

In the car with my mother, I roll my tongue all around my mouth. “My tooth on the bottom is so much going over the other one,” I say. She’s focused on the road. I’m thinking about last night, swimming in the Maine brackish water. My phone doesn’t have service at the beach, so I had to wait to text her, shivering in the passenger’s seat, preserving in the salt water:

i’ll call you soon playboy.

i mean okay lol

My fingers were passive from the cold. She responded almost immediately with:

why was that kind of hot?

In our house, my cousin’s nose starts to bleed but he doesn’t feel ill, he says. He says he is fine. He left a tissue, spotty and pink on the bathroom floor. It seems too pale to be blood. I haven’t seen this cousin in two years, and he has lost his speech impediment in our time apart. Now he holds a bowl up to me. I know children, I know what they want. We go to the kitchen and ask our grandfather where he got the sandwich he is eating. He says, “yes, tuna,” and I guess in a way he is right.

I’ve texted my dad five times over the last three days and he hasn’t responded. It’s nice because it’s something to complain about. Almost the holidays, and my dad has dyed his head and his beard blue. I know this from a Facebook post. Before my flight, he told me he’s sleeping with a woman who looks like my mother, and if I want, I can go to the sauna in her apartment complex.

All 19 of us, plus the dog, plus the six people living under the floorboards drive to the gun store to buy camouflage gloves for the kids. The car is an orange six-seater, but we don’t want to leave anyone behind so we move slowly and ineffectually like a funeral procession. I’d told everyone about the people living under the floorboards years ago when I peeled off the varnish and ate it until I was sick. The cracks have grown exponentially and everyone can see what I saw when I was child. Today, the new children love to look like they are part of the forest so that’s why we are taking them to the gun store. There are

wreaths hanging above the aisles of the firearms, my favourite wreath above the Charles Daly 101 Woodland Camo 20 GA 26" 3" Single Shot Shotgun.

My same cousin who bled out of his nose begs me to chase him around the house. I'm playing my own version of the 7 o'clock news in my head. *This bill would touch the lives of nearly all Americans, by adding 15 million people to the Medicaid rolls and subsidising private coverage for low- and middle-income people, at a cost to the government of \$871 billion over 10 years. The budget office estimates that the bill would provide coverage to 31 million uninsured people, but still leave 23 million uninsured in 2019. One-third of those remaining uninsured would be illegal immigrants.*¹

I lean down to kiss my grandfather on the cheek, and when we sit down to eat dinner, I accidentally ram his wheelchair into the table five times before he is properly aligned with his placemat. This bill would touch the lives of nearly all Americans.

The extended family say: "we saw a bunch of lobsters run over in the road on the way here.

"Somebody wants to know: "were they just shells or actual, whole lobsters? We think there was some meat there, too."

"Would you like to see a picture?"

They zoom in on a picture on their digital camera and show it off around the room. A spread of broken shells lay scattered on the road as if left over from a feast. Bits of puss coloured flesh are smeared into the pavement from the force of a car tire.

"Wow," says the child, "are the lobsters okay?"

I'm eating green beans and my uncle who looks as red as the lobsters had they lived long enough to be cooked, asks me how I met my girlfriend. I don't say through a drawing in a bin, I say at a gallery, one she works at. We'd snuck into a private view and drank lots of wine and sat on the curb outside. She'd left her gloves in the office, and as we tried to get

¹ Robert, Pear, "Senate Passes Health Care Overhaul on Party-Line Vote" The New York Times. December 24th, 2009. <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/25/health/policy/25health.html>

back in, the guard stopped us. I worried he'd check my bag and find two wet wine glasses inside, identical to the ones the people behind him were holding. She barged past him, and the security guard asked for her hand. He gently slapped it.

"You know better," he said. She does.

When the night is half spent, my grandfather wants to go to bed. He just needs to stay hydrated we say, but he refuses because my grandma loves water. There is more drama than necessary, and then my dad finally texts me and I excuse myself. I don't remember what I'd last said to him.

I dont have the bandwidth to be excoriated by my children

we are no LONGER friends on social networks anyways

I'm not sure what excoriated means, but I wish that bipartisan meant something else so I could use it in a sentence. I try it anyways, using it the way I want. So I reply with:

I'm sorry we could not come to a bipartisan agreement

He sends me a bunch of ????? I imagine him, because I am not yet too tired for empathy, that he's hunched over his phone, my messages baffling and obscure. It's Christmas, and there's a mirror up to man, making his eye big, making two of himself so he is less alone.