



THE COMET

When Tracy, my older sister, started dating Clay, we all shook our heads in disbelief. He was this hot shot corporate lawyer pushing forty and she was singing with The Weeds, a rock band, every night at the Tralfamadore Cafe. Until Tracy met Clay, she used to sleep until noon everyday and get dressed sometime around five o'clock. She celebrated her twenty-first birthday last year by cruising every bar on Elmwood Avenue until they closed at four AM. Then she went to The Cat, a club down on Franklin Street that stayed open after hours. Tracy drank so much Wild Turkey that she fell asleep on the bar and had to be carried to her rusted Mustang and driven home by God knows who. At least she could never remember his name. "He did know how to drive a stick shift, Jake," she told me, as if that made everything all right.

So when Tracy showed up at our folks' house last Easter with Clay in tow, we all did a double take. My father didn't quite know what to say to him. Clay didn't look like the type of guy who could hold his own talking about dry walling, which is pretty much all Pop knows. Tracy must have told him I painted houses, though, because he handed me a card with some guy's name on it and said, "A colleague of mine. He needs a little work done on his summer home up in Algonquin Bay." Algonquin Bay's this ritzy summer place just over the border from Buffalo in Canada. I said thanks and stuck the card in my pocket.

Tracy's usual dates were musicians or bikers with names like Bones and Squirrel. Oh, yeah, and Hammerhead. I stayed away from that one. I hear he's doing time now. Clay wasn't a biker, now or in any of his previous lives, you could see that in a second. He was wearing a pinstripe suit and socks with those diamond things, argyles, on them. He sat in the living room and kept looking around, taking in the surroundings: the worn brown plaid sofa, the pea-green carpeting, the floral curtains that hung to the floor and then