

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR



JENNIFER
WEINER

A NOVEL

ALL
FALL
DOWN

ONE

Do you generally use alcohol or drugs more than once a week?

I hesitated with my hand over the page. I'd picked up the magazine to read the "How to Dress Right for Your Shape" story advertised on the cover, but it had opened to a quiz that asked "Has Your Drinking or Drug Use Become a Problem?" and something had made me stop. Maybe it was the black-and-white photograph of a woman in profile, bending sadly over her wineglass, or maybe the statistic beside it that said that prescription painkiller overdose was now the leading cause of accidental death of women in America, surpassing even car crashes. I had a pen in my hand—I'd been using it to fill out the stack of forms for Eloise's five-year-old well-child checkup—and, almost without thinking, I made an X in the box for "Yes."

I crossed my legs and looked around Dr. McCarthy's waiting area, suddenly worried that someone had seen what I'd written. Of course, no one was paying any attention to my little corner of the couch. Sleet ticked at the panes of the oversized windows; a radiator clunked in the corner. The lamplit room, on the third floor of an office building at the corner of Ninth and Chestnut, with a volunteer in a striped pinny at a knee-high table reading *Amelia Bedelia* to kids sitting in miniature chairs, felt cozy,

a respite from the miserable winter weather. Three years ago my husband, Dave, my daughter, and I had moved out of Center City and into a house in Haverford that I refused to call a McMansion, even though that's exactly what it was, but I loved Ellie's pediatrician so much that I'd never even tried to find a suburban replacement. So here we were, more than half a year late for Ellie's checkup, in the office where I'd been taking her since she was just a week old. We'd parked in the lot on Ninth Street and trekked through the February slush to get here, Ellie stepping delicately over the piles of crusted, dirty snow and the ankle-deep, icy puddles at the corners, complaining that her feet were getting wet and her socks were getting splashy. I'd lured her on with the promise of a treat at Federal Donuts when her checkup was over.

Ellie tugged at my sleeve. "How much longer?"

"Honey, I really can't say. The doctors need to take care of the sick kids first, and you, Miss Lucky, are not sick."

She stuck out her lower lip in a cartoonish pout. "It isn't FAIR. We made an APPOINTMENT."

"True. But remember when you had that bad sore throat? Dr. McCarthy saw you right away. Even before the kids who had appointments."

She narrowed her eyes and nibbled at her lip before dropping her voice to a stage whisper that was slightly more hushed than your average yell. "I am having an idea. Maybe we could tell the nurse lady that I have a sore throat now!"

I shook my head. "Nah, we don't lie. Bad karma."

Ellie considered this. "I hate karmel." She smoothed her skirt and wandered off toward the toy basket. I recrossed my legs and checked out the crowd.

The room was predictably full. There were first-time mothers from Queen Village and Society Hill, who wore their babies

wrapped in yards of organic cotton hand-dyed and woven by indigenous Peruvian craftswomen who were paid a living wage. The moms from the Section 8 housing pushed secondhand strollers and fed their infants from plastic bottles, as opposed to ostentatiously breast-feeding or slipping the baby a few ounces of organic formula in a BPA-free bottle with a silicone-free nipple hidden under a prettily patterned, adorably named nursing cover-up (I'd worn one called the Hooter Hider).

On the days when you use drugs or alcohol, do you usually have three drinks/doses or more?

Define "dose." One Percocet, from the bottle I got after I had my wisdom teeth pulled? Two Vicodin, prescribed for a herniated disc I suffered in a step class at the gym? I'd never taken more than two of anything, except the day after my father had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's and my mother had set up a temporary fortress in our guest room. Could three pills count as a single dose? I decided not to answer.

Do you use drugs or alcohol to "unwind" or "relax"?

Hello. That's what they're there for. And was that so bad, really? How many times had I heard my husband say "I need to go for a run," or my best friend, Janet, say "I need a glass of wine"? What I did was no different. It was, actually, better. A run was time-consuming and sweaty and hard on the joints, and wine could stain.

"Mommy?"

"Hang on, sweetie," I said, as my iPhone rang in my purse. "Just one minute."

"You ALWAYS say that. You ALWAYS say just one minute and it ALWAYS takes you for HOURS."

"Shh," I whispered, before hurrying toward the door, where I could keep an eye on her while I talked. "Hi, Sarah."

"Allison," said Sarah, in the gruff, all-business tone that sur-

prised people, given her petite frame, sleek black bob, and freckled button nose. “Did the fact-checker call?”

“Not today.” The *Wall Street Journal* was in the midst of its every-six-months rediscovery that women were online. They were doing a piece on women who blog, and Ladiesroom.com, the website that I wrote for and Sarah ran, was to be featured. I was alternately giddy at the thought of how the publicity would raise Ladiesroom’s profile and nauseous at the notion of my picture in print.

“She just read my quotes back to me,” said Sarah. “They sounded great. I’ve really got a good feeling about this!”

“Me too,” I lied. I was optimistic about the piece . . . at least some of the time.

“Mom-MEE.”

My daughter was standing about six inches from my face, brown eyes brimming, lower lip quivering. “Gotta go,” I told Sarah. “We’re at the doctor’s.”

“Oh, God. Is everything okay?”

“As okay as it ever is!” I said, striving to inject good cheer into my tone before I slipped the phone back into my purse. Sarah, technically my boss, was twenty-seven and childless. She knew I was a mother—that was, after all, why she’d hired me, to give readers live, from-the-trenches reports on married-with-children life. But I tried to be a model employee, always available to talk through edits or help brainstorm a headline, even if Ellie was with me. I also tried to be a model mother, making Ellie feel like she was the center of my universe, that I was entirely present for her, even when I was on the phone, debating, say, the use of “strident” versus “emphatic,” or arguing about which picture of Hillary Clinton to use to illustrate another will-she-or-won’t-she-run story. It was a lot of juggling

and quick switching and keeping my smile in place. “Sorry, honey. What do you need?”

“I’m **FIRSTY**,” she said, in the same tone of voice an old-school Broadway actress might use to announce her imminent demise.

I pointed at the water fountain on the other side of the room. “Look, there’s a water fountain!”

“But that is where the **SICK** kids are.” A tear rolled down my daughter’s pillowy cheek.

“Ellie. Don’t be such a drama queen. Just go get a drink. You’ll be fine.”

“Can I check what is in your purse?” she wheedled. Before I could answer, she’d plunged both hands into my bag and deftly removed my bottle of Vitaminwater.

“Ellie, that’s—” Before I got the word “Mommy’s” out of my mouth, she’d twisted off the cap and started gulping.

Our eyes met. Mine were undoubtedly beseeching, hers sparkled with mischief and satisfaction. I considered my options. I could punish her, tell her no screens and no *SpongeBob* tonight, then endure—and force everyone else in the room to endure—the inevitable screaming meltdown. I could ignore what she’d done, reinforcing the notion that bad behavior got her exactly what she wanted. I could take her outside and talk to her there, but then the receptionist would, of course, call us when we were in the hall, which meant I’d get the pleasure of a tantrum on top of another half-hour wait.

“We will discuss this in the car. Do you understand me?” I maintained the steady eye contact that the latest parenting book I’d read had recommended, my body language and tone letting her know that I was in charge, and hoped the other mothers weren’t taking in this scene and laughing. Ellie took another de-

fiant swig, then let a mouthful of zero-calorie lemon-flavored drink dribble back into the bottle, which she handed back to me.

“Ellie! Backwash!”

She giggled. “Here, Mommy, you can have the rest,” she said, and skipped across the waiting room with my iPhone flashing in her hand. Lately she’d become addicted to a game called Style Queen, the object of which was to earn points to purchase accessories and makeup for a cartoon avatar who was all long hair and high heels. The more accessories you won for your avatar—shoes, hats, scarves, a makeup kit—the more levels of the game you could access. With each level, Ellie had explained to me, with many heaved sighs and eye rolls, you could get a new boyfriend.

“What about jobs?” I had asked. “Does Style Queen work? To get money for all that makeup, and her skirts and everything?”

Ellie frowned, then raised her chubby thumb and two fingers. “She can be an actress or a model or a singer.” Before I could ask follow-up questions, or try to use this as a teachable moment in which I would emphasize the importance of education and hard work and remind her that the way you looked was never ever the most important thing about you, my daughter had dashed off, leaving me to contemplate how we’d gone from *The Feminine Mystique* and *Free to Be . . . You and Me* to this in just one generation.

The magazine was still open to the quiz on the couch beside me. I grabbed it, bending my head to avoid the scrutiny of the übermommy two seats down whose adorable newborn was cradled against her body in a pristine Moby Wrap; the one who was not wearing linty black leggings from Target and whose eyebrows had enjoyed the recent attention of tweezers.

Do you sometimes take more than the amount prescribed? Yes. Not always, but sometimes. I’d take one pill and then, ten or

fifteen or twenty minutes later, if I wasn't feeling the lift, the slow unwinding of the tight girdle of muscles around my neck and shoulders I'd expected, I'd take another.

Have you gotten intoxicated on alcohol or drugs more than two times in the past year? (You're intoxicated if you use so much that you can't function safely or normally or if other people think that you can't function safely or normally.)

This was a tricky one. With painkillers, you did not slur or get sloppy. Your child would not come home from school and find Mommy passed out in a puddle of her own vomit (or anyone else's). A couple of Vicodin and I could function just fine. The worst things that had happened were the few times Dave had accused me of being out of it. "Are you okay?" he'd ask, squinting at my face like we'd just met, or apologizing for being so boring that I couldn't muster five minutes of attention to hear about his day as a City Hall reporter at the *Philadelphia Examiner*. Never mind that his anecdotes tended to be long and specific and depend on the listener's deep interest in the inner workings of Philadelphia's government. Some days, I had that interest. Other days, all I wanted was peace, quiet, and an episode of *Love It or List It*. But I'd been occasionally bored and disinterested even before my use of Vicodin and Percocet had ramped up, over the past two years, from a once-in-a-while thing to a few-days-a-week thing to a more-days-than-not thing. It wasn't as if one single catastrophe had turned me into a daily pill popper as much as the accumulated stress of a mostly successful, extremely busy life. Ellie had been born, then I'd quit my job, then we'd moved to the suburbs, leaving my neighborhood and friends behind, and then my dad had been diagnosed. Not one thing, but dozens of them, piling up against one another until the pills became less a luxury than a necessity for getting myself through the day and falling asleep at night.

I checked “No” as Ellie skipped back over. “Mommy, is it almost our turn? This is taking for HOURS.”

I reached into my purse. “You can watch *Les Miz*,” I said. She handed me the phone and had the iPad out of my hands before I could blink.

“That’s so cute,” said the mother who’d just joined me on the couch. “She watches musicals? God, my two, if it’s not animated, forget it.”

I let myself bask in the all-too-rare praise: Ellie’s passion for Broadway musicals was one of the things I loved best about her, because I loved musicals, too. When she was little, and tormented by colic and eczema, and she hardly ever slept, I would drive around in my little blue Honda, with Ellie strapped into her car seat and cast recordings from *Guys and Dolls* and *Rent* and *West Side Story* and *Urinetown* playing. “Ocher!” she’d yelled from the backseat when she was about two years old. “I WANT THE OCHER!” It had taken me ten minutes to figure out that she was trying to say “overture,” and I’d told the story for years. *Isn’t she funny. Isn’t she precocious. Isn’t she sweet*, people would say . . . until Ellie turned four, then five, and she was funny and precocious and sweet but also increasingly temperamental, as moody as a diva with killer PMS. *Sensitive* was what Dr. McCarthy told us.

Extremely sensitive, said Dr. Singh, the therapist we’d taken her to visit after her preschool teacher reported that Ellie spent recess sitting in a corner of the playground with her fingers plugged into her ears, clearly pained by the shouts and clatter of her classmates. “Too loud!” she’d protest, wincing as we got close to a playground. “Too messy!” she’d whine when I’d try to lure her outdoors, into a game of catch or hide-and-seek, or ply her with finger paints and fresh pads of paper. Movies “made too much noise,” sunshine was “too bright,” foods that were not

apples, string cheese, or plain white bread, toasted and buttered and minus its crust, were rejected for “tasting angry,” and glue and glitter gave her “itchy fingers.” For Eloise Larson Weiss, the world was a painful, scary, sticky place where the volume was always turned up to eleven. Dave and I had read all the books, from *The Highly Sensitive Child* to *Raising Your Spirited Child*. We’d learned about how to avoid overstimulation, how to help Ellie through transitions, how to talk to her teachers about making accommodations for her. We’d done our best to reframe our thinking, to recognize that Ellie was suffering and not just making trouble, but it was hard. Instead of remembering that Ellie was wired differently than other kids, that she cried and threw tantrums because she was uncomfortable or anxious or stressed, I sometimes found myself thinking of her as just bratty, or going out of her way to be difficult.

The woman beside me nodded at her son, who seemed to be about eight. He had a Band-Aid on his forehead, and he was making loud rumbling noises as he hunched over a handheld video game. “A little girl would have been so nice. I’ve got to bribe Braden to get him in the tub.”

“Oh, that’s not just a boy thing. Ellie won’t go near a tub unless it’s got one of those bath bombs. Which are eight bucks a pop.”

The woman pursed her lips. I felt my face heat up. Eight-dollar bath bombs were an indulgence for a grown-up. For a five-year-old, they were ridiculous, especially given that our mortgage payments in Haverford were so much higher than they’d been in Philadelphia, and that instead of a raise last year, Dave and everyone else at the *Examiner* had gotten a two-week unpaid furlough. When we’d filed our taxes the year before, we’d both been surprised—and, in Dave’s case, mortified—to learn that I was earning more with my blog than he was as a reporter. This,

of course, had not been part of our plan. Dave was supposed to be the successful one . . . and, up until recently, he had been.

Three years ago, Dave had written a series about inner-city poverty, about kids who got their only balanced meals at school and parents who found it less expensive to stay at home, on welfare, than to look for work; about social services stretched too thin and heroic teachers and volunteers trying to turn kids' lives around. The series had won prizes and the attention of a few literary agents, one of whom had gotten him a book deal and a hefty advance. Dave had taken the chunk of money he'd received when he'd signed the contract and driven off to Haverford, a town he'd fallen in love with when the newspaper's food critic had taken him there one night for dinner. Haverford was lovely, with leafy trees and manicured lawns. The schools were excellent, the commute was reasonable, and it all fit into my husband's vision of what our lives would one day be.

Unfortunately, Dave didn't discuss this vision with me until one giddy afternoon when he'd hired a Realtor, found a house, and made an offer. Then, and only then, did he usher me to the car and drive me out past the airport, off the highway, and into the center of town. The sun had been setting, gilding the trees and rooftops, and the crisp autumnal air was full of the sounds of children playing a rowdy game of tag. When he pulled up in front of a Colonial-style house with a FOR SALE sign on the lawn, I could hear the voices of children playing in the cul-de-sac, and smell barbecuing steaks. "You'll love it," he'd said, racing me through the kitchen (gleaming, all stainless steel appliances, granite countertops, and tile floors), past the mudroom and the powder room, up the stairs to the master bedroom. There we had kissed and kissed until the Realtor cleared his throat twice, then knocked on the door and told us we needed to respond to the seller's offer within the hour.

“Yes?” Dave asked. His eyes were shining; his whole face was lit up. I’d never seen him so boyish, or so happy, and it would have been heartless to tell him anything except what he wanted to hear.

“Yes.”

I hadn’t thought it through. There wasn’t time. I didn’t realize that I was signing up not just for a new house and a new town but, really, for an entirely new life, one where, with Dave’s encouragement, I’d be home with a baby instead of joining him on the train every morning, heading into the city to work. Dave wanted me to be more like his own mother, who’d gladly given up her career as a lawyer when the first of her three boys was born, swapping briefs and depositions for carpools and class-mom duties. He wanted a traditional stay-at-home mother, a wife who’d do the shopping and the cooking, who’d be available to sign for packages and pick up the dry cleaning and, generally, make his life not only possible but easy. The problem was, he’d never told me what he wanted, which meant I never got to think about whether it was what I wanted, too.

Maybe it would have worked if the world hadn’t decided it had no great use for newspapers . . . or if the blog I wrote as a hobby hadn’t become a job, turning our financial arrangement on its head, so that I became the primary breadwinner and Dave’s salary ended up going for extras like private school and vacations and summer camp. Maybe our lives would have gone more smoothly if I hadn’t found the house so big, so daunting, if it didn’t carry, at least to my nose, the whiff of bad luck. “The sellers are very motivated,” our agent told me, and Dave and I quickly figured out why: the husband, a political consultant, had been arrested for embezzling campaign contributions, which he used to fund his gambling habit . . . and, *Examiner* readers eventually learned, his mistress.

Dave and I had both grown up in decent-sized places in the suburbs, but the Haverford house had rooms upon rooms, some of which seemed to have no discernible function. There was a kitchen, and then beside it a smaller, second kitchen, with a sink and a granite island, that the Realtor ID'd as a butler's pantry. "We don't have a butler," I told Dave. "And if we did, I wouldn't give him his own pantry!" The main kitchen was big enough to eat in, with a dining room adjoining it, plus a living room, a den, and a home office with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves. Upstairs there were no fewer than five bedrooms and five full bathrooms. There was the master suite, and something called a "princess suite" that came with its own dressing room. The basement was partially finished, with space for a home gym, and out back a screened-in porch overlooked the gentle slope of the lawn.

"Can we afford this?" I'd asked. It turned out, between Dave's advance and the embezzler's desperation, that we could. We could buy it, but we couldn't fill it. Every piece of furniture we owned, including the folding card table I'd used as a desk and the futon from Dave's college dorm, barely filled a quarter of the space, and it all looked wrong. The table that had fit perfectly in our Philadelphia row house was dwarfed by the soaring ceilings and spaciousness of the Haverford dining room. The love seat where we'd snuggled in Center City became dollhouse-sized in the burbs. Our queen-sized bed looked like a crouton floating in a giant bowl of soup in the master bedroom, and our combined wardrobes barely filled a third of the shelves and hanging space in the spacious walk-in closet.

Overwhelmed, out of a job, and with a baby to care for, I'd wander the rooms, making lists of what we needed. I'd buy stacks of magazines, clip pictures, or browse Pinterest, making boards

of sofas I loved, dining-room tables I thought could work, pretty wallpaper, and gorgeous rugs. I would go to the paint store and come home with strips of colors; I'd download computer programs that let me move furniture around imaginary rooms. But when it came time to actually buy something—the dining-room table we obviously needed, beds for the empty guest rooms, towels to stock the shelves in the guest bathrooms—I would go into vapor lock. I'd never considered myself indecisive or suffered from fear of commitment, but somehow the thought *That bed you are buying will be your bed for the rest of your life* would make me hang up the phone or close the laptop before I could even get the first digits of my card number out.

Four months after Dave had signed his advance, another book came out, this one based on a series that had run in one of the New York City papers, about a homeless little girl and the constellation of grown-ups—parents, teachers, caseworkers, politicians—who touched her life. The series had gotten over a million clicks, but the book failed to attract more than a thousand readers its first month on sale. Dave's publisher had gotten nervous—if a book about the poor in New York City didn't sell, what were the prospects for a book about the poor in Philadelphia? They'd exercised their option to kill the contract. Dave didn't have to give back the money they'd paid him on signing, but there would be no more cash forthcoming. His agent had tried but had been unable to get another publisher to pick up the project. Poverty just wasn't sexy. Not with so many readers struggling to manage their own finances and hang on to their own jobs.

Dave's agent had encouraged him to capitalize on the momentum and come up with another idea—"They all love your voice!" she'd said—but, so far, Dave was holding on to the no-

tion that he could find a way to get paid for the writing he'd already done, instead of having to start all over again. So he'd stayed at the paper, and when Sarah had approached me about publishing my blog on her website, saying yes was the obvious choice. Once I started working, I had no more time to fuss with furniture. Just finding clean clothes in the morning and something for us all to eat at night was challenge enough. So the house stayed empty, unfinished, with wires sticking out from walls because I hadn't picked lighting fixtures, and three empty bedrooms with their walls painted an unassuming beige. In the absence of dressers and armoires, we kept our clothes in laundry baskets and Tupperware bins, and, in addition to the couch and the love seat, there were folding canvas camp chairs in the living room, a temporary measure that had now lasted more than two years—about as long as Dave's bad mood.

I remembered the sulk that had followed the *Examiner's* edict that every story run online with a button next to the byline so that readers could "Like" the reporter on Facebook.

"It's not even asking them to like the stories," he'd complained. "It's asking them to like me." He hadn't even smiled when I'd said, "Well, I like you," and embraced him, sliding my hands from his shoulder blades down to the small of his back, then cupping his bottom and kissing his cheek. Ellie was engrossed in an episode of *Yo Gabba Gabba!*; the chicken had another thirty minutes in the oven. "Want to take a shower?" I'd whispered. Two years ago, he'd have had my clothes off and the water on in under a minute. That night, he'd just sighed and asked, "Do you have any idea how degrading it is to be treated like a product?"

It wasn't as though I couldn't sympathize. I'd worked at the *Examiner* myself, as a web designer, before Ellie was born. I believed in newspapers' mission, the importance of their role as

a watchdog, holding the powerful accountable, comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable. But it wasn't my fault that newspapers in general and the *Examiner* in particular were failing. I hadn't changed the world so that everything was available online immediately if not sooner, and not even our grandparents waited for the morning paper to tell them what was what. I hadn't rearranged things so that "if it bleeds, it leads" had become almost quaint. These days, the *Examiner's* home page featured photographs of the Hot Singles Mingle party that desperate editors had thrown, or of the Critical Mass Naked Nine, where participants had biked, nude, down ten miles of Broad Street (coverage of that event, with the pictures artfully blurred, had become the most-read story of the year, easily topping coverage both of the election and of the corrupt city councilman who'd been arrested for tax fraud after a six-hour standoff that ended after he'd climbed to the top of City Hall and threatened to jump unless he was provided with a plane, a million dollars in unmarked bills, and two dozen cannoli from Potito's). "A 'Like' button is not the end of the world," I'd said, after it became clear that a sexy shower was not in my future. Then I'd gone back to my iPad, and he'd gone back to watching the game . . . except when I looked up I found him scowling at me as if I'd just tossed my device at his head.

"What?" I asked, startled.

"Nothing," he said. Then he jumped up from the sofa, rolled his shoulders, shook out his arms, and cracked a few knuckles, loudly, like he was getting ready to enter a boxing ring. "It's nothing."

I'd tried to talk to him about what was wrong, hoping he'd realize that, as the one who'd gotten us into this mess—or at least this big house, this big life, with the snooty private-school parents and the shocking property-tax bills—he had an obliga-

tion to help figure out how we were going to make it work. Over breakfast the week after the “Like” button rant, while Ellie dawdled at the sink, washing and rewashing her hands until every trace of syrup was gone, I’d quietly suggested couples therapy, telling him that lots of my friends were going (lie, but I did know at least one couple who had gone), and adding that the combined stress of a new town, a sensitive child, and a wife who’d gone from working twenty hours a week to what was supposed to be forty but was closer to sixty would put any couple on edge. His lip had curled. “You think I’m crazy?”

“Of course you’re not crazy,” I’d whispered back. “But it’s been crazy for both of us, and I just think . . .”

He got up from the table and stood there for a moment in his blue nylon running shorts and a T-shirt from a 10K he’d completed last fall. Dave was tall, broad-shouldered, and slim-hipped, with thick black hair, deep-set brown eyes, and a receding hairline he disguised by wearing baseball caps whenever he could. When we’d first started dating we would walk holding hands, and I’d try to catch glimpses of the two of us reflected in windows or bus-shelter glass, knowing how good we looked together. Dave was quiet, brooding, with a kind of stillness that made me want nothing more than to hear him laugh, and a goofy sense of humor you’d never guess he had just by looking at him. *Still waters run deep*, I’d thought. Later, I learned that silence did not necessarily guarantee depth. If you interrupted my husband in the middle of one of his quiet times, asked him what he was thinking about, and got him to tell you, some of the time the answer would concern the latest scandal at City Hall, or his attempts to confirm rumors about a congressional aide who’d forged his boss’s signature. Other times, the answer would involve his ongoing attempt to rank his five favorite 76ers.

Still, there was no one I wanted to be with more than Dave.

He knew me better than anyone, knew what kind of movies I liked, my favorite dishes at my favorite restaurants, how my mood could instantly be improved by the presence of a Le Bus brownie or a rerun of *Face/Off* on cable. Dave would talk me into jogging, knowing how good I'd feel when I was done, or he'd take Ellie out for doughnuts on a Saturday morning, letting me sleep until ten after a late night working.

He could be considerate, loving, and sweet. The morning I suggested therapy, he was none of those things. He went stalking down to the basement without a word of farewell. A minute later, the treadmill whirred to life. Dave was training for his first marathon, a goal I'd encouraged before I realized that the long runs each weekend meant I wouldn't see him for four or five hours at a time on a Saturday or Sunday, and would have the pleasure of Ellie all to myself. While the treadmill churned away in the basement, I got to my feet, sighing, as the weight of the day settled around my shoulders.

"Ellie," I said. Ellie was still standing at the sink, dreamily rubbing liquid soap into her hands. "You need to clear your plate and your glass."

"But they're too HEAVY! And the plate is all STICKY! And maybe it will DROP!" she complained, still in her Ariel nightgown, dragging her bare feet along the terra-cotta tiled floor until finally I snapped, "Ellie, just give me the plate and stop making such a production!"

Inevitably, she'd started to cry, dashing upstairs to her room, leaving soapy handprints along the banister. I loaded the dishwasher, wiped down the counters, and swept the kitchen floor. I put the milk and juice and butter back in the fridge and the flour and sugar back in the pantry. Then, before I went to Ellie to apologize and tell her that we should both try to use our inside voices, I'd taken a pill, my second Vicodin since I'd gotten

up. The day had stretched endlessly before me—weepy daughter, angry husband, piles of laundry, messy bedroom, a blog post to write, and probably dozens of angry commenters lined up to tell me I was a no-talent hack and a fat, stupid whore. *I need this*, I thought, letting the bitterness dissolve on my tongue. It had been, I remembered, not even nine a.m.

Have you ever felt like you should cut down on your drinking or drug use?

Feeling suddenly queasy, I lifted my head and looked around the waiting room again to see if anyone had noticed that I was taking this quiz seriously. Did I think about cutting down? Sure. Sometimes. More and more often I had the nagging feeling that things were getting out of control. Then I'd think, *Oh, please*. I had prescriptions for everything I took (and if Doctor A didn't know what Doctor B was giving me, well, that wasn't necessarily a problem—if it was, pharmacies would be set up to flag it, right?). The pills helped me manage everything I needed to manage.

Have other people criticized your drinking or drug use, or been annoyed by it?

I checked “No,” fast and emphatically, trying not to think about how nobody criticized my use because nobody knew about it. Dave knew I had a prescription for Vicodin—he'd been there the night I'd come hobbling home from the gym—but he had no idea how many times I'd gotten that prescription refilled, telling my doctor that I was doing my physical-therapy-prescribed exercises religiously (I wasn't), but that I still needed something for the pain. Dave didn't know how easy it was, if you were a woman with health insurance and an education, a woman who spoke and dressed and presented herself a certain way. Good manners and good grammar, in addition to an MRI that showed bulging

discs or impacted molars, could get you pretty much anything you wanted. With refills. Pain was impossible to see, hard to quantify, and I knew the words to use, the gestures to make, how to sit and stand as if every breath was agony. It was my little secret, and I intended to keep it that way.

“Eloise Weiss?” I looked up. A nurse stood in the doorway with Ellie’s chart in his hands.

Startled, I half jumped to my feet, and felt my back give a warning twinge, as if to remind me how I’d gotten into this mess. I wanted a pill. I’d had only one, that morning, six hours ago, and I wanted something, a dam against the rising anxiety about whether my marriage was foundering and if I was a good parent and when I’d find the time to finish the blog post that was due at six o’clock. I wanted to feel good, centered and calm and happy, able to appreciate what I had—my sunny kitchen, with orchids blooming on the windowsill; Ellie’s bedroom, for which I’d finally found the perfect pink chandelier. I wanted to slip into my medicated bubble, where I was safe, where I was happy, where nothing could hurt me. *As soon as this is over*, I told myself, and imagined sitting behind the wheel once the doctor had let us go and swallowing a white oval-shaped pill while Ellie fussed with her seat belt. With that picture firmly in mind, I reached out my hand for my daughter.

“No shots,” she said, her lower lip already starting to tremble.

“I don’t think so.”

“No SHOTS! You SAID! You PROMISED!” Heads turned in judgment, mothers probably thinking, *Thank God mine’s not like that*. Ellie crossed her arms over her chest and stood there, forty-three pounds of fury in a flowered Hanna Andersson dress, matching socks and cardigan, and zip-up leopard-print high-top sneakers. Her fine brown hair hung in braided pigtails, tied with

purple elastic bands, and she had a stretchy flowered headband wrapped, hippie-style, around her forehead.

The nurse gave me a smile that was both sympathetic and weary, as I half-walked, half-dragged my daughter off to the scales and blood-pressure cuffs. Eloise whined and balked and winced as she was weighed and measured. The nurse took her blood pressure and temperature. Then the two of us were left to wait in an exam room. “Put this on,” the nurse said, handing Ellie a cotton gown. Ellie pinched the gown between two fingertips. “It will ITCH,” she said, and started to cry.

“Come on,” I said, taking the gown, with its rough texture and offending tags, in my hand. “I bet if you just get your dress off, you’ll be okay.”

Still sniffing, Ellie bent gracefully at the waist—she’d gotten her ease in the physical world from her father, who ran and ice-skated and, unlike me, did not inhabit a universe where the furniture seemed to reposition itself just so I could trip over or bang into it. I watched as she eased each zipper on her high-tops down, slid her foot out of her right shoe, pulled off her pink sock, and laid it carefully on top of the sneaker. Off came the left shoe. Off came the left sock. I sat down in the plastic chair as Ellie moved on to her cardigan. I had never mistreated her while under the influence. I’d never yelled (well, not scary-yelling), or been rough, or told her that she needed to put on her god-damn clothes this century, because we couldn’t be late for school again, because I couldn’t sit through another lecture about Your Responsibilities to Stonefield: A Learning Community (calling it just a “school,” I supposed, would have failed to justify its outrageous tuition). It was the opposite. The pills calmed me down. They gave me a sense of peace. When I swallowed them, I felt like I could accomplish anything, whether it was writing a

post about the rising costs of fertility treatments or getting my daughter to school on time.

“Mom-MEE.” I looked at Ellie. Glory be, she’d gotten all the way down to her Disney Princess underpants. I held open the gown. She made a face. “Just try it,” I said. Finally, with the hauteur of a high-fashion model being forced to don polyester, she slipped her arms through the sleeves and permitted me to knot the ties in the back while she pinched the fabric between her fingertips, holding it ostentatiously away from her body, making sure the tag wouldn’t touch her. She retrieved my iPad and cued up *Les Miz*. I went back to my quiz. *Have you ever used more than you could afford?* Hardly. My doctors would write me prescriptions. My copay was fifteen dollars a bottle. But it was true that the bottles were no longer lasting as long as they were supposed to, and I spent what was beginning to feel like a lot of time figuring out how many pills I had left and which doctor I hadn’t called in a while and whether the pharmacist was looking at me strangely because I was picking up Vicodin two or three times a week.

Have you ever planned not to use that day but done it anyway?

Yes. I had thought about stopping. I had tried, a few times, and managed, for a few days . . . but during the last few not-today days, it was as if my brain and body had disconnected at some critical juncture. I’d be standing in my closet, in my T-shirt or the workout clothes I’d put on in the hope that wearing them would make me more inclined to exercise, thinking *No*, while watching my body from the outside, watching my hands uncap the bottle, watching my fingers select a pill.

Have you ever not been able to stop when you planned to?

“Mommy?” Ellie sat on the examining table, legs crossed, gown spread neatly in her lap. “Are you mad?” she asked. Her

lower lip was quivering. She looked like she was on the verge of tears. Then again, Eloise frequently appeared to be on the verge of tears. When she was a baby, a slammed car door or the telephone ringing could jolt her out of her nap and into a full-fledged shrieking meltdown. In her stroller, she'd cringe at street noises; a telephone ringing, a taxi honking. Even the unexpected rustling of tree branches overhead could make her flinch.

"No, honey. Why?"

"Your face looks all scrunchy."

I made myself smile. I held out my arms and, after a moment's hesitation, Ellie hopped off the table and sat on my lap, folding her upper body against mine. I breathed in her little-girl smell—a bit like cotton candy, like graham crackers and library books—and pressed my cheek against her soft hair, thinking that even though she was high-strung and thin-skinned, Ellie was also smart and funny and undeniably lovely, and that I would do whatever I could to maximize her chances of being happy. I wouldn't be like my own mother, a circa 1978 party girl who hadn't realized that the party was over, a woman who'd slapped three coats of quick-drying lacquer over herself at twenty-six—teased hair, cat-eye black liquid liner, a slick, lipglossed pout, and splashes of Giorgio perfume—and gotten so involved in her tennis group, her morning walk buddies, her mah-jongg ladies, her husband and his health that she had little time for, or interest in, her only child. I knew my mother loved me—at least, she said so—but when I was a girl at the dinner table, or out in the driveway, where I'd amuse myself by hitting a tennis ball against the side of the garage, my mother would look up from her inspection of her fingernails or her *People* magazine and gaze at me as if I were a guest at a hotel who should have checked out weeks before and was somehow, inexplicably, still hanging around.

When I was almost eight years old, my parents asked me

what I wanted for my birthday. I'd been thinking about it for weeks and I knew exactly how to answer. I wanted my mother, who was usually asleep when I left for school, to take me out to breakfast at Peterman's, the local diner that sat in the center of a traffic circle at the intersection of two busy highways in Cherry Hill. Everyone went there: it was where kids would get ice cream cones after school, where families would go for a dinner of charcoal-grilled burgers for Dad and dry tuna on iceberg lettuce for Mom and a platter of chicken wings, onion rings, and French fries with ranch and honey-mustard dipping sauces for the kids. One of my classmates, Kelly Goldring, had breakfast there with her mother every Wednesday. "She calls it Girls' Day," Kelly recounted at a Girl Scout meeting, taking care to roll her eyes to show how dopey she found the weekly breakfasts, but I could tell from her tone, and how she looked when she talked about splitting the Hungry Lady special with her mom and still having home fries left over to take in her lunch, that the breakfasts were just what Mrs. Goldring intended—special. I imagined Kelly and her mom in one of the booths for two. Mrs. Goldring would be in a dress and high heels, with a floppy silk bow tie around her neck, and Kelly, who usually wore jeans and a T-shirt, would wear a skirt that showed off her scabby knees. I pictured the waitress, hip cocked, pad in hand, asking "What can I get you gals?" As I imagined my own trip to the diner, my mother would order a fruit cup, and I'd get eggs and bacon. The eggs would be fluffy, the bacon would be crisp, and my mother, fortified by fruit and strong coffee, would ask about my teacher, my classes, and my Girl Scout troop and actually listen to my answers.

That was what I wanted: not a new bike or an Atari, not cassettes of Sting or Genesis, not *Trixie Belden* books. Just breakfast with my mom; the two of us, in a booth, alone for the forty-five minutes it would take us to eat the breakfast special.

I should have suspected that things wouldn't go the way I'd hoped when my mother came down to the kitchen the morning of my birthday looking wan with one eye made up and mascaraed, and the other pale and untouched. "Come on," she'd said, her Philadelphia accent thicker than normal, her voice raspy. Her hand trembled as she reached for her keys, and she winced when I opened the door to make sure the cab was waiting out front. I rarely saw my mom out of bed before nine, and I never saw her without her makeup completely applied. That morning her face was pale, and she seemed a little shaky, as if the sunshine on her skin was painful and the floor was rolling underneath her feet.

This, I reasoned, had to do with the Accident, the one my mother had gotten into when I was four years old. I didn't know many details—only that she had been driving, that it had been raining, and that she'd hit a slick patch on the road and actually flipped the car over. She'd spent six weeks away, first in the hospital, having metal pins put into her shoulder, then in a rehab place. She still had scars—a faint slash on her left cheek, surgical incisions on her upper arm. Then there were what my father portentously referred to as "the scars you can't see." My mom had never driven since that night. She would jump at the sound of a slammed door or a car backfiring; she couldn't watch car chases or car crashes in the movies or on TV. A few times a month, she'd skip her tennis game and I'd come home from school to find her up in her bedroom with the lights down low, suffering from a migraine.

The morning of my birthday, my mother slid into the backseat beside me. I could smell Giorgio perfume and toothpaste and, underneath that, the stale smell of sleep.

The cab pulled up in front of the restaurant. My mother reached into the pocket of her jacket and handed me a ten-

dollar bill. “That’s enough, right?” I stared, openmouthed, at the money. My mom looked puzzled, her penciled-in eyebrows drawn together.

“I thought you’d eat with me,” I finally said.

“Oh!” Before she turned her head toward the window, I caught an expression of surprise and, I thought, of shame on her face. “Oh, honey. I’m so sorry. When you said ‘I want you to take me to Peterman’s,’ I thought . . .” She waved one hand as if shooing away the idea that a daughter would want to share a birthday breakfast with her mom. “Since I knew I’d be getting up early, I set up a doubles game.” She looked at her watch. “I have to run and get changed . . . Mitzie and Ellen are probably there already.”

“Oh, that’s okay,” I said. Already I could feel tears pricking the backs of my eyelids, burning my throat, but I knew better than to cry. *Don’t upset your mother*, my father would say.

“Is ten dollars enough?”

How was I supposed to know? I had no idea . . . but I nodded anyhow. “Have a good day, then. Happy birthday!” She gave me a kiss and a cheery little wave before I got out of the cab and closed the door gently behind me.

I hadn’t braved the restaurant. It wasn’t Wednesday, but I could still imagine sitting at the counter and seeing Kelly and her mom in a booth. I didn’t even know whether an eight-year-old could be in a restaurant and order by herself—I could read the menu, of course, but I was too shy to talk to a waitress, and shaky about the mechanics of asking for a check and leaving a tip. I went to the bakery counter instead, where I ordered by pointing at the case—two glazed doughnuts, two chocolate, a jelly, and a Boston cream. There was a path through the woods that led from downtown to my school, and in those days a kid—

even a girl—could walk through the woods alone, without her parents worrying that she'd get kidnapped or molested. I walked underneath the shade, kicking pine needles and gobbling my breakfast, devouring the doughnuts in huge, breathless mouthfuls, cramming down my sadness, trying to remember what my mom had said—that she loved me—instead of the way she'd made me feel. By Language Arts, I was sick to my stomach, and my mother had to take a cab to come get me. In the nurse's office, still in her tennis whites, she'd been impatient, rolling her eyes as I checked my backpack for my books, but in the backseat of the taxi her pout had vanished, and she looked almost kind.

She had on a tennis skirt and a blue nylon warmup jacket with white stripes. Her legs were tan and her thighs barely spread out as she sat, whereas my legs, in black tights underneath my best red-and-green kilt, were probably blobbed out all over the seat.

"I guess breakfast didn't agree with you," she said. She reached into her tote bag for her thermos and a towel, giving me a sip and then gently wiping my forehead, then my mouth.

In Ellie's doctor's office, I sighed, remembering how special I'd felt that my mother had shared her special blue thermos, how I'd never have dreamed of grabbing it out of her bag, let alone backwashing, when Ellie's doctor came striding into the room.

"Hello, Miss Eloise!" Dr. McCarthy wore a blue linen shirt that matched his eyes, white pants, and a pressed white doctor's coat with his name stitched on it in blue. Ellie sprang out of my arms and stood, trembling, at the doorway, poised for escape. I gathered her up and set her onto the crinkly white paper on the table, ignoring my back's protests. The doctor, with a closely trimmed white goatee and a stethoscope looped rakishly around his neck, walked over to the table and gravely offered Ellie his hand.

“Eloise,” he said. “How is the Plaza?”

She giggled, pressing one hand against her mouth to protect her single loose tooth. Now that she had a handsome man’s attention, she was all sweetness and cheer as she sat on the edge of the examination table, legs crossed, poised enough to be on *Meet the Press*. “We went for tea for my birthday.”

“Did you now?” While they chatted about her birthday tea, the white gloves she’d worn, the turtle she had, of course, named Skipperdee, and how her computer game was “very sophisticating,” he maneuvered deftly through the exam, peering into her eyes and ears, listening to her chest and lungs, checking her reflexes.

“So, Miss Ellie,” he said. “Anything bothering you?”

She tapped her forefinger against her lips. “Hmm.”

“Any trouble sleeping? Or using the bathroom?”

She shook her head.

“How about food? Are you getting lots of good, healthy stuff?”

She brightened. “I like cucumber sandwiches!”

“Who doesn’t like a good cucumber sandwich?” He turned to me, beaming. “She’s perfect, Allison. I vote you keep her.” Then he lowered his voice and took my arm. “Let’s talk outside for just a minute.”

My heart stuttered. Had he seen the quiz I’d been working on? Had I done, or said, something to give myself away?

I handed Ellie the iPad and walked out into the hallway as a young woman, one of the medical students who assisted in the office, stepped in to keep an eye on the patient. “Do you like Broadway musicals?” I heard my daughter ask, as Dr. McCarthy steered me toward the window at the end of the hallway.

“I just wanted to hear how you were doing. Any questions? Any concerns?”

I tried to keep from making too much noise as I exhaled the breath I'd been holding. Maybe I'd picked Dr. McCarthy for shallow reasons—he was the first pediatrician we'd met with who hadn't called me "Mom"—but he'd turned out to be a perfect choice. He listened when I talked, he never rushed me out of his office or dismissed any of my ridiculous new-parent questions as silly, and he provided a necessary balance between me, who was prone to panic, and Dave, who was the kind of guy who'd wrap duct tape around a broken leg and call it a job.

Dr. McCarthy put Ellie's folder down on top of the radiator. "How's the eczema?"

"We're still using the cream, and we're seeing Dr. Howard again next month." Skin conditions, I'd learned, were one of the treats that went along with the sensitive child—that, and food allergies.

"And is school okay?" He paged through Ellie's chart. "How was the adjustment from preschool to kindergarten?"

I grimaced, remembering the first day of school and Ellie clinging to my leg, weeping as if I were sending her into exile instead of a six-hour day at the highly regarded (and very expensive) Stonefield: A Learning Community. (In my head, I carried out an invisible rebellion by thinking of it as just the Stonefield School.) "She had a rough few weeks to start with. She's doing fine now . . ." "Fine" was, perhaps, an exaggeration, but at least Ellie wasn't weeping and doing her barnacle leg-lock at every drop-off. "She's reading, which is great."

He looked at her chart again. "How about the bad dreams?"

"They've gotten better. She still doesn't like loud noises." Or movies in theaters, or any place—like the paint-your-own-pottery shop or the library at storytime—where more than two or three people might be talking at once. I sighed. "It's like she feels everything more than other kids."

“And maybe she does,” he replied. “Like I said, though, most kids do grow out of it. By the time she’s ten she’ll be begging you for drum lessons.”

“It’s so hard,” I said. Then I shut my mouth. I hated how I sounded when I complained about Ellie, knowing that there were women who wanted to get pregnant and couldn’t, that there were children in the world with real, serious problems that went far beyond reacting badly to loud noises and the occasional rash. There were single mothers, women with far less money and far fewer resources than I had. Who was I, with my big house and my great job, to complain about anything?

Dr. McCarthy put his hand on my forearm and looked at me with such kindness that I found myself, absurdly, almost crying.

“So tell me. What are you doing to take care of yourself?”

I thought for a split second about lying, giving him some story about actually attending yoga classes instead of just paying for them, or how I was taking Pilates, when, in fact, all I had was a gift certificate from two birthdays ago languishing in my dresser drawer. Instead I said, “Nothing, really. There just isn’t time.”

He adjusted his stethoscope. “You’ve got to make time. It’s important. You know how they tell you on planes, in case of an emergency, the adults should put their oxygen masks on first? You’re not going to be any good to anyone if you’re not taking care of yourself.” His blue eyes, behind his glasses, looked so gentle, and his posture was relaxed, as if he had nowhere to go and nothing more pressing to do than stand there all afternoon and listen to my silly first-world problems. “Do you want to talk to someone?” I didn’t answer. I didn’t want to talk to someone. I wanted to talk to him. I wanted to go to his office—it was small but cozy, with cluttered bookshelves, and a desk stacked high with charts, and a comfortably worn leather couch against the

wall. He'd offer me a seat and a cup of tea, and ask me what was wrong, what was really wrong, and I would tell him: about Dave, about Ellie, about my dad, about my mom. About the pills. I'd tuck myself under a blanket and take a nap while the volunteers kept Ellie amused in the waiting room and Dr. McCarthy came up with a plan for how to fix me.

Instead, I swallowed hard. "I'm okay," I said, in a slightly hoarse voice, and I gave him a smile, the same one I'd given my mother on my way out of the taxi on my eighth birthday.

"Are you sure? I know how hard this part can be. Even if you can find twenty minutes a day to go for a walk, or just sit quietly . . ."

Twenty minutes. It didn't sound like much. Not until I started thinking about work, and how time-consuming writing five blog posts a week turned out to be, and how on top of my paying job I'd volunteered to redesign the website for Stonefield's annual silent auction. There were the mortgage payments, which still felt like an astonishing sum to part with each month, and the *Examiner*, where it was rumored there'd be another round of layoffs soon. There was the laundry that never got folded, the workouts that went undone, the organic vegetables that would rot and liquefy in the fridge because, after eight hours at my desk and another two hours of being screamed at by my daughter because she couldn't find the one specific teddy bear she wanted among the half-dozen teddy bears she owned, I couldn't handle finding a recipe and preparing a meal and washing the dishes when I was done. We lived on grab-and-heat meals from Wegmans, Chinese takeout, frozen pizzas, and, if I was feeling particularly guilty on a Sunday afternoon, some kind of casserole, for which I'd double the recipe and freeze a batch.

Dr. McCarthy tucked Ellie's folder under his arm and looked down at the magazine in my hand. "Are you reading one of those

‘How to Be Better in Bed’ things?’ he asked. I gave a weak smile and closed the magazine so he couldn’t see what I was really reading. This was craziness. I didn’t have a problem. I couldn’t.

He glanced over my head, at the clock on the wall. From behind the exam-room door, I could hear Ellie and the medical student singing “Castle on a Cloud.” “Nobody shouts or talks too loud . . . Not in my castle on a cloud.”

I gave him another smile. He gave my arm a final squeeze. “Take care of yourself,” he said, and then he was gone.

I pushed the magazine into the depths of my purse. I got Ellie into her clothes, smoothing out the seam of her socks, buttoning her dress, re-braiding her hair. I held her hand when we crossed the street, paid for parking, and then, before I drove southwest to Federal Donuts for the hot chocolate I’d promised my daughter, I reached for the Altoids tin in my purse.

No, I thought, and remembered the quiz. Have you ever planned not to use that day but done it anyway? What excuse did I have for taking pills?

Maybe my mother had been cold and inattentive . . . but it had been the 1970s, before “parent” became a verb, when mothers routinely stuck their toddlers in playpens while they mixed themselves a martini or lit a Virginia Slim. So I had a big house in the burbs. Wasn’t that what every woman was supposed to want? I had a job I was good at, a job I liked, even if it felt sometimes like the stress was unbearable; I had a lovely daughter, and, really, was being a little sensitive such a big deal? I was fine, I thought. Everything was fine. But even as I was thinking it, my fingers were opening the little box, locating the chalky white oval, and delivering it, like Communion, to the waiting space beneath my tongue. I heard the pill cracking between my teeth as I chewed, winced as the familiar bitterness flooded my mouth, and imagined as I started the car that I could feel the chemical

sweetness untying my knotted muscles, slowing my heartbeat, silencing the endless monkey-chatter of my mind, letting my lungs expand enough for a deep breath.

At the corner of Sixth and Chestnut, I saw a woman on the sidewalk. Her face was red. Her feet bulged out of laceless sneakers, and there was a paper cup in her hands. Puckered lips worked against toothless gums. Her hands were dirty and swollen, her body wrapped in layers of sweaters and topped with a stained down coat. Behind her stood a shopping cart filled with trash bags. A little dog was perched on the topmost bag, curled up in a threadbare blue sweater.

Ellie slowly read each word of her sign out loud. “‘Homeless. Need help. God bless.’ Mommy, what is ‘homeless?’”

“It means she doesn’t have a place to live.” I was glad Dave wasn’t in the car. I could imagine his response: *It means she doesn’t want to work to take care of herself, and thinks it’s someone else’s job to pay for what she needs.* I’d known my husband was more conservative than I was when I married him, but, in the ten years since, it seemed like he’d decided that anything that went wrong in his life or anyone else’s was the liberals’ fault.

Ellie considered this. “Maybe she could live in our guest room.”

I bit back my immediate reply, which was, *No, honey, your daddy lives there.* That had been true for at least the past six weeks. Maybe longer. I didn’t want to think about it. Instead I said, “She probably needs a special kind of help, not just a place to stay.”

“What kind of help?”

Blessedly, the light turned green. I pulled into traffic and drove to the doughnut shop, feeling the glow of the narcotic envelop me and hold me tight. Leaving the shop, I caught a glimpse of myself in the window, and compared what I saw—a white

woman of medium height, in a tan camel-hair trench coat, new-this-season walnut leather riding boots, straightened hair lying smoothly over her shoulders—with the woman on the corner. *A little makeup*, I thought, in the expansive, embracing manner I tended to think in when I had a pill or two in me, *and I could even be pretty*. And even if I wasn't, I thought, as I drove us back home, as Ellie sang along to Carly Rae Jepsen and the city where I'd been so happy slipped away in my rearview mirror, I was a world away from the woman we'd seen. That woman—she was what addiction looked like. Not me. Not me.

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