

Be Worthy of Your Heritage

written by Guest Contributor | May 31, 2017



My wife and I had both been scholarship students at our respective boarding schools and when our daughter turned 13 years old and started eighth grade, Wendy started squinting at her as if she were far away.

“You guys are acting funny,” Sylvia, our daughter, said at dinner, at the start of the school year.

“You can’t talk about how parents act,” our ten-year-old son Owen said. “They can’t, like, discuss it with you.”

“Do you want me to go to boarding school?” Sylvia asked.

“No,” I said.

“Yes,” Wendy said.

“I want to go to boarding school!” Owen said.

“You’re ten. You want to go now?” I asked.

“Was it fun?” he asked me.

“No.”

“He’s lying,” Wendy said.

“Are you going to make me go?” Sylvia said.

“Honey, we wouldn’t force you to do something you didn’t want to do,” I said, and avoided looking at Wendy, who indeed forced our children to do things they didn’t want to do all the time. Owen and Sylvia swung their legs at each other under the table and Wendy sipped ice water and asked them if they had homework.

I find myself at times taking mental snapshots of the four of us, this dinner tableau, seeing myself in khakis, gold wedding band, a father, forty years old. I remembered the change when Sylvia and then Owen were born and we

descended from an adventuresome, well-adjusted couple into years of sleeplessness, defeated by round-the-clock crying and diapers. Days melded into nights of hoisting small squirming bodies out of cribs, car seats, booster seats and amusement park rides. But then, one random Saturday morning when Owen was seven, I looked over at him eating a bowl of ice cream in front of the TV and I realized first, I hadn't lifted him up in a very long time, and that I had read an entire section in the newspaper I was holding without falling asleep or his asking me for help. Now we were the picture of a father and son relaxing. Submerging and surfacing, that's what parenting is. We were submerging again.

"How dare you tell them I was lying," I said to Wendy in our bedroom.

"You are," she said, plucking our children's smaller socks out of the clean laundry pile on the bed.

"When exactly did this idea to send her off to a bigoted, elitist—oh come on, your houseparent called you an Oriental and no one remembered your real name, called you 'Handsy' until you picked out a fake name," I said.

"Names aren't *fake*. I had a roommate from the Bronx. I was in the Asian students club. There were enough of us there to *have* a discussion," she said. We live in a suburb of Milwaukee. There were currently no Asian kids at Sylvia's school. "And what about ambition? Next thing you know she's going to tell us her biggest dream is to go to UW-Whitewater."

"What is so wrong with that?" I asked.

"She deserves the same choice you had. To have ambitions outside this state."

"To be miserable? You told me you were miserable," I said. We met at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and had stayed up until 3 a.m. looking at Lake Mendota that first night, swapping war stories about how we survived boarding school.

"You've just forgotten," she said.

"You've just forgotten," I said back.

I was fourteen. Blue first light was lying in my bedroom, and everything looked still and eternal. But then a dark figure appeared in the side of my vision, my father, and he flipped on an overhead light. "It's time," he said. We made quiet turns on early streets with two duffel bags in the trunk. I looked at the backs of their heads and I heard my mother murmur something to my father and realized I was going to cry. Then I thought, *if you cry, they'll think you want to stay.*

By the time I got on the plane I was exhausted from being up since 5 a.m. and fighting emotion. As soon as I sat in my plane seat, I started to crumble back into sleep, but I forced myself to stay awake as the plane banked east to cross Lake Michigan. Every summer of my life I had stood on its bluffs

and looked into the distance and seen oblivion. I watched on the plane as Chicago and its buildings moved farther out of view; and then for long moments, all I saw was wrinkled water below and the occasional oblong crescent of a boat; no other side was visible. Exhaustion made me want to weep with elation: *it's true! There is no end!* But after long minutes, the wrinkled water broke into white-capped waves here and there until I saw the sandy brown shore. I held this bizarre hope that nothing would happen as provisioned by mundane geography and normal life; I did not want to go to any regular town, to any new kitchen—I wanted no home. I was so keen for the possibly bizarre to occur I hadn't even overly consulted a map; it was gratifyingly insane to my Midwestern sensibility that I would fly into Connecticut in order to get to Massachusetts: the Constitution state was a mystical porthole to a crazily displaced England.

Then: the medieval forest of rural western Massachusetts. An old school bus picked us up from the airport. With engine whines, creaks and ghostly, possessed silences between grinding gears, the bus wended through wilderness darkened with heavy tree canopy, broken occasionally by hand-painted signs announcing the presence of a town starting in 1647. Between deserted miles of dark, dense nature there would be a house way too close to the road with the occasional resident at the doorway squinting with brooding suspicion that suggested it was still 1647.

There was a turn off the main route. As we trundled down an oak-dappled road, there were nicer houses and then a beautiful campus unfurled, red brick and white spire buildings. I got off the bus, walked into a square, gray stone building with a white dome and white columns. Walking parents surrounded me like driving rain. I looked up and saw the blank eye of the white rotunda and looked down and saw that directly under it, inlaid on the floor, was a pewter-colored medallion. It said in English, "Be Worthy of Your Heritage." I laughed out loud and in doing this I felt the first sign of inhabiting myself, instead of feeling like an anonymous body registering novelty. Ah hah! *Ahoy!* So I was on an adventure in a foreign place; this directive from on high, almost a warning, had nothing to do with me; with my life of shopping malls and bland suburban school.

I was then in a golf cart with my bags, being transported across the green. Back beyond the main quadrangle were pathways that stopped at various clapboard houses—the cart stopped in front of mine, which had a scabby lawn and three returning students on a pulled-up park bench wearing Vuarnet sunglasses and passing back and forth a lit cigarette. I grabbed my bags and went inside. When the door shut behind me, it was so dark I couldn't see for a minute—then I saw a narrow stairway with dim light filtering down. I went up the wooden stairs; the house was bigger on the inside than on the outside. Six doors down I saw my name on an open door and walked in. There I was greeted by three people, parents and a child, who all looked at me with poised surprise.

"Oh, hello there, you must be the roommate, Daniel!" the mother said, sounding so pleased, I blushed, mostly in embarrassment that it was just me, not some dazzling Daniel, a now-the-party-can-start Daniel, whom her greeting seemed to anticipate. The man was tall, and stoop-shouldered the way

academics are in movies, with a hale and hearty friendliness towards me I hadn't experienced from an adult—a big smile and two-handed handshake. I cleared my throat and told them my name was Dan Pistore, I was from Chicago, well actually, Winnetka. My new roommate Bradley Magruder stepped forward and shook my hand. I had never shaken hands hello with anyone my age before; this must have been because Bradley's parents were watching. Did parents in the East care if you shook hands with other kids? Bradley was snub-nosed, blush-cheeked, and teenage gaunt, with a choker necklace of bright white tiny shells, stone-colored corduroys and a dark-blue polo shirt, his body swimming in them. Mr. Magruder decided to conduct our conversation by standing chummily next to me, more shoulder-to-shoulder than face-to-face. He asked me a stream of superficial questions with avuncular cheeriness. Mr. Magruder's stream of patter directed towards me struck a chord of confusion—after a minute I realized this was the sort of patter that parents did with other parents, and from here on I was responsible for holding these conversations myself. I broke out into a light but stinky sweat volleying back what I hoped were adequate responses to his soft lobs about the plane, the plane food, the location of my mailbox in the student center, and then a terrifyingly summative question about how I found life in the Middle West. As we chatted, Brad and his mother continued unpacking, striking poses that seemed like something out of the newly-invented J. Crew catalogue, forming various camera-appropriate moments of pointing, pausing and considering, with a sweater, belt, or oxford shirt in hand. At one point Brad and his father started to speak at once and Brad said, "Excuse me, I didn't mean to interrupt," like he had met his father five minutes ago.

After dinner Brad and I walked down the campus road that led to the athletic fields. Before the road sloped down to the lacrosse and football greens, right at the edge of the dip in the road, there was a small, old graveyard. The graveyard was contained by a crude wooden fence maybe three feet high; some of the tombstones had the lettering and shape washed away by weather so they were thinning oblong tablets of blank stone. At the back there were two large mounds; one marker announced a mass grave for victims of an influenza epidemic. The other one announced victims of a massacre by the French and the Mohicans. "Scalped," Magruder, standing at my elbow, said quietly. There were names like Enos, Patience, Gideon, Anath. Not even stately English names; ugly, biblical, gruel-by-candlelight names. It hit me then: the school's motto wasn't genteel, it was a dire creed of people who missed England and who were sick and frightened. I read on the historical marker that the colony of Massachusetts had sent for women and some of them came to Everfield: they all died.

"Why did you come here?" Brad said, staring at the graves.

I said, "I had to leave my school," I started. "There was a fight and it just got out of hand."

Silence. When he did speak, the intermittent baritones on his voice were absent; it was high, reedy scorn. He said, "This isn't some reform school. My dad went here and then to Princeton." He looked over at me with uncertainty. "Was it some kind of Italian mob thing?"

My entire time in public school, no one had ever said anything to me about being Italian-American, other than during International Week in the seventh and eighth grades when we were supposed to bring in our native dishes and our parents were invited. Also, my parents told me over and over that only stupid people were racists and this was a hard school to get into. I didn't understand. I tried to master my hurt; I clenched my jaw and cleared my throat, left a silence in which I thought Brad would apologize. He didn't.

"There was one black kid in my grade. Not bussed in, he moved there. Last fall a couple of kids that I'd gone to school with since kindergarten started chasing him. He was just this one kid but everyone treated it like the beginning of the end, like, the neighborhood was going to turn and a lot of things that only parents worry about, but they were saying it like they were grown ups too. I didn't even know Carl, but I thought it was unfair. Also we were older—I thought someone was going to hurt him, you can do that when you get bigger. I had this slingshot from the fifth grade and I stuck it in my backpack, just in case. I was walking home and by chance I saw him a block up and all of a sudden these kids, my friends, surrounded him in a circle and started punching him. I shot one of them—I mean with the slingshot. I hit the head of my best friend when we were in the fourth grade and there was blood everywhere. This guy at my church sent his son to Everfield five years ago, he graduated in 1979, they heard about it and I applied and got a scholarship."

"You got in to Everfield because you split someone's head open?" he said incredulously.

I shrugged. I was embarrassed to say the rest: I got into Everfield because the principal and teachers at my school wrote the Everfield Academy that I was destined to be a fearless civil rights leader, that I cared more for being right than being popular, and that my local high school was not worthy of me; I needed a better place. The praise seemed like the beginning of some special journey and I was eager to follow its trail out here.

The fall night was dark, devoid of stars, devoid of any nature sounds at all: there appeared to be nothing in the world but this mass Indian grave and Brad, who was looking at me with his eyes squinted. "That's quite a story, Dan," he said. Bradley, standing on a mound of the English dead and their motto, wordlessly communicated that if anyone asked me this question about being at Everfield again, "Because it is an excellent school," would suffice.

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Now in my forties: submerged again, confused again. It was winter and Sylvia and I were sitting by the fireplace. She was wearing a new sweater and expensive jeans that Wendy had bought her as a reward for taking the SSAT and submitting her admissions forms to my school and Wendy's school. Of course I didn't want her to go anywhere, so I avoided pointing out to Wendy how it betrayed us for the déclassé scholarship students we were, still, by having Sylvia apply only to our two schools. The air was thick with it, a hanging pause of breath wondering if this was the last time we'd all live together, school vacations aside. There were no squalling children in this phase of

parental submergence—why did I ever feel overwhelmed facing a small crying child, who could be comforted with snacks and toys? Wendy and I were no longer the goofily exhausted team that fell asleep in each other's arms on the couch; we were handling this phase like enemies, with skirmishes and then blanketing silence, piles of Wisconsin snow heaped all around our house like a muffler. We were all wide awake and quiet. As the fire crackled, I looked over at Sylvia's grave face working over her thoughts.

"Other than you'd miss me. There's something else," Sylvia said suddenly, turning her face to me.

"It's pretentious. Pretentiousness disguised as wisdom. And I think it makes you grow up too fast."

"You mean sex? Drugs?"

I laughed a little.

"What, Dad?"

"Girls lived on another planet. And Everfield was too hard a school for drugs. I mean they were there, but there was no way if you actually wanted to graduate."

She was quiet for a minute and then said, "I'd like to be with more Asian kids."

"You're not just Asian," I said.

"It's how I look, though."

"Who cares?"

"I'm lonely, Dad," she said.

"You know what this reminds me of? In *Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield is talking to this guy about something, like tennis, and they are really hitting it off, when all of a sudden this guy asks Holden if he knows where a good Catholic church is in town. And Holden's whole point is that it is kind of ridiculous the way this guy was trying to find out if they were the same religion so he could enjoy the conversation more. Do you see my point?"

"No."

I said, "If you're talking to someone about gym class, would you enjoy the conversation more if that person were Asian? You can just be friends, why does being Asian or not matter?"

She glared at the floor. "You don't get it."

"Honey, I have to tell you that this upsets me—you're Italian too, like me."

She rolled her eyes. "Dad, everyone is like, Italian or Irish or German. It's no big deal."

"You'd be surprised," I said.

"About what?" she said.

###

I hate to bring up memories like this, but if you are in your forties now, then you remember *The Preppy Handbook*. We acted as if it were a joke. We were all reading it, stuck into the spine of our schoolbooks, and memorizing it word-for-word. Which brings me to James Taylor.

"I hate James Taylor," Mr. Frank said, sitting on top of the teacher's desk, cross-legged. It was American History class.

"Why?" Magruder said.

"James Taylor is the bard of the preppy. All his music is about how everyone should just stick together, be cool, be mellow. Stay with the group." Mr. Frank had protested Viet Nam, had gotten a Ph.D. at Berkeley and had an FBI file on him. The 1980s was sort of like his worst nightmare come true; it was a great big conservative values party. Politics way aside, I loved it, trusted it: the throwing off of disco and embracing the snap of New Wave, worrying about jobs instead of free love, thinking about making things work well instead of living in a half-sentient orgy paid for by the parents of Baby Boomers such as Mr. Frank.

"You sound like my parents," Mr. Frank said, as week after week the class raged against social welfare and lax sexual mores.

"Good," Magruder said.

"But unlike my parents, you've learned about the world through TV," Mr. Frank said. "Last night as I was grading your papers, I was wondering, what would it finally take for you boys to organize and protest injustice?"

"Um, hopefully nothing?" Magruder said. Everyone laughed. "What about just being responsible for just yourself? Just be decent. Like, relax."

"I should just play James Taylor albums instead of teach," Mr. Frank said.

The personal code was *The Preppy Handbook's* leading ethos. And Magruder's. He wasn't just contrived; he *believed* in contrivance, the heroic shield of polite conversation and manners. You'd think he was trying to save society with table settings, thank-you notes, and silence. I hate to admit that his manners had a touching side. Ever aware of my eager outsider status, on Sunday mornings Magruder would sometimes put on a porkpie hat and say, c'mon. We'd hike into the woods and he'd say, look, a nuthatch, a waxwing, a cut tree that was four hundred years old. We'd leave campus on the scraggly path, still beaten, that a handful of boys volunteering for the war against the British had taken to get to Boston. "I always think of them," Magruder said.

And then there was that mid-winter mixer, where Magruder got me to smoke a

cigarette, which gave me a certain first-time high, and then said, "Let's go pay our respects." And we left the main hall and went downstairs to the ancient basement where various clubs had offices, all silent, until we got to the door of the BSE (Black Students at Everfield) and I heard Earth, Wind, and Fire and it was like, all the black girl students from all the girls' schools that had come to the mixer, and our own dudes. There was seriously like one lightbulb on and everyone was smoking. Magruder stepped in, lifted the porkpie hat off his head in greeting and then put it back on again, shook hands with the guys from our class, nodded at the girls, did not try to speak to them. I repeated his gestures, but then started to shrug off my coat and suddenly I was aware of everyone looking at me like I was nuts and Magruder clapped me on the shoulder, bringing my coat back up in the same move and said, "He's overheating—he just had his first cigarette and he's freaking out," and then everyone laughed. Magruder accepted two cans of Coke for us, and we stayed long enough for a few sips, and then we left.

"Who were we back there?" I said to him under my breath as we made our way back. "Was that some *disgusting* groovy peace thing or did you just turn us into a set of fucking overseers?"

There was one really weird night that involved *The Preppy Handbook*, or at least a poster from it. It was spring, the end of the school year. We had played a friendly lacrosse game at Avon Old Farms—an after-season game that the coach had let the freshmen play most of, it was mostly to scope us out for next year. I had sprinted with everything I had. I fell asleep reading on the bus, and when we were let off in front of the dining hall at twilight, I ate dinner with my teammates and then walked to my dorm with my eyes half-closed. Back in the room, Magruder was trying to pick a shirt. Jason Godwin, who lived downstairs, had a sister at Miss Hall's who was visiting with a couple of friends and a group was going out to dinner. He surveyed me briefly, covered in mud, hair stiff with dried sweat, swaying from exhaustion. "Rough game?" he said merrily, and I wanted to kill him, just kill him. I turned and went to the shower and leaned against the tiles while taking in the steam; when I returned Godwin and a few other guys were there. Magruder put on a B-52s album, they smoked cigarettes with the window open and eventually they left to have dinner at the Everfield Inn. I wilted over and went out cold for two solid hours.

When I woke up it was dark. I reached over, turned on the light beside my bed. In a haze, I picked up a book for my Great Thoughts class, which included Freud, and I read the following: "The individual does actually carry a twofold existence: one to serve his own purposes and the other as a link on a chain, which he serves against his will, or at least involuntarily. He is only the temporary holder of an estate which survives him." I had to go to the bathroom. I walked into the deserted hall and I stared vacantly at a poster that was a blown-up diagram from *The Preppy Handbook*. It was a picture of preppyness during the teenage years, with each clothing choice noted and discussed—this is what this skirt means, this is where this jacket came from, these are the correct loafers. Something strange then happened to me—looking at the poster, I suddenly had this feeling of watching myself looking at the poster. I looked at the boy's upturned

collar, baggy khakis. It was one of those creepy moments where you can see yourself as just a person with the detachment you'd feel watching someone you did not know at all.

Why did I hit those boys last year? What did I care about? I was supposed to be a leader, that's what they said...then I thought: *they wanted to get rid of me*. Most certainly they knew I was harmless, from a decade of incident-free schooling, so that wasn't the concern. Magruder was right, though; it didn't make any awful lot of sense. When I re-played the principal's speech to me, standing in the room as an observer, without my teenage vanity, it made no sense at all.

But then: why did this place want me? Why was I so valuable?

###

Spring, now: It was a point of pride that Sylvia got into my school. Now I just had to convince her not to go.

Sylvia stood up to Wendy and told her she didn't want to go to Wendy's single-sex school and that my school was the one she was going to go to, if she was going to go at all. My school had long since gone co-ed. Wendy regarded going co-ed as the ultimate capitulation to the patriarchy, or whatever. After Sylvia announced this, I would come home after work to find Wendy lying on our bed in her work suit staring at the ceiling, no doubt asking some evangelical Taiwanese Christian God what she had done wrong that her child wanted to go to a school that less than ten years ago only admitted boys. I wish sometimes she'd just drink. What was I doing married to someone who didn't drink?

One day after work, I came home to one of Wendy's lie-ins with her nylons ending in double-woven brown caps on her toes, her arm flung across her eyes, and I quietly let Owen go over to a friend's house and took Sylvia out for ice cream for dinner.

Over hot fudge and vanilla ice cream melting over steaming pound cake, I said, "This is fun. I want to do this every now and then, when you're in high school next year."

"If I'm here," she said.

"You're just too young. And it's just a bunch of snobs."

"You keep saying that but you never, like, *elaborate*. Dad, is there a secret about you?"

Now she sounded like my parents. "I'm just saying, for you: prep school doesn't prepare you for anything."

"Don't take this the wrong way, but I haven't, um, shot anyone with a slingshot," she said. "And...you were a scholarship kid, I won't be. I mean...I'm not like you. I'm sorry. I'm not. Dad, come on. Don't look at me like that."

Even back then I thought it would have been better for Sandeep Krishnon if everyone hated him. Instead, everyone was embarrassed for him. Krishnon came from a Brahmin family in India and clued us in to the enormous castles and staffs and adoring masses that awaited him in Bangalore, though he was at pains to point out he himself was British, England-born and had been raised in a townhouse a few blocks from Buckingham Palace in London. He was also—and this was unfortunate—an arch-conservative on matters of race and Affirmative Action. He was loathed by both the black students club and the Republican club. This black rich kid from Jamaica, Courtney Jennings, had promised to lead the Cricket Interest Club until Krishnon showed up and started about the “primitive” nature of the West Indies and everyone was like shut *up*, Sandeep. No one wanted to schedule another meeting after that and so the Cricket Interest Club was driven underground and existed as an inchoate secret society with notes passed and cover stories.

And then there was his talk about the villagers. Jesus, *the villagers*.

“Our family is beloved at home, we are always receiving visits from people on the plantation,” he would say, the word ‘plantation’ hurtling through air like gunshot everyone looking away in embarrassment. He’d gotten it so wrong. The adoration of people in an impoverished country living as virtual slaves on your land was not the thing.

Spring term freshman year we had Casino Night, near the end of the year. There would be big band music in the great hall, and the dining hall was going to be transformed with gambling tables after dinner. For the band, better-than-normal dinner, and for gambling tickets, the social committee was charging \$40 for the evening. This was in an era when parents could send kids \$100 a month for an okay allowance, and scholarship kids got by on a lot less, and so Casino Night was a problem. There was a way, though—the social committee decided that table service at the dinner would be best, and anyone who wanted to could serve and attend Casino Night—and get \$10 worth of gambling money—for free.

As the sun went down, everyone started going back to their houses to get ready. Guys were in the showers and Magruder and I stood shoulder to shoulder shaving at the sinks and talking about the summer. Shaving takes a great deal of time when you are fourteen years old; it’s kind of like playing firefighter or grocery store when you’re in kindergarten, everything is exaggerated and repeated, and we all had dots of toilet paper on our cheeks covering nicks. Jason Godwin was there too; Jason was Krishnon’s roommate. Just then Krish himself came in, his stick-like arms in a t-shirt with his pants and belt on. He then proceeded to mousse his hair. Brad, Jason and I just kind of got really quiet and looked at each other as this attention to making himself look good made it all the more painful that no one could conceivably want Sandeep. He was moussing for disappointment. The four of us walked over to the dinner together, nervous with energy, play-shoving each other. We got into the dining hall and there were girls there. You could hear their voices, smell their perfume. A senior from the social committee, a big strapping dude in a tuxedo, announced that it was time to sit down for

dinner and the four of us found a table and wondered what would happen. We looked around at guys who were pulling out chairs for their dates. Two girls did come over to our table and we stood up for them—actually, Magruder stood up first, we hastened in his wake. They were from Wendy's school—Wendy shrieked with delight years later when we met that first night, because she had heard the story of the evening.

Then the student staff came out to serve our dinner. I was horrified to see that it was the entire population of black students, plus the poor Latino students from U.S. cities; the rich ones from Latin America were all decked out in zoot suits. I was panicked and shocked. Was anyone else embarrassed? Suppose I was the only one who noticed?

Emmet Mason, who was in my science class, the only black guy on the lacrosse team, served our table. Worse still was that as he put down our salad plates Godwin, Magruder, and Krish maintained a prim silence, looking off into the distance.

"What's up, Emo?" I called out to him.

"Hey," he said under his breath, wiping some dressing off the edge of the plate with a kitchen towel tucked in his belt, before he put it down.

"This is Emmet," I said to the girls, who said faintly, hi, and he only nodded. Magruder looked at me, dead-faced.

"Is practice cancelled on Monday?" I said to Emo. "I forget."

"Not sure," he said, carefully putting down another plate.

"Luke my man!" I called to the guy who was holding a tray of plates from which Emmet was serving. I had never actually spoken to Luke before. Luke nodded.

"Excuse me," Krishnon said to them, his inflection the British falling tone when asking a question, the exact opposite of the American rising. "Could you please refresh our ice water?"

"I was just getting up, I can get it," I said, and Magruder said in a low voice, "Dan, sit down."

"You're being rude," Krishnon said when they left to get pitchers of ice water.

"Because I'm not treating our classmates like servants?"

"Do you pal up to a waiter in a restaurant because you're sorry he's a waiter?" Krishnon asked.

"Have you all gone blind or have you noticed that everyone who is serving us is black and everyone being served is white?"

"That's not our concern," Krishnon said.

"Well it should be yours," I said, "because you're almost black yourself."

"Hey," Godwin said.

"Hey *what?*" I said. "Why is it okay for us to blow off what's happening and allow Krishnon to act like he belongs?"

"Oh, and *you* totally belong, Pistore," Krishnon said. "His name is Piss-store," he said to the girls.

"It's the old Roman word for baker," I said. "You had to take your bread dough somewhere to be baked, two thousand years ago. It has history."

"It sounds disgusting, Piss-store. Finest urine in Italy."

"You're not pronouncing it right."

"But that's exactly how it looks. I bet someone can't wait to marry you and get that last name."

"Being Italian isn't that bad," Magruder said. He leaned in and said, "At least you aren't Jewish."

"Do you know what wop means, literally?" Krishnon said to the table.

"C'mon, there are girls here," Godwin said.

"When Italian immigrants came to America most of them had no documentation, so their entry papers were stamped 'without passport.' WOP. Wop, wop, wop!"

"Look, all I know is, all the black students are serving all the white students and we're pretending that this isn't creepy," I said. "Excuse me," I said to the girls, because you aren't supposed to swear in front of girls, "but this is all a bunch of bullshit."

"Then why are you here?" Magruder said. He turned to me privately. "I have always wondered."

I said nothing. I remembered Magruder that fall at the graves. I looked at him with barely registered disdain, shook a cigarette loose from his pack on the table, and tapped it. Magruder wordlessly slid me his gold lighter.

"So. Um, do you girls play any sports?" Godwin said to the girls.

After dinner I was standing in the portico of the great hall by myself when Magruder came up, hands shoved in his suit pocket, and joined me in looking off into the distance. "You're right about Sandeep," he said. "Little fucker doesn't know his place."

I sighed. "I don't think I'm coming back next year." I did not care what he said in response. The thing about Magruder is that he'd say something perceptive, but then if you took it up he'd be startled and irritated. Like

when he said to me, "It's like you've gone so far in not belonging here that you belong, like you are Everfield." When I asked what Everfield was, he said, "You will know."

"I have got to get out of here," I continued. "I'm going to withdraw for next year." I stole a look at him out of the corner of my eye. He nodded, acknowledging he heard, but then he smiled and shrugged.

"Huh. Oh well. Come on then, you spent all the money already, let's you and me warm up with a little blackjack. Girls love blackjack."

The juniors and seniors, hardened veterans to the eternal disappointment of the boarding school mixer, had to be dragged from the gambling tables to start the dance at nine o'clock. I swore I would stand and watch for five songs and leave. After the end of the third song, there was a tap on my shoulder and a girl asked me to dance. While we danced I looked at the floor and the band.

She said her name was Lisa and I said, "Dan, or actually Daniel." I asked her if she wanted to get something to drink and after awhile I asked her if she wanted to get some air. We were walking away from the main building into the night when two juniors called me over.

One was smoking and one was leaning against a parking sign. They looked like crows. "Do not return a girl to the bus all messed up," said the smoker.

The other one said, "The dean got a couple of calls after the spring mixer last year and now they're talking about adding an extra period to the day for some health class like in goddamned public school."

"Or Catholic school," said the other.

"Just make sure she looks all right. Or else offer to take her to the bathroom. Girls love going to the bathroom."

It was a clear, dry night. The farther away we got from the hall, the darker everything was. We walked down the hill by the graveyard and followed the path to the tennis courts.

"I don't know if I'm going to stay here," I said.

"I'm really homesick too," Lisa said, and then told me that for the first semester she made herself sick from nerves. "Like a friend sent me a cake for my fifteenth birthday and I ate a lot of it and then threw it up in our sink," she said.

I didn't know what to say. "Did anyone else know?"

"My roommates did. And they were *pissed*." Something about the way she said this made us start laughing.

"The stars out here look like stitches in the universe," she said. "Like the universe is a black suit and this is the inside of it and the stars are stitches."

"That would explain the suffocation."

She laughed. "Daniel," she said. "Do you really mean that?"

"It's okay. It's a lot of pressure."

"Do you have a lot of rules?" she asked. "Is that why?"

"I guess this is what it would be like in college, that's why they do it."

"Do you think this is like, preparing you for adulthood?"

"Yes," I said, "but in the worst way. It's like, here's the way to act, this is what's appropriate, and sometimes it's just..."

"Yes," she said, "I know exactly what you mean. I think it's harder for girls, too."

"Why?"

"It's about how you look. Also, we're not allowed to yell down the halls, chew gum, or leave campus after 8 p.m.," she said and tucked her long brown hair behind her ears. The sweetness of that gesture made my heart race. Over the months (and then years) girls ceased to be part of my daily life. She didn't look too comfortable either, her face was flushed and her arms crossed.

"I came here thinking I was supposed to be one way, someone who cared about rights, or telling the truth," I said.

"But of course not everyone's happy to hear the truth. People shut down," she said.

We were down by the tennis courts, opposite the athletic fields. I stopped walking and she followed my lead. Then I cleared my throat and said, "So, did anyone kiss you happy birthday?"

"I go to a girls' school. Who would I have kissed?" she said. So I leaned over and kissed her. Then we were kissing. She put her arms around me and I pressed her against the rampart of the tennis court and the new leaves rustled in the trees and there was no one else around.

When the dance was ending we walked back. At the bus she said, "I'll write you. What is your last name?"

"Pistore."

She frowned. "Pis-what?"

I turned red.

"What did you say?" she repeated, looking hurt. "Piss off?"

"No! I want you to write me. The address is just the name of the school and my name. My last name comes from...Bake...well," I said. "I mean, I'm Daniel Bakewell."

"*Bakewell*. Oh!" she laughed and I was flooded with relief. "I am going deaf. There are Bakewells that have the house next to us in Nantucket. Are you related? Listen, next fall we're going to have a house party there," she said. "We're right on the ocean, and my parents said we can drink. We'll have bonfires and stuff. I'm on the lacrosse team just like you, we can practice on the beach, even though it's different sticks. I mean, it's next year and all, but...will you come?"

Looking at her, my arousal still strong in my pants, I didn't just see what she described; I felt it. This was how. We would walk along the beach and talk. Really talk. This was, finally, the privileged space. There would be no former-best-friend-turned-monster chasing after an innocent black kid, there would be no Sandeep making us feel embarrassed for what he wanted. Lisa and I wouldn't be like Magruder either; we would be generous and true, I mean a girl who tells you she puked in her roommates sink was, like, into the truth. This would be done between lacrosse on the beach and bonfires. At night we'd listen to James Taylor and make out wrapped in Hudson Bay blankets in a New England mansion. It was vast and thrilling and beautiful and American in a way that I, Dan Pistore, had never known before.

"Yes," I said.

I didn't think of the switch as a web of lies and no one at school treated it that way. The mailroom lady (surname Billingsley) was happy to route mail for Dan Bakewell to my box, and the registrar (surname Moreland) was happy to put a hyphen after Pistore. People took to it quickly. It was also a reason to get married early—I was able to officially change my last name to Bakewell on the marriage certificate and Wendy was able to officially change her first name from Han-shi, a name she dropped her freshman year at school. I was in such a hurry, she was in such a hurry, to get out of our names and into a next life of a picture of a couple who went to boarding schools. My father only came to the wedding because my mother said she would stab herself if he didn't. In a side room of the church I said, "Dad, it's a translation."

"It's a shame."

"No, I'm proud and want to be seen and known. We come from bakers and instead of having this meaningless last name, now everyone will know where I come from and who I am."

"Oh, son. Bullshit." He sounded almost sorry for me.

What can I say, other than Everfield was an excellent school and I was very

happy there.

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Driving Sylvia to the airport was probably the worst day of my life. Suddenly I knew something of my father's heart, and my betrayal from freshman year onward swam up around my ears. It made hearing Sylvia hard, and on the way there she was so full of questions: should I play lacrosse? Did you study in your room? When I get off the bus, will someone tell me where to go? "Hey, Dad, someone will tell me, right?"

I swore I would not cry in the car after her plane took off. Wendy drove.

"I should have stopped her," I said.

"You could have if you'd told her anything, but you made it too mysterious. And therefore tempting," Wendy said. She sighed lightly. She seemed awfully philosophical that we had just put our 14-year-old child on a plane to leave us for good. "That was my mistake, with my school. I talked about it in too much detail, too vivid. You were weird, and she likes weird. The important thing is, she's going."

I looked at her profile and saw she had a small smile on her face.

"What is wrong with you?" I said.

"I know what's right. She'll get the best away from us. God, look at you. Why do people always think men are tougher than women," she said.

"This has nothing to do with toughness, or rightness. This is all about you, and your Asian need to have better children than anyone else, who cares what it does to our daughter."

"And I think you have an Italian clannish need to have your children at your side, who cares what it does to our daughter."

I took the car back after dropping Wendy off at work and drove 90 miles at a speed of 90 miles per hour away from Milwaukee to Jason Godwin's house in Lake Forest, Illinois, where he had stopped his morning commute to the Loop after my call. When I walked up his flagstone steps, birds tweeted, and even though it was mid-morning he was standing there with two double scotches on ice. We didn't even go inside; we went around to the backyard, which was on the bluffs of Lake Michigan; we walked across the green of his backyard closer to the cliff's edge and sat in large white chairs that faced the water.

"We all feel the way you do right now," he said. He had two daughters at Emma Willard.

I shook my head. I must have looked ill. "Hey," Godwin said. "Do you want me to call Wendy?"

"I'm sick of Wendy." It dawned on me that this whole year was an ending for us. Our shared adolescent experience and the fears, tastes and wishes generated from it had finally played themselves out.

"That happens," he said dryly—with the preppy ethos, from England, of understating and being stoic about a devastating loss. This was familiar and deeply comforting to me. I took a sip of the scotch and hunkered further down in the chair, and Godwin recrossed his legs and looked into his drink, his acknowledgement of the gravity of the situation.

"Look," he said, "she's all set. Jane's got her at the other end, she'll stop by and take Sylvia to dinner and walk her around."

"Jane?"

"Jane Magruder. I called Brad. His daughter's a sophomore. He's told Jane that Sylvia is her personal responsibility."

My heart seized. *Magruder has my daughter. Panic set in so quickly it took my brain a minute to figure out why. Jane Magruder will know I was Dan Pistore. Sylvia will go through what I did. And then a very different note hit: Now she'll find out she's not as different from me as she thinks. She'll learn...* Lake Michigan glinted as these revelations popped forth from the harsh diamond lights of the water.

Godwin bore my silence and dramatic breathing for a while, but then he finally said, "Okay, let's hear it."

"I have failed to do the right thing at every turn. Most of all, I didn't protect my child. She's going to be shamed and elevated by forces beyond my control."

"But Dan," he said, smiling.

"What?"

"That's the definition of the word 'heritage.'"



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