

PATRICK COLEMAN

No One Gets Hurt

Bubbe is not my grandma, but we pretend she is my grandma. She gives me peanut butter cups, but the center is creamy instead of grainy and sweet, and the wrapper is covered with SUGARFREE, SUGARFREE. The first time I met her she asked what I learned in Hebrew school. I was pretending I was Jewish, but I didn't know the words. I said I learned Hebrew in Hebrew school. She laughed and said, "Aren't you a sassy young man?" Then she whispered to me that she liked sassy young men. She rubbed my back in circles. I got a goofy feeling. It made me want to jump or make a loud honking sound, even though I didn't. That's when she became my Bubbe.

But I'm not supposed to go back because she isn't my real grandma and also because something happened and then my mom said, "We're never going back there, I promise." When I asked why, she said, "Do you really need to ask that?" I really needed to ask that, but I didn't ask anymore.

What happened was we went to see Bubbe like we always did, me and my mom and my sister, Xelha. We met Mrs. V, who is Bubbe's real daughter, in the lobby at the nursing home. Bubbe has problems with her memory. Mrs. V's kids are grown, but for Bubbe they're still young, and so we pretended to be them. Usually Mrs. V walks us back to Bubbe's room, but this time my mom and her got talking, so me and Xelha went to Bubbe's room by ourselves. When we opened the door, we found her kneeling by the bed like she was praying and on the bed there was an old man.

Bubbe stood up and smoothed her dress with her hands, and she smiled at us in a confused way, in two ways at once: a sort of, Oh-hey-I-feel-pretty-good smile and also an I-don't-like-you-looking-at-me smile, a please-stop-looking smile. The man on the bed had his wiener sticking out of his pants, and it was straight, and he had these big glasses that made his blinks big and fish-ish. It sounds like a joke but it's not a joke. Sometimes I start trying to be funny when something serious is

happening, and sometimes when something funny is happening I get a sad feeling. This is a serious thing. I'm not trying to be funny, even though this has a wiener in it. Besides, I know about hard wieners. Sometimes I get one, and it feels good to push it against things, like the bathroom countertop when it's cold.

I knew we shouldn't be there, but we were there, and I felt bad, and the man seemed like he felt bad. Bubbe stared out the window, and then she saw some birds and began smiling. Xelha ran out, her big black braid bouncing against her back. I was scared to follow her because then she'd start talking, and I already knew that talking would make something happen. We used to be friends, but she's been weird. She got jeans with sparkles on them, fancy things to clip up her hair, and a row of lip gloss tubes on her dresser. She tries them on and then licks them off in front of the mirror in the morning, and she won't share them with me.

The old man stood up and put his wiener in his pants and zipped up, and I went over to Bubbe and leaned my face against her dress. She held my head in her arm and pointed with the other and said, "Look, robins." Just saying the bird name seemed to make her really happy. It made me happy that she was happy. Her arm felt warm over my head. But then I knew I needed go.

When I got to the lobby, everyone was gone. There were a few nurses at the desk talking, so I didn't feel scared. I went over to the magazine rack and pretended to pick one out. I'd lift one halfway and then pretend to be disappointed and put it back. I didn't want to be lost, but I didn't really want anyone finding me. I didn't know what I wanted.

Eventually a nurse, a short lady with really big eyes, she came over and pointed out front. Through the little windows in the door I saw my mom and Xelha. One of them would yell and flap their arms while the other one stood still. Then, they'd switch. It was like watching them trade bodies. It was also like watching birds fight over pieces of bread.

Mrs. V came into the lobby. She was whispering with a nurse. She saw my mom out the window and went outside, and all three of them started talking. I cracked the door so I could listen: "What was going on in there?" "I'm so sorry, I didn't mean—" "So so disgusting!" "Sick. Perverted." "No, just understand—" "This wasn't what I had in mind when I said we'd do this." "Me neither, I didn't think—" "I should have never ever come to

this shitty place!” “Watch your language, Xelha.” “I’m sorry, I really—” “I need to get my kids out of here. We’ll talk at work.” “Work, yes—” “I’m going to be traumatized for life!” “No, you’re not, but I wish I’d never gotten you into this.” “Andrea, please, if there’s any way I can—” “Let’s talk at work.” “We’ll talk at wor—” “I can’t believe you made me do this!”

When they were done we left, and we never went back again.

When we stopped seeing Bubbe, that’s when everything and everybody started coming loose and drifting around like the dead bees in our blow-up pool. Xelha, my mom, and especially my Bubbe. My family had come all loose. Or maybe it should be gone loose. I’m not sure. It’s confusing. It’s like hugging something too big to be hugged, like there’s always some part I can’t reach. It’s like hugging a really fat person. You can’t hug everything that’s there.

A while ago Mrs. V taught me some Jewish words because Bubbe’d asked about Hebrew school. Mrs. V said it would make her mother happy. “Don’t you like to make your mother happy?” she said, and I said, “Yeah, like all the time.” Sometimes my mom gets tired and her face gets empty, and it’s like she’s looking into a telescope around the insides of her body. When she comes back, she asks me to tell her something funny about my day, and I usually have something funny to tell or I make something up. Then my mom smiles and looks at me, not into herself. She tells me, “Thank you for waking me up.” And I say, “You’re welcome, baby.” Sometimes she says, “Sorry, I’m not myself right now.” But she seems like herself to me. She’s more like her than anyone.

So after Mrs. V taught me some words, when we’d find Bubbe in her room I could say, “Shalom, Bubbe!” and she’d laugh like her bones were going to break apart. I liked learning the words because it was like learning to spit, how they move all in your mouth. I can almost spit from one side of the handball court to the other.

One of the other words I learned was *mitzvah!* which I always say with an exclamation mark because that’s how it should be said. It’s a tricky one, though, because it’s a good deed and also like a rule, and the rule one I’d just say, all deep and low-like: *mitzvah*. Mrs. V gave me that word because that’s what she said we were doing by going and helping her mom, a good deed. *Mitzvah!* Not *mitzvah*.

But because I’m going back to see Bubbe, I think about that word. If my mom finds out, I would be in really big trouble. She’d say that it was definitely not a *mitzvah!* That I’d broken her *mitzvah*.

After school I hide behind the portables, waiting for the teachers to leave. I don’t want them asking why I’m not on the normal bus. While I wait, I play in the dirt, which is awesome. I have one tunnel going one way and the other going the other. They meet in the middle. It’s an underground subway, and the middle is Grand Central Station. (When the phone rings a lot, my mom says, Grand Central Station!) It’s a busy place. I put my arm in one hole and my other arm in the other one. My fingers have conversations inside Grand Central Station. Really loud conversations. “Oh, you look so beautiful!” “Ah, that’s the way these things go!” “Where is the bathroom?” “I’m suing you.” “Well, I’m suing you, too!” “Who are you?” “I’m Bill.” “I’m suing you, Bill, too!” “Not me!” “Yes, Bill. You.” “I’m so sad and stuck!” “Twenty-five dollars? Twenty-five dollars!” “What I would give for some quiet, but that’s life.” “It smells like poop in this corner.” “Oh, sorry sir, I didn’t see you there.” “No, no, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to poop there.” “I should never have come to this shitty place!” “This floor is moving!” “No it’s not, you’re on drugs!” “Oh, right!” “Put the gun down and no one gets hurt!” “We don’t trust you!” “You have my word that no one gets hurt unless I say so! *Now give me a million dollars and no one gets hurt!* I need a helicopter and some scissors and no one gets hurt!” “No one gets hurt?” “No, *everyone* gets hurt!” I jab my chin into the dirt above Grand Central Station and the ceiling collapses on the people. It falls in big chunks and they cough and they shout. Eventually they stop coughing. A few fingers crawl out through the rubble, but they die on the surface. When someone makes demands you have to listen. The dirt smells good enough to eat. I look down at my fingers, some sticking up in the crumbled dirt and some still under the dirt. I lift them and sing a quiet little angel song. “Ah ah ahh, ahh ah AHH.” They float up toward heaven. I blow hard on them. “Oh no! The wind has blown the angels off course!” “Is this heaven?” “No, this is Antarctica.” It’s not heaven, but I think it looks mostly the same. It’s a big white ocean you can walk on and where everyone sticks together because otherwise you’ll die.

When I think all the teachers have gone home, I leave. I sneak out through the parking lot, and I go buy some candy, and then I wait at the bus stop. It's kind of cloudy and there are lots of cars going to downtown Santa Ana, which is away from my house. That's which way the bus is going, too, when it comes. I get on and sit next to a fat black lady with pink pants on. Pink pants means nurse. My dad's a nurse. Nurse is good.

He used to have whole days off when he'd take me and Xelha around Santa Ana, to the zoo or to Librería Martinez, or sometimes to the beach. But he's been busy and says I can't miss so much school. He took me to Jack in the Box the Saturday after the thing with Bubbe to get spicy crispy chicken sandwiches. That morning I'd woken up with my wiener big, and I cut holes in the bottoms of my pockets so I could touch it while I walked around the house. While we ordered sandwiches, yup, I was touching it. I'm sneaky like that, sometimes, like a ninja. The ninja of wiener touching.

My dad told me funny stories about the hospital. The nurses liked to play tricks on each other. He told me about how they'd gotten a new nurse once. Someone peed in a cup, and my dad was showing the new nurse what to do with it. He says, "You have to make sure it's a good sample, so pay attention." So then he dips his finger in and licks it and says, "Yup, it's good. You try." The new nurse freaks out, but my dad says urine is totally clean and it's part of how they do things there. She puts her finger in and puts it in her mouth and looks like she's going to barf. Then my dad says, "I told you to pay attention!" and he shows her again: he dips his pointer finger into the pee and then licks his pinky. That's such a good trick. My dad's probably the funniest person I know. It makes me wish we did anything with pee at school.

Then he got quieter and more serious and he asked me if I was okay with what happened at the nursing home. I said, "Totally." Then we talked about other things, like what him and his brothers used to do when they were kids. It was pretty great to hear his stories. I kind of wanted to tell him more about the thing at the nursing home, but I didn't know how to tell it because it wasn't a funny story. I wanted to tell him that I already missed Bubbe some, even though she thought I was someone else. But I didn't figure it out. I'm good with the funny stories. These other ones, though. No good at all. And there's that feeling again, like I'm trying to hug something that's so big I can't get my arms around it.

In the afternoon I took a nap and my wiener got small. I looked at my shorts with the holes in the pockets, and I didn't know what to do. Would my mom notice when she did laundry? Should I throw them away? I didn't know what had come over me when I got those scissors. I couldn't figure out why I'd thought that was a good idea.

Whenever we went to see Bubbe, my name was Burt and Xelha's name was Edie. We almost ruined it the first time because we weren't sure whose name was whose—which one was the girl name. Really, they sounded like Muppet names to us. Mrs. V walked us in and said, "Mom, Bert and Edie are here to see you. Your grandchildren." She talked like Bubbe was an idiot, but that was stupid because Bubbe is great.

Xelha, because she's older and sort of bossy, she told me to just smile and shut up. So we smiled. Bubbe smiled back. She had white hair that was short and curly, and she wore a green coat with tiny, shiny buttons or beads or something all over it. She had her hands on her knees like she was holding the ends of two baseball bats. She asked us to come hug her, and I waited for Xelha to go first. But then when Bubbe hugged me, even though it smelled like old Mike and Ikes, I started feeling better. It was like when she touched me I became her real Burt.

She said how much we'd grown, and she told Xelha she had become very beautiful. I didn't see it. Xelha had grown like a cute baby bird becomes a crow. When Bubbe asked Xelha if she had a hundred little boyfriends, that made her happy. She pulled her ponytail out from Bubbe's arm. Xelha said, "No, only three boyfriends, but they all love me very much."

Then Bubbe turned to me, and I said, "I'm Burt!" and Bubbe rubbed my shoulders and said, "I know who you are, but it's okay." That made me nervous, like she could tell I wasn't related. But then she said both us had been spending too much time in the sun, that we were starting to look like little Puerto Ricans. Then I knew we hadn't ruined it.

Xelha is pretty smart, when she wants to be. She doesn't really want to be, so most of the time she's not. Sometimes she's pretty nice, too. But most of the time, at least lately, she's doesn't want to be that, either. She said, "It's fake tan. If you take ten showers it comes off and then we're white again. It comes in a bottle. Then you don't get skin cancer. You just spray it on."

“Like this,” I said. I held my left hand away from my body, aiming a fake can at my face.

Bubbe said, “Well, we’re not exactly white, are we?” And we said, “Yeah, sure, right.”

The bus goes past the old brick courthouse and the big tree. Eventually I recognize the street we’re on, and I say to the driver that I want to get off at the nursing home, and she says, “Sure, little man.” That feels good. Little man. It felt like when I read my poetry to Bubbe, and she said I had the soul of an artist. It made me feel big and kind of spread out everywhere. Miss Sandy, my teacher for third grade last year, she taught me poetry. She says that writing won’t just give you answers, but it can make you feel less confused. I guess that’s right. Bubbe gets confused a lot. Sometimes she doesn’t remember much and people say, “She’s just a little confused,” but other times they say, “It’s so sad.” People don’t say it’s sad when I’m confused. They think it’s funny. It’s sad, though, when I don’t understand something but I want to, or when I do something wrong but I don’t know it. It’s sad when I realize what I didn’t realize before. But everyone always laughs.

Miss Sandy helped me with the poem that I read to Bubbe. She loves my poetry, too. She thinks I’m a beautiful writer. When she would say that, I pretended I had a comb in my hand and slicked back my hair like a movie star, and I’d go *hah* onto my fingertips and shake them, I don’t know why—people do it when they’re famous. In class, she was the editor. The first time I wrote the poem it looked like this:

My dog licks under the coffee table where I leave gum and where my mom takes it away. It tastes like gum under the coffee table. It must taste like the holes in the dark dirt where the red flower came out.

My dad taking me to Jack in the Box makes me feel like a balloon passing the clouds, heading for the sun, knowing I’m gonna pop soon.

Oh spicy crispy chicken sandwich, you make my heart the size of big lemons.

Oh Transformer, why do you fart on the dog?

Oh Night, why does your blackness come down angry?

When my sister is mean to me, I am a turtle on my back. My green legs are short and I wave them at the seagull with red eyes who is my sister, coming to pick at me like the bag of Doritos we took to the beach, that the seagulls took into the sky. Now that I am older I am still a turtle and my sister still is mean to me but I am on my feet and I am running like a mouse. No one can catch me, Speed Turtle, fastest in the universe! Zoom away I go!

Oh Dulce, why are you so kissy?

I liked the thing about the Transformer. Dulce, who sat next to me, didn’t like the last sentence, but it was true. Miss Sandy didn’t like the last sentence either, or other stuff—but she was the editor. That was her job.

When I read it to Bubbe, it went like this:

I am a turtle on my back.
My green legs are short.
I wave them at
the seagull with red eyes

who is my sister,
coming to pick
at me. Oh Night,
your blackness comes down angry.

My dog licks under the coffee table.
It tastes like the holes in the dark dirt
where the red flowers came out.

Now that I am older I am still a turtle.
My sister still is mean to me
but I am on my feet
and I am running like a mouse.

Bubbe said, “That’s lovely.” She said, “Read me another,” and I had to say that I only had one. Bubbe said it was fine, one great poem a day was fine. Xelha said, “One crap poem,” but I ignored her. Bubbe waved at me to come over, and when I came over she hugged me, and I could smell her lipstick.

When I read the poem into the Speak and Spell microphone on our class reading day, I added back the line about the Transformer at the end, and everyone said that was the best part and laughed a lot. When I was done Miss Sandy was all teary-eyed. I think she was proud of the poem because of all the work she put into it.

After class, she said to me, “Good work, Geo, but you don’t always have to be funny. Sometimes it’s okay to be serious.” Miss Sandy says writing makes you feel better because then it’s all written down and you can’t argue with it. I mostly feel better when I’m never confused. That’s why I’m trying to be serious, but even my feelings are all over the place and not right. I want to get the feelings right.

The bus shushes and the doors open, and I get off. Across the street is the nursing home, and it’s a pretty big street, so I wait for my chance. There’s a little gap in the traffic, so I run. My backpack bangs on my back while I run. There are cars coming at me from one side, and then I cross the cement divider and there are cars coming at me from the other side.

I look back across all the cars. Smooshed in the street is the box of sugarfree candy I’d bought for Bubbe. I reach around and feel that my backpack is open. I make sure nothing else has been falling out behind me.

The nursing home looks different. I think it’s because I normally walked in with my mom, so I just didn’t really look at all. It’s weird to think of all the things I never saw when my mom was in front. The thing is, though, it looks a lot like school. The main building is long and has the name in big letters along the top. On the side there is a fence, and behind it are picnic tables and some lounge chairs and a big white gazebo. I would probably eat my lunch behind that gazebo, see if I could dig my way under it. I would dig just about anywhere. For a minute it feels like I’ve taken the bus right back around to school, but that’s just dumb.

It looking like school makes me think about Xelha and her ugly friends. When I decided to see Bubbe again, I asked Xelha if she wanted to come, too. I went and asked her at the blue tables, where the older kids hung out. She said, “Leave me alone.” When I didn’t leave, she said, “What do you want, kid?”

I told her what I wanted, even though she knew I didn’t like being called kid and she was being a brat. She said I was a lunatic and there

wasn’t any way I’d see her going to that place again. Her girlfriends at the blue tables laughed like a bunch of ugly birds. I started to explain to Xelha why, but then she said to shut up and told all her friends what happened. She said she’d gotten paid five dollars a day to pretend to be this creepy woman’s granddaughter, and that the lady was dirty and drooled a lot, and that we’d walked in on her giving an old man a blow job, and that it was disgusting, so totally gross, and that her mom had to be polite because of her job but later had said, “Don’t get any ideas.” All these ugly birds laughed and laughed and laughed, and Xelha laughed and looked at me and said, “And *you* want to go back there? You must be a pervert, too.”

All these things were happening in my brain. One was that the words *blow* and *job* went back in time, and they were trying to stick to the fish-ish man, to Bubbe smoothing her dress. They weren’t fitting but they tried to fit. Another was that I didn’t know who Xelha was talking about—who was creepy? who was dirty?—and I couldn’t believe we’d been looking at the same lady. Bubbe, when she wasn’t real tired, she told stories especially for Xelha. They were about being a young lady in Maryland during the war. She talked about soldiers and big dances, how you had to watch out for men (then she’d wink at me), and her father’s glass factory that was turned into a place to make parts for radars. I know Xelha had listened. I know because I know what she looks like when she isn’t listening. She makes this face like she’s cross-eyed and about to throw up. It’s really ugly. She does that when I tell stories.

And there was that five dollars. Nothing was what I thought it was. I wanted to go back and call Xelha all kinds of dirty names, but then she’d be right and I’d be a pervert.

That’s when I decided to lie to my mom. That night I found her in front of the pantry in one of her fancy new suits—a black and white one. She was a manager now, so she said she had to dress like a manager. She shut the door and looked at me. She said, “What friend’s are you going to, sweetie?” I said it was Alfredo, and she asked me about Alfredo, and I made up a bunch of stuff. Alfredo wasn’t really my friend. I have school friends but not really after school friends. My mom asked, “Have I met Alfredo’s parents?” I just looked at her for a while, trying to figure her out. Her makeup was dark and colorful—green under her eyes, this nice color I can’t even describe on her lips—and she never asked questions

like this, and I felt like asking, like I was angry, “Who are you?” but I didn’t. Since she had become a manager she was always saying, “I’m so stressed out, I’m so stressed out,” but like she was happy about it. I said, “I think you met his mom,” and then she shrugged and opened the pantry again. Her voice sounded far away from out of the pantry saying, “Sounds fine to me,” and it was the voice I recognized, it was my mom’s voice again. When I left, it was like she was whispering *come back to me* because part of my brain kept going back to her, wanting to hug her and say I was sorry for lying. But the other part was going forward to Bubbe, and even though your brain has two halves it can’t go two different ways. You have to not go one way.

This way feels like the right way until I step into the lobby of the nursing home. That’s when I realize that I don’t know who Bubbe is—I mean, I don’t know her name. I don’t know how to ask to visit her. She’s just Bubbe, or Mrs. V’s mom. I don’t even know what the V stands for, or if Bubbe is a Mrs. V, too. She probably isn’t. I think about fiddling with the magazines for a while until I figure out what to do, but I can’t move. A woman’s voice says, “Hello there, can we help you?” and I think I’m busted.

When I turn around, it’s the big-eyed nurse. She smiles and asks if I’ve been dropped off to see my grandma. *She* knows me. *She* knows who my grandma is.

She points and says I can go back and see her in the lounge. I almost run down the hall I’m so happy. In the lounge room I find Bubbe, sitting at a small wooden piano. She’s wearing a red sweater and teal pants and her hair doesn’t seem as spongy as it usually is. She’s playing this weak little song. Her fingers are skinny as branches. The way she plays the song it sounds like tired angels walking down stairs with bells. I walk over and listen to her play for a while. When it seems like she’s just going to keep on playing forever and ever I say, “Hi, Bubbe, it’s me.”

She looks at me and smiles. For a little bit it looks like she’s going to open her arms and give me a big powder-smelling hug. But she nods and starts playing her song again. I kind of listen for another minute, wondering if maybe she just wants to show me the song.

I touch her on the shoulder and say, “Hey, Bubbe, shalom!” She kind of shakes a little, and coughs, and she says, “I’m playing my song.” I say that it’s a good song, and then, without even looking at me again, she says, “Just let me play my song. Can I just play my song for a while, please?”

I don’t know what to say, and Bubbe restarts her song. Her fingers really are like branches scratching at the piano—each finger lands on a key and then slides down it until it makes a sound and then the finger slides off and starts over on a new key. I see the angels leaning on the railing, walking down the stairs.

I think about the box of candy I wanted to give Bubbe that is smashed in the street. I wonder if it would be different if Mrs. V was here. Maybe if Mrs. V introduced me, introduced me again. Maybe Bubbe would recognize me if Xelha came, too, but that’s never happening again. I’d feel like a criminal bringing Xelha here anyway, even if I could. It’s hard to think about that Xelha as the same person who helped me when I fractured my arm. We were waiting for the bus, and actually she was telling me a joke about Jewish people. I’d just finished calling her names because I’d seen her kissing Allen Reynolds. She called me a baby and gay, and she said she bet I didn’t know what gay was. I said I did, and she said, “Prove it, gay baby.” Then we didn’t talk a while. Then she told me the joke. I was climbing onto a mailbox. The curved top looked like a saddle, and I wanted to ride it. “Okay,” she said, “I just made this joke up.” I said, “Fine, good for you.” “So this joke is mine,” she said, “I made it up, so you can’t tell nobody.” I said, “A joke’s a joke. Just tell me.” I got my belly on top of the box and wrapped my arms over the sides. She said, “What the beer maker do?” I wiggled and squirmed and let out a squished, “I don’t know.” She said, “Hebrew.” With enough wiggling, I got my legs on either side of the rounded top. I said, “I don’t really get it.” She said, “You know, like Hebrew, the language, and he brew the beer.” I told her it didn’t really work. “Maybe,” she said, “maybe if I said, What does the Jewish beer maker do? Would that be funnier?” “Look!” I said. “Giddy-up, Postal Service!” and slapped the mailbox and slid off and fractured my arm—not quite good enough to break it, that’s what my dad said later. Xelha ran to the office. Then she came back for me. She told me I would be okay. She said the doctors would give me medicine to make the pain

go away, and by the way she said it I knew she meant it. It turned out that the medicine wasn't that good, but that doesn't mean she didn't mean it. She meant it, then.

But I can't see her saying something like that now. The sunlight comes through the front window bright and warm, and while I watch Bubbe that feeling of trying to hug something too big to hug comes back, like a hug coming out of the middle of my chest. I think about going home.

Then Bubbe says, "Do you know how to play piano?"

I say, "No."

She says, "Okay," and she scoots over on the bench and says, "Sit here, and put your finger here, and when I say *now* push this one here one time and hold it." I sit there, and put my finger where she tells me to, and then she starts playing her song again. I keep waiting and waiting until I think she's forgotten about me all over. The notes go down and up and down real slow and quiet. I can feel them tapping around on the top of my skull. Tap, tap, tap. Real quiet she says, "Now," and I push the key and the piano goes Doon! and then the little tapping notes tap around on top of it, and when she says now again I push again and the Doon! spreads around underneath the feet of all those notes. We do this for a long time.

Then a nurse comes and says Bubbe needs to go eat and Bubbe leaves and goes to eat. She just gets up and leaves. I watch her go until I can't make out her face, only her red sweater and her teal pants turning the corner. Part of me goes with her, and she hugs that part of me, but part of me—the blood-and-guts one—that me stays.

We all used to come here for Bubbe. Now it's just me and her. But this isn't Bubbe because she doesn't know me. The Bubbe I knew knew me. Where is the other Bubbe? Where is the Xelha that means something, even if she is lying? I want them here. But they aren't here. They are far away.

I ask a nurse to call my mom. I hear my mom's voice through the phone, even though I'm not even close to it. When she picks me up and we get back in the car, she says, "I'm not even going to say a word to you, I'm so mad and embarrassed." Then she yells and yells and calls me a little liar.

At home, she makes me go to my room. That's okay with me. She says I won't get dinner, which makes me hungrier, but I just turn off the lights

and go to sleep. I wake up in the middle of the night, and I'm still tired but I'm hungry and my wiener is hard and it keeps me from sleeping. I get up and sneak into the kitchen and eat two string cheeses. My house is super quiet. I push my wiener into the cabinets and the couch and the cold sliding glass back door. The moon is out and it's really bright and I have this idea to go out into our blow-up pool, so I slide open the door as slowly as I can.

Even with the moon, it's still pretty dark, but it's warm and the cars all sound smooth and far away. I feel so big, standing out there by myself. I take off my pajamas, and I look at my wiener for a while, and then I get in the pool. There are dead bees floating everywhere, and I get sort of scared for my wiener. I scoop water and make the bees float back and forth. I pretend one is Xelha. I put it close to me, and just by moving my body a little I can make her float away. I pretend that I want to reach for her but I can't move. I do the same thing with another bee who is my mom, except a tidal wave knocks her out of the pool and onto the concrete. The bee I make into Bubbe, I scoop her back sometimes and then let her drift off again. My mom is gone, and Xelha is going away, and Bubbe is coming and going in waves. I'm making so much happen to the water that everything is moving too fast to do anything about. I could go, too. I could get up and leave them. But I have this idea—probably another of my dumb ones—that no matter which way I go, I'll circle back around like Christopher Columbus. And with everyone else moving anyways, I think that I should be the one who stays.

I say, like the Doon! of my piano note, "Away! Away!" I splash the water. The sliding glass door pulls open, squeaking loud enough for me to hear over my own voice, and here comes my mom, in her sweatpants, and I don't like the look on her face. I shake the water in the pool. The waves move me and I wave like a buoy and stay in one place. There goes Xelha bee, onto the ground, there goes Bubbe. I go, "Ahoy! Ahoy!" and they all go away, away, go away.