

Mimi and her husband, Reed, were my parents' best friends, the first found family I ever knew. We spent much of our free time together, often meeting for Friday-night dinner at a divey lounge we liked for its pizza, video games, and jukebox. My father worked with Mimi, and he joined Reed's softball team. My mom and Mimi became intimates, talking on the phone multiple times a day. Together, Mimi and Reed were impulsive and unpredictable, not above small acts of mischief that bent the rules we lived by. Mimi liked to make prank phone calls. Reed introduced us to night swimming in our backyard pool. They all seemed very adult to me, though they were still in their twenties. I didn't realize how they were all just starting adulthood, figuring out which rules were inviolable and which weren't.

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I focus on spotting light or movement in Mimi's house. I saw her vehicle through the garage door's window, so I know she's there, but it's been decades since Reed died, and I don't know if she remarried or if she's still inclined to sleep with other people's spouses. There's a white Dodge Ram parked close enough to her driveway that it could be a visitor, so I won't risk ringing the doorbell.

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Compared to everyone else in this mostly rural town, Mimi and Reed were positively cosmopolitan. They displayed a thick book of Rembrandt's art on their coffee table. They ate spinach salads with homemade dressing, chicken cordon bleu, and rum cake ringed with ladyfingers and topped with slivered almonds. On special occasions, they drank cold duck. The most exotic things my family ate were scalloped potatoes—out of a box—and Jell-O salad with fruit cocktail suspended inside. Mimi insisted on making my birthday cake every year, and it would always have an understated elegance, like white frosting and flat, sugared polka dots.

Mimi had grown up in Lansing and been in the society pages as a teenager. She shopped at Jacobson's for Pendleton wool skirts and monogrammed sweaters and at Pappagallo for shoes made from Italian kidskin. Her face was powdered, her lips red with makeup she bought from behind locked cases. She flipped her coarse, strawberry-blond hair up at her shoulders—not at all like the short, feathered hairstyles my mom and the mothers of my friends wore. She drove a red MG, a two-seater that had no business on Michigan roads in the dead of winter. We loved having that car in our driveway. It classed up our pea-green Duster.

Reed was tall and thin with a full head of brown hair. He loved playing sports—softball and golf in the spring and summer, basketball in the fall and winter—as much as he loved watching sports, especially Michigan State teams. Though a local, he used his degree in urban planning to build a career distinct from the farmers and landscapers and car salesmen who were our neighbors and my parents' other friends. He was quiet and stoic and charming and goofy. He had a toothy grin, a horseshoe mustache that made his smiles seem that much wider, and the ability to always live in the moment.

Unlike my feelings for Mimi, which changed after I learned of her longtime affair with my father, my affection for Reed never changed. He was like an uncle to me, and I loved him. I was ten the day he collapsed on a softball diamond, slipping into a sixteen-month unconsciousness from which he never recovered, and his demise has always haunted me. He was too young for his heart to just give out, for one thing, and no doctor could ever explain why. Over the years, his story rose to the level of myth in my mind, the details worrying the edges of my subconscious. I could not let him go.

Here's why: About a year before his collapse, Reed discovered the affair between Mimi and my father (my mom was the only spouse still in the dark), but instead of letting it destroy

him, he'd started seeing a woman at work. They seemed genuinely happy. For a period of six to nine months before his collapse, he was pale and intermittently sick—bouts of nausea and vomiting that would clear up for days at a time. Mimi didn't seem terribly concerned. She blamed his illness on excessive drinking though Reed was never a lush and swore he was drinking less than usual. Reed saw one doctor, then another, but their labs could not explain his gastrointestinal distress.

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The wind picks up as morning settles in, bringing with it the smell of late-spring rain. An hour passes; my eyelids grow heavy but jerk awake when I see a flash of something in Mimi's backyard. I stare hard but don't see her. Maybe it was a tree branch swaying in the wind.