

Mom drops me off at Evan's a little after five, forcing a couple of twenties into my hand "to pay for dinner." She doesn't understand that no one talks about money here. Evan orders dinner with his family's credit card and the topic never comes up. Once, a couple of years ago, I tried to broach the subject, unfolding Mom's money and placing it on the kitchen counter. I had a little speech prepared about being so grateful for their generosity and wanting to pay for that night's takeout, but before I could say anything, Evan's mom cleared her throat loudly and turned away. Evan swept the bills up like crumbs and pressed them against me as he gestured me toward the hallway and the stairs. "Let's go load up the movies, man," he said a little too brightly.

I was too young to know the word *gauche*, but I understood its meaning readily enough.

So now I ring the doorbell, Mom's money stuffed in my pocket. As I do every year, I'll sneak away to the Narc tomorrow, break the twenties, and give her a few bucks as "change." Then, a week later, I'll slip the rest of it into her wallet. She never realizes.

Evan's older brother, Richard Jr., answers the door.

"Oh," he says. "You." He says it not with disgust or outrage, but with utter nonchalance, peering past me to scan the driveway as though someone more worthy might be following right behind. "Did you see a black M-Class on your way?"

"No." I have no idea.

He grumbles and starts poking at his watch, not bothering to move aside. I press myself between him and the doorframe.

Evan comes scrambling down the left staircase into the foyer. "Sebastian! Dude!" He spares a contemptuous glance at his brother and shouts, "Hey, Tool Boy! Close the door!" receiving an almost-casual middle finger in reply.

"What a puddle of rancid douche water," Evan says, not bothering to lower his voice. "I can't wait until he's out of here."

Richard Jr. starts Yale in the fall. Once, to be polite, I asked how much it costs to go to Yale, even though I could look it up on the Internet. Evan, unthinking, told me, "It's like sixty-five per year, and it goes up each year. But they have this great program where if you prepay for the four years, you can lock it in at the freshman rate, so Dad's doing that to save money."

The surest sign that you're rich is that you don't even think about the fact that you're rich. Evan likes to act like he's above the money or disinterested in it, but he's too casual about his new iPhone, his Apple Watch Edition—which I looked up online (it cost over ten thousand dollars)—the twin to his brother's. Call him on it and he'll shrug, somewhat embarrassed, and say, "My parents want to be able to stay in touch. It's sort of practical, really."

*Practical* would have meant the same watch made out of aluminum for under four hundred. Gold is practical only in the sense of sending a message: *We can afford to buy this for our son, and*

*since we also live in one of the safest school districts in the country—notwithstanding our son’s best friend, who has a history of homicide—we’re not concerned about strapping ten-grand worth of electronics and precious metals onto our child every day.*

Evan prods and guides me upstairs before his brother can snap out a lazy retort. The strip of carpeting on the stairs has been replaced since I was last here, no doubt having shown the slightest sign of wear. That’s what you do in museums when the exhibits begin to look ratty—you replace them.

The carpet is so soft that I want to take off my shoes and let my toes sink into it. Later, I remind myself. I’ll do this later.

On our way to Evan’s room, we pass his father’s office. “Evan! Come here!” his dad calls in a voice both authoritarian and excited.

The face that goes with that excitement cannot hide a frisson of disappointment when I enter the office as well.

“Ah. Of course. Hello, Sebastian.”

I can’t help but compare the way Evan’s father says my name—as though clearing it from his throat—with the way Aneesa’s father says it. Which is to say, completely normally.

Then again, Mr. Danforth *knows*. Mr. Fahim doesn’t.

Mr. Danforth has a face shaped like a mangled upsidedown triangle, its bottommost point—his chin—crooked and jutting out aggressively. I can almost imagine him having this done deliberately, getting plastic surgery to have his chin poking constantly at other people, reminding them that Richard Danforth Sr. is in their airspace. His hair is full and thick and too shiny. He has enormous blue eyes, frightening in their luminosity. Built like a linebacker who went paleo, he’s all square shoulders and blunt forearms and wide stance. Even on the weekends, he wears slacks and a crisp buttndown dress shirt, as though at any moment, he’ll need to throw on a jacket and tie and race off to something monumentally important and wealth-enhancing and boring.

I’ve never liked him. Not since the first moment we met. The feeling, I know, is mutual. Even that first time, he regarded me with suspicion, and I imagine if he could have frisked me for firearms, he would have done so. I was seven. But for as much as I dislike Evan’s father, I have to concede that—even beyond his wealth—he has at least one trait that places him miles above my own.

Namely: He’s still around.

*My Father*

Left the house when I was six. That I definitely remember. I generally see him twice a year, on my birthday and on Christmas, occasions I dread. I should anticipate them; instead, I wish for them to pass as quickly as possible.

One year, a snowstorm made it impossible for him to see me on Christmas. It was my favorite Christmas ever.

My father is not wealthy, like Mr. Danforth. He is not cool and collected, like Mr. Fahim. My father bristles with energy, with regret, with time that has rotted and gone black and soft from disuse. He speaks little, asking me how school is, how my mother is, how my friends are. Sometimes he remembers Evan's name, typically referring to him as "that Evan," as though there is a plethora of Evans in my life, a vast and multifaceted panoply of them, and he is speaking only specifically of *that Evan*.

He is taller than he appears, his stooped posture shrinking him. His hair, sandy brown, a shade lighter than my own, is ragged, too long in some spots, too short in others, the right length nowhere. He favors quilted plaid shirts, worn buttoned over long underwear in the winter; open over white T-shirts in the summer, the sleeves rolled.

I've never seen him sweat.

My father speaks like someone who has never been entirely comfortable with the English language, although a native speaker. He halts. He backtracks. He changes tenses then returns to the original. This is when he speaks at all, which is rare. Where possible, he communicates with nods, shrugs, wordless grunts, and clucks of his tongue, expressing a bewildering range of opinions, requests, and answers without ever resorting to the spoken word.

His breath always smells of beer, but he never seems drunk.

Mr. Danforth's office is walled in bookcases, stocked with the sort of jacketless volumes you expect to find at library sales or in library-themed novelty restaurants. Evan has confirmed for me that the books were chosen by an interior decorator for "texture and color palette." Mr. Danforth has read none of them.

His desk is a massive slab of granite on steel scaffolding. Two large computer monitors sit atop it, and Mr. Danforth sits behind it, gesturing us over to him as he rises.

"My new toy," he says. "Just came today. Want to see it?"

Behind his desk, built into a nook carved out of one of the bookcases, is Mr. Danforth's gun rack. Gun display is more accurate. It's a walnut-framed glass door with four rifles mounted vertically against felt. There is also a large Magnum and a smallish Colt—Evan's mom's pistol. *A girly gun*, Mr. Danforth once called it.

Mr. Danforth is the sort of man who, if we lived in Britain, would mount a horse and terrify foxes with the strength of firearms, trained hunting dogs, and the backup of four other armed

men. But we live in Brookdale, in Maryland, in the United States, and so instead he fancies himself a “sportsman shooter.” He spends more time oiling and cleaning his weapons than actually firing them. Writing his annual dues check to the National Rifle Association makes him feel authentic and über-Republican.

There’s a fifth rifle now. Mr. Danforth unlocks the cabinet as Evan stutter-stops on the far side of his dad’s desk. “Dad, uh—”

“Wait’ll you see it. Absolutely beautiful.”

“Dad, we—”

“Just a second . . .” He fiddles with the handle to the cabinet, swings it open. I catch a whiff of gun oil. Mr. Danforth lifts out the new rifle, a truly handsome piece of equipment, its stock nearly matching the grain of the cabinet itself.

“Paid extra for the French walnut,” Mr. Danforth says, tapping the stock. He has the rifle aimed carefully at the ceiling, holding it so we can drink in its steely length. “Cooper M52. You know how they say, ‘They don’t make ’em like they used to’? Well, at Cooper, they do. This thing is gorgeous, isn’t it?” He hefts it, beaming. “Isn’t it beautiful? You can really do some damage with this baby.”

“Dad!” Evan explodes. “I don’t care. We don’t care.”

“What?” Mr. Danforth’s lip curls in that way it has when he’s been deprived or overruled. And then, as though he’s wiped a patch of condensation from glass and can finally see the other side, he realizes and seems suddenly, enormously embarrassed to be standing in front of me, rhapsodizing and ejaculating over his latest death-dealing acquisition. “Oh . . .” he says. Nothing more. Just *Oh*.

The truth is, it doesn’t matter. The truth is, it was ten years ago, and I didn’t know Evan or his family then, and it’s my history, not theirs. The truth is, I didn’t wield a hunting rifle that day. The truth is, nothing anyone does or says can change what already happened. The truth is, guns are part of the world, of Brookdale, of life, and I can’t, won’t, and don’t fall to pieces every time I see one. The truth is, I don’t care about his guns.

The truth is *also*, though, that Evan’s dad is—politely speaking—something of an asshole, and I don’t like him. I don’t like the way he talks through his teeth half the time. I don’t like the way even his jeans—on the rare occasion he wears them—have creases in them, and you know he and his wife have never touched an iron in their lives, so who put those creases there? I don’t like the gold Apple Watch he wears—matching his sons’—or the way his hair is too perfect.

So I jam my hands into my pockets and make a show of turning slightly away, a vampire repulsed by the sight of a mirror or a cross. I mumble something under my breath, not meant to be heard, going more for a tone of barely concealed anguish.

A human being would apologize. Would at least put the rifle away. But Mr. Danforth lacks the basic human firmware required for apologies. He rooted out those files and deleted them years ago. Being rich means never having to say you're sorry. He's out of practice, and so he just stands there, gaping slightly, while Evan heaves out an exasperated huff and glares up at the ceiling.

I'm glad Mr. Danforth doesn't know how to apologize. Because if he knew how, he would, and if he did, then the only decent thing to do would be to accept it. And that lets him off the hook.

Since he can't apologize, I get to keep the emotional high ground. Studiously avoiding even a glance in his direction, I turn and—stoop-shouldered, wounded—slouch from the office without a word.