Sleepover

**1**

Melanie is tall for her age, 4 feet 3 inches, but she has remarkably small feet, a children’s size 10. Melanie pays the other kids in her second-grade class in chewing gum so she can keep the class bunny, Wilson, at her house every week.

Melanie had her first boyfriend when she was only three, and her favorite thing to do is dress her Barbies up in costumes made of tape and construction paper and make them perform original musicals about mermaids or macaroni and cheese.

Annie is tiny with bobbed auburn hair. Her mother calls it a pixie cut, and she calls Annie her little peanut. Annie doesn’t like eating peanuts, but she likes being called peanut, because she likes that she is tiny.

**2**

Melanie’s house is the best for sleepovers, because of the bunny, and because she has one of those big gray sectional couches, the kind that cover the entire living room floor and that are like two big comfy beds pushed together. Melanie and Annie always sleep on the couch with their heads slightly touching, in the corner where the sections come together, in the corner where they come together. Tonight, “Thumbelina” is playing on the TV.

**3**

Annie has never had a boyfriend. She is only eight years old, and her mother has told her that eight is much too young to be thinking about boys. Her mother has told her that it is inappropriate at her age to be thinking about boys, that good girls don’t want to kiss boys. The problem is, Annie does want to kiss boys.

**4**

Let’s pretend, says Annie. Let’s play princesses. Melanie soon takes over.

What’s your princess name? Melanie asks.

I don’t know. You choose.

My name is Princess Isabella. Then: what if you weren’t a princess?

Why wouldn’t I be a princess?

What if you were a prince?

But I’m a girl.

You can pretend you’re a boy.

Why would I pretend I’m a boy?

So we can make believe falling in love.

I guess so, Annie says. She can never say no to Melanie.

**5**

We’re married now, Prince Thomas. Now you must kiss me.

Annie does not know how to respond. Melanie is looking at her, daring her to do it. Annie is nervous and so is Melanie, but Melanie is always the one who starts things and anyway it is her house so she is in charge of the games, per their rules, so she hides her anxiety behind a laugh, and says, my Prince, you are shy, I guess I will have to give *you* a kiss*.* Annie is about to speak, perhaps to protest, but Melanie closes her eyes and bends her body toward Annie.

**6**

Is that what love is like? Annie asks, feeling that kissing is not all it is cracked up to be.

Melanie says: We need to kiss like they do in the movies.

How do we do it?

You have to open your mouth. And stick out your tongue.

**7**

It’s our wedding night, Melanie says.

What does that mean?

It means we lay down together.

Since Melanie is usually the one to start things and because it is her house, she lays down on the couch and Annie lies down next to her. They don’t say anything, for awhile. Now what? Melanie inches her hand toward that place between Annie’s legs that her mother says is bad to touch and inappropriate even to think about, but that both know feels remarkable and warm and fizzly and soft and soothing and magical when you touch it. And then something strange happens, that something strange and wonderful that she has felt alone, in the dark, on the nights when she feels especially sad or lost, that always makes her feel better, that always makes her feel guilty and dirty. She feels the familiar tension and then release in her body and then she is scared, and she is panting and she feels like crying but also she feels like kissing Melanie again. And then the only thing in her head is the face of her mother, glaring down at her past stern crossed arms.

Except, says Melanie, I was supposed to be the Princess, and you were supposed to be the Prince.

**8**

Melanie’s house is the best for sleepovers. Melanie’s parents are the heaviest sleepers.

Unity Day

Based on a true story

*(lights up on three groups of teenagers sitting in three different circles on the stage, each circle containing eleven people. There is a small, folded slip of paper in front of each person. A green construction paper tree has been taped up to the back wall of the stage.)*

BETSY

*(Betsy is in the very center of the centermost circle. She is the president of Oak Ridge High School’s graduating class of 2013. She says:)*

And now, let us take hands.

Each of you has chosen a piece of paper at random from the tree of love and communal joy pasted on the back wall. Every one of these pieces of paper, which now rest in front of you, encloses a secret that one of your classmates has anonymously written down.

Each of these secrets is meaningful and important, regardless of how trivial they might sound. Secrets are often secrets because of the stigma that is attached to them. Written in front of you folded in these papers are the words we all feel like we cannot say, because we might be judged, we might get hurt, we might get in trouble or we might feel embarrassed. This is a safe space for all of us. Remember to honor the secret you have in front of you, and to honor the person who wrote it down for your eyes only by being respectful and understanding of the information they have chosen to share with you.

Secrets eat away at our insides. Give your secret to whoever has your paper, trust that they will keep it for you, so that the burden is no longer wholly yours. We all have secrets. This is a human trait, which binds us all together, no matter who we hang out with, what we wear, what music we listen to or what neighborhood we come from or what our skin color is.

You may let go of each other’s hands now. Please open your piece of paper, and take a moment to read the secret that is written.

*(each person opens their paper and reads)*

I slept with my best friend’s boyfriend last year, and she still doesn’t know about it. They are also still together.

I masturbate at school.

I kissed my cousin.

I sneak jars of peanut butter under my bed and eat straight from them with my fingers in the middle of the night.

I don’t believe in God.

I love popping zits. Anyone’s zits.

I sleep naked.

I lost my virginity when I was twelve.

I am still a virgin.

I am anorexic.

I am the kid who sticks their gum under the desk.

My father is dying, and it’s all my fault.

I killed a rabbit with a Swiss army knife in the park behind my house when I was 5.

I was raped.

He banged my head against the bathroom floor and called me a pussy.

No one would help me.

I am gay.

I hate wearing thongs, but I do anyway.

I wear a girdle and a push-up bra every single day, sometimes even to bed.

I like the smell of vagina.

I hate playing football.

I like to read.

I have six toes.

I have too many secrets.

I don’t have any secrets.

I have no secrets.

I am in love with you.

I’ve never been kissed.

I think this whole secret tree thing is stupid, and I think this whole Unity Day thing is stupid and I don’t know why my teacher even chose me to come here. It’s not like we are going to leave here and be friends for the rest of high school.

I hate most of these people, and most of these people hate me.

No one would care if I told them my secret.

My secret is a secret.

The Camping Trip

Based on a true story

I am sitting on a patch of old carpet that is the color of oatmeal and, based on the smell, is molding slightly. Directly to my left there is a side table, and on top of this side table is a plastic doll wearing a hand-crocheted Pepto-pink dress, and next to her, there is a lamp with a hand-made shade that looks exactly like the doll’s skirt. Just five minutes ago, that lamp began sputtering and flickering, and then flashing violently, until finally the light bulb burst, and shattered, and the light went out. It was the only light in the room. That is why we have lit many emergency candles. I am surrounded by these candles. And just as we lit the first one, I would swear that I saw that doll’s eyes roll back into her head for just a moment before rolling back out to stare intently, unforgiving, at me.

To my right is an old patchwork sofa with half its stuffing missing and the other half spilling out from the millions of tears that line the fabric. In front of me is the old wood-burning stove that hasn’t worked for years but that will still burn your hand if you touch it – burns it so bad it leaves blisters – and a dirty window covered with cobwebs and lace curtains. And behind me, with their rough hands firmly bracing my bare shoulders, are two women. Both of these women are frightfully tall, and their hair is almost as long as they are. They aren’t allowed to cut their hair. I have short hair, which is part of why I am here on the floor.

Sister Debbie and Sister Barbara, that is what they prefer to be called but I just call them Debbie and Barbara, and that is another reason why I am here on the floor.

DEBBIE

Our Lord, Jesus Christ, we call upon your grace to bless this house and purge this girl of the demons that possess her. Oh my lord Jesus we are in the midst of an evil that only you can save us from.

BARBARA

Our savior, our lord, save us and this house and the girls asleep upstairs, but most of all, send your love to save this little girl, who is innocent and good and kind but who is lost in the grips of the devil.

Upstairs there are other girls who also aren’t allowed to cut their hair. One of them is my friend from the house next door, and we are here, in this remote mountain cabin, for her over-night birthday party.

The blood is still running down my knee from when I got trapped between the two rocks but I have not been allowed to clean the wound and so blood drips from my skin to the carpet, adding to the rancidness and the other mysterious stains that might have come from other bleeding little girls before me.

I am still crying from when I scrambled through the woods, lost, until I miraculously found the cabin once more, and found the pair of arms waiting to scoop me into this living room and save me. But I hardly notice because I am 85% sure I must be dreaming.

Debbie has a plastic spoon that she has been hitting the ground with, but that she now hits me with, expelling the spirits that haunt my soul.

DEBBIE

Jesus speak through me and to this young girl.

Barbara flings herself, prostrate, down to the ground next to me. She is crying too, and she claws at her hair, ripping it out in chunks in her ecstasy. She wails.

BARBARA

Hicha ol-lithia plaforium may may my my neowiiiiithiaaaa

DEBBIE

Griner lolth olus olithium shoshoman shoesho sithlisium sislilum

I don’t understand what they are saying, and yet I do. They are saying, I am frightened. I am dying. They are saying, kill me, because I am frightened.

The walls were talking, that much is true. I can’t call them crazy. The walls were moaning and the voice that came from the walls asked for help. Not all of us heard it, but all of us felt the house get cold and the walls start humming and vibrating with the sudden surge of energy. We all saw the teddy bear, who sat on a trunk on the stair landing, when his head that had been so firmly stitched on slowly detached itself from the body and rolled onto the floor. Everyone felt bile rising into our throats.

They are frightened, but I am not. I have spoken to walls before. I know there is no danger. Where there is danger is out on the hiking trails with the big rocks and the sharp thorns, where you get lost and get your knee sliced open.

I tried to tell them that that was why I was crying. But that was when the lamp started flickering. And when the lamp started flickering, that is when I could not help but shout out, “don’t worry, it’s just the ghost!”

They are holding me now, and we are rocking in a heap on this dirty floor, and I am only wearing a tank top and even though it is deathly freezing in the house, with frost on the inside of the windows despite it being summer, they are making me sweat, and my sweat mixes with their tears until I am salty all over, and all I want to do is sit in a bathtub for hours soaking in my own filth.

Debbie takes my face in her two hands, and she begins to kiss my face all over. Now Barbara is still flinging herself on the ground but now she is shouting Hallelujah.

BARBARA

Hallelujah oh Jesus, oh Lord we thank you for thou hast come down from Heaven to save us from Satan’s wrath. Hallelujah, God.

DEBBIE

Thank God, child. Thank Jesus. You are now free from the devil spirit that has possessed you. This house is now purged of the devil, who has lived in these walls and poisoned our souls.

BARABARA

Jesus has told us so.

DEBBIE

We may now finish this camping trip in peace.

BARBARA

God bless you child.

They help me to my feet and they embrace me. They smell like sweat and urine and dirty hair. They leave for the kitchen together, leaving me alone. I turn to my left to wear the broken lamp stands, and the doll is still staring at me. The only difference is, now she is smiling.

Saturday Detention

Based on a true story

MARIANNE GOODRIDGE, MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER

Hello. I am not going to tell you my name, because that is irrelevant. All you need to know is that your principal has asked me to come here today and speak with you. I am a professional motivational speaker. I specialize in troubled teens, like all of you, and I have saved many lives.

Because of this it is very important that you listen to me. Therefore, although you are usually expected to do your homework during Saturday detention, you are not allowed to have any books of any kind open during my speech. You are to sit up straight and do nothing but pay close attention. It will change your life, I assure you. Anyone caught doing homework will receive a suspension.

Now because you are all here in Saturday detention, you are clearly all bad kids. You are currently bad people. You might think that this is untrue in your case, that you are special, that you are only here because your mom’s tire blew out so you were ten minutes late, and because there is a no-tolerance tardy policy you got this detention even though your mom came into the office with you and tried to explain to them what happened and tried to sign you in and even though you are one of the best students in your grade, top 4 in your class, in fact. Well, wake up, people! Take a good hard look at yourself, and stop making excuses. Stop convincing yourself that you are not spiraling downhill. Because you are. It doesn’t matter why you got detention; you got a detention. Therefore you are bad.

And since you are all bad troubled teenagers, you are likely very angry.

Well, I am here to open your eyes, folks. I am here to snap you out of it. I am here to show you exactly how your life will be ruined if you continue to spend every waking moment, and likely every sleeping moment, feeling angry, and consequently, acting out.

Did you know that anger can only end in untimely death? Let me add that I never tell lies. You might think the things I say sound outrageous, but let me assure you, they are all completely true. You see, if you don’t walk out of this room and instantly cease to be angry, it is very likely that you will develop an ulcer, and your stomach acid will bubble up and burn your insides out until your stomach eventually explodes and bleeds everywhere and you die, and it is very likely that this could happen within the next four years, perhaps even before you graduate high school.

Now let me just pause here to remind you that the situation is not hopeless. You can change and become a better person. You can choose to let go of your anger, and thus to save your life. But you must make the choice. Only you can make the decision to change.

In case you aren’t inspired to change yet, let me tell you another story of how unresolved and repressed anger can ruin your life and the lives of your loved ones.

About two years ago, there was a father who lived in Texas. He was a very nice, normal man. He had a good job, a beautiful house, and he loved his wife very much. He and his wife had been trying to get pregnant for awhile before they finally had their son, Andrew. To say that they were happy would not come close to expressing the joy they felt starting a family together. This father wanted to give his son everything, and he looked forward to nothing more than he did the days when he would play catch with Andrew, or teach him to drive, or teach him how to make microwave spaghetti or meet his first girlfriend. He looked forward to nothing more than watching his beloved son, who he had waited so long for, grow up.

This father seemed to be a very happy person. Much like many of you, I am sure, seem to be very happy people.

But one day, when his wife was out of town visiting her mother, this father was left alone with his new son for the first time since his birth. And that night, Andrew simply would not stop crying. His father tried everything, but still Andrew would not stop crying. Finally, something inside the father snapped.

Calmly, as calmly as if he were brushing his teeth, he left Andrew in the living room and went into the bathroom. Without a moment of hesitation he plugged the bathtub and began filling it with water, on the hottest setting. He waited until the tub was completely full of boiling hot water. He then retrieved Andrew from the living room and brought him into the bathroom. He held Andrew under that boiling water until he drowned. Not only that, he held Andrew in that boiling water until his skin turned red and began to peel. He boiled his baby, literally cooked his baby, all because of the anger that had been slowly building up inside of him.

Do not let yourself off the hook anymore, people. THIS COULD HAPPEN TO YOU. Do you want your stomach to explode? Do you want to die? Do you want to watch calmly and quietly as you boil your own baby because his crying was annoying you?

I hope you will take my words seriously. I cannot force you to change. I can only enlighten you to the consequences that will befall you should you choose to stay on your current path.

Thank you for having me today. I will now leave you to your thoughts, as I am sure you have much to think about.

Girls and Boys, When They Sit in Trees and Share Their Toys

A play

Characters:

THE GIRL

THE BOY

THE GIRL HE MET AT THE HOMECOMING DANCE WHO TOLD HIM THEY WOULD NEVER MARRY.

The books are the only things left.

THE BOY WHO LIKED TO DRIVE FAST CARS WHO WISHED HER BOOBS WERE BIGGER. And you expect me to just hand them over?

THE GIRL WHO LIKED TO READ BOOKS

Did you read the books?

THE BOY WHO HATED SUMMER

Only the one book.

THE GIRL WHOSE PARENTS LET HIM SLEEP IN HER BED

Which one?

THE BOY WHO LOVED HER OR SO HE THOUGHT

The one with your notes in it.

THE GIRL WHO BOUGHT HIM AN AIRPLANE LEGO SET FOR HIS 19th BIRTHDAY TO WHICH HE SAID I ONLY LIKE THE STAR WARS LEGOS

I didn’t write any notes.

THE BOY WHOSE MOTHER RESPONDED TO THE GIRL’S PEACE SIGN EARRINGS OH SO YOU ARE ONE OF THOSE GREEN PEOPLE

What were the notes then?

THE GIRL WHO THREW UP HER DINNER WHEN HE TOLD HER SHE WAS FAT

They were already in the book when I bought it. My flight is at 12:45 tomorrow.

THE BOY WITH ABANDONMENT ISSUES

And?

THE GIRL WHO HAD SWORN THAT SHE WOULD NEVER LET A MAN’S OPINION DICTATE HER CHOICES

I thought you might want to know. Are you going to give me back my books?

THE BOY WHO EXPECTED SEX SIMPLY BECAUSE SHE WAS HIS GIRLFRIEND AND THAT IS WHAT GIRLFRIENDS ARE SUPPOSED TO DO

I will if you kiss me.

THE GIRL WHO WOULDN’T WEAR THONGS

Your kisses hurt.

THE BOY WHO WAS JEALOUS OF OTHER BOYS

Touch me.

THE GIRL WHO WAS JEALOUS OF OTHER GIRLS

The thought deposits large amounts of bile into the back of my throat.

THE BOY WHO PAID $75 TO BUY HER THE CUSTOM CORSAGE SHE DEMANDED FOR PROM EVEN THOUGH HIS FRIENDS ONLY PAID 40 FOR THEIR DATES

Not even to say goodbye?

THE GIRL WHO WAS ALLERGIC TO GRASS

I said goodbye a long time ago. You just weren’t listening. You couldn’t hear me.

THE BOY SHE LOVED OR SO HE THOUGHT

And that’s why you won’t touch me?

THE GIRL WHO WEPT THE FIRST TIME AND THE SECOND TIME AND THE THIRD TIME AND THE FOURTH TIME

Give me my books.

THE BOY SHE CALLED EVERY NIGHT

If I threw these books at your eyes, one after the other, your eyes would turn black. They would grow two sizes, they would explode. You’d have to grope around with your hands in the dark, because you’d have no eyes, because I would have your eyes forever.

THE GIRL WHO SWORE TO BE FREE

I need them back so I can rip them apart. So I can burn them.

THE BOY WHO LIKED HER PUDDING AND PIE

Like I ripped you apart?

WHO KISSED THE GIRL AND MADE HER CRY

Like you burned me. Are you going to give me my books?

Impossible Play

You sit down in a red plush-velvet seat in an ornate, classic proscenium theatre, and you are prepared to see an opera, or a ballet. But what you actually see is darkness, very suddenly, and the darkness is not just on the stage, but all around you, and now the proscenium and the theatre disappear and you are alone. You are alone with one pin-prick of light, in the distance ahead of you. You look more deeply.

Here is a chorus line of caped, hooded figures. They are chanting, perhaps in Latin, but the chanting doesn’t come from their mouths, but emanates right into the center of your cerebral cortex, and into the center of your soul. Any moment they could start kicking, but you get the distinct impression that they wouldn’t dare.

Now circus music. Or Burlesque music, you can’t tell which, because actually it is both, begins to play softly. Gradually, it gets louder. Now you are in a clown horror movie, a strip-club murder scene. As the music builds, the CABARET GIRLS (you don’t know how you know what they are called, but you do) enter from the ceiling, lowered down by ropes. Each one is clutching a full length mirror. They are completely nude, of all shapes, sizes, and ages. They are beautiful. They are grotesque, they are the most beautiful monsters you have ever seen, and you realize that you yourself are only a monster, without the beauty.

The girls jump to the ground. The hooded figures produce chairs, seemingly from nowhere, and place one behind each girl. And now there is dancing. It was bound to happen eventually. The women engage in an elaborate Burlesque dance, lude and overtly sexual in nature. Does it make you uncomfortable? It’s alright if it does. But there’s no need to be embarrassed, that voice in the center of your soul encourages you. They are here for your pleasure. Lean back, relax, enjoy. The cabaret girls are making their way center with their chairs and stack the chairs into a pyramid. They are dancing with each other now.

You see the hooded figures approach and hand the girls hotdogs, in buns, and various bottles of condiments. The girls freeze in a multitude of strange (beautiful?) positions, until one of the hooded figures shoots a gun into the air, signaling the beginning of a competition. The hot dog eating contest begins. The girls are stuffing themselves with hot dogs, squirting condiments all over themselves and each other. It is sexual. It is terrifying. It is ugly. It is the most beautiful thing you have ever seen. The figure shoots the gun again, and the girls freeze again. Four hooded figures hold up signs with scores on them, ranging from 1 to 10. The girls jump up and down, excited, and the winner is hailed, presented with flowers. You jump up and down, too. You are enmeshed. There is great celebration.

That is, until the figure with the gun moves the barrel from the sky to the head of the winner. The four figures with signs then reveal their faces, on which the number they were just holding up is painted. These four figures stand with their palms and faces toward the heavens, and they begin to recite the Lord’s Prayer. At least, you think it is the Lord’s Prayer – it’s not like you memorized it or anything. The hooded figure with the gun forces the winner to center stage. Another hooded figure produces a bucket and places it at the winner’s feet. She looks at the gun, then back at the other girls, then at her condiment-laden body, then at you. Still looking deep into your eyes, she sticks her finger far down her throat (farther than you thought was possible), and makes herself vomit into the bucket. The hooded figure nods, then gestures to the other girls. The girls stand beside their naked sister, and together, they too stick their fingers down their throats, and begin to vomit in unison all over the stage. All over the world. There were only about six girls to begin with but now they are multiplying, coming from everywhere, now there are nearing fifty naked girls, one hundred naked girls, throwing up on everything. Four more of the hooded figures (there were only nine to begin with, you know) reveal their faces, and produce whips from inside their hoods. They begin lacerating themselves with the elongated leather. You try to feel horrified but the truth is, you are deeply sexually aroused, and you can’t help but touch yourself, just a little bit, discreetly, so as not to disturb the actors, so as not to disrespect them.

It is then that the mirrors begin to drop from the sky and crash to the ground.

They shatter. You feel the shards slicing open your skin, but this feeling is imaginary. The shards are confined to the stage (for there is a stage, even though it just looks like a lighted abyss in the middle of darkness), confined to the vomiting girls who have provided you with so much pleasure. The girl who won the eating contest stands on one of the chairs, and counts in multiples of seven, completely composed, as each mirror hits the ground. 7. 14. 21. 28. 35. 42. Of course the class cuts many of the girls who are still puking underneath the shower of shards, so that now the puke is blending with blood flowing from the girls’ skin. The girls are shattering too. The world is shattering.

Suddenly, you hear the sound of the gun cocking, and you are suddenly reminded that the hooded figure has been holding it poised through this whole ordeal. Everything stops. The world has never been so still, or so silent. The winner steps down from the chair, takes a bow, and crosses back to the hooded figure. After a shared glance, the hooded figure places the gun to the winner’s forehead and pulls the trigger.

Brains. Everywhere. You are not frightened. You feel calm.

And then you push the hood from in front of your eyes, and examine your surroundings, and that’s when you realize that it what you holding the gun the whole time. All dark again now. You are still touching yourself.