Dina shifted a little to one side. She laid one hand on each side of Joyce’s face, fingers along her cheeks, and began to push her thumbs against Joyce’s temples. She moved her thumbs back and forth in tight circles, steadily increasing the pressure. At first the rhythm was fluid and almost imperceptible, but as it grew more definite Dina began humming to herself. Joyce closed her eyes. She felt her eyelids flutter nervously, then grow still. She heard the newspaper rustle in the kitchen. She felt Dina purring her song. She felt the softness of Dina’s thighs, and the warmth they gave off. Dina’s hands were warm against her cheeks. Joyce reached up and covered them with her own hands, as if to keep them there.

**Tobias Wolff. The Night in Question.**

**The Chain**

Brian Gold was at the top of the hill when the dog attacked. A big black wolf-like animal attached to a chain, it came flying off a back porch and tore through its yard into the park, moving easily in spite of the deep snow, making for Gold’s daughter. He waited for the chain to pull the dog up short; the dog kept coming. Gold plunged down the hill, shouting as he went. Snow and wind deadened his voice. Anna’s sled was almost at the bottom of the slope. Gold had raised the hood of her parka against the needling gusts, and he knew that she could not hear him or see the dog racing toward her. He was conscious of the dog’s speed and of his own dreamy progress, the weight of his gumboots, the clinging trap of crust beneath the new snow. His overcoat flapped at his knees. He screamed one last time as the dog made its lunge, and at that moment Anna flinched away and the dog caught her shoulder instead of her face. Gold was barely halfway down the hill, arms pumping, feet sliding in the boots. He seemed to be running in place, held at a fixed, unbridgeable distance as the dog dragged Anna backwards off the sled, shaking her
like a doll. Gold threw himself down the hill helplessly, then the distance vanished and he was there.

The sled was overturned, the snow churned up; the dog had marked this ground as its own. It still had Anna by the shoulder. Gold heard the rage boiling in its gut. He saw the tensed hindquarters and the flattened ears and the red gleam of gum under the wrinkled snout. Anna was on her back, her face bleached and blank, staring at the sky. She had never looked so small. Gold seized the chain and yanked at it, but could get no purchase in the snow. The dog only snarled more fiercely and started shaking Anna again. She didn’t make a sound. Her silence made Gold go hollow and cold. He flung himself onto the dog and hooked his arm under its neck and pulled back hard. Still the dog wouldn’t let go. Gold felt its heat and the profound rumble of its will. With his other hand he tried to pry the jaw loose. His gloves turned slippery with drool; he couldn’t get a grip. Gold’s mouth was next to the dog’s ear. He said, “Let go, damn you,” and then he took the ear between his teeth and bit down with everything he had. He heard a yelp and something cracked against his nose, knocking him backwards. When he pushed himself up the dog was running for home, jerking its head from side to side, scattering flecks of blood on the snow.

“The whole thing took maybe sixty seconds,” Gold said. “Maybe less. But it went on forever.” He’d told the story many times now, and always mentioned this. He knew it was trite to marvel at the way time could stretch and stall, but he was unable not to. Nor could he stop himself from repeating that it was a “miracle”—the radiologist’s word—that Anna hadn’t been crippled or disfigured, or even killed; and that her doctor did not understand how she’d escaped damage to her bones and nerves. Though badly bruised, her skin hadn’t even been broken.

Gold loved his daughter’s face. He loved her face as a thing in itself, to be wondered at, studied. Yet after the attack he couldn’t look at Anna in the same way. He kept seeing the dog lunge at her, and himself stuck forever on that hill; then his heart began to kick, and he grew taut and restless and angry. He didn’t want to think about the dog anymore—he wanted it out of the picture. It should be put down. It was crazy, a menace, and it was still there, waiting to tear into some other kid, because the police refused to do anything.

“They won’t do a thing,” he said. “Nothing.”

He was going through the whole story again with his cousin Tom Rourke on a Sunday afternoon, a week after the attack. Gold had called him the night it happened, but the rest about the police was new, and Rourke got all worked up just as Gold expected. His cousin had an exacting, irritable sense of justice, and a ready store of loyal outrage that Gold had drawn on ever since they were boys. He had been alone in his anger for a week now and wanted some company. Though his wife claimed to be angry too, she hadn’t seen what he had seen. The dog was an abstraction to her, and she wasn’t one to brood anyway.

What was their excuse? Rourke wanted to know. What reason did the cops give for their complete and utter worthlessness?

“The chain,” Gold said. “They said—this is the really beautiful part—they said that since the dog was chained up, no law was broken.”

“But the dog wasn’t chained up, right?”

“He was, but the chain reaches into the park. I mean way in—a good thirty, forty feet.”

“By that logic, he could be on a chain ten miles long and legally chew up the whole fucking town.”
"Exactly."
Rourke got up and went to the picture window. He stood close to the glass and glowered at the falling snow. "What is it with Nazis and dogs? They’ve got a real thing going, ever notice that?" Still looking out the window, he said, "Have you talked to a lawyer?"
"Day before yesterday."
"What’d he say?"
"She, Kate Stiller. Said the police were full of shit. Then she told me to forget it. According to her, the dog’ll die of old age before we ever get near a courtroom."
"There’s the legal system for you, Brian me boy. They’ll give you all the justice you want, as long as it’s up the ass."
There was a loud thump on the ceiling. Anna was playing upstairs with Rourke’s boy, Michael. Both men raised their eyes and waited, and when no one screamed Gold said, "I don’t know why I even bothered to call her. I don’t have the money to pay for a lawyer."
"You know what happened," Rourke said. "The cop who took the complaint fucked it up, and now the others are covering for him. So, you want to take him out?"
"The cop?"
"I was thinking of the dog."
"You mean kill the dog?"
Rourke just looked at Gold. "Is that what you’re saying? Kill the dog?"
Rourke grinned, but he still didn’t say anything. "How?"
"How do you want?"
"Christ, Tom, I can’t believe I’m talking like this."
"But you are." Rourke shoved the naugahyde ottoman with his foot until it was facing Gold, then sat on it and leaned forward, so close their knees were touching. "No poison or glass. That’s chickenshit, I wouldn’t do that to my worst enemy. Take him out clean."

"Christ, Tom." Gold tried to laugh. "You can use my Remington, scope him in from the hill. Or if you want, get up close with the 12-gauge or the .44 magnum. You ever fired a pistol?"
"No."
"Better forget the magnum, then."
"I can’t do this."
"Sure you can."
"They’ll know it was me. I’ve been raising hell about that dog all week. Who do you think they’re going to come after when it suddenly shows up with a hole in its head?"
Rourke sucked in his cheeks. "Point taken," he said. "Okay, you can’t do it. But I sure as hell can."
"No. Forget it, Tom."
"You and Mary go out for the night. Have dinner at Chez Nicole or Pauly’s, someplace small where they’ll remember you. By the time you get home it’s all over and you’re clean as a whistle."
Gold finished his beer. "We’ve got to take care of business, Brian. If we don’t, nobody will."
"Maybe if I did it. Maybe. Having you do it—that just doesn’t feel right."
"What about that dog still running wild after what it did to Anna? Does that feel right?" When Gold didn’t answer, Rourke shook his knee. "Did you really bite the mutt’s ear?"
"I didn’t have any choice."
"You bite it off?"
"No."
"But you drew blood, right? You tasted blood."
"I got some in my mouth, yes, I couldn’t help it."
"It tasted good, didn’t it? Come on, Brian, don’t bullshit me, it tasted good."
"There was a certain satisfaction," Gold said. "You want to do what's right," Rourke said. "I appreciate that. I value that. It's your call, okay? But the offer stands."

Rourke produced the crack about Nazis and dogs not from deep reflection, Gold knew, but because to call people Nazis was his first response to any vexation or slight. Once he'd heard Rourke say it, though, Gold could not forget it. The picture that came to mind was one he'd pondered before: a line of frenzied dogs harrying Jews along a railway platform.

Gold was Jewish on his father's side, but his parents split up when he was young, and he'd been raised Catholic by his mother. His name didn't suit him; he sensed it made him seem ridiculous. When you heard Gold, what else could you think of but gold? With that name he should be a rich sharpie, not a mackerel-snapper with a dying business. The black kids who came into his video store were unmistakably of that opinion. They had a mock-formal way of saying "Mr. Gold," drawing out the word as if it were the precious substance itself. Finding themselves a little short on the rental fee, some of them weren't above asking him to make up the difference out of his own deep pockets, and acting amazed if he refused. The rusty Toyota he kept parked out front was a puzzle to them, a conversation piece; they couldn't figure out why, with all his money, he didn't get himself a decent set of wheels. One night, standing at the counter with her friends, a girl suggested that Gold kept his Cadillac at home because he was afraid the brothers would steal it. They'd been gooning on him, just messing around, but when she said this everyone went silent as if a hard truth had been spoken.

Cadillac. What else?

The Chain

After years of estrangement Gold had returned to the Catholic church, and went weekly to Mass to sustain his fragile faith, but he understood that in the eyes of the world he was a Jew. He had never known what to make of that. There were things he saw in himself that he thought of as Jewish, traits not conspicuous among the mostly Irish boys he'd grown up with, including his cousins. Bookishness, patience, a taste for classical music and complicated moralizing, aversion to alcohol and violence. All this he found acceptable. But he had certain other tendencies, less dear to him, that he also suspected of being Jewish. Corrosive self-mockery. Bouts of almost paralyzing skepticism. Physical awkwardness. A disposition toward passivity, even surrender, in the face of bullying people and oppressive circumstances. Gold knew that these ideas of Jewishness were also held by anti-Semites, and he resisted their influence, without much success.

In the already familiar picture that Rourke had conjured up, of Jews being herded by dogs, Gold sensed an instance of the resignation that he disliked in himself. He knew it was unfair to blame people for not fighting an evil that their very innocence made them incapable of imagining, yet even while admitting that they were brutalized and starved and in shock, he couldn't help but wonder: Why didn't one of them hit a guard—grab his gun—take some of the bastards with him? Do something? Even in his awareness of the terrible injustice of this question, he'd never really laid it to rest.

And with that old image vivid in his thoughts, it seemed to Gold that the question had now been put to him. Why didn't he do something? His own daughter had been savaged by just such a dog, a flinch away from having her face torn off. He had seen its insanity, felt its furious will to hurt. And it was still out there, lying in wait, because no one, himself included, would do what needed to be done.
He could not escape the consciousness of his own inaction. In the days following his conversation with Rourke, it became intolerable. No matter where he was, at home or in the store, he was also on that hill, unable to move or speak, watching the dog come at Anna with murder in its heart and the chain gliding behind like an infinite black snake.

He drove by the park late one day and stopped across the street from the house where the dog’s owners lived. It was a Colonial with a line of dormer windows, a big expensive house like most of the others around the park. Gold thought he could guess why the police had been so docile. This wasn’t a shooting gallery, a crib for perpetrators and scofflaws. The deep thunk of the brass knocker against the great green door, the glittering chandelier in the foyer, the Cinderella sweep of the staircase with its monumental newel post and gleaming rail—all this would tell you that the law was among friends here. Of course a dog needed room to roam. If people let their kids go tearing off every which way, they’d have to live with the consequences. Some folks were just natural-born whiners.

Though Gold despised the police, he believed he understood them. He did not understand the people who’d allowed this to happen. They had never called to apologize, or even to ask how Anna was. They seemed not to care that their dog was a killer. Gold had driven here with some notion of sitting down with them, helping them see what they ought to do—as if they’d even let him in the door. What a patsy!

He called Rourke that night and told him to go ahead.

Gold refused the offer. Mary didn’t know what they were up to, and he couldn’t sit across a table from her for three hours, even as the deed was being done, without telling. She wouldn’t like it, but she wouldn’t be able to stop it; the knowledge would only be a burden to her. Gold employed a graduate student named Simms who covered the store at night, except for Tuesdays, when he had a seminar. Though Rourke was disappointed by Gold’s humdrum dramaturgy, he assented: Tuesday night it was.

More snow fell that morning, followed by an ice storm. The streets and sidewalks were still glazed by nightfall and business was slow. As always Gold had a new release playing in the monitor above the counter, but he couldn’t follow the plot through the frantic cutting and ugly music, so he stopped it halfway through and didn’t bother to put in another. That left the store oddly quiet. Maybe for this reason his customers didn’t linger in the usual way, shooting the breeze with Gold and one another. They made their selections, paid and left. He tried to read the paper. At eighty-thirty Anna called to say she’d won a poster contest at school. After she hung up, Gold witnessed a fight in front of the Domino’s across the street. Two men, drunk or drugged, had a shouting match, and one of them took a clumsy swing at the other. They grappled and fell down together on the ice. A deliveryman and one of the cooks came outside and helped them up, then walked them off in different directions. Gold microwaved the chili left over from Sunday dinner. He ate slowly, watching the sluggish procession of cars and the hunched, gingerly trudge of people past his window. Mary had laid on the cumin with a free hand, which was just how Gold liked it. His forehead grew damp with sweat, and he took off his sweater. The base-
THE NIGHT IN QUESTION

board heaters ticked. The long fluorescent lights buzzed overhead.

Rourke called just before ten, when Gold was closing up. "Scooter has buried his last bone," he said.

"Scooter?"

"That was his name."

"I wish you hadn't told me."

"I got his collar for you—a little memento."

"For Christ's sake, Tom."

"Don't worry, you're clear."

"Just don't tell me any more," Gold said. "I'm afraid I'll say too much when the police come by."

"They're not gonna come by. The way I fixed things, they won't even know what happened." He coughed. "It had to be done, Brian."

"I guess."

"No guessing about it. But I've gotta say, it wasn't anything I'd want to do again."

"I'm sorry, Tom. I should've done it myself."

"It wasn't any fun, I'll tell you that." Rourke fell silent. Gold could hear him breathing. "I about froze my ass off. I thought they'd never let the damned beast out."

"I won't forget it," Gold said.

"De nada. It's over. Go in peace."

In late March, Rourke called Gold with a story of his own. He'd been gassing up on Erie Boulevard when a BMW backed away from the air hose and put a crease in his door. He yelled at the driver, a black man wearing sunglasses and a knit cap. The driver ignored him. He looked straight ahead and drove off across the lot into the road, but not before Rourke got a good look at his license plate. It was a vanity tag, easy to remember—SCUSE ME. Rourke called

the police, who tracked the driver down and ticketed him for leaving the scene of an accident.

So far, so good. Then it turned out the driver didn't have insurance. Rourke's company agreed to cover most of the bill—eight hundred bucks for a lousy dent—but that still left him with the three-hundred-dollar deductible. Rourke figured Mr. SCUSE ME should make up the difference. His insurance agent gave him the man's name and particulars, and Rourke started calling him. He called twice at reasonable hours, after dinner, but both times the woman who answered said he wasn't in and gave Rourke the number of a club on Townsend, where he got an answering machine. Though he left clear messages, he heard nothing back. Finally Rourke called the first number at seven in the morning and got the man himself, Mr. Vick Barnes.

"That's V-I-C-K," Rourke said. "Ever notice the way they do that with their names? You shorten Victor, you get Vic, right? V-I-C. So where does the fucking K come from? Or take Sean, S-E-A-N. Been spelled like that for about five hundred years. But not them, they've gotta spell it S-H-A-W-N. Like they have a right to that name in the first place."

"What did he say?"

"Gave me a lot of mouth, natch. First he gets indignant that I woke him up, then he says he's already been through all this shit with the police, and he doesn't believe he hit anybody anyway. Then he hangs up on me."

Rourke said he knew better than to call back; he wasn't going to get anywhere with this guy. Instead he went to the club, Jack's Shady Corner, where it turned out Mr. Vick Barnes worked as a deejay, and no doubt retailed dope on the side. All the deejays did. Where else would he get the dough for a new Beamer? But Rourke had to admit he was quite the pro, our Mr. Barnes, nice mellow voice, good line
of patter. Rourke had a couple beers and watched the dancers, then went looking for the car.

It wasn't in the lot. Rourke poked around and found it off by itself in a little nook behind the club, where it wouldn't get run into by drunks. He was going back tonight to give Mr. Vick Barnes a taste of his own medicine, plus a little extra for the vigorish.

"You can't," Gold said. "They'll know it was you."

"Let 'em prove it."

Gold had understood from the start where this story was taking him, even if Rourke hadn't. When he said "I'll do it," he felt as if he was reading the words from a script.

"No need, Brian. I got it covered."

"Wait a minute. Just hang on." Gold put the receiver down and took care of an old woman who was renting The Sound of Music. Then he picked it up and said, "They'll bust you for sure."

"Look, I can't let this guy fuck me over and just walk away. Next thing, everybody in town'll be lining up to give me the wood."

"I told you, I'll handle it. Not tonight—there's a talent show at school. Thursday."

"You sure, Brian?"

"I said I'd do it. Didn't I just say I'd do it?"

"Only if you really want to. Okay? Don't feel like you have to."

Rourke stopped by the store Thursday afternoon with instructions and equipment: two gallons of Olympic redwood stain to pour over the BMW, a hunting knife to slash the tires and score the paint, and a crowbar to break the windshield. Gold was to exercise extreme caution. He should work fast. He should leave his car running, and pointed in the direction of a clear exit. If for any reason things didn't look right he should leave immediately.

They loaded the stuff in the trunk of Gold's car.

"Where are you going to be?" Gold asked.

"Chez Nicole's. Same place you'd have gone if you had any class."

"I had a good sole meunière last time I was there."

"Prime rib for this bad boy. Rare. Taste of blood, eh, Brian?"

Gold watched him drive off. It was a warm day, the third in a row. Last week's snow had turned gray and was offering up its holdings of beer cans and dog turds. The gutters overflowed with melt, and the sun shone on the wet pavement and the broken glass in front of Domino's, which had abruptly closed three weeks earlier. Rourke's brake lights flashed. He stopped and backed up. Gold waited while the electric window descended, then leaned toward the car.

"Careful, Brian, okay?"

"You know me."

"Don't get caught. I have to say, that's something you definitely want to avoid."

Gold drove to the club at eleven-thirty, with the idea that there wouldn't be much coming and going at that hour on a weeknight. The casual drinkers would already be home, the serious crowd settling in for the duration. A dozen or so cars were scattered across the lot. Gold backed into a space as close to the rear of the building as he could get. He turned the engine off and looked around, then popped the trunk, took the crowbar and moved into the shadows around back. The BMW was parked where Rourke said it would be, in the short driveway between the alley and the dumpster.
Gold had no intention of using the stain or the knife. Rourke had suffered a dent; that was no reason to destroy a man’s car. One good dent in return would even things up between Rourke and Barnes, and settle his own debt in the bargain. If Rourke wanted more, he was strictly on his own.

Gold walked around the car—a beautiful machine, a gleaming black 328 with those special wheels that gang members were supposedly killing each other over. The dealership where Gold took his Toyota for repairs also had the local BMW boutique, and he always paid a visit to the showroom while he waited. He liked to open and close the doors, sit in the leather seats and work the gears, compare options and prices. Fully loaded, this model ran in the neighborhood of forty grand. Gold couldn’t imagine Mr. Vick Barnes qualifying for that kind of loan on a deejay’s salary, so he must have paid in cash. Rourke was right. He was dealing.

Gold hefted the crowbar. He felt the driving pulse of the music through the club walls, heard the vocalist—he wouldn’t call him a singer—shouting along with menace and complaint. It was a strange thing. You sold drugs to your own people, ruined their neighborhoods, turned their children into prostitutes and thugs, and you became a big shot. A man of property and respect. But try to run a modest business, bring something good into their community, and you were a bloodsucking parasite and a Child of Satan. Mr. Gold. He smashed the bar against his palm. He was thinking maybe he’d do a little something with that knife after all. The stain too. He could find uses for the stain.

A woman laughed in the parking lot and a man answered in a low voice. Gold crouched behind the dumpster and waited until their headlights raked the darkness and vanished. His hand was tight around the metal. He could

feel his own rage, and distrusted it. Only a fool acted out of anger. No, he would do exactly what was fair, what he had decided on before coming here.

Gold walked around to the driver’s side of the BMW. He held the crowbar with both hands and touched the curved end against the door at bumper height, where Rourke’s car would have been hit. He adjusted his feet. He touched the door again, then cocked the crowbar like a bat and swung it with everything he had, knowing just as the act passed beyond recall how absolutely he had betrayed himself. The shock of the blow raced up his arms. He dropped the crowbar and left it where it fell.

Victor Emmanuel Barnes found it there three hours later. He knelt and ran his hand along the jagged cleat in the car door, flecks of paint curling away under his fingertips. He knew exactly who had done this. He picked up the crowbar, tossed it on the passenger seat, and drove straight to the apartment building where Devereaux lived. As he sped through the empty streets he howled and pounded the dashboard. He stopped in a shriek of brakes and seized the crowbar and ran up the stairs to Devereaux’s door. He pounded the door with his fist. I told you next week, you motherfucker. I told you next week. He demanded to be let in. He heard voices, but when no one answered him he cursed them and began working at the door with the crowbar. It creaked and strained. Then it gave and Barnes staggered into the apartment, yelling for Devereaux.

But Devereaux wasn’t home. His sixteen-year-old nephew Marcel was spending the night on the couch after helping Devereaux’s little girl write an essay. He stood facing the door while Barnes jimmied it, his aunt and cousins and grandmother gathered behind him at the end of the hall, shaking and clinging to one another. When Barnes
stumbled bellowing inside, Marcel tried to push him back out. They struggled. Barnes shoved him away and swung the crowbar, catching Marcel right across the temple. The boy’s eyes went wide. His mouth opened. He sank to his knees and pitched facedown on the floor. Barnes looked at Marcel, then at the old woman coming toward him. “Oh Jesus,” he said, and dropped the crowbar and ran down the stairs and outside to his car. He drove to his grandmother’s house and told her what had happened, and she held his head in her lap and rocked over him and wept and prayed. Then she called the police.

Marcel’s death was on the morning news. Every half hour they ran the story, with pictures of both him and Barnes. Barnes was shown being hustled into a cruiser, Marcel standing before his exhibit at the All-County Science Fair. He had been an honors student at Morris Fields High, a volunteer in the school’s Big Brother program, and a past president of the Christian Youth Association. There was no known motive for the attack.

Camera crews from the TV stations followed students from their buses to the school doors, asking about Marcel and getting close-ups of the most distraught. At the beginning of second period, the principal came on the p.a. system and said that crisis counselors were available for those who wished to speak to them. Any students who felt unable to continue with their classes that day were to be excused.

Garvey Banks looked over at his girlfriend, Tiffany. Neither of them had known Marcel, but it was nice out and there wasn’t anything happening at school except people crying and carrying on. When he nodded toward the door, she smiled in that special way of hers and gathered her books and collected a pass from the teacher. Garvey waited a few minutes, then followed her outside.

They walked up to Bickel Park and sat on a bench overlooking the pond. Two old white ladies were throwing bread to the ducks. The wet grass steamed in the sun. Tiffany put her head on Garvey’s shoulder and hummed to herself. Garvey wanted to feel sad over that boy getting killed, but it was good being warm like this and close to Tiffany.

They sat on the bench in the sun. They didn’t talk. They hardly ever talked. Tiffany liked to look at things and be quiet in herself. Pretty soon they’d rent a movie and go over to Garvey’s. They’d kiss. They wouldn’t take any chances, but they’d make each other happy. All of that was going to happen, and Garvey was glad to wait for it.

After a while Tiffany stopped humming. “Ready, Gar?”

“Ready.”

They stopped in at Gold’s Video and Garvey took Breakfast at Tiffany’s off the shelf. They’d rented it the first time because of the title, then it became their favorite movie. Someday, they were going to live in New York City and know all kinds of people—that was for sure.

Mr. Gold was slow writing up the receipt. He looked sick. He counted out Garvey’s change and said, “Why aren’t you kids in school?”

Garvey felt cornered, and decided to blow a little smoke at the man. “Friend of mine got killed,” he said.

“You knew him? You knew Marcel Foley?”

“Yes sir. From way back.”

“What was he like?”

“Marcel? Hey, Marcel was the best. You got a problem, you took it to Marcel. You know, trouble with your girlfriend or whatever. Trouble at home. Trouble with a friend. Marcel had this thing, right, Tiff?—he could bring people together. He just had this easy way and he talked to you like you were important, like everybody’s important. He
could get people to come together, know what I'm saying? Come together and get on with it. *Peacemaker*. Marcel was a peacemaker. And that's the best thing you can be."

"Yes," Mr. Gold said. "It is." He put his hands on the counter and lowered his head.

Then Garvey saw that he was grieving, and it came to him how unfair a thing it was that Marcel Foley had been struck down with his life still before him, all his sunny days stolen away. It was wrong, and Garvey knew that it would not end there. He touched Mr. Gold's shoulder. "That man'll get his," he said. "He'll get what's coming to him. Count on it."

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*Smorgasbord*

A prep school in March is like a ship in the doldrums. Our history master said this, as if to himself, while we were waiting for the bell to ring after class. He stood by the window and tapped the glass with his ring in a dreamy, abstracted way meant to make us think he'd forgotten we were there. We were supposed to get the impression that when we weren't around he turned into someone interesting, someone witty and profound, who uttered impromptu bon mots and had a poetic vision of life.

The bell rang.

I went to lunch. The dining hall was almost empty, because it was a free weekend and most of the boys had gone to New York, or home, or to their friends' homes, as soon as their last class let out. About the only ones left were foreigners and scholarship students like me and a few other untouchables of various stripes. The school had laid on a nice lunch for us, cheese soufflé, but the portions were small and I went back to my room still hungry. I was always hungry.

Sleety rain fell past my window. The snow on the quad