



# I'll Give You the Sun

*Jandy Nelson*

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From the author of *The Sky Is Everywhere*, a radiant novel that will leave you laughing and crying - all at once. For fans of John Green, Gayle Forman and Lauren Oliver. Jude and her twin Noah were incredibly close - until a tragedy drove them apart, and now they are barely speaking. Then Jude meets a cocky, broken, beautiful boy as well as a captivating new mentor, both of whom may just need her as much as she needs them. What the twins don't realize is that each of them has only half the story and if they can just find their way back to one another, they have a chance to remake their world.

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432 pages

Extrait

This is how it all begins. With Zephyr and Fry—reigning neighborhood sociopaths—torpedoing after me and the whole forest floor shaking under my feet as I blast through air, trees, this white-hot panic. “You’re going over, you pussy!” Fry shouts. Then Zephyr’s on me, has one, both of my arms behind my back, and Fry’s grabbed my sketchpad. I lunge for it but I’m armless, helpless. I try to wriggle out of Zephyr’s grasp. Can’t. Try to blink them into moths. No. They’re still themselves: fifteen-foot-tall, tenth-grade asshats who toss living, breathing thirteen-year-old people like me over cliffs for kicks. Zephyr’s got me in a headlock from behind and his chest’s heaving into my back, my back into his chest. We’re swimming in sweat. Fry starts leafing through the pad. “Whatcha been drawing, Bubble?” I imagine him getting run over by a truck. He holds up a page of sketches. “Zeph, look at all these naked dudes.” The blood in my body stops moving. “They’re not dudes. They’re *David*,” I get out, praying I won’t sound like a gerbil, praying he won’t turn to later drawings in the pad, drawings done today, when I was spying, drawings of *them*, rising out of the water, with their surfboards under arm, no wetsuits, no nothing, totally glistening, and, uh: holding hands. I might have taken some artistic license. So they’re going to think . . . They’re going to kill me even before they kill me is what they’re going to do. The world starts somersaulting. I fling words at Fry: “You know? Michelangelo? Ever heard of him?” I’m not going to act like me. *Act tough and you are tough*, as Dad has said and said and said—like I’m some kind of broken umbrella. “Yeah, I’ve heard of him,” Fry says out of the big bulgy mouth that clumps with the rest of his big bulgy features under the world’s most massive forehead, making it very easy to mistake him for a hippopotamus. He rips the page out of the sketchpad. “Heard he was *gay*.” He *was*—my mom wrote a whole book about it—not that Fry knows. He calls everyone gay when he’s not calling them homo and pussy. And me: homo and pussy *and* Bubble. Zephyr laughs a dark demon laugh. It vibrates through me. Fry holds up the next sketch. More *David*. The bottom half of him. A study in detail. I go cold. They’re both laughing now. It’s echoing through the forest. It’s coming out of birds. Again, I try to break free of the lock Zephyr has me in so I can snatch the pad out of Fry’s hands, but it only tightens Zephyr’s hold. Zephyr, who’s freaking Thor. One of his arms is choked around my neck, the other braced across my torso like a seat belt. He’s bare-chested, straight off the beach, and the heat of him is seeping through my T-shirt. His coconut suntan lotion’s filling my nose, my whole head—the strong smell of the ocean too, like he’s carrying it on his back . . . Zephyr dragging the tide along like a blanket behind him . . . That would be good, that would be *it* (PORTRAIT: *The Boy Who Walked Off with the Sea*)—but not now, Noah, *so* not the time to mind-paint this cretin. I snap back, taste the salt on my lips, remind myself I’m about to die—Zephyr’s long seaweedy hair is wet and dripping down my neck and shoulders. I notice we’re breathing in synch, heavy, bulky breaths. I try to unsynch with him. I try to unsynch with the law of gravity and float up. Can’t do either. Can’t do anything. The wind’s whipping pieces of my drawings—mostly family portraits now—out of Fry’s hands as he tears up one, then another. He rips one of Jude and me down the middle, cuts me right out of it. I watch myself blow away. I watch him getting closer and closer to the drawings that are going to get me murdered. My pulse is thundering in my ears. Then Zephyr says, “Don’t rip ’em up, Fry. His sister says he’s good.” Because he likes Jude? They mostly all do now because she can surf harder than any of them, likes to jump off cliffs, and isn’t afraid of anything, not even great white sharks or Dad. And because of her hair—I use up all my yellows drawing it. It’s hundreds of miles long and everyone in Northern California has to worry about getting tangled up in it, especially little kids and poodles and now asshat surfers. There’s also the boobs, which arrived overnight delivery, I swear. Unbelievably, Fry listens to Zephyr and drops the pad. Jude peers up at me from it, sunny, knowing. *Thank you*, I tell her in my mind. She’s always rescuing me, which usually is embarrassing, but not now. That was righteous. (PORTRAIT, SELF-PORTRAIT: *Twins: Noah Looking in a Mirror, Jude out of It*) “You know what we’re going to do to you, don’t you?” Zephyr rasps in my ear, back to the regularly scheduled homicidal programming. There’s too much of him on his breath. There’s too much of him on me. “Please, you guys,” I

beg. "Please, you guys," Fry mimics in a squeaky girly voice. My stomach rolls. Devil's Drop, the second-highest jump on the hill, which they aim to throw me over, has the name for a reason. Beneath it is a jagged gang of rocks and a wicked whirlpool that pulls your dead bones down to the underworld. I try to break Zephyr's hold again. And again. "Get his legs, Fry!" All six-thousand hippopotamus pounds of Fry dive for my ankles. Sorry, this is not happening. It just isn't. I hate the water, prone as I am to drowning and drifting to Asia. I need my skull in one piece. Crushing it would be like taking a wrecking ball to some secret museum before anyone ever got to see what's inside it. So I grow. And grow, and grow, until I head-butt the sky. Then I count to three and go freaking *berserk*, thanking Dad in my mind for all the wrestling he's forced me to do on the deck, to-the-death matches where he could only use one arm and I could use everything and he'd still pin me because he's thirty feet tall and made of truck parts. But I'm his son, his *gargantuan* son. I'm a whirling, ass-kicking Goliath, a typhoon wrapped in skin, and then I'm writhing and thrashing and trying to break free and they're wrestling me back down, laughing and saying things like "what a crazy mother." And I think I hear respect even in Zephyr's voice as he says, "I can't pin him, he's like a frickin' eel," and that makes me fight harder—I love eels, they're *electric*—imagining myself a live wire now, fully loaded with my own private voltage, as I whip this way and that, feeling their bodies twisting around mine, warm and slick, both of them pinning me again and again, and me breaking their holds, all our limbs entwined and now Zephyr's head's pressed into my chest and Fry's behind me with a hundred hands it feels like and it's just motion and confusion and I am lost in it, lost, lost, lost, when I begin to suspect . . . when I realize—I have a hard-on, a supernaturally hard hard-on, and it's jammed into Zephyr's stomach. High-octane dread courses through me. I call up the bloodiest most hella gross machete massacre—my most effective boner-buster—but it's too late. Zephyr goes momentarily still, then jumps off me. "What the—?" Fry rolls up onto his knees. "What happened?" he wheezes out in Zephyr's direction. I've reeled away, landed in a sitting position, my knees to my chest. I can't stand up yet for fear of a tent, so I put all my effort in trying not to cry. A sickly ferret feeling is burrowing itself into every corner of my body as I pant my last breaths. And even if they don't kill me here and now, by tonight everyone on the hill will know what just happened. I might as well swallow a lit stick of dynamite and hurl my own self off Devil's Drop. This is worse, so much worse, than them seeing some stupid drawings. (SELF-PORTRAIT: *Funeral in the Forest*) But Zephyr's not saying anything, he's just standing there, looking like his Viking self, except all weird and mute. Why? Did I disable him with my mind? No. He gestures in the direction of the ocean, says to Fry, "Hell with this. Let's grab the slabs and head out." Relief swallows me whole. Is it possible he didn't feel it? No, it isn't—it was steel and he jumped away totally freaked out. He's still freaked out. So why isn't he pussyhomoBubbling me? Is it because he likes Jude? Fry twirls a finger by his ear as he says to Zephyr, "Someone's Frisbee is seriously on the roof, bro." Then to me: "When you least expect it, Bubble." He mimes my free-fall off Devil's Drop with his mitt of a hand. It's over. They're headed back toward the beach. Before they change their Neanderthal minds, I hustle over to my pad, slip it under my arm, and then, without looking back, I speed-walk into the trees like someone whose heart isn't shaking, whose eyes aren't filling up, someone who doesn't feel so newly minted as a human. When I'm in the clear, I blast out of my skin like a cheetah—they go from zero to seventy-five mph in three seconds flat and I can too practically. I'm the fourth-fastest in the seventh grade. I can unzip the air and disappear inside it, and that's what I do until I'm far away from them and what happened. At least I'm not a mayfly. Male mayflies have two dicks to worry about. I already spend half my life in the shower because of my one, thinking about things I can't stop thinking about no matter how hard I try because I really, really, *really* like thinking about them. Man, I do. At the creek, I jump rocks until I find a good cave where I can watch the sun swimming inside the rushing water for the next hundred years. There should be a horn or gong or something to wake God. Because I'd like to have a word with him. Three words actually: WHAT THE FUCK?! After a while, having gotten no response as usual, I take out the charcoals from my back pocket. They somehow survived the ordeal intact. I sit down and open my sketchbook. I black out a whole blank page, then another, and another. I press so hard, I break stick after stick, using each one down to the very nub, so it's like the blackness is coming out of my finger, out of me, and onto the page. I fill up the whole rest of the pad. It takes hours. (A SERIES: *Boy Inside a Box*

*of Darkness*) • • The next night at dinner, Mom announces that Grandma Sweetwine joined her for a ride in the car that afternoon with a message for Jude and me. Only, Grandma's dead. "Finally!" Jude exclaims, falling back in her chair. "She promised me!" What Grandma promised Jude, right before she died in her sleep three months ago, is that if Jude ever really needed her, she'd be there in a flash. Jude was her favorite. Mom smiles at Jude and puts her hands on the table. I put mine on the table too, then realize I'm being a Mom-mirror and hide my hands in my lap. Mom's contagious. And a blow-in—some people just aren't from here and she's one of them. I've been accumulating evidence for years. More on this later. But now: Her face is all lit up and flickery as she sets the stage, telling us how first the car filled with Grandma's perfume. "You know how the scent used to walk into the room before she did?" Mom breathes in dramatically as if the kitchen's filling with Grandma's thick flowery smell. I breathe in dramatically. Jude breathes in dramatically. Everyone in California, the United States, on Earth, breathes in dramatically. Except Dad. He clears his throat. He's not buying it. Because he's an artichoke. This, according to his own mother, Grandma Sweetwine, who never understood how she birthed and raised such a thistle-head. Me neither. A thistle-head who studies *parasites*—no comment. I glance at him with his lifeguard-like tan and muscles, with his glow-in-the-dark teeth, with all his glow-in-the-dark normal, and feel the curdling—because what would happen if he knew? So far Zephyr hasn't blabbed a word. You probably don't know this, because I'm like the only one in the world who does, but a dork is the official name for a whale dick. And a blue whale's dork? Eight feet long. I repeat: EIGHT FEET LOOOOOOONG! This is how I've felt since it happened yesterday: (SELF-PORTRAIT: *The Concrete Dork*) Yeah. But sometimes I think Dad suspects. Sometimes I think the toaster suspects. Jude jostles my leg under the table with her foot to get my attention back from the salt shaker I realize I've been staring down. She nods toward Mom, whose eyes are now closed and whose hands are crossed over her heart. Then toward Dad, who's looking at Mom like her eyebrows have crawled down to her chin. We bulge our eyes at each other. I bite my cheek not to laugh. Jude does too—she and me, we share a laugh switch. Our feet press together under the table. (FAMILY PORTRAIT: *Mom Communes with the Dead at Dinner*) "Well?" Jude prods. "The message?" Mom opens her eyes, winks at us, then closes them and continues in a séance-y woo-woo voice. "So, I breathed in the flowery air and there was a kind of shimmering . . ." She swirls her arms like scarves, milking the moment. This is why she gets the professor of the year award so much—everyone always wants to be in her movie with her. We lean in for her next words, for The Message from Upstairs, but then Dad interrupts, throwing a whole load of boring on the moment. *He's* never gotten the professor of the year award. Not once. No comment. "It's important to let the kids know you mean all this metaphorically, honey," he says, sitting straight up so that his head busts through the ceiling. In most of my drawings, he's so big, I can't fit all of him on the page, so I leave off the head. Mom lifts her eyes, the amusement wiped off her face. "Except I don't mean it metaphorically, Benjamin." Dad used to make Mom's eyes shine; now he makes her grind her teeth. I don't know why. "What I meant quite literally," she says/grinds, "is that the inimitable Grandma Sweetwine, dead and gone, was in the car, sitting next to me, plain as day." She smiles at Jude. "In fact, she was all dressed up in one of her Floating Dresses, looking *spectacular*." The Floating Dress was Grandma's dress line. "Oh! Which one? The blue?" The way Jude asks this makes my chest pang for her. "No, the one with the little orange flowers." "Of course," Jude replies. "Perfect ghost-wear. We discussed what her afterlife attire would be." It occurs to me that Mom's making all this up because Jude can't stop missing Grandma. She hardly left her bedside at the end. When Mom found them that final morning, one asleep, one dead, they were holding hands. I thought this was supremely creepy but kept it to myself. "So . . ." Jude raises an eyebrow. "The message?" "You know what I'd love?" Dad says, huffing and puffing himself back into the conversation so that we're never going to find out what the freaking message is. "What I'd love is if we could finally declare The Reign of Ridiculous over." This, again. The Reign he's referring to began when Grandma moved in. Dad, "a man of science," told us to take every bit of superstitious hogwash that came out of his mother's mouth with a grain of salt. Grandma told us not to listen to her artichoke of a son and to take those grains of salt and throw them right over our left shoulders to blind the devil. Then she took out her "bible"—an enormous leather-bound book stuffed with batshit ideas (aka: hogwash)—and started to preach the gospel. Mostly to Jude. Dad lifts a slice

of pizza off his plate. Cheese dives over the edges. He looks at me. “How about this, huh, Noah? Who’s a little relieved we’re not having one of Grandma’s luck-infused stews?” I remain mum. Sorry, Charlie. I *love* pizza, meaning: Even when I’m in the middle of eating pizza, I wish I were eating pizza, but I wouldn’t jump on Dad’s train even if Michelangelo were on it. He and I don’t get on, though he tends to forget. I never forget. When I hear his big banging voice coming after me to watch the 49ers or some movie where everything gets blown up or to listen to jazz that makes me feel like my body’s on backward, I open my bedroom window, jump out, and head for the trees. Occasionally when no one’s home, I go into his office and break his pencils. Once, after a particularly toilet-licking Noah the Broken Umbrella Talk, when he laughed and said if Jude weren’t my twin he’d be sure I’d come about from parthenogenesis (looked it up: conception without a father), I snuck into the garage while everyone was sleeping and keyed his car. Because I can see people’s souls sometimes when I draw them, I know the following: Mom has a massive sunflower for a soul so big there’s hardly any room in her for organs. Jude and me have one soul between us that we have to share: a tree with its leaves on fire. And Dad has a plate of maggots for his. Jude says to him, “Do you think Grandma didn’t just hear you insult her cooking?” “That would be a resounding no,” Dad replies, then hoovers into the slice. The grease makes his whole mouth gleam. Jude stands. Her hair hangs all around her head like lightcicles. She looks up at the ceiling and declares, “I always loved your cooking, Grandma.” Mom reaches over and squeezes her hand, then says to the ceiling, “Me too, Cassandra.” Jude smiles from the inside out. Dad finger-shoots himself in the head. Mom frowns—it makes her look a hundred years old. “Embrace the mystery, Professor,” she says. She’s always telling Dad this, but she used to say it different. She used to say it like she was opening a door for him to walk through, not closing one in his face. “I married the mystery, Professor,” he answers like always, but it used to sound like a compliment. We all eat pizza. It’s not fun. Mom’s and Dad’s thoughts are turning the air black. I’m listening to myself chew, when Jude’s foot finds mine under the table again. I press back. “The message from Grandma?” she interjects into the tension, smiling hopefully. Dad looks at her and his eyes go soft. She’s his favorite too. Mom doesn’t have a favorite, though, which means the spot is up for grabs. “As I was saying.” This time Mom’s using her normal voice, husky, like a cave’s talking to you. “I was driving by CSA, the fine arts high school, this afternoon and that’s when Grandma swooped in to say what an absolutely perfect fit it would be for you two.” She shakes her head, brightening and becoming her usual age again. “And it really is. I can’t believe it never occurred to me. I keep thinking of that quote by Picasso: ‘Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once one grows up.’” She has the bananas look on her face that happens in museums, like she’s going to steal the art. “But this. This is a chance of a lifetime, guys. I don’t want your spirits to get all tamped down like . . .” She doesn’t finish, combs a hand through her hair—black and bombed-out like mine—turns to Dad. “I really want this for them, Benjamin. I know it’ll be expensive, but what an oppor—” “That’s it?” Jude interrupts. “That’s all Grandma said? That was the message *from the afterlife*? It was about some *school*?” She looks like she might start crying. Not me. Art school? I never imagined such a thing, never imagined I wouldn’t have to go to Roosevelt, to Asshat High with everyone else. I’m pretty sure the blood just started glowing inside my body. (SELF-PORTRAIT: *A Window Flies Open in My Chest*) Mom has the bananas look again. “Not just any school, Jude. A school that will let you shout from the rooftops every single day for four years. Don’t you two want to shout from the rooftops?” “Shout what?” Jude asks. This makes Dad chuckle under his breath in a thistly way. “I don’t know, Di,” he says. “It’s so focused. You forget that for the rest of us, art’s just art, not religion.” Mom picks up a knife and thrusts it into his gut, twists. Dad forges on, oblivious. “Anyway, they’re in seventh grade. High school’s still a ways away.” “I want to go!” I explode. “I don’t want a tamped-down spirit!” I realize these are the first words I’ve uttered outside my head this entire meal. Mom beams at me. He can’t talk her out of this. There are no surfards there, I know it. Probably only kids whose blood glows. Only revolutionaries. Mom says to Dad, “It’ll take them the year to prepare. It’s one of the best fine arts high schools in the country, with topnotch academics as well, no problem there. And it’s right in our backyard!” Her excitement is revving me even more. I might start flapping my arms. “Really difficult to get in. But you two have it. Natural ability and you already know so much.” She smiles at us with so much pride it’s like the sun’s rising over the table. It’s true. Other kids had picture books, we had art

books. “We’ll start museum and gallery visits this weekend. It’ll be great. You two can have drawing contests.” Jude barfs bright blue fluorescent barf all over the table, but I’m the only one who notices. She can draw okay, but it’s different. For me, school only stopped being eight hours of daily stomach surgery when I realized everyone wanted me to sketch them more than they wanted to talk to me or bash my face in. No one ever wanted to bash Jude’s face in. She’s shiny and funny and normal—not a revolutionary—and talks to everybody. I talk to me. And Jude, of course, though mostly silently because that’s how we do it. And Mom because she’s a blow-in. (Quickly, the evidence: So far she hasn’t walked through a wall or picked up the house with her mind or stopped time or anything totally off-the-hook, but there’ve been things. One morning recently, for instance, she was out on the deck like usual drinking her tea and when I got closer I saw that she’d floated up into the air. At least that’s how it looked to me. And the clincher: She doesn’t have parents. She’s a foundling! She was just left in some church in Reno, Nevada, as a baby. Hello? Left by *them*.) Oh, and I also talk to Rascal next door, who, for all intents and purposes, is a horse, but yeah right. Hence, Bubble. Really, most of the time, I feel like a hostage. Dad puts his elbows on the table. “Dianna, take a few steps back. I really think you’re projecting. Old dreams die—” Mom doesn’t let him say another word. The teeth are grinding like mad. She looks like she’s holding in a dictionary of bad words or a nuclear war. “Noah and Jude, take your plates and go into the den. I need to talk to your father.” “We don’t move. “Noah and Jude, now.” “Jude, Noah,” Dad says. I grab my plate and I’m glued to Jude’s heels out of there. She reaches a hand back for me and I take it. I notice then that her dress is as colorful as a clownfish. Grandma taught her to make her clothes. Oh! I hear our neighbor’s new parrot, Prophet, through the open window. “Where the hell is Ralph?” he squawks. “Where the hell is Ralph?” It’s the only thing he says, and he says it 24/7. No one knows who, forget where, Ralph is. “Goddamn stupid parrot!” Dad shouts with so much force all our hair blows back. “He doesn’t mean it,” I say to Prophet in my head only to realize I’ve said it out loud. Sometimes words fly out of my mouth like warty frogs. I begin to explain to Dad that I was talking to the bird but stop because that won’t go over well, and instead, out of my mouth comes a weird bleating sound, which makes everyone except Jude look at me funny. We spring for the door. A moment later we’re on the couch. We don’t turn on the TV, so we can eavesdrop, but they’re speaking in angry whispers, impossible to decipher. After sharing my slice bite for bite because Jude forgot her plate, she says, “I thought Grandma would tell us something awesome in her message. Like if heaven has an ocean, you know?” I lean back into the couch, relieved to be just with Jude. I never feel like I’ve been taken hostage when it’s just us. “Oh yeah it does, most definitely it has an ocean, only it’s purple, and the sand is blue and the sky is hella green.” She smiles, thinks for a moment, then says, “And when you’re tired, you crawl into your flower and go to sleep. During the day, everyone talks in colors instead of sounds. It’s so quiet.” She closes her eyes, says slowly, “When people fall in love, they burst into flames.” Jude loves that one—it was one of Grandma’s favorites. We used to play this with her when we were little. “Take me away!” she’d say, or sometimes, “Get me the hell out of here, kids!” When Jude opens her eyes, all the magic is gone from her face. She sighs. “What?” I ask. “I’m not going to that school. Only aliens go there.” “Aliens?” “Yeah, freaks. California School of the Aliens, that’s what people call it.” Oh man, oh man, thank you, Grandma. Dad has to cave. I have to get in. Freaks who make art! I’m so happy, I feel like I’m jumping on a trampoline, just boinging around inside myself. Not Jude. She’s all gloomy now. To make her feel better I say, “Maybe Grandma saw your flying women and that’s why she wants us to go.” Three coves down, Jude’s been making them out of the wet sand. The same ones she’s always doing out of mashed potatoes or Dad’s shaving cream or whatever when she thinks no one’s looking. From the bluff, I’ve been watching her build these bigger sand versions and know she’s trying to talk to Grandma. I can always tell what’s in Jude’s head. It’s not as easy for her to tell what’s in mine, though, because I have shutters and I close them whenever I have to. Like lately. (SELF-PORTRAIT: *The Boy Hiding Inside the Boy Hiding Inside the Boy*) “I don’t think those are art. Those are . . .” She doesn’t finish. “It’s because of you, Noah. And you should stop following me down the beach. What if I were kissing someone?” “Who?” I’m only two hours thirty-seven minutes and thirteen seconds younger than Jude, but she always makes me feel like I’m her little brother. I hate it. “Who would you be kissing? Did you kiss someone?” “I’ll tell you if you tell me what happened yesterday. I know

something did and that's why we couldn't walk to school the normal way this morning." I didn't want to see Zephyr or Fry. The high school is next to the middle school. I don't ever want to see them again. Jude touches my arm. "If someone did something to you or said something, tell me." She's trying to get in my mind, so I close the shutters. Fast, slam them right down with me on one side, her on the other. This isn't like the other horror shows: The time she punched the boulder-come-to-life Michael Stein in the face last year during a soccer game for calling me a retard just because I got distracted by a supremely cool anthill. Or the time I got caught in a rip and she and Dad had to drag me out of the ocean in front of a whole beach of surfers. This is different. This secret is like having hot burning coals under my bare feet all the time. I rise up from the couch to get away from any potential telepathy—when the yelling reaches us. It's loud, like the house might break in two. Same as the other times lately. I sink back down. Jude looks at me. Her eyes are the lightest glacier blue; I use mostly white when I draw them. Normally they make you feel floaty and think of puffy clouds and hear harps, but right now they look just plain scared. Everything else has been forgotten. (PORTRAIT: *Mom and Dad with Screeching Tea Kettles for Heads*) When Jude speaks, she sounds like she did when she was little, her voice made of tinsel. "Do you really think that's why Grandma wants us to go to that school? Because she saw my flying sand women?" "I do," I say, lying. I think she was right the first time. I think it's because of me. She scoots over so we're shoulder to shoulder. This is us. Our pose. The smush. It's even how we are in the ultrasound photo they took of us inside Mom and how I had us in the picture Fry ripped up yesterday. Unlike most everyone else on earth, from the very first cells of us, we were together, we came here together. This is why no one hardly notices that Jude does most of the talking for both of us, why we can only play piano with all four of our hands on the keyboard and not at all alone, why we can never do Rochambeau because not once in thirteen years have we chosen differently. It's always: two rocks, two papers, two scissors. When I don't draw us like this, I draw us as half-people. The calm of the smush floods me. She breathes in and I join her. Maybe we're too old to still do this, but whatever. I can see her smiling even though I'm looking straight ahead. We exhale together, then inhale together, exhale, inhale, in and out, out and in, until not even the trees remember what happened in the woods yesterday, until Mom's and Dad's voices turn from mad to music, until we're not only one age, but one complete and whole person. • • • A week later, everything changes. It's Saturday, and Mom, Jude, and I are in the city at the museum's rooftop café because Mom won the argument and we're both going to apply to CSA in a year. Across the table, Jude's talking to Mom and at the same time sending me secret silent death threats because she thinks my drawings came out better than hers and we're having a contest. Mom's the judge. And fine, maybe I shouldn't have tried to fix Jude's for her. She's sure I was trying to ruin them. No comment. She eye-rolls at me on the sly. It's a 6.3 on the Richter scale. I think about giving her a dead leg under the table but resist. Instead, I drink some hot chocolate and covertly spy on a group of older guys to my left. As far as my eight-foot concrete dork goes, still no fallout except in my mind: (SELF-PORTRAIT: *Boy Gets Fed Piece by Piece to a Swarm of Fire Ants*). But maybe Zephyr's really not going to tell anyone. The guys at the next table all have rubber plugs in their earlobes and studs in their eyebrows and are joking around with each other like otters. They probably go to CSA, I think, and the thought makes my whole body thrum. One of them has a moon face with blue saucer eyes and a bursting red mouth, the kind Renoir paints. I love those mouths. I'm doing a quick sketch of his face with my finger on my pants under the table when he catches me staring and instead of glaring at me so I'll mind my beeswax, he winks at me, slowly, so there's no mistaking it, then returns his attention to his friends as I go from solid to liquid mass. He winked at me. Like he *knows*. But it doesn't feel bad. Not at all. In fact, I wish I could stop smiling, and now, oh wow—he's looking this way again and smiling too. My face is starting to boil. I try to focus in on Mom and Jude. They're talking about Grandma's batshit bible. Again. How it's like an encyclopedia of odd beliefs, Mom's saying. How Grandma collected ideas from everywhere, everyone, even left the bible open on the counter next to the cash register in her dress shop so all her customers could write in their batshit hogwash too. "On the very last page," Mom tells Jude, "it says in case of her untimely death, it becomes yours." "Mine?" She throws me her smuggest look. "Just mine?" She's all gift-wrapped now. Whatever. Like I even want some bible. Mom says, "I quote, 'This good book is bequeathed to my granddaughter, Jude



Sweetwine, the last remaining bearer of The Sweetwine Gift.” I barf bright green barf all over the table. Grandma Sweetwine decided Jude had The Sweetwine Gift of Intuition when she discovered Jude could do the flower tongue. We were four years old. After, Jude spent days with me in front of a mirror, pressing her finger into my tongue, again and again, trying to teach me so I could have The Sweetwine Gift too. But it was useless. My tongue could flip and curl, but it couldn’t blossom. I look back over at the table of otters. They’re packing up to leave. Winking Moon Face swings a backpack over his shoulder and then mouths *bye* to me. I swallow and look down and burst into flames. Then start mind-drawing him from memory. When I tune back in minutes later, Mom’s telling Jude that unlike Grandma Sweetwine, she’d haunt us flamboyantly and persistently, no quick visits in the car for her. “I’d be the kind of ghost that interferes with everything.” She’s laughing her rumbly laugh and her hands are twirling around in the air. “I’m too controlling. You’d never be rid of me! Never!” She bwah-ha-ha’s at us. What’s weird is that she looks like she’s in a windstorm all of a sudden. Her hair’s blowing and her dress is slightly billowing. I check under the table to see if there’s a vent or something, but there isn’t. See? Other mothers don’t have their own private weather. She’s smiling at us so warmly, like we’re puppies, and something catches in my chest. I shutter myself in while they talk more specifically about what kind of ghost Mom would make. If Mom died, the sun would go out. Period. Instead, I think about today. How I went around from painting to painting asking each to eat me and each did. How my skin fit the whole time, didn’t once bunch up at my ankles or squeeze my head into a pin. Mom’s drum roll on the table brings me back. “So, let’s see those sketchbooks,” she says, excited. I did four pastel drawings from the permanent collection—a Chagall, a Franz Marc, and two Picassos. I picked those because I could tell the paintings were looking at me as hard as I was looking at them. She’d said not to feel like we had to copy exactly. I didn’t copy at all. I shook up the originals in my head and let them out all covered in me. “I’ll go first,” I say, shoving my book into Mom’s hands. Jude’s eye-roll is a 7.2 on the Richter this time, causing the whole building to sway. I don’t care, I can’t wait. Something happened when I was drawing today. I think my eyes got swapped for better ones. I want Mom to notice. I watch her page through slowly, then put on the granny glasses that hang around her neck and go through the drawings again, *and then again*. At one point she looks up at me like I’ve turned into a star-nosed mole and then goes back to it. All the café sounds: The voices, the whirring of the espresso machine, the clink and clatter of glasses and dishes go silent as I watch her index finger hover over each part of the page. I’m seeing through her eyes and what I’m seeing is this: They’re good. I start to get a rocket launch feeling. I’m totally going to get into CSA! And I still have a whole year to make sure of it. I already asked Mr. Grady, the art teacher, to teach me to mix oils after school and he said yes. When I think Mom’s finally done, she goes back to the beginning and starts again. She can’t stop! Her face is being swarmed by happiness. Oh, I’m reeling around in here. Until I’m under siege. A psychic air raid discharging from Jude. (PORTRAIT: *Green with Envy*) Skin: lime. Hair: chartreuse. Eyes: forest. All of her: green, green, green. I watch her open a packet of sugar, spill some on the table, then press a fingerprint of the crystals into the cover of her sketchbook. Hogwash from Grandma’s bible for good luck. I feel a coiling in my stomach. I should grab my sketchbook out of Mom’s hands already, but I don’t. I can’t. Every time Grandma S. read Jude’s and my palms, she’d tell us that we have enough jealousy in our lines to ruin our lives ten times over. I know she’s right about this. When I draw Jude and me with see-through skin, there are always rattlesnakes in our bellies. I only have a few. Jude had seventeen at last count. Finally, Mom closes my book and hands it back to me. She says to us, “Contests are silly. Let’s spend our Saturdays for the next year appreciating art and learning craft. Sound good, guys?” Before even opening Jude’s sketchbook, she says this. Mom picks up her hot chocolate but doesn’t drink. “Unbelievable,” she says, shaking her head slowly. Has she forgotten Jude’s book altogether? “I see a Chagall sensibility with a Gauguin palette, but the point of view seems wholly your own at the same time. And you’re so young. It’s extraordinary, Noah. Just extraordinary.” (SELF-PORTRAIT: *Boy Dives into a Lake of Light*) “Really?” I whisper. “Really,” she says seriously. “I’m stunned.” Something in her face is different—it’s like a curtain’s been parted in the middle of it. I sneak a glance at Jude. I can tell she’s crumpled up in a corner of herself, just like I do in emergencies. There’s a crawlspace in me that no one can get to, no matter what. I had no idea she had one too. Mom doesn’t notice. Usually she notices everything.

But she's sitting there not noticing anything, like she's dreaming right in front of us. Finally she snaps out of it, but it's too late. "Jude, honey, let's see that book, can't wait to see what you've come up with." "That's okay," Jude says in the tinsely voice, her book already buried deep in her bag. Jude and I play a lot of games. Her favorites are *How Would You Rather Die?* (Jude: freeze, me: burn) and *The Drowning Game*. The *Drowning Game* goes like this: If Mom and Dad were drowning, who would we save first? (Me: Mom, duh. Jude: depends on her mood.) And there's the other variation: If we were drowning, who would Dad save first? (Jude.) For thirteen years, Mom's stumped us. We had absolutely no idea who she'd dredge out of the water first. Until now. And without sharing a glance, we both know it. Jude 3 years later Here I am. Standing next to my sculpture in the studio at CSA with a four-leaf clover in my pocket. I spent all morning on hands and knees in a clover patch outside school, all for nothing—it was picked clean. But then, eureka! I super-glued a fourth leaf onto an ordinary old three-leafer, wrapped it in cellophane, and slipped it into my sweatshirt pocket right beside the onion. I'm a bit of a bible thumper. Other people have the Gideon, I have Grandma Sweetwine's. Some sample passages: *A person in possession of a four-leaf clover is able to thwart all sinister influences* (Art school is rife with sinister influences. Especially today—not only is it my critique day, I have a meeting with my advisor and I might be expelled.) *To avoid serious illness, keep an onion in your pocket* (Check. Can't be too careful.) *If a boy gives a girl an orange, her love for him will multiply* (Jury's out. No boy has ever given me an orange.) *The feet of ghosts never touch the ground* (We'll get to this. Soon.) The bell rings. And there they are. The other clay second-years. Every last one of them ready to suffocate me with a pillow. Oops, I mean: staring dumbfounded at my sculpture. The assignment was to do another self-portrait. I went abstract, as in: blob. Degas had dancers, I have blobs. Broken, glued-together blobs. This is my eighth. "What's working here?" asks Sandy Ellis, master ceramicist, clay instructor, and my advisor. The way he begins every critique. No one says a word. The proper California School of the Aliens feedback sandwich starts and ends with praise—in between, people say the terrible things they really think. I scan the room without moving my head. The sophomore clay crew is a pretty good sampling of the CSA student body: freak-flags of every variety flying proud and loud. Normal run-of-the-mill people like me—except for a few discreet tics, sure, who doesn't have something?—are the exception. I know what you're thinking. It's Noah who belongs at this school, not me. Sandy peers at the class over his round, tinted spectacles. Usually everyone jumps right in, but the only sound in the studio is the electric hum of the fluorescent lights. I study the time on Mom's old watch—she was wearing it when her car sailed off the cliff two years ago, killing her on impact—as it ticks around my wrist. *Rain in December brings with it an unforeseen funeral* (It rained most of the December before she died.) "C'mon guys, positive impressions of *Broken Me-Blob No. 8?*" Sandy slowly strokes his straggly beard. If we all morphed into our mirror animals (a game Noah made me play constantly when we were little), Sandy would poof into a billy goat. "We've been talking about point of view," he says. "Let's discuss CJ's, shall we?" CJ, short for Calamity Jane/Jude, is what everyone at school calls me on account of my "bad luck." It's not just breakage in the kiln. Last year, in pottery studio, some of my bowls allegedly took flying leaps off the shelves at night when no one was around, when the windows were all closed, when the closest earthquake was in Indonesia. The night janitor was confounded. Everyone was but me. Caleb Cartwright raises both hands in a gesture that further clinches his mime thing: black turtleneck, black skinny jeans, black eyeliner, black bowler hat. He's actually quite hot in an arty cabaret kind of way, not that I've noticed. The boy boycott's on. I come fully equipped with boy-blinders and failsafe invisibility uniform: *To disappear into thin air: Cut off three feet of blond curls and shove remaining hair into a black skullcap. Keep tattoo tucked away where no one can see it. Wear only oversized hoodies, oversized jeans, and sneakers. Stay quiet.* (Occasionally, I write a bible passage of my own.) Caleb scans the room. "I'll just say it for everyone, okay?" He pauses, taking great care to find the perfect words to throw me overboard. "It's impossible to critique CJ's work because it's *always* mangled, glued together like this. I mean, we're talking serious Humpty Dumpty every time." I imagine myself in a meadow. This is what the school counselor told me to do when I feel mental, or as Grandma used to say: minus some buttons. And if anyone

was wondering: DIY four-leaf clovers have no juice. “Well, what does that say in and of itself?” Sandy asks the class. Randall “no offense, but” Brown starts to sputter. He’s this all-star a-hole who believes he can say the most offensive things imaginable in critique if he precedes them with “No offense, but.” I’d like to bean him with a tranquilizer dart. “It would say a lot more, Sandy, if it were intentional.” He looks at me. Here it comes. “I mean, CJ, *no offense, but* it’s got to be that you’re fundamentally careless. The only *rational* explanation for so much breakage in the kiln is that you don’t knead your clay enough or let your work dry evenly.” Nail on the head. Bingo. Pop goes the weasel. Sometimes explanations are *not* rational. Strange things happen. And if we were allowed to talk when our work was being critiqued, and if I could get a signed affidavit from someone very high up, like God for instance, that I wouldn’t be locked away for the rest of my life, then I’d say, “Doesn’t anyone else have a dead mother angry enough at them to rise from the grave and break their artwork?” Then they’d understand what I’m up against. “Randall brings up a good point,” Sandy says. “Does intentionality matter in our experience and appreciation of art? If CJ’s final sculpture is in pieces, does her original conception of wholeness even matter? Is it about the journey or the destination, so to speak?” The whole class hums like a happy hive at this and Sandy launches them into a theoretical discussion about whether the artist even matters after the art has been created. I’d rather think about pickles. “Me too—kosher dills, big fat juicy ones. Mmm. Mmm. Mmm,” whispers Grandma Sweetwine in my head. She’s dead like Mom, but unlike Mom, who just breaks things, Grandma’s vocal and often visible. She’s the good cop of my ghost world; Mom, the bad. I try to keep my face blank as she continues. “Ho, dee, hum, what a snooze. And really, that’s a highly unattractive thing you’ve made. Why all this beating around the bush? Why don’t they tell you better luck next time and move on to their next victim like that fella there with the bananas springing out of his head.” “Those are blond dreadlocks, Grandma,” I tell her in my mind, careful not to move my mouth. “I say you make a run for it, dear.” “I’m with you.” Those discreet tics? I confess, maybe not so discreet. But, for the record: Twenty-two percent of the world’s population sees ghosts—that’s over one and a half billion people worldwide. (Professors as parents. Mad research skills.) While the theoretical clone-drone continues, I amuse myself by playing: How Would You Rather Die? I’m the reigning champion of this game. It’s not as simple as it seems, because making the deaths on either side of the equation comparably frightful takes enormous skill. For instance: eating fistful after fistful of crushed glass *or*—I’m interrupted because to my surprise and everyone else’s as well, Fish (no last name) has raised her hand. Fish’s a mute like me, so this is something. “CJ has good technique,” she says, her tongue stud flashing like a star in her mouth. “I propose it’s a ghost that’s breaking her work.” Everyone hardy-har-hars at this, including Sandy. I’m floored. She wasn’t joking, I can tell. She meets my eyes, then lifts her wrist and gives it a subtle shake. On it is a cool punky charm bracelet that perfectly matches the rest of her: purple hair, tattoo sleeves, acid attitude. Then I recognize the charms: three pieces of ruby red sea glass, two four-leaf clovers in plastic, and a handful of sand-dollar birds, all strung together with black ratty leather. Wow. I hadn’t realized I’d snuck so much luck into her bag, into her smock pockets. She just always seems so sad under all the ghoulish makeup. But how did she know it was me? Do the rest know too? Like that jittery new kid? Definitely minus some buttons. Been slipping him sand-dollar birds galore. But Fish’s dead ringer of a pronouncement and bracelet are the lone fireworks. For the rest of the hour, one by one, the others skewer *Broken Me-Blob No. 8* and I become more and more aware of my hands, which are in a white-knuckled clasp in front of me. They feel itchy. Very itchy. Finally, I unclasp them and try to examine them on the down low. No sign of a bite or rash. I search for a red spot that might indicate necrotizing fasciitis, more commonly referred to as flesh-eating disease, which I read *all* about in one of Dad’s medical journals—Okay, got it: How Would You Rather Die? Eating handful after handful of crushed glass, or a whopping case of necrotizing fasciitis? The voice of Felicity Stiles—signifying the end is nigh!—pulls me out of this brain-squeezing conundrum where I’m leaning toward eating the glass. “Can I do the closing, Sandy?” she asks like she always does. She has this gorgeous lilting South Carolinian accent that she uses to give a sermon at the end of every critique. She’s like a flower that talks—an evangelical daffodil. Fish covertly mimes a dagger going into her chest. I smile at her and brace myself. “I just think it’s sad,” Felicity says, then pauses until the room is hers, which doesn’t take more than a second because she doesn’t only sound like a daffodil,

she looks and acts like one too and we all become human sighs around her. She holds her hand out to my blob. "I can feel the pain of the *whole wide world* in this piece." It takes a full rotation of that world for her to drawl out all those *Ws*. "Because we are all broken. I mean, aren't we now? I am. The *whole wide world* is. We try to do our best and this is what happens, time and time again. That's what all CJ's work says to me, and it makes me really, really sad." She faces me directly. "I understand how unhappy you are, CJ. I *really* do." Her eyes are huge, swallowing. Oh, how I hate art school. She raises a fisted hand and clutches it to her chest, then beats it three times, saying, "I. Understand. You." I can't help it. I'm nodding back at her like a fellow flower, when the table beneath *Broken Me-Blob No. 8* gives way and my self-portrait tumbles to the floor and shatters into pieces. Again. "That's cold," I tell Mom in my mind. "You see," Fish declares. "A ghost." This time nobody hardy-har-hars. Caleb shakes his head: "No way." Randall: "What the hell?" Tell me about it, countrymen. Unlike Casper and Grandma S., Mom is not a friendly ghost. Sandy's under the table. "A screw fell out," he says in disbelief. I get the broom I keep at my station for such occasions and sweep up broken *Broken Me-Blob No. 8* while everyone mutters about how unlucky I am. I empty the pieces into a trashcan. After the remains of my self-portrait, I toss in the useless DIY-clover. I'm thinking maybe Sandy will feel sorry for me and postpone our big meeting until after winter break, which starts tomorrow, when he mouths at me *My office*, and gestures toward the door. I cross the studio. *Always walk right foot first to avert calamity,*

*which comes at you from the left* • • I'm sunk into a giant plush leather chair across from Sandy. He's just apologized about the screw falling out and joked that maybe Fish was right about that ghost, eh, CJ? Chuckling politely here at the absurd notion. His fingers are piano-ing on the desk. Neither of us is speaking. I'm fine with this. To his left is a life-size print of Michelangelo's *David*, so vivid in the fragile afternoon light that I keep expecting his chest to heave as he claims his first breath. Sandy follows my gaze over his shoulder to the magnificent stone man. "Helluva biography your mother wrote," he says, breaking the silence. "Fearless in her examination of his sexuality. Deserved every bit of acclaim it got." He takes off his glasses and rests them on the desk. "Talk to me, CJ." I glance out the window at the long stretch of beach buried in fog. "A white-out's coming for sure," I say. One of the town of Lost Cove's claims to fame is how often it disappears. "Do you know that some native peoples believe fog contains the restless spirits of the dead?" From Grandma's bible. "Is that right?" He strokes his beard, transporting flecks of clay from his hand to it. "That's interesting, but right now we need to talk about you. This is a very serious situation." I think I *was* talking about me. Silence prevails once again . . . and I've decided to eat the crushed glass. Final answer. Sandy sighs. Because I'm disturbing him? I disturb people, I've noticed. Didn't used to. "Look, I know it's been an extraordinarily hard time for you, CJ." He's searching my face with his kind billy goat eyes. It's excruciating. "And we pretty much gave you a free pass last year because of the tragic circumstances." He has on The Poor Motherless Girl Look—all adults get it at some point when they talk to me, like I'm doomed, shoved out of the airplane without a parachute because mothers *are* the parachutes. I drop my gaze, notice a fatal melanoma on his arm, see his life pass before my eyes, then realize with relief it's a dot of clay. "But CSA is a tight ship," he says more sternly. "Not passing a studio is grounds for expulsion, and we decided to just put you on probation." He leans forward. "It's not all the breakage in the kiln. That happens. Granted, it seems to always happen to you, which calls into question your technique and focus, but it's the way you've isolated yourself and your clear lack of investment that deeply concern us. You must know there are young artists all around the country banging on our doors for a spot, for *your* very spot." I think how much Noah deserves my spot. Isn't that what Mom's ghost is telling me by breaking everything I make? I know it is. I take a breath and then I say it. "Let them have my spot. Really, they deserve it. I don't." I lift my head, look in his stunned eyes. "I don't belong here, Sandy." "I see," he says. "Well, you might feel that way, but the CSA faculty think differently. *I* think differently." He picks up his glasses, begins cleaning them with his clay-splattered shirt, making them dirtier. "There was something so unique in those women you made out of sand, the ones that were part of your admission portfolio." Huh? He closes his eyes for a moment like he's listening to distant music. "They were so joyful, so whimsical. So much motion, so much emotion." What's he talking about? "Sandy, I submitted dress patterns and sample

dresses I made. I talked about the sand sculptures in my essay.” “Yes, I remember the essay. And I remember the dresses. Lovely. Too bad we don’t have a fashion focus. But the reason you’re sitting in that chair is because of the photographs of those wonderful sculptures.” There are no photographs of those sculptures. Okay then, feeling a little light-headed here in this episode of *The Twilight Zone*. Because no one ever even saw them. I made sure of it, always sneaking far down the beach to an isolated cove, the tide taking them away . . . except Noah did tell me once, no, twice actually, that he followed me and watched me build. But did he take pictures? And send them to CSA? Nothing could seem less likely. When he found out I got in and he didn’t, he destroyed everything he’d ever made. Not even a doodle remains. He hasn’t picked up a pencil, pastel, stick of charcoal, or paintbrush since. I glance up at Sandy, who’s rapping his knuckles on the desk. Wait, did he just say my sand sculptures were wonderful? I think he did. When he sees I’m listening again, he stops knuckle-rapping and continues. “I know we inundate you with lots of theory your first two years here, but let’s you and me get back to basics. One simple question, CJ. Isn’t there anything you want to make anymore? You’ve been through so much for someone so young. Isn’t there something you want to say? Something you *need* to say?” He’s gotten very serious and intense. “Because that’s what all this is about. Nothing else. We wish with our hands, that’s what we do as artists.” His words are loosening something inside. I don’t like it. “Think about it,” he says more gently. “I’m going to ask again. Is there something you need in the world that only your two hands can create?” I feel a searing pain in my chest. “Is there, CJ?” he insists. There is. But it’s off limits. Imagining that meadow now. “No,” I say. He grimaces. “I don’t believe you.” “There’s nothing,” I say, holding my hands together as tight as I can in my lap. “Nada. Zip.” He shakes his head, disappointed. “Okay then.” I gaze up at *David* . . . “CJ, where are you?” “Here, I’m here. Sorry.” I turn my attention back to him. He’s clearly upset. Why? Why does he care so much? Like he said, there are young artists all around the country dying for my spot. “We need to talk to your father,” he says. “You’d be giving up an opportunity of a lifetime. Is this really what you want?” My eyes drift back to *David*. It’s like he’s made of light. What I want? I want only one thing—Then it’s as if *David*’s jumped off the wall and swooped me into his massive stone arms and is whispering into my ear. He reminds me that Michelangelo made him over *five hundred* years ago. “Do you really want to transfer out?” “No!” The vehemence in my voice surprises us both. “I need to work in stone.” I point to *David*. An idea’s exploding inside me. “There *is* something I need to make,” I tell him. I feel wild, like I’m gulping for air. “Badly.” I’ve wanted to make it since I got here, but I couldn’t bear it if Mom broke it. Just couldn’t bear it. “This pleases me to no end,” Sandy says, clasping his hands together. “But it can’t be built in clay. No kiln,” I say. “It has to be stone.” “Much more resilient,” he says, smiling. He gets it. Well, part of it. “Exactly,” I say. She will not be able to break this so easily! And more importantly, she’s not going to want to. *I’m* going to dazzle her. I’m going to *communicate* with her. This is the way. “I’m so sorry, Jude,” she’ll whisper in my ear. “I had no idea you had it in you.” And then just maybe she’ll forgive me. I don’t realize Sandy’s been talking, oblivious of the music swelling, of the mother-daughter reconciliation that’s occurring in my head. I try to focus. “The problem is, with Ivan in Italy for the year, there’s no one in the department to help you. If you wanted to work in clay and cast in bronze I could—” “No, it’s got to be stone, the harder the better, granite even.” This is genius. He laughs, back to his mellow goat-grazing-in-a-field self. “Maybe, hmm, maybe . . . if you’re okay with mentoring with someone outside of school?” “Sure.” You kidding? Bonus. Sandy’s stroking his beard, thinking. And thinking. “What is it?” I ask. “Well, there is someone.” Sandy raises his eyebrows. “A master carver. One of the last ones standing perhaps. But no, I don’t think it’s possible.” He pushes the idea away with his hand. “He doesn’t teach anymore. Doesn’t exhibit. Something happened to him. No one knows what the deal is, and even before all this, he wasn’t the most . . . hmm, how shall I put it?” He looks up at the ceiling, finds the word there: “Human.” He laughs, starts digging around in a pile of magazines on his desk. “An extraordinary sculptor and a helluva speaker. I heard him when I was in grad school, amazing, he—” “If not human, what?” I interrupt, intrigued. “Actually . . .” He smiles at me. “I think your mother said it best.” “My mother?” I don’t even need to have The Sweetwine Gift to know this is a sign. “Yes, your mother wrote about him in *Art Tomorrow*. Funny. I was just looking at the interview the other day.” He flips through a few issues of the magazine Mom used to write for, but doesn’t find it. “Oh well,” he says, giving

up. He leans back in his chair. "Let me think . . . what were her words? Oh yes, yes, she said, 'He was the kind of man who walks into a room and all the walls fall down.'" *Revue de presse*  
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