

“It’s time to come inside, guys.”

Archie and Rose were in the hot tub, pink as cooking lobsters.

Amanda insisted the children bathe and banish that chlorine smell. She poured herself another glass of wine. Clay returned with a surprising number of paper bags.

“I went a little overboard.” He looked sheepish. “I thought it might rain. I don’t want to have to leave the house tomorrow.”

Amanda frowned because she felt she was supposed to. It wouldn’t ruin them to spend a little more than was usual on groceries. Or maybe it was the wine. “Fine, fine. Put those away and let’s eat?” She wasn’t sure she wasn’t slurring a little bit.

She laid the table. The children, redolent of marzipan (Dr. Bronner’s, in the green bottle), sat. They were the best kind of tired, docile, almost polite, no burping or name-calling. Archie even helped his father clear the table, and Amanda lay on the sofa beside Rose, her head in her child’s warm lap. She didn’t mean to sleep, but she did, full of wine and pasta and bored by the television’s prattle. Amanda was perplexed when she was roused twenty minutes on by an especially shrill commercial and Rose’s need for the bathroom. Her mouth was dry.

“Have a nice nap?” Clay was teasing, not amorous (he was still sated) but romantic—even better or rarer. They’d made a nice life for themselves, hadn’t they?

Amanda did the *New York Times* crossword on her phone—she was afraid of dementia, and felt this was preventative—and the time passed strangely, as it did when measured in minutes before the television. If the night before she’d been eager to look at her work and fuck her husband, tonight it felt important to linger on the sofa with her children, Archie dopey in his too-big hooded sweatshirt, Rose infantile, wrapped in the itchy woolen throw left on the sofa’s arm. Clay served bowls of ice cream, then collected the bowls, and the dishwasher ran with its reassuring gurgle, and Rose’s eyes looked blank and Archie yawned loudly, suddenly, so

like a man, and Amanda sent the children to bed, telling them to brush their teeth but not standing sentry to verify that they did.

She yawned, was tired enough to go to bed, but knew somehow that if she moved, she would not fall asleep. Clay changed the channel, pausing a moment on Rachel Maddow and then switching to a thriller that neither of them were able to follow, detectives and their prey.

“Television is idiotic.” Clay turned it off. He’d rather play with his phone. He dropped some ice into a glass. “You want a drink?”

Amanda shook her head. “I’m done.”

She didn’t yet quite know which switch controlled which light. She flicked one, and the pool and the grounds beyond it were illuminated, pure white beams shot through the green branches overhead. She turned the light off, returning things to their black state, which seemed right, seemed natural.

“I need some water,” she said or thought, and made her way into the kitchen. She was filling one of the IKEA glasses when she heard a scratch, a footfall, a voice, something that felt odd or wrong. “Did you hear that?”

Clay mumbled; he wasn’t truly listening. He checked the little buttons on the side of his phone to make sure the sound was turned off. “It’s not me.”

“No.” She sipped her water. “It was something else.”

There it was again: shuffle, a voice, a quiet murmur, a *presence*. A disruption, a change. Something. This time Amanda was more certain. Her heart quickened. She felt sober, awake. She put her cup down on the marble counter, quietly—suddenly that seemed right, to move stealthily.

“I heard something.” She was whispering.

Such moments, Clay was called upon. He had to be the man. He didn’t mind it. Maybe he liked it. Maybe it made him feel necessary. From down the hall, he could almost hear Archie, snoring like a sleeping dog. “It’s probably just a deer in the front garden.”

“It’s something.” Amanda held up a hand to silence him. Her mouth was metallic with fear. “I know I heard something.”

There it was, undeniable: noise. A cough, a voice, a step, a hesitation, that uncategorizable animal knowledge that there’s another of the species nearby and the pause, pregnant, to see if they mean harm. There was a knock at the door. A knock at the door of this house, where no one knew they were, not even the global positioning system, this house near the ocean but also lost in farmland, this house of red bricks painted white, the very material the smartest little piggy chose because it would keep him safest. There was a knock at the door.