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ABRAHAM'S ENCHANTED FOREST

Old rides were easy to come by if you knew where to look. Places went out of business all the time. Abraham drove to Pennsylvania and Ohio to check out people's old Scramblers and Whack-a-Moles and Zip-Dee-Doos. If Greta was out of school, she went with him and gave her opinion on the rusting metal giants. She was sixteen now and could be trusted with important decisions. He rarely bought anything, though. Most of the time he'd come home and say, You know what? I've got an idea! Then he'd vanish into his shop for a few hours or a few days and come out with something strung together with pieces of old tires. All of the attractions at the Forest were homemade except for the lonely Ferris wheel, which poked dramatically over the tree line. There was a guy in Big Sur who carved things with a chainsaw, and he and Abraham had some kind of deal going. It had something to do with weed. Every now and then a truck would pull up and deposit a burl dwarf or wizard or unicorn, and there'd be something else inside, too. Abraham liked it when things looked like they could have occurred organically, like when a tree stump looked enough like a miniature castle to label it as such, but you'd still have to squint and maybe put in some windows and turrets in your head.

Greta knew that things were confusing on purpose. The Enchanted Forest was an actual place, that's why lots of people stopped. On the map, there was a small triangle of green, labeled *Enchanted National Forest and State Park*, and Abraham's Enchanted Forest roadside attraction was on the highway headed in that direction. Before Greta was born, her parents Abraham and Judy had made enough

signs to divert even the most dedicated of road warriors. *Look out, goblins ahead! Magical pony crossing! Entering Fairy Dust Area! Food! Rides! Unexplainable phenomena! Visit the Enchanted Forest, Five Miles!* His goal was to be the Northeast's answer to Wall Drug and South of the Border, but to actually give people a good reason to stop. Sure, he wanted them to pay admission, but more than that, he wanted to give them a worthwhile experience. He wanted to give them poetry and apple pie, the good kind of Americana. He and Judy had bought the land for nothing and then built the whole Forest from scratch, except for the trees. Greta knew that tourists considered the Forest a rip-off; after all, it was mainly a path through big old trees with some plaques telling you to look out for some imaginary thing, a Ferris wheel, and a place to eat lunch. But she also knew the truth: most people didn't look hard enough.

Apparently, you could see the upper rim of the Enchanted Forest's Ferris wheel all the way from New York City, which was thirty miles south. At least that's what Abraham liked to say. He was big-bellied and big-voiced and liked to say a lot of things. Sometimes Greta made lists in her spiral notebook. *Today, Abraham made a speech about different ways to reuse plastic water-bottles and it lasted for twenty-six minutes. Almost all of the ideas involved using way more plastic. What if no one wants to go inside a Trojan horse made of garbage?* In her sixteen years, she couldn't remember ever calling her father by anything but his first name. Abraham's enormous gray and white speckled beard was reason enough.

Greta's parents met in 1975, back when things were cheap. Her mother, Judy, was driving across the country in an old school bus with her then-boyfriend, who was a candle maker. The boyfriend — Greta could never remember his name, no matter how hard she tried — would set up camp somewhere and make candles long enough to sell them at craft fairs and farmer's markets, and then, when he'd made enough money to last a few hundred miles,

off they'd go. The problem was, one day the bus wouldn't start, and he decided he'd rather keep moving than stick around and make more candles. He gave Judy the bus and the buckets of wax and all the spools of heavy string for the wicks, and he was gone. For the next month, Judy and the bus sat in the parking lot and made candles on the asphalt. That was until she met Abraham. The way he liked to tell it, Abraham fell in love with the bus first, then Judy. It was a win-win situation.

The old, yellow bus now sat on the edge of the Enchanted Forest parking lot, as though a crowd of fifth-graders was on an endless field-trip. They'd had it towed. You couldn't see much of the Forest from the parking lot; that was the point. You had to pay your money before you saw exactly what you were paying for. It was always fun when the lot was full — when she was little, Greta would wander in between the parked cars, weaving in and out, trying to count all the states from the license plates. Every now and then there was something exciting, like California or Colorado or Alaska, but mostly it was New York, New Jersey, Connecticut. All the ones she could spell without writing them in the air with her finger.

Of course, these days if the lot was full enough to have cars from Alaska, it meant that Greta was supposed to be inside, taking tickets or bussing tables or walking around smiling at people. She was supposed to be a fairy. Judy'd sewn her some wings. The costume really wasn't so bad. Greta could wear whatever she wanted as long as she had on the glittery wings, which she could put on and take off like a gossamer backpack. Most of the time, Greta put them on over her t-shirt or sweatshirt, depending on the weather. They were adjustable. Here's what Greta liked to wear: normal clothes. Not the kind that the popular girls wore, the ones whose parents had moved from the city, with brand names glistening off their breast pockets and waistbands, but the kind of clothes you wouldn't think twice about. That was her goal: to blend. The wings made it more diffi-

cult, but when she was at home, what was the point? There was no one to convince.

During the off-season, the long months between September and May, Abraham made money by going into local public schools and libraries and doing readings as Walt Whitman. He wore his cleanest clothes and a hat, though the beard and the voice were the real selling points. People would stand up and applaud, except for the small children, who would cower behind their parents' legs and occasionally burst into tears.

The tenth grade had read *Leaves of Grass* in English class that spring. Greta knew what was coming. The school wasn't big; everyone else knew, too. The teacher probably assigned the book because she'd seen Abraham do his shtick at the Enchanted Forest Public Library. High schools were always a joke in May, no matter where you were. The seniors were already into their colleges or technical schools or had jobs at the mall, and the juniors could see the light at the end of the tunnel. For everyone else, it was just the looming summer, and the sunlight, and the tanning lotion. During the year, it was easy to pretend that she had dreamed up the Forest and her parents and that, really, she had a normal house and a sister or two and a neutered dog, but once the summer was underway, it wasn't so bad. Abraham was funny when she had no one to compare him to.

Lincoln High School sat in the middle of the town proper, which was a fifteen minute bus ride down Route 17 from the Enchanted Forest. People had started getting their learner's permits, and riders were dropping like flies, but Greta didn't mind. She couldn't imagine what kind of car Abraham would help her buy. The school bus, at least, was neutral.

He'd beat her to school somehow, despite the bus's head start. When Greta pulled open the heavy door to the main corridor, people

were already giggling in a way that was impossible to misunderstand.

“Ahoy, matey,” a boy from her geometry class called out. There was a portrait of Herman Melville in the mall’s Barnes and Noble, and the beard was similar. She nodded and kept walking, holding her book bag tight against her chest.

Abraham’s voice reached her first. It was “O Captain, My Captain,” and it was coming from the direction of the cafeteria. Greta knew most of the big hits by heart, not on purpose, just because the house wasn’t that big and Abraham liked to practice. Greta took a minute to picture Abraham in his Walt Whitman outfit, standing in front of the hot food trays. There were three bays for food – gross, grosser, and grossest. She usually ate from the first one, the salad bar. Greta imagined Abraham sticking his chubby finger into the plastic bucket of Italian dressing, and picking up a handful of cherry tomatoes without using the tongs. He loved cafeteria food. She knew that Abraham would stick around to eat, either before or after he spoke to her class, still wearing the Whitman outfit, and undoubtedly still in character. Greta could picture all the nerdy, bookish kids loving him, and crowding around his table. They would all look make-believe and pale next to him, imaginary. They would slop up their applesauce and macaroni and cheese and not believe their luck. Abraham could do that to people, make them feel important, like they had something interesting to say. She took a breath and rounded the corner, her sneakers squeaking on the glossy red tiles. She looked through the glass-paned door at her father.

Abraham, or rather Walt, wasn’t just standing in front of the lunch trays. One of his hands held aloft a slotted metal spoon, and the other was clamped over his heart. His eyes were closed. It was only the middle stanza. Greta closed her eyes, too, and waited for it to be over. The room was quiet aside from her father’s voice and the clinking of cheap, school-issue flatware. There was going to be applause, and laughter. The ratio seemed unimportant.

Judy was in charge of the restaurant, which had a lunch counter and five tables, too small for the busloads of Japanese tourists. In season, there was always a line out the door. Everyone paid cash and bussed their own tables—it was part of the appeal. Greta’s favorite part of the entire Forest was her mother’s apple pie. Some writer had mentioned it in a guidebook once—*You’ve Got to Eat This!*—and now people drove out of their way just to order a piece. In July and August, Judy baked fifteen pies a day. She’d been almost forty when Greta was born; Abraham was a decade older. It was some kind of miracle, Judy liked to say. “My tubes were all going the wrong way,” she told Greta. “You were the only one who knew where to go.”

The restaurant was painted green both inside and out, with fake vines winding their way up the walls in between the tables. Judy had drawn each of the leaves individually, so they were all slightly different, like snowflakes or the wooden creatures lining the path to the door.

“What do you think about a strawberry pie today, honey? Or maybe something with only red ingredients? So you were never sure what you were eating?” Judy set a fork and a knife at each place setting. It was still early enough in the season to experiment. Later in the summer, people would complain. Greta watched her mother bend over the tables, stretching her small back. She didn’t wear any theme-clothing, only stuff you could order from the L.L. Bean catalog. When her hair was loose, it hung down to the middle of her spine, but it was never loose during the daytime. Every day, Judy twisted her hair into two long braids and fastened them to the top of her head with bobby-pins. Her hair was beginning to be more gray than brown. The effect was something like an aging Swedish milkmaid. It was her only concession to the fairytales happening around her, in her pies, on the walls.

“Sure, Mom.” Greta had Abraham’s body and Judy’s face. She was taller than her mother by eight inches, and sometimes Judy still

seemed surprised to have given birth to something so big and patted her daughter on the shoulder, shaking her head. Their faces were the same, though. Small ovals with tight brown eyes, and plump, pale lips. Greta liked that they looked similar—it was proof that there were some things in the world more powerful than Abraham. “Red pie sounds good.”

“It could be ‘Rose Red Rumble!’” Judy said, excited. It was good to give things theme names; that made people feel like it was worth three dollars a slice. The apple pie was called ‘Sleeping Beauty’s Revenge.’ Judy and Greta wrote most of the fables that appeared on plaques around the property. They retold fairytales, sometimes with two different versions, Disney or Grimm. Greta had always preferred the Disney versions, which appalled her parents. Abraham would rail for hours against the dumbing-down of Cinderella. It was nothing without the bloody toe stubs, he said, nothing at all. When Greta was little, she’d let her father dip her feet in red paint and then run, screaming, through the crowd.

In June, when people started to pile into their cars and RVs and station wagons, Greta came up with an attraction of her own: Who Wants to Kiss a Fairy? It was located behind the dining room or a little ways into the woods or wherever else no one usually went. She didn’t charge; that would be gross. Instead, she kept an eye out for interested parties, and gave them The Look when it was time. Here were all the boys who ever came to the Enchanted Forest and looked like they deserved a vacation fairy: the blond from Massachusetts with all those sisters; the tall, tan one from Florida who was alone with his mother; the funny one with the red hair who was soft all over. Most of the boys who came to the Forest just glanced at her boobs in the fairy costume and didn’t even say hello.

It was only kissing, nothing gross. The blond one was the first. He was reading about Jack and the Beanstalk underneath Beanstalk’s

Ladder, the tallest tree in the Forest. Greta sidled up next to him and plucked at her wings, which she put on backwards, so that they were growing out of her chest, a concession to the boredom of the endless summer days. The blond blushed and didn't say hello, but she could tell that he was interested. It was a silent flirtation. They both looked around the corner, where his mother and three sisters had already scurried. A blond head soared above on the Ferris wheel. They had at least five minutes.

If the Enchanted Forest were in a movie, they'd always be playing Bob Dylan or Van Morrison or maybe even Leonard Cohen in the background. Greta thought about that a lot. Sometimes when she was taking a shower or helping her mom in the restaurant, she'd imagine what kind of scene it would be, and what would be playing to set the mood. Most of the day would end up in a montage; very rarely were things important enough for a whole scene. Her favorite movies were the ones where people just did normal stuff: go to school dances, eat dinner with their parents, take walks and talk to each other about their problems. The point was, no one in the movies ever seemed to realize how good they had it. No one ever lived on the side of the highway with Walt Whitman and a bunch of wooden dwarves.

Abraham was trying to fix the Hall of Mirrors. It was the garden-shed until he took it over. It was too close to everything else not to be a part of the tour, he said. Then you tell me where I'm going to put my shovels, Judy said back. The shed was too small to fit more than five or six people at once, four if one of them was Abraham.

"Don't you think you should come up with something different to call it? Like, if you're calling it a hall, don't you think it should have a hall?" Greta sat on the ground next to her father's toolbox, which wasn't a box at all, but a stained canvas bag.

"People come for the attractions, babygirl. It's all how you present your case." Abraham had briefly considered going to law school, several times. His voice boomed from inside the shed. It was missing a roof, so it wasn't even a shed anymore, it was just a bunch of walls.

"I see," she said, lying down in the grass. The cool, flat flagstone path crossed under the backs of her knees. Greta looked straight up at the sun and imagined that she was tied to railroad tracks. If she stayed put long enough, someone was sure to come along to rescue her.

"Hand me the hammer, will you." Abraham stuck his hand out of the hole where the ceiling should have been.

Greta rolled onto her side and blinked enough times to have the world make sense again. The clouds were solid masses of marshmallow fluff, the kind that Judy would never let her eat. If she lived inside a television commercial, she would be able to reach up and take a pinch. Greta extended two fingers and tried, squeezing nothing but dumb, blue air. "I'll be right on it, Chief," she said.

Every year, during the high season, Abraham hired Joe from the library circulation desk to come and work the Ferris wheel. Joe was seventy and had fought in a war—Greta wasn't sure which one. He wore an army green cap with a short bill to keep the sun out of his eyes, although his freckled and sagging skin suggested decades of reckless summers and melanoma.

Joe stood by the gate to the Ferris wheel. He took his job very, very seriously. There were safety issues, he knew, and he was in charge. Abraham liked him because he never smiled, which Abraham thought was hilarious.

"Afternoon, Joe," Greta said. She plucked at her left wing. It was sticky outside, and the straps adhered to her bare skin.

"Greta." Joe nodded, and continued to stare straight ahead.

People were milling around the Forest, as much as one could mill around. There was a single path, and arrows pointed you in the right direction. Unless you hopped a fence or consciously disobeyed Abraham's 'Trespassing is for trolls' signs, there was only one way to go. But people seemed to like it anyway, at least most of the time. Women usually took pictures of their children standing next to the wooden dwarves outside the Snow White cottage. Sometimes they even climbed onto the tiny wooden beds, even though they weren't supposed to. Greta never stopped them. Teenaged siblings shoved one another into trees. Nothing out of the ordinary.

Greta's room was in the back of the house, and looked out into the trees. They were big and natural and Abraham wasn't allowed to cut them down. The Forest and the highway were on the other side. Looking out her bedroom window, the house could have been anywhere in town, in any town in the county.

Judy knocked, and then opened the door without waiting for a response. She was carrying a hamper full of clean laundry, and dumped it out unceremoniously onto Greta's twin bed. She'd unpinned her braids, and they swung around her shoulders.

"Thanks, Judy," Greta said. The lumps of clothes on the bed made faces: this sleeve was a mouth, that sock an eye. There were highlights of living at home: when Judy washed her clothes, they were always softer and better than Greta remembered them. Abraham's beef stew that cooked in red wine all day long and made the house smell like it was somewhere in France. Knowing that the keys to the school bus were hanging on a hook in the kitchen, as though anyone could take them and drive it off into the sunset. Sometimes Greta took the keys and sat in the driver's seat and pretended she was on the highway — a different highway, one that went somewhere.

"Sure, love." Judy came over with the empty hamper hiked against her hip and stood on her tippy-toes to kiss Greta's forehead. She smelled like caramelized butter and soap. They stood next to

each other and stared out the window into the night, though Greta looked mostly at their reflection in the glass. The fairytales Greta had always liked most were the ones from Judy's childhood—the banker father, the homemaker mother, the tidy house in the suburbs of Long Island. Her grandfather had worn a suit every day of his adult life. He'd had a tie rack. Her grandmother wore pearls. It was almost too much to bear, the thousands of choices that led up to Greta's existence. It just all seemed so unlikely. How could you know which parking lot to sleep in, which wax to use, which tie to wear? The choices went back farther than the trees, back so far they became myth. Greta had never met her grandparents. There was something about Abraham they didn't agree with.

In August, cars pulled in and out all day long. Women had yappy little dogs on leashes and sometimes even in their purses. Two boys, older than her, but still not grown-ups, came into the ticket booth on their own.

"Want tickets for the Forest, for the Ferris wheel, or both?" Greta's pointer finger hovered over the cash register.

The boys looked at each other, which gave Greta the opportunity to do the same. The one on the left was shorter, darker. His hair was so dark brown that it was almost black, like in comic books. The sun was directly overhead, and Greta almost expected to see little illustrated windowpanes when he turned his cheek towards his friend.

The other one spoke first. He was taller and thinner. Judy would have called him a stringbean. "Uh, I don't know. Which would you recommend?" he said.

Greta stroked the tips of her wings. "I'd do both. I mean, are you in a hurry?"

They were not.

Boys from school were out of the question. If they were interested, it invariably had more to do with wanting to get a blow job on the Ferris wheel and then tell everyone at school. It didn't matter

that she hadn't done that, wouldn't do that. When people heard that you lived in an amusement park, they'd believe anything. When boys came from other places, though, it was like the opening scenes from *Grease*. No one from home was there to watch, so you could say whatever you wanted. No one would ever know how nice you'd been, how sweet. Everyone always promised to write and to call. It almost didn't matter that they never did.

The stringbean's name was Jeff; the other one was Nathan. They were from somewhere in Ohio where they had the biggest roller coasters in the country. They were driving home from a trip to New York. Stringbean thought he remembered the Forest from a trip he'd taken with his parents as a kid. They liked the Ferris wheel, and Nathan said he liked her wings.

After selling them tickets, Greta took the boys on a private tour of the property. It was the end of a slow day. If someone really needed to get in, they could buy a ticket from Judy at the restaurant. Greta left a sign.

The first stop was the other side of the old barn, where the imaginary unicorns lived. "Don't bother looking," Greta said. "There aren't any." Nathan whinnied, and pawed the ground with his sneaker.

The second stop was the path up the hill. Greta knew better than to take them to the house; they didn't want to see that she really lived there. They wanted her to be a magical tree fairy, who only wore wings and flip-flops and never went to the bathroom. A few feet up the trail, the path veered to the right. Greta hopped the fence and led them to the left.

They sat in the still-roofless Hall of Mirrors, which had still yet to acquire either a hall or a mirror. They each picked a wall and leaned against it, their feet all touching in the middle. It was just starting to get dark, and overhead flocks of birds settled onto branches and told each other what was for dinner.

"So what do you do for fun around here?" The Stringbean waved his feet back and forth, sending his Converse All-Stars into Greta, then Nathan, then Greta again.

"Oh, you know, stuff. Gets pretty wild, as you can imagine," Greta said. They were maybe twenty. Greta did the math and mentally bumped herself up to eighteen. There was no reason not to. Nobody wanted to feel creepy.

There were things Greta could tell in the Forest that she couldn't at school, like which boy wanted to kiss her. The Stringbean was the chattier of the two, but Nathan looked at her in a way that she recognized, like he was trying to put together a stereo without having read the instructions. Every now and then there was a breakthrough, but mostly his brow stayed tight with concentration. He kept his eyes on Greta's mouth. She could see it, even in the dark.

"Do you get out of here much?" Nathan asked. He had small hands, almost feminine, and he rubbed them together, making a swooshing sound. "You should come to Ohio. There's all kinds of crazy stuff there."

He was handsome, but didn't really seem to know it. That was the best kind of boy, Greta knew. If they'd gone to the same school, he might still have talked to her in the halls, might still have looked at her that way. His eyes were a better brown than hers, richer. There was so much to see in the dark, if you really looked.

"Oh yeah? Like what?" Greta thought about the part in the movie where she would just decide to go somewhere, with boys she'd just met. They would stop at the same trucker diners that Abraham liked, but the food would taste completely different. Sometimes, when she was in the right mood, Judy would talk about her life before Abraham, all the places she'd been, where she'd eaten the best pieces of pie in the whole country. Greta liked to think that someday she would have those stories, too. She and Nathan would drink coffee all day long, just so they could talk more. They would wish that Ohio were farther away. Maybe when they hit Ohio they'd just keep

going. Eventually Stringbean would understand, and he'd buy a bus ticket home.

"There's the Boy with the Boot. In the middle of this fountain, there's like this little boy. A statue. I don't know." Nathan shrugged. "In Cleveland, there's the world's largest rubber stamp."

Greta nodded. "What about movie theaters? Or places where the waitresses wear rollerskates?" Maybe in some states, it was still 1975, or even earlier.

Stringbean pulled a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket and they all took one. Soon the glowing red tips were the only things they could see. Greta started writing words in the air, and the boys had to guess. She wrote *Ohio*, with all those loop-de-loops. She wrote *Hello*. She wrote her name.

The Forest was closed. Greta could hear Abraham pulling down shutters and flipping switches. Nathan and the reluctant Stringbean drove to the campgrounds in the Enchanted Forest State Park for the night, so that they could come back the next day. Everyone agreed that they hadn't gotten their money's worth.

At night, Abraham liked to drink wine and smoke a few joints. Judy valiantly tried to keep up, but her body just wasn't big enough. She had one big mug full of red wine and declared herself tippled.

"I'm going to bed!" she announced. She kissed Greta and Abraham on their foreheads and padded down the hall to the bedroom, wiggling her bottom slightly as she went, and sometimes wagging a finger. Greta thought there was probably always music playing inside her mother's head, music only she could hear.

Abraham passed his joint to Greta. The kitchen table was dark and wide, old wood. It had been a door in the barn, before the barn became the ticket booth and the Abandoned Unicorn Rehabilitation Center. Outside the window, the Forest was dark, the forest was

dark, the world was dark. Only the light over the Enchanted Forest sign still lit the night, and the road at the bottom of the sloping hill.

"So," Greta said, sucking in a cloud of smoke. "Do you ever think about what would have happened if Mom's bus hadn't broken down here?" Fate was an issue. The gray cloud rumbled around in her throat, drawing maps to places that might have been, places that could be.

"That bus and I," Abraham said, "have an unspoken connection. It would have found me eventually." He beckoned for the joint with a flick of his eyebrow. The coarse hairs over his upper lip somehow managed to escape being singed. The smell was warm and skunky. Greta wondered if people driving by could smell it, too.

"You know that's not what I meant." Greta's eyes felt tighter in her skull, as though they were receding further into her head. She put her palms over them to make sure they stayed put.

"Well, babygirl, some questions are beyond us all." Abraham extended his arms over his head, leaning back with the joint in his mouth. He tilted his neck so that his face was pointed toward the ceiling, and let out a smoky burp.

"You are disgusting," Greta said.

"That may be, but I am yours." Abraham rocked forward in his chair, and patted Greta's hand with his own. She wondered what it was like to have a normal-sized father, what that would be like. Would you grow up and think everything else was normal, too? Would you see yourself everywhere, in every family's station wagon? How would you remember which family you belonged to?

The next day, Nathan came back alone. Stringbean waited at the park. When Nathan came back to the ticket booth, he smiled. His teeth weren't perfect, but they were close, with only a slight snaggle along the bottom row.

"Hi," Greta said.

"Hi," Nathan said back.

He was as good as anyone. There was something safe about his face, something that she knew she wouldn't love forever. In Ohio, roller coasters pierced the sky, unapologetically reaching for something higher than the earth. As far as she was concerned, there was no going back.

It was a Monday, and the park was closed. Judy was at a day-long meditation retreat in Rhinebeck, and Abraham was being Walt at the Enchanted Forest Public Library — his one appointment of the summer season. Greta packed a small duffel bag — wings, underwear, socks — and took it with her in Nathan's car. She couldn't leave without saying goodbye.

The Library was only two rooms long, with low ceilings and brown carpeting. No one went except for people with kids and lonely old people. The old people were Abraham's biggest fans. They came every time, no matter how frequently. The back room, where Abraham did his readings, smelled like pee and mildew.

Greta and Nathan had to stand in the back; all the seats were taken. Their wrists might have touched, but they didn't hold hands. Two ladies had their plastic bonnets on; the forecast looked iffy, and it was better to be safe.

Abraham was halfway through *Song of Myself*, and it sounded like he was gearing up to do the whole thing. Greta wondered if the old people knew it was okay to take bathroom breaks.

He was unscrewing the locks from the doors. He was unscrewing the doors from their jambs. Abraham's voice bounced off the walls and the ceiling. Foamy spit would begin to form in the corners of his mouth, if it hadn't already. The halves of his cheeks not covered with hair would begin to color, peach to pink, then pink to red.

If Abraham were Walt Whitman, not just for pretend but for real, he'd write poems about the Forest, and about her, and about Judy's pies and the view from the top of the Ferris wheel and the burl creatures from California. He'd say *I sing the apple pie electric*. He'd say

but oh daughter! My daughter! He'd say *I will live forever*. He'd say *Don't ever go*. Here was something that Greta thought about: if you had to pick the person you loved the most, who would it be? Greta thought that if someone asked Abraham that question, he would probably say her. Sure, parents were supposed to say things like that, but she thought he might even really mean it.

There were people who were just meant to get you somewhere, like Judy's old boyfriend the candlemaker. They weren't supposed to stick around. And sometimes people had to stay put. Greta thought of the Forest filled with drying candles, their wicks still connected and slung over low branches. She looked at Abraham, who was raising his hands to the sky. The room seemed bigger, somehow. There would be a better time to go.