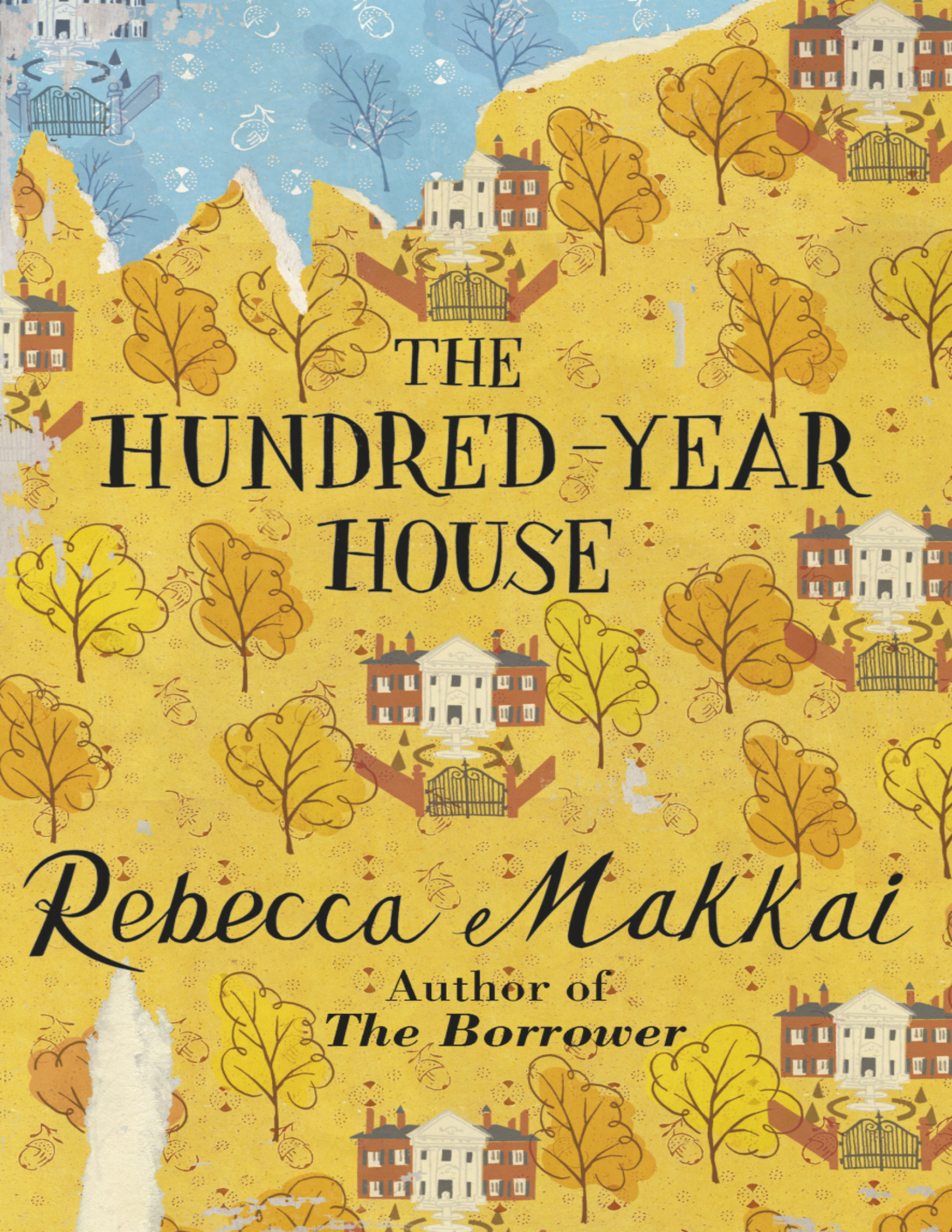
THE
HUNDRED-YEAR
HOUSE
Rebecca Makkai
Author of
The Borrower

CONTENTS

About the Book

The acclaimed author of *The Borrower* returns with a dazzlingly original, mordantly witty novel about the secrets of an old-money family and their turn-of-the-century estate, Laurelfield.

Meet the Devohrs: Zee, a Marxist literary scholar who detests her parents' wealth but nevertheless finds herself living in their carriage house; Gracie, her mother, who claims she can tell your lot in life by looking at your teeth; and Bruce, her step-father, stockpiling supplies for the Y2K apocalypse and perpetually late for his tee time. Then there's Violet Devohr, Zee's great-grandmother, who they say took her own life somewhere in the vast house, and whose massive oil portrait still hangs in the dining room.

Violet's portrait was known to terrify the artists who resided at the house from the 1920s to the 1950s, when it served as the Laurelfield Arts Colony – and this is exactly the period Zee's husband, Doug, is interested in. An out-of-work academic whose only hope of a future position is securing a book deal, Doug is stalled on his biography of the poet Edwin Parfitt, once in residence at the colony. All he needs to get the book back on track – besides some motivation and self-esteem – is access to the colony records, rotting away in the attic for decades. But when Doug begins to poke around where he shouldn't, he finds Gracie guards the files with a strange ferocity, raising questions about what she might be hiding. The secrets of the hundred-year house would turn everything Doug and Zee think they know about her family on its head – that is, if they were to ever uncover them.

In this brilliantly conceived, ambitious, and deeply rewarding novel, Rebecca Makkai unfolds a generational saga in reverse, leading the reader back in time on a literary scavenger hunt as we seek to uncover the truth about these strange people and this mysterious house. With intelligence and humor, a daring narrative approach, and a lovingly satirical voice, Rebecca Makkai has crafted an unforgettable novel about family, fate and the incredible surprises life can offer.

About the Author

Rebecca Makkai's first novel, *The Borrower*, was a *Booklist* Top 10 Debut, an Indie Next pick, and an *O Magazine* selection. Her short fiction has appeared in *Harper's, Tin House, Ploughshares, New England Review*, and has been selected four times for *The Best American Short Stories*. The recipient of a 2014 NEA Fellowship, she lives in Chicago and Vermont.

ALSO BY REBECCA MAKKAI

The Borrower

THE HUNDRED-YEAR HOUSE

REBECCA MAKKAI

WILLIAM HEINEMANN: LONDON

for
—but not about—
Ragdale and Yaddo
with boundless gratitude

Nothing of her was left, except her shining loveliness.

—Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, "The Transformation of Daphne"

PART I

1999

1

FOR A GHOST story, the tale of Violet Saville Devohr was vague and underwhelming. She had lived, she was unhappy, and she died by her own hand somewhere in that vast house. If the house hadn't been a mansion, if the death hadn't been a suicide, if Violet Devohr's dark, refined beauty hadn't smoldered down from that massive oil portrait, it wouldn't have been a ghost story at all. Beauty and wealth, it seems, get you as far in the afterlife as they do here on earth. We can't all afford to be ghosts.

In April, as they repainted the kitchen of the coach house, Zee told Doug more than she ever had about her years in the big house: how she'd spent her entire, ignorant youth there without feeling haunted in the slightest—until one summer, home from boarding school, when her mother had looked up from her shopping list to say, "You're pale. You're not depressed, are you? There's no reason to succumb to that. You know your great-grandmother killed herself in this house. I understand she was quite self-absorbed." After that, Zee would listen all night long, like the heroine of one of the gothic novels she loved, to the house creaking on its foundation, to the knocking she'd once been assured was tree branches hitting the windows.

Doug said, "I can't imagine you superstitious."

"People change."

They were painting pale blue over the chipped yellow. They'd pulled the appliances from the wall, covered the floor in plastic. There was a defunct light switch, and there

was a place near the refrigerator where the wall had been patched with a big square board years earlier. Both were thick with previous layers of paint, so Doug just painted right on top.

He said, “You realize we’re making the room smaller. Every layer just shrinks the room.” His hair was splattered with blue.

It was one of the moments when Zee remembered to be happy: looking at him, considering what she had. A job and a house and a broad-shouldered man. A glass of white wine in her left hand.

It was a borrowed house, but that was fine. When Zee and Doug first moved back to town two years ago, they’d found a cramped and mildewed apartment above a gourmet deli. On three separate occasions, Zee had received a mild electric shock when she plugged in her hair dryer. And then her mother offered them the coach house last summer and Zee surprised herself by accepting.

She’d only agreed to returned home because she was well beyond her irrational phase. She could measure her adulthood against the child she’d been when she lived here last. As Zee peeled the tape from the window above the sink and looked out at the lights of the big house, she could picture her mother and Bruce in there drinking rum in front of the news, and Sofia grabbing the recycling on her way out, and that horrible dog sprawled on his back. Fifteen years earlier, she’d have looked at those windows and imagined Violet Devohr jostling the curtains with a century of pent-up energy. When the oaks leaned toward the house and plastered their wet leaves to the windows, Zee used to imagine that it wasn’t the rain or wind but Violet, in there still, sucking everything toward her, caught forever in her final, desperate circuit of the hallways.

They finished painting at two in the morning, and they sat in the middle of the floor and ate pizza. Doug said, “Does it feel more like it’s ours now?” And Zee said, “Yes.”

At a department meeting later that same week, Zee reluctantly agreed to take the helm of a popular fall seminar. English 372 (The Spirit in the House: Ghosts in the British and American Traditions) consisted of ghost stories both oral and literary. It wasn't Zee's kind of course—she preferred to examine power structures and class struggles and imperialism, not things that go bump in the night—but she wasn't in a position to say no. Doug would laugh when she told him.

On the bright side, it was the course she wished she could have taken herself, once upon a time. Because if there was a way to kill a ghost story, this was it. What the stake did to the heart of the vampire, literary analysis could surely accomplish for the legend of Violet Devohr.

2

DOUG WORKED IN secret whenever Zee left the house.

The folders on his desk were still optimistically full of xeroxed articles on the poet Edwin Parfitt. And he *was* still writing a book on Parfitt, in that its bones continued to exist, on forty printed pages and two separate diskettes. The wallpaper on his computer (Zee had set it up) was the famous photo of Parfitt kissing Edna St. Vincent Millay on the cheek.

But what Doug was actually sitting down to write, after a respectful silence for the death of both his career and the last shred of his manhood, was book number 118 in the *Friends for Life* series, *Melissa Calls the Shots*. He hid the document on his hard drive in a file called “Systems Operating Folder 30.” This book, unlike the Parfitt monograph, even had an actual editor, a woman named Frieda who called once a week to check his progress.

Doug’s stopover in the land of preteen literature was only the latest in a wretched chain of events—lack of money, paralysis on the monograph, failure to find employment, surreal indignity of moving into the coach house on Zee’s mother’s estate—but it would be the last. He would get this done and get paid, and then, because he’d be on a roll, he’d get other things done. He would publish the Parfitt book, he’d land a tenure-track post, and somehow along the way his hair would grow thicker.

He’d found Frieda through his friend Leland, a luckless poet who wrote wilderness adventures at the same press

for “two grand a pop.” Leland talked like that, and he drank whiskey because Faulkner had. “They give you the entire plot,” he said, “and you just stick to the style. Really there *is* no style. It’s refreshing.” Leland claimed they took a week each, and Doug was enchanted with the idea of shooting out a fully formed book like some kind of owl pellet. He hadn’t written fiction since grad school, when he’d published a few experimental stories (talking trees, towns overcome with love) that now mortified him, even if Zee still adored them. But these publication credentials, plus Leland’s endorsement, landed him the gig. He knew nothing about wilderness adventure, but the press was suddenly short a writer for their middle-grade girls’ series—and desperate enough to hire a man. And so. Here he was.

The money would be nice. The coach house was free, but not the food, the car payments, the chiropractor. And that last wasn’t optional: If Dr. Morsi didn’t fix Doug’s back twice a week, he’d be unable to sit and work on anything at all. Frieda sent him four other books from the series, plus a green binder labeled “THE FFL BIBLE” with fact sheets on each character. “Melissa *hates* dark chocolate!” came several bullet points above “Melissa’s grandfather, Boppy, died of cancer in #103.”

“The first chapter,” Frieda told him on the phone, “introduces the conflict, which is the Populars on the team, will Melissa ever be goalie, *et cetera*.” He’d never met Frieda, but imagined she wore pastel blazers. “The second chapter is where you recap the founding of the club. Our return readers skip it, so you can plagiarize chunks from other volumes. The rest will be clear from the outline. Everything’s wrapped up at the end, but there’s that thread you leave hanging, ‘What’s wrong with Candy,’ which is where 119 picks up; 119 is being written already, so—as we tell all our writers—it’s important you don’t make uninvited changes to the world of the series.” Doug took comfort in

the fact that this was clearly a memorized speech, part of the formula.

He dumped the books at the thrift store, hid the “Bible” pages among some old tax forms, then went to the library every day for a week to skim the series.

And meanwhile, the little house was strangling him, tightening its screws and hinges. There was an infestation of ladybugs that spring, a plague straight out of Exodus. Not even real ladybugs but imposter Japanese beetles with dull copper shells, ugly black underwings jutting out below. Twice a day, Doug would suck them off the window screens with the vacuum attachment, listening as each hit the inner bag with a satisfying *thwack*. The living ones smelled like singed hair—whether from landing too close to lightbulbs or from some vile secretion, no one was sure. Sometimes Doug would take a sip of water and it would taste burnt, and he would know a bug had been in that glass, swimming for its life and winning.

There was a morning in May—notable only for Zee storming around in full academic regalia, late for commencement—when Doug, still in bed, nearly blurted it all out. Wasn’t it a tenet of a good marriage that you kept no secrets beyond the gastrointestinal? Hundreds of movies and one drunken stranger in a bar had told him as much. And so he almost spilled it, casual-like, as she tossed shoes from the closet. “Hey,” he might have said, “I have this project on the side.” But he knew the look Zee would give: concern just stopping her dark eyes from rolling to the ceiling. A long silence before she kissed his forehead. He didn’t blame her. She’d married the guy with the fellowship and bright future and trail of heartbroken exes, not this schlub who needed sympathy and prodding. When she dumped her entire purse out on the bed and refilled it with just her keys and wallet, he took it as a convenient sign: *Shut the hell up, Doug.* He might have that tattooed on his arm one day.

Zee's mother, Gracie, would sometimes include the two of them in her parties, where she'd steer Doug around by the elbow: "My son-in-law Douglas Herriot, who's a fantastic *poet*, and you know, I think it's *wonderful*. They're in the coach house till he's all done writing. It's my own little NEA grant!" Doug would mutter that he wasn't a poet at all, that he was a "freelance PhD" writing *about* a poet, but no one seemed to hear.

The monograph was an attempt to turn his anemic doctoral dissertation on Edwin Parfitt into something publishable. Parfitt was coming back into style, to the extent that dead, marginal modernists can, and if Doug finished this thing soon he could get in on the first wave of what he planned, in job interviews, to call "the Parfitt renaissance." The dissertation had been straight analysis, and Doug wanted to incorporate some archival research, to be the first to assemble a timeline of the poet's turbulent life. In her less patient moments, Zee accused him of trying to write a biography—academically uncouth and unhelpful career-wise—but Doug didn't see what harm it would do to set some context. And the man's life story was intriguing: Eddie Parfitt (Doug couldn't help but use his nickname, mentally—after nine years of research he felt he knew the guy) was wealthy, ironic, gay, and unhappy, a prodigy who struggled to fulfill his own early promise. He committed suicide at thirty-seven after his lover died in the Second World War. Parfitt had left few personal records, though. Nor had he flitted about the Algonquin Round Table and cracked wise for posterity. Entire periods—the publication gap between 1929 and late 1930, for instance, after which his work became astonishingly flat—lacked any documentation whatsoever.

Not that it mattered now.

Each morning, as Doug switched off his soul and settled in to write ("*Twelve-year-old Melissa Hopper didn't take 'no' for an answer*," the thing began), he imagined little

Parfitt stuffed in the bottom desk drawer on those diskettes, biding his time between the staplers, choking with thirst. The ladybugs hurled their bodies against his desk lamp, and it sounded like knocking—like the ghost of Parfitt, frantically pounding against the wood.

In the brief window between commencement and the start of Zee's summer teaching, Gracie invited them to the big house for brunch. They ate on the back terrace overlooking the grounds—the paths, the fountain, the fish ponds. It was like the garden behind a museum, a place where art students might take picnic lunches. Bruce, Gracie's second husband, had conveniently excused himself to make his tee time when Gracie announced that she had invited Bruce's son and daughter-in-law to move into the coach house too.

"It's really a two-family house," she said, "and what was done, way back, was to keep the gardener's family there as well as the driver's, and they all shared the kitchen. Can you believe, so many servants? I couldn't manage."

Zee didn't put the butter dish down. "Mom, I've met Case *twice*. We're strangers." Bruce's children had always lived in Texas.

"Yes," Gracie said, "and it's a shame. Didn't you dance with him at our wedding, Zilla? You'd have been in college, the both of you. He's quite athletic."

"No."

"Well he's out of work. He lost five million dollars and they fired him. Miriam's a wonderful artist, but it doesn't support them, you know how *that* is, so they need the space as much as you."

Doug managed to nod, and hoped Zee wouldn't hold it against him.

"So they'll both hang around the house all day," Zee said.

"Well yes, but it shouldn't bother you, as you'll be at work. It only concerns Douglas. He could even write about them!" Gracie rubbed the coral lipstick off her mug and

smoothed her hair—still blonde, still perfect. “And something will open up at the college for Douglas, I’m sure of it. Are you asking for him?”

“Really,” Doug said, “I don’t mind. I can get used to anything.”

That afternoon, Doug watched his wife from the window above his desk. She stood on the lawn between the big house and the coach house. Anyone else might have paced. For Zee, stillness was the surest sign of stress. She stared at the coach house as if she might burn it down. As if it might burn *her* down.

She wouldn’t let herself pitch a fit. At some point she and Gracie had come to the tacit agreement that no actual money or property would pass between them. It was the apotheosis of that old-money creed that money should never be discussed: In this family, it couldn’t even be *used*. Doug had doubts whether Zee would even accept her eventual inheritance, or just give it directly to some charity Gracie wouldn’t approve of. She was a Marxist literary scholar—this was how she actually introduced herself at wine and cheese receptions, leaving Doug to explain to the confused physics professor or music department secretary that this was more a theoretical distinction than a political one—and having money would not help her credibility. But she had accepted the house.

And now this.

The Texans were just *there* one Tuesday in June when Doug returned from the gym. He picked a box off the U-Haul lip and carried it up to the kitchen, which sat between the two second-floor apartments. Doug loved the feel of an upstairs kitchen, of looking out over the driveway as he flipped pancakes.

A woman with curly brown hair stood on the counter in cutoffs and a tank top, arranging plates in a high cupboard.

He put the box down softly, worried that if he startled her, she'd fall. He waited, watching, which seemed somehow inappropriate, and he was about to clear his throat when she turned.

"Oh!" she said. "You're—Hey!" He offered a hand, but she shook it first, then realized what it was for and held on tight as she hopped to the floor. She was a bit younger than Doug and Zee, maybe twenty-eight. And tiny. She came to his armpit. "Miriam, obviously. I hope we're not in your way. I had to scoot some glasses over."

"Doug Herriot," he said, and wondered at his own formality. "I can clear out the lower cupboards. You'll never reach that."

"I'm not so tall, am I! But Case is. We'll be fine." She opened the box on the table, saw it contained clothes, and closed it again. "This is a hell of a place."

He looked out the window and laughed. "Yeah, it's not subtle."

"Oh, I meant *this* place!" She tapped the open cabinet door. "This is quarter sawn oak!"

Doug had no idea what she meant, but he nodded. He wasn't surprised that the kitchen should be well built; the same architect had designed both houses, and presumably the same carpenters and brick layers had constructed them. The stone wall that bordered the estate also formed the eastern wall of the coach house, or at least its ground floor. The second story rose above that, making the structure look from the road like a child's playhouse perched atop the wall. Really it was quite large. The ground floor had at first been open garage space, with two arched entrances for cars. Gracie and her first husband, Zee's father, had the arches filled in with glass panels, and stuck a sunporch on the back. Why they bothered was unclear, except that in the post-chauffeur sixties they'd wanted an attached garage on the big house and felt they

ought to transform the old one into something useful and rentable.

The estate had belonged to Gracie's family all along—the Devohrs, though Gracie never used her maiden name. The Devohrs sat firmly in the second tier of the great families of the last century, not with the Rockefellers and Vanderbilts of the world but certainly shoulder-to-shoulder with the Astors, the Fricks, and were lesser known in these parts only by virtue of their Canadian roots. Toronto was hardly Tuxedo Park. Of those families, though, only the Devohrs were so continually subject to scandal and tragedy and rumor. An unkind tabloid paper of the 1920s had run a headline about the "Devohrcing Devohrs," and the name had stuck. So had the behavior that prompted it.

Before that infamy, back in 1900, Augustus Devohr (unfocused son of the self-made patriarch), wanting to oversee his grain investments more closely, had built this castle near Lake Michigan, thirty miles straight north of Chicago. By 1906, after his wife killed herself in the house—the suicide that had so bothered an adolescent Zee—he wanted nothing more to do with the Midwest or its crops. In either a fit of charity or a deft tax dodge, Augustus allowed the home to be used for many years as an artists' colony. Writers and painters and musicians would stay, expenses paid, for one to six months. And—a knife in Doug's heart—Edwin Parfitt himself had visited the colony, had worked and lived right behind one of those windows, though Doug would never know which one. It was the real reason Doug had even agreed to move into the coach house: as if the proximity would, through some magical osmosis, help his research.

Miriam climbed back on the counter, her small legs folding and then unfolding like a nimble insect's. She redid her ponytail. She wasn't exactly attractive, Doug decided (he'd been deliberating, against his will), but she had an interesting face with a jutting chin, eyes bright like a little

dog’s. And as soon as he thought it, he recognized it. It was the beginning of a thousand love stories. (“She wasn’t beautiful, but she had an interesting face, the kind artists asked to paint.”) And uninvited, the next thought bore down: He was supposed to fall in love. It wasn’t true, and it wouldn’t happen, but there it was, and it stuck. Anyone watching him in a movie would *expect* him to fall in love, would wait patiently through the whole bag of popcorn. He tried to push the thought away before she turned again, before she saw it on his face. He excused himself and left the room.

3

DOUG WAS READING in bed when Zee got home. She closed the door. “Did you see them?”

“I met her—Miriam—and she’s okay. She’s small. But then I stayed in here working. I’m sure we don’t have to whisper.”

It was probably true—the two bedrooms were at opposite ends of the second floor. Each apartment had a large entry room, which would once have been the sitting area but which Doug and Zee used as a study, desks under both windows. Before the Texans came, they would use the other apartment for laundry folding or exercise or sex.

“You just hid in here? Did you meet Case?”

“I didn’t want to make them feel they were invading. You know, like if I sat and watched them unpack. Right?”

She was disappointed. She’d wanted the whole story, the gruesome details. Something concrete at which to direct her anger.

She had managed to stay calm and pleasant all day. She had forced herself to smile when Sid Cole had called to her across the lawn—in front of students—that “Marxists don’t drink cappuccino!” She’d even raised her coffee cup into the air. She had laughed out loud: Ha!

The irony was not lost on her that she, willfully mistaken for a Communist by her most obnoxious colleagues, should be allergic to communal living.

“Does she have a Texas accent?”

“No, actually. I don’t think so. Not really, more like—I don’t know.”

What was wrong with him?

She said, “Did she take Case’s last name?”

“I have no idea.”

“That would have a horrible sound. Miriam Breen. It’s too ugly.”

“Yes, it’s ugly.”

Zee changed and found her glasses and lay on top of the covers, underlining an article in *The New York Review of Books*.

“It should give you some impetus to write,” she said. “The more annoying these people are, the better.”

“I’m writing every day.”

She hoped it was true. The worst part of her wanted to stand over his shoulder as he wrote, to suggest commas. Once, early in grad school, she’d tidied up a paper of his when he was out for the night. He’d never noticed.

Doug flipped himself around on the bed and started rubbing her feet.

“Doug,” she said. “Stop it.”

“I can’t hear you.”

“I have stuff to do.”

“I’m sorry, I’m way down here by your feet, and I can’t hear you.”

He peeked over the crest of her knees like a groundhog, then ducked down. He did it till she laughed. She put the journal down, and he worked his way up.

4

CASE AND MIRIAM and Zee were at the table when Doug came out the next morning, fortunately having remembered to put on pants. Case was tall, as Miriam had said, and deeply tan with big, straight teeth. Polo shirt and flip-flops. In a movie, Doug thought, he'd be the guy who beats up John Cusack. The men shook hands, and Doug found himself giving Miriam a ridiculous little salute. He began making eggs, just so he had something to do.

Zee was dressed for teaching her summer session class, silk blouse tucked into her skirt in such a tidy way that if he hadn't known better, Doug would have imagined her morning routine involved duct tape. "So," she said, "I hear you're searching for a job, Case."

Case looked up from his cereal, leaned back, and regarded Zee as if she'd ruined his beach vacation by asking where he planned to be five years from next Thursday. "I'm in no rush," he said. And then he laughed, releasing them all abruptly from whatever contempt he'd held them in. Doug decided, in that moment, that he despised Case Breen.

"He needs a few weeks to recoup," Miriam said. "We're aiming for September."

"Gonna get some exercise. Might shop for a new car."

Zee said, "What's wrong with your old one?"

Miriam put her hand on Case's shoulder and said, "I hope we won't be in the way. I know you're making a sacrifice. I

was going to set up on the sunporch to work, but only if it's okay with you."

Doug gestured to the constellation of ladybugs on the ceiling. "You won't be more trouble than our other houseguests." No one laughed.

"Or the ghost," Zee added, and smiled as if she'd just played some kind of trump card, as if Case and Miriam would now spring up and flee. "Violet mostly sticks to the big house, but you'll hear her knocking on the windows some nights. You'll get used to it."

Miriam said, "Oh, I *love* ghost stories. I do."

Zee picked up her keys. "I'm kidding, of course."

She left, and Doug ate his eggs standing up. Case asked if Doug wanted to join him for a run, and he managed to bow out, blaming his bad knees.

"Suit yourself," Case said, and (Doug could have sworn) glanced at Doug's paunch before leaving the room.

Doug started scrubbing dishes, and a minute later Case appeared down on the drive, changed and stretching his calves. Miriam came over to rinse and dry, and they talked above the sound of the water. He learned that Miriam's art was mixed-media mosaics.

"Most people would call it detritus collage," she said. "But I use classical mosaic techniques. Just using found pieces. I'm always cutting up Case's clothes." She pushed her curls from her face with a wet hand. "Tell me about your poetry."

"*No*," he said, which she didn't deserve. "Sorry. I'm not a poet. I'm writing *about* a poet. Gracie's mixed up. I didn't mean to shout at you."

She smiled, as if it were regular and amusing for people to make idiots of themselves in front of her. "What poet?"

"Oh. Edwin Parfitt? He was a modernist."

"Sure, right, that one poem! From high school! I mean, not—"

"'Apollo on the Mississippi.'"

“Yes! ‘Whose eyes’ bright embers gleam.’ That one!”

“He was a one-hit wonder. It’s his worst poem, but it’s all anyone knows. That and his suicide note. He drowned himself in a lake, and the note had instructions for his friends to burn his body on the beach just like the poet Shelley. And they *did* it.” He let the soapy water out and sprayed down the basin. All because of that inane thought yesterday, he was aware of the distance between their bodies.

“I’d love to read it,” she said. “Your book, not the suicide note.” She dried her little red hands. “Well, both.”

5

ZEE TOOK TWO aspirin, forgetting they'd just make her sicker to her stomach. The cramps might have been from dehydration, or from the hell of teaching summer school English to the seventeen-year-olds who were supposed to be experiencing college-level academics but were more interested in college-level drinking. But the headache was definitely from having her home invaded.

She gave up on grading ("Most people," began one essay on *Heart of Darkness*, "will encounter water at some point in their lives") and stacked the papers neatly on the corner of the desk, so it would look like a planned installation rather than an abandonment. On top she put the strange metal thing she'd found in the woods behind the big house that spring. It was probably some sort of machine part, but she loved the design of it, the waffled roundness, and she loved its thick and ancient rust. She thought of it as a metal daisy top: six hollow petals around a hollow center. She stuck a pencil in one of the holes, and now the stack looked complete.

She checked mail and got coffee in the English office. Chantal, the department secretary, was on the phone, so Zee lingered over a sabbatical notice on the board.

Zee was obsessive about the bulletin board, and about the campus papers and the department calendar. She figured her job had two parts: the work part and the career part. The work part right now was teaching, publishing, flying to petty conferences in depressing university towns.

The career part was showing up at concerts and sitting behind the college president, keeping in touch with everyone from grad school. If she could, she'd have hosted dinner parties. It was easy enough to tell her colleagues she and Doug were renting a coach house in town, but it would be far too risky to bring them so close to the Devohr family history. She couldn't imagine the jokes Sid Cole would make if he knew she'd been to the manor born.

Thank God the "Devohr" was buried under her father's name, Grant. She'd been tempted to take Doug's name just to inter the Devohrs one layer further, but she refused to part with that last scrap of her father. She told colleagues, if they asked, that her mother had stayed home, and her father had been a journalist and a recovering alcoholic, all of which was true. Really, she felt she could say "recovered" alcoholic now, in defiance of all the careful AA jargon, because he'd never have the chance to fall off the wagon again, and never had in the twelve years she knew him, not even on the night Nixon was reelected and he was the only man in town hurling books at the TV. He had a lifelong habit of sucking coins—popping a nickel in his mouth and flipping it with his tongue while he wrote or thought—that she figured must have been some kind of crutch. A reminder not to drink, maybe.

Chantal hung up and crossed her eyes at Zee. "Are we working out?" she said.

"I need to punch someone. But working out will suffice."

Chantal had a thousand little braids, and not one was ever askew. She was the most competent person Zee knew—a filing system to rival the FBI's—and Zee liked her better than any actual department member. They did the ellipticals side by side, and Zee told Chantal about the Texans moving in. "I never get along with southern women," she said. "I'm always offending them. What I see as debate, they see as assault. The worst part is, Doug will

fall in love with her.” She was whispering. There were students all around.

“Is she pretty?”

“The point is she’s *there*.”

Chantal was cheating, taking her hands off the grips. “But he’s not like that, is he? Your husband?”

“He’s so desperate not to work on the Parfitt thing, he’d fall in love with a zebra. He might not *do* anything about it, but he’ll fall in love.” A woman like Miriam, with the wild eyes and chewed-off fingernails, would fall for anyone who listened to her emote—especially Doug, whose half smile was a sort of magical charm. It had disarmed even Zee. But Doug wouldn’t recognize the difference between love and a diversion, would think that just because he hadn’t been distracted like this before, there was destiny involved. “You know what his nickname was, in school? Dough. Because he was Doug H., but also because he’s just—he’s malleable. He’s suggestible.”

Chantal pushed the button to up her speed. “Keep him on his toes. Not to tell you what to do. But a bored man is—I don’t know, isn’t there an expression for that?” She laughed. “A bored man is not a good thing.”