

Paris Syndrome

Lying down to rest, their first afternoon in Paris, was a total rookie mistake. Dana should have known better than that. In all her travels a couple of years ago—her time away to get her head together—she had gleaned so much: not just tricks for avoiding jet lag but how to really suck the marrow out of a place, to absorb its tastes and smells and rhythms. It was expertise she was eager to offer to Laurel, her daughter, now that she had the chance. This, too, counted as maternal wisdom, right? And Laurel at thirteen was old enough, finally, to understand where Dana was coming from, what propelled her.

“Mom,” said Laurel. “Wake up.”

Laurel’s face loomed above in the hotel-room half-light. She was rubbing her lips together, something she did lately when anxious—as Dana had learned in this year of getting-to-know-each-other-again. Back home, Laurel had been coming to Dana’s every other week for almost a year now; more time with Laurel was the whole reason, the only possible reason, for moving from L.A. to the sun-baked Stepford-burbia that Cal and his vanilla second wife now called home. (Mission Viejo: some place for a Black man to raise a biracial daughter. The whole thing made Dana want to puke.)

“I’m awake, I’m awake,” Dana said. She lurched to sitting, slid her hand under the pillow to her phone, lit up the screen—after seven in the evening, already, but she hadn’t missed a call from Cal, at least. The last thing she needed on Day One of Paris was a check-in from her ex. This was their trip: hers and Laurel’s. Their first trip, alone, since Laurel was little. Free tickets—he presto—from the radio station; Cal’s grudging yes. And here they were. Unreal.

“Mom,” said Laurel. She was shifting from foot to foot, waving the guidebook. “I got the park wrong.”

While Dana splashed water on her face, Laurel hovered in the bathroom doorway. “It’s the Luxembourg Gardens. That’s where Marius falls in love with Cosette. I don’t know why I thought it was the Tuileries. And we spent, like, an hour there this afternoon.”

"Laurel." Dana moved to cup Laurel's face and then thought better of it when Laurel flinched; Dana had forgotten that her hands were still dripping wet from the sink. "You hear yourself, right? Are you actually complaining about spending an hour in the Tuileries?"

"Fine. It was pretty. But it wasn't the right park. And by the way, I'm starving."

"Me too. Let's blow this joint. We'll see where the evening takes us. Yeah?"

Outside, the daylight lingered. June in Paris. A wash of rose that pricked you all over, teased you with possibility. On the narrow side-streets north of the hotel, beyond Les Halles, crowds spilled from outdoor tables, elbows perilously close to wine stems. The scent of baking pizza and cigarette smoke. Near a gelato kiosk, young women in hijab laughed at a joke in chorus.

Dana led her daughter through the throngs, squeezing her arm close. A stranger's gaze flicked their way, like an itch that needed scratching—again, again, again—even here, in cosmopolitan Paris. The difference in color between them, mother and daughter, had always elicited quizzical glances. Dana, not translucent-pale and nowhere near blonde, thankfully, felt that she did read as "ethnic" (and Jewish specifically), if you were paying attention. Laurel was at least a couple of shades darker, sure, but the two of them certainly looked related. If you were paying attention. Dana pressed her cheek to Laurel's briefly, as if to tell the world: she's mine. Believe it.

Laurel pulled away. Her mood was sinking like an anchor, clearly. Laurel on an empty stomach was a volatile creature, at thirteen or at five—Dana now, suddenly, recalled a disastrous Fourth-of-July parade viewing, years before. Castigated by Cal (that dolorous, judging look of his) for failing to bring an apple or a baggie of crackers for little Laurel, volcanic and tear-stained and forlorn.

Now Laurel was trailing ten steps behind and Dana had to stop on the curb and wait for her, jamming up the flow of foot-traffic. Then, crossing the street at last, Laurel kicked the back of Dana's foot so that her sandal came halfway off in the middle of the crosswalk.

"Could you not do that?"

"I didn't mean to." Laurel's voice quavered. Okay, Dana thought, she's exhausted. We need a meal. I need a drink.

They turned onto a side street. Midway down the block a door opened, and a waiter in a bow-tie emerged. He waved them over and

opened a menu for them, insisting. Mediocre Chinese food in Paris was still dinner in Paris—how bad could it be? It was sure to be a more authentic local dining experience than at some picture-perfect brasserie back near the hotel. “This’ll be super,” said Dana. “A neighborhood spot. Totally off the radar.”

A different waiter, this one not smiling, appeared at the table as they sat down, looking them over. The menu photographs showed glistening, gloppy dishes; the prices were atrocious. Dana refrained from grumbling, to set a mom-like example. But it was hard to pretend that they weren’t off to a bad start. It would be different if Dana were traveling by herself, easy to right the ship. But this was just the two of them. An adventure to remember, Dana and Laurel on their own. Ha. And six more days of this.

(Do you have an up-to-date passport, Dana?)

-What?

Have you ever been to Paris, Dana?

-Wait.

Because you are going to Paris.

-You’re kidding.

You’ve won a romantic trip for two to Paris.

-No way.

You sound pretty excited, Dana.

-Oh my God.

Who’s going to Paris with you, Dana?

-My... my daughter is going to Paris with me. My daughter.)

“This is so gross,” Laurel said now, dangling a dripping noodle from her fork. Then she giggled so hard that she brought on hiccups. The food had clearly revived her. “Tomorrow night,” she was saying, “can we go to that place with the orange tables outside? You know, on that first street we turned onto, from the hotel? I think it was falafel. It looked really good.”

Dana had rested her chin in her hand and was tracing a wet circle onto the tablecloth near the base of her wine glass. She drained the glass early in the meal but had waved the waiter off when he suggested another. Was it her imagination, or did Laurel eye her warily, just before Dana told the waiter non, merci?

“Hello? Mom, are you in there?”

Dana started. It gave her an electric charge every time Laurel said it: Mom. Pow. “I’m here.” She smiled and sat up straight, stabbed at a water chestnut on her plate.

When anyone asked, Dana fully admitted that she had been the one to initiate the break with Cal a few years before. Laurel was nearly ten, then. What Dana had needed was to open up some space. To imagine a way forward for herself as an autonomous human. And then after the stints in Lisbon and in San Miguel de Allende—maybe eighteen months away, in total, and anyway, she visited SoCal as often as humanly possible during that period—she had settled down in a eucalyptus-ringed bungalow in L.A. Figuring shit out. And Laurel always on her mind. She had made constant offers to Cal, and she meant every one of them: to drive Laurel back and forth to Eagle Rock for weekends; to take Laurel for the whole summer. Even to enroll Laurel in that charter school downtown, for junior high.

But Cal and his newly acquired bride—Iowa-born, pasty-faced, a fellow do-good-lawyer—had said no. They chose to punish Dana for her independence, for her questioning and questing. The divorce, for Cal, had always really been about wresting control of Laurel from her. He and his wife rationed out weekends, partitioned winter breaks, policing Dana's access, until Laurel caved and moved back to the O.C. Their O.C. It's not like Laurel had stopped calling her "Mom" during that in-between-time after the divorce, when Dana was away; they Skyped and talked and e-mailed (always according to Cal's schedule, of course), plenty. But this year, with Dana now living close by, she sensed something changing: Laurel was plugging into her like a socket. The connection was alive again, she felt it—and it felt good. Well, Dana had had to journey there first, in order to get here now, right? Of one thing she was sure: she would never hand Cal another excuse to accuse her of fucking everything up.

"Mom. You look really tired. You brought the guidebook, yeah?"

Dana smiled again at Laurel. She fished the book from her bag, passed it across the table.

"Since I messed up about the Tuileries, can we go to the Luxembourg Gardens tomorrow? And then we could check out a museum. Like, the train station one. With the Impressionist art." She flipped through the pages and tapped a photo with her thumb. "This one. And then maybe a boat tour?" Laurel asked for a pen and began writing a list on the inside flap of the guidebook.

Dana pushed her plate away and breathed, really breathed. Okay. It hadn't been a great day, but it was a fine day. We're doing it. Paris. Me, Laurel. Just the two of us. I'm doing it. Mom.

And look at Laurel. Dana had reentered her life just in time to witness the unfolding adolescent metamorphosis. Laurel's awkward grace. Her performatively cool gaze. Her hair pulled back tight and then exploding, high and electric—the girl had a nascent bohemian flair. Laurel didn't wear her hair in this mode very often. Mostly, she appeared on Dana's doorstep, back home, with one fat, boring braid in back—hair out of the way for school and for soccer. (Cal, lifting a hand in greeting from the steering wheel; his wife, not turning her head in Dana's direction.) But here in Paris, away from it all, it was easy to picture Laurel seven years in the future. College Laurel: tall, sculptural, her hair a glorious Diana-Ross halo. Hanging with a bright-eyed posse of half-this, half-that kids—just like her. Ready to take on the world.

The check arrived. When Dana looked up from her wallet, Laurel was handing the waiter a credit card. "This one's on Dad," she said.

"I love your hair like that," said Dana.

"Jeez, I know, you've told me a million times." Laurel rolled her eyes, teasing, and tamped the puff down with one hand. She gritted her teeth and wedged a finger at the back corner of her mouth, dislodging something from behind a metal square of braces.

"I like it in a braid, too, though."

"Mmm-hmmm," said Laurel, cocking an eyebrow, "sure you do." How grown up she seemed, already. Dana snaked her hand across the table. Laurel looked at it, and then offered her own, palm up. When Dana squeezed, Laurel squeezed back.

The Louvre. Saint Chapelle, the Catacombs, the Deux Magots. Laurel with her lists, dog-earing every other page of the guidebook. Dana made good on the promise to return to the Jardin du Luxembourg, so they could sail those miniature boats. They decided not to schlep out to Versailles, as Dana originally proposed. "We'll go next time we're here," said Laurel, before closing herself into the tiny hotel bathroom, their fifth morning in Paris. (Next time we're here. Dana fizzed, heart in throat, to hear Laurel anticipate a future just-the-two-of-them-in-Europe.) The last morning of the trip, they toured Sacré Coeur and then meandered down the hill on the other side. Laurel took a picture of a headless Saint Denis by a fountain with Dana's phone (it was only Dana's they had set up with the international plan; Laurel's phone, with its downloaded playlists and pictures of friends, stayed in the hotel room).

They were the first to sit down to lunch in a restaurant on rue Caulaincourt. The waitress: sweet and bright-eyed, with that now-familiar air of expectation—it was never too early for a glass of wine, apparently. Somehow Dana mistakenly ordered a carafe. Well, when in Paris, right? She'd been super-virtuous so far and they were heading home tomorrow (fuck you, Cal—there's a midpoint between teatotaller and raging alcoholic). Dana drank at least a couple of glasses, faster than she intended. But Laurel, scrolling through photos on Dana's phone, didn't seem to notice.

Overfull, Laurel and Dana strolled, arm in arm, all the way to Anvers station, the Eiffel Tower hazy in the distance. Dana insisted she could intuit the direction home. Laurel checked the wall map in the Métro, just to be sure—but Dana was right, ha (victorious, she elbowed Laurel harder than she meant to)—they only needed to go one stop to change to the pink line, toward the hotel. In the train car, hipsters in tank tops and huge headphones draped themselves along the doors; old people wilted in their seats. Laurel had pulled up her cloud of hair with a fat purple elastic and Dana fanned the back of Laurel's neck. For some reason, "All You Need Is Love" was stuck on repeat in Dana's head. She didn't notice she was singing it out loud till Laurel shushed her.

And then, at the Chateau d'Eau station, the train stuttered to a stop. The doors opened. Men and women in special vests ushered everyone off. The platform was packed with passengers. A guy in a beret, semi-automatic slung over a shoulder, straddled the stairs, his face blank. Dana's heart leapt in her chest. Her mind raced. A bomb. What else could it be? A bomb on the Métro. The ceiling and walls pressed in; she wrapped her arm in Laurel's.

"What's going on? Do you know? Do you speak English?" Dana asked the woman next to her, whose spiky bleached hair tickled Dana's ear, that's how close she was. The woman shook Dana's hand off her arm, annoyed.

This one is not my fault, she thought. It had been such a good trip, capping off a totally solid year. She was getting so good at staying grounded, staying focused, smiling, smiling—one-hundred-fifty-percent Amazing, Present Mom. Had Laurel told Cal how great a time they'd had together this year? How good they were together? Now Laurel would never have the opportunity. They'd be blown to pieces any second. "A bomb," Dana whispered. Fuck.

A voice chimed over a loudspeaker. Dana strained to hear, holding tight to Laurel. Everyone out of the station; some kind of security sweep. Dana grabbed Laurel by the elbow and they pushed their way up the stairs and out of the Métro.

They crossed the street, stood in the shadow of an electronics store's awning while Dana consulted her phone map.

"That was bananas," Laurel said. "Was there really a bomb? Dad and Melanie won't believe it when I tell them. Mom, are you okay?"

"Yeah. Totally fine," said Dana. In truth, she couldn't bear to go down into the Métro again, assuming the all-clear came, but a bus demanded courage and resourcefulness she no longer possessed. "We're not really that far from our neighborhood," she said, pretending optimism. "Are you up for a walk?"

They hadn't gone two blocks before Laurel complained of thirst. Dana was still shaking, from the bomb scare. Just something to settle the nerves, that's all she needed—a completely legitimate desire, considering the circumstances. She steered Laurel into a café: cheap mirrored walls, peeling vinyl booths. She clinked her raspberry liqueur against Laurel's Orangina, the pulp drifting, silt-like, to the bottom of Laurel's glass. Okay, everything is okay. They hadn't been blown up. They had made it. Their last afternoon in the City of Lights, just the two of them. Dana totally in charge. Mom. Cheers.

After that, they headed back to the boulevard. In the windows, smooth brown mannequin heads sat on display, wigged and braided, along with rows of creams and oils. A placard on a salon door showed a light-skinned black woman, eyebrows arched, hair hanging like a velvet curtain over her shoulders. On a plywood-encased sidewalk passage, a bloom of posters advertised a hip-hop trio, SIM cards, mega shop sales. Bodies were weaving from the doors to the street and back again. Men calling out to women. Women laughing, waving them off.

And then Dana felt Laurel tugging at her arm. Laurel flared her nostrils, a signal of distress, and jerked her head toward the man at her side who had matched her pace. He was chanting something at Laurel. He spoke low and fast.

"Mademoiselle, mademoiselle," he said. He snapped his fingers, too, trying to draw Laurel's attention.

"What does he want?" Laurel whispered. She wrapped her arms around her stomach as she walked faster, eyes trained on the ground.

The man had sped ahead and was jogging backwards now. "We got the best for you, chérie," he said, in English. "My cousin's shop." He stopped in front of them, impeding their way, pointing across the street. Behind them, someone cursed, and then the crowd flowed around and past them. "We make your hair beautiful, mademoiselle. Most beautiful."

"What?" Laurel touched her hair.

Now Dana understood. She kept her voice low. "He's a hawker, Laurel. He's trying to get customers. For a salon. That's what they're doing, all these men." It was fascinating, now that she grasped the situation. She smiled at Laurel, gave her daughter's waist a light pinch. She felt good. Buzzy. Her sense of adventure was returning, like the first rumblings of hunger.

Dana shook her head at the man now, waved a scolding finger. "Non," she said. She could see herself from outside in that moment, wagging her finger like a frowning matron in a costume drama. Ridiculous. She giggled. Laurel looked up at her with a jolt, eyebrows crimped.

The man nodded at Dana. "You are her mother?" Dana said yes. "She has your eyes."

And then he smiled, slow and deliberate. God, that smile. Cal, twenty years ago. Glowing with youth, glowing. How had she so misjudged? What happened to the man she fell in love with—the Puma-shod star of Berkeley's KALX (DJ Caliph comin' at you, in the Hour of Power), who read Derek Wolcott to her in bed, their first night together? How had that charmer, that spinner of elegant dreams of their future, become a humorless, blinkered foe?

"Mom?" Laurel stood in front of her, gripping Dana's wrist, rubbing her lips together feverishly over her braces. It really was an awful habit. And what was she so anxious about, anyway? Dana was right there with her.

Just then, Dana decided. Yes. It would be fun—a special treat for Laurel. Back home, she had begged Laurel repeatedly to set aside an evening to go together to a friend-of-a-friend in Long Beach, a woman who did amazing things with braids and extensions. Laurel always said no—could anything be more boring, she said, than hours of sitting still, some lady pulling at your hair? But Dana knew the truth. Laurel's refusal stemmed from another source: Cal's wife. Laurel must sense that her stepmom would disapprove. That had to be the reason.

In a crystal-ball flash, it came to her: at baggage claim, Laurel in glory, braided and beaded; Cal's wife, blue eyes widening, her mouth an

"o" of dismay in her pale face. Dana giggled again, through her nose. Win-win. Why not?

"Where's your shop?" said Dana. The man pointed again, vaguely. Laurel was making a pained noise now, a faint lowing at the back of her throat. "Mom," she was saying, through gritted teeth. Laurel's hand was still clamped fast to Dana's wrist—a superhuman grip—and Dana shook it lightly, making a playful eddy with Laurel's arm, as if to say: relax, kiddo. Then she pried Laurel's fingers away, first the pointer, then the thumb. She gave Laurel's hand a reassuring squeeze and released it.

"Okee-dokee," Dana said brightly. "Lead the way."

The man nearly levitated with joy. Then he grew serious, holding a hand up to an impatient moped, ushering Dana and Laurel across the street. He swung a door open, called out, and deposited them at the threshold. He turned and left.

The walls of the salon glowed satiny pink. Dana breathed in the metal tang of flat irons, a whiff of orchid from a nearby candle. A tall, dark-skinned woman sporting a perfect violet shag pressed Laurel into a swivel chair and pumped, Laurel's face ascending in the mirror opposite. She was looking straight ahead, at her reflection.

There was nowhere for Dana to put herself; chairs along the wall were occupied by women, some under dryer-domes, beneath framed posters of edenic Senegalese beaches. No one so much as glanced at Dana. She pushed herself back against the window and tapped her foot to the music. If only she had brought a bottle of water; her tongue was cottony, fattened with a cloying aftertaste. She stifled a burp. She tried to catch Laurel's eye and failed.

The hairdresser pulled Laurel's elastic free, shook Laurel's hair out with her fingers, dragging it from the scalp till it radiated from Laurel's head. She clicked her tongue. She asked her something in French and Laurel didn't respond. "Je ne parle pas français," said Dana, for both of them. She laughed lamely and caught a glimpse of her wan reflection in the mirror, her attentive and ineffectual smile. The hairdresser grabbed a magazine from the top of her work station, showed Laurel a picture. Laurel shrugged.

Laurel sat, rigid, while the hairdresser combed out her hair and then sprayed and clamped and smoothed it, section by section, threading her fingers through the emerging hot silk. Dana hadn't wanted Laurel's hair straightened. Nature had rendered it springy, whorled, and now, in

summer, a gold-threaded mesh. Mixed hair, Black and Jewish. What Dana and Cal had made, together. She had never even brushed it, when Laurel was little—you weren't supposed to, it wasn't good for it. And now this. This wasn't what she had meant to have happen in the salon. She had pictured something else. And what was she supposed to do about it at this point? Too late to intervene; and anyway, she didn't have the words. Well, this was where the journey led—so be it. All part of the adventure, right?

Dana had been standing long enough that her leg fell asleep. Her stomach growled. Surely an hour hadn't passed, already? She didn't want to look at her phone to check, she didn't want to know. This was supposed to be fun. And Laurel sat, still and silent. So still and so silent that Dana didn't see that Laurel was crying till the hairdresser put her arm around Laurel, wiping her eyes for her. "Si belle, si belle," the hairdresser said. "très, très jolie, heh?" Laurel looked taller somehow. Sleek and angular. The hairdresser tugged the cape off.

"Laurel, sweetie," said Dana, holding out her arms, then dropping them at her sides again. "You look so... glamorous. Really glamorous." Laurel did look glamorous. Dana swallowed. The lady wrote down the price on a scrap of paper and showed it to Dana, who fished out her wallet. She was too embarrassed to count carefully; it was a lot of hair, the woman deserved a handsome tip.

Laurel had left the salon already and was waiting outside, glaring, her mouth pulled tight as a drawstring, when Dana emerged.

"Laurel," said Dana. "Hold on. You can't just march off like that. You didn't need to be so rude to the hair-salon lady, by the way," she called, to Laurel's back.

"Rude?" Laurel turned, masked with fury.

"Yes, rude."

"Did you think that was, like, educational or something?"

Dana took a step back and blinked.

"Did you plan this ahead of time? To take me to the sketchiest, loudest street in all of Paris, and then throw me into a chair at some random salon and let a stranger put her hands all over my hair?"

"Lower your voice. Just—wait a minute."

Laurel thrust her hands to her hips and tapped her toe in exaggeration.

"First of all," Dana said, "it was supposed to be a treat."

"Oh really? A treat? Nobody asked me."

"Anyway," Dana pressed on, "are you kidding? Plan this in advance?"

Is it my fault that we had to get out of the Métro here? I'm sorry, should we have waited for a bomb to explode? Or maybe you think I arranged for the police to clear the platform, just for fun?"

"God. Stop being so melodramatic."

"Me?" Dana laughed, a hoarse honk of indignation. "Who's being melodramatic?"

"You think I don't pay attention, but I do. I pay attention. All the time." Laurel was leaning toward Dana now, her hands balled at her sides. Ropey, rabid. Spit at the corners of her mouth.

"I don't know what you mean," said Dana. Her heart lurched—what had Cal said to Laurel? Had he told her to keep an eye on Dana? To call him, if she had an extra glass or two of wine, if she was too lax, too flighty, not Mom enough? "But how about we talk about this somewhere else."

"You think I don't see what you're doing. But I do."

Dana put a hand to her brow, braced herself. "What? What is it that I'm doing?"

"Oh Laurel, look at all these interesting African people doing interesting African things, 'Oh Laurel, let's go find a real, live African hairdresser-lady to do your hair.'" Her eyes widened as her voice rose. "You didn't say it, but I know. I'm not stupid."

Dana closed her mouth, opened it, closed it again.

"Why can't you just leave me alone sometimes? I don't need you to fix me."

"What are you talking about?" Dana sucked her breath in. "I love who you are." She felt a gathering cloud of tears in her throat and a throbbing deep in her ear, hammering in time with her heartbeat. She couldn't think straight. What was the indictment, truly? Caring too much? Cal had wedged their daughter into a lily-white life, as far as she could tell, a choice beyond comprehension; who else was going to steer Laurel in the right direction? Help her find herself?

"I'm not yours to parade around like a trophy," Laurel spat.

And then she lunged. Dana was surprised by the force of Laurel's palm smacking her shoulder aside. When she turned, Laurel was already rounding the corner, picking up speed as she went. And then she was gone. Laurel: phone-less, livid, running loose in Paris.

Dana abandoned the excuse-me's after her first few steps. She darted on and off the curb, swiveling, panic thrumming up and down her arms.

She circled the block: once, twice. She walked fast and then slow; ran, then stopped; turned around. She circled the block again. The sun was everywhere, glinting from car doors and bouncing off sunglasses. Fighting her way through the crowd, she was somehow always against the current: jostling elbows, bobbing heads, the red-and-orange cranes of a woman's dress, a man shouting into a phone. A look of disgust on the face of a young woman passing by, the wide berth she gave Dana: crazy white lady. Cal's face, Cal's adjudicating face, his voice—of course you fucked it up, Dana, of course, of course.

Dana crossed a narrow street and stood at the corner outside a spice shop, her hand over her mouth. She sobbed into her elbow, briefly, and then straightened up and took a breath. How much time had passed? A thousand years. Not a thousand years. How long? She felt someone touch the back of her waist. It was Laurel.

"I'm right here," Laurel said.

They stood there, face to face. Not touching. Both of them wet-cheeked. Dana tasted bile.

"I'm sorry I pushed you," said Laurel.

Dana let out her breath. "It doesn't matter. You were angry. It's okay."

Laurel peered at Dana, from behind her silky fall of hair. "Mom. You went right past me. I called you like a billion times, but you didn't hear me."

"I didn't," said Dana, shaking her head. She couldn't stop shaking her head. "I didn't hear."

They walked together, silently. The sidewalks were so jammed with people that you had to step into the street to move forward. They made it all the way to the Seine. At the Pont Louis-Philippe, they paused to watch a spindly, melancholy busker.

This trip was worth every second, Dana was thinking. Every single second. The good and the bad. Hey Cal, I don't regret a thing. We're getting somewhere now, me and Laurel. Just the two of us.

They listened as the guy strummed a mournful blues on his banged-up guitar. Laurel seemed to be elsewhere. Shadowed and still, she leaned against the bridge's stones, away from Dana. Maybe she was contemplating the plane ride home, or school, or friends. The mind of a thirteen-year-old: a foreign country, really, Dana was thinking.

Dana moved next to Laurel, threw her arms around Laurel's shoulders from the side and drew her close. It was an awkward angle; Laurel almost

lost her footing, and Dana wobbled, holding fast. Then Laurel slipped a thumb under Dana's right arm and shucked it off; she nudged Dana's left arm away, too. Dana's arms fell and dangled at her sides. She felt the unbearable, useless weight of them; all of her bones heavy enough, in that moment, to leave her anchored forever, marooned. Above them, the sky stretched—balloon-taut, platinum, though it would soften to twilight eventually, many hours later. The final sunset.



jelly bucket

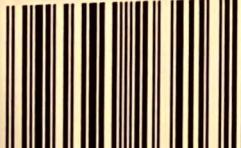
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Jelly Bucket [jel-ee buhk-it]-noun

1. archaic slang for a lunch pail, formerly used by coal miners and other laborers residing in Appalachia.

2. Bluegrass Writers Studio's annual graduate-student-produced literary journal.

