

I Spy the Everglow

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I was nine years old the summer that Harriet the Spy came out in movie theaters. Harriet was my idol; she found the answers to absolutely everything. She was amazing, and that summer I wanted to be just like her and so did my cousins.

She had red hair and freckles. She was so keen, so innovative. What made her even more admirable was that she was realistic in the way she went about her spy work. All she needed was a pad of paper and pen, along with the occasional voice recorder. Her simple approach meant that I could be just like her, and I would. My cousins, my sister, and I first saw the movie while we were spending a weekend on Cape Cod as we so often did during the summer. The four of us decided immediately that the next day, we would become Harriet; we would all officially become spies.

There were so many things to spy on: people at the beach, children getting ice cream, our parents, our aunts and uncles. So many people were around and unsuspecting. We wrote down everything they did and said. We took notes about the boy at the corner store who wore a red shirt and was stung by a bee after parking his bike. We wrote about how he screamed “Ouch!” as he hopped around and complained. The most annoying part about spying, though, was that there was usually no story at all: Nana would be sweeping the porch making little heaps of dust (unexciting). Uncle Paul would be smoking a cigarette outside and tapping his ashes on the orange lilies (boring). Dad would stay home from the beach because he didn't want to get sunburned (typical). Mom would be reading (yet another book).

Auntie Janet was absent from the Cape this weekend, which... only sort of had a story. My cousins told me that their mother wasn't there because she had caught a cold and just wasn't

feeling up to it. My parents talked about Auntie Janet's cold only when the kids weren't around. My mother went to visit her a lot and my cousins said that she was always going to see the doctor to get medicine. It wasn't really a "cold," of course; it was something worse, something that I couldn't possibly understand. But then again, I doubt it is something that anyone understands, except, perhaps, for the doctors who diagnose it. That's why they didn't tell us. *Man wears long white coat, smells clean, scribbles on notepad, wears necklace that lets him listen to heartbeat.*

I couldn't believe we hadn't discovered that she was ill while we were spying on people. How could we not see it? Why weren't we able to write the story about my aunt who was so sick? Why couldn't I voice record our last conversation together? The entire family kept such a good secret from the four little spies who were constantly lurking about, looking for a story. I felt betrayed by my parents. They especially should have told me; she was my godmother, after all. The kids couldn't have known, though; we couldn't have understood why God would want to take her away from us. Our parents knew better than to make us worry. In hindsight, they probably did choose the better of the two bad choices. But my most vivid memory now is the last time I saw Auntie Janet.

It was August and I was at her mother's house in the sunroom. She was watching T.V. and I walked in to say goodbye. My family was to return home from our summer in Massachusetts, so I knew that I wasn't going to see her for a solid six months at least. I remember seeing the room in an afternoon glow-she was glowing. She was my glowing godmother. I kissed her and said goodbye, thinking maybe I'd see her at Christmas. I remember the glow so well; it was one of the few times I had seen her that summer. I wanted to write in my spy journal that she was glowing and that I was so excited to see her, but sad to say goodbye. I can't remember

perfectly, but I think I asked her how she was feeling, and she said she was feeling well. I would have written that down, too. I would have thought that the mystery was solved. I would have taken my black pen and would have written on an unlined notepad, *Auntie Janet is feeling better. She sits in a room with a glow.* I felt like a bad spy. Harriet would have solved it; she would have found out that Auntie's cold wasn't really a cold. She wouldn't have been satisfied with such an answer. I didn't work hard enough. I replayed that memory so many times that it wouldn't have been worth writing down. I played it out so completely that I can only remember the glow.

I can remember that same glow from the day I found out she was gone, too. My parents had been keeping secrets; they made it impossible for me to spy on them. But on October 10th, 1997 I walked into my parents' bedroom to find my mother sobbing in a chair and my father at her side trying to comfort her. *Mother sits in long cushy chair, she cries, father looks confused, neither of them will look at me.* I didn't understand what was going on and after looking at my confused face through her tears my mother said, "Auntie Janet has cancer." I almost dared to think nothing of it. People get over cancer all the time; at least that's what my friend Julia had told me at school. I believed her. I thought Auntie Janet would be fine. I walked home from the bus stop that day and as soon as I walked in the house, my mother told me to go straight into the living room and wait for her. I whined and said that I already knew what she was going to tell my sister and me. I thought I already knew the news.

My mother and father stayed in their room for a long time, strategizing. They were planning out their explanations as to why God had taken her away, how much school we would have to miss, and why they didn't tell us that she was sick before the day she was taken away from us. I was sitting on the bright yellow couch in our sunlit living room with my sister. I was antsy, but my sister was calm. My mother said without emotion, "Auntie Janet died at four this

morning.” It was as easy as that. The truth revealed. Mystery solved, but not by me. I should have apprenticed a different spy (Sherlock Holmes, perhaps) and then maybe I could have saved her.