It Is My Summer of Four Best Friends

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Rebecca

I sit on the floor of my best friend Rebecca’s room dragging a knife across my wrist. A half an hour ago, or maybe an hour ago, they’d gone into the bathroom to talk. Rebecca, my best friend, and her boyfriend Wes, my other best friend, left me alone with a pocketknife given to me by my father. It was my great-grandmother Lucille’s pocketknife. It has a lemon colored pearl handle with a rusty blade. My father didn’t actually give it to me, I took it from a drawer at his house, but I’d taken other things and he never missed them.

Rubbing the blade back and forth across my frayed jean shorts, I try to shine it up a bit. Shine me up a bit. And then I rock it across my wrist. It’s not dangerous, because at this point I’m not trying to kill myself and rocking it the wrong way, even if I was. I’m just trying to draw a little blood. Back and forth. Small lines, diagonal slashes, some criss-cross, others do nothing. But I wait. The blood takes a while to surface. Then little beads pop through the skin, little neat beads following the lines I make. I watch and feel a little better.

But it’s not fast enough for me. With one quick, hard pull, I yank the blade across my skin. This gash opens up. I can see in between my skin. It’s pink. It’s pretty. It’s my summer of knives. But then the blood comes and I’m wondering if I cut too deep. If I’ll die.

Wes and Rebecca come into the room. He doesn’t touch her because she doesn’t like PDA. I lean against her closet door my knees bent, pressing my arm into the crook between my legs and belly; I don’t look at them. My neck is bent and I trace the brown carpet with my eyes, while I consider telling them. The knife is next to my foot, but I have forgotten it.

“Sorry, Laura,” Rebecca says, sitting on bed, “we had to talk.” I roll my eyes and Wes sits to the right of me on the floor and picks up my stolen knife and examines the handle. Copying me, he slides his knees up near his chest. His sneakered feet point outward and his blue tee shirt is tight against his arms and chest. After one year of wrestling at South High School, he had the most “typical” male body I knew. But I didn’t understand desire then, I’d never even kissed a boy.

“Are you carving again,” he asks me, as Rebecca gets up to get us sugar-free koolaid and him a pop. He twirls the tip of the knife on the pad of his index finger as he glances at my self-made tattoo on my ankle. Two days ago, the night I first got my knife, I carved a heart with a
knife going through it on the inside of my left ankle. Every so often, since then, I’d go over the slight scratches that made a red scab outline. I didn’t want it to fade, but it did fade years later.

I lift my wrist near my face and bite my lip. Dried blood paints my wrist and where the new cut is, fresh blood still drips in fat drops that swell and then run down my arm.

“Let me see,” he says, reaching for my left arm and pulling it across my body. “Bad, eh? Let’s go wash it off.” We get up and go into the bathroom and he wets toilet paper and presses it against my arm. The dried blood washes off and the wet makes spider configurations on my flesh.

“It’s a deep cut,” he says.

“Yeah,” I say, “It’ll scar.” And it does, I still have the white scar on the inside of my wrist, nine years later.

“Hold your shirt against it. It’ll stop soon.” We leave the bathroom and resume our spot on the floor, all before Rebecca comes back from the kitchen with drinks.

I watch her enter the room and sit back on the bed. She has long curly red hair that reaches about mid back. She’s very thin, thinks she fat, but I’ll get to that. It’s my summer of starvation. We have just finished our last year at Mitchell Junior High, she fourteen, I’m fifteen, and Wes is sixteen. Her eyes are brown and she’s very pale and covered with ruddy freckles. Today, she wears a blue long sleeve hooded tee shirt with “paris sports club” written across the chest. She’s covering up her wrists. Her shorts are long because she hates her legs. She hates my legs because sometimes they’re skinnier than hers.

Rebecca and Wes had started dating at the beginning of summer, but couldn’t see each other much. Wes lived on the east side of Des Moines, I lived on the South, and she was spending most of the summer in Ames, living with her father. But every couple of weekends she’d come down and spend the weekend with us. Or we’d write letters and call. She’s my best friend. She taught me how to smoke.

When she wasn’t in town, Wes and I would talk on the phone late. Sometimes he’d come over. Sometimes not. Sometimes, my other best friend, Molly, would be there too, sometimes not. I had four best friends that summer; what kind of summer I was having depended on who I was with. As long as Rebecca and Wes dated, we were friends. But later, after Rebecca broke up with him, he got a new jealous girlfriend and couldn’t be my friend any more. That’s getting ahead of the story though, first I must talk about that night.
Wes left soon after. Later that night, Rebecca and I make plans for sneaking out and walking around after dark. We don’t have to sneak out though, her mom doesn’t care. We carry sleeping bags, tapes, and a radio downstairs.

“Have you seen Molly, recently?” asks Rebecca as she turns on seventy-style decorated lights that were here when her mother moved in. Like track lighting, they line the ceiling but are housed in orange, brown, and yellow boxes.

I sit on the orange couch and push a roller skate across the floor, “Yeah, school got out a week ago.”

“No, I saw her today. She’s getting too skinny. You know, she was at ninety-eight pounds for awhile last year when we were dieting together. But, I don’t know, I think her grandma caught her. Now she eats rice with sugar or a can of green beans.”

“I think I’m staying over there this week. Do we have any wine coolers to sneak?” I ask, while playing with a hula-hoop with my feet. Her basement is full of elementary school toys.

She nods and we rush up steep steps to the kitchen, where her mom sits occasionally tilting back a small glass of golden liquid. Her mom is dressed in a black dress, black shoes, and small little-girl white ruffle socks. “What can I get for you ladies?” she asks as she fills in her checkbook. Her black hair falls in a created mess around her shoulders.

“Mom, do we have any wine coolers?” Rebecca asks and I’m silent. I’m always silent around parents of my friends. I smile a lot and keep my eyes down when they’re looking at me.

“No, do you want some Black Velvet?” Her mother swirls the whisky around her glass and then tips a drink down her throat without a grimace.

“No,” Rebecca is annoyed and is looking in the cupboards for something to eat or drink. “You didn’t even buy me my Diet Pepsi. God.” Slamming the refrigerator door, she looks at me above her mom’s head as if I’m supposed to understand how annoying this is. And I do, but I’m not getting involved.

“Here,” her mother says as she reaches into her purse. Pulling out two neatly rolled joints, her mother puts them on the table and offers them to us. They’re small, white-gray and lie there like emblems of promise. I stare at her mother’s purse as she does this and wonder what else is hidden inside the curves of leather. What else she would give us for free?

“No,” Rebecca says in disgust and storms from the kitchen and goes to her room. I follow and sit on her bed as Rebecca looks through her closet for something to wear tonight when
we sneak out.

Not that I really want to smoke pot, I pretty much smoked it my whole life. I can’t remember a day when my mom wasn’t high or smoking or with some relative or friend or lover smoking. Incense burning. Talking without trying to exhale. I’d even stole some from her once and gave it to a boy who got excited when he saw it was the light green kind. Whatever that means. But it was nothing exciting. It was normal. I wouldn’t think about drinking my mom’s beer. I never even thought to smoke her pot.

Soon after, Rebecca’s mom’s boyfriend comes over and drops two four-packs of wine coolers at our door, which is shut. Her mom and the boyfriend leave without saying goodbye and the night is ours.

I go into the kitchen and get two glasses of water. Rebecca comes in and gives me two caffeine pills. We swallow and immediately start to feel good. She takes these all the time, but I’m just learning. In the living room is her mom’s stereo and I put in my tape of Metallica’s *Black Album*. The building song of “Enter Sandman” comes on and we headbang for awhile until our necks are rubbery.

We go out into the night and walk. We visit the parks and school grounds. We go to an elementary school and play on the swings. Wes shows up and takes Rebecca over to the cement tubes to be alone. They leave me and I walk to the edge of the grass and look up into the sky. The air is warm and balmy. I feel skinny and light, like I could float away and reach into the darkness. As if I could lose myself in the night and wander forever.

The sky is cast with stars. I lie in the moist grass and scan the houses from my hilly perch. Most of them are dark. However, someone, right across from the park is watching tv in a dark room. The colors of the screen brighten and dim, flash and change. The house throbs with the light show. Shadows jump and fling formations on the walls and curtains. I can’t see inside really, but there’s a mysterious draw to watch a house absorbed by oscillating light.

**Molly**

I throw fruit loops in the air and try to catch them with my mouth as Molly does sit-ups for her urinary tract infection. This way I eat less than half and make it fun, since I hate to eat now. I walk to the bathroom to weigh myself after I’m finished, the brown carpeted floor is speckled with hoops of the rainbow.

The scale is a newer model. When I step on it, red block numbers tell me my mood: 122
lbs. According to the scale, I’ve lost six pounds since school ended, but I can’t tell. Everything still fits the same and my belly still spills over my jeans when I sit down.

“What are you doing? Get out of here,” Molly demands as she sees me on her scale. She pushes me from the bathroom and slams the door. I walk into her bedroom, framed Disney movie posters cover her walls. Over her bed, is a Little Mermaid comforter with matching pillows. I walk down the hall to her mom’s room. Marilyn Monroe in her blown dress pouts at me from the picture. I pick up her mother’s Poison perfume in a deep purple bottle and smell.

“How much?” I say as Molly joins me in her mom’s room and flings herself on the maroon bedcover. She smiles and her eyes look up and into the distance. Curling her short blonde hair with her hand, she puts her index finger in her mouth and won’t answer. “I’m the same,” I say, to make her feel better in case she has gained.

“103,” she says, then jumps from the bed and runs into her room to change, “Come on, we have to go to Jessica’s.”

Molly is about 5’2 and very petite. She wears size fourteen in girls clothes. She’s blonde and blue eyed with a pug nose. When I first met her, I thought she was all surface. Just an airhead. But, now, I’m sure there’s more to her.

When she comes out of her room, she pulls the shorts from her belly and shows me how much extra space there is. In the mirror she blows kisses and looks at herself, her legs do not touch each other when she stands with her feet together. I’m taller than her, 5’7, but I don’t look as skinny and I sometimes wonder if that is why she’s my friend. I look fat.

We head out of the house at noon to go to Jessica’s. I wear Molly’s moonwalker Adidas sneakers. She wears a pair of two dollar K-mart black shoes. Our plan is to steal Jessica’s shoes, which are identical to the ones I wear, so we can match.

Jessica lives in a split-level. Her room is mostly filled with a waterbed. I go into her room to ask her questions about her boyfriend. “What’s it like having a boyfriend?” I ask, sitting on her bed and staring at his picture in the frame. Molly gets up to pee.

“I don’t know,” she says. Jessica is ugly. She has glasses, a pointed nose, stringy hair and lots of zits. Nobody likes her and she has sex with Tim. She’s gross. I’m sure he’s only with her because they have sex because she’s too ugly for anything else.

“I know about kissing and stuff,” I lie, “but I want to know what else you do together.” I want to know if they do anything else because I don’t think they do. Only sex. She just lets
him use her that way. He’s in high school, why else would he want an ugly fourteen-year-old.

“I don’t know. Watch movies. Swim in my pool. You and Mol can come swimming today if you want.”

I smile because I know that Molly used to come over here to swim, but that was last summer and she was only using Jessica for her pool then. Both her and Rachelle used to use Jessica for her pool. Nobody likes her.

“My mom wants us home,” Molly announces as she comes back into the room. “We have to go, bye, Jessica.” She wheels around and I follow, waving goodbye, without looking at her.

When we get to the corner of her block, we run as fast as we can. Molly in Adidas and me in Adias. This is my summer of stealing.

We walk to my block, Glenwood Street, and stop at Mark’s house. A bunch of guys are playing basketball. Their sweaty bodies slide against each other as they go for the ball. Most of them go to high school. They will be sophomores next year. Only Mike is still in junior high, but no one pays attention to him because he has a belly and the is youngest.

Molly is in love with Mark. Mark is tall and thin, like a basketball player. He struts around cocky, his chest gleaming and tanned in the sunshine. She’s a little puppy around him, just gushing at his slight show of affection. Flaunting herself, she’ll bend over, show him her bra, or fetch him whatever he wants.

It’s time for a break from basketball. The guys decide they want to play a different game of ranking our bodies, just Molly’s and mine. Guys aren’t included in the ranking, just girls. The guys do the ranking. They want us to stand before them, moving in this direction or that, in order to find the precise number for us. Ten is good. One is bad.

Molly jumps up from the picnic table and walks by the basketball hoop and waits. “Come on, Laura,” she says.

“No, I don’t think so,” I say. Something doesn’t feel right and I don’t want to be put in the same category as Molly, who is wearing purple short shorts and a white tank top that you can see her bra through. The guys are trying to encourage me to go up there, but I look down at myself and see it is pointless. I wear mid-thigh shorts, a black Marvin the Martian shirt, glasses, and my hair is fuzzy from the humidity.

“You’re my best friend, you have to,” she insists and I get up and stand next to her. “This better get Mark to like you,” I whisper. She smiles, and puts her bent index finger in her
“Turn around,” they say and we do. There is a lot of whispering and laughing. “Bend over.” Molly, immediately bends over straight legged, her ass in the air. I just look at her refusing to go farther. She yanks me down by my arm and I hang there kind of helpless for a minute, before I stand up, fold my arms across my chest and glare at them.

“Yeah do that,” they say, “put your arms under and push up your chest.” They are all looking at Molly, with sick little smiles on their faces. They sit at the table conversing, their legs stretched wide as they snicker. Molly giggles and pushes her boobs out and smiles bashfully. The guys gosh each other, punching each other in the shoulder and try to hide their laughing faces.

“I’m leaving,” I announce, “Come on Molly,” I say grabbing her, but she resists and pulls her arm back and smiles at the boys. “Come on.” But she won’t, I start walking down the driveway and out into the street.

“Don’t leave,” the guys say and they get up from the table and start walking towards us. Jason, the heaviest of the boys, stops me and whispers that they were doing it for Mark, that it has nothing to do with me. I look at his long black hair that has fallen into his eyes and don’t say anything.

“Okay, we have a decision,” one of the guys say.

“I’m leaving,” I turn around again, but this time both Jason and Molly have my arms. I’m forced to stay and listen.


I turn around and walk home, which is at the other end of the block. When I get home, I call Wes, but he’s at his construction job. I do thirty sit-ups as I cry. I pick up my weights and do arm curls. I take my knife and draw it across my thigh a few times and watch the blood leak into the frayed edge of the jeans. It is my summer of worthlessness. I read a letter Rebecca sent me. I begin writing a story called “Ribbon River” where the heroine dries up like the river during a drought.

Molly never comes over. My sisters play out back on a spool for wires. Mom hides in her room with her boyfriend, Chuck. When dinner time comes, I don’t notice. I listen to “Runaway Train” by Soul Asylum and “Creep” by Radiohead over and over again. Wes calls later and we talk until 11. I tell him I’m bleeding. He says, “I know.”
Wes

We’re sitting around in bikini tops and daisy duke jean shorts. Karen, my next door neighbor in the duplex, tells us she slept with Ryan. Ryan is sixteen, Karen, twelve. Ryan has a car, goes to Lincoln High School and is fat with glasses.

“What was it like,” asks Molly.

Karen jumps into the details, leaning over to whisper the secret. Her long brown hair sways in front of her navy blue halter-top bikini. Her knees press against the newly fixed coffee table that her father threw her mother into the week before.

I pick up the phone and call Wes. It rings and rings without answer. Hanging up, I fold my arms over my belly trying to hide the rolls. I’ve lost another two pounds, but still I can’t tell.

There’s a honk and we run to the door to see Wes stepping out of a blue truck. Falling out of the screen, we rush towards him with questions. Molly is first; she leans over the bed, her red and white padded polka-dot top pressing into the side of the truck.

“Can we go for a ride?” she says.

Karen jumps in the back. Her golden brown skin sways as she moves and her breasts bounce with each step. “Come on,” she says, “before anyone notices we’re gone.” Molly climbs in with her, giggling, throwing her shoulders back and cocking her head with a smile.

My younger sister Lissa is looking towards our house, where mom could stick out her head at any minute. Mom hates these boys. Hates the way Molly flits about. Hates when we’re inside. Hates when we’re out.

“Shot gun!” I screech rushing towards the cab as the pale cream of my flowered string bikini barely holds me in. Wes never actually got out of the truck and merely shuts his door, the engine still running.

My sister slides in next to me. She is shy and doesn’t say much, her jean shorts are the longest, her skin the tannest, her suit the least filled out. But there is something exotic about her, the way her permed brunette hair falls into her eyes protecting her from the world. Lissa kissed a boy on Station Street. They made out. And I tell everyone that I have too. That his name is Christopher. But I haven’t and my younger sister has. This is my summer of lying.

Wes guns the engine into reverse, slides the gears back and heads down Glenwood going forty. All of the windows are down, the thick humid air rushes in from all sides and sends my hair up and around. No one wears seat belts.
“Freeway,” shouts Karen from the back. Molly and her wave at Mark’s house as we pass, but we speed by so fast I can’t tell if he even glances this way.

“How’s Rebecca,” I say, watching Wes shift as we make our way north on East 14th.

“Running every day and avoiding her dad and step-brothers,” he says, passing one car after another on the road. “It’s hot.”

“It’s Iowa.”

“Here hold this,” he says, as he takes his hand off the steering wheel and pulls off a sweaty blue tee shirt. Shoving it behind the seat, he turns around in time, to rip the truck to the left and barely miss the rear end of a rusted Cadillac without a muffler. “You’re supposed to be watching the road.”

“I don’t know how to drive.”

The truck is a 1985 Chevy S-10. The interior is cracked in places, the dash dusty, and the seats ripped and oil stained. Attached to the dash is a pig tracker and the radio blares “Plush” by Stone Temple Pilots. One of Wes’s hands rests on the wheel and the other taps the rhythm out on the stick shift. His legs move and shift, sport sandals lifting and accelerating in sync.

We make a sharp right on to the 2-35 and head west at 75mph and climbing. Molly and Karen squeal in delight in the bed, their fingers wrapped tightly on the hot metal truck. Lissa and I slide back and forth in the seat. Slamming into the unlocked door. Slamming into Wes. Slamming backwards into the seat, we’re flying. Faster and faster.

Wes has this look of glee and power in his eyes. Like he’s invincible, like this is a game. He passes and zips into and out of traffic. We come inches from the rears of car after car. I shriek off and on, and inhale sharply, but it’s lost in the whirl of air and the throbbing sound of the stereo.

His arms flex, his hands tense and a small smile hangs on his lips. “Faster?” he asks with a crooked grin that I half see while trying to watch the road.

“Yes!” I say, but it sounds like, “Yeeeeeaaah!!”

I watch the speedometer rise. 85. We pass a bus full of kids. 95. Minivans with soccer moms. 105. Hills and by-passes blur. 115. The needle wiggles back and forth as if it’s not sure it is going this fast either. 120. The roar of the air is deafening. The sweat on our bodies completely blown away. But there is a buffer of quiet around us, like we’re all invincible, staring death in her face, and then waving goodbye. Cars zip backwards behind us, fewer and fewer of them are in our way and the highway stretches before us.
Karen is knocking on the back window and moving her lips. Wes starts to slow, down shifts and heads to an exit to turn around. We get to the stoplight and Karen holds up her shoe and then throws it in the front seat.

“What are you doing?” he asks.

“The other got sucked away.”

Wes grins and doesn’t reply. Karen and Molly parade wave at cars as we drive past. This time we do a normal speed. The moment is lost to something. Lissa is silent and I poke her with my finger. “Don’t, Laura,” she says and watches the traffic from the passenger car window. Leaning into the door, she lets the air bathe her face. Her eyes are slits.

I look at Wes’s body without looking at it. His chest is smooth and only slightly tanned. The shoulders are pink, but the arms are dark. Hair pokes out from his armpits and his elbows look rough. I don’t see many male bodies. I don’t have brothers. Sometimes I see my mom’s boyfriends without shirts. Chuck once came into the kitchen from my mom’s room and there were red scratch marks up and down his back.

Wes has little hard nipples and this small trail of hair by his belly button. “You look thin, Laura,” he says.

“Yeah right.”

We pull into my driveway and pile out of the truck. Mom steps out of the house that moment and sees us. “Get in the house,” she says staring at Lissa and me. It’s only four in the afternoon, we protest. And as she slams the door, we’re grounded for the rest of the night because we’re romping around in bikinis in front of boys. “You look like sluts.” I storm upstairs, pissed because she just embarrassed me in front of my friends.

The next morning, I'm at Molly’s by noon. Molly is curling her bangs up and away from her forehead. Her make-up is flawless.

“I don’t have anything to wear,” I say, staring into my reflection. Zits freckle my face and merge with the real freckles. My hair is a frizzy mess. And I have on the same stupid daisy dukes, size five, that I always have on and some dumb tee shirt.

Rebecca’s in town and we’re all going over to Wes’s house to watch movies and have an indoor picnic. Of course, mom thinks I’m staying with Molly. Molly’s mom thinks we’re going to my house. But we won’t get caught. We never do.

“Wear these,” she says, throwing me her favorite pair of shorts. They’re jean shorts but made to look like you’re wearing boxers too because checkered fabric sticks out on the top
and bottom. She also tosses me a white tee shirt lifted from her grandfather’s closet. “Do I look different today?” she asks.

“Skinnier.”

“No. More mature?”

“Sure,” I say, slipping into the clothes and putting in my new contacts. I’ve had them only for five days now. I can wear them for up to ten hours if I want. I move my eyes around and see the world. I look out the corner of my eye as Molly is throwing poses in front of the mirror.

“I went to Mark’s after your mom yelled at you.”

“What happened to everyone else?”

“They left and Mark came over to my house.”

“He did? Why would he do that?”

Molly smiles and won’t look at me, she’s only looking at her reflection. Sliding her bent index finger in her mouth, she pauses. Slipping it out again, she says, “We had sex on my mom’s bed. We’ve consumated!”

I glance back and forth between her and her mom’s bed. Question after question I send her way because my only sex education comes from novels and books. Stephen King’s “IT” has the most complete explanation of sex that I know of. She doesn’t really answer my questions, she tries to explain with her body and with “I don’t knows.”

“Well, is he your boyfriend now?”

“I don’t know.”

Standing up, I look at her in the reflection of the mirror. Her finger is in her mouth and she’s practically spilling over with excitement. “Do you still have the gap?” Wes once told us that he always dated girls with gaps because if they had the gap then they were still virgins. The gap was a diamond of light that could be seen between the thighs and crotch of a girl wearing jeans. If she was wearing regular or tight jeans and there wasn’t a gap, she wasn’t a virgin.

We look and she still has one.

“Maybe the first time doesn’t count.”

There’s a honk and we rush out the door and pile into Wes’s truck. Molly gets in front next to Rebecca, but the cab is full and I get in the bed. The world speeds away from me as we head east.
In Wes’s house, his parents have set up a buffet table of chips, cheese, vegetables, pop, snacks, and plastic throwaway dishes. The parents chat and grill meat in the backyard. People, kids, and friends move through the house and hang out. It’s a party of about thirty people.

Everyone finds something to do and I go and hide in Wes’s room. His room is a pit. The walls are covered with posters, the floor covered with clothes. His older brother shares this room with him until he goes to community college in a month. The room has a bunk bed, a papasan, two dressers, and an overflowing closet. In some areas, the plaster of the wall has been knocked out. The ceiling panels are at obscure angles.

I lie on his bottom bunk. A school picture of Rebecca is slipped between the slats above and I stare at her for a moment. Whenever he calls me, I always ask where he is, what he’s wearing, and what he’s doing. It’s like I want to be able to picture him in some room existing. He can’t just be a voice. A sound. He has to exist in places other than the cordless I hold next to my head.

It smells like musk, sweat, and B.O. I click on the clock radio next to the bed. Red numbers remind me I will be here for at least five more hours. KGGO plays the Steve Miller Band as I run my fingernails back and forth across my wrist. I don’t have my knife. I left it somewhere. Lost it somewhere. And I want to cry, but I don’t have a reason. I just feel worthless and alone. It is my summer of tears.

“Hey Laura, I couldn’t find you,” says Wes as he squats down next to the bed, “What a mess,” he says surveying the room, “It’s my brother, I swear.”

“I like this picture of Rebecca. She looks happy.” I sit up, my back to the wall, my legs hanging off the bed. Wes sits next to me in the same position and we stare out into his room.

“Can I see?” he asks carefully lifting my wrist from my lap and examining the red scratches. Little layers of flesh follow the scratches like waves. “My parents are cooking tons of burgers and hotdogs. Are you hungry?”

I shake my head. I don’t notice that he is still holding my wrist, my hand. I’m numb. I don’t notice my body. It’s like I don’t own it. It’s foreign. It’s just some object. I can’t feel anything.

“Come on. Let’s watch a movie.”

We move to the living room. Wes sits next to Rebecca who is sipping a diet coke. Molly is talking to his older brother and giggling. The other chairs are full of cousins and friends that I don’t know. An Elvis movie plays. I grab a Diet Mountain Dew. I drink it fast, letting it fill
me. Walking into the kitchen, I put the empty can in the trash and open another one. There are straws on the table. Picking up one, I slip it into my mouth and start chewing on the end.

I lie on the floor in front of the tv. Everyone is watching or talking. I lie belly down on the floor. To see the tv, they all have to look at me, around me, or over me. I feel skinny as I chew on the straw. I haven’t eaten today. It becomes bent and lined as I chew. The clear plastic becomes milky. I lie on my belly awhile. Then roll over and lie on my back, my head tilted and looking up at the screen that is only a foot and a half off the floor.

I roll around the floor for the duration of the movie. I’m skinny. And I know that they all have to look at me as they watch the tv. I’m in their line of view.

**Diana**

The metal chairs vibrate violently to the sound of an eight-piece drum corps. A saxophone player, wearing purple and black wrestling shoes, makes eyes at me for the third time that morning. He is Stephen Knoff, a junior with floppy red brown hair and long thick sideburns. It is the second day of band camp and I shoot glances at Diana, my best friend, every few seconds for reassurance.

Summer isn’t officially over and high school doesn’t officially start for another two weeks. But, in order to be ready for our first football game the Saturday before school begins, we have to practice.

Mr. Pauson is instructing the flutes to play the melody slowly. The freshmen flutes struggle through and I wait until he turns to the clarinets and forces us to play too. “From the fermata,” he instructs, raising his arms, which reveal wet pits and harnesses the band to play. It’s a struggle. We all giggle and try to focus.

I’ve arrived. The braces were removed last week. My contacts are in for good and my hair is curling around my face from the humidity. I wear a white tee shirt that I permanently borrowed from Molly and my size five jeans are now loose. I haven’t been on a scale in days, but yesterday I only ate dinner and that’s all I plan to eat today.

“Mony Mony” lurches along, the senior band players dragging the swelled ranks of thirty freshmen. I look over at Steve. He is bouncing up and down in his chair. The strands of his hair flap and fly and he grins as he catches my eye.

Diana is whispering with an upperclassman flute girl as her long golden curls fall over her hands trying to memorize the fingering as quickly as possible. Diana is an old best friend.
A best friend from sixth grade and much different than my other newer best friends. Diana is driven. Smart. Talented. She is strong. Her face is open and broad with pale blue eyes. She always wears a hemp beaded necklace. She is not pretty, she’s tough.

While I romped around the south side of town all summer, Diana babysat her younger siblings. Diana worked on her novel. Diana went to church and Al-Anon. I did talk to her on the phone occasionally, but not as often as I was calling Wes, walking with Molly, or smoking with Rebecca. None of them were in band; I’d met them all elsewhere. Band brought Diana’s and my reunion.

Mr. Pauson stops the band and breaks for lunch. He leaves the podium and goes into his office. The drum majors turn on the stereo and “Hey Jealousy” by the Gin Blossoms comes on and when Mr. Pauson comes out, he sings the words too.

I separate my clarinet in two and put it on my chair like the other clarinets and ask the other girls what they’re doing for lunch. Yesterday, half the upperclassmen left to get fast food, to bring it back to eat outside on the grass. My new friends plan to go to the Sinclair down the alley. I run to my black metal locker and spin the combination to get my five dollars that I took from my mom’s dresser drawer yesterday when she was at work.

“Laura, where are you going for lunch?” says Steve.

I look up startled into his bright blue eyes that are very close to mine and say, “Uh, I don’t know?”

“Do you want to go get a sandwich with me?” he says throwing a sneaky smile, closing my locker door, and spinning the lock. He slides his hands into the pockets of knee-length jean shorts. This makes his yellow shirt bunch a little by the waist, but grow taut across his pecks.

“Come on,” he says, before I answer. And I’m off following him away from the band and from the school. He doesn’t talk or walk next to me until we’re well away. I hurry to catch up, but he increases his speed, so I let the distance stay between us.

About a block away from the high school, he slows his pace and throws me a smile, his blue eyes sparkle. We chitchat for awhile and then go into the store for two pops. He buys mine.

“This way,” he says and leads me around to the backside of the store. “Look, from here you can see where we march in the mornings,” he says pointing to a grassy field with newly painted white yard lines.
“Wow,” I say, leaning against the brick wall of the gas station. The brick is cool against my shoulders. I tip back my diet pop and let it slowly fill me. Maybe I will only have this to drink today.

“Hey, that’s a pretty necklace,” he says pointing at my four-leaf gold clover charm on a delicate chain. I raise my fingers to it and feel it. It’s about the size of a half-dollar with an engraving on it.

“My aunt gave it to me.”

“Let me see,” he says, moving closer and closer, his fingers holding it and his eyes scrutinizing the glossy front. “What does it say?”

“Good luck.”

“Does it work?”

I open my mouth to say yes and then he kisses me. Not just a peck, but a french kiss. My first kiss is a french kiss! Or as my younger sister called it years later, “a porno kiss.” He kisses me again, this time sliding his hand up my shirt. And then a third time.

He stops and I open my eyes to look into his. Little crinkles are at the corner of his eye and his grin is crooked. “Here,” he says, thrusting a piece of paper into my shaking hand. “I gotta go.” He turns around and heads away towards the practice field.

I head back to the band room, slowly unfolding the small ripped corner of notebook paper. It has a phone number on it and “Call me. Steve.” Maybe this will be my school year of boys.

Sneaking back to the room, I find Diana among many other freshmen girls who are eating chips and sandwiches. “Do you want some of these, Laura,” Diana says offering the bag to me with her hand. I decline and chitchat until band starts again for the afternoon.

Three days and two phone conversations later, Steve picks me up in a red sports car and takes me to his mom’s apartment. Mom thinks I’m going to Molly’s. Molly, is waiting for my phone call. When we get there, he plays his guitar for a little while and then starts kissing me. We go into his room and make out. He wants me to give him a blow job, but I don’t know how. So we kiss for awhile and then go onto the balcony to smoke.

I button up my red men’s shirt as we stand there and stare out into the parking lot. Diana warned me that Steve had a girlfriend, but I told her that he liked me, so I didn’t care. “So, why do you have a girlfriend if she’s so mean to you,” I say, getting dizzy off of the cigarette. I never smoke a whole one myself. I’m used to sharing them with Rebecca.
He doesn’t answer, but twists his lips, squints his eyes, and flicks ash off the side banister.

“Are you scared?”

“Umm,” is all he says and then, “I better take you home.”

On the ride, Blind Melon’s “No Rain,” blares from the stereo. We don’t talk and when we get to my house he only waves goodbye.

I walk in and stay on cloud nine the rest of the night. *Groundhog Day* comes on the tv and I giggle hysterically every time Bill Murry moves into kiss Andi McDowell. And when he does, I stick the edge of the blanket into my mouth and try to stifle my laughter and excitement. I call Molly. I call Rebecca. I call Wes. I twirl around my room listening to Pearl Jam and laugh and laugh.

The next week at band camp, Steve doesn’t look at me. He doesn’t call me at home. He doesn’t smile and he flirts with a little red headed flute freshman. I tell Diana and she is upset, but doesn’t say, “I told you so.” She wants to kick his ass and wants to confront him, but I won’t let her. “It won’t help,” I say.

By Saturday, the night of our first football game, she is livid. She is mad at me because I won’t do anything and him because he keeps flirting with these girls. Her blue eyes are flames as she tucks her blonde hair into the trojan style helmet of our uniform, she sends daggers his way. Especially when he talks to his colorguard girlfriend.

We stand around Mr. Pauson. The drums kick into the cadence to warm up. The last parts of our uniform are put into place. I zip up my bright red jacket and look down at the long white stripes that go along the side of my black pants. Mr. Pauson tunes the band section by section, giving everyone time to whisper and readjust ourselves.

We begin to play our set list. The flutes and saxes don’t have to play at all during the third song, but clarinets do, so I fumble through the fingerings line by line. I watch Mr. Pauson, but see Diana move away from the flutes. She goes over to Steve who is not too far ahead of me as I stand at the very back of the band circle. She is talking to him very sternly, shaking her head and slamming her lips together at every syllable. Her face is red and flushed, like she’s full of blood and hot. He turns around to face her and I can see both of them at a side profile from where I stand.

I keep the clarinet in my mouth and pretend to play.

Steve reaches up and slaps her across the face. Returns a few words and shakes his finger at her fiercely. Then he turns around and moves over to where the other saxophone upper-
classmen stand. Diana looks at me, her face going very white. Her eyes shocked pools of disbelief. She stares at me, urging me to do something. But I only stand there, the clarinet wedged into my mouth.

And then I see the mark begin to redden on her white face. The scarlet outline of a hand is across her cheek and it slowly turns crimson as it fills with blood.

She looks at me a moment more, then turns away as Mr. Pauson begins the next song. I flush, grow hot, and feel the fatness of my eyes. I am standing away from everyone, it seems. My clothes bulge then. My waist spills over my pants. My breasts swell. The clarinet feels heavy and the skin of my wrists pull and beg. They itch and tingle. And I wish at that second that I had my pearl handled knife for one quick slice.