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9 Livingston Place, Stuyvesant Square
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(Late Morning)

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*I*t's a lost day, I'm afraid. Pamela's here. I hadn't counted on that. Just one look at her this morning and despair flew into my heart. She had the look I dread, her eyes overbright, shining with that queer mix of euphoria and terror. And she talked incessantly, a very bad sign. She was going to start painting again, she said, and went on and on about the large canvasses she seems to have had in her head for so long. I encouraged her, naturally, but I knew by the way she was acting that it was only talk, that she wasn't near ready. If she really meant it, we wouldn't see her at all, she'd disappear. She'd be too busy *painting*.

When she stopped talking it was midsentence, her thoughts trailing off into a dramatic yawn. She was awfully tired, she said. Did I mind if she just lay down for a while? I didn't need to answer, though of course I said, "Certainly, darling!"

She gave my shoulder a squeeze as she passed by. But I didn't look up. I find every way to avoid it, but the truth will look me right in the face: there is madness in my daughter's eyes.

This heat's unbearable.

The fan blowing back and forth across the ice hypnotizes me with its jerky rhythm—the faint *screeitch* as it hesitates at every rotation, the cool breath of air across my face. My manuscript sits in front of me on the kitchen table, but I know I won't touch it. The desire to work has fled, it ran off down the hallway along with

Pamela. Worry occupies me now, and the same questions roil in my brain: Will it be a bad one? Will it go away of its own accord? Or—God forbid—will we have to bring her to the hospital again?

When Francesco left for the printer's studio at dawn, saying he'd be back by suppertime, I was quite glad to have the day to myself, all the time in the world, I thought, to do a final reading of *Forward, Commandos!* A nice, long stretch of solitude. . . .

I suppose you could say I'm alone now, here in the kitchen, but somehow it's not the same, not with Pamela just a few feet away, asleep in her old room. We heaved a sigh of relief when she moved into an apartment of her own a few years ago, but her "independence" has been tenuous at best. Little has changed. Her place is only a stone's throw away. Inevitably, she shows up on our doorstep when she is feeling not quite herself.

She'll sleep the day away, I can count on that. Another bad sign. There's trouble ahead when the little genius takes to bed.

The little genius. Why on earth did that pop into my head? We haven't called her that in years. . . . I suppose it was Pamela's attempt to discuss the past, her childhood. I had to cut her off.

Thank God there aren't any of those minefields to navigate with Lorenzo. Still, I should have realized that my hopes for a day alone would be futile when he appeared first thing this morning—I should have known that it was only a matter of time before his mother showed up.

Lorenzo burst into the apartment, vibrating with that matchless energy of youth, and planted himself in my kitchen. A bright pinwheel, spinning even when sitting still. His mother didn't feel like cooking, he said, she'd told him he could help himself to some Wheaties. He looked at me sheepishly then, not wanting to ask. "Scrambled eggs and cinnamon toast sound okay?" I said, and he grinned. While I fixed his breakfast, he chattered about his great plans. It's the start of Labor Day weekend today—naturally, he's determined to cram in all the last-minute adventure he can before school begins.

It's a miracle that Pamela produced such a solid, uncompli-

cated child. He shows none of the fragile jumpiness of his parents. Not that I ever knew Robert very well, but he was a type. And Lorenzo is not at all that type. He's blessedly normal. He likes the sorts of things most boys his age like, sports and model airplanes and listening to *Boston Blackie* on the radio. And roller-skating. "It's swell, Grams, you should try it!" he tells me. Well, I'm tempted. With the gas rationing going on, the streets aren't nearly so busy these days as they used to be. Lorenzo goes down to the financial district on weekends, when it's all but abandoned. He and his friends can skate right in the middle of the road all the way from Wall Street and Broadway, past the New York Stock Exchange and Broad Street, and never have to dodge an automobile!

Lorenzo finished his breakfast and ran off to meet his friends for a swimming party at McCarren Park. He seems to have a great many friends. They all call him Larry, or sometimes "Red," which irritates Pamela no end. But what twelve-year-old boy—what boy at all—wants to be called Lorenzo?

When Pamela showed up a few hours later, I sighed inwardly as I told her, all cheerful, that I'd make us some tea, thinking, *How does this happen?* She's seemed so much better in the last year or so. I was sure it had to do with the fact she was out in the world for a change—doing her bit in the war effort, volunteering at the Department of Censorship. It's the perfect job for her, translating letters in the Italian Division. Francesco and I've often talked about how good it's been for her, for her confidence, to see that she's needed, that she has skills to offer that have nothing to do with art.

Well, I suppose I've done the talking. Francesco has been mostly silent on the subject. He's glad, of course, that Pamela's stronger. At least she seemed to be. But—he won't say this to me, I know—he's dying to get her painting again. Would strong-arm her if he could.

I put the tea things down, talking all the while about Lorenzo's visit, his plans for the weekend. The only response from Pamela was a slight nod. She stared at her teacup with that serious think-

ing expression of hers, her eyebrows drawn together in a way that, since she was a child, has always made us exclaim, “There, Pamela’s at it again!” Only now it’s a bit harder to read. She always had strong, dark eyebrows that almost met over her nose and now they are gone. Completely erased. I do wish she hadn’t shaved them off. It gives her such a fixed look, a false sophistication.

I will say this, though, the penciled lines are beautifully done. If anyone can draw in a perfect eyebrow, it’s Pamela.

She started up again about painting. *I must try . . . I want to . . . I can see the images so clearly . . . my childhood.* And somewhere amongst all the talk she wondered aloud, as if it were something she’d just thought of, something that had never occurred to her before, that she supposed her childhood had ended that day in Turin. Yet another bad sign, that ancient story. I had no energy for it. We had both, in our own ways, returned to it too many times.

And so I smiled and went over to hug her, and said something like, “Well, here we are now, and I suppose we must concentrate on what’s in front of us.” Some such platitude, meant to be comforting. And meant to change the subject. After all, she’s a grown woman now, and I did not want to revisit the past. Not that particular past, at any rate, a time when I may have let her down—I will never know, not really—and a time when Francesco and I turned a corner and could not look back.

How easily, in the end, I gave in to him. I try not to think of it. But there it is, it’s inevitable. I feel the quick clenching of my stomach, the twinge of guilt running through me even now. It’s simply wearying.

The fact is that when Pamela started in on that subject, my first thought was not a comforting platitude at all. The mind goes where it will. I’ve learned to forgive myself its quirky meanderings. We are all the same, aren’t we? The most angelic among us must sometimes have thoughts that are mean or vengeful or idiotic or perverse. Just yesterday I was shopping at Balducci’s and came across an elderly couple huddled in the aisle. They were examining the pudding boxes. And what should spring into my mind but a picture of them

naked in bed. I even heard the man groaning. Wretched, horrid thought. I went back to hunting down the Colman's.

I do wonder, though, about these thoughts that fly into our minds from God knows where, shocking our decent and amiable selves. I suppose it must be a filtering mechanism of sorts, sanity's system of checks and balances.

At any rate, I confess that my immediate thought when Pamela talked of her childhood ending was, "I'm afraid, my dear, it never really has."

Now here she is, and not a thing I can do.

I hear nothing. The door to her room is shut, there is no sound of movement. She's utterly quiet, as if she's not here at all—yet somehow she fills the apartment so that I feel there is no room for me in this place.