t want to do that anymore. He whistles and gently says my name.

Halftime

Ahh ha ha ha ha ha

*I’d like to buy the world a home, and furnish it with love,
grow apple trees, honeybees, and snow-white turtledoves,
I’d like to teach the world to sing, in perfect harmony,
I’d like to buy the world a coke and keep it company.*

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La la la la la

We're going to take you through the disadvantages of the new Benson and Hedges One-hundreds. There a lot longer than king size and that takes some getting used to.

La la la la

La la la la la la la

La la la la la la

La la la la la la

La la la la la la la

La la la la

Benson and Hedges One-hundreds are the new longer filter cigarettes. Three puffs longer, four puffs longer, maybe five puffs longer than kings, once you get the hang of them.

The Second Half

Birds whistle outside of my window. It's morning. I open my eyes because that's what people do and I get out of bed. The morning doesn't mean much to me anymore; it's like any other part of the day. I leave my room and head towards the kitchen. Cad is on the telephone.

"Fine. Fine. We'll see you soon. OK. Bye." he says.

"Who was that, dad?" I ask him.

"Well good morning princess. Did you sleep well?"

"Who was on the phone?" I keep my distance.

"It was Doc Cod. He's a palindrome you know."

"What's a palindrome?" I ask.

"It's a word or words that's spelled the same way forwards and backwards."

"Oh." I spell the words out in my head.

"I came by your room last night."

"Oh. I must have been sleeping."

He pauses. "Vont asked my why you won't talk to him."

"He made me blind and he's an asshole and a coward."

“He didn’t mean it and you know that. It could have been me who threw you in the river. It was my idea too, you know. I told you that already.”

“So what? You didn’t actually do it.”

“Who knew it would make you go blind.”

“Why did he leave then? Why didn’t he stay with me?”

“He had to, he was drafted.”

“He could have burnt his draft card.”

“Burned. He could have, sure, but he wanted to go fight in the war.”

“That’s not true, he hated the war. He used to protest it in high school.”

“People change, Evalynn.”

“He left because he’s a coward and you stayed because--”

“You know *why* I stayed.”

* * *

At first Cad stayed because he didn’t want to fight in the war. He got into Case Western to study design. I liked him staying, we’ve always been pretty close and I needed someone close to me after the accident. We soon became too close.

Cad never told me why he started doing it with me. It first happened in June of 1969. Sometimes I think he did it because he felt sorry for me. I let him because I hated Vont and everybody else in the world and it was the only thing that felt good in my life. I thought it was weird, but I got used to it, after all, I couldn’t really see that it was him on top of me.

* * *

“Listen, I’m going to wake up Vont and we’re going to see Doc Cod and daddy.”

“The palindrome,” I say.

“Yes, the palindrome. Can you be ready in a half an hour?”

“Sure.”

We are driving to the hospital listening to the local news on the radio. Yesterday a cab driver, on his way to Cleveland from somewhere in the southeast, swerved off the road and crashed. They said he is in stable condition but things could have been worse. I wonder if his blood type is the same as my dad’s? I don’t think it would matter because

the waiting list for a cadaver donor is two years unless they specifically name a recipient and sign a waiver. Vont says he hopes it was the same guy that charged Cad the extra money for the ride. Cad says that's a horrible thing to say.

We pull up to the front of the hospital and Cad drops me and Vont off. He says to wait for him while he parks the car.

"Do you want a cig?" Vont asks me. I don't say anything. I feel him grabbing for me. I try to pull away but he gets hold of my hand and puts a cigarette in it. "I heard you listening to *Let It Be* last night. Whatta think, pretty groovy eh?" I still don't say anything. "Horrible thing, McCartney leaving and all."

* * *

I was very upset when the radio said that the Beatles had broken up. Dad took me for a drive that night. He didn't tell me where we were going. We stopped somewhere a little while later. We got out of the car and sat on the hood. Dad said it was a real clear night and that the moon looked like a lemon wedge. I asked him what we were doing and he told me looking for a spaceship. What spaceship? I asked and he told me the Apollo 13. It was launched today on a mission to the moon he said. He told me if we looked real real close, we might just get a chance to see it moving. I told him that was impossible that I couldn't see my own hand. He told me to just stare into the sky and that if I could see it, so could he.

Dad started saying stuff like that after Cad left. I hated when he tried to be nice to me and make me feel better. But it did make me feel better.

The Apollo 13 spaceship never made it to the moon. It had to turn around because it lost all of its oxygen and nobody inside could breathe. The astronauts made it back safely and they were breathing fine soon after.

* * *

I put the cigarette in my mouth. I hear a flicking sound and I inhale. I feel the smoke touch my lungs. "They released *The Long and Winding Road* last month. Their last single ever," I say and exhale.

"What's the B side?"

"*For You Blue.*"

"You have it, right?"

“Yep. Two copies.”

“Can I listen to it later?”

“No.”

“Ev, I know you hate me but it was an accident. I swear.” His voice sounds honest but I know my brother, he is a liar. I smoke my cigarette. “Evalynn, please, this isn’t fair.”

“Give dad your kidney, then we’re even.”

“Is that what you want man?” His voice changes from honest to bitter. “Fine, if Brazil wins. If Brazil wins, dad gets my kidney. That’s the bet.”

“You lost the bet already you asshole. Why are you even here? Why didn’t you just die over in Vietnam? You don’t care about anybody but yourself.” I toss my cigarette in the direction of his face. I hope it burns him.

“Ev, you’re blind. Why don’t you just accept that fact and stop taking it out on everybody else in your life, ok?” I ignore him. He grabs my wrist but I yank it away. I search for a wall but I can’t find one. I *have* accepted that fact, just not from him. I wish I could just kill him. I suddenly feel very disoriented. That is when I hear Cad’s voice.

“You guys ready?”

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“So you’ve decided to donate a kidney to your father.”

“Yes. We have.” answers Cad.

“Well, according to your Army and Navy records, either one of you would be a suitable donor. Have you decided who is going be the courageous one?”

“We’re still discussing the matter. We’ll know by tomorrow.”

“The reason I ask is because time is a serious issue in this circumstance. You father’s condition is very unstable. We are doing everything our power to keep him alive, but the sooner we get a donor, the sooner we can try and save him.”

“That’s some heavy shit,” says Vont.

“It sure is Mr. Jasper, it sure is.”

“They bet on the World Cup and when Brazil wins, Vont is gonna give daddy his kidney,” I say.

“I beg your pardon,” says Doc Cod.

“Nothing, Ev, she’s got some imagination. Do you follow soccer, Dr. Cod?” asks Cad.

“No, as a matter of fact I don’t.”

“Our family is crazy about soccer and the World Cup finals are tomorrow. Vont and I usually make a small wager on the outcome, that’s all Evalynn is talking about,” says Cad.

“Well I wish you could give me your answer now, I honestly don’t believe he’ll survive much longer.”

I suddenly wonder what it’d be like if my dad really *did* die. It would just be Cad, Vont, and me. Vont would go back to Vietnam and probably get shot or he’d run away somewhere without going back to the war at all. Cad would have to stay and it would be just him and me. I hold that thought for just a moment, and let it disappear. I don’t like it.

“I don’t suppose either of you know what’s involved with donating a kidney. First off, there is always the risk of death during the operation. For this particular procedure, the incidence is quite low, so that is not a major concern but I should mention it.” Doctor Cod is always honest and to the point. His first name is Paul and I would marry him too if I weren’t already married to two other Pauls. “If the operation is a success, living with only one kidney is, within itself, difficult for both the donor and the recipient. Your diet must be carefully monitored, your habits as well. Drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, these are both highly dangerous. Your ability to physically exert yourself is weakened and frequent urination is quite common. I’m sorry for being so frank, but you two *must* know what you are getting into. There is also the possibility of your father’s body rejecting the donated organ; the incidence of that happening is high, roughly forty-five percent.”

“That’s some heavy shit,” says Vont.

“There’s another problem. Your father does not want to accept a donated organ from either of you.”

“I don’t understand,” says Cad.

“He has made some questionable statements to me in confidence during the past two weeks, including that one. I believe his deteriorating condition has led to this mental

imbalance, so Cad, you being the next of kin, I have arranged that you have complete consent in the matter. I've checked with the local bylaws and due to your father's state, and the absence of Mrs. Jasper, the decision is legally yours."

"What exactly did he tell you?" says Cad. He thinks Doc Cod knows.

"It doesn't matter. Like I said, your father is in a state of confusion, his statements are irrational and paranoid. Now as far as the transplant is concerned, like I said, the decision is yours."

"You are *going* to get him a kidney," I say. I don't want dad to die. I don't want to be alone with Cad. I don't want any of this to be happening.

"Of course, of course Ev, don't you worry," says Cad.

"Can we go talk to 'im, doctorman?" says Vont.

"He might not be too responsive, but sure, he's in room 245."

"Ev, you wait here, Vont and I are going alone."

"Why?" I ask. Cad doesn't answer.

* * *

One night last summer dad said he was going to call the police and make sure Cad spent the rest of his life in prison. I don't know how dad found out about Cad and me, he just did. That was the last time they spoke. Cad came into my room that same night. He didn't touch me. He said he was going to a concert somewhere in New York and he'd be back in a week or so. I asked him if I could come, but he said no. He also told me that what him and me did was *our* secret and if I *ever* told anyone about it, he would never speak to me again.

The concert was called Woodstock even though it took place in a town named Bethel, which about fifty miles away from the town of Woodstock. Cad explained that it was called Woodstock because that was the town Bob Dylan lived in. I didn't understand why. Cad never came back like he said he would. I asked dad and he told me he didn't know where he could be. Dad then asked me if Cad ever hurt me or did things to me that I didn't like. I told him no. I told him that I love Cad and he never would hurt me. We never spoke of Cad and me again. I didn't need to tell him what he already knew.

Dad and I became closer that fall, probably because we had nobody else in our lives. The whole kidney thing happened kinda suddenly, sometime the next February, so

dad was in pretty good health at the time. One day, about two months after Cad left, we got a letter from him. He was in the Philippines. He had joined the Navy. After reading the letter to me, dad told me Cad was a coward and he should have stayed at home with his family. Dad also said if I got any more letters from him, I should tear them up.

Cad continued to write me letters. I knew when the mail came which ones they were. I could tell by the texture of the envelope. It was Army paper. I would take them before dad got home and hide them in my room. Whenever Debby would come over, I'd ask her to read them to me and to write my replies. She asked me if my brother and I were close; the letters, she said, were very intimate. I told her we were close because we were family. Families should be close. I still had those kinds of feelings for Cad back then.

When I was close to Cad, I told him not to speak. I knew who was with me. His breath is Paul Newman's, his sweat, Paul McCartney's. Next time, if there is one, although I hope there isn't, he'll be Doc Cod. Never once has it been my brother's body touching mine.

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"Are you sure you want to do this. I'll call it off and we'll decide another way. We can go ask Doc Cod who'd be a better donor and let him decide," Cad says.

"No no, we made a bet. I think Italy's groovy, they can win. Well what if--"

"What if what?" Cad asks.

"What if Italy loses but it's close, say by one goal?"

"Then we flip a coin. How's that?"

"Yeah, yeah, that's it, man, that's what we'll do. Best out of five, no seven."

"You don't want to go through with it, do you?"

"No, I ain't scared, man. This is dad we're talkin' about. I'll go right now, forget this whole World Cup. Come on."

"No, we have a *bet* here. Go and grab us a cold beer from the icebox. The game is on in a few minutes."

"You know what man, could be your last beer," says Vont as his voice fades into the kitchen.

“Hey Ev, you going to--” says Cad.

“--Listen. Yes I am. I’m lucky to be blind you know, I don’t have to look at your ugly face.” I say.

“You don’t mean that, kid.”

He puts his arm around my neck and kisses my hair. “You’re a pretty girl, you know that? I’m sure the guys go nuts over you at school. Do you have a boyfriend yet?”

I laugh a little but I’m beginning to feel uncomfortable again. The problem is I still trust Cad. He’s kind and responsible.

“I sure hope not because this morning, I realized that I really miss you. I really do. It made me think that I don’t want to go back to the war. I just want to stay here with you.”

His voice is comforting but creepy. He kisses the back of my neck and I get goose bumps. I softly pull away from him.

“What’s the matter, Ev? You won’t let your own brother kiss you?”

He grabs my shoulders and pulls me into his broad chest. He runs his hands over my breasts and down towards my stomach. Vont says something from the kitchen and he lets go.

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...Welcome to ABC’s Wide World of Sports. Today we are broadcasting live from Mexico City, Mexico where Brazil and Italy are competing for the world’s most famous sports prize, the World Cup.

...And Pelé has guaranteed a win today for his home country. Frankly Chuck, I don’t see Italy winning this game.

...I will say this, they have their work cut out for them.

+ + +

“Come on, I’ll drive you to the hospital.”

“Right now, couldn’t we go tomorrow morning?”

“Doc Cod said it was urgent, remember?”

Their conversation sounds like a Smothers Brothers act. But not funny.

“Yeah, yeah, if it was so urgent, then why didn’t we just go there first thing the other day, man, why did we wait for this stupid game?”

“Vont, I know you’re scared, but you’re doing a wonderful thing. You’re saving dad’s life.”

“I’m surprised you don’t let dad just die, life would be easier for you. And why can’t Ev give him a kidney? She’s already a cripple and doesn’t do much with her life anyway. I have things to do, man, in life.”

“Don’t you dare say that Vont. How dare you.” Cad adds some meanness to his speech.

“I’ll do this, I don’t care. But I don’t think I’m the one who should, that’s all.” Vont is pacing. *Clap clap* go his feet. Cad has not said a word. I decide to say something.

“What time is it, Cad?” My voice is rough.

“Four thirty, why?”

“I want to call Doc Cod.”

“Well we’re going to the hospital right this minute, can’t you wait until we get there?”

I raise my voice. “I want to talk to Doc Cod.”

“Fine honey, you call and Vont will pack his things for the hospital, isn’t that right Vont? And Evalynn, tell him we’re coming.”

“Listen to you, all righteous, who do you think you are man?” Vont says.

“Just get your things and let’s go.” His voice is angry but calm. I walk over to the wall and before I can pick up the phone, it rings. I answer it and it’s Doc Cod. He says that dad is really, really sick and they need to perform the operation now. I give the phone to Cad. I lean against the kitchen counter and wait. Cad tells Dr. Cod that we’re leaving right now and hangs up the phone.

“Vont, Ev, let’s go. NOW!” He shouts louder than I’ve ever heard him shout before. Cad is never this mad.

I sit in the front with Cad and Vont stays in the back seat. They don’t say anything the whole way. Neither do I. I’m too scared. Cad is driving fast; I feel and hear the wind from my open window rushing into the car. I can also feel his heart beating fast. It vibrates in the seat back. I don’t understand Cad. He is acting peculiar. I was beginning to think he wanted dad just to die but now I’m not so sure.

We arrive at University Hospitals, Cad parks the car and the three of us enter together.

+ + +

“Mr. Jasper, Vincent, if I may call you that, you’re a brave man. You’re saving a life today, you know that,” says Doc Cod.

I know Vont and Doc Cod are here but I’m not sure about Cad.

“Yeah, yeah, well somebody has to have courage in the family.”

“That’s right. I just need you to sign these release forms. Just sign them, I’ll have my secretary fill out the rest. Thank you again, Vincent, you’re a good man.”

“Yes yes, where do I sign?”

“Right here, here, here and here. Your father is being prepared for surgery now. It will be a few minutes before we will be ready for you. Is there anything you would like?”

“Can I go have a cigarette, man?” His voice is grumpy.

“I suppose that would be fine. Your final cigarette.”

“It’s like I’m being executed or somethin’. You got a blindfold, Doc?”

“Oh it’s nothing like that, we’re just taking a kidney. Go and have your cigarette. There’s a lounge at the end of the hall. Come see me in ten minutes. I’m going to check on your father.”

Doc Cod walks away. Vont, he is not coming back. I know it. Where’s Cad?

“Cad? Cad?” I say.

“He’s not here, *Ev*, what is it? Afraid I’m gonna run away? Now why would I do a thing like that? I’m good, courageous, didn’t you hear the good doctorman?”

He’s lying. He’s a coward. He’s not coming back. “Vont!” I scream. I hear his footsteps stop.

“What!” he says.

I reach into my pocket and take out one of my cards. I don’t get a good feel but I’m sure it’s a yellow one. I show it to him.

“Ha. Very funny, Evalynn. What, am I suspended for two games or somethin’? You’re a freak.”

His footsteps disappear. I showed him the wrong card. What did I do? “Vont!” I yell but he doesn’t answer. I stand up and find the closest wall. I think about going after him. I don’t.

Ten minutes later somebody come into the office. My heart beats faster. It’s Cad. He asks me where Vont is and I ask him where *he* has been and I tell him he went to the lounge for his last cigarette and he *must* go find him right away. My words are shaking. Cad tells me he’ll be right back.

I wait.

+ + +

“Ev.” It’s Cad’s voice. He sounds calm. “He’s gone,” he says. “He’s gone. He’s not in the lounge; he’s not in the cafeteria. He’s gone. Let me find Doc Cod.”

+ + +

“I don’t know what to say, Cadman, your father is ready for surgery and if we do not perform it within the next two hours or so, I’m afraid he will die.”

“We’ll can’t you do anything else? Make some phone calls, find a last minute donor?”

“Mr. Jasper, I believe the only donor in this hospital is you. Or your brother Vincent, if he’s still here.”

“I cannot be incapacitated in such a way. I need to take care of Evalynn in case anything goes wrong, in case dad doesn’t survive the operation.”

I can’t believe it.

“There is a decent chance you’ll be fine in a few months, Cadman, not all kidney transplants are unsuccessful. This is, after all, 1970.”

“What did you talk about with dad?” I say.

“Nothing, Ev, he was barely conscious.”

“I wanna know!”

“I told you Evalynn, he was unconscious. Now that’s all.”

He wants dad to die. I feel nauseous.

“What did you talk about with Vont and dad!?” I scream.

“Dr. Cod, can I talk to my sister alone for a minute?”

“Of course.” Doc Cod leaves.

“Vont is gone. He’s going to Canada. We never even saw dad.”

“Did you tell him to go?”

“He didn’t want to go back to the war and he surely wasn’t about to give dad his kidney.”

“You can’t do this. I’m gonna tell Doc Cod everything.”

“Fine. Tell him. It wouldn’t matter; he already knows.”

“Doc Cod!” I yell.

Cad quietly threatens me. He grabs my wrist and squeezes tightly.

“Yes Evalynn?” Doc Cod comes back into the office.

“Why don’t you call for him on the loudspeaker? I’m sure he’s around the hospital somewhere,” I say.

“What was that Ev?” asks Cad.

“Why don’t you call for Vont on the loudspeaker.”

“I suppose we can do that. Vera? Vera, can I have a Mr. Vincent Jasper paged. Tell him to call here immediately. I don’t know what good that’s gonna do, but if you think it will help, Evalynn, We’ll try it.”

We sit in silence for a few minutes. Dr. Cod taps a pen or pencil on his desk. Cad is loosely holding my hand. His palm is sweaty.

“Dr. Cod?” Vera’s voice calls from the other room. “There’s a call for you on line two.”

“Hello. Yes. Yes. Vincent Jasper. Yes.” Cad grip gets tighter. “That’s strange. We’ll come have a look. Thanks.”

“Is he here?” Cad asks.

“Well, apparently he is.”

“Where?”

“He’s on the way to the autopsy room. He’s dead.” Doc Cod is a straightforward man.

“What are you talking about?” Cad asks. His words fall to pieces.

+ + +

After Cad positively identifies our brother's body we take an elevator up and go to the emergency room. The security guard explains to us what he saw.

"So I'm outside here havin' my afternoon smoke, ya know, and all of a sudden, this fella comes a runnin' past me like he just seen a ghost. I tell him he oughta slow down but he don't pay me no mind. He just run out in that there street. Well, at the same time, in comes this car racin' like *it* just seen a ghost. Well that there car done hit that man and sent him 'bout twenty feet into th'air. The man drivin' gets out screamin' 'cause his wife's about to have her baby, ya know. I seen the man when they took him in here, his eyes were all coverd in blood and he don't look like he's breathin' none."

"Can we take his kidneys?" I ask.

"Evalynn, Vont is dead," says Cad.

"I know, can we take his kidneys and give them to dad?"

"He is not officially a cadaver donor, if he were, he'd have to be placed on the list for awaiting recipients. That list is two years long," says Doc Cod.

"But he signed the papers saying he would give his kidney to daddy," I say.

"That is true, but it just doesn't work like that, Evalynn," says Doc Cod.

"Why can't it work like that, my dad will be dead and Vont is his *donor* and can save him." I raise my voice.

"Just stop Ev, just stop." Cad speaks softly. "You can't do that, can you?"

"It just sounds so unethical. I would first have to inspect the tissue to see if it has been damaged."

"But you can't really do that?" Cad doesn't *really* want dad to live.

"I don't know. Let's go to my office and make some quick phone calls."

+ + +

Dad died during the operation. His body couldn't take the strain. We had only one funeral for dad and Vont two days later. My mom showed up and cried for them, she cried for me and she cried for Cad. She was only here for a day. She was with her new husband. Not the doctor but a different one. He's a banker from New York. She told me stuff that I didn't try to remember. She asked me to move to New York with her. I told her I didn't know and I'd call her if I wanted to. She is the one who left and I don't think

dad would want me to go to her. Not that he'd want me to stay with Cad, but at least Cad has always shown affection towards me.

We live in dad's English "garden city" style home on Morningside Drive. The house was designed to use the landscape and terrain that surrounds it. Hans Scheuer called yesterday. He read about dad and Vont in the newspaper. He was wondering how I was. Cad told him I was fine but that I couldn't come to the phone. A police siren whistles down our quiet street.

End of Match