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Inside the main room of the house on Billingsley Lane, a woman sits transfixed in front of a computer screen and makes small, disbelieving noises under her breath. The screen bathes her face in pale light, the room having grown dim around her as the afternoon becomes dusk, so that she takes on the silent, lonely look of an astronaut peering at the earth from space. She has a certain weightlessness about her—her mind slipping continually away from the present and into recollection, which has become her natural state in recent times. It is a process, this disbelief, which must descend and settle in the self like rain, and which finds outward expression in a series of gestures and agitations. For instance, having pinched her left earlobe to redness, she now presses her thumb underneath her chin and drags it along the curvature of her jaw, feeling the bone cushioned by skin, as her eyes slide back and forth across the monitor, reading. The thick rims of her glasses are a ledge on which her gaze sits. Without them, she is quite blind. Her right hand is closed over the mouse, her index finger flicking up, down, and then down again, then up.

“Uhh,” she says. She removes her thumb from under her chin and places it between her teeth. She feels the urge to bite down hard on the nail, or to chew on her knuckle, but she remembers to be more gentle with her teeth, having lost a crown and two molars on a gingersnap last month. Oh, how she wept when that happened, holding her small spent teeth in her palm, and then despised herself for weeping. She was momentarily, fleetingly thankful it was her back teeth that had fallen out and not her front. *Imagine*, she’d thought to herself, rallying. “Why hello toothless wonder! Hi-ho gappy gumdrops!” But that didn’t stop her from crying, silently, almost against her will. She just cannot help it. These days, she finds herself crying over blown light bulbs, broken chair legs and never-before-seen cracks in the walls—but, strangely, when she brings to mind her husband, Robert, now twelve months gone, she experiences a detachment from feeling, as if she has been the target of a tranquiliser dart. She floats, and she floats.

There are a dozen emails in the thread on the computer screen, so not *that* many in the grand scheme of things, but enough. Enough to feel an indiscretion has been made. Enough to feel that fraying sense of betrayal. And what does the phrase, ‘the grand scheme of things,’ even mean, anyway? Who lives in the *grand scheme*? No one.

The emails are today’s discovery. Last week, it was a photograph from Robert’s travels in the nineteen eighties she hadn’t seen before. There was nothing disturbing about it, per se—it was a shot of a sharp triangular rock on a summit, a mountain’s party hat, and a young man

at Robert's side she couldn't place and now can't ask about—which brought home to her the fact that all new questions will remain unanswered. It made her realise that the death of a lover was not only the death of the known, but the loss of all future knowns; the cessation of all possible gains.

And so how to describe them, these emails? They were tender, kind. Philosophical, even. Yes, they had an expansiveness about them. Robert lapsing into rumination and reflection, writing in a way he didn't often speak, at least not to her, Diana, or not during that time. That's really what shocked her: the *language*, so confessional in tone. Each day holds the potential for such surprises—some small, some large—as she navigates this new existence without her spouse of forty-one years. Without, as in Plato's formulation, two of her four arms, two of her four legs. Twelve months deep into this loss—twelve months last week, in fact—and she remains cleaved in half; the custodian of half as many memories, in possession of half of herself. And so of course it is a shock to come upon this correspondence. Not because it is evidence of an affair. No, they are not that. But they are a transgression. Even more so, they are an accusation.

Her sister Julie had left another one of her entreating messages on the landline that afternoon, this time in a sort of huffing voice that indicated she was either walking fast or jumping on the spot. It was entirely possible she'd combined an aerobics lesson with family administration—who knew, with Julie. Diana had always found her sister's tireless effervescence a little bit... affected. Or, no, not affected, but 'cultivated.' *Deliberate*. Like she'd spent a long time thinking about how she wanted to be in the world and had decided, after much consideration, to be her most primal self: spontaneous, impulsive, *bodily*—driven by inalienable urges. It felt like every time Diana spoke to her sister she was in motion—going into or coming out of a Zumba class, or Soul Cycle, or Hot Yoga, or Punch Club. Diana used to joke that her own preferred form of exercise was Mental Gymnastics, to which Julie would tut and call her a prat, and this would go on until, eventually, they'd laugh. It amazed Diana how two people who shared the same origins could be so different, so totally unlike. Julie was warm: rich dark hair, honey-toned skin, and a supposedly easy way of being. Younger than Diana by six years, Julie had an unfussy, unapologetic attitude; prone to broiling emotional outbursts and unpredictable displays of affection. In contrast, and on a bad day such as this, Diana might describe herself as slightly 'starched': colourless, odourless, crisp, and stiff.

The voice message said their father was not coping. Their father needed to be assessed, and perhaps it was time to move him into a ‘place’. “He’s *ninety*, Diana, so I just don’t think it’s safe for him to live at home anymore. I’m scared he’s going to fall. Could you call me, please? I need your help with this.” A pause here. Some sort of clanging sound in the background. “He’s different since he came out of hospital,” she said. “Frail, you know? God, those *fucking* prawns, I swear to God. We should sue the RSL. Should we sue the RSL? Marty says I’d be a jerk to get litigious but... Anyway, I organised one of those emergency necklaces in the meantime. Not that he wears it. Every time I go over it’s sitting by the stove, and I tell him, you’ve got to *wear* it, Dad, in case you fall in the shower or something, you need to be able to press the button to call for help. But—” A long sigh, followed by a longer pause. “Look, just call me back, Diana. Please.”