La Petite Mort

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THEY FOUGHT IN LONDON, made up in Paris, fought again all through Italy except for three transcendent days at a Tuscan villa. By the time the ferry expelled them onto the dock at Mykonos, Roberta was exhausted, as in the early days of single-motherhood. But she was not giving in.

Roberta was a competitor, a good and bad thing, but mostly a good thing. It had enabled her to raise a son without help from the immature (moron) father or her overweening mother (her Dad was long gone). Justin was a college freshman now, in theater. Roberta was a CPA (Wentz & Reebock), a position she had attained after ten years of waitress and college course work, with Justin in school or daycare, or, earlier, at home crying for her attention while she turned relentless pages. She was thirty-eight now, short and compact with a narrow face, attractive because of its concentrated force. Fall, winter and early spring she had worked nights and weekends for these three liberated weeks. With Ira Light, an ophthalmologist (hers, in fact)—with whom, in bed, her body inclined toward surrender, a state so terrifying that when orgasm loomed—the irrevocable trough before the first crest—it was like glimpsing the face of God. The little death it was called. *La petite mort.* In a different life she'd have majored in French.

But the fighting, the rage. In Chicago it wasn't like this. In the lulls they blamed the narrow airplane seats, small European hotel rooms, subcompact rental cars in which they kept bumping each other's sore spots. She felt patronized; he felt misheard (she oversimplified his point of view then took the

other side). The issues were farcically slight: Should they tip in the British or the American mode? Should Ira ask for directions in French when he probably wouldn't understand them (Who's patronizing now, Roberta?)? And which was the more genuine democracy, ancient Athens or 21st century America? Ira declared Athens with its town meetings, but there were slaves in Athens, she thought she had read, and women didn't vote, nor did landless men, and she hated how excessively sure of himself Ira was without any basis for it. A larger-spirited person could have forgiven him, or laughed, she suspected, but in the heat of battle she drove toward victory, as if for her soul or her right to exist.

Mykonos was the last stop on their itinerary, the planned restful close to a trip of admiring and learning with Ira as guide. Ira had been to Europe more than once, while Roberta took Intro to European Art, Lascaux to Arles at the Discovery Center, to keep up with Justin when he tested into a good city high school. But Ira hadn't seen Mykonos, and their first glimpse reduced them both to awed silence: the white town rising out of the glittery blue sea. Climbing up from the dock, then up sun-bleached wooden steps to the large airy room they'd found online, Roberta felt burdens lifting. The room was even prettier than she had expected, with windows on two walls and gauzy white curtains that let in a benign blue translucence.

Ira, who had diabetes, tested his blood and injected himself, then went down to put his tiny bottle in the landlady's fridge. Roberta looked in the drawers and found them clean. She put some clothes away, hung up her one dress. There was an armoire instead of a closet. Her eyeballs ached a little. She set her glasses on the marble top of the nightstand. When Ira returned he took off his shirt, lay down on the bed. "That's an idea," she said, and he opened his arms. Sweat and deodorant issued from him in equal parts. She removed her windbreaker, unbuckled her travel belt, gave herself to the pleasure of skin on skin, murmuring what had become on this trip their avowal of feeling for each other. Not love—she couldn't say love, simply *Who are you?* Part question, part assertion of wonder and gratitude.

They were in early middle age (late youth, Ira said), but neither had ever been married, a commonality they had examined back in Chicago on weekend

nights that didn't necessarily have to end with them at one or the other's apartment. Ira had lived with a nurse practitioner from the hospital where he had surgical privileges—for five years, until she realized that marriage wasn't going to happen (although he had warned her). Roberta had been staunch about not bringing men home, not that, before Ira, she had dated anyone she'd have trusted with Justin. *Trust*, their acknowledged, shared deficit. The genetic glitch in their emotional make-up. Ira not only didn't understand the meaning of the entirely commonplace word (he said), he didn't know he didn't know till he started therapy.

For Roberta, trust gleamed from behind a wall of need and shame. Dr. Ira had diagnosed her with dry eyes, a condition that made it hard to wear contact lenses, and the pair of glasses he prescribed gave her better vision than she had ever had in memory. He offered to correct her nearsightedness for all time—he was by all accounts an excellent surgeon—but she hated the thought of herself on the table, anesthetized, abandoned to him. Yes, she was neurotic.

At this moment, however, for both of them other forces prevailed. In their low-lit, sweet-smelling rented room she licked his cheek. "Who are you?" she said, and he replied, "Who are *you*?" and the kernel of anxiety in the back of her throat for the past two weeks gave way. Among many other aspects of Ira she loved his penis. He was lean and on the short side, but his penis, which hooked slightly, was fearless and stalwart in its uprisings. *It* trusted her. Sometimes she felt an affection for Ira's penis, related to but not identical with her affection for Ira. They made love, fear prodded her and fell away; she loved him, or someone. Then she slept. In her dream she sat in the passenger slot of an open, Thirties-style airplane, hair blowing in her eyes, which watered in the windy sky. The plane bucked and began to spin, wing over wing; she held for dear life to the pilot, an obvious Ira-figure. Then from somewhere outside the dream came an uncertain, rising moan, like the sound of a toddler just before his full-bodied cry.

Her eyes opened instantly. The sun shone in the window; despite her myopia she saw outlines. But the objects they formed? Names surfaced slowly: Night-stand. Chest of drawers. Suitcase, open, a sleeve spilled onto the floor. Things unfamiliar, free of history. She felt like her mother, newly retired from teaching American history, who lived in a northern suburb and who had gotten lost last month driving home from the supermarket. She had changed apartments. She

had called, at least. Roberta met her at the curb where she had pulled to a stop, paralyzed with fear while other cars swerved around her and her Lean Cuisine defrosted in the trunk. And what was that noise?

In bed beside her Ira had sat up.

She pushed toward her old remembering self, peeling back clove after clove of fear till there was only the low-grade prickle that assailed her sometimes when a name slipped her mind. Wentz & Reebock—she worked there. She had a desk, a computer, screens of familiar blanks to fill in. Her window overlooked the familiar bustle of the Loop. The scene was hazy, though, as if she were nearsighted for mental images as well. Last week at the Uffizi she had walked through hall after hall, religious paintings dissolving in her mind to a red and gold blur. She fixed on the side of Ira's face, his jawbone, its sharply angled turn. He was rubbing his forehead as if he had a headache or had had a bad dream. Did the sound come from him? It replayed in her mind, halfway between a cry for help and the growling moan of a predator.

In Florence, the summer before medical school, Ira had gone to the Uffizi—rhymes with sleazy, he said (whimsically)—and had an insulin reaction. He was years from being a doctor, and he was new then to diabetes, in erratic control. Hypoglycemia had crept up on him. He was alone wandering the galleries, slowly losing sight of where and even who he was, too far gone even to be afraid. At some point a guard took him to a clinic where he was restored with a bottle of Coca Cola. It was a good story. He could have died. He had been saved. She touched the back of her hand to the side of his thigh. "That was a weird noise you just made." She didn't like to ask questions; it put the questioner on a lower rung. Even with good friends she didn't ask.

He didn't explain, though—he just shook his head, one of many things he did that unsettled her.

They went out at sunset, drank retsina, approved the dearth of other tourists. They watched Greek men dance together joined by white handkerchiefs and wondered, agreeaby, where the wives were, the beautiful Greek women. What was wrong? Nothing. Their dinner table was made of gleaming white ceramic tile. Outside the window the slope of glimmering rooftops faded in the dusk till all they could see was a rim of flame at the horizon where sea met sky.

They touched foreheads, charting together the vague, spreading plazas of their consensus. They loved retsina, the strangely lucid high it conveyed. They loved the town, the white-washed houses along streets that ended or turned whimsically, as if at random. After dinner they strolled alleys onto unexpected dead ends. How satisfying to learn from *Guide to the Greek Islands* that Mykonos had been laid out to foil pirates, who would get lost with their booty in the maze of streets.

They stood on the dock a while observing the tiny rocking lights of boats in the harbor, then turned and wound their way upward. Clever Ira had brought a flashlight, and they played it along the street names and shop signs. Swatches of music reached out and sprayed them. The Hard Rock Café, in faux-Greek English lettering. They exchanged looks of mutual disdain. In the doorway of a fortune teller named Nadya they tried to dispute each other's belief in the uncanny, but neither admitted to any so there was no argument. The name Nadya seemed phony. Using their guidebook, they tried to find a church called Panagia Paraportiana, but now the flashlight battery was giving out; in the hazy moonlight it was impossible to tell one beautiful, white-washed building from another. At one point she stopped Ira and looked at his moonlit face. It too was beautiful.

After a while the flat paving stones became gravel then dirt. The moon set, the darkness thickened, but Roberta remained tranquil. It was fun not knowing where you were going when you were with someone you liked and maybe loved. Somehow your feet knew not to stumble. Since there was no point to looking down she looked up at the sky, a black brilliance, thickly inlaid with stars. A world beyond ego. She inhaled voluptuously. Why did she always feel like she was fighting for her life, when life had nothing against her, and if challenged, she could survive nicely without Ira or anyone? As she surely had proved.

The next morning, on a daylight jaunt through the winding streets, a minor dispute began. Ira stopped dead on a corner, compelled by the need to clarify or organize their mutual past—a habit of his. "You know the Musée D'Orsay, this painting we saw, picnickers under a tree? I'm wracking my brain. It's called *Luncheon on the Grass*. Who painted it?"

She told him. She remembered the slide from her art history class. The painting had scandalized polite society, the professor said, she told Ira, because the male picnickers wore clothes while the one female was naked. "Not nude, *naked*." She loved the subtle difference in the words, which made sense now in a way her younger self hadn't appreciated. In her mind's eye she could see the woman's alabaster shoulder and hip, her face turned toward the viewer, as if she and they had it all over the men in their nineteenth-century black suits. "It was a feminist statement," she said, lavishly pleased with herself.

"Manet was male," said Ira mildly. He was always mild when they argued. He grew more soft-spoken as he became more entrenched. She felt her lower back straighten.

"So what's your point?" She hadn't wanted to be sarcastic but she heard it in her voice. "He was turning himself on?" Her eyes probed him; her breaths came fast. "*I* think he was making fun of men who have nothing but sex on their minds."

"Or he was making fun of artists who liked to paint naked women under trees."

Suddenly it seemed that he was right, probably. The painting became in her mind a muzzy framed rectangle, on the wall of the Musée and on the screen lit by the slide projector of her old art history professor, whose name she couldn't remember, though why should she, since it was years ago? Still, her heart was thudding, she had trouble breathing, a state that harkened back to her CPA exam, which she had failed the first time and here it was again, a wave of blackness cresting toward her.

Ira was smirking. "Admit it! The dudes aren't even looking at her, they're into their discussion."

"Dudes?" she cried. "Who says 'dudes'? Are you in college or something?"

She tried again to bring the painting into focus but all she could see now was the image Ira had described, men sprawled under a tree conversing passionately, and it seemed to her that in overlooking the woman's naked body they were taking strength not just from the woman in the painting but from her as well. "I hate you," she said.

He laughed. "*I hate you*? That's your argument?"

He sounded good humored. Ready for a new subject. It was so patronizing.

Worse, he was looking at her as if something was wrong with her. She thought of her smart, fierce mother, of late so tentative. Softened. Her mother, who used to annoy her friends, was strangely popular in Independence Village where she had moved last year, a complex that offered services for all levels of need. Independencewise she was on the highest tier. But she was repeating herself. Three times in one week she told Roberta the same irritating thing a woman in her book club had said. Of course her mother still read books, and remembered what she read. A long-time irascible Democrat, she listened to the news, had deeply felt political opinions. It was hard to retire, Roberta imagined, especially when you were alone.

She was walking quickly, a little in front of Ira. He did not increase his pace. There were bad feelings, it seemed, in both of them. They reached the harbor. Behind them was a row of tavernas with outdoor tables facing the sea. She strode into the first one, found the host, followed him to a table by the railing. On the pavement a step below, a pelican picked something up with his long pouched bill then raised his head to look at her, one eye then the other. She resolved to be casual, anecdotal with Ira, who had joined her but did not sit down. "We just had breakfast," he said.

"But it's so nice here." When she was anxious the best antidote was sitting at a restaurant table. Not even to eat, just to order, to be there. "I need this."

"We're a little obsessive, aren't we?" He countered with his own idea: to rent a motorcycle, ride out into the wilds beyond the town. "We'll find a better place to eat."

He was amused, as always, but not quite at ease. He really wanted her company. She was touched. Till she thought of riding behind him on a motorcycle, feeling power in the machine he was driving, and thus in him, and she in back hanging on to him.

"*You* could rent a cycle," she said, reminding herself that he was the obsessive one, about remembering things. "I'll stay here for a while. We're not joined at the hip." He looked irritated, which gave a new tilt to the power balance. She pulled bread from the table's basket and offered it to the pelican, who took it into his huge mouth with surprising delicacy. "*If you love something let it go,*" she quoted, from a poster framed in her mother's new small kitchen. He completed the saying: "*If it comes back it's yours. If not it never was.*"

The more unmoored he sounded, the firmer her own footing. She put her arms around his neck, kissed him, and said frankly, "Your memory is scary." It wasn't enough. "I love being with you."

"Yeah right," he said.

With Ira gone, she unzipped her travel belt, checked money and passport. He had the guidebook, but that was fine; he needed it more. She ordered a glass of red wine, smiled at the boats in the harbor, gave a coin to a little girl selling Chiclets who couldn't have been more than three. "Yassou," she said to the girl. "Yassou," the girl whispered. They were speaking Greek! She knew one other Greek word: Opah! Though she would have to wait till someone lit a plate of saganaki.

She drank less than half the wine, beyond the need now for restaurant reassurance. With Ira gone, the white-washed walls and the shimmering sea seemed more concentrated; she was dazzled almost to blindness, as she had felt as a child walking out of a dim school building onto sunlit snow. After settling her bill she turned up the first street, eager to see the town while the edges of things seemed so sharp. Sounds, too, were distinct. From below came the slap of waves on rocks and, from above, music edged with static, as from a transistor radio. She wound her way upward, liking the pull on her calf muscles. She was physically strong. She liked to run, though one evening on the running track some creep had called out, *You already developed your legs babe; why don't you develop your chest?* Too late came the perfect retort: *You've already developed your mouth. Why don't you develop your brain?* She would love the opportunity to say that.

She walked briskly, with short, competent strides. The shade was cool today, and she thought of going back for her windbreaker, which she had left in the room because Ira said it made her look like a tourist. But the B & B was behind her, and soon the walking warmed her. She loved the sudden heat on her eyelids when she turned a corner into the sun. She saw a black-haired woman sweeping the walk in front of her shop, and another woman inside behind a counter, following her passage with a bright flicker of the eye. In Mykonos the men went out, the women stayed in. Roberta was grateful to reside in Chicago, America, 2011—all right, luck had played a part in her life but it wasn't the main

part. If her arms looked strong in her sleeveless top it was because she got up early before work to go to the gym. She inhaled the scent of oregano, garlic, sun on paving stones. And a pleasant bitterness she didn't recognize but which she planned always to associate with this time and place.

The sloping street ended at a dirt and gravel road that looked to ring the island. Above were gray-green fields of spiky foliage, traversed by meandering stone walls, within which the tiny figures of six white goats stood motionless as if stamped upon the landscape. Below, flat white roofs sloped down to the sea, simultaneously distant and close at hand, a bolt of shimmery blue fabric reaching up and over. She sat on the stone wall alongside the road and crossed her legs, savoring her wellbeing even when she noticed that her nose was sunburned. Happiness seemed her natural state now, though she could remember lapses. She turned her back to the sun and started walking the ring road, looking for a gap in the wall that led to a street. A new street; she wanted continually new adventures.

She had been walking for several minutes when she heard the putt-putt of a small engine. She pressed up against the rocks to let it pass, half-expecting to see Ira. What a joke if it were he. She wouldn't mind riding home behind him. It stopped behind her, a moped, chugging. She cast a glance its way, noted two males, one teenage, the other thirty, maybe. There was no one else in sight. She increased her pace, not that she was frightened. It was the middle of the afternoon, the sky a friendly bright blue. The machine passed her and shut off. The riders were smiling. "Hello, American girl, righty right? Speak English?"

Her return smile was purposefully dull-witted. Swatches of music reached out and sprayed them as they passed. Vaguely maternal. She slowed to a stop ten paces in front of them.

"Be friendly, American girl," said the older man.

"Baby," said the other, "do the locomotion?" He glanced at his friend as if to ascertain the correctness of the expression. The older man looked irritated.

"Hot and sexy American girl. Come to drink something?"

She would have laughed if she weren't nervous. She gave the helpless shrug of a person who did not understand what had just been said to her. Besides English she knew a little French; she said with her best French accent, "*Je ne suis pas Americaine*"—I am not an American girl—feeling fairly certain that these guys spoke less French than she. "Excusez-moi!" she said, and marched

forward, her eyes peeled for a break in the wall. Under her breath she hummed the beginning of the Marseillaise, but as she passed the men, her face frozen in faux-French aplomb, one of them grabbed her arm; the other flicked open a knife. Scream! she said to herself, as she had learned in a women's self-defense class. Then, she had managed a full-throated shriek, much praised by the instructor. Now, her breath caught. In voiceless rage she elbowed her attacker, felt the damp of his T-shirt. She almost gagged. Only when the moped had roared off did she realize that her travel belt was gone. Cut, from around her waist. There was a slit in her blouse where it tucked into her pants. She screamed loud and long, she ran a dozen steps after the machine, not that she knew what she'd do if she caught up with it. Not that she was going to. The sound was gone. Not a goat had raised its head.

Several minutes later she found a downward-leading street and began a jagged, dispirited course back to the B & B. At intervals she would catch a glimpse of the sea, though it seemed to get no nearer. She was trembling. She needed a place to sit for a few minutes, where she would not be asked for money. Where she would be looked at sympathetically, or at least overlooked. Over a doorway she saw a sign she recognized:

La Bonne Aventure—Nadya.
Tarot, Palm-reading, Divination

They had been here last night. The door opened as if someone were waiting for her.

Nadya was at least half a foot taller than Roberta, with the long, thick, grizzled hair of an aging hippie, though her round face was unlined. She extended a hand of welcome. Then, before Roberta could speak, the woman stepped back. There was no choice, it seemed, but to fill the newly empty space.

Nadya led her down a shadowed hallway, her broad back obscuring what lay ahead. They passed a dust mop leaned against a wall, then a long dining table. A small girl sat under the table, holding a cloth doll with orange braids. Roberta smiled automatically, though she was still shaking, and though, apart

from Justin and a few of his friends, she didn't care for children. She liked, she would say, *certain* children.

The hallway gave onto a high-walled courtyard, shady in the late afternoon. The ground was hard-packed dirt. Fragrant potted trees flanked the walls, lemon, pomegranate, the fruits small and hard. Roberta shivered in the coolness, and maybe from the metaphor as well, feeling her soul—something inside her—small, hard and unripe like a green fruit. She didn't want her fortune told—not even if she had money—but there had been no time to explain. She wanted to use Nadya's phone. She should have bought an international cell phone. Ira had suggested it.

Nadya was waving her over to a wrought-iron table under the one tree growing out of the ground. Two dinner plates bore the remains of a meal—crumbs, olive pits. Lozenges of shadow from the leaves overhead. Roberta wanted to speak but her will seemed to have drained out of her. She sat, as, throughout the late afternoons of her childhood, she had sat at the kitchen table doing her homework, to be checked by her mother before she went out to play. In thrall to her mother even when she was alone. Nadya clapped her hands, and the little girl appeared, picked up the plates, ran them back into the house—preternaturally mature, Roberta thought with a hint of envy; Justin was not (though he was an early reader). "I'm sorry," she said at last, "I'm not usually like this." She detailed the event of her mugging, trying not to weep with shame. If she could have a glass of water she would be very grateful. And could she use the phone to call her B & B? "I'm still kind of disoriented."

Nadya regarded her impassively. *"Tu voudrais connaître ton destin?"*

"Excuse me?"

It was French that Nadya had spoken but that was all Roberta understood. I speak French very poorly, she said in French.

That the woman spoke no English seemed unlikely, a ploy of some sort, though its aim was obscure. The logical course was to go. Pick herself up; get out of here. But an abrupt leave-taking required an explanation. Roberta was loath to violate rules, especially those she didn't comprehend. The woman had placed her hand on the table in front of Roberta, and seemed to be reaching for her hand. Men held hands in this country, perhaps women did too. Roberta put her hand in the hand of her hostess, aware of a flush on her face, spreading to

her ears. But when Nadya began tracing a line in Roberta's palm with a long-nailed forefinger and a fortune teller's rapt, slightly distressed countenance, Roberta snatched her hand back. She wanted nothing from the great beyond. "I have no money!" She said it in French too.

To Roberta's surprise, the fortune teller's face remained rapt and distressed. She plucked a dark-skinned fruit from the tree over the table and gave it to her. It felt soft, smelled sweet. Her mouth started to water. *"Mange-toi,"* Nadya murmured then plucked a second fruit and finished it off in two bites; Roberta couldn't help but do likewise. It was a fig, seedy and sweet with a faint bitter underlay that made her want more. Nadya placed a deck of tarot cards on the table. Mix them, if you please, she said in French, but slowly, as if she recognized her guest's limited grasp. –How may I serve you? Her voice was throaty, her round face seemingly free of judgment. The V of her shirt exposed a distinct cleavage, under which beat, perhaps, a warm heart. Nadya was hardly older than she, but evinced strength and tenderness like a good mother. –Is there something in particular that you wish to know?

Roberta, who rarely acted on whim, decided to give herself over to the moment. What could happen? At worst she'd have a good story for Ira. She mixed the cards. Then from the travel bag of her fears and confusions she retrieved a question and converted it to her best French: —The man with whom I am traveling, is he good for me? Nadya's face didn't change; Roberta tried again: —We are going to be happy, yes? Understanding that, as trust and shame were entangled in her mind, so marriage for her was entwined with death. Soul death. Abandoned by her spouse, her mother had carried on her life, but angrily, suspiciously, a constricted version of herself. Roberta's high school boyfriend went off to college, joined a frat, left a break-up message on her mother's answering machine. And died in a car accident the spring of his sophomore year without knowing he had a son. Don't ask, don't tell. She looked at Nadya beseechingly.

The little girl danced in with a plate of olives and set them on the table, but Nadya paid her no attention. She asked for Ira's full name, and repeated it. She said slowly, with a breath after each word: You. Hold. His. Heart. In. Your. Hands.

It was a disturbingly literal image. Roberta trembled with tenderness. She wanted to hear French and more French; she wanted to bathe in French. Words

of love leapt from her tongue. *Je t'aime, je t'aime.* She wanted to run back to the room where Ira might be and tell him she loved him. He had said it to her once, and what had she said in return? *Thank you!* How fearful and petty. Snotty. She ate an olive, savored it, the sourness and salt. She smiled at Nadya. She thought of kissing the woman's hand.

Then another question came to her mind. Having gone this far with the occult, why not farther? If Nadya gave her a clean bill of psychic health she would feel good, and if not, she was free to disbelieve. If you please, she said in French, for how long will I retain my mental faculties? For the rest of my life?

Nadya clucked, which could have meant "poor, sad, crazy girl," or else disdain for Roberta's American accent. Or maybe she didn't understand. With pursed lips and the thin, high voice of her college French instructor, who had lived in Paris for several years, Roberta said, "*Avec toutes mes facultés?*" Hoping *faculté* was a real cognate. What was French for 'brain'? She pointed a demented finger at the side of her head.

Nadya mimed for Roberta to take off her glasses. Roberta obeyed, and sat in a fuzzed-over world while Nadya looked into her eyes. It was like going to the eye doctor. "*Comment va ta maman*?" said Nadya. Your mother, is she in good health?

"She's fine," Roberta cried. "She's great!" But before she could qualify her response, or ask why it mattered, the little girl ran in wailing. She buried her head in the fabric of Nadya's skirt, kicked at Nadya's legs; her howl spiraled up the courtyard walls, goosebumpy, preternatural, until Nadya, who was probably her mother, though she could also have been her grandmother, stood her up and slapped her face. Roberta almost cried out.

Silenced, the little girl fled. Nadya rose, blank as the moon. Feeling silenced as well, Roberta stood on weak legs. Under the table lay the girl's doll, which was missing an eye. It had the slightly malevolent look that damaged dolls possess. Should she thank Nadya? The woman was already striding down the hall. She scrambled after her to the door, which opened then closed behind her.

Out on the street the white-washed walls of houses were amber in the long rays of the sun, as if time had passed faster here. Roberta labored toward dailiness. Nadya didn't know anything special (she told herself). Anyone could set herself up as a seer, with a little painted sign and the nerve to pretend to be God.

Three or four streets away, she was trying to remember the address of their B & B, not that she had cab fare, when she realized she had left her glasses at Nadya's. She had packed only the one pair, the good new ones, an indulgence of sorts. Testimony to trust of a sort, obviously unwarranted. Without them she'd spend the rest of the trip trailing Ira to the bank and passport office, or with a hand on the top of his arm like a blind woman. He would read to her from menus, omitting expensive or exotic foods. She squinted up at the place on the corner building where a street name would be.

But even if she could have found her way back to Nadya's, she couldn't bring herself to turn around. She gave herself over to the force of gravity, wafting down to the sea and their B & B, and Ira, for better or worse. She moved uncertainly, stumbling like a drunk or a beggar, *sans* money, eyesight, even self-love, in this place where you had no power over things no matter how well you planned.