

# Tomorrow

By Siobhan Hill

Rhythmic beeping. Strong hands pummel my ribs, willing them into an accordion-like symphony of oxygen and carbon dioxide. It's cold and damp. An annoying yellow light keeps flashing, disorienting my already stuttering mind. Someone is crying. Someone else is screaming. Oh god oh god oh god, they say. That taste, the metallic twinge of blood, eroding and pooling, sloshing and settling in my teeth. It's too bright, I can't see.

With a shuddering gasp I sit up in my bed. Moments go by, where I attempt to regain control of my heartbeat. What a terrible dream.

Beautiful golden sunlight streams through the curtains, peeking out behind the dark clouds that threatened rain. Birds chirping, the smell of clean laundry. Home. Tomorrow I would be leaving for college. Much like estranged relatives or ugly patterned pajama sets, I would only see this place on holidays for the next four years, perhaps eight. My heart sank. While most of the graduating class would be out partying and drinking tonight, excited to leave behind this old town and their parents, I wanted to take a drive and try to preserve the memory of this place. My heart continued its journey downward as I recalled certain happenings with my mother from the night before. Cruel words were exchanged. It seemed silly now.

With most teenagers, a calculated apathy is the best defense when confronted with authority. A causal 'fine' or a tasteful 'whatever' will gain sacred ground in the trenches of suburbia. As the case may be, it was ludicrous in my mind that so close to my departure I should be held to such an adolescent standard as a curfew. I had gone to a local secondhand bookstore and coffee shop, where I had resided until closing. My younger sister had accompanied me. The owner, a fussy elderly woman who smelled of lavender and antibacterial soap, had a cat that my sister liked to play with while I read. Although young, I had reasoned that 9:00 PM was not unreasonable for her, as a treat since I would be leaving

soon. When I arrived home however, my mother sat in her armchair facing the door, a pestilent grimace set firmly in place. We argued in raised voices until I set the defense of my generation into place. After we both reached paramount frustration, we parted like gunslingers who had used all their bullets – spent and slightly embarrassed.

When I entered the kitchen, it became apparent that I was the only one who had forgiven and forgotten the previous evening's contretemps. For all the practiced lethargy of my age group, the middle aged had coined an equal force of irritation and discomfort called the 'silent treatment'. She ignored me as I stood in the doorway, debating the script for my formal apology. I initiated carefully so as not to be interpreted with that foul temptress 'attitude'.

*Mom?*

She bustled about, continuing her premise of my non-existence. My little sister tiptoed down the stairs behind us in her nightgown, her blonde ringlet hair tossed in pillow-induced disarray, and a small pudgy hand rubbing the drowsiness from her soft angelic face. She yawned, hopping onto a chair at the table, and smiled sleepily at me. I tried again.

*Mom?* The silence continued. The little one spoke up. *Mom? She's trying to talk to you.*

“I know baby,” my mother said, shakily laying down a tea cup, and a plate of toast.

It was at this moment I actually saw my mother's face. It was red and puffy, with deep dark circles under her eyes so intense that it looked as though she was recovering from a broken nose. She also seemed thinner, sickly.

*Mom, are you alright?* I reached out but she flinched away. The stale stench of alcohol wafted off her. *Mom, have you been drinking?*

“Please, just leave me alone,” she whispered.

Something was very wrong. Was it something I said? Did she want me to stay that badly? I could always transfer to a local college to be with her, to be home. I never wanted to leave anyway. *Mom, I'm sorry, I'm not going, not for a long time. I'll stay.*

"I said leave me alone," she wailed.

*Mom, you're not well. Come upstairs, come with me, you should sleep.* I reached out to touch her again.

"I said leave!" she screamed. She hurled her plate at me. It shattered on the wall, shards ricocheting across the linoleum. I was knocked off my feet. We looked incredulously at her, stunned by her actions. My mother had never hit me before. I gingerly felt my forehead. Blood. Her whole body was shaking, she looked down at her hands in shock. We stared at each other, paralyzed by the still reverberating fragments of ceramic in the background. Then her face hardened with dark intension. Seized with purpose and panic, I rushed to my sister's side as my mother reached for another plate.

*Come on, munchkin, we've got to go!* I scooped her up into my arms and ran pell mell into the hallway.

"No!" my mother shrieked, "Don't take her! Don't take my baby away!"

A bowl cracked next to my head on the wall. I dashed out the front door and across the green lawn, my mother's caterwauling resonating in our ears. It had started to rain. I almost threw my sister into the car. She cried as I wrestled with her car seat and peeled out of the driveway. Questions, an endless barrage of questions flooded my mind. None of which I could organize enough to phrase concisely. When I had reached a level of calm where I could speak coherently, I pulled over.

*How are you doing back there?* I asked.

*Why is mommy so mad?* she asked, her big blue eyes swimming with heart crushing curiosity. I don't know.

*Just stay there,* I said getting out of the car, *I'm going to call dad.*

The phone rang twice. "Hello," he answered.

*Dad. You have to come home, I think Mom is having a nervous breakdown. I don't know what to do. It's bad, it's really bad.* He spoke my name, as if it were a question.

*Yes, it's me,* I said.

“I told you not to call me anymore,” he spoke, his voice heavy with exhaustion.

*Didn't you hear me? Mom needs help.*

“Mom cannot get help until you and you sister move on.”

*What do you mean? I can't take her to college with me.*

Suddenly a speeding car rounded the curb. It hit a slick patch and spiraled towards us. I looked at my sister, she looked at me. Fear was frozen on her face and I felt the blood drain from my own. Impact. I knew she was dead before I hit the ground, her broken body flew through the air and landed with an abrupt thwack on the pavement. I couldn't move. The panic alarm was going off in the other car, beeping.

“Hello? Hello!” my father said. Rhythmic beeping.