

September, 1968...

It is my sophomore year and I have just transferred to New York University, in the heart of Greenwich Village. I've been in Manhattan only three days and I'm already painfully aware of what a small town girl I am—from Cranston, Rhode Island. Take my first date. It's with Jeffrey Miller, who, I swear to God, is Michelangelo's *David* come to life.

I meet this Adonis while waiting in line the six hours it takes to register for classes. We talk. *I drool*. Then he mentions that his father owns a movie house in upstate New York. Because of that, Jeff happens to know the manager of the Andy Warhol Theater on Bleecker Street and is welcome to free passes any time.

Before parting, he asks, "So, would you like to catch a flick there, tonight?"

"Sure, what's playing?"

"*Flesh*."

"Sounds great." (*What did I know?*)

"I'll meet you under the Arch at 7:00."

At the movies I sit for two hours fidgeting, cringing, *dying*, while watching every possible combination of sexual partnering and positioning I'll ever need to know. Afterwards, and without a word, we walk briskly back to my dorm, the One Fifth Avenue Hotel (owned by N.Y.U. and used to house a fortuitous overflow of "coeds").

When we arrive and stand canopied by the long awning to the street, Jeff spies the inscription by the revolving doors: "The most distinguished address in America," which he reads aloud.

"What can I say?"

Then, without even a peck on the cheek, he disappears around the corner sputtering, "See ya." Passing in the hallway the following morning, neither one of us can manage the cordial nod of acknowledgment.

Besides registering for classes, my only other official task this week is finding a job. My father has made it clear that if I want spending money, I'll have to earn it. With my slumped shoulders, collapsed chest, and long black hair draping my blemished face, I am, by any standard, the epitome of the insecure, self-loathing adolescent. I've had a great role model—this same father—whom I've often seen unable to extricate himself from bed in the morning. He views himself as a frustrated rabbi or academic condemned by post-war family obligations to work as a traveling sales rep for men's clothing manufacturers. Demeaned and unfulfilled, he berates everyone in his path. I am, for some reason, constantly in his way. "Can't you even hold a broom right, Sara?" "If there's a complicated way to do something,

you'll find it, won't you?" or, one of his worst insults, "You're just like your mother."

The dutiful daughter, I've done a meticulous job of internalizing my father's judgments. I bitterly critique my every move and remind myself that there is absolutely nothing I can do right. So, the very idea of employment is a frightening concept. If I think about it, I react somewhat like Dobie Gillis' friend Maynard G. Krebs, who spasms anytime he utters the word "work".

I imagine myself waitressing. In my mind's eye I see myself stumble, then fall, spilling boiling soup onto a customer's lap. Or I picture myself working in the hosiery department of Gimbel's and envision some lady from Staten Island with blue hair asking me whether to buy, the "Nearly Nude" or the "Barely Black." I gather my courage and dare to recommend the "Nearly Nude." The lady hates my suggestion and storms off to my supervisor, who fires me on the spot.

For the first time in my life I need to find work and I am in New York City—a concrete sea, teeming with sharks.

Getting a grip, I make a beeline for the N.Y.U. Student Employment Office. There on the table lie four large notebooks, each filled with index cards announcing a myriad of job possibilities. It takes over an hour for me to leaf through them all. At the end of that time, I've copied down only one name and phone number from a card that reads: "Elderly Woman's Companion Needed." I almost pass by that card too, but something tells me it holds promise and, unlike the rest, at least I have a chance of *qualifying* for this job. Yet even this one conjures up foreboding images. What if she's cranky? Rude? Bedridden? What if I have to bathe her, or feed her, or dress her in diapers, and I can't hack it?

Back at the dorm, I tentatively dial the number and speak to Mrs. May. We arrange to meet at her place at 3:00 tomorrow afternoon. Conveniently, she lives only two blocks away, on 10th Street just off Fifth.

As I approach her brownstone, a plaque reading "Mark Twain's Residence" catches my eye. I ring the bell and she releases the door latch with her buzzer. She's already instructed me to take the elevator to the third floor. I do. The gate opens and there she is—standing in her doorway awaiting me. She reminds me of a cross between Flora, one of the fairies in Walt Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* and the "Bibbity-bobbity-boo" godmother in *Cinderella*—though not nearly so plump. She is quite petite, in her late 70's, with cheeks aglow and a look on her face that says, "Give me a minute and I'll melt your heart."

She bids me enter and I walk past her into the apartment. It is elegant: high ceilings, built-in libraries, formal drapery, antique furniture everywhere. Sepia-toned family photos grace the walls, reflecting a long

overstuffed, eucalyptus green corduroy sofa, I quietly hope, someday, to hear the stories captured in these photographs.

She starts out by explaining to me that her eyesight and hearing are failing rapidly. Then she speaks of being afflicted by Parkinson's Disease, which at this point manifests only as a trembling in her hands, which she demonstrates.

Next she gives me a brief rundown of what my job will entail. "First and foremost," she says emphatically, "you'll have to read the *New York Times* editorial page to me. You see I simply cannot miss Russell Baker or James Reston. Then, there will be an occasional walk to Washington Square Park, a stop at Gristede's Market and maybe Brentano's Bookstore. You may need to accompany me on errands or to my daughter Margaret's nearby. Otherwise, you'll just have to sit here and keep me company."

As I enter the elevator for my descent to the ground floor, she leaves me with, "You're hired. I think \$2.50 an hour seems fair and don't worry, we'll work out the rest of the details later. How about starting tomorrow? Can you be here at 2:30?"

"Sure." Then the gate closes and down I go. I can't believe how wonderful she is, or that this was ever classified as a job to begin with or that I'm the lucky one to land it. And to top things off, \$2.50 an hour—that's a fortune relative to the minimum wage.

"We'll start off with two afternoons a week and see how that goes," she says during our second meeting. I settle in by reading the editorials to her and then I set out her lunch. We sit in the great green living room, a hushed, mossy green—velour to the soul.

And just as I'd hoped, with these old photos as reference, she begins painting the picture of her life.

Starting with her husband of sixty years, she points to his portrait across the room. There he stands frozen in middle age, with tender eyes, tall and gallant behind his desk, firmly gripping the back of his chair with his right hand. "Mr. May and I had an incredible life together. We met when I was seventeen and had just entered Barnard. He was two years my senior and attended Columbia. The next year, we did a most daring thing. We both left our Ivy League schools and entered the first class at the New School for Social Research. Such an exciting time that was! We felt so bold, so *avant garde*. The classes were extraordinary, the people we met amazing, and the quality of the discourse dazzling. We spent much of our time going to the theater, socializing with Eugene O'Neill and his theater group. We took trips to Provincetown—such fun. Oh, those were the days when New York was on fire."

Then coming back into the present, she sighs, "Well, Mr. May died this past year. I miss him terribly." She pauses. "But I sense," and she puffs

herself up as she says this, “that you’re a fresh breath of air brought in to lighten up my life. I’m so glad you’re here.”

With a bit more time, it becomes obvious that she truly likes me. Moreover, she likes me for who I am, for being *me*. A novel experience. She doesn’t know or care about my grades. It doesn’t matter to her how I dress (and I am prone to making unique and zany fashion statements), who my friends are, or what their fathers do for a living. She likes the essence of me and she tells me so. I feel showered with approval whenever I enter her presence and two or three hours pass effortlessly and it’s time to go. As each enchanting visit ends, we stand in the doorway waiting for the elevator to arrive and she hands me my payment. I blush, embarrassed to be taking money for time spent with someone who is fast becoming one of my closest friends.

I want to know *everything* about her. So she tells me all about growing up as a Jew in Harlem, which (news to me) was once predominantly an upper middle-class Jewish neighborhood. Her grandfather had founded Ethical Culture, a secular offshoot of Judaism. He’d bought a large house in Harlem, where he established a school and later built three or four smaller houses on the same acreage—one for each of his children. This dreamy story mesmerizes me. I can barely comprehend her deep connection to family and community. And although I discover very little about Ethical Culture, I am enjoying how very cultured and ethical Mrs. May is herself.

Picture the contrast between us. I am utterly cynical. I see human nature as depraved—rotten to the core. I perceive New York City, the biggest communal apple of all, as the major challenge of my life—an inferno of alienation that would impress even Dante. Martin Luther King was assassinated last spring and Richard Nixon is about to be elected president.

No different from most other teenagers, I’m trying hard to be cool, and can’t quite pull it off. More than anything else, I am awkward, confused and in particular, failing miserably in the romance department. Simultaneously convinced that no one will have me, I have yet to meet a single guy who is worthy of me. Pessimism enfolds me like a shroud. I am lost, teetering precariously on my own edges.

Meanwhile, here I sit across from a woman whose hands are so shaky the coffee barely makes it to her lips, yet her faith in people is as solidly planted as the Chrysler Building. When we are out walking, Mrs. May talks to everyone on the streets or in the shops and restaurants we visit. She loves the changes she’s witnessed in her nearly 80 years. She’s seen New York go from a horse and buggy town of cobblestone streets, through the model T, the El and now Rapid Transit—the IRT and the BMT. Rather than letting these changes oppress or depress her, she marvels at them. Instead of seeing the city as her enemy, she sees it as a wealthy

benefactor. While I wait for the next disappointment, she anticipates what to do next, gravitates toward the million exciting things the city has to offer. I am frightened and bitter and she is chomping at the bit for an adventure.

“Have you ever had a cucumber and cream cheese sandwich on crustless rye?” she inquires.

“No.”

“Then how about lunch at Sutters, next Tuesday?”

“Sure.”

Months pass. Mrs. May increases my work schedule to three afternoons a week. It is the middle of January and on one Thursday she suggests we walk over to Gristede’s Market. She wants me to taste Welsh Rarebit, a favorite dish of hers, made with beer and eggs, and served over toast. We can buy the ingredients today and then whip them up for lunch tomorrow.

I button up my navy pea-coat and help her with her nubby gray lamb’s wool coat and her clear plastic, over-the-shoe, rain boots. We walk out into the frozen afternoon. It’s probably 10 degrees. After a brief search, I realize that I have forgotten my gloves upstairs. Ordinarily, that wouldn’t be a problem, because I could stick my hands in my pockets and then gallop the two short blocks to my dorm. But that isn’t what’s happening here. I must walk with one hand clutching Mrs. May’s arm, and the other grasping her ancient shopping cart. And “galloping” is not the pace we’re moving at either. “Inching along” these icy sidewalks, is more accurate. What we have to negotiate are four-and-a-half, slippery, windswept, dreary city blocks—in each direction. What I have to endure is a pair of nearly frostbitten hands and a profound lesson in patience and sacrifice.

With tears streaming down both my cheeks, I creep alongside Mrs. May. Even though the thought crosses my mind to dash ahead, to slip into a doorway (any doorway), or perhaps to confess my suffering, I feel it imperative to weather my discomfort silently. I can’t bear to upset her. She’d hate to think that her limitations have hampered me in any way.

Suddenly, I envision us, as if from atop one of the adjacent brownstones, and I cherish the image: two friends, young and old, balanced by our mutual support for one another.

By the time February arrives, I’ve worked and saved enough to consider traveling to Europe with my dearest friend and roommate Olga—Ollie for short—who is hell-bent on discovering her roots in Hungary. Her parents, both Holocaust survivors, had immigrated to New York after the war. Other relatives had returned to their hometowns. She wants to find those lost family members as well as see Europe for the first time. And she

wants me to join her. But to say we're "considering" this trip is to deny that we're fixated—dead set—on this fantasy. Together we dream, day and night, about what it will be like to see Paris and the Riviera, Florence and Amsterdam. Imagine two whole months on our own.

Finally, I muster enough courage to write my father about our intent. When I next speak to him by phone, he says, "Listen Sara, your birthday's approaching. I'll be in New York for a sales show that week. Let me take you out to dinner. We can talk about it then."

"Great."

On March 16, I turn nineteen. My father and I meet at a fabulous Chinese restaurant, uptown. We are seated in the expansive, chandelier-lit main dining room. As the maitre d' shows us to our table, I scan my father, for cues. His bald head is shining. He looks particularly dapper in his navy blue blazer and khakis. His round baby face is grinning from ear to ear. *All good signs*. Relief ripples through me. Then, knowing we'll be ordering momentarily, I start to explain that after seeing Jean Luc Godard's movie, *Weekend*, the previous Friday night, I have become a vegetarian. I proceed to summarize this anti-materialistic saga of man's inhumanity to man that includes a graphic pig slaughtering and culminates in a cannibalistic scene with a husband munching on his ex-wife's thigh.

"Have you lost your marbles?" is my father's only response.

When I try to describe my culinary limitations to our sixty-year-old Chinese waiter, he stares at me and his eyes glaze over. Then nervously, yet insistently, he indicates that I should wait. He turns, pushes through the swinging kitchen doors, and emerges moments later with the head chef, who listens to me and understands exactly what I need. Graciously he assures me that he will prepare a sumptuous meal for us, sans meat. And so he does: Hot and sour bean curd soup, vegetable chow mein, and baked bean curd and snow peas in tangy orange sauce—each presented exquisitely.

Typically, my father takes advantage of every opportunity to lodge a complaint, and thus wield his authority. So I am more than grateful when he sends back only one item of this sumptuous meal: the soup—to be reheated. ("You call *this* hot?")

As the busboy clears our dinner plates, I venture to ask my father what he thought of my letter.

"We'll discuss it when we get back to my hotel room."

The taxi ride to the hotel is tense, the air between us frozen. He does a lot of muttering to himself. This is *not* a good sign. So I brace myself.

In his room, I sit down on the bed. He removes his jacket and loosens his tie before pulling the desk chair over to face me. His baby face swells to explosive proportions and turns bright red. His eyes, magnified three-fold by his bifocals, begin to bulge as he starts waving his pointed

finger in my face and launches into a tirade.

“How dare you suggest traveling to Europe? Why aren’t you thinking about putting the money you’ve saved towards your own education? Aren’t you part of this family? Don’t you feel any responsibility to help out? Remember you have a brother and sister who have to go through college, too. What if you don’t get a full scholarship next year? The college won’t even notify us until July and by then you’d be off gallivanting in Europe. What’s your big rush anyway? You can plan this for a year or two from now. *That* would be more reasonable. And besides, who do you think you are? I’ve never been to Europe myself.”

Capsized and sinking quickly, I suddenly recall feeling this same sensation at seven years old while running, chest and diaphragm, straight into clenched hands, after hearing “Red rover, red rover, send Sara right over” bellowed across the field. Having just run into my father’s fist, now like then, I reel with the wind knocked out of me. No draft left to complete my voyage.

Deflated, I creep away from his hotel room, take the subway back down to One Fifth Avenue, break the news to Ollie and cry myself to sleep.

Some birthday celebration... My father, my commanding officer, has issued his edict, loud and clear. I don’t question his power or the finality of his decision. But did he have to do it on my birthday? Wouldn’t a letter the week before have been more decent?

All I know is that I’ll have to shelve the pain quickly or else slump into the dark abyss, the depression I’ve already visited for long stretches twice in the last few years. Gloom and Doom clutch at me. I resist tenaciously. It takes a few days, but I emerge victorious. I’ve pushed away my anger, disappointment and helplessness enough to carry on with life.

The next time I see Mrs. May, she deciphers the expression on my face and reads straight through to my not-so-well-kept-secret.

We’re walking to Washington Square Park, and without any overt clues from me, she blurts out, “So, your father said ‘No’ to Europe? I’m so very sorry.”

“It’s okay, I’ll get there someday,” I respond. Then, in my father’s defense, I tell her some of what his reasoning had been.

“Well, Sara dear, I discussed this possibility with my daughter yesterday, and I have a proposition to make to you.”

“No, please don’t,” I plead.

“Listen, I’m an old woman. What I’m about to suggest would bring me great pleasure. Would you deny me that?”

“Yes, I would. Please, don’t say anything more,” I continue. “You are already so wonderful to me without feeling you have to do something about *this*.”

“Will you just give me a chance? Listen to my proposal and then

react to it.”

“Oh God. All right,” I wince as we continue our slow journey to the park.

“I thought what I’d do first, is write to your father and make sure I don’t offend him. Then, I’d like to lend you two hundred dollars for the airfare. When school’s out you can go home to Rhode Island, work for a month and put *that* money towards your tuition. Then, with your savings, you’ll be able to go away for July and August. *But*, there are very specific conditions on the loan.”

My face is aglow—and I’m still listening.

“Someday, when and if you’re in my position, I want you to do the same for another young woman.”

By this time, I have metamorphosed into a puddle and feel myself dripping through the slats of the park bench where we’ve landed. The green budding trees all around us are one big blur. Is she for *real*, this woman who cradles my heart in her hands?

What I know, is that in her grasp I feel seen and loved. A simple, choked, “Thank you,” is all I can utter.

The letter is sent. My father can’t say “No.” Mrs. May is a genius.

The two months that follow are some of my sweetest. New York is alive with forsythia and crocuses. Ultimate possibilities brew along with the cappuccinos at Cafe Reggio’s, which I frequent daily now, to sip lattés while boning up on my *Français* and reading everything I can about Europe.

Mrs. May shares tales of her trips with Margaret to Paris starting when Margaret herself was a teenager. I learn more about Mrs. May’s immediate family, which is, in fact, quite large. Counting her great-grandchildren, they number as many as fifty. For me, every one of them, simply by being related to her, is enviable. But Mrs. May is the first to discourage me from idealizing her or her family. She speaks of her son, who had written the story of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer for Montgomery Ward’s Christmas promotional. After it ran for the season, he asked to retain the rights and the company granted his wish. Soon after, his brother-in-law put the story to music, and the rest you know.

“But think about it, Sara,” she says, “that song is clearly autobiographical. Robert was a loner and had a very hard time as a child. As his mother, I felt helpless watching him.”

Later, she confesses that when one of her granddaughters reached seventeen, she decided to join a convent. The very idea of this so disturbed Mrs. May, that she tried to “meddle”. There was no real resolution. Her apologies weren’t accepted and neither the parents nor the granddaughter (who did indeed take the vows) have spoken to her since. Desperately

regretting this episode, Mrs. May makes it clear to me that she is no “saint”. Ironically, her vulnerability, openness and honesty only serve to fortify my admiration for her.

We wind our way through May to Mother’s Day. With my last three exams scheduled at the end of the week, I am in the midst of some fierce cramming. Nevertheless, I take a break on this beautiful Sunday afternoon and walk over to Mrs. May’s apartment with a large bouquet of flowers. We sit in her front room and talk for hours. I am floating in our conversation. Meanwhile darkness begins its descent over us, hovering just outside our awareness for a time. Now, noticing it, I imagine us somewhere else entirely, New Orleans perhaps. The warm, moist night air envelops us like a delicate gypsy shawl. The amber streetlight, echoing hues of the nearby red brick facades, filters in through gauzy green curtains. I distinctly remember expecting the Preservation Hall Jazz Band to march right down 10th Street, its “soul” purpose to fill this apartment with music.

Our dialogue flows hypnotically into the night. Mrs. May speaks in detail about her experiences of pregnancy and childbirth. “The most extraordinary moments of my life,” she says, “were feeling the baby swimming inside me and later feeling it fight its way out to the light.”

When I slip into my usual, I-doubt-I’ll-ever-meet-anyone routine, she consoles me with, “Sara, I think you’re going to be with someone very wonderful, for a very long time.” She doesn’t seem to mind in the least that I’ve set her up for this reassurance, so I just sit back and soak it in.

It is a magical evening, a perfect sharing of our deepest secrets with one another. As I get ready to leave, she says, “Thank you so much for stopping by. And those flowers...mmm. Tomorrow, I have an appointment, so don’t bother coming over, but do plan on being here Tuesday afternoon around 2:00, okay?”

“Fine. Bye. I love you.”

“I love you, too. And Sara, good luck with your studying.”

The home stretch is here and now. As usual, I’m doing a whole semester’s reading in the final hour. Procrastination has been my companion all quarter and now as the exams roll around, I pay the price. My “Physics for Poets” exam is on Monday and so I pull an all-nighter Sunday night and walk into the classroom quaking from the coffee overdose.

By Tuesday afternoon, bug-eyed and welcoming the interruption, I reach for Mrs. May’s doorbell. I find a note covering it that reads: “Sara, ring Mrs. Brode’s bell instead. We’re waiting there for you.” I do as I am told while an about-to-faint feeling washes over me. My legs of jelly are barely holding me up when Mrs. Brode and Margaret come out to fetch me. One of them says, “Come in, Sara. Sit down.”

Then Margaret, through her tears, says what I already know, “We’re so sorry to tell you this, darling, but she’s dead.”

I am handed an envelope. “This is for you. She wrote it just before she took her life.” *Now my mind begins racing.... No! When? Why? How?*

Trembling, I sit staring at this photocopy written in her unsteady hand: “For Sara.” (The police have insisted on keeping the original suicide notes.) I am told there are several letters to her family, one to Addie, her housekeeper of twenty-five years, who found her that Monday morning after her wine and drug overdose—and then this one, to me. I remove the letter from the envelope. By the time I’ve unfolded it, I can hardly read it though my deluge of tears.

Sara dear,

I know I’m hurting you badly, and I wish I could be beside you to comfort you. At least I can tell you why it is so necessary for me to go. I have known of this need for a year but kept putting it off. My future in life is so dark that anyone would choose to avoid it. You have surely noticed how fast my sight is going. I am very strong and would probably live another ten years, much of it in an institution and a great burden to everyone. I’ve had a great life and don’t want to turn into a vegetable.

You have been the light and the joy of this past winter. I have felt your love for me and something in me bloomed under that tenderness. You have so much to give and you can give it so lavishly.

Have not only a happy summer, but a happy and rich life, with that man who is somewhere waiting for you. Remember me with joy and not with sadness. Somehow I will know that you are happy and I will be glad too.

Jeanette May

Mrs. Brode, Margaret and I sit huddled together weeping for an hour more and when I leave that brownstone, it is for the last time. Outside the gate, I know that New York cannot console me. No one can. In a daze, I make my way back to the dorm. The revolving doors suck me into the building and as I move in the direction of the elevators, I spot the darkened phone booth in the right-hand corner of the lobby. Some vague despairing hope pulls me towards it. Once squeezed inside, I close the door. Suddenly illuminated, I find myself dialing home.

My father picks up the phone and spends a long time trying to decode the hysterical grief I am spewing into the receiver.

“Who’s dead? Who? Sara, you have to stop crying for a minute, so I can understand what you’re saying... But she was an old woman.” Finally,

as if throwing up his hands, he ends the conversation with, “Sara, what can I tell you? People die.”

Spontaneously, I forgive Mrs. May.

Despite my devastation, I pass all my finals. After working through June in one of Providence’s sweaty costume jewelry factories, I finally make it to Europe. Taking Mrs. May and her courage with me, I revel in two glorious months abroad. It isn’t until I return to New York in mid-September and stroll innocently into Washington Square Park, that my grief erupts full force. There, with the first autumn leaves floating to the ground, her absence is palpable.

And I have so much to tell her.



Sara Friedlander

The Lift

Katie Frey

We all dreaded the visits from Grandma DuPree. Or rather, we dreaded the visits from her dog, but an attendance from one invariably meant the accompaniment of the other, so either way we had to confront both of them.

We have lived next to Grandma DuPree for six years now and ever since my family knew her, she had that dog, Peikie. Peikie, for his own part, was a wiry old mutt, ugly as hell. He had a squashed up face, a stout terrier nose, a stupid little terrier under bite and dark beady eyes that darted about looking to assert terror. It was Peikie's eyes that had convinced my sister and I that he was possessed—or at least inherently evil—every definition of dog terms possible. Grandma DuPree claimed that Peikie was a Brussels Griffon, some proper terrier breed of sorts that was first bred in Belgium for the aristocracy. It didn't really matter: the feisty, energetic terrier personality manifested in Peikie as a single-minded drive to bite, maim, and destroy all other living beings—excluding Grandma of course—with a strength and vigilance worthy of his griffin namesake.

Grandma DuPree was not actually our grandma. It's just sort of a weird coincidence. My parents, both veterinarians, Mr. and Mrs. Doctors DuPree, bought the clinic, our house, from a doctor whose name also happened to be DuPree. The house is subdivided three ways. On the bottom floor there is my parents' clinic; we live in the second and third floors above the clinic; and Grandma DuPree lives next door. But the houses are really all part of just one building that used to be a massive Victorian mansion back in the day. However, when Dr. DuPree's mother took sick and needed more privacy, they wanted to separate the clinic from upstairs, so to get to its present state it's had quite a few renovations. My family got the place when Dr. DuPree decided to relocate his family to a larger city to expand his practice; he always was a money monger. Grandma DuPree had been obstinate to leave the house where she had raised four children, three grandchildren, and had lived in for the past 43 years. So when she found out that another family of DuPrees were moving in, she took it as a sign from divinity that she was meant to stay. It was settled, Dr. DuPree and his family left and our family of DuPrees moved in. Although DuPree isn't a popular name, my mom says we all have some Dutch ancestry, not that it explains the strange coincidence or anything, but my sister and I are pretty sure that somehow we are all actually related, even if it is just by a little bit. We got into the habit of calling Grandma DuPree "Grandma" because our real grandma lives a good eight-hour drive away, and anyway, her name is Grandma Estelle. I think Grandma DuPree even likes us to call her "Grandma," now that her own grandchildren have moved away. Besides, we spend enough quality grandma-time with her, playing cards or drinking

tea on Sundays, so it just sort of works out for everyone. Or it would, if every meeting with Grandma DuPree didn't also involve an encounter with Peikie.

Last year, Grandma DuPree had been walking Peikie around the forested park down by the river. The river borders one of the local summer camps and there is a footbridge over the river that joins the park and the camp. One of the counselors was on her lunch break and was walking over to the park when Peikie, eyeing her P.B. and J. jerked loose from Grandma and jolted towards the girl, snarling and snapping at the sandwich. The girl was so frightened that she just dropped the sandwich into the river. The camp's dog, a beautiful Newfoundland retriever with burnt-umber fur that shone from exercise and sun exposure had been trained as a lifeguard aide, jumped into the water and actually rescued the sandwich, although, at that point it was hardly worth eating. Peikie was so perturbed by the Newfoundland's show of heroism that he turned tail and ran sulkily back towards Grandma. Grandma was still struggling to catch up and missed seeing the incident all together. Later that week the Newfoundland got an award for outstanding performance. All the summer camp kids made a cute bone-shaped dog tag out of wood, which they strung about his collar during a special ceremony. Needless to say the Newfoundland's pride swelled a bit, and he walked around ever more graceful and poised, head up and eyes serious. He even taught himself how to help unload the shopping van by carrying the bags in his mouth.

The Newfoundland had later come by my parents' clinic a couple times for some booster shots. On both occasions Peikie rippled back his upper lip and growled, hooking his teeth into the metal links of Grandma's fence and rattling it ferociously. He made sure the Newfoundland didn't have any doubts about the implied threat while passing into the clinic. Grandma had to coax Peikie with doggy treats just to get him to calm down. If the Newfoundland recognized Peikie at all he didn't show it. He just walked proudly into the clinic bearing the special award on his collar. I am sure that his self-important lack of interest in Peikie infuriated the latter to an even greater extent. Later that summer, the Newfoundland had been patrolling around camp and saved a little fourth grader from a spider. It had been crawling on her as she worked on a signpost in Crafts; the Newfoundland plucked the spider squarely off her arm and downed it in two gulps before she could even scream. The only way anyone knows it must have been a spider was that later that day the Newfoundland's mouth swelled up and started to pus. We guess that the spider must have bitten him on his tongue. Anyway, my dad took him in and had to special feed him because his tongue was all swollen and put him on some heavy antibiotics. Somewhat dazed from the medicine dosag, he was laying out in the courtyard to rest a bit when Peikie wriggled his way under Grandma DuPree's gate and ran straight towards him. After biting him in four

different places, Peikie bent down, carefully arranging his jaws over the bone-shaped award tag and then violently snapped backwards, yanking it off the chain. We bolted towards the courtyard, screaming profanities at Peikie, but it was too late! That demon shot us a contemptuous look and then swallowed the damn thing whole. It must have been out of jealousy. The Newfoundland lay there whimpering and my sister ran to console him. I tried to chase down Peikie, but he escaped through the doggy door into Grandma Dupree's house. I could see him just behind the semi-transparent plastic flap, chest puffed out with pride at having beaten the Newfoundlander more than twice his size. I wanted to punch him.

The kids at the summer camp were pretty upset when they heard that a mangy mutt had stolen their dog's award. They tried to get some monetary compensation—one camper's mom even tried to press for a court appearance but that got Grandma DuPree involved and her charisma worked wonders. She pled with them, claiming that Peikie didn't do it maliciously, "he's only a dog you know," she said, cute little grandma eyes blinking back tears, "he was just trying to play." As irate as everyone was, no one could deny Grandma DuPree. So in the end Peikie won, and we all hoped that he would get splinters in his stomach lining from eating the award, but dogs have pretty strong stomachs and we never noticed any ill effects.

It was a long time before my parents felt one way or another about Peikie, but in the end even they hated him, despite the fact that they are veterinarians and technically should want to help animals. I don't think they ever really took much notice of Peikie until he peed on an important letter that my dad had received from a distant relative in Israel. It wasn't so much the fact that the dog pee had gotten on the letter, but that it was clear that Peikie had plotted to get the dog pee on the letter. It had been late May and the lilac bush was uncharacteristically in bloom, just the covering Peikie needed to momentarily distract the postman. As Mr. Wilkans rounded the corner of our driveway with the daily deliveries, Peikie crouched on his stomach beneath the lilac bush, behind a ceramic gnome poised in waiting. At precisely the right moment, as Mr. Wilkans is lifted his left heel mid-step, Peikie pushed the chipped-paint, smiling-faced gnome over the arch of Mr. Wilkans' shoe. The dazed Mr. Wilkans lurched forward to regain his stride, but his feet fumbled under the bulk of the gnome and he was instead sent sprawling to the cement, the letter for my father knocked out of his hand. Peikie was quick and precise. He sprinted to the letter, peed directly on it, not even bothering to lift his leg, and ran straight through his doggy door. Grandma DuPree was inside watching *Days of Our Lives* and oblivious to the entire episode. Mr. Wilkans apologetically delivered the letter to us, sputtering out the story between lapses of cursing and further apologies. We assured him that it wasn't his fault.

Dad went over to talk to Grandma Dupree about the event. As he walked in Peikie was sitting with Grandma at the dinner table, decked out in his usual ruffled bib. Dad tried to explain the importance of keeping the gate locked and not letting Peikie run amok around the neighborhood but Grandma DuPree's affection for Peikie was not to be reasoned with. She immediately burst into tears and threw her arms around Peikie, her voice rose excitedly making it clear that no one was going to take her dog away from her; she loved him and he was a good dog. Dad tried to explain that no one was going to take Peikie away, but if Peikie couldn't behave, he would have to be kept on a leash, or not allowed outside. Grandma retracted from Peikie and touched her hair, rearranging some of the curls. She said she was sorry for the sudden outburst, but she was afraid of someone taking Peikie away. Dad told her that was completely unfounded, although he knew of a number of complaints that had been lodged against the dog. Meanwhile Peikie had run out of the doggy door, still wearing the bib, and bore into the metal linked fence, snarling at the paper-boy as he tossed out the nightly rounds of the classifieds supplement. Dad just silently shook his head and left, somewhat disappointed at his lack of negotiating skills.

Later that evening, while we cleared the dishes and my sister brought out the still warm sticky-date pudding, my parents slowly began to recollect all of the horrible things Peikie had done. I don't think they had ever really noticed before—or they had never put all the instances together. But then, retelling them in a string of horrifying realizations, none of us had any doubts in our mind that Peikie was evil. I said I thought he may even be possessed, but my parents just laughed and said, no, he was just undisciplined. Either way, it was nice for my sister and I to finally have our parents on our side against Peikie. "He doesn't do anything when you go over for Sunday tea?" my dad asked, a new hint of concern in his voice. My sister and I told him of the time he had farted on our shoes after we left them by the door, and how another time he had picked our cake forks off our plates, licked them, and then tried to set them back on the plates when he thought we weren't looking. Our parents couldn't believe that we had never told them any of this before, but we explained that we thought that they couldn't hate animals, being vets and all, and we were afraid that they would never take us seriously. They shook their heads and Dad tried to lighten the mood again by suggesting various ways that we could kill Peikie without Grandma DuPree ever knowing it was planned. We came up with the typical: run him over with the car, slip him an overdose of dog tranquilizers, accidentally-on-purpose lock him in the walk-in freezer... The more we thought about it, the easier it seemed. I suggested that we could slowly tighten his collar until he went limp from lack of oxygen; Peikie deserved the slow torture. Still, I don't think any of us had the determined initiative to ever implement such a plan.

The problem with offing Peikie was that Grandma DuPree kept

Peikie within a 10-meter proximity of her 24 hours a day. She took him with her to get groceries, to the hairdressers, to friends, to the doctors. He even accompanied her to pick out her new back-supporting brassier, which I always thought had been a little odd. But it didn't matter what she was doing or where she was going, Peikie was with her, eternally attached on his rhinestone-studded, tanned leather leash that Grandma DuPree had specially imported from a dog-lovers society in Switzerland.

It wasn't long after that my parents, while hosting a dinner party, started telling stories about Peikie over the late evening wine. "I don't know how you stand for it Greg," Dr. McKellin, another veterinarian, addressed my father, his wide mouth, moist as usual, continued chuckling over the various rampages of Peikie. "If I were you, I'd hire a hit-man. That dog's got to be deterring business, I suspect." My parents jabbered on about how thankful they were that their clientele had remained faithful after the Newfoundland incident. They even joked about how our family had been thinking of possible ways to kill Peikie just the other night over dinner. "It couldn't be that hard," replied Mrs. Delancy, who owned two dogs herself, but she admitted she had a thing against terriers. "If you planned it properly," Mrs. Delancy's husband chimed in, "I believe there would be no way to prove you were in any way involved. It would be the perfect crime—a piece of cake! Who seriously examines a dog death anyway, there isn't any protocol." The Jakowskis and the McKellins nodded in agreement. Mrs. Delancy, with a far off glazed look, formed her words thoughtfully, "I think you could operate on it—perform a dog lobotomy while Mrs. DuPree was sleeping? I mean, she wouldn't be concerned, he'd still be alive, but, well, just not the same dog..." Lobotomies were indeed invented as a psychosurgery to deter violent behavior, my mom pointed out, but they were a bit outdated. "I'll buy anyone a case of this wine if they can come up with the best fool-proof plan for killing that dog," Dr. McKellin said, raising his glass for a refill. "But you can't do that," his wife squeaked, clearly flustered, "its just not humane!" Dr. McKellin turned sweetly to his wife, "Its not actually as if we are going to kill him dearie," then his broad smile shot across to the rest of the dinner party, "I just want to know what the possibilities are." So it was set. My sister and I gathered up a number of pens and pencils and distributed them to our parents' friends and everyone set to work sketching out ways to kill Peikie. There was a rather jovial mood to the table, and Dr. McKellin took the opportunity to fill his glass yet again while everyone's heads were down in preoccupation.

The party continued well past twelve o'clock with the laughter rising and falling in response to Mrs. Jakowski's animated facial impressions of dying dogs. "There are so many good ways to kill a dog!" Dr. McKellin noted heartily, and rather un-veterinarian-like. Indeed, his wife was the only one who didn't wish Peikie a gory death of bodily harm or opiate drugs. In her quiet, kindhearted voice she suggested that we might force

Peikie to sit through hours of old Lassie reruns until he simply went insane, or by some bizarre turn, was driven to be nice. “Not likely,” Mr. Delancy shook his head sadly, and lowering his voice, as if Peikie might overhear, he proposed shoving a rubber chicken down the dog’s throat and asphyxiating him, making appear as if he had only been chewing on it as a play-toy and choked. It did have a sense of spontaneity and naturalism to it and dad rather liked it. “I could first give Peikie the rubber chicken as a Christmas present. Grandma would love that—but little would she know...” His sneer was decidedly devilish. “These are all so tame,” Dr. McKellin slammed his fist on the table, “Where’s the guts? Where’s the gore?” First he thought, we could feed Peikie fiberglass, lacerating his stomach and initiating a slow death of internal bleeding. Then on second thought however, Dr. McKellin figured it would be even better to feed him small doses of heroin daily and then to suddenly cut off the supply, causing Peikie to commit suicide in the agony of withdrawals. “Not bad, not bad at all,” the dinner party marveled. Mr. Jakowski who taught phys-ed and health at the local middle school thought it especially humorous as he had been reviewing drug addictions with his class just that past week. “What happens if you end up buying that case for yourself,” dad questioned Dr. McKellin a bit sarcastically. “I’d orchestrate the funeral as well,” Dr. McKellin grinned, “and there would be free drinks all around!” The men raised their glasses, “Death to Peikie!!” and the women simply rolled their eyes. “We could electrocute him,” mom suggested, her childlike enthusiasm seemed somewhat out of character. “I mean,” she continued, “his water dish in the laundry room—we could strip a small piece of the washing machine cord, accidentally push the cord in the dish, and next time Peikie went to take a drink, ZAP!” The party raised their eyebrows in delight. Mrs. Delancy said that she would like to see Peikie set on fire, so discussion ensued about how and when that could take place. And Mr. Jakowski kept trying to involve a lawnmower in the plots, but no one could quite figure out how to work that element in.

Observing from the adjacent room where my sister and I were playing cards, we couldn’t help but be struck with the irony of the situation. As Dr. McKellin continually brought out a new bottle of wine, and each dinner guest played off the ideas of the other, their voices rose excitedly. I wouldn’t have been surprised if Peikie did hear bits and pieces of their conversation. The funny thing was that once my parents had told their Peikie stories, and why they hated him, the other members of the party, even the Jakowskis, who I didn’t even think knew Peikie, all had their own horror stories to tell. There was everything from how he had peed on car doors and ruined the paint, to how he had mangled umbrellas left outside to dry on the stoop. Despite the heinous plots aimed towards Peikie’s end, not a single person developed any form of pity for him. Peikie’s far as being evil was concerned, had admittedly never directly injured a human.

It is that fact alone which I believe had, up until that point, preserved Peikie from any specific negative action. But I think even Peikie had gotten bored with his same old tricks and recently he had been pushing the limits of his methods of disturbance. Getting into the spirit of the dinner party, my sister and I set up a betting list and passed it around the party, letting people guess how long it would take, and who it would be to cave in and off Peikie first. Cleaning up later, we were amazed to find that there was more than 750 dollars in the betting pool. Peikie death wasn't just small money.

I often wondered how Grandma DuPree could be so naive of Peikie's continual villainy. It seemed that anytime he was bad, she would conveniently be involved in something else. It was as if she knew precisely when to divert her attention. I realized that Peikie was her only real companion; still, he was the solitary reincarnation of what I imagine Beelzebub must have been like if he really existed. Sometimes I was sure that Grandma must have known more than she let on. I used to try and get her to comment on it, even if it was indirectly, but the only thing she ever said was, "I think next time I'll get a cat."

The plots for Peikie's death were put on hold when the other Dr. DuPree returned for a short visit. Grandma DuPree's back was acting up again, and the weather had turned dreary as it moved into winter. Dr. DuPree decided Grandma needed to go on vacation. She hadn't been out further than the golf club in more than four years so Grandma seemed most enthusiastic about the idea. She suggested perhaps a trip to the coast, where she could take Peikie on walks to the beach and where the fresh salt air might improve her sinuses. My sister and I went over one afternoon and looked through a number of tour books with her, picking out the prettiest pictures and planning Grandma three weeks of relaxation and beautiful scenery. As we went about making the bookings, Dr. McKellin called up to say that he and his wife had vacationed in the same town just over Easter time, so he passed on the information for his favorite hotel accommodations. "It's the perfect little place," Dr. McKellin described, "it has that cozy home feel, but Five Star facilities, friendly staff who are willing to do anything if you paid them—and an excellent cliff's side view of the water: blue, serene and utterly escapist," Grandma was impressed with such a depiction and more excited to go than ever. Since he knew the staff, Dr. McKellin ended up making the arrangements himself, giving special care instructions concerning Grandma. Since dogs, as a rule, were not allowed, he also worked out an agreement with the manager so she could bring Peikie. Everything seemed to fall into place with amazing ease and less than a week later Grandma was boarding the plane. Peikie looked out of his plastic travel case as we drove them to the airport. He seemed too dumbstruck by the whole situation to react; I believe that was the most pleasant I recall ever seeing him.

It was about seven the next morning when we got the phone call:

Grandma DuPree was arriving at the airport at nine-thirty that evening—could we please go and pick her up. It was one of the hotel staff. Something tragic had happened, and Grandma was returning home as soon as she was discharged from the hospital. Whomever it was my mom talked to didn't know any more details, but assured us that when the manager returned, we would be informed immediately. It was about twenty minutes later that we got a phone call from Dr. McKellin, explaining what had happened, and after that, a phone call from Dr. DuPree. The hotel manager called at about 10 and notified us of the hospital results and filled in a few of the finer details which were absent in the former accounts. From what we pieced together, and later, from the story as told by Grandma DuPree, the event unfolded in the following manner: after landing safely and collecting her bags and Peikie, Grandma was escorted to the hotel. The view, Grandma admitted, was spectacular. As the staff carried in her luggage, Grandma took Peikie out of his travel case and put him on his bed. Grandma then entered the lobby to check in and get her key. The inside of the lobby was richly colored, with plush burgundy carpets and lots of warm toned wooden paneling. There were several comfortable Victorian-styled couches surrounding a stone fireplace and the reception desk, located along the back wall to the right, was made of a thick mahogany that matched the mahogany-paneled doors of the elevator which stood adjacent to it. Grandma approached the desk with Peikie. As Grandma signed the papers, the elevator doors opened, glowing of shiny brass and polished wood, and Peikie stepped in. By the time either the staff or Grandma noticed, it was too late. The doors closed with Peikie trapped inside. First there was the pop, pop, pop of the rhinestones passing through the tightly shut wooden doors while the leash got progressively shorter. Grandma tried to run, but was lurched forward, her wrist dislocating as the end loop of the leash caught and tore about her knobby hand. The hotel staff had already jumped the desk and fumbled to remove the leash from Grandma as she was dragged across the floor. It didn't matter much though, the large hand loop of the stiff leather leash stuck in the lift door. There was the sound of tugging machinery, then a pause, the splintering of wood, and a jerk, then the smooth purr of the elevator continuing its ascent. At length there was the faint ding! as the doors opened on the second floor, then a paralyzing scream, and seconds later a jarring thud as a body hit the paneled floor. Grandma too, let out a muffled squeal as she exploded into sobs and her hand began to swell almost twice its normal size. She and the women who had fainted on the second floor were rushed to the hospital and the police were called in to investigate the scene, although it was highly unusual for police to get involved in such matters as dog deaths.

There wasn't a proper funeral for Peikie because he wasn't exactly in one piece, and the whole thing had been rather bloody. The investigation revealed that the cleaner used to polish the wood in the elevator strangely

had a smell similar to smoked jerky, not that it meant anything directly, but it was curious. Also, it seems that the leash might have slipped through the lift door had Grandma not specially stiffened the leather just the week before. The elevator couldn't be used for several days. There was talk about stripping out the whole inside and building it up again. No one really felt comfortable, no matter how clean it was, to enter the death box and to touch the same surfaces. Doctor McKellin, either out of guilt, or obligation



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to the staff went down for a week to help with the loose ends. Although he used the pretext of Peikie's death, it was basically a vacation for him. My dad pointed out later that it was peculiar that Dr. McKellin should have been notified first about the incident. When dad questioned him about it, Dr. McKellin swore that it was nothing more than his friendship with the manager and his acquaintance with Mrs. DuPree.

We had Grandma over for dinner on a regular basis after that. It wasn't so much that she needed cheering up or that she was alone, but finally, for us, it was a pleasant experience. "Peikie's death was somewhat fitting for him, don't you think?" Grandma asked us once, and we were all left to wonder what exactly she meant by that.