

Getting the News

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Your doctor is waiting for me right outside the women's room. He's more stick bug like as I'm suddenly standing on his shoes. He reaches out, grips me by the shoulder as if I were in danger of falling. *I need to have a meeting with your family.* Maybe I nod. Behind me, I hear the hand dryer still roaring away in the women's room. Nurses, orderlies walk past, laughing into cell phones. He gestures towards a hallway where our mother and your best friend are already lined up, two obedient hand-wringing school girls. There's a secret door in the wall I never noticed before. As we pass through, my arm hairs bristle thinking of our grandparents' scratchy plaid couch where we used to play Clue as girls. There are stained glass decals applied to the walls of the secret room inside, chairs grouped neatly as a church choir. A fake chapel. I want to bolt. But he gestures—sit. I sit. He locks eyes with me. *This is it. We've gotten as far as we can with these lungs.* Then details. The transport to the next hospital. The evaluation process. The paralytic meds they'll use to keep you in your virtual coma. *It wasn't supposed to happen like this,* our mother whispers to her knees. Questions? he asks, in a voice admirably soft, a chenille blanket of a voice. Our father, over speaker phone, heaves a sigh like he's testing his own pulmonary function. *Well, you just took all the air out of my lungs with that news.* We all rise, start back through the Clue door but this time I stop him, our toes sandwiched again. But is she well enough, I ask? I mean, can she—will she—make it? He shakes his head. *I don't know. I really don't.* And it's all I can do to get back to the women's room where the toilet, the sink, and the hand dryer, are all inexplicably where I left them.