
WEIGHT

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It was quiet that afternoon. Weekday afternoons were always quiet in our house. Dreamy, lazy, languid in the heat of summer, resting on the downstairs couch I heard you calling me from upstairs. Your voice had that same timber, will always have that same timber every time you call me upstairs. I rose, hesitant to leave that sunlit couch, but your voice again *Claire, come up just a moment!* there again beckoned me up, up into that bathroom. I entered the room and met eyes with you and you said *I just need your help for a moment* in that hushed way, in that way that made me know it was ME who needed to help you, and it couldn't be Jill. That hushed language between parents and older siblings is one you learn from the moment that second child is born. Out on the smooth countertop sat Dad's old electric razor. I lifted it, felt it weigh in my hands. I knew what was coming, God we all knew it was coming. It had been coming since April, since that hushed conversation, that same hushed language in the car on a same sunny afternoon, that same *don't tell Jill* had weighed the same as this razor weighed now. You sat in that chair and stared back at me from the mirror, but your eyes weren't meeting mine, not really, and mine weren't meeting yours, not really.

You looked like a child then, like I did when I was five and waiting for Dad to comb my hair, and you looked up at me, your child, in that same way. Waiting for me to comb your hair. The razor felt heavier now, the weight of that hush felt heavier now, everything was heavier now the moment you looked up at me like that.

I turned the razor on.

It became real then.

I fumbled my way through the already thinning patches of your scalp. I felt unsure, unready, wielding that razor. Shouldn't I know how to do this, shouldn't everyone know from the movies? They do this all the time in movies, this moment right here. But they don't tell you about how heavy that razor is in movies, they don't tell you how much steel can weigh when you look at me like that.

You made a joke like you always do - that Irish bleak humor never turns off, not even for a second. I laughed. I appreciated it.

You could tell how hard this was, I could tell how hard this was, but we just kept staring and not seeing, not actually. But we knew, and we kept that secret, you and me, between ourselves and the hushes and that heavy, heavy razor.

I finished and cleared some stray hairs from your crown, and you sat (admiring yourself, I liked to imagine). Seeing yourself, that terrifying feeling of seeing yourself, and while you were seeing yourself so was I. I was seeing you, actually. For the first time, maybe.

You were thinner now, medications already starting to wear on you. But you looked determined. But you looked scared. But you looked at me and I knew you were looking at me as equal now, because I was seeing you for the first time. How is it that after sixteen years I am only now seeing you for the first time?

We'll be okay you said. That 'we'. The 'we' that meant we were in this together, as partners, as equals, that 'we' that made up that hushed language, that 'we' that had been weighing down on me since you pulled over that car on that sunny afternoon in April and you told me that you had breast cancer.

Yes, that same 'we' that made me know we - you, and me, and Jill - we would all be okay.