

# THE VISIT

By

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SYNOPSIS: Ten days after the death of her husband Maggie has an unexpected visitor, her husband's first love. The couple had a complicated, heartbreaking history and Maggie's daughter Lise, slightly neurodivergent, is intrigued by the story she's never heard. Sis, the visitor, wants a relationship with the young woman, but Maggie is adamant the option is not healthy. The power of history, then healing, for the three women unfolds.

CHARACTERS:

SIS	50
MAGGIE	50
LISE, Maggie's daughter	
Slightly mentally delayed	22

22

SETTING:

Maggie's living room

TIME: The present

Maggie sits on her couch, motionless.

There is a knock at the door. Maggie doesn't respond.

Knock again. Maggie sighs, slowly rises. Goes to the door C/S. Opens it.

At the doorway stands Sis.

MAGGIE

Yes?

SIS

Hi. Um. This is weird.

MAGGIE

Not a good time.

She starts to close the door.

SIS

I'm - I know - he died.

Maggie hesitates.

SIS, CONT.

I'm sorry. It's strange. We've never met  
- and I know he died ten days ago. I read it in the paper,  
and I've thought so much about -

MAGGIE

Truly. Thank you, but we're not seeing people at this time.

SIS

I understand. It's just that - this feels so serendipitous. I was supposed to catch the ferry this morning, and then I couldn't get on because - well - it doesn't matter. I never come to this part of the state, normally. I knew where your house was - where you and Gary lived, and your daughter - I found it about ten years ago - drove by on a whim - and -

MAGGIE

*Who* are you?

SIS

Sis. Sis Granger. I - I knew Gary. I - I'm sure Gary told you about me.

MAGGIE

No.

SIS

Really?

MAGGIE

Really. Now, if you'll excuse me -

SIS

I find it impossible that he never -

MAGGIE

Look. Sister.

SIS

Sis. But, yes, the derivation is sister.

MAGGIE

We're - if you're an old friend, you can go to the site from the memorial service, and make a comment -

SIS

"Make a comment".

MAGGIE

As I said, this is not a good time.

LISE enters.

LISE

Mom?

SIS

Oh, is this -

MAGGIE

Lise. This is - an old friend of your father's, apparently.

SIS

Ha. That's a casualization.

Lise extends her hand.

LISE

(to Sis) I'm Lise. What's a casualization?

She and Sis shake. Sis takes Lise's hand in both of hers afterwards, looking into Lise's eyes.

SIS

Not important. (She takes a full measure of Lise) Oh, Lise.

LISE

What's your name?

SIS

Sis Donovan. Actually, my name is Kather-

MAGGIE

Lise. I'm going - upstairs. Could you help 'Sis' with directions - away?

Maggie exits.

LISE

We're - she's - my dad just died.

SIS

I know. I knew him.

LISE

Yeah? How?

SIS

It was a long time ago.

LISE

How long?

SIS

Oh. Sweetie. Long before you.

LISE

You weren't - like - a girlfriend, or something?

She laughs.

SIS

I was. Your dad - he - was a big part of my life.

LISE

Really? How come I never heard of you?

SIS

I - I don't know. But I could tell you stories -

LISE

Come in. Tell me a story.

Sis enters, joins Lise on the couch.

LISE, CONT.

So, did you know Dad in college? Because he met Mom in -

SIS

I know when he met your mom.

LISE

Did you know both of them?

SIS

No. Just your dad.

*Beat.*

SIS, CONT.

I knew your dad in high school. He was - he was my first -  
boyfriend.

LISE

Really? For sure?

SIS

For sure.

Lise rises. Looks to the exit where Maggie left.

LISE

Does my mom know?

SIS

Apparently not.

Lise stands behind Sis.

LISE, CONT.

My dad always said my mom was his first and only love.

Sis shivers. A dagger to the heart.

SIS

Well then.

She rises.

I - nice to meet you - Lise. I - I bet your dad was a good dad. He was, right?

LISE

He was. Even though I wasn't a boy.

SIS

He said that?

LISE

No. He wouldn't. But - I knew. I don't know why I said that. Things are weird right now. He was a great dad. The best in the world.

Sis heads to the door.

SIS

I'm sorry for - please tell your mom I apologize for - imposing.

Maggie enters from stairway.

MAGGIE

You're still here.

SIS

I was just leaving.

LISE

She knew Dad. In high school.

MAGGIE

Sister. Sis. I'm sure you can understand that we're not -  
having strangers in our home right now isn't -

SIS

I do understand. I - it was just weird that I was in town.  
That's all. Gary always said -

LISE

What. What did he say?

SIS

*(looking at Maggie)* He - nothing. Sorry to bother you.

She heads to the door.

LISE

Mom, Sis was just about to tell me stories. About Dad.  
Don't you want to know about him when he was in high  
school?

MAGGIE

He told me about high school.

SIS

Not everything, apparently.

LISE

Come on Mom. Maybe he was a geek, or whatever you used to  
call weirdos.

SIS

He wasn't a geek. I promise.

LISE

Please Mom? You haven't smiled once since he - died. Maybe  
it would make you happy. For a few minutes. Hearing good  
stories.

MAGGIE

Lise.

Lise makes a 'begging' motion.

Fine. Please sit down, Sister.

SIS

It's Sis. Funny how you keep calling me Sister. Do you have sisters?

MAGGIE

Look, Sis. I love my daughter, and because I do, I am allowing a stranger to sit in my living room and talk to us. But I don't need or want to talk to you about my life, nor, frankly, am I interested in yours. I'm -

LISE

Mom! Rude. *(to Sis)* She's tired. We're tired. And we're - very sad.

SIS

I can imagine. Gary was - he was bigger than life.

*Beat.*

LISE

Tell us a happy story about Dad. How you guys became - friends. Mom. Guess what? Dad was Sis' boyfriend in high school. Tell us more about that.

MAGGIE

I don't -

She shakes her head. Sits.

SIS

*(hesitates)* I met your dad in Algebra class. I was crying because I didn't understand anything, and he tried to help me.

LISE

He was good in math. I'm terrible.

SIS

He was. And so handsome. Did he stay handsome?

MAGGIE

He did.

LISE

I'll get some pictures. He was gorgeous. For a dad, he was sooooo gorgeous.

She exits.

SIS

I'm sorry. This is a horrible imposition.

MAGGIE

If you can raise Lise's spirits, it's - fine.

SIS

If I can help - though, after twenty-five years of marriage you'd be the -

MAGGIE

How would you know that?

SIS

Because I - I sort of kept track of Gary, one way or another.

Maggie gives Sis a long look.

MAGGIE

I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to leave.

SIS

I'm not being - it's not - I'm not a - stalker, or anything. Gary and I - Gary was -

Lise returns with a scrapbook. She gestures for Sis to sit by her on the couch. Maggie sits tentatively on the corner chair. Lise opens the scrapbook.

LISE

Here he is. Handsome, right?

SIS

*(turning pages)* Yes. He was - beautiful.

MAGGIE

It's late. Maybe tell Lise one appropriate story and -

SIS

Right. Of course. One appropriate story. *(beat)* I've got one.

Lise tries to close the scrapbook, but Sis puts her hand over the open page to prevent it.

SIS, CONT,

This picture -

LISE

That's our summer cabin. Well, the family cabin. It was my Grampa and Grandma's place -

SIS

Oh, I know.

MAGGIE

I'd rather we didn't -

LISE

Mom! It's like - this is a bonus - to hear about Dad in a different way, right?

MAGGIE

*(softens)* Sure. Right.

SIS

I visited that cabin several times. We - our group of friends - often went during the summer. It was - special.

MAGGIE

Actually, this feels like a bad idea. Maggie is - vulnerable right now.

LISE

Mom. It was a long time ago. You're not jealous, are you? That would be - odd.

MAGGIE

This whole - conversation - is - odd.

LISE

Please. This could be wonderful. A story. Please, Sis?

SIS

*(looking at Maggie)* Maybe I shouldn't -

MAGGIE

Just - tell it. And then -

SIS

Of course. Then I leave. *(beat)* One time, one fourth of July weekend, a big gang of us all went to the cabin, and of course your Grandmother and Grandfather were there then. They were lovely, and so welcoming.

Maggie closes her eyes.

And it was hot - really hot, so we all went swimming. It was great until we happened upon a pod - well - not a pod - but whatever you call a group of jellyfish. Half of us got stung, and we were screaming and trying to get to shore, not knowing what was happening -

LISE

Yeah, Dad was always bugging me about those jellyfish.

SIS

And once we all got up to the cabin, there was no calamine lotion for some reason, so your dad filled up one of the horse troughs with ice cubes and told us to jump in. No one wanted to, but he promised he'd make us homemade peppermint ice cream, and we were all so miserable, so we did.

LISE

Did it make you feel better?

SIS

Immediately. And that ice cream was the best I ever had. But that was your dad. Always coming up with fun solutions to - tricky problems.

MAGGIE

Thank you, Sis. But it's late and it's past our bedtime.

LISE

Mom. I've been in charge of my own bedtime forever.

SIS

*(rising, heading to door)* Thank you both for - listening. Lise, Maggie. It was such a treat to meet Gary's child. And Maggie, forgive my imposition.

LISE

I'll walk you out.

MAGGIE

Good night, and good-bye.

Maggie exits to upstairs door. Sis and Lise go outside the front door where there are steps. They stand at the top.

LISE

So that was Dad? Even in high school? A little goofy but really smart?

SIS

Yep. That was your dad.

LISE

One more story?

She sits on the stoop. Gestures to Sis to join her. She does.

SIS

How about you tell me a story about you?

LISE

Nothing to tell. Not that smart. Not that popular. Some people think I'm - well -

SIS

Wonderful?

LISE

*(laughing)* Nah - Dad was the only one who thinks I'm wonderful. Thought.

She tears up.

SIS

And your Mom.

LISE

*(wiping her eyes)* Oh, sure. In a different way. How about one more short story?

SIS

*(Looking toward Maggie's exit door)* Serious, or funny?

LISE

Serious. Jellyfish was funny.

SIS

*(considers)* The first time I went to that beach house, I didn't know your dad well and hadn't met his family. We were with this group of his friends I barely knew, and they were all so - smart. I was - intimidated. Remember, I never even passed algebra. I just sat in the car and didn't say a word as they all laughed and shared 'in' jokes. We drove up to the property which at that time had a gate -

LISE

The gate. That was always my job.

SIS

And after the gate opened and we drove through and the little road to the property was - revealed, I saw this huge meadow, and the cabin at the far end. Like a fairy tale. I - I'd never seen anything like it. And then, suddenly, there was a beautiful horse - a pinto -

LISE

Yeah, they got rid of him before I was born.

SIS

And this seemingly wild animal gallops up, and as we progressed down that funny dirt road, the horse started - racing - the car. This gorgeous creature - as if he were escorting us. Welcoming us to the - experience. And I looked at your dad - and I whispered "magical" and he nodded and said, "Yep. Pure magic."

LISE

He loved that place.

SIS

It meant so much to me that he understood what I was saying - what I meant. It made me feel - comfortable, I guess. Like someone got me.

LISE

He could be goofy too. The horse trough stuff.

Sis laughs. Stands.

SIS

He could.

LISE

Can you - do you have more stories? Maybe about his goofiness? My mom - she's - she's more serious.

SIS

Really? Huh. I'd love to tell you more, but I'm already on your mom's bad side. But it was nice to meet you. Truly.

LISE

Can you give me your contact info? I have a phone. Maybe -

Sis considers, then opens her hand and Lise hands over her phone. Sis inputs information and hands it back.

SIS

Bye Kiddo.

Lise startles.

LISE

That's what my dad always called me.

SIS

Ah. Well. Bye Lise.

She goes to leave, but Lise grabs her arm and pulls her into a hug.

We see Sis's face in the hug. She's overwhelmed with grief. She exits. Lise returns to the couch, looks at the scrapbook.

Maggie enters.

MAGGIE  
She's gone?

LISE  
Yep.

Points to the scrapbook.

LISE  
Mommy. Do you remember -

MAGGIE  
Mommy. You haven't called me that in years. Feels - good.

LISE  
I'm feeling - little, I guess, since Dad died. Sorry. I know you like 'Mom'.

MAGGIE  
I'm sorry. You can call me - what you want.

Maggie joins Lise on the couch. Lise puts her head on Maggie's shoulder. Maggie allows it, but it's not their usual physicality. Stiff. Lise lifts her head away.

LISE  
I liked that Sis. She was funny.

MAGGIE  
Is that what you need right now? Funny? Because we both know that's not - me. I wish it was, but that was your dad's job.

LISE  
I want - I want to remember all the good things about Dad - as much as I can. If I think about him never walking back into the house, I feel like I'll - like, when I step out of bed in the morning I might fall into a black hole.

MAGGIE  
Oh, honey. You know those things don't happen.

LISE

Yeah, but - I feel like those scary thoughts might be coming back.

MAGGIE

They won't.

*Beat.*

LISE

It felt good to laugh.

MAGGIE

Stories about your dad make you feel - better?

LISE

She knew him when he was younger than I am now. That makes his life feel - longer. To me. And you never heard of her?

MAGGIE

*(beat)* No.

LISE

Is it O.K. if I see her again?

MAGGIE

I'd rather you didn't - her showing up seems very strange.

LISE

But I'm not a kid and you don't tell me what to do anymore.

MAGGIE

You're right. You're not a kid. But you're - . *(beat)* If you do see her, I'd like to know.

LISE

You treat me like I'm - *(shakes her head)* Dad never did that.

MAGGIE

I'm sorry. I'll be better. I just - worry. Your dad always - he helped me worry less. Fine. If you want to see her - you can. Don't tell me.

LISE

I want to remember Dad. I want to think about him so much it feels like he's - back. That's the only way I can - that's the only way I won't worry about the - darkness.

MAGGIE

All right. I'll try.

LISE

And don't get mad about Sis.

MAGGIE

I won't. I'm - exhausted. Do you mind if I go to bed? You can lock up?

LISE

I can lock up. I'm not a - I'm, like Dad used to say, I'm a "very smart young woman".

They both rise, hug. Maggie exits to upstairs door. Lise sits, opens the scrapbook again. Lovingly touches a photo.

LISE

Oh, Dad. My Papa.

She begins to cry, then gets out her phone, dials.

Sis answers, from the stage opposite. She's sitting on a park bench.

SIS

Yes?

LISE

Hi. It's Lise. Gary's daughter.

SIS

Oh, I know who Lise is. What can I do for you?

LISE

Are you driving?

SIS

Actually - no. I just started walking after I left your house and found this little park.

LISE

Children's Park.

SIS

*(looks around)* Oh, yeah - I guess it is. I see the slides and swings now.

LISE

*(giggles)* No, it's called The Children's Park.

SIS

Should I be sitting in the Grownups Park instead?

LISE

*(laughs again)* Nah. You won't get arrested. I spent a lot of time in that park. With Dad.

SIS

That's lovely. I'm glad.

LISE

I was wondering, if it isn't too late, if you could tell me another story.

SIS

Well. Huh. 'Once upon a time' -

Lise laughs.

LISE

You know what kind of story. Funny, or sad. Or anything, really. What was Dad like in high school?

SIS

Dreamy.

LISE

Such a silly thing to say. No one cool would say that.

SIS

How do you know? Are you cool?

LISE

Oh, gosh no. I'm the least cool person in my school.

College?  
SIS

(hesitates) Um. Kind of.  
LISE

Aren't you twenty-two?  
SIS

Wow. You know everything. Yeah. Twenty-two.  
LISE

But not in college.  
SIS

Kind of. Not really. It's hard to explain.  
LISE

She goes to a chest, pulls out a blanket, settles into the couch.

But tell me more about dreamy Dad.  
LISE

He wasn't only dreamy, he was smart, and kind, and everyone loved him. Kind of the perfect guy, a perfect kid.  
SIS

Were you a perfect girl?  
LISE

Perfect? No. Proper? Yes. I was always a rule abiding good girl.  
SIS

And Dad chose you for a girlfriend.  
LISE

Amazingly, he did.  
SIS

Did you love him?  
LISE

SIS

Oh. Well. They say high school kids don't really know about love.

LISE

That's not true. I had my first big love in high school.

SIS

'Big'?

LISE

Well, yeah. And only.

SIS

That first love is important.

*Beat.*

But. Story. Hm. Well, you know your grandparents are very smart - and accomplished. And my family - they had some money, but not from their hard work or brainpower. More - luck, actually. So, on the day I met your grandparents -

LIGHTS DIM. SPOTLIGHT ON LISE as she sits, pulls the blanket around her and pulls her phone closer.

LIGHTS UP

Maggie sits at a table, sipping some coffee. Sis enters, tentative. She approaches the table where Maggie is sitting.

SIS

Hi. Uh - I'm here.

MAGGIE

Yes. Have a seat.

Sis joins Maggie.

I - thought we should talk.

SIS

So, you do know about me. I mean, obviously.

MAGGIE

I do.

SIS

Everything?

MAGGIE

I think, to protect Lise, you need to not be in touch with her. I know you saw her last night after you left our house. Gary's house.

SIS

Well, Maggie, if you don't mind my frank reply to your somewhat accusatory tone, Lise can make that choice. You're clearly monitoring her phone - that's how you got my number, which seems weird for the parent of a twenty-two-year-old.

MAGGIE

Lise isn't a typical twenty-two-year-old. She - has challenges. And I don't want her to know about the - incident.

SIS

You mean my baby?

MAGGIE

It wasn't a real - it didn't go to term. Not technically a -

Sis rises. Starts to walk away.

SIS

HE didn't go to term. HE. My son. Gary's son. The only child I will ever have.

MAGGIE

But, there was never a real -

SIS

(Stands) DON'T YOU DARE say he wasn't real. Don't you dare.

She exits.

Maggie sits. Shakes her head.

Takes another sip of her coffee.

Lise enters.

LISE  
Was that Sis? I saw her walking in.

MAGGIE  
You should be in school honey.

LISE  
Not today. Maybe next week.

MAGGIE  
It would be better for you if - fine.

LISE  
So it was Sis?

MAGGIE  
We had to have a conversation.

LISE  
About Dad? I want to be a part of any talk about Dad. Or were you going to tell her I was 'special'? Don't tell her that.

MAGGIE  
Lise. You are special. But it just wouldn't be right for you, at this point, to - to talk to Sis.

LISE  
I'm moving out on my own this year. You told me I could. I'm a grown up. They're helping me get a job. I can do what I want.

MAGGIE  
You - yes. All right. You are going to be on your own soon. It's just - fine. She was your dad's girlfriend in high school. They were - serious.

LISE  
I know - she told me. What were you - jealous? Why would you pretend you didn't know?

MAGGIE  
I didn't - it wasn't the right time.

LISE

So, he was her boyfriend. What's the big deal.

MAGGIE

She - Sis - she got pregnant.

LISE

Whoa. So - I have a - what? A brother or sister? That would be so cool.

MAGGIE

No. The - she lost the baby.

LISE

That's so sad.

MAGGIE

Yes. But your dad - he never - he had strong feelings about the whole thing. The baby. The almost baby.

LISE

I bet he did. So why did she show up now? I mean - if there's not a baby, or a kid - a child -

MAGGIE

I'm not quite sure why she is here, but I am asking you again not to be in touch with her.

LISE

But - I know now. It's fine. I understand. Dad and Sis had a baby that died. But she - she knows about Dad. She likes me. What do you care if I talk to her?

MAGGIE

I just don't trust her. You're - you get hurt so easily Sweetie. More stories about your dad might - it might be hard for you.

LISE

It isn't. I'm going to Uncle Rob's house. They like talking about Dad. And I'm taking the bus.

She exits.

LIGHTS DOWN

LIGHTS UP

Evening. The Children's Park.

Sis is leaning against a tree, sipping out of a wine bottle. Lise approaches.

LISE

Hey.

SIS

Hey.

Lise joins Sis, sits. Sis takes a sip from the bottle.

LISE

You're what Dad would call hard core.

SIS

Want some?

She offers the bottle to Lise. Lise considers, takes the bottle, sips. She chokes, spits it out.

SIS

Not a drinker. That's good.

LISE

Mom told me everything.

SIS

I figured. Whatever 'everything' means to your mother.

LISE

You got pregnant. A baby died.

SIS

WE got pregnant. I lost a son.

LISE

Well - Mom said it wasn't - he wasn't -

SIS

Have you ever been pregnant?

LISE

*(giggles)* No! I only had one boyfriend. And - well - it's private.

SIS

*(considers - she's starting to get Lise's limitations)* The thing is, Lise, it wasn't that a baby died. I lost a son.

LISE

OK. *(beat)* I'm sorry. I don't know what it's like to lose a baby or have a baby. I don't know - I - I just know - *(breaks down)* that my dad is dead, and I want stories.

SIS

Yes, he is. And I still can't believe it. All these years, when I would grieve what happened, and, frankly, grieve still the loss of your dad in my life, it made me happy to know that he had a child - you - and I knew he'd be a wonderful father. That he had what - we couldn't.

LISE

Did you want to keep the baby? Sorry. Is that the wrong thing to say?

SIS

Yes. Despite what my parents and, as you can imagine, your grandparents said, I was keeping him. We were keeping him. We didn't have a plan other than both of us choosing to be parents, but -

She shakes her head. Tears up.

LISE

What happened?

SIS

I was six months pregnant. Going to school, causing a scandal, but, honestly, it was the happiest I've ever been. And then one day - unfortunately at the high school, I - had a miscarriage. The ambulance came, and Gary was away at some sports exchange, so I was alone.

LISE

And -

SIS

And he was - gone. His name was Chase. We had already named him Chase.

LISE

Did you - did they let you hold him?

SIS

It wasn't - no. I never got to hold him.

She breaks down. Lise puts her arms around Sis.

SIS, CONT.

Sorry. Stupid, right. Something that happened so long ago.

LISE

Did you - do you have other kids?

SIS

No. I - after - I wasn't able to.

LISE

Wow. What - what did Dad say - when he found out. That the baby was - wasn't there.

SIS

*(beat)* He - it was awful. Your dad and I - we were both - dreamers, I guess. And - we were very caught up in that odd, shared dream that had emerged from two young people not being - responsible. Which was funny, because he was such a responsible young man. As was I, actually. I think the chance for us to buck the system, our parents, the expectations - it was thrilling. We created a whole - myth of what our lives would be. So different than what we, and everyone else had planned.

LISE

Well, if you two were such - if you loved each other, why didn't you stay together? Go to college, get married - have - *(she laughs)* me? You could have had me!

SIS

We tried. I tried. I think for Gary - losing the baby was like a failure, and your dad didn't have many failures in his life.

LISE

Until he died when he was fifty. Like the cool kids would say, 'Big fail'.

SIS

*(taking another swig)* Major. Sorry. So inappropriate.

They both chuckle.

Hey. Would you do me a favor?

LISE

Sure. If I can. I just can't tell Mom.

SIS

I'm sorry she isn't happy about me showing up.

LISE

The thing about Mom is - she's not a happy person.

SIS

Her husband just died.

LISE

I know. But I'm afraid that - if it's just me - she'll never laugh again. She'll be sad until the day she dies. I can't make her happy or feel silly. That was what Dad did.

SIS

Oh. I'm sorry. That must be hard for her.

LISE

I guess. But he made her happy.

SIS

He sounds too perfect.

LISE

Oh, he wasn't perfect. He farted all the time.

They both laugh.

SIS

Could you - could you tell me a story? About your dad?  
About what kind of dad he was? What you loved about him?

They both settle against the tree.  
Sis takes another drink.

LISE

Oh. O.K. *(she laughs)* As Dad would say, "Where to begin".

SIS

Anywhere. Anywhere would be - wonderful.

LISE

*(thinks)* Well, you know he could be - corny. And very -  
what's the word - senti - senti -

SIS

Sentimental?

LISE

Yeah. That. He was the one who took me Trick or Treating.  
Mom thought it was - well, anyway. And he always dressed up  
too. When I was Peter Pan, he was Captain Hook. He wore a  
wig and used a potato masher as a hook. And when I wanted  
to be a movie star, he went as my agent - actually wearing  
a hat that said "agent" and carrying a fake cigar.

Sis laughs.

SIS

Somehow none of that surprises me. And - this seems kind of  
personal, and don't answer if you don't want to, or if it's  
too hard, so soon after he's - gone - but did he put you to  
bed at night, and if he did, what was that like?

LISE

He did. He and Mom traded nights. Mom did it one night,  
then Dad the next one. And Dad read me stories - even after  
I learned how to read. I - I learned a little late.

SIS

*(gentle)* That's O.K.

LISE

And then, then he'd close up the book, and -

She breaks down but continues.

LISE, CONT.

He'd say "Good night, my treasure."

*Beat.*

SIS

I knew he'd be wonderful. A wonderful father.

LISE

The best.

*Beat.*

LISE

Why did you come to our house? I mean, you knew he died, but, no offense, it was brave of you to knock on our door.

SIS

It was, wasn't it? I - well, as I told your mom, I actually was in town for a work thing and missed the ferry - it was just a meeting, so I wasn't going to spend any time here. But I suddenly had time, and, honestly, I wanted to meet you.

LISE

Me? *(laughs)* Well, I guess you wouldn't have been super psyched to meet Mom.

SIS

Yes, you. Though, truthfully, I was curious about Maggie, too.

LISE

Were you always, like, jealous? That Dad married her?

SIS

Oh, I knew he'd marry someone.

LISE

But why wasn't it you? You'd loved each other. Why didn't you keep loving each other?

SIS

Life - it doesn't work quite that - neatly. After - Chase - it was hard. We still loved each other, but - everything changed when - when it didn't work out the way we thought. I -

Shakes her head.

LISE

You what?

SIS

I always felt like I disappointed him somehow. Not - making it through. He never said that, of course, but I don't know - maybe it was all in me - that, after I lost - Chase - I felt like I let down the one person in the world who I had this extraordinary bond with. I mean - we were the talk of the town, as you can imagine. It was us against the world, and then we were two separate - kids -

LISE

I can't believe I never knew about this. It seems so - important.

SIS

Oh, your grandparents, as wonderful as they were, were so - relieved - that your dad could - have a life.

LISE

And you - you had a life too, right? You have a job, and a nice car.

SIS

I did. I do. A - nice life. (*laughs*) And a nice car. But -

LISE

But Dad was inside your heart. That's what I always was. Inside Dad's heart.

SIS

Exactly. (*beat*) Hey. Thank you for spending time with me. For telling me stories - for letting me have a glimpse into someone's life that I never stopped caring about. I'm so glad you had Gary as a dad, and that he had you as a daughter. And as sad as you are right now, I promise you, you'll always know what a lucky person you are because of that.

LISE

One last swig - for Dad?

Sis takes a swig, hands it to Lise, who does the same. Shakes her head in disgust.

Man. I don't get why people like this stuff.

Sis laughs. They rise, hug. Lise starts walking away.

LISE

Sis?

SIS

Yep?

LISE

I never told anyone this, but, when I was growing up, I never wanted a brother or a sister. I liked being the only kid that Mom and Dad loved. But, sometimes, in my bed at night, I felt like - this sounds weird, I guess - I felt like there was someone there. Beside me. Not in my bed, or anything. Just - in my room. Like a dog - not a dog, but- another - I guess maybe a soul? Yeah. Another soul. Beside me sometimes. Maybe - do you think it was Chase?

SIS

Oh, Lise. I hope so.

They hug again. Lise waves goodbye as she exits.

Sis sits, then dials.

Maggie? Can we meet - just one last time? I leave tomorrow at noon. (*listens*) I know, but - just a brief meeting? I promise. (*listens*) Thanks. The coffee shop. Nine tomorrow.

She clicks off.

LIGHTS DOWN

LIGHTS UP

The coffee shop. Sis is sitting at the table. Maggie enters. Sis waves. Joins Maggie at the table.

SIS

Thank you for coming.

MAGGIE

Lise doesn't know.

SIS

That's - fine. Actually, this is about Lise.

MAGGIE

I figured.

SIS

I was wondering -

MAGGIE

You want to be in her life.

SIS

Well, yes. And, as she pointed out, she's an adult who can make that decision for herself, but out of respect for you, and Gary, I wanted to ask your - permission. She's a wonderful young woman and -

MAGGIE

You understand that Lise is -

SIS

Delayed? Yeah. I finally got that. But - she's quite -

MAGGIE

Normal? She's not. She looks normal, and she can present as normal, but Lise will never be - what we - what we wished for her.

SIS

I understand. As much as I can understand. But I'd still like to - know her - to be someone she could - to be available to her. Somehow. And honestly? I don't technically have to ask your permission. All things considered, she's an adult.

MAGGIE

What's the point of asking then? You appear to do exactly what you want anyway. Show up at my house after my husband dies. Hook my kid emotionally when she's vulnerable. I assume you'll do as you please.

SIS

I guess that would be a reasonable assumption. The thing is -

MAGGIE

You want someone to talk to about Gary. To relive your - time with him.

SIS

Truthfully? In part. You had him all these years. I - he was the one I missed - yearned for -

MAGGIE

Stop talking that way about my husband. MY husband. For twenty-five years.

SIS

He could have been mine.

MAGGIE

But he wasn't. And your - loss - was important, but it didn't define him. We fell in love. We had a good marriage for a long time. Would have stayed together another twenty-five years. He wasn't - he wasn't thinking about you.

SIS

I know. I know that. But - I was thinking about him. Every relationship - it was never - it wasn't -

MAGGIE

You were seventeen. People change. Grow. Become different pieces of themselves. Parts of themselves.

SIS

I know. I know that Gary - moved on. Fell in love with you. Married you. But I - I stopped - growing - being - someone - after - everything happened. And then meeting Lise -

MAGGIE

MY daughter.

SIS

Yes, of course, she's yours. But I feel somehow connected to her - she's such a special - kid - well - young woman. And I would like to know her better.

MAGGIE

You are not her aunt. You're not my friend. You're not, nor have you been, connected to Gary in any way for decades. No. I say no. And if you had any - decency is the word that comes to mind, you'd leave now, and never contact us again. We didn't need this. Lise doesn't need this -

SIS

Maybe she does! She wants to be connected to her father in any way possible, and I can do that for her.

MAGGIE

You're doing - whatever this is - for yourself.

SIS

*(considers)* Possibly. I hope not. Who I'm doing it for, really, is - Gary.

MAGGIE

That's not your gift to give. I'm asking you, Sis, if you want to show your love for Gary, or your 'new' love for Lise, think about that girl's heart. And she is a girl, in so many ways. If you loved Gary, if you loved - that baby - do what's right. Look - beyond yourself. It's what mothers do.

She stands, leaves.

LIGHTS DIM

That night. Maggie sits on the chair, reading, Lise is on the couch, looking at her phone. She clicks off.

LISE

Did Sis leave? I tried texting her but she didn't answer.

MAGGIE

Yes.

LISE

I want to see her again. And so I will. You can't stop me.

MAGGIE

She won't respond.

LISE

Did you tell her not to contact me? That's - selfish of you Mom.

MAGGIE

Maybe. But, Sweetie, believe it or not, I did it for you. For us. For our family. For your - heart - to be safe.

LISE

What about what I want? I want to be with people who want to talk about Dad. To tell stories and jokes about him. Like Uncle Rob. I want to know as much about him - when he was little, and a teenager, and - everything - because he's never coming back, and I didn't know he was going to leave - to DIE, and now I have to - remember. For the rest of my life.

MAGGIE

But -

Shakes her head.

LISE

What?

MAGGIE

If I - give permission - and that's what Sis asked for - in the end. She finally said she wouldn't see you if I didn't grant it - then - oh, God. It sounds so -

LISE

Mean.

MAGGIE

It sounds that way, I know. But - I -

Maggie breaks down.

Lise rises, takes Maggie's hand, pulls her over to the couch. They

sit for a minute until Maggie can talk.

MAGGIE

Sweetie. This is hard for you - all of it. And I know it's hard to understand that if you count on Sis and she - and she gets busy or forgets to call you - that kind of thing is really tough for you. Remember all the work you and Dad did about how to feel better if you're sad? You - you feel things very deeply. You know that, right?

LISE

Yeah. I know. It's - it's one of the ways I'm special. That's what Dad always said.

MAGGIE

He's right. He was right. And now, you and me - we need to - be careful about how we live our lives without Dad. Sis is - she means well. Meant well. And maybe - after a while, if you still want to see her, we can arrange that. But right now, I - remember when Dad and I taught you how to be a porcupine when kids called you names when you were little?

LISE

Yeah.

MAGGIE

It's time for you, for us, to be porcupines together for a while. Till we - till we know how to be without your dad.

LISE

But. We *don't* know how. That's why Sis could help us.

MAGGIE

Maybe. Maybe someday she can help us. But for now, I need to be the one. And I know I'm not funny like Dad -

LISE

You're not.

MAGGIE

And I'll probably make a lot of mistakes.

LISE

Probably.

MAGGIE

But I'm going to try. And you can too.

LISE

Be a porcupine.

MAGGIE

Yes. Until we're ready to be - I don't know - Sloths?

Lise laughs.

LISE

O.K. But if I can't - if I can't know Sis right now - it's just for right now - yes?

MAGGIE

Just for right now.

LISE

Then, you have to do something.

MAGGIE

Anything.

LISE

Because it's like Sis was a wicked witch that came to our door and we have to - I guess - do some magic to keep her away. Or, to stop me from wanting to have that witch come back to our house.

MAGGIE

Well, she really wasn't a witch.

LISE

Mom. I know.

MAGGIE

What do you want me to do then? You don't want me to - hurt the witch - I mean, you understand what I meant when I -

LISE

Mom. I'm so much smarter than you think I am.

Maggie laughs

LISE

You laughed. That's - I haven't heard you laugh since Dad died.

MAGGIE

I'm sorry. I will laugh again. We will laugh again. So, what do you want me to do, little porcupine?

LISE

Can you - can you come sit next to me?

Maggie does.

I'm going to ask you to do something, and it's really important. And if you do it, I won't call Sis. And I know you don't want to do it, but if you do -

MAGGIE

What? What do you want? It's not having to do with Sis, is it? Because you understand what I was saying about her, and that it's not quite right to -

LISE

Mom. I'm not stupid.

MAGGIE

Oh, I'm sorry. I would never say that. Or think that.

LISE

Fine. So, this is what I want.

MAGGIE

Anything. Anything I can do, I will.

LISE

Tell me a story. About Dad. Any time I want. Even when you're sad, or cranky. If you tell me a story when I want, then I will feel better. I won't need to be a porcupine. I'll just - feel better. But you can't ever say no.

MAGGIE

Even if I cry?

LISE

Even then.

MAGGIE

All right.

Lise sidles up to Maggie. Maggie awkwardly puts her arm around her.

MAGGIE

Once upon a time there was a witch who knocked on a door that -

LISE

Mom!

MAGGIE

Sorry. That was mean.

LISE

Yeah. When people feel hurt sometimes, they get mean.

MAGGIE

I'm sorry. Sis doesn't deserve that.

LISE

She just wants to remember Dad.

MAGGIE

Yes. But we're not thinking about Sis quite yet.

LISE

No. Not yet.

MAGGIE

All right. Once, upon a time, on a snowy night when your father was twenty years old and I was nineteen, we kissed under a lamplight.

LISE

Mom! Not that stuff. Good stuff.

MAGGIE

*(laughing)* Good stuff. Hm. This is hard.

LISE

Try. You have to try. I am counting on you.

Lights start to dim.

MAGGIE

Once upon a time, on the night you were born, your father looked at you and said, "This is the most beautiful child I have ever seen."

LISE

He did? He really did?

MAGGIE

I promise.

LISE

Then what?

LIGHTS DOWN  
END OF PLAY

*(shaking her head)* I don't think so. It's simple, really. Just - tell me a story about Dad any time I ask. Any time. Day or night. Don't go into yourself. Even if you cry, or if makes you sad, do it. Because honestly? I think it would help you as much as it would help me.

MAGGIE

A story. I'm not a good story teller. That was your Dad.

LISE

And now he's gone. And that - wicked witch - well - not really - but let's go with the analogy with Sis -

MAGGIE

Honestly? I'd like the 'wicked witch' - or maybe she's just a - messenger - to go away. To you it sounds simple. Tell a story. But for me - nothing like that is ever easy for me. Sometimes I won't want to - it will be hard. Often it will be hard. Always. It will be hard always.

LISE

It will be hard for us until we both die. We've lost the love of our lives - and Sis has too, I suppose - but you and I - we have a chance to - get something as a result. Please. I beg you. Please.

Maggie stands.  
Walks to a  
side table  
where the  
scrapbook  
sits. Takes it  
and places it  
on Lise's lap.  
Sits next to  
her.

MAGGIE

How do I start?

LISE

*(smiles)* Once upon a time -

Maggie smiles.  
Kisses Lise.  
Points to a  
photo in the  
album.

MAGGIE

This was taken on the day your father charmed a very cranky woman.

Lise laughs

LISE

Tell me!

MAGGIE

Once upon a time -

LIGHTS DIM

CURTAIN

